



The mediating effect of brand trust on social media marketing-brand loyalty relationship in Mineral Water industry

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ABSTRACT

The current investigation aims to explore the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty of Aqua mineral water in Padang City, with brand trust positioned as the mediating variable. This research employs quantitative methods with hypothesis testing at the 5% significance level. The results showed that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty, which is strengthened by consumer brand trust. The study confirms that brand trust serves as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. This research recommends the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of social media content using digital metrics and invites further research to explore other factors that influence brand loyalty. The findings contribute to both academics and practitioners in understanding effective marketing strategies in the digital age, particularly in building brand loyalty through social media marketing and brand trust enhancement.

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INTRODUCTION

Brand loyalty is very important for a brand because it not only drives business growth, but also creates a strong foundation for surviving market competition. By building brand loyalty, companies can achieve financial stability, reduce marketing costs, and create long-term relationships that are beneficial to both parties. According to Atulkar (2020), brand loyalty reflects the degree of a consumer's attachment that customers hold for a brand, motivating customers to show steady buying habits toward favored brands. Brand loyalty reflects consumer behavioral responses to selected products or services, which include the intention to make repeat purchases (Sohaib & Han, 2023).

In line with this, research by Puspaningrum (2020) shows that brand loyalty arises due to consumer brand trust in the brand, indicating that the greater the trust consumers have, the stronger the brand loyalty they show. Furthermore, referring to earlier studies carried out by Hussain et al. (2025), brand loyalty represents a consumer choice and tendency to keep buying from the same brand despite negative incidents such as opportunistic product recalls.

Customer commitment to repurchase or choose a brand consistently in comparison with other brands in the same category, as well as a biased behavioral response to one brand compared to another, is expressed through a pattern of repeat purchase decisions (Yazdanian et al., 2019). Brand

loyalty is a deep commitment from customers to continue to buy or use products from a certain brand consistently, even though it can cause changes in purchasing behavior (Ebrahim, 2020).

Social media marketing is among the key factors affecting brand loyalty and possesses a positive relationship (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Assistant et al. (2016) state that social media marketing consists of leveraging social media channels to advertise products or services, build brands, and interact with audiences. Social media offers a better medium for marketing and building trust and brand loyalty. Social media marketing allows brands to interact explicitly with consumers through interesting content, creating engagement that can improve consumers' feelings of attachment to the brand (Jibril et al., 2019). Therefore, marketing activities through effective social media marketing are very important to form brand loyalty.

Another factor that affects brand loyalty is brand trust (Ebrahim, 2020). Consumers' positive expectations of the brand are related to the belief that the brand will fulfill the promises it has made, which indicates a strong sense of trust (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Brand trust is considered a reciprocal relationship, in which the beliefs of consumers create expectations that the brand will meet their needs, and in turn, the brand must commit to fulfilling these expectations (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016). In the marketing world, brand trust is considered a major factor in creating successful and sustainable relationships (Ellitan et al., 2022).

The phenomenon regarding the issue raised in this study stems from the importance of brand loyalty for a brand, which not only drives business growth, but also creates financial stability and strengthens the company's competitiveness in the market. However, building brand loyalty amidst strong business rivalry is a challenge faced by many companies. One factor that adds to the growth of brand loyalty is marketing through social networks. However, the effectiveness of social media marketing in building brand loyalty is still debatable, especially since it is influenced by the existence of the trust factor known as brand trust.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Loyalty

Ismail (2017) described brand loyalty as a customer's dedication to continue purchasing goods or utilizing services from specific brands, regardless of the impact of competitors. In Ebrahim's research (2020), brand loyalty was described as a strong dedication by consumers to make repeat purchases of certain brands in the future, regardless of situational factors. Based on research by Assistant et al. (2022), brand loyalty is defined as consumer dedication to continue to choose and buy certain brands in the future, without being influenced by situational factors.

According to Sohaib & Han (2023), indicators of brand loyalty are:

1. Consider themselves loyal to the product.
2. If the preferred product is out of stock at one store, they might purchase it from a different store.
3. Ready to spend extra on the product of choice.

Social Media Marketing

Jibril et al. (2019) stated that social media marketing involves utilizing social media channels for promotional purposes as communication tools to establish connections between brands and consumers. Other research also says social media marketing is defined as a strategy that leverages social media channels to distribute content related to the brand and track consumer engagement with the brand (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Research by Yadav and Rahman (2018) shows that social media marketing involves the process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver marketing offers online through social media platforms to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders.

