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Digital Marketing Stimuli, Buyer Trust, and Real Estate Sales Performance: A Stimulus-Organism-Response Perspective

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Abstract

Real estate developers and brokerages increasingly invest in digital marketing channels such as social media, property listing websites, and online review platforms, yet converting digital exposure into actual sales remains a persistent challenge in a market characterised by high financial value, long decision cycles, and significant information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. Although prior research has examined how digital tools and platforms influence property purchase intention, the psychological mechanisms through which digital marketing stimuli translate into sales outcomes remain underexplored. Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework and signaling theory, this paper develops a conceptual model that explains how three digital marketing stimuli (Social Media Marketing Quality, Website Quality, and Online Reputation and Reviews) influence Real Estate Sales Performance. Buyer Trust is conceptualised as the key psychological mechanism through which these digital marketing stimuli are translated into measurable sales outcomes. Five propositions are advanced, and a methodology for future empirical testing using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is outlined. The framework offers testable guidance for property developers, brokerages, and digital marketing teams seeking to optimise their digital marketing investments. The propositions require future empirical validation.

Keywords: Real Estate Sales Performance, Stimulus-Organism-Response, Signaling Theory, Buyer Trust, Digital Marketing Stimuli, Social Media Marketing, Website Quality, Online Reputation

Introduction

For many households, residential property represents a major financial commitment and an important component of household wealth and well-being (Piazzesi & Schneider, 2016; Broxterman & Zhou, 2023). Within this landscape of high individual and societal stakes, the

real estate industry has undergone a fundamental shift in how properties are marketed and sold. Developers and brokerages now deploy a diverse range of digital marketing tools including social media campaigns, property listing portals, virtual tours hosted on dedicated websites, and online review management to attract, inform, and convert prospective buyers (Al-haimi et al., 2025; Prasad et al., 2026). These digital channels have become essential touchpoints in the buyer journey, reshaping how property information is discovered, evaluated, and compared (Ho et al., 2024). Yet despite substantial investment in digital marketing, real estate sales performance remains difficult to secure. Property purchases involve high financial value, long decision cycles, high perceived risk, and significant information asymmetry between buyers and sellers (Broxterman & Zhou, 2023), and the journey may involve both online information gathering and offline interactions before a signed agreement is reached (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2015). In such a high-involvement context, the mere availability of digital marketing content is insufficient; what matters is whether that content is able to build the buyer trust necessary to drive conversion (Gefen et al., 2003; Pavlou, 2003).

A growing body of research has examined the role of digital tools in property markets. Recent research has examined digital transformation in the real estate industry and the relationship between digital marketing and property purchase intention (Al-haimi et al., 2025; Prasad et al., 2026). Prasad et al. (2026) examined a multidimensional digital marketing construct and found that perceived usefulness and developer trust mediate its relationship with residential property purchase intention. Ho et al. (2024) confirmed that social media marketing activities, specifically entertainment, interaction, customisation, and word of mouth, have a significant positive impact on customer purchase intention in the Malaysian property market. Broxterman and Zhou (2023) documented persistent information frictions in real estate markets that digital tools have only partially resolved. Recent research beyond the property sector has increasingly examined how digital marketing stimuli translate into consumer behaviour through the mediating role of trust. Wang et al. (2022) reported a positive association between trust and purchase intention in social commerce. Luo et al. (2025) further identified trust as a mediator between short-video content characteristics and purchase intention. Within property markets, Ho et al. (2024) examined social media marketing and purchase intention, while Prasad et al. (2026) investigated perceived usefulness and developer trust as mediators. These studies provide evidence on purchase intention but do not establish how digital marketing stimuli relate to actual sales outcomes, such as conversion rates, sales speed, and transaction value achievement. The present study therefore focuses on the proposed role of buyer trust in connecting digital marketing stimuli to these sales outcomes.

