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Enhancing Customer Loyalty through Social Media Marketing and Brand Experience

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing on customer loyalty by considering the mediating role of brand experience among consumers of modern coffee beverages, specifically Generation Z in Malang City. This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory design. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to 120 respondents who had purchased modern coffee products and followed the relevant brand's social media accounts. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with specific criteria, and data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that social media marketing has a positive effect on brand experience and customer loyalty. Furthermore, brand experience was also found to have a positive effect on customer loyalty and acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media marketing and customer loyalty. These findings indicate that the success of social media marketing strategies depends not only on the intensity of promotions but also on a brand's ability to create memorable experiences for consumers. Thus, this study concludes that the integration of social media marketing with a strong brand experience can effectively enhance customer loyalty in the modern coffee industry.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Experience, Customer Loyalty, Coffee Beverage, Gen Z

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed how companies build relationships with consumers (Verhoef et al., 2021). In the modern marketing landscape, social media is no longer merely a communication channel but has evolved into an interactive space that enables the formation of perceptions, experiences, and emotional connections with brands (Hussein & Hapsari, 2020; Sabil Hussein et al., 2022). For the rapidly growing and highly competitive coffee shop industry, the ability to effectively leverage social media marketing has become increasingly crucial, particularly in efforts to retain customer loyalty, which tends to be dynamic and easily swayed. The proliferation of modern coffee consumption in Indonesia reflects a shift in consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z, who consume products not only for their functionality but also for the accompanying experience (Filzah Salsabila et al., 2025; M.-J. (Sebrina) Wang et al., 2024). Coffee shops are no longer positioned merely as places to buy drinks, but as part of a lifestyle and social identity. In this context, social media serves as the primary medium that shapes both consumer expectations and experiences regarding a brand. Digital interactions, product visualizations, and narratives built through content are key determinants in creating a lasting impression in consumers' minds (Li et al., 2021).

Previous studies have confirmed that social media marketing contributes to increased customer loyalty (Ali et al., 2020; Qurrata et al., 2021). However, this relationship is often understood in a straightforward manner without considering the underlying psychological mechanisms. Most studies have focused on variables such as satisfaction, trust, or engagement as mediators, while the role of brand experience which reflects consumers' sensory, emotional, and cognitive responses to a brand remains relatively under-explored, particularly within the context of the modern coffee industry. Yet, in a consumption environment increasingly centered on experience, brand experience has the potential to serve as a key link explaining how marketing exposure on social media can translate into sustained loyalty (Merdiaty & Aldrin, 2022; Paramita et al., 2021). Addressing

this gap, this study aims to examine the influence of social media marketing on customer loyalty by positioning brand experience as a mediating variable among coffee shop consumers in Malang City. This city was selected because it represents the growth dynamics of the coffee industry as well as the characteristics of young consumers who are active on social media.

This study introduces a novel approach by integrating the Experience Quality Theory (EQT) perspective as a conceptual framework to understand how experience quality mediates the relationship between social media marketing and customer loyalty. EQT emphasizes that consumer experience is not merely viewed through the lens of product or service functionality but also through the quality of emotional, cognitive, and sensory perceptions formed during the interaction process with the brand (Hapsari et al., 2024; Hussein et al., 2018, 2022). In the digital context, this experience becomes increasingly complex as it is influenced by social media content, user interface, social engagement, and brand values communicated online (Miryam & Antonio, 2022; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021). The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on the role of brand experience as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and customer loyalty within the context of contemporary coffee consumption, a topic that has not yet been extensively studied, particularly in local settings such as Malang City. This approach offers a more comprehensive perspective on understanding the formation of customer loyalty in the era of experience-based marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing represents an evolution in marketing strategy that leverages digital platforms to create two-way communication between brands and consumers (Laradi et al., 2024). Unlike traditional, one-way marketing approaches, social media enables more personal, real-time, and experience-based interactions. From a relationship marketing perspective, social media marketing serves as a means to build long-term relationships through engagement, trust, and emotional closeness with consumers (Nugroho et al., 2022; Poturak & Softic, 2019). In the past decade, various studies have shown that the effectiveness of social media marketing is measured not only by exposure or reach but also by the quality of the interactions generated. Recent studies confirm that interactive, authentic, and relevant content can enhance positive brand perceptions and strengthen consumer loyalty (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Additionally, advancements in social media platform algorithms are driving companies to be more creative in crafting brand narratives that create meaningful experiences for their audience.