Ali et al. (2024) stated that social media marketing has five dimensions and eleven indicators, namely:

1. Entertainment
 - a) The content found on AQUA's social media looks interesting.
 - b) Gathering information about products via social media is enjoyable.
2. Customization
 - a) One can search for tailored information on products on social media.
 - b) Social media platforms offer personalized services.
3. Interaction
 - a) I find it simple to share my opinions via the product's social media channels.
 - b) It is simple to share opinions or engage in discussions with other users via social media.
 - c) Allows for reciprocal communication via social media.
4. Word of Mouth
 - a) Want to convey information from social media products to friends.
 - b) Intend to post content from social media products on their own social media profiles.
5. Trendiness
 - a) Using social media products that are trending.
 - b) The product's social media features up-to-date information.

Brand Trust

Research by Haudi et al. (2022) defines brand trust as a bond in the customer-brand relationship grounded in a feeling of trust and assurance that the brand is dependable to fulfill customer needs and interests. Meanwhile, Hanaysha (2022) describes brand trust as the brand's trustworthiness, originating from consumers' confidence that the product fulfills its promised benefits, based on consumers' confidence that the brand prioritizes their interests. Ali et al. (2024) state that brand trust shows the belief that relational participants in trade will not take advantage of the weaknesses of the other party. According to Atulkar (2020), brand trust relates to consumers' willingness to rely on a brand's capability to fulfill its promised purposes, playing a crucial role in fostering lasting customer relationships with companies.

According to Konuk (2021), brand trust has indicators, namely:

- Have confidence regarding this brand
- Depend on this brand
- Consider this brand to be truthful
- Believe this brand is secure

Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty

Sohail et al. (2019) found in their research that social media marketing has ramifications on brand loyalty. Ismail (2017) states the function of social media marketing in shaping brand loyalty. Research by Erdoğan & Çiçek (2012) also states that customer involvement in social media marketing can improve brand loyalty. Almohaimmed (2019) confirms that marketing through social media marketing effectively increases brand loyalty.

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

Social Media Marketing on Brand Trust

According to Hanaysha (2022), via social media channels, companies are able to engage directly with consumers, build closer relationships, and create positive experiences. Research by Haudi et al. (2022) shows that through marketing activities on social media, companies can build closer and interactive bonds with customers. Haudi et al. (2022) say that with the increase in social media marketing, brand trust facilitates brand loyalty.

H₂: Social media marketing has a positive effect on brand trust.

Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty

Within marketing, trust is regarded as a key element in creating successful and sustainable relationships (Ellitan et al., 2022). According to Alhaddad & Alhaddad (2015), when consumers feel trust in brands, they tend to remain loyal. According to Zehir et al. (2011), when consumers strongly trust brands, they tend to remain loyal and make repeat purchases. Sahin et al. (2011) state that brand trust holds a positive effect on brand loyalty, with consumers who have greater trust in the brand leading them to stay loyal and make repeat purchases.

H₃: Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Brand Trust Functions as a Mediator Influencing How Social Media Marketing Affects Brand Loyalty

Sohaib & Han (2023) discovered that social media marketing fosters brand loyalty, both directly and indirectly via the mediation of trust. A study by Haudi et al. (2022) emphasizes that for companies aiming to strengthen brand loyalty utilizing social media marketing, it is crucial to build brand trust by ensuring good interactions, transparency, and responsive service. Research by Hanaysha (2022) also points out that brand trust holds a significant facilitating role in the interaction between variables. Zehir et al. (2011) stated that whenever consumers experience confidence that a brand can fulfill the pledges it offers and meets the anticipated needs, brand trust emerges acting as a link between favorable social media marketing experiences and brand loyalty.

H₄: Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

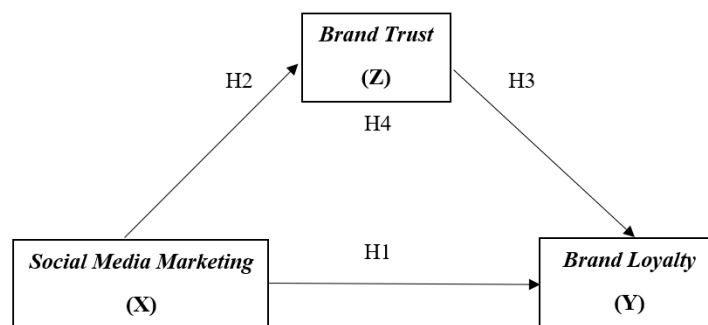


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

METHODS

The present research employs quantitative technique. The data used involves collecting primary data directly by researchers via distributed questionnaires randomly via Google online Forms. The population of this study were Aqua’s consumers in Padang City, with 184 respondents. Sampling was done using purposive sampling method. To guarantee the measurement model’s validity, this research employs two methods, specifically convergent validity and discriminant validity, which are analyzed by PLS (Partial Least Squares). After the validity test, a reliability test was conducted, which was assessed through Cronbach's alpha value and composite reliability. In addition, the structural model was assessed using R-square testing to see the influence and relationship between variables, and assess the significance of the relationship. In this study, there are four factors to consider, namely one independent variables, namely social media marketing; one mediating variable, namely brand trust; and one dependent variable, brand loyslty.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Validity Test

