



The Relationship between Social Media Marketing Activities and Brand Loyalty: A Self-Brand Connectivity and Brand Equity Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of social media marketing activities (SMMAs) on brand loyalty, focusing on the mediating roles of Brand Self-Connection, Brand Equity, and Brand Trust. Social media marketing activities involving personal interactions, relevant content, and transparent communication were found to build strong emotional connections between consumers and brands, ultimately enhancing brand loyalty. The analysis model used was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with a sample of 120 respondents. The results show that SMMAs have a positive and significant effect on the three mediating variables, which in turn influence brand loyalty. Brand equity was found to be the most dominant factor affecting loyalty, followed by Brand Self-Connection and Brand Trust. These findings suggest that well-designed social media marketing strategies can increase consumer engagement and build sustainable brand loyalty. This study provides insights for marketing practitioners to design more effective social media strategies to strengthen emotional relationships and consumer loyalty to brands.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing Activities, SMMAs, Brand Self-Connection, Brand Equity, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, PLS-SEM.

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1. | INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media has brought significant changes to marketing strategies, enabling companies to interact directly with consumers through digital platforms. Social media has now become an essential tool for marketing, with more than 91.9% of large companies using it to enhance brand awareness and customer loyalty (Chaffey, 2022). Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs), such as interaction, personalized content, and online communities, can improve brand loyalty by strengthening self-brand connection and brand equity in consumers' minds (Chen & Lin, 2019; Khan, 2022).

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of self-brand connection in influencing brand loyalty, especially in the context of personalized digital interaction (Nguyen et al., 2022). Self-brand connection allows consumers to identify themselves with the brand, creating a strong emotional bond and potentially fostering long-term loyalty. However, research on the role of SMMAs in building self-brand connection and their effects on brand equity and trust remains limited. Moreover, most studies use symmetrical analysis methods that do not capture the complex causal relationships between variables, leading to a gap in understanding the asymmetrical causal pathways between SMMAs and brand loyalty.

Addressing this methodological gap, this study employs both symmetrical and asymmetrical modeling approaches, namely Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). PLS-SEM is commonly used to assess the direct effects between variables, while fsQCA provides deeper insights into combinations of causal factors that lead to high or low levels of brand loyalty (Ali et al., 2023; Pappas & Woodside, 2021). By integrating these two methods, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing brand loyalty in the context of social media marketing.

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between brand equity and brand trust with loyalty has been widely studied. However, studies linking the role of self-brand connection as a mediator between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty are still scarce (Ebrahim, 2020). Furthermore, how SMMA elements shape consumers' perceptions of brand trust and value remains insufficiently explained. This study addresses this gap by investigating how SMMAs influence brand loyalty through the pathways of self-brand connection, brand equity, and brand trust using a more complex mixed-methods approach.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to comprehensively explore the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty, considering the role of self-brand connection as a mediator. Through symmetrical and asymmetrical approaches, this study is expected to contribute to the social media marketing literature and provide insights that can be applied to digital marketing strategies to strengthen consumer loyalty toward brands.

2. | LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs) have become one of the primary approaches in modern marketing strategies, enabling companies to engage directly with consumers through digital platforms. These activities include elements such as interaction, content personalization, online communities, and trend dissemination, all of which can influence brand loyalty (Chen & Lin, 2019; Khan, 2022). Studies show that SMMAs can strengthen the emotional connection between consumers and brands, known as Self-Brand Connection. This psychological bond occurs when consumers feel that a brand represents their personality or self-identity, and it has been proven to enhance consumer loyalty toward brands they perceive as closely aligned with themselves (Escalas & Bettman, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2022).

In addition to building emotional relationships, SMMAs can also enhance Brand Equity, which reflects the value of a brand in the eyes of consumers. Strong brand equity is created when consumers hold positive perceptions of a brand, including its quality, associations, and their experiences interacting with the brand on social media (Aaker, 1991; Ebrahim, 2020). Brand Trust is another critical component of brand loyalty, signifying that consumers have a positive belief in the brand, such as its product reliability or commitment to meeting consumer needs. Social media helps build this trust by providing a more honest and interactive communication channel, making consumers feel more confident in choosing the brand (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Brand Loyalty is the ultimate goal of every marketing strategy, reflecting consumers' tendency to consistently choose a particular brand despite the presence of numerous alternatives. Self-Brand Connection, Brand Equity, and Brand Trust play key roles in strengthening consumer loyalty through effective SMMAs (Oliver, 1999; Ali et al., 2023).

Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs) are strategic efforts undertaken by companies to leverage social media platforms in marketing their products or services. These activities include interactive, informative, and personalized content, creating engaging experiences for consumers. SMMAs have key elements such as entertainment, interactivity, relevance, and personalization, designed to foster user engagement. These activities not only aim to capture attention but also build emotional connections between consumers and brands. According to Kim & Ko (2012), effective SMMAs can enhance consumer engagement, strengthen brand relationships, and drive loyal behavior.