Brand Experience

Brand experience refers to the consumer's internal response encompassing sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions that arise from interactions with a brand (Gao & Shen, 2024; Singh et al., 2022). This concept evolved from the experiential marketing approach, which emphasizes that consumption decisions are not solely based on functional utility but also on the experiences felt during the interaction process with the brand. Previous research indicates that brand experience plays a strategic role in shaping perceptions of brand value and differentiation, particularly in lifestyle-based industries such as coffee shops (Hanaysha, 2022). Positive experiences can strengthen consumers' memories of the brand, enhance satisfaction, and foster deeper emotional engagement (Angeline, 2023a). In the digital context, brand experience is shaped not only through direct interactions but also through visual representations, storytelling, and communication conveyed via social media (Akar & Dalgic, 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Naeem et al., 2025).

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is a consumer's commitment to consistently making repeat purchases and demonstrating a preference for a particular brand over alternatives (Cardoso et al., 2022a; Mansouri et al., 2022). Loyalty is not merely behavioral (repeat purchase) but also reflects attitudinal commitment, such as recommendations and advocacy for the brand (Cardoso et al., 2022b; Rahayu et al., 2020). Recent literature emphasizes that customer loyalty is increasingly influenced by emotional factors and experiences, not just satisfaction alone. In a competitive business environment, companies need to create sustainable value through experiences that build long-term relationships with consumers (Chi & Phan, 2025; Pardo-Jaramillo et

al., 2025a, 2025b). Therefore, understanding the determinants of loyalty in a digital context is becoming increasingly important, especially when consumers have broad access to a wide range of alternatives.

Hypothesis Development

Social Media Marketing and Customer Loyalty

The relationship between social media marketing and customer loyalty has been extensively studied in the digital marketing literature (Bakalo, 2024; Yulianto et al., 2024b). Social media enables companies to establish sustained communication with consumers, which ultimately enhances trust and brand engagement (Eslami et al., 2022; Kartomo, 2024a). Empirical research in recent years has shown that consistent and relevant marketing activities on social media can significantly increase customer loyalty (Kartomo, 2024b; Kumar & Hsieh, 2024; M. Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Aekram Faisal, 2022a). However, in the context of modern consumption, this influence is not always direct but often occurs through more complex psychological processes. Nevertheless, in general, social media marketing still has a direct contribution to shaping customer loyalty.

H1: Social media marketing has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Social Media Marketing and Brand Experience

Social media marketing provides various stimuli that can influence consumers' perceptions and experiences of a brand (Al-Hujri et al., 2025; Kumar & Hsieh, 2024). Visual content, direct interactions, and narratives built through social media play a role in creating multisensory and emotional experiences(Lapresta-Romero et al., 2026). Previous research indicates that social media marketing activities can enhance brand experience by increasing engagement and consumers' perceived value (Hanaysha & Alhyasat, 2025; Kumar & Hsieh, 2024; Yulianto et al., 2024a). In the context of coffee shops, where experience is an integral part of consumption, social media serves as an extension of that experience before, during, and after consumption. Thus, the more effective the social media marketing strategy implemented, the stronger the resulting brand experience.

H2: Social media marketing has a positive impact on brand experience.