This research categorizes respondent characteristics according to gender, age, occupation, education, and monthly expenses. Respondent characteristics data is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Amount	Percentage
Gender		
Women	76	41.3%
Male	108	58.7%
Age		
18 - 28	142	77.2%
29 - 39	37	20.1%
40 - 50	5	2.7%
Occupation		
Civil servants	14	7.6%
Entrepreneur	47	25.5%
TNI/POLRI	22	12.0%
Farmer	0	0%
Private	18	9.8%
College Student	77	41.8%
State-owned enterprises	3	1.6%
Unemployed	3	1.6%
Education		
Elementary School	0	0%
Junior High School	0	0%
Senior High School	93	50.5%
Diploma	4	2.2%
S1	80	43.5%
S2	7	3.8%
S3	0	0%
Monthly expenses		
< Rp 1.000.000	3	1.6%
Rp 1.000.000 – Rp 3.000.000	128	69.6%
Rp 3.000.000 – Rp 5.000.000	46	25.0%
> Rp 5.000.000	7	3.8%
Do you live in Padang city?		
Yes	184	100%
Have you ever bought Aqua Mineral Water?		
Yes	184	100%
Have you ever seen Aqua's social media?		
Yes	184	100%

Category	Amount	Percentage
Have you made a purchase of the Aqua brand in the last 2 months?		
Yes	184	100%
Aged 18 – 50 years		
Yes	184	100%

Source: Data Processed

The validity testing procedure involves observing AVE and external variable loading to determine whether the latent variable is different from other variables. Convergent Validity is said to be fulfilled if it has outer loading > 0.5, and also seeing whether discriminant validity has been fulfilled can be seen from the cross-loading value, namely by comparing the correlation indicator of a variable with other variables. Here are the test results :

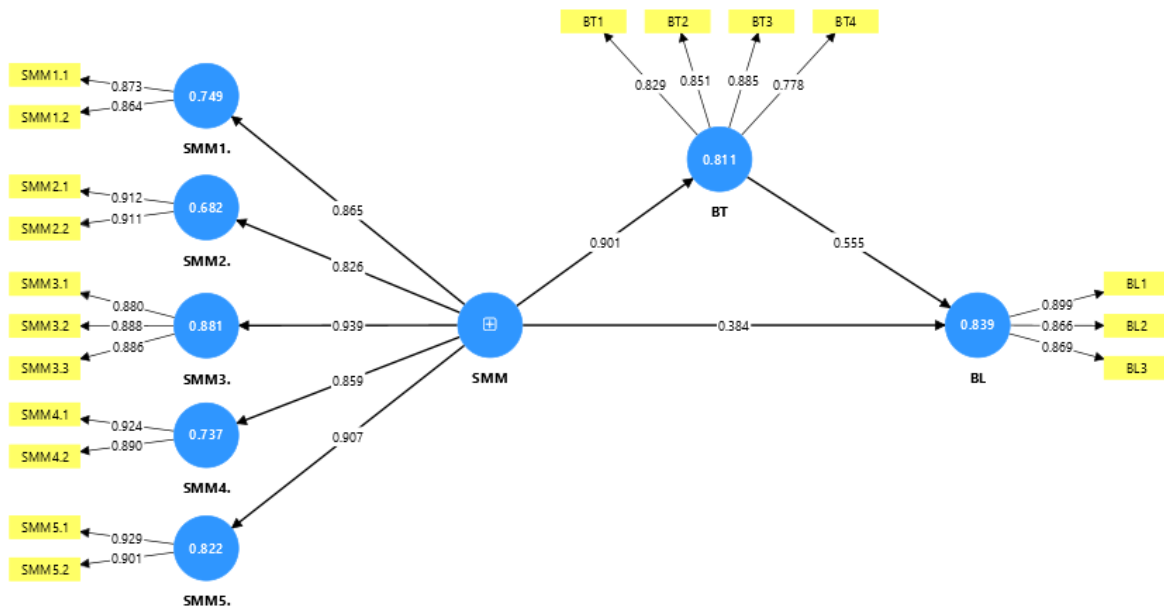


Figure 2 : Final PLS Model Output

From the results of outer loading in Figure 2 above, shows that the criteria for each variable have robust convergent validity, as every indicator shows a loading factor higher than 0.7. Similarly, the cross-loading value shows that the discriminant validity is high as a higher value compared to other variable indicator correlations.

Every other technique that may be used to examine discriminant validity involves comparing the rectangular the R-square the AVE values or each component is evaluated against the correlation amid that construct and related constructs within the model. If a construct has an AVE value > 0.5, it can be considered valid.

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Results

Variable	(AVE)
Brand loyalty	0.771
Brand trust	0.700
Social media marketing	0.628

Source: Result from the SmartPLS process

From the table above, it is possible to conclude indicating that the validity of each construct is above 0.5. Thus, it can be concluded that the variables have a satisfactory or acceptable degree of validity.

