

The Impact of Social Media Usage on Branding: The Perspective of Thai Social Media Users

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the influence of social media usage on fundamental branding impacts, i.e., Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty. Its objectives included both direct and indirect effects of social media usage on the above variables. Ultimately, this study aimed to produce empirically based information on how organizations can strategically use social media sites to increase brand capital in the digital age.

Introduction/Background: As the world has become increasingly digitalized, social media websites have emerged as important tools for organizational strategy, allowing consumer interaction, facilitating brand recognition, and building consumer loyalty. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) offer brands immense opportunities for interacting with target markets and constructing brand communities. But whereas there is broad recognition of the strategic importance of social media in modern marketing theory, the specific causal mechanisms by which social media usage affects important metrics like brand awareness and loyalty are not well understood. This study addresses this gap in the literature by rigorously examining the effect of social media usage on fundamental branding constructs and consequent consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Methodology: A quantitative research design was employed in this study, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to rigorously test hypothesized relations among Social Media Usage (SMU) and specified brand-related outcomes. Data were collected from a sample of 300 Thai social media users recruited through a non-probability convenience sampling technique. A carefully crafted web-based questionnaire survey was employed to determine respondents' attitudes regarding SMU, consumer engagement, brand reputation, brand awareness, and brand loyalty factors. Data thus gathered were subsequently readied for SEM to analyze the estimated direct and indirect effects hypothesized in the theory framework and thereby evaluate how social media usage translated to the brand's performance indicators.

Findings: Statistical analysis revealed strong empirical evidence regarding the effects of social media usage. Findings indicate that SMU positively and significantly affected consumer engagement, brand reputation, and brand image. These, in turn, were revealed to positively affect brand loyalty. Specifically, path analysis indicated that social media behavior strongly predicted increases in brand awareness ($\beta = .70, p < .01$) and improvements in a brand image ($\beta = .33, p < .01$). Moreover, consumer engagement, found to be influenced by social media usage, was also identified as a mediating variable that significantly influenced the relationship between SMU and brand loyalty. Additionally, the analysis confirmed brand image and brand awareness as key antecedents, positively predicting brand loyalty. The findings collectively supported the central role of strategically using social media in building brand visibility, creating favorable brand perception, and ultimately inducing consumer loyalty.

Contribution/Impact on Society: The current research is an essential contribution to the literature in the area of social media marketing, since it presents robust empirical evidence for the direct and indirect effects brought about by social media usage on significant brand-related consequences. The

findings specifically elucidated the role of consumer engagement as a mediator in the process towards stronger brand loyalty. Moreover, the study prescribes and examines a model charting the nomological network among SMUs, brand awareness, brand image, consumer interaction, and brand loyalty. The results hold practical importance to marketing managers and firms dedicated to refining and optimizing their social media campaigns to improve branding efficiency and ensure competitive advantage in contemporary marketplaces.

Recommendations: Empirical findings suggest that firms should invest in engaging social media content designed to stimulate active user interaction, thereby enhancing brand visibility and positive perceptions. Maintaining consistent brand messaging across digital touchpoints and strategically leveraging user-generated content is crucial for fostering authenticity and trust. Furthermore, social media campaigns should be planned to simultaneously improve both brand awareness and consumer engagement, which are essential antecedents for building sustainable brand loyalty.

Limitations of the Study: This research had certain built-in limitations worth mentioning. First, reliance on self-reporting enables response biases, and the application of a non-probability convenience sampling process may constrain the generalizability (external validity) of the outcome outside of the selected sample that was surveyed. Furthermore, the sample was confined to active social media users and so may not be representative of the attitudes or behaviors of the general consumer populace. Finally, the application of a cross-sectional research design inevitably precludes firm causal connections between the variables of interest; reported associations should accordingly be viewed circumspectly in causal terms.

Future Research: Acknowledging current limitations, future research directions include: 1) Implementing longitudinal studies to examine temporal processes and potential causal effects of social media engagement on brand loyalty development over time; 2) Comparing the heterogeneous impacts of different social media platform types (e.g., Instagram vs. Twitter) on branding metrics like awareness, image, and loyalty; 3) Using qualitative techniques (e.g., interviews, focus groups) to gain deeper understanding of subjective consumer experiences and motivations involved in social media engagement and loyalty formation.

Keywords: *Social media usage, consumer engagement, branding*

Introduction

In today's contemporary era of technological advancements, social media has proven to be one of the strongest weapons for building ties with consumers and a business's brand image. With an adequate number of online users on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, businesses are incorporating social media as a platform for marketing and advertising, and even as a branding technique. Social media platforms offer brands a precious opportunity to speak with their audiences directly and meaningfully, get feedback, and develop a narrative for one's brand. Therefore, integrating social media as a component of branding strategy has become a significant focus.

Social Media Usage (SMU) enables companies to promote their goods, post content, and engage with customers in ways that traditional advertising methods cannot. Through regular promotional posts and interactive campaigns, companies can raise their profile, create consumer engagement, and influence how they are perceived. This is particularly critical in today's competitive business environment, where brand awareness (BA) and brand image (BI) can directly affect a firm's market position and consumer loyalty. Social media's capacity to facilitate instant consumer interactions has led many to believe that a successful social media presence can directly contribute to developing brand loyalty (BL) and fostering a positive brand image in the long term.