Against this backdrop, this study addresses the following research problem: how do digital marketing stimuli, specifically Social Media Marketing Quality, Website Quality, and Online Reputation and Reviews, influence Real Estate Sales Performance through the mediating role of Buyer Trust in a high-involvement property market context? This question connects to several active debates in the social sciences. First, the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) provides a well-established theoretical lens for understanding how external environmental cues shape internal psychological states that in turn drive behavioural responses, and has been widely applied in digital marketing and e-commerce research (Eroglu et al., 2003; Jacoby, 2002). Second, signaling theory (Connelly et

al., 2011; Spence, 1973) explains why digital marketing activities function as quality signals that reduce information asymmetry and build buyer trust in markets where product quality cannot be directly observed. Third, the role of trust as a critical mediator in information-asymmetric markets has received considerable attention in information systems and marketing research (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002; Pavlou, 2003). By integrating these theoretical perspectives within a property market context, this study extends existing knowledge beyond retail and e-commerce settings where most SOR evidence currently resides.

This paper develops a conceptual framework, grounded in the SOR model and signaling theory, that explains how three digital marketing stimuli influence Real Estate Sales Performance through the mediating role of Buyer Trust. Five propositions are advanced, and a methodology for future empirical testing is outlined. The framework advances existing research by identifying buyer trust as a proposed mediating mechanism linking digital marketing investments to measurable sales outcomes in property markets.

Literature Review

This section reviews digital marketing in real estate, the SOR framework, signaling theory, and the role of trust in high-involvement property purchases.

Digital Marketing in Real Estate Sales

Digital marketing in real estate refers to the strategic use of digital channels and platforms to promote property listings, communicate with prospective buyers, and facilitate the property search and evaluation process. Property technology, often termed PropTech, represents the broader digital infrastructure through which the real estate industry is undergoing digital change (Al-haimi et al., 2025). Within this infrastructure, three categories of digital marketing stimuli are particularly prominent in property sales. First, developers and brokerages use social media platforms to publish property-related content, interact with prospective buyers, and build brand awareness (Ho et al., 2024; Kim & Ko, 2012; Prasad et al., 2026). Second, property listing websites and developer portals serve as the primary digital interface through which buyers access listing information, compare options, and initiate enquiries, and information systems research offers a basis for considering the quality of these platforms (DeLone & McLean, 2003). Third, online reviews and reputation signals generated by previous buyers and third-party platforms provide social proof that influences prospective buyers' trust and purchase decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri, 2015). These three stimulus types differ in their predominant sources of information (organisation-generated, platform-mediated, and peer-generated), a distinction that becomes central to explaining how each builds buyer trust through different informational pathways.

Two features distinguish the digital marketing environment in real estate from general digital retail. First, the high financial value and long decision cycle of property purchases mean that buyers may engage in extensive information search and evaluation across digital and offline touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Payne & Frow, 2005). Second, information asymmetry between buyers and sellers is particularly acute in property markets, where buyers cannot fully assess construction quality, neighbourhood conditions, or developer credibility from digital information alone (Broxterman & Zhou, 2023; Gefen et al., 2003). These features mean that the effectiveness of digital marketing in real estate depends not merely on reach and

exposure, but fundamentally on the ability of digital stimuli to build buyer trust, which this study proposes as an important psychological mechanism linking digital engagement to sales outcomes.

Empirical evidence supports the importance of these digital marketing channels in property markets. Prasad et al. (2026) found that developer trust partially mediates the relationship between a multidimensional digital marketing construct and residential property purchase intention. Ho et al. (2024) demonstrated that entertainment, interaction, customisation, and word-of-mouth dimensions of social media marketing activities significantly influence purchase intention in the Malaysian property market. Broxterman and Zhou (2023) documented that information frictions, which digital marketing tools are expected to reduce, remain a persistent challenge in real estate transactions, underscoring the importance of studying how digital marketing stimuli build trust and translate into measurable sales outcomes.

Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework was proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in their seminal work on environmental psychology. The framework posits that external environmental stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal cognitive and affective states (O), which in turn drive behavioural responses (R) in the form of approach or avoidance behaviour. The SOR model has since become one of the most widely applied theoretical frameworks in consumer behaviour and marketing research (Jacoby, 2002).