Brand Experience and Customer Loyalty

Brand experience is one of the primary determinants in the formation of customer loyalty (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021; Şahin et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2022). Positive experiences not only enhance satisfaction but also foster emotional bonds that encourage consumers to remain loyal to a brand (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021; Y. Wang et al., 2025). Recent studies indicate that consumers with strong brand experiences tend to exhibit higher levels of loyalty, including through repeat purchases and recommendations to others (Ahrholdt et al., 2019; Y. Wang et al., 2025; Wardana, 2025). In the coffee shop industry, a pleasant consumption experience—both physical and digital—can serve as a significant differentiator in retaining customers. Therefore, brand experience can be viewed as a key mechanism in building long-term loyalty.

H3: Brand experience has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

The Mediating Role of Brand Experience

Although social media marketing can directly influence customer loyalty, this relationship is often reinforced through the experiences perceived by consumers(Kulikovskaja et al., 2023). Brand experience serves as a bridge connecting marketing stimuli with consumer behavioral responses (Fischer & Praxmarer-Carus, 2021; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020). In this context, social media creates initial expectations and perceptions, which are then translated into experiences that influence loyalty (Astrid et al., 2026; Indrasari & Hikmah Perkasa, 2026). Previous research has begun to show that brand experience plays a significant mediating role in various marketing relationships, although it remains limited to specific contexts. Therefore, testing the mediating role of brand experience in the relationship between social media marketing and customer loyalty is crucial for providing a more comprehensive understanding.

H4: Social Media Marketing influences customer loyalty, mediated by Brand Experience

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to examine the relationship between social media marketing, brand experience, and customer loyalty. The study population consists of coffee shop consumers in Malang City who have made purchases and interacted with the brand's social media, with sampling conducted using purposive sampling based on specific criteria. PLS-SEM was selected as the analytical tool because it is a non-parametric method suitable for data that may not follow a normal distribution and is effective for research involving complex models with smaller sample sizes. Furthermore, PLS-SEM is preferred when the primary objective is to predict key target constructs or when the theoretical framework is in an exploratory stage. The sample of 120 respondents satisfies the minimum requirement of 5–10 times the number of indicators, ensuring the model's reliability and stability (Hair et al., 2014). Data were collected through the distribution of an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The research instrument was developed from indicators validated in previous studies covering the dimensions of social media marketing (Almohaimmeed, 2019; Gao & Shen, 2024; Li et al., 2021), brand experience (Gao & Shen, 2024; Khan et al., 2020; Kumar & Hsieh, 2024), and customer loyalty (Hapsari et al., 2020; Hussein & Rohman, 2021). Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to test validity and reliability, and evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to test relationships between variables and the role of mediation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

The following section describes the demographic characteristics of the 120 respondents involved in this study. The data was collected to provide a comprehensive overview of the Generation Z consumers of modern coffee beverages in Malang City, as presented in **Table 1. Respondent Profile**.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Category	Classification	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	52	43.3%
	Female	68	56.7%
Age	17 – 20 years old	35	29.2%
	21 – 24 years old	65	54.1%
	25 – 29 years old	20	16.7%
Main Occupation	Student / Undergraduate	82	68.3%
	Private Employee	22	18.3%
	Entrepreneur / Freelancer	12	10.0%
	Others	4	3.4%
Monthly Expenditure	< IDR 1,500,000	48	40.0%
	IDR 1,500,000 – 3,000,000	55	45.8%
	> IDR 3,000,000	17	14.2%

Results of the Outer Model Analysis

This study analyzed data obtained from coffee shop customers in Malang City using a Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The initial stage involved evaluating the measurement model (outer model) to ensure the validity and reliability of the constructs. The test results showed that all

indicators had factor loadings above 0.70, thus meeting the criteria for convergent validity. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each variable were also above 0.50, indicating that the constructs effectively explained the variance of their respective indicators. Additionally, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for all variables were above 0.70, confirming that the research instrument is reliable, as shown in **Table 2. Results of the Outer Model Analysis**.

