

The Interplay of Social Media, Brand Trust, Customer Satisfaction, and Loyalty

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to understand how social media marketing (SMM) affects customer satisfaction and loyalty in emerging e-commerce markets, with a particular focus on the mediating role of brand trust.

Methodology/approach: This study used a quantitative correlational research design. Data were collected through an online survey of 182 active users of a leading Indonesian e-commerce platform. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS software to examine the relationships between SMM, brand trust, customer satisfaction, and loyalty.

Results: The study found that SMM had a significant positive impact on brand trust. In turn, brand trust positively influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, brand trust is a critical mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between SMM and customer outcomes.

Conclusions: Building brand trust through effective social media engagement is essential for enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty in e-commerce brands. SMM strategies that foster trust can serve as powerful tools for achieving long-term consumer retention in competitive digital marketplaces.

Limitations: This study focused solely on Indonesian users of a single e-commerce platform, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other markets or platforms.

Contribution: This study provides practical insights for marketers, digital strategists, and e-commerce businesses aiming to strengthen consumer relationships. This study contributes to a broader understanding of how social media engagement can be leveraged to build trust and drive loyalty in rapidly growing online markets.

Keywords: *Brand Trust, Customer Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, E-Commerce, Social Media Marketing.*

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1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of social media and digital connectivity has significantly transformed how businesses interact with consumers, particularly in emerging markets. With billions of active users on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn and TikTok, businesses are increasingly leveraging these channels to drive sales, foster customer relationships, and enhance brand visibility (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021; Waworuntu, Mandagi, & Pangemanan, 2022). This shift has positioned social media marketing (SMM) as a core component of strategic business planning (Warbung, Wowor, Walean, & Mandagi, 2023). Furthermore, customer-brand relationships cultivated through social media can have a significant and positive impact on various aspects of customer behavior, including attitudes, satisfaction, purchase intentions, word of mouth (WOM), and loyalty (Mandagi, 2023; Miykel, Lefrand, & Mandagi, 2022). Additionally, an effective SMM strategy helps shape a strong brand image,

awareness, perception, and equity (Mandagi, Soewignyo, Kelejan, & Walone, 2024; Marhareita, Kila, & Mandagi, 2022; Warbung et al., 2023).

Despite the growing importance of SMM, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding of how it translates into meaningful customer outcomes, particularly in the context of e-commerce in emerging markets. Existing research confirms that brand trust is a critical factor influencing consumer behavior (Atulkar, 2020; Azhar, Husain, Hamid, & Rahman, 2023; Ibrahim, Aljarah, & Sawaftah, 2021; Samarah, Bayram, Aljuhmani, & Elrehail, 2022). However, few studies have examined its mediating role between SMM and customer loyalty, especially within the e-commerce sector. Moreover, most existing studies focus on Western or developed economies, often overlooking culturally specific contexts such as Indonesia, where digital behaviors and trust mechanisms may differ significantly (Wuryaningrat, Paulus, Rantung, & Mandagi, 2024). While prior research has confirmed the mediating effect of brand trust in the relationship between SMM and customer loyalty by Samarah et al. (2022); Azhar et al. (2023); Ibrahim et al. (2021), limited studies have explored this dynamic within emerging markets, where mobile-first, Gen Z-dominated user bases drive digital interactions (Waworuntu et al., 2022). Additionally, the increasing complexity of influencer marketing, personalized content, and community-based digital engagement Bakri (2023); Sijabat, Rantung, and Mandagi (2022) underscores the need to explore trust formation processes within the e-commerce context. These gaps highlight the necessity for context-specific research to better understand how SMM influences customer loyalty through the mediating role of brand trust.

This study contributes to the literature by integrating the Stimulus OrganismResponse (SOR) framework to explain how SMM stimuli influence internal cognitive responses—specifically brand trust and satisfaction, which in turn affect customer loyalty as a behavioral outcome. By applying this model to Shopee users in Indonesia, the study advances the theoretical understanding of how trust mediates digital marketing effects in emerging markets. It also builds on prior studies Miykel et al. (2022); Rantung, Mandagi, Wuryaningrat, and Lelengboto (2023); Rondonuwu and Mandagi (2023) by clarifying the psychological mechanism through which social media engagement drives loyalty. Furthermore, the study addresses contemporary concerns about ethical digital practices by acknowledging the role of privacy and data handling in trust formation, which is a growing concern among digital consumers. In doing so, the research not only validates existing models but also adapts them to a more culturally relevant and digitally active context.

By applying SOR model to Shopee users in Indonesia, the study not only validates existing digital marketing theories but also adapts them to the unique dynamics of emerging markets. This is especially important in a mobile-first and Gen Z-dominated digital environment like Indonesia, where social media plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021). Moreover, the study fills a critical research gap by investigating the mediating role of brand trust—an essential, yet underexplored mechanism in emerging market e-commerce contexts. The urgency of this research lies in the increasingly competitive nature of digital marketplaces and the pressing need for businesses to foster long-term customer loyalty through trust-based strategies (Mandagi & Sondakh, 2022). concerns about online privacy, misinformation, and consumer skepticism grow, understanding how trust is built and sustained through SMM becomes not only relevant but imperative for the sustainability of digital business models (Azhar et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aims to examine the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between SMM, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty among Shopee users in Indonesia. By addressing a context-specific gap and applying an established theoretical framework, this study intends to offer both theoretical insights and practical strategies for businesses seeking to optimize customer engagement and retention in evolving digital environments.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