In marketing, the SOR framework explains how environmental cues shape consumers' internal responses and subsequent behaviour. Eroglu et al. (2003) examined online store atmospherics and shopper responses. Ha and Lennon (2010) investigated pleasure and arousal in response to online visual merchandising cues, while Kim and Lennon (2013) examined emotion and perceived risk in relation to reputation, website quality, and purchase intention. These studies illustrate that the organism component can encompass different psychological states. In short-video commerce, Luo et al. (2025) identified consumer trust as a mediator between content characteristics and purchase intention. In residential real estate, Prasad et al. (2026) incorporated developer trust and perceived usefulness into an SOR-based account of purchase intention. Building on this evidence, the present study proposes extending the outcome of interest to real estate sales performance.

In this study, the SOR framework is applied to the real estate digital marketing context. The three digital marketing stimuli (Social Media Marketing Quality, Website Quality, and Online Reputation and Reviews) represent the stimulus variables (S). Buyer Trust represents the organism variable (O), capturing the internal psychological state that buyers develop in response to these digital stimuli. Real Estate Sales Performance represents the response variable (R), reflecting the behavioural outcome of the buyer's psychological processing. The parsimony of using a single organism variable is deliberate: in high-involvement, high-risk property purchases characterised by acute information asymmetry, trust is proposed as a focal psychological mechanism through which digital marketing stimuli may influence purchase behaviour (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002).

Signaling Theory in Information-Asymmetric Markets

While SOR theory explains the overall process through which digital marketing stimuli shape buyer psychology and drive behavioural responses, signaling theory provides the complementary explanation of *why* these digital stimuli are able to build trust in the first place. Signaling theory, originally proposed by Spence (1973) in the context of job market economics, explains how one party (the signaler) communicates credible information about unobservable qualities to another party (the receiver) through observable actions or attributes. Connelly et al. (2011) provided a comprehensive review and assessment of signaling theory in management research, identifying four core elements: the signaler, the signal, the receiver, and the signaling environment.

In property markets, information asymmetry between developers and buyers is particularly severe: buyers cannot directly observe construction quality, verify the accuracy of listing information, or assess developer credibility before committing to a purchase (Broxterman & Zhou, 2023). In this environment, digital marketing activities function as quality signals that developers send to prospective buyers. Social media marketing quality signals the developer's willingness to engage transparently and responsively with the market. Website quality signals the developer's organisational competence and investment in professional infrastructure. Online reputation and reviews may provide complementary third-party signals when buyers perceive their sources as independent and credible (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Connelly et al., 2011).

The integration of signaling theory with the SOR framework provides a more complete theoretical account of the proposed relationships. SOR explains *the process*: external stimuli shape internal states that drive behaviour. Signaling theory explains *the mechanism*: in information-asymmetric property markets, digital marketing activities function as quality signals that reduce buyer uncertainty and build trust. Together, the two theories explain both the psychological pathway (SOR) and the informational logic (signaling) through which digital marketing may influence real estate sales performance.

Trust in High-Involvement Purchases

Trust is a central construct in understanding consumer behaviour in markets characterised by information asymmetry and high perceived risk. McKnight et al. (2002) developed a comprehensive trust model for e-commerce that identifies three dimensions of trustworthiness: competence (the ability to fulfil promises), benevolence (genuine concern for the buyer's interest), and integrity (adherence to ethical principles). In property markets, where buyers cannot fully verify listing accuracy, construction quality, or developer credibility before purchase, trust in the developer and the digital platform serves as a critical psychological gateway that determines whether buyers progress from information search to serious enquiry and commitment (Gefen et al., 2003; Pavlou, 2003).

