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EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS, SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ON BRAND LOYALTY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GENERATION X, Y, AND Z CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the influence of online marketing effectiveness, social media engagement and customer satisfaction on customer brand loyalty in retail industry in Malaysia. This study, based on the theory of Relationship Marketing and Social exchange Theory, which measures the direct effects of digital marketing strategies on customer brand loyalty by involving generation cohorts as a moderator. This study uses a purposive sampling technique. As a quantitative research study, approximately 500-600 samples will be generated from a population of active social media users across the three generational groups and will be conducted using online platforms. The expected findings are expected to cover the extent to which customization of online marketing effectiveness, customer satisfaction and social media engagement to influence customer brand loyalty among generation X, Y and Z. It is expected that Generation Z will be more responsive to interactive and authentic online experiences. In addition, this study also suggests strategic views for retail companies in aligning their digital marketing strategies according to preferences of different generation cohorts. Therefore, this study will offer and contribute to more sustainable and loyal customer brand relationship in a competitive world.

Keywords: online marketing, social media engagement, customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, generation Z

INTRODUCTION

In the digitalization era, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok play an important role in promoting customer engagement, emotional connection, and trust through user-generated content, influencer partnerships, and authentic interactions (Shafik, W. (2024). Thus, it clearly stated how social media has become one of the critical factors to influence in developing brand loyalty among customers. This study tends to clarify the function of social media marketing in promoting brand loyalty in retail sector by digging into emotional and behavioral dimensions among three generation cohorts namely Generation X, Y and Z.

Online marketing, social media engagement and customer satisfaction have been recognized as a contributor to customer brand loyalty, however there is insufficient empirical evidence indicating which factors are the most effective one. Moreover, prior research has not fully explored how these factors influence different generations (Bolton et al., 2013). Therefore, this study is significant, since it provides valuable knowledge for retailers on how to practice authenticity and meaningful engagement to strengthen the relationship with customers with different generations, stresses the high importance on transparency and genuine interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand loyalty refers to a consumer's consistent purchase of a specific product which is demonstrated through repeated purchases even when alternatives are available (Oliver, 1999). However, this concept has evolved. Many studies focus both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions of loyalty, thus reflects repurchase actions, while attitudinal loyalty reflects emotional attachment, trust, and advocacy (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Kim, Kim, & Wang, 2021).

Brand loyalty is fundamental to long-term business success (Agu, Iyelolu, Idemudia & Ijomah, 2024). It enhances customer lifetime value, minimizes marketing costs, and provides competitive advantage through customer retention. Loyal customers tend to be less sensitive on price, more forgiving of service or product failures, and more likely to suggest the brand to others (Tarazona-Montoya, Bernal-Torres, & Gómez-Ramírez, 2024). In the world of digitalization, switching costs are low and competition is crucially intense. Therefore, brand loyalty serves as an important asset that protects brands from customer defection (Godey et al., 2016). Moreover, prior research indicates that perceived quality, customer satisfaction, brand trust, and brand experience are among the most significant predictors of loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). In addition, Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014 argue how co-created value and meaningful brand interactions such as personalization, transparency, and responsiveness foster emotional connections that lead to long-term loyalty.

The influences of brand loyalty have increased together with the shift toward online commerce and social media engagement. Innovation in digitalization, such as mobile apps, customer service chatbots, personalized email marketing, and influencer collaborations all influence consumer perceptions and promote loyalty (Tarazona-Montoya et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2017). Moreover, communities' brand and user-generated content highly improve customer-brand identification, which in turn increase both emotional and behavioral loyalty among consumer (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014). Other previous research shows how different elements influence brand loyalty. For example, personalized communication, value for money, and halal assurance strongly affect loyalty among consumers in multiple sectors (Ainin et al., 2015; Ladhari, Gonthier, & Lajante, 2019). In addition, mobile-friendliness, trustworthy service, and brand reputation when having online repurchases also impacted Malaysian consumers thus enhance loyalty among them (Chuah et al., 2016).

