

***INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING, PURCHASE INTENTION,
BRAND LOVE AND BRAND LOYALTY IN FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS***

**MENGINTEGRASIKAN PEMASARAN MEDIA SOSIAL, NIAT BELI, CINTA
MEREK, DAN LOYALITAS MEREK DI RESTORAN MAKANAN CEPAT SAJI**

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ABSTRACT

In the rapidly evolving fast-food industry, leveraging social media marketing has become crucial for building strong consumer relationships. This study aims to examine the influence of social media marketing on brand love, purchase intention, and brand loyalty, as well as to investigate the mediating roles of brand love and purchase intention in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. A quantitative approach was employed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. Data were collected from 203 respondents who are active social media users and fast-food restaurant consumers. The results reveal that social media marketing significantly enhances brand love and purchase intention, yet it does not have a direct effect on brand loyalty. Among the factors analyzed, brand love emerged as the most dominant predictor of brand loyalty, followed by purchase intention. Mediation analysis further confirms that both brand love and purchase intention effectively mediate the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of crafting social media strategies that foster emotional attachment and encourage purchase intentions, thereby establishing a foundation for long-term consumer loyalty. This research contributes to the advancement of digital marketing theory and offers practical guidance for companies seeking to optimize social media platforms to build sustainable consumer relationships.

Keywords: Brand Love; Brand Loyalty; Purchase Intention; Social Media Marketing; Fast-Food Restaurant.

ABSTRAK

Dalam industri makanan cepat saji yang terus berkembang pesat, pemanfaatan pemasaran media sosial telah menjadi hal yang krusial dalam membangun hubungan yang kuat dengan konsumen. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh pemasaran media sosial terhadap cinta merek, niat membeli, dan loyalitas merek, serta untuk menyelidiki peran mediasi cinta merek dan niat membeli dalam hubungan antara pemasaran media sosial dan loyalitas merek. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dengan Model Persamaan Struktural (SEM) dan metode Partial Least Squares (PLS). Data dikumpulkan dari 203 responden yang merupakan pengguna aktif media sosial dan konsumen restoran cepat saji. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemasaran media sosial secara signifikan meningkatkan cinta merek dan niat membeli, namun tidak memiliki efek langsung pada loyalitas merek. Di antara faktor-faktor yang dianalisis, cinta merek muncul sebagai prediktor dominan terhadap loyalitas merek, diikuti oleh niat membeli. Analisis mediasi lebih lanjut menegaskan bahwa baik cinta merek maupun niat membeli secara efektif memediasi dampak pemasaran media sosial terhadap loyalitas merek. Temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya merancang strategi media sosial yang memupuk ikatan emosional dan mendorong niat pembelian, sehingga membentuk dasar untuk loyalitas konsumen jangka panjang. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perkembangan teori pemasaran digital dan memberikan panduan praktis bagi perusahaan yang ingin mengoptimalkan platform media sosial untuk membangun hubungan konsumen yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Cinta Merek; Loyalitas Merek; Niat Pembelian; Pemasaran Media Sosial; Restoran Cepat Saji.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become a central strategic tool in modern marketing, extending beyond mere promotional channels to create interactive, two-way communication

between companies and consumers. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok enable companies to deliver more personalized and immersive brand experiences, strengthening consumer trust and loyalty (Kaplan & Haenlein,

2010; Hanaysha, 2021; Arghashi, 2021). Recent studies highlight the effectiveness of social media marketing (SMM) across diverse sectors. For instance, Mandagi and Aseng (2021) demonstrated that SMM enhances festival branding among Millennials and Gen Z through the mediating effect of brand gestalt, while Waworuntu et al. (2022) found that SMM significantly influences Gen Z's purchase intentions for local products by shaping brand image. Similarly, Warbung et al. (2023) reported that SMM strengthens brand equity in the beauty clinic sector, indicating its broad applicability across industries.

SMM plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior by increasing brand awareness, stimulating engagement, and fostering emotional connections with brands (Walter Tabelessy, 2024; Dwivedi, 2021). Entertainment, informational content, credibility, and digital word-of-mouth promotion enhance SMM's ability to influence consumer decision-making. In the context of fast-food restaurants, Wantah and Mandagi (2024) highlighted the direct impact of SMM on brand loyalty, demonstrating that strategic social media engagement encourages repeated purchases and strengthens consumer attachment. Other studies corroborate these findings in sectors such as education (Poluan et al., 2022; Pasuhuk & Mandagi, 2023; Manggopa et al., 2023; Marhareita et al., 2022; Carundeng et al., 2024) and institutional branding (Rayo et al., 2024; Queenditya et al., 2024), indicating that SMM's effectiveness is amplified when brand gestalt and personality are carefully managed.

A key outcome of effective SMM is purchase intention, which reflects consumers' willingness to buy products or services based on digital interactions

and experiences. Positive perceptions of a brand's SMM activities increase the likelihood of forming strong purchase intentions (Mustafa, 2022; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). In addition to purchase intention, companies aim to cultivate brand loyalty, manifested not only through repeat purchases but also through emotional attachment, recommendations, and preference for a brand over competitors (Oliver, 1999). Brand love has emerged as a critical mediating variable in this process, capturing consumers' emotional attachment, affection, and commitment toward brands. Consumers with strong brand love demonstrate higher loyalty and stronger purchase intentions, serving as a bridge between SMM effectiveness and consumer behavioral outcomes (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra, 2012).

