

The effect of service quality, marketing strategy and distribution efficiency on sales with the mediation of consumer trust

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis pengaruh kualitas layanan, strategi pemasaran, dan efisiensi distribusi terhadap kinerja penjualan dengan kepercayaan konsumen sebagai variabel mediasi pada usaha penjualan daging sapi skala UMKM di Pasar Toboali. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan melibatkan 160 responden dan dianalisis menggunakan *Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kualitas layanan dan efisiensi distribusi berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja penjualan, baik secara langsung maupun melalui kepercayaan konsumen. Sebaliknya, strategi pemasaran tidak berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kepercayaan konsumen maupun kinerja penjualan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa dalam konteks pasar tradisional dan produk pangan segar, konsumen lebih memprioritaskan kualitas pelayanan, konsistensi produk, dan kelancaran distribusi dibandingkan aktivitas pemasaran konvensional. Penelitian ini menegaskan peran kepercayaan konsumen sebagai mediator penting yang menghubungkan praktik operasional dengan kinerja penjualan serta memberikan implikasi manajerial bagi pengembangan UMKM pangan segar.

Kata Kunci: kualitas layanan; strategi pemasaran; efisiensi distribusi; kepercayaan konsumen; kinerja penjualan

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the influence of service quality, marketing strategy, and distribution efficiency on sales performance with consumer trust as a mediating variable in the beef sales business of MSMEs in Toboali Market. The study used a quantitative approach involving 160 respondents and was analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results showed that service quality and distribution efficiency had a positive and significant effect on sales performance, both directly and through consumer trust. Conversely, marketing strategy did not have a significant effect on consumer trust or sales performance. These findings indicate that in the context of traditional markets and fresh food products, consumers prioritize service quality, product consistency, and smooth distribution over conventional marketing activities. This study confirms the role of consumer trust as an important mediator linking operational practices with sales performance and provides managerial implications for the development of fresh food MSMEs.

Keyword: service quality; marketing strategy; distribution efficiency; consumer confidence; sales performance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Amid intense competition in Indonesia's national agribusiness sector, the beef cattle industry faces increasingly complex challenges. While consumer demand for beef continues to rise, domestic production capacity remains insufficient to meet this demand optimally. As a result, distribution efficiency, marketing

strategies, and service quality have become strategic determinants of competitiveness, particularly for smallholder farming enterprises. In this context, local-scale businesses such as Pak Usup's Farm at Toboali Market play a critical role as an interface between internal operational factors—namely service quality, marketing practices, and distribution efficiency—and external elements such as consumer trust and dynamic market conditions. Contemporary consumers no longer base purchasing decisions solely on price; instead, they increasingly consider service quality, hygiene standards, food safety, and transparency regarding product origin, all of which significantly influence purchasing behaviour.

In practice, service quality contributes to shaping consumer perceptions and loyalty, while marketing strategies function as tools for expanding market reach and differentiating products. Distribution efficiency, meanwhile, directly affects meat freshness, cost efficiency, and overall competitiveness, thereby influencing sales volume. Consumer trust acts as a crucial mediating variable in this relationship, as even superior service quality may fail to generate sales if consumers lack confidence in the product or the business operator. Empirical conditions in the research area illustrate these dynamics clearly. Toboali Market, as the primary beef distribution hub in South Bangka, experienced an increase in livestock population from approximately 1,100 head in 2017 to around 1,400 head in 2018, followed by fluctuations over the subsequent five years. Beef prices in the Bangka Belitung region have also demonstrated volatility, reaching approximately £10.15/kg in August 2025 with minor monthly adjustments, and declining to around £8.75/kg ahead of Eid al-Fitr at Toboali Market. These trends underscore the importance of adaptive marketing and efficient distribution strategies for sustaining the competitiveness of local livestock enterprises.

Although previous studies have examined the influence of service quality, marketing, and distribution on business performance, a notable gap remains in the literature concerning smallholder livestock enterprises operating within traditional markets, particularly studies that position consumer trust as a mediating variable. Existing research has predominantly focused on modern retail settings, large-scale industries, or processed food products, leaving empirical evidence related to fresh meat commodities at the local farmer level relatively limited. Consequently, research is needed that not only evaluates the direct effects of service quality, marketing strategy, and distribution efficiency on sales performance but also elucidates the psychological mechanisms through which consumer trust shapes purchasing decisions.