Brand Awareness refers to the ability of consumers to recall or recognize a brand, and it is typically considered to be a precursor to brand loyalty. Previous research has highlighted the crucial role of brand awareness in forming the foundation for future consumer decisions and behavior (Keller, 2003). An effective social media strategy, with targeted content and consistent consumer

interaction, can significantly improve brand awareness among potential consumers (Tyrväinen et al., 2023).

Brand Image is also a crucial aspect of branding, involving consumers' connections and perceptions of a brand. Social media makes it easier to establish a brand image using visual content, customer recommendations, and storytelling platforms. The continuous flow of content enables brands to craft a picture that resonates with consumers and builds emotional connections (Aaker, 1996). Social media campaigns can influence whether a brand is seen as trustworthy, innovative, or socially responsible, thereby becoming a powerful tool for brand positioning.

The second significant characteristic is consumer engagement (CE), or the level of involvement, interaction, and emotional attachment that a consumer displays towards a brand. The proliferation of social media has made it convenient to achieve greater consumer engagement, which has been shown to have a positive influence on both brand awareness and brand image (Barger et al., 2016). Greater levels of engagement, such as liking, commenting, or sharing a brand post, result in an increased emotional connection to the brand and more customer loyalty (Dessart et al., 2015).

Furthermore, brand loyalty (BL), or the habit of consumers repeatedly buying a brand's products and recommending them to others, is one of the most vital objectives of branding. Empirical research has indicated that brand image and awareness, cemented by customer interaction, highly enhance brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). As individuals increasingly utilize social media to find and engage with brands, those capable of using the platform effectively can potentially develop long-term loyalty and trust among their followers.

The relationships between the variables of social media usage, brand awareness, brand image, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty were the focus of this research. Through a study of how social media usage affects brand awareness and image, and how these affect consumer engagement and loyalty, this study aimed to create a comprehensive picture of the role of social media in contemporary branding practices.

The present study examined the indirect effects of social media usage on brand loyalty, with consumer interaction and brand consideration serving as mediators. The outcomes of this study may be extremely valuable to marketers seeking to optimize their social media efforts to build more effective brands and foster stronger consumer commitment.

Research Objectives

To investigate the influence of social media usage (SMU) on consumer engagement, brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty.

Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine the impact of social media usage on branding, focusing on the most critical variables, including consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), and brand loyalty (BL). The primary objective of this review was to examine the interrelation between these variables and describe the pivotal role that social media plays in shaping brand image and customer loyalty.

Social Media's Impact on Brand Performance

Social media has fundamentally reshaped brand strategy, shifting from one-way corporate messaging to a dynamic, interactive environment where consumers and brands co-create value (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A review of academic literature reveals that specific social media factors drive a sequence of critical brand outcomes, from initial awareness to long-term loyalty.

Initially, brand awareness is amplified through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and the creation of "viral" content that is emotionally evocative or highly useful, motivating users to share it widely (Berger & Milkman, 2012). This visibility then evolves into brand engagement, a deeper connection defined by consumers' active participation (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Engagement is primarily fostered through a brand's strategic, high-quality content, and, crucially, its responsive two-

way communication, which makes consumers feel heard and valued (Gummerus et al., 2012). Furthermore, user-generated content has emerged as a powerful factor, significantly influencing brand perceptions by providing authentic social proof (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

These interactions directly shape brand image. While brands use social platforms to strategically craft narratives about their identity (Gensler et al. 2013), their image is also heavily influenced by consumer conversations, which can either enhance reputation or rapidly escalate into a public relations crisis if it is negative (Pfeffer et al., 2014).

Ultimately, sustained positive interaction on social media cultivates brand loyalty. This is achieved by building online brand communities that foster a sense of belonging and trust (Laroche et al., 2013) and by providing effective social customer care, which fortifies customer relationships and satisfaction (van Asperen et al., 2018). The literature demonstrates a clear progression, where strategic social media activities generate awareness and engagement, which in turn shape a favorable brand image and cultivate lasting consumer loyalty.

Social Media Usage and Consumer Engagement (CE)

Consumer engagement (CE) refers to the degree of interaction, participation, and emotional connection that customers have with a brand. It is perhaps the most sought-after outcome of social media usage. Social media websites facilitate two-way communication, which permits instant communication and the formation of emotional bonds between consumers and brands.

Dessart et al. (2015) also found that consumer involvement on social web pages was correlated with higher brand loyalty and good brand attitudes. Consumer participation tends to lead to stronger brand advocacy, where consumers endorse the brand to their friends and other people within their social circle (Barger et al., 2016).

Calder et al. (2009) contended that social media interaction has affective and cognitive responses, thus supplementing the whole consumer process. Positive brand interaction will most likely stimulate the probability of repeat purchasing and long-term brand choice. Negative interaction is likely to result in disengagement because of brands' need to protect their social media reputation.

