

The effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty for a sportswear brand: The mediating role of brand trust and cognitive engagement

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Abstract: Building brand loyalty has become essential, particularly for sportswear brands in the age of social media. As one of the countries committed to increasing the trend of healthy lifestyles, Indonesia provides opportunities for sportswear brands to grow. This study aims to investigate how social media marketing affects brand loyalty, together with cognitive engagement and brand trust as mediators. An online survey was conducted with 350 respondents and the PLS-SEM method was used for analysis. The results show that social media marketing positively affects cognitive engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Furthermore, both cognitive engagement and brand trust positively affect brand loyalty and act as mediators in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. This study contributes to marketing literature by highlighting the role of cognitive engagement and brand trust in influencing brand loyalty. It provides strategic recommendations for sportswear to enhance its digital marketing efforts. These include creating interactive and engaging content, maintaining transparency and authenticity communication to customers, leveraging credible influencers, and using data-driven insights to personalize content.

Keywords: Brand loyalty, Brand trust, Cognitive engagement, Social media marketing, Sportswear brand.

1. Introduction

Social media's explosive growth has significantly changed global marketing strategies. An increasing number of businesses are realizing the value of integrating social media into their overall marketing strategies, including advertising and customer relationship management, and using it as an internal communication channel [1, 2]. Because of that, social media marketing (SMM) is becoming an essential component of marketing strategies [3]. Social media marketing is important for all brands, including sportswear brands. In Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia has committed to continuing to encourage the development of the sports industry considering the trend of a healthy lifestyle in society. This healthy lifestyle trend provides opportunities for fashion brands engaged in sports, such as clothing, footwear, or sports equipment [4]. This provides an opportunity for sportswear brands to grow in Indonesia.

Despite its strategic efforts, it cannot be denied that the sportswear brand sometimes experiences fluctuating engagement rates on Instagram. This inconsistency emphasizes engagement's vital role in the brand's overall marketing success. High engagement levels are essential as they foster a sense of community among customers and help brands grow in the digital environment. Brand trust (BT) is another fundamental element influencing customer interactions on social media. Establishing strong brand trust requires companies to make sincere efforts to nurture positive relationships with their customers [5]. When customers feel a sense of trust toward a brand, it can significantly enhance brand loyalty (BL) [6]. This loyalty is the key to long-term success.

Nevertheless, the brand has faced its challenges. At times, controversial social media campaigns have sparked negative perceptions, making it harder to keep customers engaged. In this way, customers may have incentives to switch to other substitutes. These challenges highlight how crucial it is for brands to strike the right balance in their marketing strategies, ensuring they build and maintain BT and BL in the fast-changing world of social media.

Previous studies suggest that BT can mediate SMM and BL [6, 7]. Research also shows that customer brand engagement (CBE) and BT can act as mediators between SMM and BL [8]. However, the dimension of CBE that can be mediated is cognitive engagement (CE), while the emotional engagement dimension may not be as impactful [9]. Thus, CE will be introduced as a new mediator in this study. The role of CE and BT as mediators in linking SMM to BL has not been thoroughly explored in the context of sportswear brand customers in Indonesia, thereby creating a potential research gap. Indeed, technological advancements have brought about a transformation in the behaviors of customers in Indonesia [10] and loyalty remains a key construct in understanding customer behavior [11]. Therefore, this study aims to examine SMM along with the effects of CE and BT on BL among the sportswear brand customers in Indonesia, addressing the following questions.

RQ1: How does SMM influence CE, BL, and BT among the sportswear brand customers in Indonesia?

RQ2: How do CE and BT influence BL among the sportswear brand customers in Indonesia?

RQ3: How do CE and BT mediate the relationship between SMM and BL?

2. Literature Review

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model builds on the foundation of stimulus-response theory [12]. This research utilizes that model, which proposes that SMM consists of five dimensions as the stimulus (S) that will trigger the occurrence of internal processes (i.e., CE) and the customer's initial external evaluation in the form of BT, which then results in BL as a response (R). This relationship is visually represented in Figure 1.