Despite growing research on the effects of SMM, studies examining brand love as a mediator in the context of fast-food restaurants in developing countries remain limited. This research gap underscores the need for further study to understand the mechanisms connecting SMM, purchase intention, and brand loyalty, and to provide practical insights for marketing strategy development (Hair, 2021).

Based on this background, the objectives of the present study are to: (1) analyze the influence of social media marketing on purchase intention, (2) examine the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty, (3) assess the effect of purchase intention on brand loyalty, and (4) explore the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between social media marketing, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. The study is expected to provide theoretical contributions by enriching literature on consumer behavior and digital marketing, particularly regarding brand love's role in fostering loyalty.

Practically, the findings can guide companies in designing more effective social media marketing strategies to enhance purchase intentions and strengthen long-term consumer loyalty.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET), as proposed by Homans (1958) and Blau (1964), posits that social interactions are based on mutually beneficial exchanges, where individuals evaluate the costs and benefits of each relationship. In the context of consumer behavior, this theory emphasizes that individuals engage in behaviors when they perceive positive value or reciprocal benefits from their interactions with a party, including brands. Within digital marketing, social media functions as a platform for value exchange, offering consumers information, experiential engagement, and emotional interactions with brands.

The relevance of SET to this study lies in its ability to explain how social media marketing strategies foster reciprocal relationships that enhance brand love. Consumers who perceive benefits such as relevant information, entertainment, or personalized interactions are likely to respond with positive attitudes, which manifest as increased purchase intention and brand loyalty (Ao et al., 2023). In other words, SET provides a theoretical foundation to understand the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between social media marketing, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. Recent studies further reinforce this perspective, demonstrating that perceived reciprocity and value in online interactions enhance emotional attachment and behavioral commitment to brands (Li et al., 2022; Kim & Park, 2023).

2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the strategic utilization of social networking platforms to create, communicate, and deliver value to consumers while fostering long-term brand relationships (Azhar et al., 2023). The interactive nature of social media enables companies to enhance consumer engagement, expand brand visibility, and influence purchase intention through relevant and personalized content (Ao et al., 2023).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of SMM in building trust, loyalty, and positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). For instance, Sikandar and Ahmed (2019) highlighted that consumer participation in online communities strengthens brand loyalty through engagement and information sharing. In the fast-food industry, social media platforms are effective tools for promoting menus, discounts, and customer experiences, which in turn increase brand awareness and purchase intention (Zam, 2024).

Moreover, SMM plays a critical role in shaping brand gestalt and brand personality, which are significant determinants of consumer purchase intentions and loyalty (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021; Rayo et al., 2024; Queenditya et al., 2024). Research across diverse sectors, including educational institutions, beauty clinics, faith-based schools, and government organizations has consistently found that effective SMM enhances brand awareness, image, and consumer attitudes (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Warbung et al., 2023; Poluan et al., 2022; Pasuhuk & Mandagi, 2023; Manggopa et al., 2023; Marhareita et al., 2022; Carundeng et al., 2024).

In addition, several studies underscore the mediating role of brand gestalt in the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty. Wantah and Mandagi

(2024) demonstrated this effect in the fast-food sector, while Queenditya et al. (2024) confirmed similar outcomes in broader consumer contexts. Rayo et al. (2024) also emphasized that SMM significantly influences brand personality and gestalt, which are pivotal in determining consumer behavioral responses. Collectively, these findings suggest that SMM is not only a tool for communication but also a strategic driver of brand development, loyalty, and purchase intention across sectors.

2.3 Brand Love

Brand love is conceptualized as a consumer's deep emotional attachment and enduring commitment to a brand, manifested in affection, passion, and a desire to maintain the relationship over time (Anwarie & Chan, 2024). Unlike constructs such as satisfaction or trust, brand love reflects a profound affective bond that drives consumers to engage in loyalty behaviors, including positive word-of-mouth, willingness to pay premium prices, and resistance to competitors' offerings (Le et al., 2019).

Recent research highlights brand love as a critical predictor of purchase intention and brand loyalty, particularly in industries with high symbolic value and experiential consumption, such as food and beverage (Ali, 2025). In the fast-food sector, brand love strengthens consumer commitment, enhancing brand equity and providing a sustainable competitive advantage (Wantah & Mandagi, 2024). This emotional attachment often arises from consistent, meaningful interactions between consumers and brands, including personalized experiences, storytelling, and social media engagement.

Empirical studies demonstrate that brand gestalt plays a pivotal role in cultivating brand love. Social media marketing, by facilitating interactive and

engaging brand experiences, fosters emotional attachment that translates into loyalty and advocacy behaviors (Pasuhuk & Mandagi, 2023; Fetais, 2023). In this way, brand love acts as both an affective driver and a strategic resource, linking consumer experiences and brand-related communication to long-term relational outcomes.

Additionally, scholars argue that brand love not only influences individual-level behaviors but also shapes collective brand communities, where shared emotional attachment reinforces social identification and advocacy (Batra et al., 2012; Thomson et al., 2005). This underscores its dual role: as a driver of personal loyalty and as a catalyst for broader brand equity formation through networked consumer interactions.