In summary, a survey of the literature highlights social media's primary role in influencing consumer behavior, and by extension, brand loyalty. Firms strategically utilize social media to foster maximal consumer contributions and enhance brand performance.

Social Media Usage and Brand Awareness (BA)

Brand awareness is the foundation of branding, which refers to the degree to which customers may remember or recognize a brand. Brand awareness has been cited by Keller (2003) as an important part of the customer decision-making process, one of the key ingredients that lead to brand loyalty.

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter enable brands to engage with consumers through targeted posts, sponsored posts, and consumer-generated content; such engagement leads to brand recall and visibility. For example, Setiawan et al. (2024) illustrated how reflective and regular posting on social media had a positive influence on brand awareness, and how visual posts and engagement campaigns were particularly effective at this activity. Likewise, Barger et al. (2016) validated the effectiveness of social media campaigns—competitions, contests, and influencer collaboration—to strengthen brand awareness by appealing to larger audience groups.

Evidence indicates that widespread coverage on social media is an awareness driver. Through specific messaging and regular promotions, brands can successfully increase visibility and reinforce their association with consumers, thereby establishing platforms for long-term brand equity.

Social Media Usage and Brand Image (BI)

Brand image is the sum of consumers' perceptions and associations regarding a brand, driven by marketing communications and consumer experience. Social media is central to the creation and

maintenance of brand image because it can convey information about the personality, values, and market positioning of a brand.

Social media allows brands not only to sell their goods but also to transfer their culture, ethos, and values. Repetitive messaging, as argued by Aaker (1996), reinforces brand image since such messaging is greatly encouraged on social media websites. The very graphic nature of social media—gradients ranging from images to videos, infographics, and other multimedia content—permits the development of brand perceptions by consumers. Hutter et al.'s (2013) research established that the core role of social media, particularly through platforms like customer feedback and favorable user-generated content, is to solidify positive brand associations.

The tone and content conveyed by social media also have a profound effect on brand image. Bagozzi et al. (2017) confirmed that brands endowed with authenticity, trustworthiness, and social responsibility conveyed through their social media platforms tend to build positive brand images. Conversely, incongruent or poorly designed social media approaches can destroy brand image and result in consumer distrust or perplexity. These findings emphasize the importance of strategic planning and meticulous execution in leveraging social media to establish a brand image.

In general, social media is a powerful medium for constructing brand image by allowing brands to project their identity and values authentically. Through effective and consistent communication, brands can reaffirm consumer notions and create long-term relationships, untainted by the pitfalls of poor communication tactics.

Social Media Usage and Brand Loyalty (BL)

Brand loyalty (BL) is the extent to which customers are involved and committed to a brand, typically indicated by repeated purchasing and favorable word-of-mouth comments to others. Social media usage has emerged as a major driver of brand loyalty, as it generates continuous interaction between consumers and brands.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2001) research demonstrated that brand awareness and brand image make significant contributions to brand loyalty. Brand sites, to the extent that they can ensure ongoing conversations, play a key role in reminding viewers of a brand's ideal attributes, thereby developing customer loyalty. Brands may remain in customers' minds if they are repeatedly reminded of their value, which may help to strengthen long-term loyalty. Moreover, social media enables brands to make their loyal customers feel special by providing them with personalized discounts, special content, and special offers. Zoubi and Al-Harazneh (2019) mentioned that a brand's valued customers were likely to display loyalty-driven behaviors such as repeat purchases and word-of-mouth promotion on social media.

Thus, consumer engagement is a powerful mediating variable linking social media usage and brand loyalty. Empirical observations have demonstrated that active social media engagement initiates trust and intensifies affective relationships between brands and consumers, both of which are powerful drivers of loyalty (Bagozzi et al., 2017). This emphasizes the need for brands to utilize strategies that focus on high-frequency engagement on social media platforms. By managing social media in an organized manner to connect and engage consumers, brands can establish loyalty and attain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Indirect Effects of Social Media Usage on Brand Loyalty

Recent research has focused on the indirect effects of social media usage on brand loyalty, examining its impact on brand awareness and customer interaction. For instance, Ahmed et al. (2019) established that social media usage indirectly increased brand loyalty by simultaneously creating brand awareness and customer interaction. They concluded that social media efforts aimed at building awareness and eliciting engagement led to increased brand loyalty, and they suggested the importance of direct and indirect channels in this dynamic.

Similarly, Jibril et al. (2019) placed significance on the mediating role of consumer interaction in the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty. Consumers who were not only familiar

with a brand's products and values but also interacted with the brand were the most likely to form intimate emotional connections and higher loyalty levels. This points the way toward synergistic brand awareness initiatives and initiatives toward creating vital consumer interactions.

The academic literature emphasizes the significant role of social media in generating brand awareness, enhancing brand image, fostering consumer engagement, and promoting brand loyalty. Empirical research has consistently shown that social media usage not only generates brand awareness and image, but also enables consumer interaction, a crucial mediator to brand loyalty reinforcement. Social media has effects that are more than just immediate and direct effects, such as its role in reinforcing long-term relationships between consumers and brands. Such long-term interactions are also a primary component in forming brand loyalty, thereby facilitating long-term brand success and competitiveness in the market.