FACTORS INFLUENCING BRAND LOYALTY

Online marketing effectiveness is one of the essential factors for increasing brand loyalty (Rochefort & Ndlovu, 2024). Significant brand-customer relationships are enhanced by successful strategies such as email marketing, influencer collaborations, content marketing, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and search engine optimization (SEO) (Aghazadeh & Khoshnevis, 2024). Moreover, effective implementation of these strategies increases customer perceived value, consumer engagement, and brand visibility thus are critical factors to brand

loyalty. Tarazona-Montoya et al. (2024) suggest influence-marketing and personalization as two aspects of digital marketing, which increase brand commitment and customer trust on the brand. Other authors, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) argued that data-driven targeting and customized content enhance the marketing communications, therefore enhance consumer loyalty towards the brand. Meanwhile, customer-centric digital approaches have been connected to increased customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty, where digital interaction channels are dominant (Zhang et al., 2017).

Recently, social media has been the main online platform that engages and connects the consumers and products together. Social engagement such as likes, shares, comments and direct interactions have proven to develop a sense of emotion and belonging among consumers. This is supported by Habibi, Laroche, and Richard (2014), who found how the interrelation of social-based brand communities enhances brand identification and customer trust thus maintaining long term loyalty. In addition, Ibrahim and Aljarah (2021) further demonstrated how brands maintain active engagement with users on platforms. The engagement through social media proves to foster stronger emotional bonds and improve consumer repurchase behavior. Godey et al. (2016) argued how components in social media marketing activities such as brand content, community engagement, and responsiveness to significantly influence both brand equity and consumer behavior thus promote brand loyalty. Meanwhile, real-time interaction and personalized communication enhance brand transparency, positively associated with emotional loyalty among Millennials and Gen Z (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Consumer brand loyalty is also influenced by satisfaction with using the products or services. When satisfied, they are most likely to repeat purchasing and then disseminate the positive thing about product benefit and customer service to others through word-of-mouth, even with the existence of alternatives from competitors. This is supported by Kim, Kim, and Wang (2021), in which the positive value received by the customers through customer experiences strengthens emotional loyalty. In addition, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) also highlighted how the quality of service plays a crucial role in shaping how satisfied customers feel. When the business being responsive, deliver their promises and show empathy to their customers, they are more likely to build strong satisfaction on the brand and promote long lasting relationship. Moreover, Morgan and Hunt's (1994) suggest commitment trust theory that strengthen the view that satisfaction and trust operate jointly to enhance brand loyalty, especially in service-driven sectors.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework has been proposed based on Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan and Hunt 1994) that focuses on developing long-term, trust-based relationships with consumers. In digital contexts, these relationships are measured through interactive and personalized experiences on social media platforms. Meanwhile, the Social Exchange Theory also supports this framework by explaining the consumers engage in long-term brand relationships when perceived benefits such as satisfaction and emotional connection (Blau, 1964). Therefore, these theories were applied to illustrate how social media marketing activities specifically online marketing effectiveness, social media engagement, and customer satisfaction influence brand loyalty. In this case, brand loyalty will be measured using two dimensions known as emotional loyalty (trust, attachment, identification) and behavioral loyalty (repeat purchases, engagement, and advocacy). In addition, this model also includes generation cohorts as moderator as stated in the research objectives to measure whether the effectiveness of social media strategies varies across different generation groups.

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Each variable serves its own roles, in which the online marketing effectiveness (SEO, personalized content, influencer partnerships and mobile responsiveness) is used to measure visibility, trust, and emotional ties. This was supported by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) who highlight how these strategies influence both emotional and behavioral loyalty through improved consumer-brand interaction and brand credibility through improved consumer-brand interaction and brand credibility. Social media refers to participation and interaction that helps to form emotional bonds and strong brand communities. This is aligned with Habibi, Laroche, and Richard (2014) stated the role of social media-based brand communities to nurture identification, trust, and loyalty. Meanwhile, Godey et al. (2016) further affirms that interaction with branded content enhances both emotional and behavioral aspects of customer loyalty. The last independent variable, customer satisfaction derived from stable and promising interaction between quality of product and service and after sales support service. This is supported by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), discovered how superior service quality contributes to customer satisfaction thus promoting customer loyalty behavior. Meanwhile, research by Kim, Kim, and Wang (2021) proved satisfaction of using social media which cause consumer to be more loyal.