SMM is a form of digital marketing that involves the strategic use of social media platforms to promote a brand, engage with audiences, and offer products or services to potential customers (Warbung et al., 2023; Waworuntu et al., 2022). It has transformed how businesses connect with their audiences by

enabling real-time interactions, personalized content delivery, and wide-scale visibility (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021). At its core, SMM leverages platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok to build meaningful relationships between brands and consumers through consistent, relevant, and engaging content (Carundeng, Rantung, & Mandagi, 2024; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023). The advantage of this marketing approach lies in its ability to blur the lines between communication and commerce, making it a powerful tool in the competitive digital market (Ibrahim et al., 2021). The importance of SMM continues to grow in line with the widespread adoption of social media in daily life. With billions of users globally, social media has become an essential part of how people identify products, gather information, compare options, and make purchase decisions (Waworuntu et al., 2022). Social platforms now serve not only as entertainment and communication hubs but also as critical points of influence in the consumer journey. As users frequently share personal preferences, feedback, and lifestyle content, businesses are presented with rich opportunities to engage with their target audiences more personally and effectively (Wantah & Mandagi, 2024). Social media's ability to instantly disseminate messages also allows brands to remain agile in responding to trends or shift in customer's preferences (Warbung et al., 2023).

The key elements of SMM include content creation, community engagement, influencer collaboration, analytics, and paid promotion. Businesses typically deploy a variety of content formats to promote their brand narratives and offerings (Mandagi & Sondakh, 2022). The role of the social media manager has become central in orchestrating these elements, acting as a bridge between the brand and its digital audience (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). Social media platforms are also increasingly tailored for business use, offering tools for targeted advertising, audience segmentation, performance tracking, and customer interaction. As noted by Siddik, Soewignyo, and Mandagi (2024), social media platforms have reshaped how marketing departments operate, prompting the rise of specialized roles and even new academic disciplines.

Recent research further underscores the strategic value of SMM in shaping brand trust, image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. For example, Waworuntu et al. (2022) found that SMM activities have a significant influence on brand image. Likewise, Miykel et al. (2022) found that SMM plays a substantial role in driving customer satisfaction. In the context of e-commerce, Samarah et al. (2022) emphasized that promotional efforts via social media significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. These findings highlight the dual function of social media as both a promotional and relational tool, capable of driving not only transactional outcomes but also long-term brand equity.

2.1 Brand Trust

Brand trust is a critical construct in the digital marketing landscape, particularly in the context of SMM, where interactions are frequent, dynamic, and often unmediated by physical encounters. It refers to the confidence consumers place in a brand's ability to consistently deliver on its promises, maintain quality, and behave ethically and reliably over time (Azhar et al., 2023). In a marketplace saturated with options and influenced heavily by peer opinions and algorithm-driven visibility, brand trust has emerged as a cornerstone of long-term customer relationships (Ibrahim et al., 2021) as such, it plays a pivotal role in shaping brand equity, loyalty, and consumer decision-making (Carundeng et al., 2024; Warbung et al., 2023).

The importance of brand trust lies in its profound impact on consumer behavior. It fosters customer-brand attachment, reduces perceived risk, and encourages repeat purchases (Samarah et al., 2022). Trust enhances brand loyalty, drives repurchase intentions, and stimulates positive word-of-mouth, in the context of social commerce, it becomes a behavioral anchor, influencing how consumers evaluate information, engage with content, and make purchasing decisions (Azhar et al., 2023). Additionally, as social media platforms become key venues for marketing, the formation of trust is increasingly shaped by the quality of digital interactions, the credibility of influencers, and the transparency of brand communications (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Key elements that contribute to building brand trust utilizing SMM include consistency in brand messaging, transparency, responsiveness, personalization, and value-driven content. These elements help foster a consumer-brand connection that is emotionally engaging and cognitively reassuring

(Walewangko, Mandagi, & Indrajit, 2024). Brands that succeed in building this trust are more likely to maintain consumer loyalty and gain long term competitive advantage (Mandagi & Centeno, 2021). Social media platforms have transformed how brands engage with consumers, enabling real-time interaction, community building, and content sharing (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021). Through these tools, brands can deliver personalized experiences that reinforce perceived reliability and authenticity (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023), which are essential components of trust.

Recent studies emphasize that trust is not only a direct predictor of loyalty but also mediates other important relationships. Azizan and Yusr (2019) highlight that brand trust and customer satisfaction are key drivers of consumer loyalty. Similarly, Diputra and Yasa (2021) found that brand image and brand trust significantly influence consumer satisfaction, reinforcing the view that trust functions as a foundational mechanism in the consumer-brand relationship framework. Moreover, in highly competitive digital environments like e-commerce platforms, brand trust emerges even more essential due to consumers' sensitivity to perceived risks and service quality variability

2.2 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a fundamental concept in marketing and service management, representing the degree to which a company successfully meets or exceeds the expectations of its customers (Mandagi, Rampen, Soewignyo, & Walean, 2024). It is generally understood as the emotional and cognitive response of consumers following their consumption experiences, shaped by a comparison between anticipated and actual performance (Abedi & Jahed, 2020). This construct has gained significant traction as a key performance indicator in both product- and service-based industries, serving as a key indicator for customer attitude, brand loyalty, and overall business success (Lebo & Mandagi, 2023).