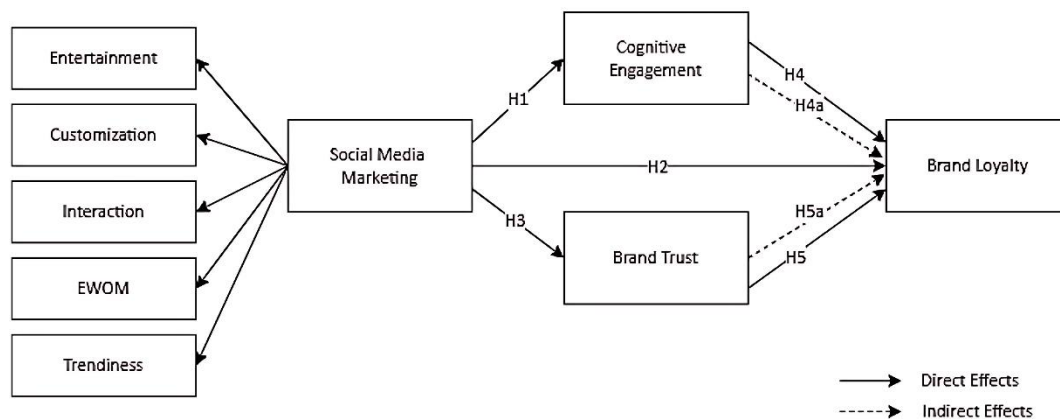


Figure 1.
Conceptual framework.

2.1. SMM, CE, BT, BL

Social media is now a significant marketing tool and serves as a connecting platform between consumers, businesses, and organizations. Social media-driven e-commerce, otherwise known as social commerce, leverages social media platforms to support social interaction as well as advertising [13]. Social media is also used by businesses to interact and engage with customers, which increases customer attention and cognitive engagement [9]. It will encourage positive customer responses to

brands [7]. One of these positive responses is brand loyalty. It is consumer loyalty to a brand characterized by commitment and emotional attachment to the brand [14]. Brand loyalty reflects the commitment of consumer behavior demonstrated through their actions in maintaining attachment to a brand [15]. Moreover, brand loyalty refers to a response to behavior toward a preferred product or service, which is demonstrated through the intention to repurchase in the long term and recommend products and services from that brand [16]. Several studies also support the positive effect of SMM strategies on BL [6, 17]. Furthermore, the existence of SMM that can create a positive response must also enhance the brand trust (BT) level [6]. In this way, BT is considered important in every relationship with customers.

H₁: SMM positively affects CE.

H₂: SMM positively affects BL.

H₃: SMM positively affects BT.

2.2. CE and BL

Customer-Brand Engagement (CBE) through social media has attracted more attention in recent decades [18]. CBE on social media platforms is becoming very important [19]. The cognitive engagement dimension is the beginning of CBE. Cognitive refers to the level of consumer thinking related to the processing and elaboration of the brand in the interaction of consumers with the brand [20]. Moreover, cognitive engagement (CE) is a collection of long-lasting and active mental states in a consumer [21]. Cognitive engagement is a part of CBE that is important to examine loyalty when seeking to understand the customer engagement process [22]. Thus, CE positively impacts BL, and CE can act as a mediator [9]. Nevertheless, another study revealed that CE does not have a positive effect on attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty [21]. Thus, there is a gap and a scarcity of research that clarifies it.

H₄: CE positively affects BL.

H_{5a}: CE mediates between SMM and BL.

2.3. BT and BL

Brand trust (BT) develops over time, shaped by experiences and interactions that have occurred in the past [23]. BT is customer confidence in a brand that is related to its reliability. Previous studies found that BT impacts brand BL [6, 7, 24] and advertising has a significant impact on BL [25]. In other words, BT can act as a mediator [5]. Thus, the SMM affects BT [6, 7] and BT impacts BL [6, 7, 24] which means BT can mediate the SMM and BL [26].

H₆: BT positively affects BL.

H_{5b}: BT mediates between SMM and BL.

3. Research Method

The study used a quantitative approach with PLS-SEM to analyze the relationship between variables. An online survey was conducted with 350 respondents who met the criteria, which was distributed through Instagram Stories and the sportswear social media community. The criteria outlined below are designed explicitly for this empirical study.

1. Active in using Instagram.
2. Viewed marketing content on the sportswear brand's Instagram account in the last six months.
3. Have purchased products of the sportswear brand in the last six months.
4. Have been involved in sharing experiences with sportswear brands, such as posting comments or reviews, sharing content, or recommending the brand.

As a measurement, eleven items were used to evaluate the five dimensions of SMM [27]. On the other hand, two items for cognitive engagement [9]. BT and BL were assessed using three items

[6]. All items were modified to fit the purpose of this study. The data will be analyzed using PLS-SEM, with a 5% significance level (one-tailed) and the SMM which comprises five dimensions was assessed as a Type I second-order reflective. For the reliability and validity of construct were tested using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, outer loading, and average variance extracted (AVE). Structural model assessment included R^2 values, Q^2 values, goodness of fit, and hypothesis testing using bootstrapping.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 350 respondents, male respondents, make up the majority (61.4%), namely 215 respondents. Meanwhile, 135 respondents were female with a percentage of 38.6%. The largest percentage (40.6%) were in the 25-34 age range. Of those surveyed, 30.9% reported an income between IDR 6,000,000 to IDR 9,000,000 and 49.4% worked in the private sector. Afterward, this study first conducts measurement and structural model assessments—the measurement model as shown in Table 1 for reliability and convergent validity.