2.4 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's conscious plan or deliberate inclination to buy a particular product or service in the future (Rinaldy, 2025). It reflects a critical stage in the decision-making process, bridging consumers' attitudes and actual purchasing behavior. As one of the most widely examined constructs in marketing research, purchase intention serves as a vital indicator of brand performance, marketing effectiveness, and business sustainability (Ajzen, 1991; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

This intention is shaped by a combination of cognitive evaluations and emotional responses toward a brand. Factors such as brand image, customer satisfaction, perceived value, and emotional attachment are consistently identified as key antecedents. Recent studies have underscored the importance of brand gestalt as a significant determinant of customer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Rantung et al.,

2023). Similarly, Rantung et al. (2025) emphasize that when brands successfully integrate cultural and emotional elements into their identity, they foster stronger consumer loyalty, repurchase intention, and even customer citizenship behaviors that sustain long-term relationships. These findings highlight that purchase intention is not merely a rational decision but a multifaceted outcome shaped by affective, symbolic, and experiential dimensions.

In digital marketing contexts, purchase intention is also driven by interactivity, online trust, and consumer engagement through social media platforms (Lim et al., 2022). Interactive features enable consumers to co-create value and experience meaningful two-way communication with brands, enhancing their sense of involvement and control. Online trust—established through transparency, reliability, and consistent digital presence—reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, while engagement activities such as likes, comments, and shares amplify emotional connection and social validation. Moreover, positive brand image and emotional attachment can amplify the persuasive power of digital communication, encouraging consumers to proceed from favorable attitudes to concrete buying behavior (Anwarie & Chan, 2024; Le et al., 2019).

Therefore, purchase intention can be operationalized as consumers' readiness or predisposition to engage in a purchase as a result of favorable brand perceptions, emotional connections, and interactive digital experiences. Within the social media ecosystem, this intention reflects the outcome of complex exchanges between cognitive beliefs, affective bonds, and social influence, ultimately guiding consumers toward actual behavioral commitment.

2.5 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to the degree to which consumers consistently prefer, select, and repurchase a particular brand despite the presence of competitors (Oliver, 1999; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). It represents a deeply rooted attitudinal and behavioral commitment that reflects a consumer's enduring attachment to a brand. The construct encompasses two interrelated dimensions: affective loyalty, characterized by emotional attachment and trust, and behavioral loyalty, manifested in repeated purchases, advocacy, and resistance to switching. As a key indicator of long-term marketing success, brand loyalty contributes to customer retention, reduced price sensitivity, and enhanced brand equity (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In the digital age, brand loyalty is increasingly shaped by the interactive and participatory nature of social media platforms, where consumers engage directly with brands through likes, comments, and content sharing (Dwivedi, 2021; Khan, 2023). This digital engagement fosters emotional bonding and enhances consumer trust, leading to stronger loyalty outcomes. Research by Kainde and Mandagi (2023) demonstrated that social media marketing significantly shapes brand attitudes and loyalty in educational institutions, emphasizing the importance of continuous interaction and perceived brand authenticity. Similarly, Queenditya, Lovely, and Mandagi (2024) found that social media marketing strengthens loyalty through the mediating role of brand gestalt, showing that digital experiences help consumers form holistic and enduring brand perceptions.

The concept of brand gestalt, or the integrated perception of sensory, emotional, symbolic, and cognitive

brand elements, has emerged as a vital determinant of loyalty across sectors. Studies have consistently demonstrated that brand gestalt influences consumer satisfaction and loyalty in tourism (Rondonuwu & Mandagi, 2023; Mandagi et al., 2024; Tumober et al., 2024), telecommunications (Walean et al., 2024), and small business contexts (Rantung et al., 2023). In fast-food industries, Wantah and Mandagi (2024) and Ole, Sakka, and Mandagi (2025) reveal that brand gestalt, along with perceived quality, trust, and brand image, substantially contributes to consumer loyalty and brand equity. These findings highlight that loyalty is not only a behavioral tendency but also an emotional and perceptual phenomenon, grounded in consumers' holistic brand experiences.

Moreover, Rather (2022) underscores that brand loyalty in digital contexts is reinforced by a sense of belonging and community identity developed within online brand communities. Consumers who identify with a brand's social environment exhibit stronger affective attachment and are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors such as advocacy, co-creation, and positive word-of-mouth. The integration of emotional connection, interactive communication, and social belonging transforms loyalty from a transactional outcome into a relational and experiential commitment (Anwarie & Chan, 2024; Le et al., 2019).

2.6 Hypothesis Development

SET provides a strong conceptual basis for explaining how social media marketing (SMM) fosters emotional bonds such as brand love. According to SET, consumers engage in relationships that yield perceived reciprocal benefits, SMM enables a continuous exchange of value through interactive content,

personalized engagement, and community participation, which in turn evoke positive affective responses toward the brand (Ao et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022; Kim & Park, 2023). Empirical research further reinforces this link, demonstrating that social media activities enhance consumer affection and intimacy by facilitating two-way communication and authentic brand interactions (Dwivedi, 2021; Khan, 2023). Through social media platforms, consumers experience not only utilitarian benefits such as convenience and information but also hedonic and relational rewards that nurture emotional attachment (Anwarie & Chan, 2024; Le et al., 2019). Studies across sectors, from education (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023) and tourism (Rondonuwu & Mandagi, 2023; Mandagi et al., 2024) to fast-food industries (Wantah & Mandagi, 2024; Ole et al., 2025), consistently reveal that engaging and value-laden social media strategies stimulate emotional resonance and affection toward brands. Consequently, the following hypothesis was developed. .

H1: Social media marketing positively influences brand love.