The importance of customer satisfaction lies in its multifaceted influence on business outcomes. Satisfied customers are more likely to return, engage in repeat purchases, and become brand advocates, thereby reducing marketing costs and increasing customer lifetime value (Rondonuwu & Mandagi, 2023). In the context of the education institution, found that customer satisfaction positively impacts both the profitability and the long-term value of an institution. A high satisfaction levels are closely tied to customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and continued patronage—all essential for sustaining competitive advantage in service-driven sectors (Rita, Oliveira, & Farisa, 2019; Solimun & Fernandes, 2018; Walean, Pongoh, & Mandagi, 2024).

Customer satisfaction is also a critical mediating factor in customer relationship models. For instance, Dam and Dam (2021) demonstrated a strong positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, highlighting its role as a bridge between service quality and repeat business. Recent studies also revealed that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between customer loyalty and their perception of employee performance, further emphasizing its significance in shaping brand-consumer dynamics (Budur & Poturak, 2021; Rantung et al., 2023). These findings underline that satisfaction is not merely an outcome but a dynamic component that influences customer attitudes and behaviors.

2.3 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to the sustained commitment of customers to repeatedly purchase from and engage with a particular brand over time. It is formed through consistent positive experiences, emotional attachment, and trust in the brand's reliability (Alam, Karim, & Habiba, 2021; Ali, Suveatwatanakul, Nanu, Ali, & Terrah, 2025). Arslan (2020) emphasized the significance of customer loyalty initiatives and relationship marketing strategies in cultivating enduring brand relationships. Loyal customers not only contribute to repeat sales but also play a vital role in enhancing brand image through word-of-mouth advocacy (Marcos & Coelho, 2022). The importance of customer loyalty has become even more pronounced in the digital age, where customer expectations evolve rapidly.

Several key elements contribute to the development of customer loyalty. These include brand trust, satisfaction, and perceived value, which collectively shape the customer's emotional and behavioral response to a brand. Alam et al. (2021) found that customer relationship management (CRM) dimensions, such as customer advocacy, orientation, and knowledge, positively influence loyalty.

Moreover, Kumar et al. (2010) noted that loyal customers are less likely to be influenced by pricing or incentive differences from competitors, demonstrating the strength of their brand attachment. In a nutshell, cultivating loyalty requires a deep understanding of the psychological and experiential drivers behind consumer choices, especially in a digitally driven marketplace where customer retention is both increasingly challenging and strategically crucial.

2.4 Hypothesis Development

SMM has transformed the way brands interact with customers by enabling direct, real-time, and personalized communication, which plays a critical role in shaping customer satisfaction. The interactive nature of SMM facilitates continuous engagement between brands and consumers, allowing for the creation of meaningful relationships (Walean et al., 2024). This two-way communication channel enables businesses to provide timely responses, personalized messages, and relevant content that resonates with customer preferences, ultimately enhancing the overall customer experience (Mandagi, Soewignyo, et al., 2024). Furthermore, effective management of customer feedback and complaint resolution via social media platforms is vital for maintaining high satisfaction levels, as it demonstrates the brand's responsiveness and commitment to service quality.

Beyond engagement, SMM offers brands the tools to anticipate and meet consumer expectations, creating a sense of trust, belonging, and loyalty. The integration of these practices contributes significantly to customer satisfaction, which is a key determinant of long-term business success. Drawing from previous studies and logical reasoning, it is evident that effective SMM enhances customer satisfaction by fostering stronger brand-consumer connections, improving service experiences, and nurturing brand trust. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: SMM has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction.

SMM plays a critical role in cultivating customer loyalty by providing a dynamic platform for continuous engagement, personalized communication, and meaningful brand experiences. Through consistent and authentic interactions, brands can foster deeper emotional connections and trust with their audiences, previous studies shows that when brands actively engage users by responding to comments, offering tailored incentives, and delivering valuable, relevant content, consumers are more likely to feel recognized and appreciated (Lebo & Mandagi, 2023; Rantung et al., 2023). This sense of connection can translate into stronger loyalty behaviors, such as repeat purchases and brand advocacy (Sijabat et al., 2022). Moreover, social media facilitates the creation of digital communities where customers can share experiences, provide feedback, and interact with other brand followers. The interactive nature of social media helps sustain brand visibility while nurturing a loyal customer base that is more inclined to stay engaged and recommend the brand to other customers (Mandagi, 2023). Based on the findings of previous studies and the logical linkage between social media engagement and loyalty outcomes, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: SMM has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty.

SMM plays a crucial role in shaping brand trust by enabling transparent and authentic interactions between brands and consumers. According to Jeswani (2023), the open nature of communication on social media platforms fosters an environment where trust can flourish. Brands can demonstrate dependability and credibility by consistently sharing honest, engaging, and value-driven content that reflects their mission and principles (Pongoh & Mandagi, 2025). Direct interactions—such as responding to inquiries, addressing concerns, and providing timely support—enhance the perception of brand responsiveness and accountability (Yu, 2023). Additionally, user-generated content, such as reviews and testimonials, acts as powerful social proof that reinforces trustworthiness in the eyes of potential customers (Osly & Wijaya, 2025). When brands actively participate in sincere dialogue and demonstrate a commitment to consumer needs, they not only establish credibility but also cultivate deeper emotional connections. This pattern of interaction strengthens the consumer-brand relationship, ultimately fostering trust and enhancing loyalty. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: SMM has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