The importance of trust in high-involvement purchases is well established. Pavlou (2003) demonstrated that consumer trust reduces perceived risk and increases willingness to transact in electronic commerce. Gefen et al. (2003) showed that trust, integrated with the Technology Acceptance Model, is associated with online purchase intention. In the property context, Prasad et al. (2026) found that developer trust significantly mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchase intention, and Ho et al. (2024) confirmed the

significant role of social media marketing in building purchase intention in the property industry. More recently, Wang et al.'s (2022) meta-analytic review confirmed that trust exerts a significant and positive effect on consumers' purchase intention across a wide range of social commerce contexts, with trust in the seller producing the strongest effect. Taken together, these studies support the importance of trust in shaping purchase intention across e-commerce, social commerce, and residential property contexts.

Research Variables

This study examines five research variables: three stimulus variables (Social Media Marketing Quality, Website Quality, and Online Reputation and Reviews), one organism variable (Buyer Trust), and one response variable (Real Estate Sales Performance). Each construct is defined below with its meaning, its real estate context, and its main dimensions.

Social Media Marketing Quality

Social Media Marketing Quality refers to the overall quality of a developer's marketing activities on social media platforms, as perceived by prospective buyers. Kim and Ko (2012) identified five dimensions of social media marketing activities: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and word of mouth. In the real estate context, Social Media Marketing Quality encompasses the relevance and visual appeal of property-related posts, the responsiveness of developer accounts to buyer enquiries, the currency of listing information shared on social platforms, and the extent to which content is tailored to individual buyer preferences (Ho et al., 2024; Prasad et al., 2026). Its main dimensions are entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and word of mouth (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Website Quality

Website Quality refers to the overall quality of property listing websites and developer portals as evaluated by buyers across information, system, and service dimensions. The DeLone and McLean (2003) Information Systems Success Model identifies three core quality dimensions: information quality (the accuracy, completeness, and relevance of content), system quality (the usability, reliability, and speed of the platform), and service quality (the responsiveness and helpfulness of online support). In real estate, Website Quality shapes the buyer's ability to efficiently search listings, compare property options, access pricing information, and initiate contact with sales representatives. Qalati et al. (2021) found that trust partially mediates the relationship between website quality and online purchase intention, with perceived risk moderating the relationship between trust and purchase intention. Its main dimensions are information quality, system quality, and service quality (DeLone & McLean, 2003).

Online Reputation and Reviews

The construct Online Reputation and Reviews refers to the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) information that prospective buyers encounter about a developer, a project, or a property through online review platforms, social media discussions, and third-party rating sites. Cheung and Thadani (2012) reviewed eWOM research and developed an integrative model of its influence on consumer responses. Filieri (2015) further demonstrated that the diagnosticity and helpfulness of online reviews significantly influence consumer adoption of reviewer recommendations. In real estate, buyers frequently consult online reviews, forum discussions, and social media comments to assess developer credibility, construction quality,

and after-sales service before committing to a site visit or purchase. For this framework, review credibility, review quantity, and review consistency are proposed dimensions informed by the eWOM literature (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Their operationalisation requires validation in the property context.

Buyer Trust

Buyer Trust refers to the buyer's overall assessment of the developer's trustworthiness across three dimensions: competence (the developer's ability to deliver the property as promised), benevolence (the developer's genuine concern for the buyer's interest), and integrity (the developer's adherence to ethical standards and honest communication). This conceptualisation follows McKnight et al. (2002), whose trust model has been widely validated in e-commerce and information systems research. In real estate, Buyer Trust reflects the buyer's confidence that the developer will deliver accurate listing information, honour pricing commitments, maintain construction quality, and provide reliable after-sales service (Prasad et al., 2026). Its main dimensions are competence trust, benevolence trust, and integrity trust (McKnight et al., 2002).

Real Estate Sales Performance

Real Estate Sales Performance is the response variable of the framework. It is conceptualised as a multidimensional sales outcome that includes the sales conversion rate, the sales speed from enquiry to signed agreement (Anglin et al., 2003; Castelli et al., 2020), and the achievement of transaction value relative to the asking price (Anglin et al., 2003; Zahirovic-Herbert et al., 2020). This proposed conceptualisation draws on research concerning marketing time and sale prices, while extending the framework to include sales conversion. The definition and measurement of each outcome must be aligned with the unit of analysis.