Grounded in SET (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964), consumers are more likely to engage in favorable behaviors when they perceive reciprocal value from interactions. In digital marketing, social media functions as a value-exchange platform that delivers information, entertainment, and engagement, encouraging consumers to respond with purchase intention (Ao et al., 2023). Empirical evidence shows that effective social media marketing (SMM) enhances brand awareness, trust, and perceived value, which in turn stimulate consumers' willingness to buy (Lim et al., 2022; Azhar et al., 2023). In the fast-food sector, SMM campaigns and interactive content directly increase

purchase likelihood by strengthening engagement and emotional connection (Zam, 2024; Wantah & Mandagi, 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis was introduced:

H2: Social media marketing positively influences purchase intention.

According to SET, lasting relationships emerge when both parties perceive ongoing mutual benefits. In digital contexts, SMM enables continuous value exchange through engagement, information sharing, and interactive communication, fostering consumer trust and commitment (Ao et al., 2023). Empirical research demonstrates that SMM strengthens brand loyalty by cultivating satisfaction, emotional attachment, and a sense of belonging within online brand communities (Dwivedi, 2021; Khan, 2023; Rather, 2022). Studies across various sectors, including education, tourism, and fast food, confirm that active social media engagement enhances consumers' attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Wantah & Mandagi, 2024; Ole et al., 2025). Thus, when consumers perceive social media interactions as rewarding and relationally meaningful, they reciprocate through long-term loyalty and advocacy behaviors. This theoretical and empirical backdrop leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H3: Social media marketing positively influences brand loyalty.

Building upon SET, emotional and relational exchanges between consumers and brands play a central role in sustaining long-term loyalty. When consumers perceive that a brand delivers continuous emotional, symbolic, or experiential value, they reciprocate with affective commitment and repeat behaviors. Within this theoretical framework, brand love emerges as a

critical emotional outcome of meaningful exchanges. It reflects consumers' affection, passion, and commitment toward a brand, formed through satisfying and rewarding interactions. Empirical evidence indicates that brand love fosters enduring loyalty, as emotionally bonded consumers tend to remain resistant to competitors and demonstrate higher advocacy behaviors (Khan, 2023; Anwarie & Chan, 2024; Mandagi et al., 2024). Therefore, consistent with SET and prior findings, it is expected that:

H4: Brand love positively influences brand loyalty.

Moreover, in the exchange process, purchase intention reflects consumers' readiness to continue the relational cycle by translating positive attitudes and perceived value into actual behavior. From an SET perspective, when consumers perceive high benefits from their interactions with a brand, such as quality, trust, and satisfaction, they develop stronger intentions to purchase, which eventually consolidate into brand loyalty. Prior studies confirm that purchase intention serves as a strong behavioral antecedent to loyalty across various industries, including fast-food and tourism sectors (Rantung et al., 2023; Rantung et al., 2025; Rinaldy, 2025). Hence, it is reasonable to propose that:

H5: Purchase intention positively influences brand loyalty.

In digital marketing contexts, SMM facilitates reciprocal exchanges that extend beyond transactional value. Through interactive communication, personalized engagement, and emotional resonance, SMM strengthens consumers' affection toward brands. Within the SET framework, such interactions provide experiential and emotional rewards that stimulate brand love, which in turn fosters loyalty

behaviors. Empirical research has shown that social media engagement often leads to stronger emotional attachment and sustained brand commitment (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Wantah & Mandagi, 2024). Accordingly, this study posits that:

H6: Brand love mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Finally, purchase intention can also serve as a cognitive pathway that translates social media marketing effects into loyalty. According to SET, consumers reciprocate the perceived benefits from brand interactions, such as entertainment, information, and connection—by developing favorable purchase intentions that strengthen their ongoing commitment. Empirical evidence supports that effective SMM enhances consumers' purchase intention, which ultimately fosters brand loyalty and retention (Lim et al., 2022; Ao et al., 2023; Ole et al., 2025). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H7: Purchase intention mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 integrates the theoretical relationships among SMM, Brand Gestalt, Brand Love, Purchase Intention, and Brand Loyalty. Grounded in the SET, this framework posits that social media marketing serves as a stimulus that shapes consumers' holistic brand perception (brand gestalt) and emotional connection (brand love) as organismic responses, which in turn influence behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention and brand loyalty. This model reflects the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping not only transactional but also emotional and relational dimensions of consumer–brand interactions. Accordingly, it proposes that brand gestalt and brand

love act as key mediating mechanisms linking SMM efforts to positive consumer behaviors and sustained brand commitment.

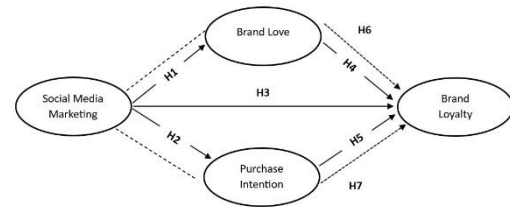


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Desain

This study employs a descriptive quantitative and correlational approach to analyze the interplay of social media marketing, brand love, purchase intention and brand loyalty in fast-food restaurants in Bitung City. This approach was selected because it allows for a systematic and objective depiction of the characteristics of the observed phenomena through quantitative data. Moreover, the study is correlational in nature, as it aims to examine both the direct and indirect relationships among the research variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to customers of fast-food restaurants such as Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), McDonald's, and Texas Chicken, who had prior experience engaging with the restaurants' digital marketing strategies. All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree", to capture respondents' perceptions and attitudes quantitatively (Ali et al., 2025).