Table 1.
Reliability and Convergent Validity.

Constructs	Indicators	Outer Loading	Alpha	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Entertainment	ENT1	0.905	0.773	0.898	0.815
	ENT2	0.901			
Customization	CUS1	0.900	0.784	0.903	0.822
	CUS2	0.914			
Interaction	INT1	0.880	0.814	0.890	0.729
	INT2	0.851			
	INT3	0.830			
EWOM	EWO1	0.905	0.763	0.894	0.808
	EWO2	0.892			
Trendiness	TRE1	0.880	0.711	0.874	0.775
	TRE2	0.881			
Cognitive Engagement	CE1	0.876	0.735	0.883	0.790
	CE2	0.901			
Brand Trust	BT1	0.836	0.783	0.873	0.697
	BT2	0.830			
	BT3	0.838			
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.800	0.761	0.862	0.676
	BL2	0.831			
	BL3	0.836			

The results of reliability and convergent validity show that they are reliable and valid as they meet the threshold set by Hair, et al. [28]. Moreover, the measurement model also tests the discriminant validity. These are shown in Table 2 for Fornell-Larcker and Table 3 for HTMT.

Table 2.
Fornell and Larcker of Discriminant Validity.

	BL	BT	CE	CUS	ENT	EWO	INT	TRE
BL	0.822							
BT	0.575	0.835						
CE	0.400	0.365	0.889					
CUS	0.452	0.426	0.301	0.907				
ENT	0.411	0.396	0.362	0.602	0.903			
EWO	0.401	0.405	0.392	0.595	0.606	0.899		
INT	0.377	0.326	0.300	0.600	0.607	0.580	0.854	
TRE	0.448	0.392	0.410	0.521	0.470	0.526	0.480	0.881

Table 3.
HTMT of Discriminant Validity.

	BL	BT	CE	CUS	ENT	EWO	INT	TRE
BL								
BT	0.742							
CE	0.534	0.481						
CUS	0.584	0.542	0.396					
ENT	0.535	0.508	0.477	0.773				
EWO	0.525	0.522	0.525	0.769	0.788			
INT	0.480	0.406	0.390	0.753	0.765	0.737		
TRE	0.610	0.523	0.565	0.700	0.634	0.716	0.632	

All of the results in Table 2 and Table 3 for discriminant validity have met the threshold by Hair, et al. [28] indicating that they are valid. Furthermore, Figure 2 presents the structural model. R² values to assess its explanatory power, suggest that 42.2% BL can be explained (R² = 0.422), 23.7% BT can be explained (R² = 0.237), and 19.5% CE can be described (R² = 0.195). We assessed the model’s predictive relevance using the Q² value. The results show that all Q² values greater than zero (BL = 0.267, BT = 0.230, COG = 0.187), support the conclusion that the constructs exhibit satisfactory predictive relevance. The goodness of fit for the model was further assessed, yielding a value of 0.064. Therefore, the model exhibits a good fit.