Research Propositions

Based on the theory and the variable definitions above, this section presents the proposed relationships. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework. The three digital marketing stimuli influence Buyer Trust (P1–P3), Buyer Trust influences Real Estate Sales Performance (P4), and Buyer Trust mediates the relationship between the stimuli and performance (P5).

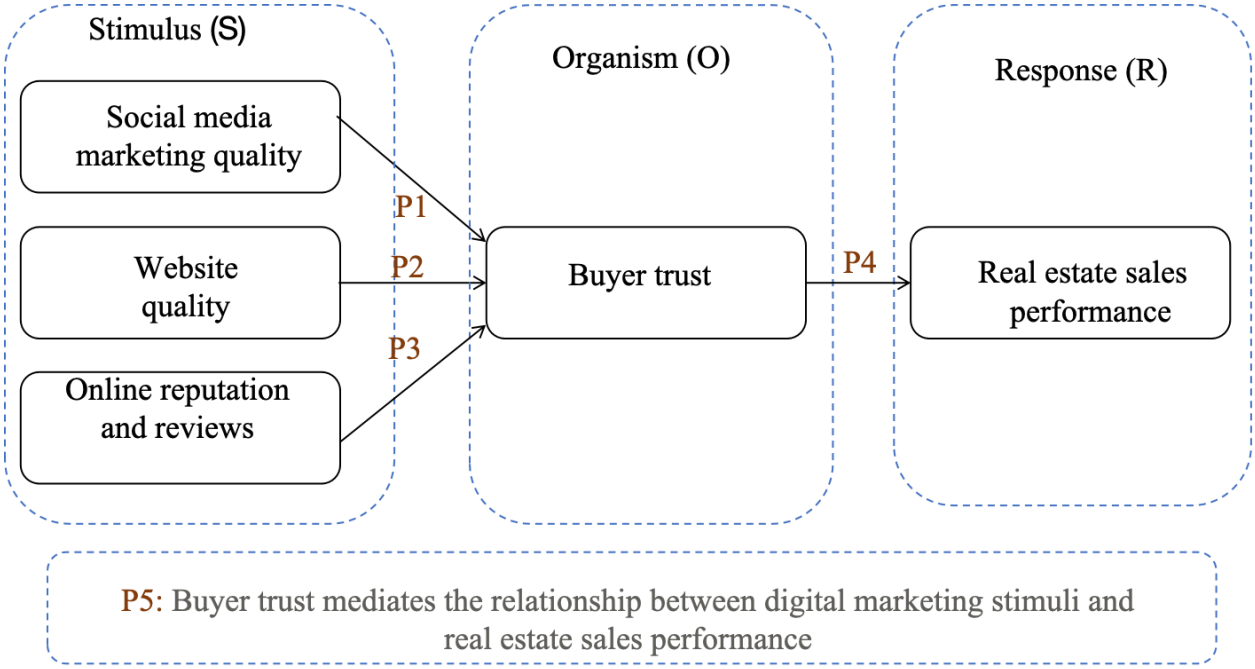

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Digital Marketing Stimuli and Buyer Trust

In high-involvement purchase contexts characterised by information asymmetry, buyers rely heavily on digital cues to form trust judgements about sellers (Gefen et al., 2003; Pavlou, 2003). From a signaling theory perspective (Connelly et al., 2011), the three digital marketing stimuli identified in this framework each function as distinct quality signals that reduce buyer uncertainty through different mechanisms.

Social media marketing provides interactive and personalised content that allows prospective buyers to observe developer behaviour, communication responsiveness, and community feedback in real time. Repeated positive interactions on social media platforms may build relational familiarity and signal the developer's willingness to engage transparently with prospective buyers, thereby supporting trust (Karunasingha & Abeysekera, 2022; Kim & Ko, 2012). Prasad et al. (2026) found a positive relationship between their multidimensional digital marketing construct and developer trust in the residential property context, and Ho et al. (2024) demonstrated that entertainment, interaction, customisation, and word-of-mouth dimensions of social media marketing significantly influence purchase intention in the property industry. Therefore, this study proposes the following.