Customer satisfaction is deeply influenced by brand trust, as it forms the foundation of consumers' positive attitude in their purchasing decisions. When consumers believe a brand will reliably deliver on its promises, as noted by Sari and Darma (2022), they are more likely to feel secure and satisfied with their experience. This sense of reliability not only improves the overall customer journey but also fosters emotional assurance. Singh et al. (2023) further emphasize that consistent brand performance in meeting or exceeding expectations cultivates a reputation for quality and dependability, which in turn strengthens customer satisfaction. Moreover, trusted brands tend to encourage stronger consumer engagement, retention, and advocacy. This creates a reinforcing cycle where trust boosts satisfaction, which then fuels loyalty and brand advocacy, thereby amplifying the brand's credibility and appeal in the market. Collectively, these findings highlight the integral role of brand trust in shaping customer satisfaction and provide a logical basis for the following hypothesis:

H4: Brand trust marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction.

Customers who trust a brand are significantly more likely to engage in repeated purchases, driven by the belief that the brand will consistently meet their needs and expectations (Rita et al., 2019). This trust functions as a psychological safety net, reducing the perceived risk associated with purchase decisions and enhancing consumer confidence (Kumar et al., 2010). Trust is not formed overnight; rather, it emerges gradually through consistent product or service quality, transparent communication, and overall positive customer experiences (Huddin, Kurnia, Deviyantoro, & Nafiudin, 2024). When these elements align, they foster a strong emotional bond between the customer and the brand—transforming satisfied customers into loyal advocates. These brand advocates not only maintain their own loyalty but also actively promote the brand to others through word-of-mouth recommendations, amplifying the brand's reach and credibility. Given this body of evidence, it is reasonable to assert that brand trust plays a pivotal role in shaping customer loyalty. As trust builds over time through positive and consistent interactions, customers are more inclined to remain loyal even in the face of alternative options or competitive incentives. This logical progression from trust to loyalty suggests a meaningful and testable relationship. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Brand Trust has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty.

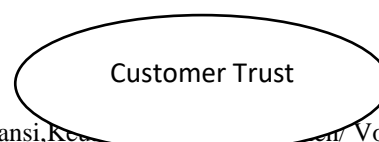
SMM, brand trust, and customer satisfaction form a dynamic interplay that significantly shapes consumer perceptions and behavior. By addressing consumer concerns in real time, sharing relevant content, and maintaining openness, brands signal their commitment to customer needs and values, which in turn nurtures brand trust. Trust enhances customer confidence in the brand's reliability and responsiveness, leading to greater satisfaction with both interactions and purchases. This satisfaction further reinforces trust and encourages deeper engagement with the brand's social media, creating a virtuous cycle that supports customer retention and long-term loyalty. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Brand trust mediates the relationship between SMM and customer satisfaction.

Building on this foundation, research by Ali et al. (2025) and Dwivedi et al. (2021) confirms the critical role of SMM in cultivating brand trust and, subsequently, customer loyalty. Interactive content, personalized messaging, and frequent updates enhance transparency and foster emotional bonds between brands and consumers. When consumers perceive brands as trustworthy and aligned with their personal values, they are more inclined to remain loyal and advocate for the brand through word-of-mouth and repeat purchases. As such, brand trust emerges as a crucial mediating variable linking SMM efforts to both customer satisfaction and loyalty. Based on these insights, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Brand trust mediates the relationship SMM marketing and customer loyalty.

Figure 1 outlined the suggested conceptual model considering the study's objective, the literature review, and the formulation of the hypotheses.



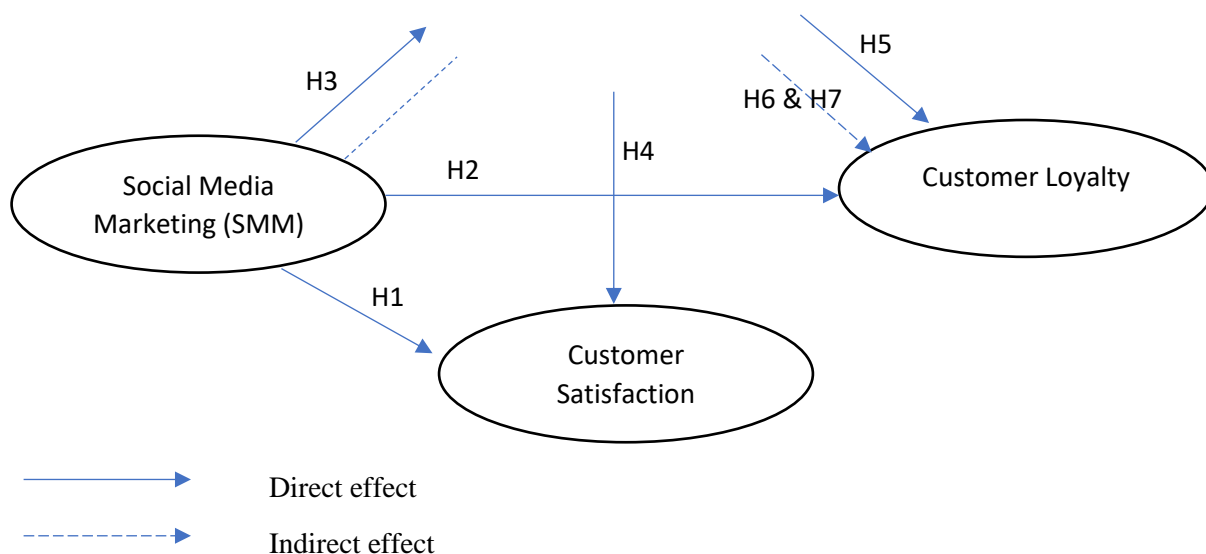


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a quantitative descriptive and correlational research design, which enables a comprehensive analysis of the dynamic relationship between SMM, brand trust, customer satisfaction and loyalty. To collect the data, from the respondents, a quantitative survey is employed. For data analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), is employed in order to guarantee precision and a thorough examination (Hair, Hollingsworth, Randolph, & Chong, 2017). This analysis utilized SmartPLS, which allows for a systematic and comprehensive investigation of the connections among brand trust, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, and SMM.