Table 2. Results of the Outer Model Analysis

Variable	Indicator	Factor Loadings	Cross Loadings	AVE	Cronbach 's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Social Media Marketing	SMM1	0.955	0.955	0.894	0.941	0.962
	SMM2	0.922	0.922			
	SMM3	0.959	0.959			
Brand Experience	BE1	0.928	0.928	0.915	0.969	0.977
	BE2	0.968	0.968			
	BE3	0.951	0.951			
	BE4	0.979	0.979			
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.964	0.964	0.878	0.965	0.973
	CL2	0.904	0.904			
	CL3	0.966	0.966			
	CL4	0.939	0.939			
	CL5	0.911	0.911			

Inner Model Analysis Results

The evaluation of the structural model (inner model) in this study was conducted to assess the predictive ability and the strength of the relationships among the latent variables included in the research model. The evaluation of the inner model refers to several key indicators, namely the R-square value to measure the amount of variance in the endogenous variables that can be explained by the exogenous variables, the Adjusted R-square to account for model complexity, and the Q-square value (predictive relevance) to evaluate the model's predictive ability regarding the observed data. Generally, the R-squared value is categorized as weak, moderate, and strong, while a Q-squared value greater than zero indicates that the model has adequate predictive relevance. Therefore, these three indicators were used as the basis for assessing the validity of the structural model in this study, as shown in **Table 3. Results of the Inner Model Analysis**.

Table 3. Results of the Inner Model Analysis

Variable	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Q-Square
Brand Experience	0.285	0.279	0.231
Customer Loyalty	0.517	0.509	0.442

Based on the results of the inner model analysis, it is known that the brand experience variable has an R-square value of 0.285, which falls into the weak category, meaning that only a small portion of its variance can be explained by social media marketing, while the rest is influenced by other variables outside the model. Meanwhile, the customer loyalty variable has an R-square value of 0.517, which is classified as moderate, indicating that the combination of social media marketing and brand experience can explain more than half of the variance in customer loyalty. Additionally, the Q-square values for both endogenous variables are greater than zero (0.231 and 0.442), indicating that the model possesses good predictive relevance. Thus, overall, the

structural model in this study is deemed sufficiently adequate for explaining and predicting the phenomenon of customer loyalty in the context of coffee shops.

Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted by examining path coefficients and significance (p-values). Hypothesis testing in this study was based on t-value calculations obtained through the bootstrapping method. Hypothesis testing aims to evaluate the direct influence between variables. The criterion used for direct hypothesis testing is that if the p-value is < 0.05 (significance level = 5%) and the t-statistic value is > 1.96, then a significant influence of the exogenous variable on the endogenous variable is established. Conversely, if the t-statistic is less than 1.96 and the p-value is greater than 5 percent (0.05), it can be concluded that there is no significant influence between one latent variable and another latent variable, as shown in **Table 4. Results of the Inner Model Analysis**.

Table 4. Results of the Inner Model Analysis

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-value	Notes
H1	Social Media Marketing → Customer Loyalty	0.394	3.355	0.001	Positive, Significant
H2	Social Media Marketing → Brand Experience	0.534	4.679	0.000	Positive, Significant
H3	Brand Experience → Customer Loyalty	0.427	4.215	0.000	Positive, Significant
H4	Social Media Marketing → Brand Experience → Customer Loyalty	0.228	2.757	0.006	Mediation, Significant

Based on these results, all hypotheses proposed in this study were found to be significant and mutually supportive. Based on the results of the hypothesis testing in Table 4, all hypotheses testing direct and indirect relationships between variables were found to be significant and supported. Social media marketing was found to have a positive and significant effect on brand experience ($t = 4.679 > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.534$), indicating that increased social media marketing activity drives an increase in brand experience. Furthermore, brand experience also has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty ($t = 4.215 > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.427$), meaning that the better the perceived brand experience, the higher the customer loyalty. Moreover, social media marketing has a direct, positive, and significant effect on customer loyalty ($t = 3.355 > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.394$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of social media marketing on customer loyalty through the mediation of brand experience was also found to be positive and significant ($t = 2.757 > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$), confirming the mediating role of brand experience in strengthening this relationship. Thus, all relationships tested in this study are positive and statistically significant.