Service quality is widely recognised as a primary determinant of consumer perception, satisfaction, and loyalty. In the context of beef sales, service quality extends beyond friendliness and speed of service to include accuracy of information, transparency regarding product origin, cleanliness, and food safety. Prior studies have demonstrated that high service quality directly enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty (Lestari, 2020) and reduces consumer uncertainty, particularly in online and informal markets (Gerstenkorn, 2013). Moreover, consumer preferences for premium, organic, or specifically farmed beef (e.g., grass-fed) are influenced by how product information is communicated (Lim et al., 2018). In competitive market environments, superior service quality increases perceived product value, enhances willingness to pay, and expands market share (Lusk & Norwood, 2005). Nevertheless, service quality alone is often insufficient if not accompanied by credible product quality, positioning service quality as an antecedent to trust formation that ultimately drives sales.

Marketing strategies also play a significant role in influencing beef sales through segmentation, targeting, pricing, branding, and promotion. Effective segmentation and targeting enable producers to communicate value propositions that align with specific consumer preferences (P et al., 2024). Branding initiatives, including branded fresh beef products, have been shown to increase consumers' willingness to pay by strengthening perceptions of quality and safety (Wachenheim et al., 2000). Integrated marketing approaches—combining online and offline channels—have proven effective in building trust and increasing sales volume, as evidenced in studies such as Delastra Farm (Listyani & Riyono, 2025). However, the effectiveness of marketing strategies is highly contingent upon consumer perceptions and trust in both the product and the producer, particularly in traditional market settings.

Distribution efficiency represents a fundamental component in maintaining the quality, quantity, and continuity of beef supply. Logistical inefficiencies increase operational costs, accelerate spoilage, and diminish product value, thereby exerting a direct negative impact on sales performance (Hasmawati, 2024). Cold-chain logistics systems are essential for preserving product freshness during transportation and storage, which enhances consumer satisfaction and selling value. Efficient coordination among farmers, distributors, and retailers accelerates product flow, reduces delays, and improves operational efficiency. Direct distribution from producers to consumers is often more effective, as it reduces marketing margins and enhances product accessibility (Syafira et al., 2024). Furthermore, market integration and price sensitivity influence distribution efficiency and, ultimately, sales outcomes (Lei et al., n.d.; Jooste & Schalkwyk, 1996). Thus, distribution efficiency affects not only operational performance but also consumer perceptions of product quality.

Consumer trust plays a critical role in purchasing behaviour, particularly for fresh food products that are associated with higher perceived risk. Trust can be strengthened through transparent product information,

traceability systems such as blockchain technology, and food safety assurances (Morales et al., 2022). Perceptions of safety and quality strongly shape consumer confidence, with fresh meat often perceived as safer than processed alternatives (Drescher et al., 2012). Direct interactions with farmers who are perceived as competent and trustworthy further enhance consumer trust (Yee et al., 2005). Although the direct impact of trust on purchasing decisions may sometimes appear limited, trust remains a decisive factor in environments characterised by high uncertainty, such as traditional markets (Drescher et al., 2012).

A synthesis of existing literature suggests that service quality, marketing strategy, and distribution efficiency do not always exert a direct influence on sales performance. In many contexts—particularly within fresh food markets—these factors operate indirectly through the formation of consumer trust. From the perspective of Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), trust constitutes the foundation of long-term producer–consumer relationships. High-quality service reinforces perceptions of integrity and competence, strengthening trust that subsequently drives purchasing decisions. Effective marketing enhances credibility and social proof, reinforcing trust, while efficient distribution signals the producer's ability to deliver safe, fresh, and timely products, thereby reducing perceived risk. Conceptually, consumer trust functions as a psychological bridge connecting operational practices with purchasing behaviour. Without trust, even superior service, effective marketing, and efficient distribution are unlikely to maximise sales performance.

Accordingly, this study aims to empirically analyse the effects of service quality, marketing strategy, and distribution efficiency on beef sales performance at Pak Usup's Farm in Toboali Market, while examining the mediating role of consumer trust in these relationships. This research seeks to explain how operational and marketing factors influence purchasing decisions both directly and indirectly through consumer psychological mechanisms. By doing so, the study provides a deeper understanding of the key determinants of sales performance in local livestock enterprises and offers an empirical foundation for developing more effective and sustainable service, marketing, and distribution strategies.