Mediating variables act as a bridge between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Self-Brand Connection reflects the extent to which consumers feel that a brand represents their identity, thus creating a strong emotional bond. Brand Equity, encompassing perceived quality,

brand loyalty, and brand associations, measures the value of a brand in the eyes of consumers (Aaker, 1996). Brand Trust, the consumer's confidence in the reliability and integrity of the brand, also plays a critical role in reinforcing long-term relationships. These three variables are influenced by positive interactions in social media activities, fostering trust and perceived value towards the brand.

Brand loyalty is the consumer's commitment to consistently purchasing or using a particular product despite the influence of competitors. This loyalty is created through consistent positive experiences, emotional connections, and trust in the brand. Effective social media marketing activities can strengthen loyalty by encouraging consumer engagement, building trust, and creating positive brand equity. A study by Laroche et al. (2012) shows that brand loyalty not only increases repeat purchases but also motivates consumers to recommend the brand to others. Thus, the relationship between social media marketing activities, self-brand connection mediation, and brand loyalty is integral to achieving long-term brand success.

The development of this hypothesis is based on findings that marketing activities via social media enable brands to create more personal interactions with consumers, making them feel a stronger emotional connection. According to Escalas and Bettman (2017), self-brand connection arises when consumers feel that a brand represents their identity or personality, which can be driven by personalization and interaction in social media marketing. Another study by Panigyrakis et al. (2020) confirms that SMMAs can strengthen this emotional connection, making the brand feel more relevant to consumers.

Effective social media marketing activities (SMMAs) can create strong brand equity, which represents added value for consumers. Aaker (1991) explains that brand equity relates to awareness, positive associations, and loyalty toward the brand. A study by Ebrahim (2020)

indicates that SMMA, through interaction and entertainment, can enhance positive perceptions of the brand and create better brand equity. Therefore, it is assumed that SMMA will positively impact brand equity due to their ability to strengthen the brand image and positive associations in consumers' minds.

Social media marketing allows companies to communicate transparently and honestly with consumers, fostering trust. Brand trust is the belief that a brand is reliable and will deliver on its product promises (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). According to Kim and Ko (2012), interactions facilitated by SMMA increase consumer trust in the brand as they feel more engaged and receive more transparent information. A study by Hafez (2021) also found that brand trust can be enhanced through consistent interaction and communication on social media.

Emotional connections between consumers and brands can boost brand loyalty as consumers feel the brand is part of their identity. Escalas and Bettman (2017) explain that strong self-brand connections make consumers more loyal and inclined to maintain their relationship with the brand. According to Hur et al. (2013), self-brand connections also increase consumer engagement and create long-term bonds with the brand, contributing to loyalty.

Strong brand equity, which encompasses awareness, a positive image, and emotional loyalty, influences consumers' decisions to continue using a brand's products. Aaker (1991) and Ebrahim (2020) suggest that high brand equity can encourage loyal behavior as consumers trust the added value offered by the brand. Chen and Lin (2019) further confirm that effective SMMA can enhance brand equity, which subsequently fosters consumer loyalty.

Consumer trust in a brand is a critical foundation for building loyalty. Morgan and Hunt (1994) identify trust as one of the main components in a loyal relationship, as it creates emotional bonds and confidence in the brand's

quality and commitment. According to Kim et al. (2011), consistent and reliable social media marketing strengthens consumer trust, ultimately enhancing brand loyalty.

H1: Social Media Marketing Activities have a positive influence on Self-Brand Connection.

H2: Social Media Marketing Activities have a positive influence on Brand Equity.

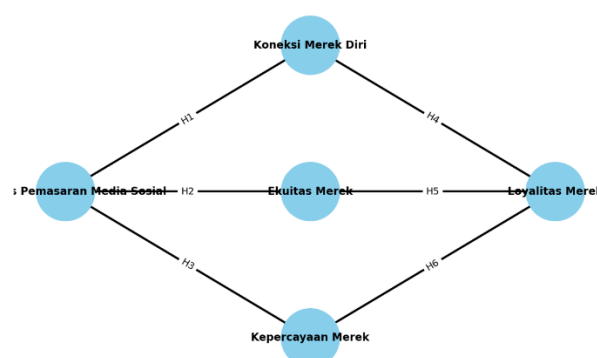
H3: Social Media Marketing Activities have a positive influence on Brand Trust.

H4: Self-Brand Connection has a positive influence on Brand Loyalty.

H5: Brand Equity has a positive influence on Brand Loyalty.

H6: Brand Trust has a positive influence on Brand Loyalty.