Reliability Test

Reliability assesment is done by examining the ofcomposite reliabilityAndCronbach's alphacan be Deemed dependable if it has a value of 0.7.

Table 3. Reliability Test

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Brand Loyalty	0.851	0.852
Brand Trust	0.856	0.860
Social Media Marketing	0.940	0.943

Source: Result from the SmartPLS process

All constructs show composit reliability and cronbach's alpha greater than 0.7, which demonstrates that every construct in the proposed model meets the reliability standards.

R – Square

Table 4. R-Square

	R-square
Brand loyalty	0.839
Brand trust	0.811

Source: Result from the SmartPLS process

The R-square indicates how much of the variance of th exogenous construct accounts for the endogenous construct in the model. In general, the R-square value obtained is quite high, indicating that the model possesses good forecasting power. For example, the SMM3 construct exhibits an R-square statistic of 0.881, implying that 88.1% of the differences in the construct can be explained by the construct that influences it. Likewise, the BL and BT constructs have Values of R-square at 0.839 and 0.811, in that order, indicating a significant contribution from the independent construct to the dependent construct.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis testing was performed to identify the direct, indirect, and total effects among variables. This test was conducted using bootstrapping in the SmartPLS4 program to obtain the relationships between the influence of exogenous and endogenous variables.

Table 5. Direct and Indirect Effects Analysis

Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Value	Significance
Direct Effects				
Social Media Marketing → Brand Loyalty	0.381	4.749	0.000	Significant
Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust	0.899	55.795	0.000	Significant
Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty	0.558	6.901	0.000	Significant
Indirect Effect				
Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty	0.502	7.196	0.000	Significant

Source: Result from the SmartPLS process

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty

Based on the study results above, it is evident that the t-statistic value of 4.749 surpasses the critical value of 1.96, while the p-value stands at 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This outcome leads to rejecting the null hypothesis (H_0) and accepting the alternative hypothesis (H_1), thereby confirming the validity of the proposed hypothesis. Therefore, social media marketing positively and significantly affects Aqua's brand loyalty in Padang City. The positive effect means that if Aqua wants to increase brand loyalty, then Aqua must continue to enhance marketing efforts implemented on its social media accounts. The significant effect implies that social media marketing substantially influences the degree of Aqua's brand loyalty in Padang City.

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Trust

Based on the findings of the study above, it is known that the t-statistic value exceeds the critical t-value ($55.795 > 1.96$), with the p-value falling below the significance threshold ($0.000 < 0.05$), indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted, which implies that the hypothesis is supported. Thus, social media marketing exerts a positive and significant effect on Aqua's brand trust in Padang City. The positive effect means that if Aqua wants to increase brand trust, it must continue to enhance marketing activities on its social media. This significant influence suggests that social media marketing exerts a meaningful effect on the level of Aqua's brand trust in Padang City.

The Effect of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty

According to the findings from the study above, it is known that the t-statistic value exceeds the critical t-value ($6.901 > 1.96$), with the p-value being below the significance threshold ($0.000 < 0.05$). The results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and confirmation of the alternative hypothesis (H_1), indicating that the hypothesis is supported. Therefore, brand trust holds a notable and positive impact on brand loyalty for Aqua in Padang City. The positive effect means that if Aqua wants to increase brand loyalty, it must continue to enhance consumer trust in the Aqua brand. This significant influence means that brand trust significantly affects the level of brand loyalty for Aqua in Padang City.

Brand Trust as a Mediator Between Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty

Analysis revealed that the t-statistic (7.196) is greater than the critical threshold (1.96), and the p-value (0.000) falls below the 0.05 significance level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This result validates the proposed hypothesis. Consequently, brand trust functions as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty for Aqua in Padang City. The findings further suggest partial mediation, meaning that while brand trust partially explains the link between social media marketing and brand loyalty, the direct influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty remains significant.

CONCLUSION

In light of the test results analyzing the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty for Aqua in Padang City, with brand trust playing a mediating role, the results can be summarized as follows:

1. **Social media marketing exerts a significant and positive influence on brand loyalty.** This finding shows that the better the social media marketing implemented by Aqua, the more it can increase brand loyalty for Aqua in Padang City.
2. **Social media marketing exerts a significant and positive impact on brand trust.** The outcome means that the better the social media marketing efforts executed by Aqua, the more it can increase brand trust for Aqua in Padang City.
3. **Brand trust holds a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.** This implies that the higher the consumer brand trust, the more it can increase brand loyalty for Aqua in Padang City.

4. **Brand trust plays a mediating role in linking social media marketing to brand loyalty.** This shows that the more effective the brand trust that is built, the stronger the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty for Aqua in Padang City.

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