3.2 Sampling

A survey approach was done to 196 Shopee customers in Indonesia recruited using convenience sampling. The reason for using this sampling technique is that it has been generally accepted as the most cost-effective way to collect customer data, particularly when the sample frame is not available. Convenience sampling also makes it easier for researchers to contact respondents and distribute the questionnaire. Before beginning the data collection process, the consents from the participants were sought. 182 valid participant responses were obtained for this study and judged appropriate for data processing. Based on the demographic data presented in table 1, 66% of the respondents are women. In term of age, 34 % of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 30.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Characteristic	Category	n	Percentage
Gender	Male	62	34.1%
	Female	120	65.9%
Ages	15-20 years	24	13.2%
	21-25 years	25	13.7%
	26-30 years	62	34.1%
	31-35 years	56	30.8%
	<36 years	15	8.2%

3.3. Data and Instrumentation

To streamline the data collection process, an online survey was administered utilizing Google Forms to disseminate the questionnaire online. Once participants completed the questionnaire, their answers were

automatically recorded, which expedited the procedure and minimized the data recording error. The components' measuring items were modified from earlier studies in order to create the survey for data collecting. While the other section of the survey dealt with the measuring items, Section A focused on the respondents' demographic information, including their age, gender, occupation, social media they use. Section B comprises measurement items for the variable. Seven items were used to measure SMM, five things were used to measure brand trust as a mediator, and five items each were used to test consumer satisfaction and loyalty. All the measurement items presented in Likert scale, that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative dataset in this study was analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), utilizing SmartPLS. To make sure the indicators appropriately reflect the intended constructs, the convergent and discriminant validity was evaluated prior to hypothesis testing. In order to verify its reliability and validity, the measurement model was assessed by evaluating the factor loading (Albahri et al., 2021). Factor loadings should be greater than 0.7 to be considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2017). The Fornell-Larcker criterion are used to assess convergent validity. When the coefficient of each indicator with its concept is greater than that of other constructs, the Fornell-Larcker criterion is satisfied (Hilkenmeier, Bohndick, Bohndick, & Hilkenmeier, 2020).

Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) were used to evaluate reliability. Greater dependability is shown by higher CR values, which gauge how well the indicators reflect the underlying construct (Cheung, Cooper-Thomas, Lau, & Wang, 2024). Survey questions' internal consistency is evaluated by CA to see if they measure the same thing. Acceptable reliability is indicated by values for both CR and CA above 0.70 (Sürücü, Maslakçı, & Sesen, 2022). The structural model evaluation process comprised comparing empirical data with the theoretical model to determine the model's goodness-of-fit and testing hypotheses based on the importance of path coefficients. This approach ensured a comprehensive assessment of the correlations among the variables and the model's overall fit (Hair et al., 2017).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Measurement Model

The Smart PLS program was used to analyze the data for this investigation. First, the measurement model was evaluated to examine the factor loadings in order to confirm the validity and reliability of the selected measurement scales. Four aspects of the measurement model were estimated: convergent validity, reliability analysis, factor loadings, and model fit. The acceptable threshold values ought to be attained by the fit indices.

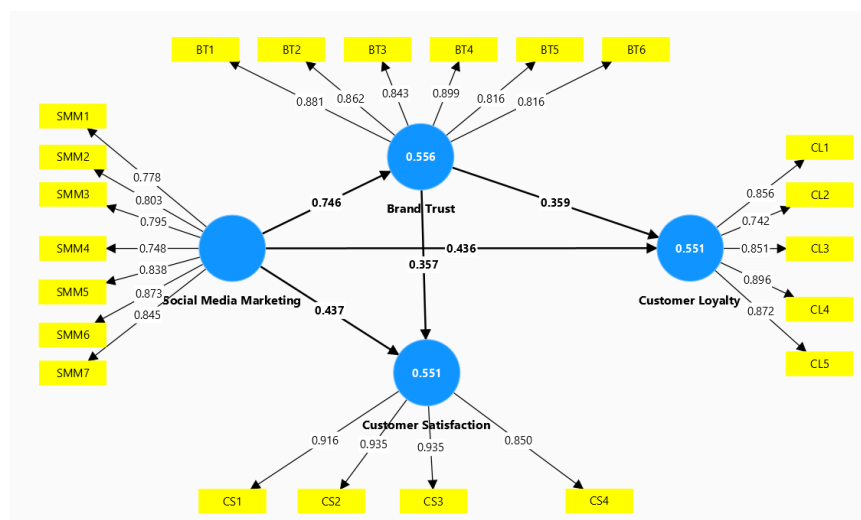


Figure 2. Measurement Model

Table 3. Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Factor Loading
SMM	SMM1	0.778
	SMM2	0.803
	SMM3	0.795
	SMM4	0.748
	SMM5	0.838
	SMM6	0.873
	SMM7	0.845
Brand Trust	BT1	0.881
	BT2	0.862
	BT3	0.843
	BT4	0.899
	BT5	0.816
	BT6	0.816
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.856
	CL2	0.742
	CL3	0.851
	CL4	0.896
	CL5	0.872
Customer Satisfaction	CS1	0.916
	CS2	0.935
	CS3	0.935
	CS4	0.85