As a moderator, generation cohorts configure how individual simplify and react to marketing effort. For instance, Generation Z generally focuses on authenticity and interactive experience. Whereas Generation X focuses on the importance of reliability and value (Dimock, 2019). However, both Generation Z and X able to reform the customer reaction to social media marketing and how they tend to be loyal to the brand. Therefore, this framework presents an extensive view on the relationships between online marketing effectiveness, social media engagement, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty, while testing the moderating effect of generation cohorts aim to refine digital marketing strategies to better preserve consumers across different generational groups.

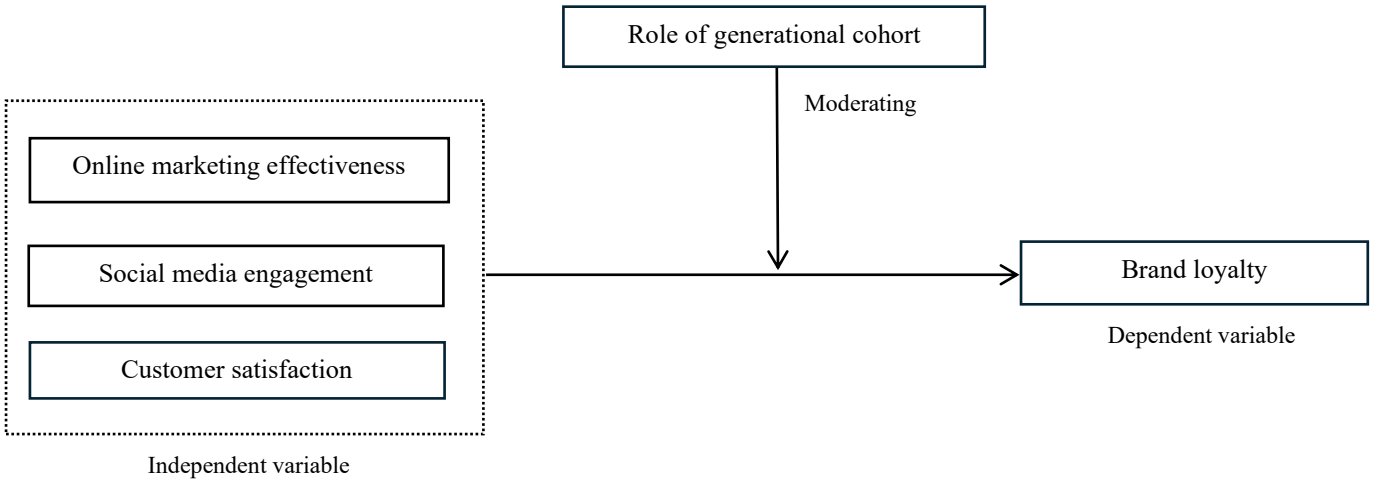


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

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METHODOLOGY

This is quantitative research, focuses on consumers in retail industry in Malaysia as a population of study who actively and previously have experience with the use of social media platforms or interacted with online retail brands. This type of interaction consists of following brand pages, liking or commenting on posts, or making online purchases. Consumers in retail industry is chosen because majority of them face direct experience in digital marketing activities and brand interactions that in turn influence brand loyalty. The consumers or participants will be drawn from three generational cohorts. Generation X (born 1965–1980), Generation Y or Millennials (born 1981–1996), and Generation Z (born 1997–2012), following the classification by the Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2019). Since each generation is different, the engagement with digital platforms is surely different. Therefore, including all three groups allows meaningful comparison of how generation preferences moderate the relationships among online marketing effectiveness, social media engagement, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty.

A purposive sampling technique will be applied since it focuses on consumers who actively use social media and prior experience engaging with retail brands online. This sampling technique is relevant where the goal is to understand specific behavioral patterns and generalize to the entire population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). During the survey procedure, focus will be given more on involving respondents from Generation X by engaging them through online community groups since this generation is typically hard to access on other social media platforms compared to Generation X and Y. As suggested by Krejcie and Morgan, a minimum sample of 384 is needed for population more than one million (95% confidences level, 5% margin error). To make sampling more reliable, a quota-based purposive sampling approach will be executed, with approximately 150 to 170 participants from each generational cohort; ensures valid generational comparisons (Hair et al., 2020). Combining these three generation cohorts, the total sample size of 500-600 will be chosen as it serves as a buffer for any incomplete or invalid response. In addition, larger samples will enhance the statistical power for the study, especially for moderation analysis. An online survey questionnaire will be used in the primary data collection process as it is widely reachable across geographical locations. To ensure reliability and validity, the adapted questionnaire is divided into five sections as follows:

No.	Sections	Item	Measurement Scale	Adapted from
1.	A	Demographic Profile	Open ended	-
2.	B	Online Marketing Effectiveness	Five-Point Likert Scale	Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019)
3.	C	Social Media Engagement		Habibi et al. (2014) and Godey et al. (2016)
4.	D	Customer Satisfaction		Parasuraman et al. (1988).
5.	E	Brand Loyalty		Faridi, Curatman & Siddiq (2025)

The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale starting from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Fair), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly Agree) (Hair et al., 2020). Items for online marketing effectiveness are adapted from Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), focusing on visibility, relevance, and personalization. Social media engagement items are drawn from Habibi et al. (2014) and Godey et al. (2016), addressing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Whereas customer satisfaction will be measured using items from Parasuraman et al. (1988). The item that represents brand loyalty will be assessed using scales from Faridi, Curatman & Siddiq (2025) focusing on customer brand loyalty.

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DATA ANALYSIS

A pilot test will be conducted to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire free from internal errors, with 0.70 as the minimum acceptable threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Descriptive statistics will be executed to summarize the demographic profiles of the respondents and to describe the main features of a dataset in a meaningful way. Then, the reliability and validity of the measurement model will be tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in SEM-AMOS. The Factor Loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) will be measured based on the acceptable thresholds suggested to confirm whether the measurement items are appropriate and consistent (Hair et al., 2010). To further confirm the strength and reliability of the measurement model, model fit will be evaluated using several goodness-of-fit indices as illustrates in Table 1. Combining these tests together will ensure the overall model fits the data well thus the results are both valid and reliable. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be executed to measure the relationships among the constructs. In this analysis, the regression path coefficients (β values) and p-values were analyzed to determine the strength and significance of the relationships between variables.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation and Model Fit Criteria

Assessment Type	Indicator	Description / Purpose	Acceptable Threshold
Convergent Validity	Factor Loadings	Measures the strength of each item's relationship with its latent construct.	> 0.60
Convergent Validity	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Indicates the average amount of variance explained by the construct in relation to the variance due to measurement error.	≥ 0.50
Reliability	Composite Reliability (CR)	Evaluates the internal consistency of the construct.	> 0.70
Model Fit	Chi-square/df (CMIN/DF)	Assesses model parsimony by comparing the chi-square statistics to degrees of freedom.	< 3.0
Model Fit	Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	Measures how well the model fits the observed data.	≥ 0.80
Model Fit	Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	Adjusts GFI for the number of parameters estimated.	≥ 0.80
Model Fit	Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)	Represents the average residuals between observed and estimated covariance matrices.	< 0.05
Model Fit	Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI)	Reflects model fit adjusted for model simplicity.	> 0.50

The study will ensure all respondents are fully informed and consent voluntarily, as comply with social research ethics guidelines (Bryman, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The outcome from this study is expected to discover the moderating effect of generation cohorts in influencing marketing effectiveness, social media engagement, customer satisfaction and customer brand loyalty. First, effective online marketing strategies are anticipated to enhance brand visibility and build trust, thus strengthening customer loyalty to the brand. Second, social media engagement is expected to enhance emotional connections and develop brand loyalty among customers. Last, customer satisfaction operationalized by experience with product quality, service delivery and responsiveness is expected to develop customer brand loyalty towards a brand. This study also aims to measure generational differences in relationship to social media marketing strategies. Generation Z is expected to be more sensitive to transparency, authenticity, and interactivity, making them more responsive to personalized and influence-driven campaigns. Whereas Generation X may focus on the reliability of the service and consistency which reflects more traditional loyalty drivers. In contrast, Generation Y is most likely to show a quite balance in both emotional connection and technological integration. All these variables are most likely to emerge as the most powerful driver towards customer loyalty as it reinforces emotional commitment and the desire to repeat purchase. Finally, contribution of this study theoretically will provide meaningful insights for retailers, assist them to align their digital marketing strategies to suit the preferences of different cohorts. Thus, in turn empowering customer loyalty in today's highly competitive environment.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study. No affiliations, employment, stock ownership, patent applications, consultancies, or grants have influenced the design, conduct, analysis, or reporting of this research.

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