Typically, the indirect effects of social media on brand loyalty via brand awareness and customer interaction are a crucial research issue. By utilizing social media in strategic ways to formulate these intermediate constructs, brands indirectly enhance customer-company relationships and receive long-term competitive benefits.

Conceptual Research Framework

The primary aim of this research was to examine the impact of social media usage (SMU) on key branding metrics, including consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), and brand loyalty (BL). Through examinations of the inter-relationships among these variables, the study aimed to gain a clearer view of how social media ignites the facilitation of brand-related outcomes.

This study investigated the impact of Social Media Usage (SMU) on Brand Loyalty (BL), exploring the mediating roles of Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), and Brand Image (BI). The independent variable, SMU, encompassed brand activities on social media platforms, such as content posting and marketing efforts aimed at increasing visibility and interaction. The mediating variables represented key consumer responses: CE measured the intensity of consumer interaction with the brand's social media presence (e.g., likes, shares, comments); BA reflected the extent of consumer recall and recognition of the brand; and BI captured the perceptions and associations consumers held about the brand, including trust and emotional appeal. Finally, the dependent variable, BL, signified the degree of consumer commitment and attachment, often demonstrated through repeat purchases and positive recommendations, serving as a key indicator of long-term brand success.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed to guide this research:

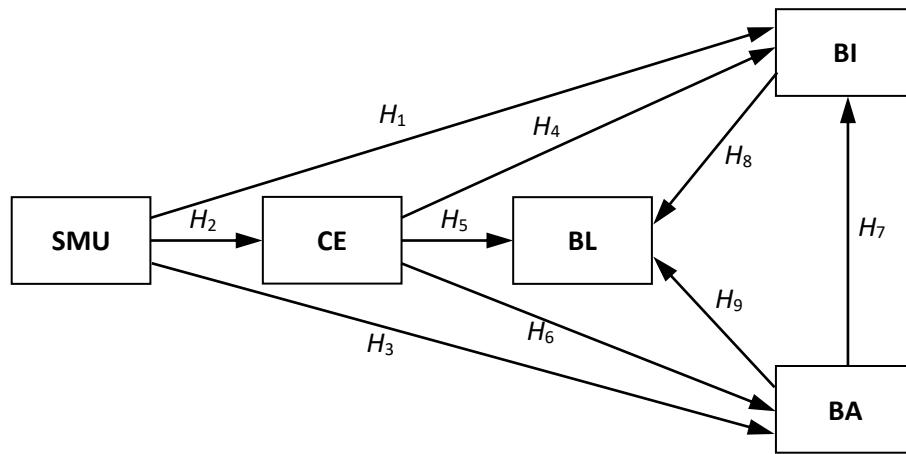
- H_1 : Social media usage (SMU) has a positive direct effect on Brand Image (BI).
- H_2 : Social media usage (SMU) has a positive direct effect on Consumer Engagement (CE).
- H_3 : Social media usage (SMU) has a positive direct effect on Brand Awareness (BA).
- H_4 : Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive effect on Brand Image (BI).
- H_5 : Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H_6 : Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive effect on Brand Awareness (BA).
- H_7 : Brand Awareness (BA) has a positive effect on Brand Image (BI).
- H_8 : Brand Image (BI) has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H_9 : Brand Awareness (BA) has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty (BL).

Conceptual Framework Representation:

The conceptual framework graphically indicates the direction of influence among the variables. Social media usage (SMU) was the independent variable, with direct effects on the mediating variables—Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), and Brand Image (BI). These mediating variables influence the dependent variable, Brand Loyalty (BL), either directly or indirectly. The model highlighted the interdependence between these constructs and suggested the pivotal role of social media in shaping brand-related outcomes.

In short, the purpose of this research was to enhance theoretical understanding of how the use of social media influences concepts of branding. Through studying both direct and indirect processes, this research addressed common academic and business debates about Internet marketing strategies and their implications for brand equity and customer response. The conceptual research framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Diagram



Research Methodology

The research paradigm employed in this study centered on empirically verifying the hypotheses regarding how social media usage (SMU) affects brand performance in terms of brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), consumer engagement (CE), and brand loyalty (BL). A quantitative approach was employed based on survey data. This method included research design, population, sampling technique, data collection methods, and data analysis methods.

Research Design

This research followed a quantitative approach to investigate the influence of social media engagement on branding results. A cross-sectional design was used in which data were gathered at a single moment from a sample of respondents that sufficiently represented a particular population (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This particular design is suitable for examining relationships among variables in non-experimental contexts and is commonly used for branding and marketing studies (Malhotra et al., 2017). The study sought to establish both the direct and indirect influences of social media usage on the aforementioned branding constructs.

Population and Sampling

The scope of this research included Thai social media users who engage with brands regularly on all social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok. It was expected that these users had some degree of awareness of brands that use social media as part of their marketing mix.