The contributions of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches agribusiness marketing literature by presenting empirical evidence on the mediating role of consumer trust within traditional market settings. Practically, the findings offer strategic guidance for local livestock enterprises in prioritising service quality improvements, refining value-based marketing strategies, and optimising distribution systems to enhance sales performance. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of consumer trust as a form of social capital that underpins the sustainability of beef cattle farming businesses in island regions such as South Bangka.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with a survey design to examine the effects of service quality, marketing strategy, and distribution efficiency on sales performance, with consumer trust positioned as a mediating variable. The population of this study consists of consumers who purchase beef from Pak Usup's Farm at Toboali Market. A purposive sampling technique was applied, with the selection criterion that respondents must have made at least two purchases within the last three months, ensuring that participants had sufficient experience to evaluate the business performance and service attributes.

The required sample size was determined based on the *10 times rule* commonly used in PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2021), which recommends a minimum of ten observations for each indicator or structural path in the model. Considering the number of indicators and model complexity, the minimum sample size was set at 100 respondents. This study successfully collected data from 160 respondents, thereby exceeding the minimum requirement and ensuring adequate statistical power for model estimation.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of 20 items distributed across five constructs: service quality (5 items), marketing strategy (5 items), distribution efficiency (5 items), consumer trust (3–4 items), and sales performance (3–4 items). Measurement items were adapted from established and validated theoretical frameworks, including SERVQUAL for service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988), the marketing mix concept (Kotler & Keller, 2020), and supply chain as well as relationship marketing literature (Chopra & Meindl, 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This adaptation ensured both conceptual relevance and measurement validity within the context of traditional beef markets.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. The evaluation of the measurement model involved testing convergent validity through outer loading values (≥ 0.70) and Average Variance Extracted ($AVE \geq 0.50$), discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio ($HTMT < 0.85$), and internal consistency reliability assessed through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (≥ 0.70). All constructs satisfied the recommended validity and reliability thresholds.

The structural model was subsequently assessed by examining path coefficients, *t*-statistics, and *p*-values using a bootstrapping procedure. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) were evaluated to determine the explanatory and predictive power of the model. The results revealed notable differences in the strength of relationships among variables, with service quality and distribution efficiency demonstrating dominant effects on sales performance, both directly and indirectly through consumer trust.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal important dynamics between operational variables—namely service quality, distribution efficiency, and marketing strategy—and sales performance in the context of beef sales among small and medium-sized enterprises, such as Pak Usup's Farm. The variation in significance across the tested pathways confirms that not all operational factors exert a direct or immediate influence on sales performance. Instead, some variables operate through consumer psychological mechanisms, particularly trust, while others affect sales through more direct operational processes. This finding aligns with consumer behaviour theory (Kotler & Keller, 2020), which emphasises that purchasing decisions, especially for fresh food products, are shaped not only by marketing activities but also by perceived risk, trust, and service experience. Consequently, the relationships identified in this study reflect the non-linear and process-oriented nature of consumer decision-making in traditional food markets.

Service quality emerged as the most consistent and influential variable in the model. The significant path coefficients from service quality to consumer trust ($O = 0.618$) and to sales performance ($O = 0.378$) support the SERVQUAL framework (Parasuraman et al., 1988), which posits that service quality directly influences trust, satisfaction, and repurchase intention. In the beef trade context, service attributes such as price transparency, accurate weighing, hygiene of the cutting area, and seller friendliness strongly shape consumers' emotional responses and perceived reliability. Previous studies, including Kim and Kim (2021), have similarly demonstrated that consistent service quality in fresh meat markets significantly enhances trust and customer loyalty. These findings confirm that service quality functions as a “psychological engine” that simultaneously reinforces positive consumer perceptions and translates into improved transactional outcomes.