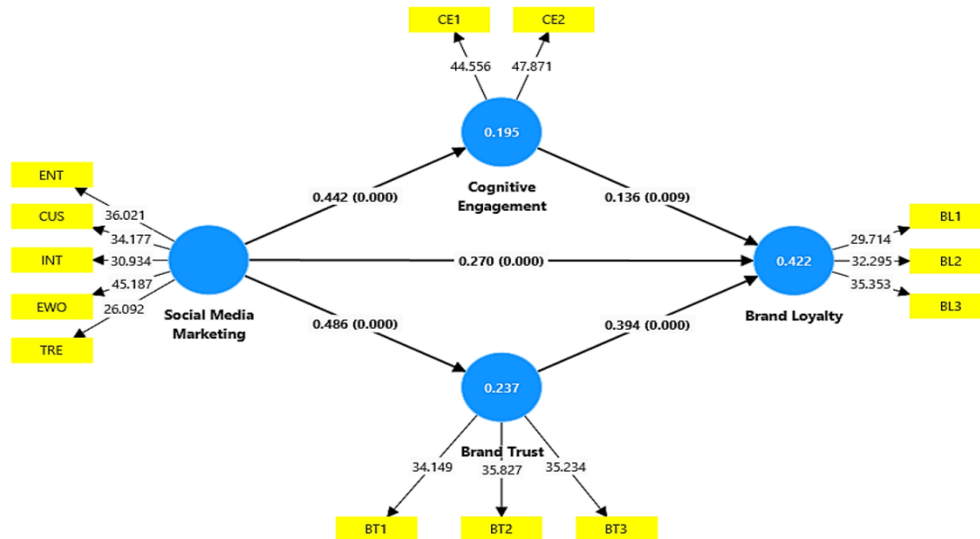


Figure 2.
Result of Structural Model.

A detailed analysis of the results shows that hypothesis testing was conducted using bootstrapping. The results are presented in Table 4 for direct effects and Table 5 for indirect effects.

Table 4.
Direct Effect Results.

Direct Effect	Original Sample	T-stat	P-value	Decision
H1: SMM -> CE	0.442	9.399	0.000	Accept
H2: SMM -> BL	0.270	5.458	0.000	Accept
H3: SMM -> BT	0.486	11.138	0.000	Accept
H4: CE -> BL	0.136	2.368	0.009	Accept
H5: BT -> BL	0.394	7.705	0.000	Accept

Table 5.
Indirect Effect Results.

Indirect Effect	Original Sample	T-stat	P-value	Decision	Mediation
H4a: SMM -> CE -> BL	0.060	2.278	0.011	Accept	Partial
H5a: SMM-> BT -> BL	0.192	6.456	0.000	Accept	Partial

The hypotheses testing results confirm that H1 to H5 are accepted, as all path coefficients are positive, t-stat > 1.65, and p-value < 0.05. This indicates that SMM positively affects CE (H1), BL (H2), and BT (H3). In addition, CE and BT also positively affect BL (H4 and H5). These findings align with previous studies, which found that SMM positively affects CE and CE positively affects BL [9]. SMM positively affects BT [6, 7, 26, 29]. SMM positively affects BL [6, 7, 9, 26, 30]. BT positively affects BL [6, 7, 25, 26]. This study also confirms that CE mediates the relationship between SMM and BL, consistent with Aljuhmani, et al. [9]. This reinforces the importance of cognitive engagement in customer-brand interactions. Additionally, BT as a mediator between SMM and BL [6, 26]. Therefore, CE and BT play a significant role in mediating the relationship between SMM and BL (H4a and H5a are accepted).

All these accepted hypotheses show that the presence of SMM on the sportswear brand's Instagram social media will affect the CE of the audience. This means that the sportswear brand will be in the audience's minds along with the brand's marketing content. How that brand carries out SMM will also affect the level of trust in the sportswear brand. This means that the more positive the brand carries out the marketing method, the higher the brand's trust. The brand, which is often in the mind accompanied by a high level of trust in the brand, will also increase brand loyalty. Thus, this empirical study found valuable insights into the relationship between SMM and BL by highlighting the role of CE and BT on social media, which carry several managerial implications, especially for sportswear brand managers. The brand should focus on creating interactive and engaging content. Strategies such as user-generated content, behind-the-scenes storytelling, and interactive social media experiences will further engage customers. In addition, transparency, authenticity, and consistent communication are essential to build brand trust. Responding promptly to customer feedback and leveraging credible influencers can further build brand trust and credibility. To maximize the impact of SMM, the brand must ensure that its social media efforts attract attention and foster meaningful engagement and long-term relationships. By leveraging data-driven insights, the brand can personalize content, enhance the customer experience, and create deeper emotional connections with its audience. Strengthening cognitive engagement and brand trust through SMM will ultimately help the brand differentiate itself in the competitive sportswear market, increase customer retention, and drive long-term brand loyalty. For enhance interactive and engaging content to strengthen customer-brand relationships. Implementing transparent communication and influencer marketing can further build trust and loyalty.

5. Conclusion

This study adds important insights to marketing literature by examining SMM, CE, BT, and BL together. The results indicate that SMM, CE, and BT are significant drivers of BL. Notably, CE and BT can act as mediators. In essence, the findings suggest that SMM, CE, and BT are important for shaping Indonesian customer's behavior toward a sportswear brand, especially regarding brand loyalty. However, this study has some limitations. First, it focuses only on the Instagram platform, which may limit generalizability. Second, the study is limited to Indonesia so that it can expand the scope to multiple countries could offer more insights into customer behavior. Last, because data collection relied solely on online surveys, other methods like interviews could yield more profound insights.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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