Determination of the sample size was informed by Hair et al.'s guidelines (2020) for structural equation modeling (SEM) studies, which suggest at least 200 to 300 respondents for moderately complex models and high statistical power. Thus, the researcher aimed for about 300 respondents to provide robust results. A convenience sampling method was used to recruit respondents due to its ease, cost-effectiveness, and suitability for marketing research (Saunders et al., 2016). The research instrument was administered online via social media platforms and email invitations to potential participants who fulfilled the inclusion criterion of being active social media users.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected via a structured online survey designed to assess perceptions related to Social Media Usage (SMU; frequency/nature of interactions), Consumer Engagement (CE; active participation), Brand Awareness (BA; recognition/recall), Brand Image (BI; perceived traits/personality), and Brand Loyalty (BL; behavioral/attitudinal intent). Measurement primarily utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), consistent with standard marketing research practices for reliability and usability (Malhotra et al., 2017).

The questionnaire's content validity was evaluated by three experts with expertise in areas of business administration, management, and business computing, using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index, adhering to Hambleton's (1984) criterion ($IOC > .60$). All items surpassed this threshold. Following revision based on expert feedback, the instrument underwent a pilot test (tryout) with 30 non-sample Thai online consumers.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Alpha values for social media usage (SMU), consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), and brand loyalty (BL) were .887, .787, .850, .785 and .960, respectively. All coefficients exceeded the .70 threshold (Cronbach, 1951), indicating high reliability and suitability for main data collection.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a sophisticated statistical technique chosen for its capacity to examine complex interrelationships among both observed and latent variables (Byrne, 2016). SEM was particularly well-suited for this research study as it facilitated the simultaneous assessment of direct and indirect pathways, making it ideal for testing the proposed theoretical framework. The core of the analysis involved testing the structural model to evaluate the hypothesized relationships. Specifically, this included examining the direct effects of Social Media Usage (SMU) on Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), Consumer Engagement (CE), and Brand Loyalty (BL). Furthermore, the indirect effects of SMU on BL were investigated as mediated by the intervening variables of BA, BI, and CE.

A critical step in this process was the evaluation of the model's fit to the data, which was assessed using several standard fit indices. Acceptable model fit was determined based on established criteria: a non-significant Chi-square (χ^2) probability level ($p > .05$); Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) values exceeding .90; and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value below .08, with values under .05 indicating a particularly close fit (Hair et al., 2010).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlational Analysis

The demographic profile of the respondents revealed that the majority were female (61.7%), with ages predominantly ranging between 45–54 years (22.3%). Additionally, the frequency of social media usage was reported to be 1–2 hours per day (48.0%), and Facebook emerged as the most frequently used social media platform (34.0%). These descriptive statistics provide a foundational understanding of the sample characteristics and their social media usage patterns.

A correlational analysis demonstrated significant relationships among the study variables. Social Media Usage (SMU) exhibited positive correlations with Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Image (BI), Brand Awareness (BA), and Brand Loyalty (BL), with correlation coefficients of .598, .666, .829, and .652, respectively. Similarly, CE was positively correlated with BI, BA, and BL with correlation coefficients of .609, .637, and .615, respectively. Brand Image showed strong positive correlations with BA and BL, with correlation coefficients of .655 and .760, respectively. Furthermore, BA was positively correlated with BL, with a correlation coefficient of .654.

All observed relationships among the variables were statistically significant at the .01 level ($p < .01$), indicating robust associations within the proposed model. The correlations among the variables are summarized in Table 1, providing empirical support for the hypothesized relationships, and underscoring the interconnected nature of the constructs under investigation.

These findings highlight social media's critical role as a driver of key branding outcomes and the importance of mediating factors such as Consumer Engagement, Brand Image, and Brand Awareness in fostering Brand Loyalty. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying digital marketing strategies and their impact on consumer-brand relationships.

Table 1 Correlation among Variables in the Proposed Model

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	CE	BI	BA	BL
Social media usage (SMU)	3.72	.86	.598**	.666**	.829**	.652**
Consumer Engagement (CE)	3.69	.80	-	.609**	.637**	.615**
Brand Image (BI)	3.72	.77		-	.655**	.760**
Brand Awareness (BA)	3.67	.83			-	.654**
Brand Loyalty (BL)	3.68	.79				-