Proposition 1: Social Media Marketing Quality positively influences Buyer Trust.

Website quality signals organisational competence and professionalism. Accurate and complete listing information, an intuitive user interface, and responsive online support convey the developer's capability and reliability, and may contribute to the buyer's trust assessment. The information systems success model provides a conceptual basis for these quality dimensions (DeLone & McLean, 2003). Qalati et al. (2021) demonstrated that website quality significantly influences trust in online purchase contexts, while Gefen et al. (2003) examined trust alongside technology acceptance in online shopping. Kim and Lennon (2013)

further demonstrated, within an SOR framework, that reputation and website quality are related to consumers' internal responses, including emotion and perceived risk, and to purchase intention. In real estate, where the property listing website or portal is often the buyer's first point of contact with the developer, the quality of this digital interface plays a particularly important role in establishing initial trust. Therefore, this study proposes the following.

Proposition 2: Website Quality positively influences Buyer Trust.

Online reputation and reviews provide third-party validation that reduces uncertainty. From a signaling perspective, credible third-party reviews may complement developer-generated information (Connelly et al., 2011). Credible, consistent, and sufficient online reviews from previous buyers serve as social proof of developer trustworthiness, which is particularly influential in property markets where direct product inspection is limited at the early search stage (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri, 2015). Therefore, this study proposes the following.

Proposition 3: The construct Online Reputation and Reviews positively influences Buyer Trust.

Buyer Trust and Real Estate Sales Performance

Trust is associated with willingness to transact in online settings (McKnight et al., 2002; Pavlou, 2003). Wang et al. (2022) also reported a positive relationship between trust and purchase intention in social commerce. Extending this reasoning to property transactions, this study proposes that buyer trust may encourage progression from enquiry to a signed agreement and reduce hesitation during negotiation. These mechanisms could improve conversion, shorten the sales cycle, and support transaction value achievement. The effects on these actual sales outcomes remain propositions for empirical testing, rather than established findings of the cited e-commerce studies. Therefore, this study proposes the following.

Proposition 4: Buyer Trust positively influences Real Estate Sales Performance.

Mediation Effect

The SOR framework provides a theoretical basis for examining how internal psychological states transmit the effects of external stimuli on behavioural responses (Jacoby, 2002; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Signaling theory complements this account by explaining how credible signals may reduce uncertainty in information-asymmetric markets (Connelly et al., 2011). In this study, Buyer Trust is proposed as a mediator between the three digital marketing stimuli and Real Estate Sales Performance. Evidence for trust mediation is available in social media marketing and short-video contexts (Karunasingha & Abeysekera, 2022; Luo et al., 2025). Prasad et al. (2026) also reported partial mediation by developer trust in the relationship between digital marketing and residential property purchase intention. These findings motivate the proposed mediation pathway but do not establish that all effects on sales performance operate through trust. Therefore, this study proposes the following.

Proposition 5: Buyer Trust mediates the relationship between digital marketing stimuli (Social Media Marketing Quality, Website Quality, and Online Reputation and Reviews) and Real Estate Sales Performance.

In doing so, the framework opens a new research agenda situated at the intersection of digital marketing, buyer psychology, and property sales management.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

This section describes the sample and data collection procedures for the proposed empirical test of the framework. The proposed study will employ a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, which is an established approach for capturing buyer perceptions across multiple constructs at a single point in time and is widely employed in marketing and digital engagement research (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Because cross-sectional data cannot establish causal direction, any estimated mediation effects will be interpreted as associations consistent with the proposed framework, rather than as proof of causality. Procedural steps will be taken to reduce common method variance, a recognised risk when all constructs are measured from the same respondent using the same instrument (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. The following paragraphs specify the target population, sampling strategy, recruitment channels, questionnaire procedures, and minimum sample size.