3.2 Population and Sampel

The population of this study comprises all customers of fast-food restaurants operating in Bitung City. Since it is not feasible to reach every

customer, this research employs a purposive sampling technique, a non-probability sampling method based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Zam, 2024). The inclusion criteria consist of customers who have made purchases and have prior experience with the restaurant's services. This technique allows the researcher to obtain more relevant and insightful data from respondents who fit the study's context.

The sample size was determined using the N5 approach, which recommends a minimum of ten respondents per observed indicator (Hair et al., 2019). Given that the questionnaire included 30 indicators, the minimum sample required was calculated as 5×30 , resulting in 150 respondents. The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression with the assistance of SmartPLS software to assess both direct and indirect relationships among the study variables.

3.3 Research Instrument

The data collection instrument utilized in this study was a structured questionnaire systematically developed to measure six primary constructs: social media marketing, brand love, purchase intention and customer loyalty. Each construct was operationalized through multiple indicators adapted from established theoretical and empirical sources to ensure content validity.

Specifically, Social Media Marketing was measured using seven items adapted from prior studies (Ali et al., 2025; Ang et al., 2022; Waworuntu et al., 2022). Purchase Intention was assessed using eight items adopted from previous research (Fetais, 2023; Muliadi & Japariato, 2021; Mayasari, 2023). Brand Love was measured with five items derived from established scales (Fetais, 2023; Saleem et al., 2022; Batra

et al., 2012; Mayasari, 2023), while Brand Loyalty was evaluated using six items adapted from earlier studies (Ali et al., 2025; Wantah & Mandagi, 2024; Queenditya et al., 2024).

To ensure the robustness and reliability of the measurement model, the instrument was subjected to validity and reliability testing using SmartPLS software. Convergent validity and discriminant validity were examined to verify the adequacy and distinctiveness of the indicators, whereas Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha values were employed to assess internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted from April to May 2025 through the distribution of questionnaires both in person and online to respondents who met the established criteria. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the research objectives and instructions for completion to ensure a clear understanding of each item. Upon data collection, the researcher performed a verification and data cleaning process to eliminate incomplete or inconsistent responses, ensuring that only valid and analyzable data were included in the final dataset (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) approach, employing SmartPLS software. This technique was chosen for its capability to handle complex research models involving multiple interrelated latent variables and its flexibility in managing non-normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2019).

The analytical procedure began with descriptive analysis to provide an overview of the respondents' characteristics and the distribution of the research variables. Subsequently, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated by assessing convergent validity through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), and construct reliability through Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha.

Once the measurement model was confirmed to be valid and reliable, the structural model (inner model) was examined to analyze the relationships among the latent variables. This evaluation included the analysis of path coefficients, R^2 values to determine the model's explanatory power, effect size (f^2) to assess the relative influence among variables, and predictive relevance (Q^2) to evaluate the model's predictive capability. Furthermore, the Goodness of Fit (GoF) index was used as an overall indicator to assess the model's comprehensive adequacy.

By employing this analytical approach, the study aims to provide a

deeper understanding of how digital marketing influence brand love, purchase intention and brand loyalty in the context of fast-food restaurants, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of customer satisfaction. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for restaurant managers in developing more effective marketing and service strategies to enhance customer retention and loyalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondents Demographic Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The data indicate that the majority of respondents identified as female (61.6%). In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the 15–25 years age group, representing 44.5% of the total sample. Regarding domicile, 73.9% of respondents resided in Bitung, indicating that most participants were local residents. As for occupation, 24.7% of respondents were employed as honorary staff or temporary government employees (THL), while the remaining respondents represented a variety of general occupations commonly found within the community

Tabel 1. Respondents Demographic Profile

Variable	Level	n	%
Gender	Male	78	38.4
	Female	125	61.6
Age	15 - 25	90	44.5
	26 - 35	85	41.9
	36 - 45	18	9
	<46	10	5
City of Domicile	Bitung	150	73.9
	Manado	12	5.9
	Tomohon	3	1.5
	Minahasa	14	6.9
	Minahasa utara	13	6.4
	Minahasa Tenggara	4	2
	Minahasa Selatan	7	3.4
Occupation	Students	41	20.2
	Private Employee	31	15.3

Government Employee	19	9.4
Entrepreneur	38	18.7
Freelancer	24	11.9
Daily Labor	50	24.7

4.2 Measurement Model

The evaluation of the measurement model, as illustrated in Figure 1, aims to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs. Convergent validity was evaluated through the analysis of factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values.

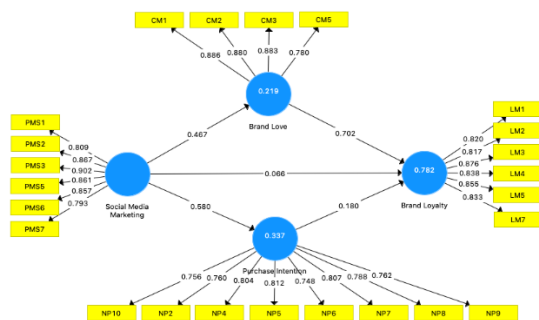


Figure 1. Measurement Model

4.2.1 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was evaluated by examining the factor loadings, which reflect the degree of association between each indicator and its corresponding construct. The recommended threshold value for factor loadings is greater than 0.70, indicating a strong relationship between the indicator and the latent variable. Similarly, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should exceed 0.50, signifying that at least 50% of the variance in each indicator is explained by the construct it represents (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the validity test results presented in the corresponding figure and table, all factor loadings and AVE values surpassed the recommended thresholds, confirming that all constructs in this study have satisfied the required criteria for convergent validity.