4.2 Discriminant Validity

In order to make sure that each construct's measurement items differ using the measuring methodology, discriminant validity was also examined in relation to those of other constructs. This process was employed in response to Fornell and Larcker's (1981) suggested formula. These authors claim that by comparing the correlations between each construct to the AVE's square root (SQRT), we may verify discriminant validity. Overall, the results (refer to Table 4) confirmed that the AVE' SQRT values for each construct exceeded the correlation values in the same row and column. This clearly shows that the discriminant validity assumptions are met. In specifics, customer loyalty has a diagonal value that is stronger than the other constructs below, while brand trust has a strong link with itself (0.853) and a smaller correlation with other constructions.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	BT	CL	CS	SMM
Brand Trust (BT)	0.853			
Customer Loyalty (CL)	0.683	0.845		
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.683	0.78	0.91	
SMM	0.746	0.703	0.703	0.812

Furthermore, each variable in this study exhibits strong discriminant validity, according to the cross-loading test findings, which are shown in Table 5. Each variable indicator's loading factor is higher than those linked to other variables, which serves as proof of this.

Table 5. Cross Loading

	Brand Trust	Customer Loyalty	Customer Satisfaction	SMM
BT1	0.881	0.551	0.567	0.55

BT2	0.862	0.58	0.567	0.62
BT3	0.842	0.548	0.563	0.573
BT4	0.898	0.593	0.661	0.656
BT5	0.817	0.567	0.617	0.684
BT6	0.816	0.643	0.671	0.707
CL1	0.541	0.856	0.643	0.555
CL2	0.485	0.742	0.619	0.517
CL3	0.599	0.851	0.611	0.669
CL4	0.624	0.896	0.708	0.59
CL5	0.623	0.872	0.754	0.624
CS1	0.624	0.738	0.903	0.592
CS2	0.704	0.739	0.936	0.701
CS3	0.636	0.684	0.915	0.672
CS4	0.502	0.682	0.831	0.583
CS5	0.402	0.285	0.374	0.417
SMM1	0.556	0.446	0.538	0.778
SMM2	0.592	0.459	0.53	0.803
SMM3	0.577	0.596	0.583	0.796
SMM4	0.588	0.552	0.603	0.748
SMM5	0.672	0.609	0.626	0.837
SMM6	0.658	0.64	0.618	0.873
SMM7	0.589	0.656	0.682	0.845

4.3 Reliability

With respect to the reliability test, Table 6 displays the Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values for each variable above the lowest recommended thresholds. Specifically, all of the variables have CR and CA values greater than 0.70. Furthermore, the AVE values for each variable exceed 0.50. Hence, the reliability is achieved for all variables in this study.

Table 6. Reliability test Analysis

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Trust	0.925	0.927	0.941	0.728
Customer Loyalty	0.899	0.905	0.926	0.714
Customer Satisfaction	0.854	0.895	0.905	0.672
SMM	0.914	0.917	0.931	0.66

4.4 Structural Model

The structural model was assessed by evaluating the R square and F square values. The R square value in Table 7 indicates the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables in the model. The result shows that model's predictors explain 55.6% of the variation in brand trust, based on the brand trust R-square of 0.556. The customer loyalty R-square of 0.551 indicates that the model accounts for 55.1% of the variation in customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction's R-square is 0.551, which imply that 55.1% of the variation in customer satisfaction can be explained by the model.

Table 7. R Square

Construct	R-square	R-square adjusted
Brand Trust	0.556	0.554
Customer Loyalty	0.551	0.546
Customer Satisfaction	0.551	0.546

Furthermore, the F-square values is reported in Table 8, which calculates the effect of a predictor variable on an endogenous variable. With a score of 0.127, brand trust has a small to medium effect size on consumer loyalty, implying that it has a impact but not very significant. With a score of 0.126, the relationship between brand trust and customer satisfaction has a modest to medium effect size, meaning that brand trust has a noticeable but not significant impact on customer satisfaction. SMM has a small to medium effect size, with a brand trust score of 1.253, showing a noticeable impact on customer loyalty. Lastly, a small to medium effect size is suggested by the association between SMM and customer satisfaction, which has a value of 0.189, implying that SMM has an impact on customer satisfaction.

Table 8. F Square

Construct	Brand Trust	Customer Loyalty	Customer Satisfaction	SMM
Brand Trust		0.127	0.126	
Customer Loyalty				
Customer Satisfaction				
SMM	1.253	0.188	0.189	

After evaluating the structural model, hypothesis testing was performed by evaluating the significance of each path coefficient. The results of hypothesis testing are shown in Figure 3, Table 9, and Figure 10.