The target population is individual residential property buyers who have completed a digital property purchase journey within the previous twenty-four months. This recall window reflects the nature of residential property purchase as a high-involvement decision with a lengthy search and negotiation cycle (Broxterman & Zhou, 2023; Prasad et al., 2026), and the proposed twenty-four-month boundary balances recruitment feasibility against the risk of recall error; its suitability will be assessed during pre-testing (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The unit of analysis is the individual buyer, because all stimulus and organism constructs are buyer-reported perceptions.

The study will use purposive sampling to reach qualified respondents who possess direct and recent experience of a digitally mediated property journey (Etikan et al., 2016). To be eligible, respondents must be of legal contracting age, must have actively searched for residential property using at least one digital channel, and must have progressed to at least the negotiation or offer stage. Qualified buyers will be reached through property listing platforms, developer customer databases with institutional consent, and property-focused online communities. Distributing recruitment across multiple channels reduces the risk of source-specific selection bias (Dillman et al., 2014).

Self-administered online questionnaires will be the primary instrument. Participation will be voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire will undergo cognitive pre-testing with a pilot group of fifteen to twenty respondents to check wording clarity and item comprehension before full deployment (Collins, 2003). To reduce common method bias, the survey will employ procedural safeguards including clear item wording, assurances of anonymity, and psychological separation of predictor and outcome sections (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Attention check items will be embedded to identify inattentive respondents (Meade & Craig, 2012).

The minimum sample size will be estimated using the inverse square root method, with assumptions about the smallest path coefficient of interest and the desired significance level and statistical power specified in advance (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). A target of at least 300 valid

responses is proposed, subject to this assessment rather than treated as a guarantee of adequate power (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Measures

Each construct will be measured reflectively (Hair & Alamer, 2022) by several survey items on a seven-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Where suitable validated scales are available, items will be adapted and reworded for the property context; newly developed items will require content validation and pilot testing. Social Media Marketing Quality will be measured with items adapted from Kim and Ko (2012); Website Quality with items informed by DeLone and McLean's (2003) quality dimensions; Online Reputation and Reviews with items informed by Cheung and Thadani's (2012) integrative framework; and Buyer Trust with items adapted from McKnight et al. (2002). Real Estate Sales Performance will be measured using items capturing sales conversion rate, sales speed, and transaction value achievement, with operational definitions informed by research on marketing time and sale prices (Anglin et al., 2003; Castelli et al., 2020; Zahirovic-Herbert et al., 2020).

For constructs specified reflectively, the psychometric properties will be assessed following established criteria. Internal consistency reliability will be examined through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with values of 0.70 or above treated as acceptable (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Nunnally, 1978). Convergent validity will be examined through the average variance extracted, with values of 0.50 or above treated as acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity will be examined through the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations, with values below 0.85 indicating satisfactory discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). These criteria will inform the evaluation of reflective measures before structural model testing; any formative or objective measures will require assessment appropriate to their specification.

Data Analysis

The collected data will be analysed with partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2014) for the structural model and SPSS for descriptive statistics. This method suits a predictive conceptual model with several related constructs and a mediation path (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The analysis will follow two steps.

First, the measurement model will be examined through indicator reliability, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio for discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Second, the structural model will be examined through path coefficients and their significance from bootstrapping (Hair & Alamer, 2022), the coefficient of determination, and effect sizes (Cohen, 1988), in order to assess the five propositions. Direct paths from each stimulus to performance will also be examined to distinguish partial mediation from an indirect-only pattern. The specific indirect effects through Buyer Trust will be assessed using the specific indirect effect procedure in PLS-SEM with bootstrapped confidence intervals (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Harman's single-factor test and the full collinearity approach will be used as supplementary diagnostics for common method bias (Kock, 2015; Podsakoff et al., 2003); neither will be treated as definitive evidence that such bias is absent. These analytical steps provide a rigorous basis for evaluating both the measurement quality and the structural relationships proposed in the framework.