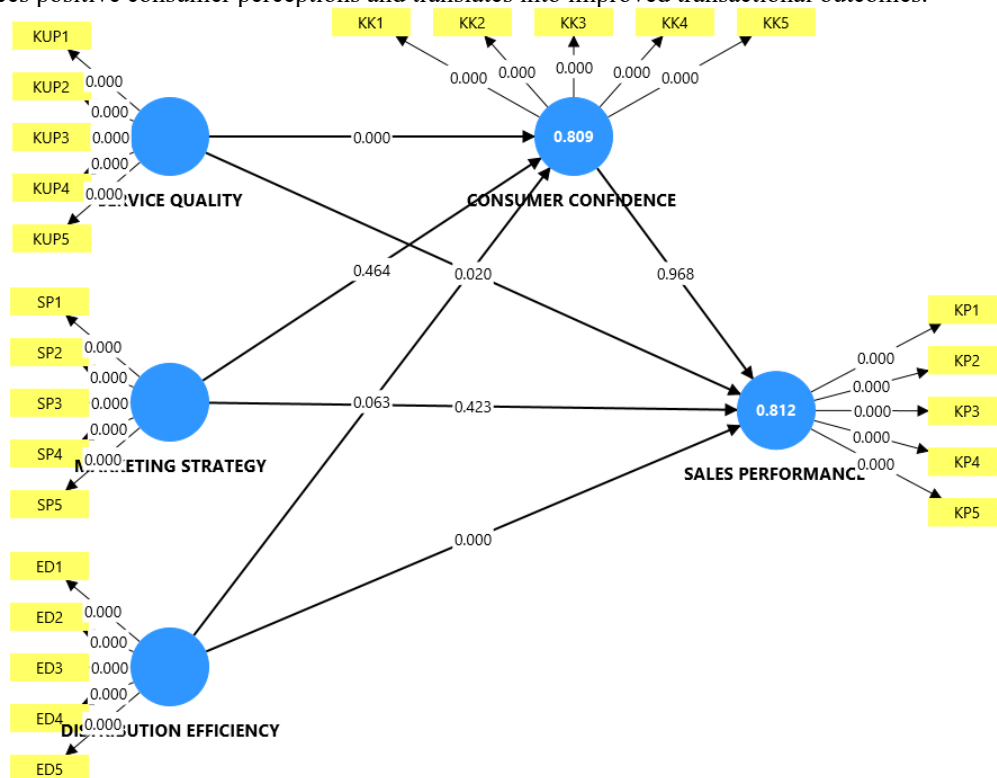


Figure 1. Hypothesis Testing

In contrast, marketing strategy did not demonstrate a significant influence on either consumer trust or sales performance. This outcome is consistent with prior research on fresh food MSMEs, which indicates that conventional promotional activities—such as banners, price discounts, or informal messaging—often fail to influence purchasing behaviour when not supported by strong product quality and service performance (Widjajanta, 2019; Pratama & Syahrul, 2022). From the perspective of Customer-Based Brand Equity theory (Keller, 2003), marketing strategies are only effective when they succeed in building strong, distinctive, and

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favourable brand associations. In the case of Pak Usup's Farm, the marketing efforts appear to be generic and insufficiently differentiated, limiting their ability to strengthen trust or stimulate sales. This suggests that marketing practices need to move beyond basic promotion toward value-based and experience-oriented approaches.

Table 1. Path Coefficient

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Consumer confidence -> sales performance	0.006	0.014	0.140	0.040	0.968
Distribution efficiency -> consumer confidence	0.449	0.441	0.241	1.863	0.063
Distribution efficiency -> sales performance	0.433	0.429	0.116	3.746	0.000
Marketing strategy -> consumer confidence	-0.153	-0.130	0.209	0.732	0.464
Marketing strategy -> sales performance	0.109	0.120	0.136	0.802	0.423
Service quality -> consumer confidence	0.618	0.605	0.156	3.953	0.000
Service quality -> sales performance	0.378	0.363	0.162	2.332	0.020
Distribution efficiency -> sales performance	0.003	0.004	0.067	0.038	0.970
Marketing strategy -> sales performance	-0.001	-0.002	0.033	0.026	0.979
Service quality -> sales performance	0.003	0.012	0.091	0.038	0.970

Distribution efficiency demonstrated a strong and significant direct effect on sales performance ($O = 0.433$; $p < 0.001$), while its effect on consumer trust was marginal ($p = 0.063$). This pattern highlights the operational nature of distribution efficiency. Factors such as delivery speed, continuity of stock availability, and minimisation of product damage directly influence sales volume by ensuring that products remain fresh and consistently available. However, these operational improvements are not immediately perceived as trust-building attributes by consumers. Similar patterns are reported in supply chain literature, which shows that distribution efficiency tends to affect business performance before it translates into consumer trust, as consumers often experience its benefits indirectly (Chopra & Meindl, 2020; Nugroho, 2021). Thus, distribution efficiency serves primarily as an “operational backbone” rather than an explicit source of emotional trust.