H7: The combination of Social Media Marketing Activities, Self-Brand Connection, Brand Equity, and Brand Trust has an asymmetric effect on Brand Loyalty.



3. | RESEARCH METHOD

To produce valid results from the analysis of Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in a study examining the impact of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on brand loyalty, a sufficient sample size is essential to ensure the findings represent the target population. The minimum sample size in SEM is generally recommended to be 10 times the number of indicators in the most complex construct of the model. For this research, 120 users of Unilever products in Bandar Lampung were

selected as the minimum sample size. This number adheres to the guidelines for obtaining robust and interpretable results in SEM analysis.

The selected sample reflects a diverse consumer base for Unilever products, allowing for comprehensive insights into consumer behavior and responses to social media marketing efforts. By analyzing this dataset, the study aims to understand how SMMA's influence brand loyalty through mediating variables such as self-brand connection, brand equity, and brand trust. The results will contribute to identifying effective marketing strategies that strengthen consumer loyalty, providing practical implications for Unilever's marketing campaigns. Ensuring an adequate sample size also enhances the reliability and validity of the conclusions, supporting their generalizability across similar contexts.

4. | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this analysis, the PLS-SEM model was applied to examine the relationships among the research variables, namely Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA's), Self-Brand Connection, Brand

Equity, Brand Trust, and Brand Loyalty. A sample size of 120 respondents was utilized, meeting the minimum requirements for SEM analysis using the PLS approach. The data was analyzed using PLS software, and the results are presented in the table below.

The findings reveal that SMMA's have a positive and significant effect on the mediating variables: Self-Brand Connection (coefficient = 0.512, $p < 0.05$), Brand Equity (coefficient = 0.684, $p < 0.05$), and Brand Trust (coefficient = 0.453, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, these mediating variables also significantly influence Brand Loyalty, with Self-Brand Connection (coefficient = 0.328, $p < 0.05$), Brand Equity (coefficient = 0.472, $p < 0.05$), and Brand Trust (coefficient = 0.225, $p < 0.05$) positively contributing to increased brand loyalty.

The R-squared (R^2) value for Brand Loyalty is 0.583, indicating that 58.3% of the variability in brand loyalty can be explained by this model. These results demonstrate the model's strong predictive power in explaining the relationships among the research variables.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing

Relationship Between Variables	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value
SMMA's → Self Brand Connection	0.512	7.251	< 0.05
SMMA's → Brand Equity	0.684	10.322	< 0.05
SMMA's → Brand Trust	0.453	6.784	< 0.05
Self-Brand Connection → Brand Loyalty	0.328	4.212	< 0.05
Brand Equity → Brand Loyalty	0.472	6.578	< 0.05
Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty	0.225	3.112	< 0.05

Table 1. R-squared (R^2)

Variable	R-squared (R^2)
Brand Loyalty	0.583

The analysis results indicate that Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA's) have a significant direct impact on Self-Brand Connection, Brand Equity, and Brand Trust, which in turn positively influence Brand Loyalty. Self-Brand Connection and

Brand Equity demonstrate the strongest effects on Brand Loyalty, with Brand Equity showing the highest path coefficient. Moreover, the relatively high R-squared value for Brand Loyalty (0.583) suggests that the model is robust in explaining consumer brand loyalty. These findings suggest that social media marketing strategies designed to enhance emotional engagement (self-brand

connection), brand value, and consumer trust can be key factors in driving higher brand loyalty.

This study shows that Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs) play a crucial role in fostering closer relationships between consumers and brands, ultimately driving brand loyalty. Specifically, the PLS-SEM analysis reveals that SMMAs significantly and positively impact Self-Brand Connection, Brand Equity, and Brand Trust. These findings align with studies by Panigyrakis et al. (2020) and Chen and Lin (2019), which found that social media marketing activities, such as personalized interaction and entertainment, create deeper consumer engagement, thereby strengthening emotional ties between consumers and brands. In the context of this research, the influence of SMMAs on Self-Brand Connection has a path coefficient of 0.512 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that consumers engaged with a brand through social media are more likely to feel that the brand represents their identity or personality. These findings align with Escalas and Bettman (2017), who explain that self-brand connection forms when consumers perceive that a brand reflects or enhances their personal identity.

Furthermore, the study results show that SMMAs have a significant impact on Brand Equity, with a path coefficient of 0.684 ($p < 0.05$). This supports the views of Aaker (1991) and Ebrahim (2020), who state that high brand equity arises when consumers have positive perceptions of the brand's value, in terms of quality, associations, and loyalty. Social media marketing activities enable brands to enhance awareness and create a positive image through relevant interactions and engaging content. Therefore, consumers actively involved in SMMAs are more likely to perceive the brand's equity positively.