Tabel 2. Factor Loading

Variable		CM	LM	NP	PMS	AVE
Brand Love	CM1	0.886				0.737
	CM2	0.88				
	CM3	0.883				
	CM5	0.78				
Brand Loyalty	LM1		0.82			0.706
	LM2		0.817			
	LM3		0.876			
	LM4		0.838			
	LM5		0.855			
	LM7		0.833			
Purchase intention						0.608
	NP10			0.756		
	NP2			0.76		
	NP4			0.804		
	NP5			0.812		
	NP6			0.748		
	NP7			0.807		
	NP8			0.788		
	NP9			0.762		

Social Media		0.721
Marketing	PMS1	0.809
	PMS2	0.867
	PMS3	0.902
	PMS5	0.861
	PMS6	0.857
	PMS7	0.793

4.2.2 Discriminant validity

This study employed several methods to ensure discriminant validity. First, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was applied by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with the correlations among the constructs. Discriminant validity is considered satisfactory when

the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its corresponding inter-construct correlations. The results of this comparison are presented in Table 3, which displays both the correlation coefficients among the constructs and the square root of the AVE values along the diagonal.

Tabel 3. Fornell Larcker Criterion

Variable	1	2	3	4
Brand Love (1)	0.858			
Brand Loyalty (2)	0.872	0.84		
Purchase Intention (3)	0.772	0.761	0.78	
SMM (4)	0.467	0.499	0.58	0.849

Based on the data presented in Table 3, the square roots of the AVE values were found to be higher than the correlations among the constructs. This indicates that the variables and their respective indicators have satisfactorily met the discriminant validity criteria as proposed by the Fornell–Larcker method, thereby confirming that each construct is empirically distinct from the others.

In the second stage of validity testing, a cross-loading analysis was conducted to evaluate the relationship between each indicator and its corresponding construct. This analysis assesses the extent to which an indicator

is strongly associated with the construct it is intended to measure. High discriminant validity is achieved when each indicator demonstrates a stronger loading on its own construct compared to its loadings on other constructs. In addition, a cross-loading analysis was performed to further confirm discriminant validity by examining whether the loading factor of each indicator was higher for its associated construct than for any other constructs. Indicators that met this criterion were considered valid representations of their respective latent variables. The detailed results of the cross-loading analysis are presented in Table 4.

Tabel 4. Cross Loading

	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Purchase Intention	SMM
CM1	0.886	0.809	0.76	0.478
CM2	0.88	0.736	0.676	0.367

CM3	0.883	0.753	0.701	0.433
CM5	0.78	0.689	0.491	0.309
LM1	0.677	0.82	0.57	0.379
LM2	0.635	0.817	0.676	0.449
LM3	0.726	0.876	0.689	0.437
LM4	0.73	0.838	0.558	0.356
LM5	0.805	0.855	0.651	0.406
LM7	0.801	0.833	0.683	0.48
NP10	0.714	0.672	0.756	0.367
NP2	0.602	0.64	0.76	0.459
NP4	0.621	0.648	0.804	0.433
NP5	0.651	0.68	0.812	0.395
NP6	0.568	0.52	0.748	0.354
NP7	0.57	0.503	0.807	0.564
NP8	0.549	0.531	0.788	0.58
NP9	0.534	0.532	0.762	0.455
PMS1	0.395	0.353	0.487	0.809
PMS2	0.459	0.425	0.56	0.867
PMS3	0.402	0.411	0.542	0.902
PMS5	0.379	0.451	0.511	0.861
PMS6	0.343	0.415	0.431	0.857
PMS7	0.393	0.483	0.408	0.793

Based on the results of the cross-loading analysis presented in Table 4, it can be concluded that the measurement model demonstrates good discriminant validity. This is evidenced by the fact that the correlations between each indicator and its corresponding construct were higher than the correlations between that indicator and other constructs, thereby confirming that each indicator accurately represents its intended latent variable.

The reliability of the constructs in this study was assessed by analyzing the values of Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (ρ_a), Composite Reliability (ρ_c), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). A construct is considered reliable if it meets the following thresholds: Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70, Composite Reliability (ρ_a) > 0.70, Composite Reliability (ρ_c) > 0.70, and AVE > 0.50. The results of the reliability analysis for these four indicators are presented in Table 5 below.

4.2.3 Reliability

Tabel 5. Reliability Test Result

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Love	0.88	0.887	0.918	0.737
Brand Loyalty	0.917	0.919	0.935	0.706
Purchase Intention	0.908	0.909	0.925	0.608
SMM	0.922	0.925	0.939	0.721

Based on the results presented in Table 5, all indicators demonstrated values exceeding the recommended minimum thresholds. The reliability testing results showed that all constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, Composite Reliability (ρ_a) above 0.70, Composite Reliability (ρ_c) above 0.70, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables in this study exhibit strong internal consistency and reliability, confirming the robustness of the measurement model.

4.3 Structural Model (inner Model)

After confirming that all indicators in the measurement model were valid and reliable, the next step was to evaluate the structural model. The primary objective of this stage was to test the hypotheses formulated in the study. The assessment of the structural model, or hypothesis testing, was carried out by examining the significance levels of the path coefficients obtained through the PLS Bootstrapping procedure using SmartPLS software. The results of the structural model evaluation are presented in Figure 3 and Table 6.