Discussion

Theoretical Contributions

This paper makes several contributions to the literature. First, it builds on applications of the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework in digital commerce and residential real estate by focusing on sales performance as the proposed response variable. Second, it integrates signaling theory with the SOR framework to provide a dual-theoretical account that explains both the psychological pathway (SOR) and the informational logic (signaling) through which digital marketing may influence sales performance. Third, it identifies three categories of digital marketing stimuli (social media content, website quality, and online reputation) that correspond to different signal sources (organisation-generated, platform-mediated, and user-generated) and examines their effects on buyer trust. Fourth, the framework positions buyer trust as a focal mediator whose contribution to sales performance can be tested alongside possible direct effects. This parsimonious approach provides a focused theoretical account that identifies a specific psychological mechanism through which digital marketing may relate to sales outcomes. Fifth, the framework advances the real estate marketing literature by proposing links between digital marketing constructs and multidimensional sales performance outcomes rather than purchase intention alone, addressing a measurement gap identified in prior property digitalisation research (Al-haimi et al., 2025; Ho et al., 2024; Prasad et al., 2026).

Practical Implications

For practice, the framework suggests that real estate sales performance may depend partly on how effectively digital marketing investments build buyer trust. Developers and brokerages should recognise that social media content, website quality, and online reputation management are not isolated marketing activities but interconnected quality signals that collectively shape the same psychological outcome: buyer trust (Connelly et al., 2011). Social media marketing should prioritise interactive and responsive communication to build relational trust, rather than focusing solely on content volume (Ho et al., 2024; Kim & Ko, 2012). Property listing websites should ensure information accuracy, system reliability, and responsive online support, as these quality dimensions may signal organisational competence to prospective buyers (DeLone & McLean, 2003; Qalati et al., 2021). Online reputation management should actively encourage credible buyer reviews and address negative feedback transparently, as user-generated content serves as powerful third-party validation in a market defined by information asymmetry (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri, 2015). Most importantly, the trust-centred framework suggests that all digital marketing activities should be evaluated not by reach or engagement metrics alone, but by their contribution to building buyer trust and, subject to empirical validation, sales conversion.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

This study has several limitations. First, as a conceptual paper, its propositions are drawn from theory and existing literature and have not yet been tested empirically. Second, the framework is developed for high-involvement residential property in digitally mature markets, which may limit its generalisation to other property types, emerging markets, or low-digital-adoption contexts. The proposed cross-sectional survey is also vulnerable to recall error and common method bias, and cannot establish causal mediation. In addition, the relationship between buyer-level perceptions and sales performance depends on a measurement design that aligns outcomes with the unit of analysis.

These limitations open several directions for future research. First, the framework should be tested empirically using the survey design outlined above. Second, longitudinal designs can track how digital marketing stimuli shape trust across the long property decision cycle, offering stronger evidence of temporal sequence than cross-sectional data alone (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Third, the framework could be tested across different countries, city tiers, and market segments, including commercial property, to examine cultural and market differences in the trust-building process. Fourth, future work can introduce additional organism variables, such as perceived value or perceived risk, to determine whether trust is a sufficient mediator or whether other psychological states provide additional explanatory power. Fifth, future research can examine moderating variables such as buyer digital literacy, property price tier, and market maturity to identify boundary conditions under which the proposed relationships are strengthened or weakened. Finally, future studies can compare the relative importance of the three digital marketing stimuli in building trust, providing actionable guidance on how developers should allocate their digital marketing budgets across social media, website development, and reputation management.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper has developed a framework proposing how digital marketing stimuli may shape real estate sales performance through the mediating role of buyer trust. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework and signaling theory, it addresses a context in which purchases carry high value, high risk, and significant information asymmetry, and in which the psychological mechanisms linking digital marketing to sales outcomes have received limited theoretical attention. The framework proposes that Social Media Marketing Quality, Website Quality, and Online Reputation and Reviews influence Real Estate Sales Performance through Buyer Trust, and it advances five propositions and a method for future testing. These propositions await empirical validation, but the framework provides a structured basis for future research and practice. The framework suggests that credible digital signals may support buyer trust and progression towards a signed agreement, providing a basis for testing how trust relates to actual sales outcomes

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