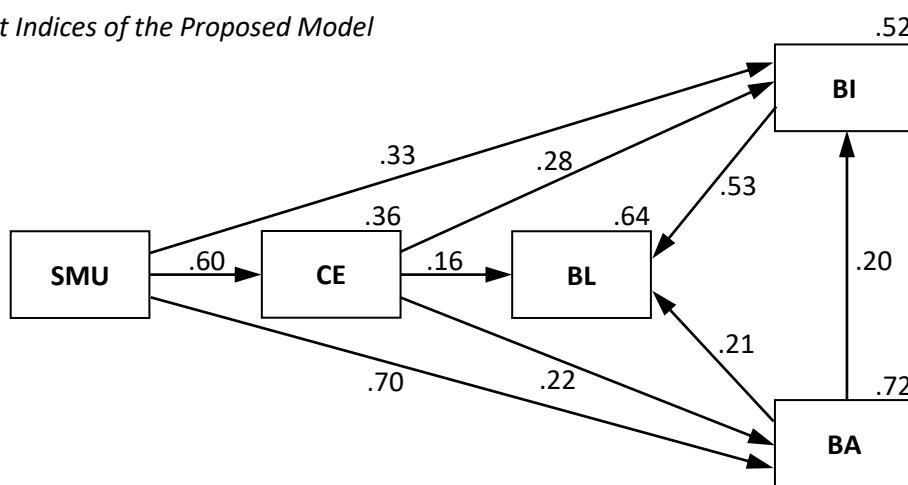
Note. ** $p < .01$

Analysis of the Relationships Among Social Media Usage (SMU), Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL)

The relationships among Social Media Usage (SMU), Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL) were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This approach was employed to test both the direct and indirect effects among the variables, as hypothesized in the study. The results of the analysis encompassed model fit indices, direct effects, indirect effects, and hypothesis testing.

The SEM analysis confirmed a strong fit between the proposed theoretical model and the collected data. Key fit indices supported this conclusion: the Chi-square test was non-significant ($\chi^2 = 3.200$, $df = 1$, $p = .074$), but the relative Chi-square was acceptable ($\chi^2/df = 3.200$), falling within the recommended threshold of less than 5.0 (Wheaton et al., 1977) and approaching the stricter criterion of 3.0 (Kline, 2016). Both the GFI (.996) and CFI (.998) indicated excellent fit by exceeding the .90 threshold for acceptable fit (Hair et al., 2019) and the more stringent .95 threshold for excellent fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Additionally, the RMSEA (.086) suggested a reasonable fit, as it was below the .10 ceiling for poor fit, and close to the .08 cutoff for acceptability (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; MacCallum et al., 1996). As shown in Figure 2 and Table 2, these indices collectively demonstrated the model's appropriateness for representing the observed data. This robust fit provided a valid basis for interpreting the hypothesized direct and indirect effects and testing the study's hypotheses, thus enhancing the reliability of the findings derived from the model.

Figure 2 Fit Indices of the Proposed Model



Chi-Square = 3.200, $df = 1$, $p = .074$

CMIN/DF = 3.200, GFI = .996, CFI = .998, RMSEA = .086

Table 2 Summary of Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Calculated Value	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-square (χ^2)	3.200 ($df=1, p=.074$)	$p > .05$	Acceptable Fit
Relative Chi-square (χ^2/df)	3.200	< 5.00	Acceptable Fit
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	.996	> .90	Excellent Fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	.998	> .90	Excellent Fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	.086	< .08 (Reasonable Fit)	Acceptable Fit

The structural model was analyzed to examine the direct relationships between social media usage (SMU) and the other variables under investigation. The findings provide robust support for the majority of the hypotheses related to direct effects, as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Results		
		β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
H_1	Social media usage (SMU) → BI	.33	4.552**	.000
H_2	Social media usage (SMU) → CE	.60	12.905**	.000
H_3	Social media usage (SMU) → BA	.70	18.244**	.000
H_4	Consumer Engagement (CE) → Brand Image (BI)	.28	5.408**	.000
H_5	Consumer Engagement (CE) → Brand Loyalty (BL)	.16	3.423**	.000
H_6	Consumer Engagement (CE) → Brand Awareness (BA)	.22	5.713**	.000
H_7	Brand Awareness (BA) → Brand Image (BI)	.20	2.674**	.007
H_8	Brand Image (BI) → Brand Loyalty (BL)	.53	10.741**	.000
H_9	Brand Awareness (BA) → Brand Loyalty (BL)	.21	4.084**	.000

Note. ** $p < .01$

In addition to examining direct effects, the indirect effects of social media usage on brand loyalty were also explored through mediating variables such as consumer engagement, brand awareness, and brand image. The results of SEM analysis revealed the total, direct, and indirect effects of these relationships, as summarized in Table 4. These findings underscored the mediating roles of Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, and Brand Image in amplifying the impact of Social Media Usage on Brand Loyalty.

Table 4 Effect of Variables in the Proposed Model

Variables	CE			BI			BA			BL		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
SMU	.60	-	.60	.33	-	.33	.70	-	.70	-	-	.62
CE				.28	.04	.32	.22	-	.22	.16	.22	.38
BI							.20	-	.20	.53	.00	.53
BA										.21	.11	.32

Note. DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect (β)

The study's results provided strong empirical support for the hypothesized relationships, confirming both the direct and indirect effects of Social Media Usage on Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty. The analysis demonstrated that social media usage exerted a direct influence on consumer engagement, brand awareness, and brand image, while also indirectly impacting brand loyalty through these mediating constructs.

These findings underscored the critical role of social media platforms as strategic tools for building robust brand equity and cultivating enduring consumer loyalty. By elucidating the mechanisms through which social media usage shapes branding outcomes, the study makes a

significant contribution to the expanding body of literature on the role of digital media in modern branding strategies.