Table 9. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Remark
BT -> CL	0.358	0.087	4.139	0.000	Significant
BT -> CS	0.358	0.095	3.743	0.000	Significant
SMM -> BT	0.748	0.041	18.302	0.000	Significant
SMM -> CL	0.439	0.079	5.509	0.000	Significant
SMM -> CS	0.437	0.095	4.578	0.000	Significant

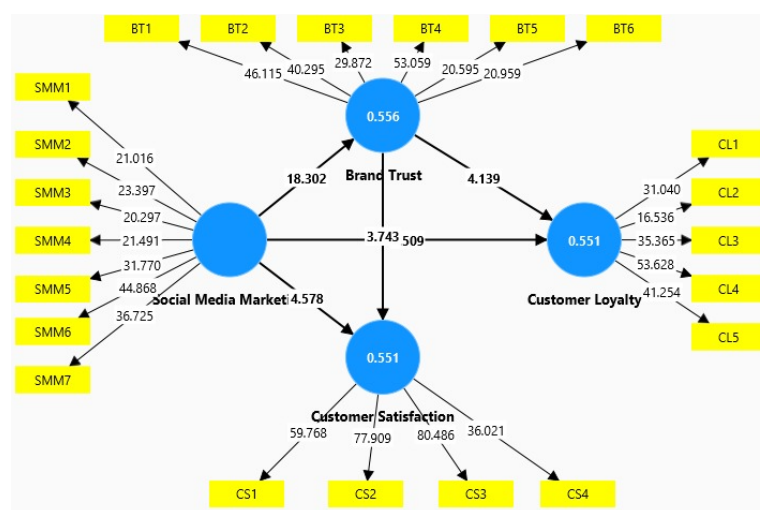


Figure 3. Structural Model

Table 9 displays the direct effects of each variable (H1–H5). The results of the hypothesis testing for H1 show a significant and positive impact of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on customer satisfaction (p-value < 0.000; t-statistic = 17.247). Next, the second hypothesis (H2) examines the effect of SMM on customer loyalty. The test results confirm that SMM has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty (p-value < 0.000; t-statistic = 17.315). Additionally, the third hypothesis (H3) explores the relationship between brand trust and SMM. The test results affirm a significant and positive effect of SMM on brand trust (p-value < 0.000; t-statistic = 18.307). The impact of brand trust on customer satisfaction is examined in the fourth hypothesis (H4). The findings reveal a significant and positive effect of brand trust on customer satisfaction (p-value < 0.000; t-statistic = 4.236). Finally, the fifth hypothesis (H5) investigates the relationship between brand trust and customer loyalty. The results support a positive and significant effect of brand trust on customer loyalty (p-value < 0.000; t-statistic = 4.142).

4.5 Mediating effect

H6 concerns the mediating effect of brand trust on the relationship between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and customer satisfaction. The results in Table 11 show that the t-statistic value is 4.025 and the p-value is < 0.000, confirming the mediating effect of brand trust. H7 examines how the relationship between SMM and customer loyalty is mediated by brand trust. The results support the mediating effect of brand trust on this relationship (p-value < 0.000; t-statistic = 3.515).

Table 11. Hypothesis Testing Results for specific indirect effect

	Sample mean	Standard deviation	Tstatistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Remarks
SMM -> BT -> CL	0.268	0.066	4.025	0.000	Significant
SMM -> BT -> CS	0.268	0.076	3.515	0.000	Significant

4.6 Goodness of Fit Model

Furthermore, the Goodness-of-Fit of the model was evaluated. The results, as shown in Table 9, indicate that there is little disparity between the goodness-of-fit indexes of the two models. For the estimated model, the d_ULS is 1.576, the d_G is 0.607, the Chi-Square is 573.849, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is 0.079, and the Normed Fit Index (NFI) is 0.841. These values indicate a strong correspondence between the observed data and the model.

Table 12. Goodness-of-Fit Model

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.061	0.079
d_ULS	0.946	1.576
d_G	0.539	0.607
Chi-square	528.653	573.849
NFI	0.854	0.841

4.9 Discussion

With regard to H1, the result indicates that SMM has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. This finding supports the view that active and strategic use of social media enhances the overall customer experience by promoting engagement, responsiveness, and value-driven interactions. This is consistent with the findings of Walean et al. (2024), who emphasized that SMM facilitates two-way communication and strengthens relationships between brands and consumers. Similarly, Mandagi, Rampen, et al. (2024) highlighted that personalized communication, timely responses, and interactive content through social media contribute to improved customer satisfaction. Furthermore Rita et al. (2019) found that the effective management of customer feedback and complaint resolution on social media platforms helps reinforce trust and positively impacts satisfaction.

Regarding the H2, the results show that SMM has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. This finding confirms the importance of consistent and engaging social media strategies in building long-term consumer loyalty. Jeswani (2023) emphasized that meaningful and continuous brand interactions on social media create customer-brand connections and build customer loyalty. Lebo and Mandagi (2023); Rantung et al. (2023) documented that when brands actively engage with users, by acknowledging their feedback, providing timely responses, and offering relevant incentives consumers feel more valued, which contributes to increased loyalty.

With respect to H3, the results confirm that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. This findings highlights the critical role that trust plays in shaping consumers' perceptions and responses to brand experiences. Azhar et al. (2023) and Ibrahim et al. (2021) similarly highlighted that trust in a brand creates customer confidence and satisfaction. Warbung et al. (2023) and Carundeng et al. (2024) also noted that in brand-customer interaction mediated by social media, trust becomes a key determinant of how customers evaluate brand communications and offerings. Samarah et al. (2022) documented that when consumers perceive a brand as trustworthy, they are more likely to experience satisfaction due to reduced perceived risk and increased emotional attachment. The present findings align with these studies, emphasizing that trust not only drives satisfaction but is also a necessary foundation for positive brand-consumer relationships.