Discussion

The results indicate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. This suggests that social media marketing activities conducted by coffee shops can enhance customers' attachment to the brand. These findings align with relationship marketing theory, which emphasizes the importance of sustained interaction between companies and customers in building loyalty (Hussein, 2020; Hussein & Hapsari, 2020; Kusnayain & Hussein, 2025). Furthermore, these results are consistent with previous studies stating that social media serves as an effective communication tool for enhancing customer engagement and loyalty (Kartomo, 2024a; Kumar & Hsieh, 2024; Wardana, 2025).

The significant impact of social media marketing on brand experience indicates that engaging, interactive, and relevant content on social media can create a stronger brand experience in consumers' minds (Angeline,

2023b; Kumar & Hsieh, 2024). In this context, brand experience is formed not only through direct interactions in-store but also through the digital experiences consumers have when engaging with brand content. These findings reinforce the concept of experiential marketing, which asserts that customer experience is a key factor in shaping perceptions and attitudes toward a brand.

Furthermore, brand experience has been shown to have a positive influence on customer loyalty. This indicates that positive experiences felt by consumers, both emotionally and cognitively, will encourage them to make repeat purchases and recommend products to others (Astrid et al., 2026; Indrasari & Hikmah Perkasa, 2026). These results align with various previous studies that affirm that brand experience is a primary determinant in building long-term loyalty.

The mediating role of brand experience in the relationship between social media marketing and customer loyalty indicates that the influence of social media is not only direct but is also reinforced through the experiences perceived by consumers. In other words, effective social media marketing strategies must be able to create meaningful experiences to optimally enhance customer loyalty (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021; Kartomo, 2024b; M. Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Aekram Faisal, 2022b). These findings make an important contribution to the digital marketing literature by affirming that brand experience is a key mechanism in bridging the relationship between marketing activities and customer behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media marketing exerts a positive influence on customer loyalty, both directly and through the mediating role of brand experience. These results demonstrate that brand experience serves as a crucial mechanism in strengthening customer loyalty among coffee shop consumers in Malang City. From a practical standpoint, business owners should optimize their social media marketing strategies by prioritizing interactive and relevant content that fosters emotional engagement, as this consistently builds the consumer experiences necessary to sustain long-term loyalty.

Nevertheless, several limitations were encountered during the execution of this research. While the quantitative approach provided robust statistical evidence, it was inherently constrained in capturing the deeper psychological nuances and idiosyncratic behaviors of consumers that a qualitative lens might reveal. Furthermore, despite efforts to ensure a representative sample, the findings are bound by the specific demographic and cultural characteristics of Malang City, which may limit the generalizability of the results to different urban contexts or age cohorts. Additionally, this study focused on a specific set of variables; thus, unobserved factors such as price sensitivity or peer influence might have influenced the respondents' loyalty in ways not fully captured by the current model.

Consequently, future research is encouraged to employ a mixed-methods approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the consumer psyche. Expanding the geographical scope and incorporating additional variables, such as brand trust or perceived value, would further refine the research model and provide a more holistic perspective on the drivers of customer loyalty in the evolving coffee industry.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating the concepts of social media marketing, brand experience, and customer loyalty into a single empirical model, specifically within the context of the coffee shop industry. This research enriches the literature by demonstrating that brand experience acts as a significant mediating variable in this relationship.

Practically, the results of this study provide implications for coffee shop business owners to further optimize their social media marketing strategies by focusing on creating engaging and memorable experiences. The use of creative visual content, strong storytelling, and responsive interaction with customers can enhance the brand experience and ultimately drive customer loyalty. Additionally, business owners need to understand that customer loyalty is not built solely through product quality but also through the holistic experience perceived by consumers, both online and offline.

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