Discussion

The results of this research provide valuable information on the influence of Social Media Usage (SMU) on Consumer Engagement (CE) Improvement, Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL). Its findings offer sufficient evidence for the hypotheses to confirm that social media is a very significant platform to influence consumer minds and build long-lasting brand loyalty.

Social Media Usage and Brand Perception (H₁)

The immediate effect of Social Media Engagement on Brand Image lent strong confirmation to Hypothesis 1 (H_1). Social media has a notable influence in establishing the attitudes and perceptions that consumers develop toward a brand. This result is aligned with the pioneering work by Aaker (1996), which underlined that brand image constitutes an essential element of branding, molded through consistent communication and engaging interactions with consumers.

The information posted on social media, such as advertising content, user-generated content, and customer reviews, plays a crucial role in determining a brand's personality and identity. This study demonstrates that if brands effectively utilize social media to convey their underlying values, are socially responsible, and adopt a customer-oriented strategy, they can have a positive impact on consumer attitudes. This supports the assertion put forth by Hutter et al. (2013), who emphasized that social media is an effective platform for building brand reputation, especially if brands engage in sincere and open communication with their followers. By using social media strategically to build trust and credibility, firms can create a good brand image that connects with their consumers.

Social Media Usage and Consumer Engagement (H₂)

These results confirmed the strong impact of Social Media Usage on Consumer Engagement, thus supporting H_2 . The positive direct relationship between SMU and CE was aligned with previous findings (Barger et al., 2016; Dessart et al., 2015). Social media platforms facilitate consumer engagement through features like likes, comments, shares, and user-generated content, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional connection between brands and consumers.

This discovery highlights the need for producing content that is both interactive and engaging, which stimulates consumers and results in active participation. Those brands that produce content intended to invoke meaningful interactions are the most likely to establish deeper consumer-brand relationships, thereby achieving higher levels of engagement. Engaged consumers are more prone to repeat purchases and more likely to recommend the brand to others, thus playing a significant role in building brand loyalty (Calder et al., 2009). As such, stimulating consumer engagement through social media-focused initiatives constitutes a prime strategy for building short-term consumer interactions as well as sustaining brand equity over the long term.

Social Media Usage and Brand Awareness (H₃)

The findings demonstrated that social media usage had a positive influence on Brand Awareness and thus confirmed H_3 . The developed linkage between social media actions such as posting, sharing, and engagement with consumers and increased brand awareness was aligned with current research focused on the role of social media in increasing brand visibility (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter enable companies to engage with a broad audience, thereby enhancing consumer recall and awareness (Tyrväinen et al., 2023). This result underscored the strategic value of maintaining an active and ongoing social media presence, as brand awareness is a key initial phase in the consumer decision-making process (Keller, 2003). Brands that actively utilize social media to interact with customers are more apt to gain top-of-mind awareness that reinforces consumer awareness and improves their influence on purchase decisions.

By placing a focus on social media as a key channel for communication and interaction, brands can create a strong foundation for building lasting relationships with consumers.

Consumer Engagement and Brand Image (H₄) and Brand Awareness (H₆)

The results indicated that Consumer Engagement positively influenced Brand Image and Brand Awareness, thereby supporting H_4 and H_6 . As consumers engage with the social media content of a company, the company's visibility is not only enhanced, but the development of favorable perceptions is also assisted. These findings aligned with previous research by Calder et al. (2009) and Dessart et al. (2015), which demonstrated that user engagement can significantly increase brand awareness and positively shape attitudes toward a brand's attributes. Actively engaged consumers have a higher likelihood of sharing content, hence broadening the brand's reach and solidifying its reputation.

The findings highlighted the paramount importance of consumer engagement as a means of creating brand awareness and shaping brand perception. Consumer engagement with the content of a brand is inherently connected with the formation of favorable brand judgments, which contribute significantly to the formation of brand loyalty. By fostering active engagement and constructive interaction on social media sites, companies can effectively heighten their visibility, establish positive reputations, and set the stage for lasting consumer loyalty.

Consumer Engagement, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty (H₅, H₇–H₉)

The results of this research offer robust empirical evidence for the positive interconnections between Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Loyalty (H_7 – H_9). That is, both Brand Image (H_8) and Brand Awareness (H_9) were identified as essential drivers of Brand Loyalty, while Consumer Engagement (H_5) also had a positive effect on Brand Loyalty.

The findings aligned with the foundational research conducted by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), which established BA and BI as major constituents that play a central role in consumer loyalty. The positive effect of BI on BL was consistent with their findings, which shows that brands with strong and positive images tend to form consumer trust and long-term loyalty. BA has also been established as a significant component of BL, as consumers tend to show greater loyalty towards well-known brands (Keller, 2003). This stresses the need for developing and nurturing strong levels of BA as a fundamental cornerstone to establishing long-term consumer relationships.

In addition, the results of the study revealed a positive impact of Consumer Engagement on Brand Loyalty, thereby supporting the hypothesis posited by Dessart et al. (2015) that consumers who are highly engaged are more likely to form emotional connections with a brand. Emotional involvement is critical in validating Brand Loyalty, because customers who interact with a brand frequently on social media will view it as a regular and preferred brand.