The H4 results show that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. This findings reinforces that when customers perceive a brand as trustworthy, they are more linkely to remain loyal and continue engaging with the brand. This finding is in line with previous studies by Alam et al. (2021) and Ali et al. (2025), who highlighted the foundational role of trust in buliding long-term brand relationships. Azizan and Yusr (2019); Diputra and Yasa (2021) also noted that brand trust not only directly influences loyalty but acts as a mediating factor between customer experience and loyalty behaviors. In social commerce and digital settings, as discussed by Azhar et al. (2023), trust acts as a behavioral anchor, particularly when consumers face high levels of information asymmetry. The current study reinforces the notion that trust is not only a relational asset but a strategic imperative in loyalty development.

H5 testing reveals that customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. This confirms that satisfied customers are more likely to engage in repeat purchases and act as brand advocates Dam and Dam (2021) documented similar evidence by identifying customer satisfaction as a bridge between service quality and customer loyalty. Rantung et al. (2023) further supported this relationship, demonstrating that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and customerloyalty. Mandagi, Rampen, et al. (2024) highlighted that satisfaction is not merely an endpoint but a dynamic component that informs consumer attitudes and future behavioral intentions. Consistent with Rita et al. (2019) and Solimun and Fernandes (2018), the current findings reinforce the idea that customer satisfaction is a key driver of loyalty.

The results of H6 testing confirm that brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between SMM and customer satisfaction, which indicates that the positive impact of SMM on satisfaction is not only direct but is also enhanced through the development of brand trust. In other words, when customers interact with a brand through social media and perceive it as trustworthy, which in turn strengthens their satisfaction with the brand. This aligns with findings from Samarah et al. (2022), who noted that trust plays a vital mediating role in translating digital engagement into positive emotional outcomes.

The H7 testing results also supports the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between SMM)and customer loyalty, which implies that while SMM can directly influence loyalty, its impact is significantly strengthened when it fosters brand trust first. This finding highlights that trust acts as a psychological bridge that converts social media engagement into lasting loyalty behaviors such as repeat purchases and brand advocacy. It is in line with the studies by Ali et al. (2025) and Alam et al. (2021), who stated that brand trust not only serves as a key antecedent to loyalty but also enhances the effectiveness of SMM in digital platforms. According to Azizan and Yusr (2019), customers are more likely to remain loyal to brands they trust, especially in competitive environments where switching costs

are low. Therefore, this result suggests that companies must not only focus on being present on social media but should also prioritize building and maintaining trust with the customers.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the interplay between SMM, brand trust, customer satisfaction and loyalty in the e-commerce context. The results show that SMM positively and significantly influences customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This indicates that engaging, personalized, and responsive social media interactions enhance the customer experience and foster long-term customer-brand relationships. Secondly, brand trust is found to have a significant positive effect on both customer satisfaction and loyalty, emphasizing its role in shaping consumer perceptions and encouraging customer-brand engagement. Additionally, customer satisfaction is found to be a significant determinant of customer loyalty, highlighting that satisfied customers are more likely to repurchase and advocate for the brand. Furthermore, brand trust significantly mediates the link between SMM on both customer satisfaction and loyalty, suggesting that the effectiveness of social media efforts is amplified when customers perceive the brand as trustworthy.

The findings of this study offer several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study reinforces the principles of relationship marketing by demonstrating that SMM significantly enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly when interactions are engaging, personalized, and responsive. This supports the notion that digital platforms serve as effective tools for fostering long-term customer-brand relationships. Moreover, the results validate the role of brand trust as a crucial mediator in the S-O-R framework, where SMM (stimulus) influences trust (organism), which in turn drives satisfaction and loyalty (responses). This not only expands the trust-based view of consumer behavior but also provides a more integrated understanding of how various relational factors contribute to customer loyalty in the e-commerce context.

5.2 Suggestions

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the importance for e-commerce businesses to optimize their social media strategies by focusing on personalized content, real-time responsiveness, and consistent brand messaging. These efforts can significantly enhance the overall customer experience and increase satisfaction levels. In addition, the strong influence of brand trust on both satisfaction and loyalty suggests that companies must invest in building and maintaining trust through transparency, reliability, and consistent service delivery. Strategies such as sharing customer testimonials, providing clear policies, and leveraging authentic brand ambassadors can be effective in this regard. Since customer satisfaction is shown to directly impact loyalty, companies should also prioritize post-purchase engagement and support to ensure positive customer experiences. Furthermore, the mediating role of trust highlights its strategic importance; organizations should leverage trust to amplify the impact of their SMM initiatives. Finally, the use of analytics to track the effectiveness of SMM in building trust and loyalty can help businesses refine their strategies and achieve better outcomes.

While the study offers valuable insights into the relationships among SMM, brand trust, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, it has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design used in this study limits the ability to infer causality between variables; longitudinal research would provide a more dynamic understanding of these relationships over time. Second, the study's data were collected from a specific demographic and geographic context of Shopee customers in Indonesia, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural settings. Third, the research relied on self-reported questionnaire, which can be influenced by respondent bias such as social desirability or recall inaccuracies. Finally, the study focused on general social media platforms and did not account for platform-specific differences, which may play distinct roles in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors. Future research could address these limitations by comparing the group of customer across social media platforms.

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