Additional pathway tests revealed several coefficients that were close to zero and statistically insignificant in alternative model specifications. This phenomenon may be explained through two complementary perspectives. First, a full mediation mechanism may be present, whereby consumer trust or perceived product quality acts as the primary channel through which operational and marketing factors influence sales (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen, 2002). Second, potential model diagnostic limitations should be considered. In MSME contexts, operational and marketing indicators are often relatively simple and homogeneous, which may limit the model's ability to capture meaningful variation. Therefore, the absence of statistical significance does not necessarily imply the absence of real-world influence, but rather reflects constraints in measurement sensitivity and contextual complexity.

Overall, the findings underscore three key insights. First, service quality is the most critical determinant in building consumer trust and enhancing sales performance. Second, distribution efficiency plays a vital role in sustaining operational performance and sales continuity, although its psychological impact on trust remains indirect. Third, existing marketing strategies require substantial redesign to become more relevant, differentiated, and experience-driven. Importantly, this study reinforces the theoretical argument that consumer trust acts as a central bridge between operational practices and business outcomes. Future research is encouraged to explicitly model mediation and moderation effects, utilise longitudinal designs, and expand sample sizes to better capture the evolving dynamics of trust and purchasing behaviour in traditional markets.

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that service quality and distribution efficiency should be prioritised as the two main pillars for improving sales performance. Management should focus on strengthening service standards through structured training, clearer operational procedures, and consistent quality assurance, given the proven role of service quality in enhancing trust and driving sales growth. In parallel, distribution efficiency must be optimised through improved supply chain coordination, better route planning, and stronger supplier relationships to ensure stable product availability and freshness.

The insignificance of current marketing strategies indicates a clear need for re-evaluation. Marketing efforts should shift toward more segmented, value-based, and experience-oriented approaches, including greater use of digital platforms and clearer communication of product differentiation. Finally, consumer trust should be deliberately positioned as a strategic asset, reinforced through service consistency, transparency of information, and positive customer experiences. By integrating these elements, MSMEs such as Pak Usup's Farm can develop a more sustainable competitive position and achieve long-term sales growth.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that service quality and distribution efficiency are the most consistent and significant factors influencing consumer trust and beef sales performance at Pak Usup's Farm in Toboali Market. The findings indicate that service quality exerts the strongest influence on consumer trust and also has a direct and significant effect on sales performance. Distribution efficiency is proven to contribute significantly to sales performance, although its influence on consumer trust remains marginal and close to the threshold of significance. In contrast, marketing strategies do not demonstrate a significant effect on either consumer trust or sales performance, indicating the need for further evaluation and strategic refinement.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its ability to map both direct and indirect relationships between operational variables and sales performance within the context of MSME-scale fresh food businesses—an area that remains relatively underexplored in marketing and operational management literature. Furthermore, this study highlights the role of consumer trust as a potential mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between service quality and sales outcomes. This finding enriches the understanding of psychological mechanisms underlying consumer purchasing behaviour in traditional market settings, particularly for fresh food products that involve higher perceived risk.

From a practical perspective, the managerial implications emphasise the importance of prioritising improvements in service quality and optimising distribution efficiency as core strategic actions. Service consistency, hygiene standards, accuracy in weighing, speed of supply, and stock stability are critical operational aspects that must be strengthened to enhance both consumer trust and sales performance. In addition, marketing strategies should be reorganised to become more relevant and value-based, with greater utilisation of digital media, clearer product differentiation, and increased customer engagement.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. These include a relatively limited sample size, the use of a cross-sectional research design that does not capture changes in consumer behaviour over time, and potential limitations in variable indicators that may not fully represent the conceptual dimensions of the constructs examined. Moreover, the research model does not explicitly incorporate mediator and moderator variables that could further clarify causal relationships among variables.

Future research is therefore recommended to expand the sample size and employ longitudinal designs to better capture the dynamic nature of consumer trust and purchasing behaviour. Model development can be strengthened by incorporating additional mediating variables such as customer experience or perceived product quality, as well as moderating variables such as competition intensity or consumer characteristics. The application of mixed-method approaches or field experiments is also encouraged to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how service quality, distribution efficiency, and marketing strategies influence sales performance in MSME fresh food contexts.

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