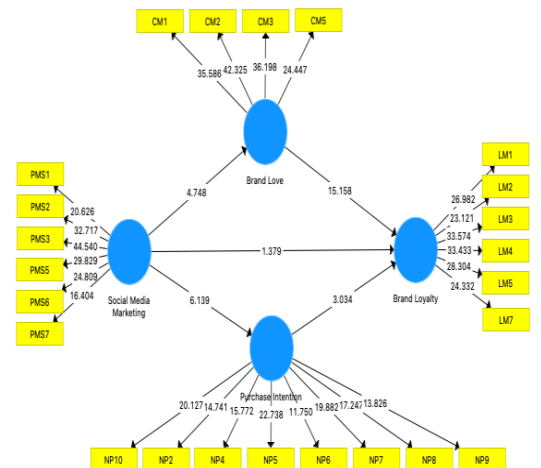
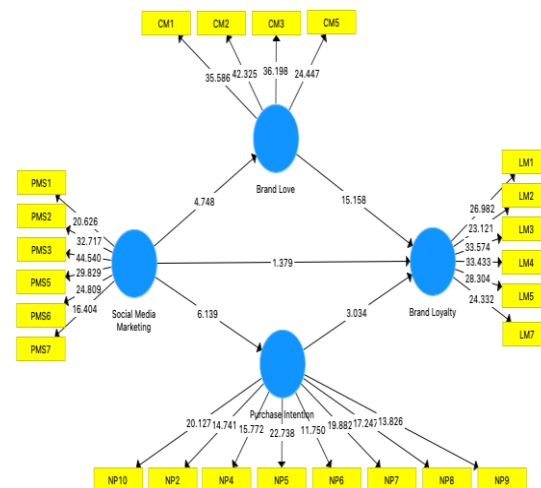


Figure 3. Structural Model PLS Bootstrapping



Tabel 6. Hypothesis Testing Result

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Brand Love -> Brand Loyalty	0.702	0.698	0.046	15.158	0.000
Purchase Intention -> Brand Loyalty	0.18	0.182	0.059	3.034	0.003
Social Media Marketing -> Brand Love	0.467	0.468	0.098	4.748	0.000
Social Media Marketing -> Brand Loyalty	0.066	0.065	0.048	1.379	0.169
Social Media Marketing -> Purchase Intention	0.58	0.582	0.095	6.139	0.000

The results of the structural model analysis presented in Figure 3 and Table 6 provide partial support for the hypotheses proposed in this study. The findings reveal that Brand Love exerts a strong and significant influence on Brand Loyalty, with a coefficient value of 15.158 and a p-value of 0.000. This

indicates that when consumers experience a deep emotional attachment or love toward a brand, their loyalty to that brand increases significantly.

Furthermore, Purchase Intention was also found to have a positive and significant effect on Brand Loyalty, with a coefficient value of 3.034 and a p-value

of 0.003, although the magnitude of its influence was relatively smaller compared to Brand Love. This suggests that consumers' purchase intention remains an important factor that contributes to the formation of brand loyalty.

The analysis also confirmed that Social Media Marketing plays a significant role in enhancing both Brand Love and Purchase Intention, with coefficient values of 4.748 (p-value = 0.000) and 6.139 (p-value = 0.000), respectively. This finding indicates that social media marketing strategies are effective in fostering consumers' emotional attachment to a brand while simultaneously influencing their willingness to purchase. However, another finding revealed that Social Media Marketing does not have a direct

impact on Brand Loyalty, as shown by a coefficient of 1.379 and a p-value of 0.169, which exceeds the 0.05 significance threshold. In other words, the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty operates indirectly, primarily through the mediating roles of Brand Love and Purchase Intention.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that Social Media Marketing also has a significant influence on Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty, with a coefficient value of 2.817 and a p-value of 0.005. These results demonstrate that social media marketing not only strengthens consumers' emotional connections to brands but also enhances their willingness to make purchases, which in turn reinforces their loyalty toward the brand.

Tabel 7. Indirect effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Social Media Marketing -> Brand Love -> Brand loyalty	0.328	0.326	0.068	4.831	0
Social Media Marketing -> Purchase Intention -> Brand loyalty	0.105	0.105	0.037	2.817	0.005

Table 8 presents the results of the Goodness of Fit (GoF) analysis used to assess the model's overall fit with the research data. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value for the estimated model was 0.164, which is higher than that of the saturated model (0.08), indicating a less-than-ideal model fit. Similarly, the d_ULS (8.022) and d_G (1.513) values were greater than those of the saturated model, suggesting discrepancies between the estimated and actual data. The Chi-Square value for the estimated model (1426.32) was also higher than that of the saturated model (1308.533), further indicating that the model does not achieve an optimal fit. Meanwhile, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.693 was below the ideal threshold of ≥ 0.90 , reinforcing that the

overall fit of the model remains suboptimal.

Tabel 8. Goodness of Fit Model

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.08	0.164
d ULS	1.942	8.022
d G	1.238	1.513
Chisquare	1308.533	1426.32
NFI	0.718	0.693

4.4 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that brand love exerts a strong and positive influence on brand loyalty, confirming that consumers' emotional attachment to a brand significantly strengthens their long-term commitment. This aligns with Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that relationships are

sustained through reciprocal exchanges of emotional and symbolic value (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). When consumers perceive emotional satisfaction and meaningful engagement from a brand, they reciprocate through loyalty behaviors. This result is consistent with Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Bairrada (2019), who found that loyalty is driven not only by rational benefits but also by affective bonds developed through positive brand experiences. Similarly, Mandagi et al. (2024) and Anwarie and Chan (2024) emphasize that affective exchanges foster enduring brand commitment, supporting the current study's conclusion that emotional connection serves as a key antecedent of brand loyalty.