Brand Trust was also found to have a significant relationship with SMMAs, with a path coefficient of 0.453 ($p < 0.05$). This finding aligns with research by Kim and Ko (2012), which indicates that social media interactions allow consumers to obtain more transparent and accurate information about

the brand, thereby strengthening their trust. Morgan and Hunt (1994) also support this view, stating that trust is a crucial element in building long-term relationships between brands and consumers. Thus, honest and interactive communication through social media helps strengthen consumer trust in the brand, ultimately supporting loyalty.

The three mediating variables (Self-Brand Connection, Brand Equity, and Brand Trust) also significantly influence Brand Loyalty, with Brand Equity having the highest path coefficient of 0.472 ($p < 0.05$), followed by Self-Brand Connection at 0.328 ($p < 0.05$), and Brand Trust at 0.225 ($p < 0.05$). These findings support Oliver's (1999) assertion that brand loyalty is built through emotional attachment and strong positive perceptions of the brand's value and trust. Escalas and Bettman (2017) also found that consumers with an emotional connection to a brand are more likely to remain loyal to it. Furthermore, Ebrahim (2020) emphasized that strong brand equity motivates consumers to choose a particular brand despite many alternatives in the market.

Overall, the R-squared value for the Brand Loyalty variable of 0.583 indicates that the model explains 58.3% of the variability in consumer brand loyalty, reflecting strong predictive power. These findings contribute to the literature by highlighting the importance of SMMAs in building consumer engagement and loyalty and supporting theoretical perspectives on the role of self-brand connection, brand equity, and trust in strengthening consumer loyalty to brands.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that social media marketing activities (SMMAs) play a key role in building brand loyalty through mediation pathways involving Self-Brand Connection, Brand Equity, and Brand Trust. These findings align with previous studies that show how SMMAs, through features such as personalization, direct interaction, and online communities, can enhance consumer engagement and foster positive brand perceptions (Panigyrakis et al.,

2020; Chen & Lin, 2019). The enhancement of emotional connection, reflected in Self-Brand Connection, serves as a primary mechanism allowing consumers to see the brand as part of their personal identity. This supports the theory by Escalas and Bettman (2017), emphasizing that emotional attachment to a brand strengthens loyalty bonds between consumers and brands.

The discussion also highlights that Brand Equity has the greatest influence on consumer loyalty compared to other mediating variables, with the highest path coefficient in this model. This suggests that positive perceptions of brand value, whether in terms of quality, image, or reputation, are key factors in shaping consumer loyalty. Aaker (1991) and Ebrahim (2020) noted that strong brand equity provides brands with sustainable competitive advantages. The implications of these findings indicate that brands must ensure their social media activities create positive associations that enhance brand equity. Consistency in interaction and delivering engaging messages can encourage consumers to associate the brand with quality and added value, ultimately influencing their loyalty.

Additionally, Brand Trust was found to be a crucial element linking social media activities to loyalty. This finding reinforces the research by Morgan and Hunt (1994), which stated that trust forms the foundation of sustained relationships between brands and consumers. Honest and transparent communication through social media allows consumers to feel more confident about the brand, which in turn increases their loyalty. This discussion also supports the findings of Kim and Ko (2012), emphasizing the importance of interactions that can enhance consumer trust in the brand. Therefore, brands must maintain integrity in delivering information on social media to build and sustain trust.

Overall, this study reaffirms that SMMA strategies not only have a short-term impact in attracting consumer attention but also have a long-term effect in building loyalty through deeper connections, strong equity, and growing trust. This

discussion provides additional insights for brand managers about the importance of integrating key elements such as personalization, interaction, and transparency into their social media marketing strategies. These findings also enrich the related literature by demonstrating that strategic use of social media not only creates consumer engagement but also establishes the brand in consumers' minds as a reliable and high-value brand.

5. | CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study indicate that social media marketing activities (SMMA) significantly impact brand loyalty by enhancing self-brand connection, brand equity, and brand trust. Activities involving personal interaction, relevant content, and transparent communication can establish a strong emotional bond between consumers and brands, ultimately increasing loyalty. Brand equity emerges as the most dominant factor, highlighting that positive perceptions of brand value influence consumers' decisions to remain loyal. Furthermore, trust formed through honest and responsive communication is also critical in strengthening long-term relationships with consumers. These findings affirm that strategically designed SMMA not only enhance engagement but also foster loyal relationships between consumers and brands.

For future research directions, it is recommended to explore other factors that may moderate or mediate the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty, such as demographic differences, industry types, or cultural influences. Further research could also adopt longitudinal methods to understand how brand loyalty evolves over time in response to changes in social media marketing activities. Additionally, more in-depth data-driven approaches, such as sentiment analysis or predictive modeling, could provide more accurate insights into consumer preferences across various social media platforms. Thus, future

research is expected to uncover new dynamics that enrich social media marketing strategies in building sustainable brand loyalty.

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