In conclusion, the dynamic process of brand awareness, brand image, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty highlights the complexity of branding in the digital era. Through the successful exploitation of these factors, brands can build more meaningful relationships with consumers, thereby fostering long-term loyalty and guaranteeing competitive advantage.

The Unintended Effects of Social Media Usage on Customer Brand Loyalty

These results further confirm that social media use affects brand loyalty indirectly through mediators like brand awareness, brand image, and consumer engagement. This shows that social media affects brand loyalty both directly and indirectly via intermediate variables. These findings agree with those in a study by Jibril et al. (2019), which demonstrated the positive effect of social media usage on brand recall and consumer engagement, and therefore brand loyalty.

The indirect effects highlighted the complexity of branding in the age of social media. Brands that can successfully harness social media platforms can create brand loyalty not just through direct engagement, but by establishing brand awareness and influencing brand attitudes. This indicates the interrelatedness of these branding elements and how they collectively interact to establish long-term relationships with customers.

Conclusion

Seeking to understand the intricate ways social media impacts modern branding, this research investigated how Social Media Usage (SMU) affected Consumer Engagement (CE), Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Image (BI), and Brand Loyalty (BL). Through a quantitative approach utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), ten hypotheses exploring both direct and indirect relationships were examined. The resulting findings shed considerable light on social media's crucial function in today's branding landscape, identifying it as a valuable asset for building brand equity.

The analysis confirmed that a brand's activities on social media positively shape consumer responses. Higher social media usage by a brand leads to increased Brand Awareness, enhancing consumer recognition and recall. It also significantly influences Brand Image, demonstrating that a brand's online persona directly impacts consumer perceptions of its values and character. Furthermore, social media drives Consumer Engagement, which in turn not only bolsters awareness and image but is fundamentally linked to fostering Brand Loyalty. The study also found direct pathways from both Brand Awareness and Brand Image to Brand Loyalty, alongside a significant direct effect of Consumer Engagement on loyalty intentions and behaviors.

Importantly, the research also validated the indirect role of social media. It revealed that SMU builds Brand Loyalty not just directly, but also *through* its positive effects on Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Consumer Engagement, which act as crucial mediators. This mediated relationship emphasizes the complex, interconnected system influencing consumer loyalty, and highlights the multi-layered approach required for effective digital branding. In essence, the study strongly supports the conclusion that social media is an indispensable tool for businesses aiming to strengthen their brand. It provides a dynamic stage for engaging customers, managing perceptions, and ultimately nurturing the long-term loyalty that underpins brand success.

Recommendations

The insights gleaned from this research translate into several practical strategies for firms and brand managers seeking to optimize their social media efforts for branding success and customer loyalty. A key takeaway is the imperative to actively foster brand engagement. This means moving beyond passive content delivery to create interactive experiences that encourage likes, comments, shares, and user contributions, as this engagement is a direct driver of loyalty (Dessart et al., 2015). Equally important is the cultivation of a consistent and authentic brand image across all social platforms. How a brand communicates its values and personality online significantly shapes consumer perceptions and loyalty, requiring careful alignment with its core brand identity (Aaker, 1996).

Furthermore, recognizing the power of social media in driving brand awareness, businesses should implement strategies specifically designed to enhance visibility and recall, such as targeted content, influencer partnerships, and engaging campaigns (Tyrväinen et al., 2023). A particularly potent approach involves encouraging user-generated content. Leveraging customer testimonials, reviews, and photos not only boosts engagement, but also builds invaluable trust and credibility, fostering a sense of community (Bagozzi et al., 2017). Central to these tactics should be a commitment to building long-term relationships, using social media for ongoing dialogue and personalized interaction that extends beyond immediate sales goals (Barger et al., 2016).

The significance of forging emotional connections through social media was also underscored. Sharing relatable stories, highlighting shared values, or offering authentic insights can create powerful bonds that translate into deeper trust and loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). To guide these efforts effectively, rigorous tracking and analysis of social media metrics is essential. Monitoring engagement data allows brands to understand what resonates with their audiences and continuously refine their strategies for maximum impact (Hair et al., 2010).

Looking ahead, this research opens doors for further exploration. Future studies could explore the roles played by specific social media platforms in influencing branding outcomes, providing more granular insights for platform-specific tactics. Moreover, employing longitudinal research designs would be beneficial. While the current study offers valuable correlational evidence,

longitudinal approaches could provide stronger causal evidence regarding how social media usage shapes brand loyalty trajectories over extended periods.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this study demonstrate the important role that social media plays in creating brand awareness, enhancing brand image, engaging with consumers, and building brand loyalty. Those brands that can use social media to engage with consumers, create engaging content, and consistently communicate their values can build strong and lasting relationships with consumers. Since social media is still an emerging industry, businesses must update their strategies to remain current and competitive in an increasingly digital business landscape. By adhering to these principles, brands can position themselves for success in the changing marketplace of modern marketing.

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