Moreover, the results demonstrate that purchase intention contributes positively to brand loyalty, indicating that consumers' intention to purchase acts as a behavioral bridge between brand engagement and sustained loyalty. This supports the work of Mustafa (2022) and Kim (2023), who noted that purchase intention often precedes loyal behaviors as consumers translate favorable perceptions and attitudes into consistent actions. Within the SET framework, this process can be interpreted as consumers' effort to reciprocate the perceived benefits of their relationship with a brand through continued purchase and advocacy.

The study further confirms that social media marketing (SMM) plays a significant role in enhancing both brand love and purchase intention. This finding aligns with Ao et al. (2023) and Azhar et al. (2023), who highlighted that SMM creates reciprocal value through interactive, personalized, and relational exchanges. Such digital interactions not only provide informational and hedonic benefits but also generate emotional

rewards that foster deeper connections with the brand. The result also resonates with empirical evidence from Hanaysha (2021), Arghashi (2021), and Prentice (2022), who demonstrated that relevant and engaging social media content encourages emotional attachment and stimulates consumers' willingness to purchase. Similarly, Wantah and Mandagi (2024) and Queenditya et al. (2024) found that effective SMM strengthens both brand love and loyalty through enhanced brand gestalt and experiential engagement, particularly in fast-food and service industries.

However, the study found that social media marketing does not directly influence brand loyalty, suggesting that loyalty is not a simple consequence of exposure to marketing activities but rather emerges through emotional and cognitive mechanisms. This supports the argument of Zollo (2020) and Chinomona and Sandada (2022) that brand loyalty develops through a layered process involving affective attachment, satisfaction, and trust. Consistent with SET, this indicates that consumers do not reciprocate loyalty merely in response to promotional stimuli but through meaningful relational exchanges that deliver continuous perceived value (Li et al., 2022; Kim & Park, 2023).

The mediating role of brand love provides a crucial insight into this process. The results align with Mandasari (2024), who demonstrated that brand love mediates the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty among smartphone consumers, and with Fetais (2023), who found that emotional attachment or "lovemark" acts as the psychological bridge linking marketing engagement to loyalty. In this study, brand love operates as an affective pathway that translates social media engagement into sustained brand commitment. This reinforces the view of

Pasuhuk and Mandagi (2023) and Batra et al. (2012) that brand love not only influences individual behavior but also strengthens collective brand communities by fostering emotional resonance and shared identity.

In addition, purchase intention is also shown to mediate the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. This finding is consistent with Lim et al. (2022) and Rinaldy (2025), who observed that interactive and trust-building digital experiences can drive purchase intention, which subsequently translates into loyalty behaviors. However, the present findings suggest that brand love serves as a more dominant mediator, indicating that loyalty rooted in emotional connection tends to be stronger and more enduring than loyalty derived purely from purchase motivation.

Overall, this study supports the central premise of Social Exchange Theory, emphasizing that consumer–brand relationships in digital contexts are governed by reciprocal value exchanges encompassing informational, experiential, and emotional dimensions. Social media marketing facilitates these exchanges by offering entertainment, interaction, and authenticity—benefits that consumers reciprocate through emotional attachment and loyal behavior (Ao et al., 2023; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Ole et al., 2025). The findings contribute to the expanding literature that views SMM not merely as a promotional tool, but as a relational mechanism that cultivates affective commitment and behavioral loyalty through emotional and cognitive engagement.

In emerging markets, particularly in fast-food industries where consumption is driven by both symbolic and experiential motives (Ali, 2025; Wantah & Mandagi, 2024), these

dynamics are even more pronounced. Consumers are more responsive to emotional cues, interactive content, and relational authenticity than to purely informational or transactional appeals. Consequently, companies should optimize their social media strategies not only to enhance visibility but also to foster meaningful consumer relationships that build brand love and purchase intention as the dual pathways toward sustainable brand loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights that the primary drivers of brand loyalty are consumers' emotional attachment and purchase intention rather than direct social media marketing activities. Brand love emerges as the most influential factor, showing that emotional bonds between consumers and brands play a crucial role in fostering long-term loyalty. Purchase intention also contributes meaningfully, acting as a bridge between consumer engagement and sustained loyalty. Meanwhile, the influence of social media marketing on loyalty is largely indirect, operating through the mediating roles of brand love and purchase intention.

The findings emphasize that loyalty does not stem merely from rational or transactional interactions but from emotional and relational connections developed through meaningful brand experiences. The process of loyalty formation in the digital era is therefore best understood as a sequence in which social media interactions evoke emotional engagement, shape positive intentions, and ultimately lead to loyal behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, these results enhance the understanding of how emotional mechanisms underpin consumer–brand relationships in digital environments. Practically, they provide

important insights for marketers to design social media strategies that go beyond information delivery. Brands should focus on creating authentic, interactive, and emotionally resonant content that deepens consumer connection and encourages repeat engagement.

Although this research offers valuable insights, it is limited by its cross-sectional design and industry focus. Future studies are encouraged to explore other contexts, adopt longitudinal approaches, and include additional variables such as trust or customer engagement to gain a more comprehensive view of loyalty development in digital marketing.

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