

Challenges of Local Newspaper Sustainability in the Digital Era: Effect of Social Media Marketing on Customer Loyalty through Brand Image and Brand Awareness Development

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effect of social media marketing on customer loyalty with brand image and brand awareness as mediating variables. A survey approach with quantitative data was conducted among subscribers of Harian Berita in Ambon, Indonesia. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). The results show that social media marketing has a positive impact on customer loyalty. When companies build and promote brand image and brand awareness through social media, it significantly enhances customer loyalty in the era of technological advancement. The study confirms that social media marketing positively influences customer loyalty both directly and indirectly through the development of brand image and brand awareness. These findings have important implications for the development of digital marketing strategies and brand excellence. Strengthening brand presence through social media can improve customer loyalty and contribute to increased company revenue in a competitive business environment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an important part of modern society. The use of social media is now not only used for communication, but also as a tool for sharing information, collaborating, building networks, and business (Cardon & Marshall, 2015). The existence of social media has given rise to a new paradigm regarding online marketing and digital platforms (Khoa & Huynh, 2023). Most Indonesians have made social media a part of their lifestyle and a center of attention in interacting online (Mehrabi et al., 2014).

The development of social media users in Indonesia has increased from year to year. Reporting data in 2017, social media users in Indonesia were only 47.03% of the total population. This figure is expected to increase 2-fold in 2026 with a total of 81.82% of users (Yonatan, 2023). Estimates of these figures show that there has been growth in the number of social media users in Indonesia since 2017 until the estimated year 2026. The increase in the use of social media must be responded to quickly by companies in product marketing which has an impact on increasing company revenue and employee welfare (Didiharyono et al, 2024).

The advancement of social media is able to connect everyone to use it in various activities, especially in business activities and marketing products with their brands. The existence of a brand is a substantial thing in

a business that is built to create consumer loyalty (Masitenyane & Dhurup, 2023; Obiegbu et al., 2020). A consumer tends to be more interested in deciding to buy a product that already has a brand with the implementation of brand image and brand awareness. Brand image is built based on the experience and information received by consumers while using the products produced by the company (Wijaya & Anjasari, 2022).

Consumers who already have a high level of brand image on a product tend to be more loyal to the brand and do not switch to liking other brands. Meanwhile, brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize or remember a brand based on a particular product category (Bergkvist & Taylor, 2022). The more consumers recognize the existence of a brand, the more they are aware of the existence of a brand that will make it easier for potential consumers to make purchasing decisions and influence consumer loyalty.

The subjects of this study were customers of Harian Berita in Ambon City who had implemented brand awareness and brand image of the company's products by using social media marketing in promoting products. Among the strategies carried out by Harian Berita in Ambon City is creating a good impression on customers by strengthening brand image and brand awareness then highlighting the advantages and benefits that can be provided. So that it is expected to influence perception and create emotional relationships and influence customer loyalty.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Ethical Considerations

An ethics permit has been granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Institut Bisnis dan Keuangan (IBK) Nitro. Ethical Certificate Reference Number 275/ECE-1/IBKN/8/2024.

2.2 Design

The research design used is a quantitative approach with a survey method conducted on consumers of Harian Berita in Ambon City, Indonesia. This location was chosen as the research location because it has several unique characteristics by considering local wisdom that influences the characteristics of respondents. The population of this study was all customers of Harian Berita in Ambon City who have social media accounts totaling 14,039 customers and the number of samples taken using the Slovin formula with an alpha of 10% rounded up to 100 respondents. The sampling technique used in this study used the purposive sampling method.

2.3 Data collection

Data collection was conducted from January to March 2024. To obtain the data needed to answer the research objectives, a questionnaire was distributed through an online survey using Google Forms. The research construction was accessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree (STS), (2) disagree (TS), (3) sufficient (C), (4) agree (S), and (5) strongly agree (SS) (Hendra et al., 2024). The response variable used in this study is social media marketing (X). The predictor variable used in the study is customer loyalty (Y). And the intervening variables are brand image (Z1) and awareness variable (Z2).

2.4 Data analysis

The analysis used in data processing includes descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Descriptive analysis is interpreted as data analysis to present information in the form of tables and graphs in describing the distribution of respondents' answers through the size of the mean, percentage, variance, and standard deviation. To obtain the results of the interpretation of respondents' responses to the research variables, each variable is subjected to a scoring analysis with the equation, namely class interval = (highest score - lowest score)/ number of classes = $(5-1)/5 = 0.8$.

Thus, a categorization is arranged which includes (a) very low in the interval $> 1.00 - 1.80$; (b) low in the interval $> 1.80 - 2.60$; (c) sufficient in the interval $> 2.60 - 3.40$; (d) high in the interval $> 3.40 - 4.20$; and (e) very high in the interval $> 4.20-5.00$. Meanwhile, inferential statistical analysis was conducted using structural equation model (SEM) analysis with Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) with the help of Smart PLS software. This analysis aims to determine the effect of various response variables on predictor variables both partially and simultaneously.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Respondent Descriptive

Respondent characteristics described in this section include age, gender, and occupation. According to Table 1, it explains that the presentation of customers in terms of age is almost even with a percentage greater than 10-29% with the majority of company customers aged between 30 years to 40 years at 29%. Meanwhile, for customers based on gender, the majority are male with a percentage of 89% and customers based on occupation are mostly ASN/Employees with a percentage of 46%.

Table 1. Respondent Description

Respondent Description	Presentase %	Total
Age (years)		
10 – 20	11	100
>20 – 30	15	
>30 – 40	29	
>40 – 50	24	
> 50	21	
Gender		
Male	89	100
Female	11	
Type of work		
ASN/Employees	46	100
Entrepreneur	32	
Students	13	
Other	9	

3.2 Variable Description

Based on the data collected from the questionnaire regarding the variables used in this study, it shows that the frequency distribution of each variable is as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Variable Description

Variable	Indicator Items	Alternative Answers					Average	Total Average
		STS	TS	C	S	SS		
Social Media Marketing	X1	-	-	-	28	72	4.72	4.59
	X2	-	-	-	49	51	4.51	
	X3	-	-	-	53	47	4.47	
	X4	-	-	-	41	59	4.59	
	X5	-	-	-	35	65	4.65	
Brand Image	Z1.1	-	-	-	33	67	4.67	4.62
	Z1.2	-	-	-	33	67	4.67	
	Z1.3	-	-	-	45	55	4.55	
	Z1.4	-	-	-	41	59	4.59	
	Z1.5	-	-	-	38	62	4.62	
Brand Awareness	Z2.1	-	-	-	24	76	4.76	4.70
	Z2.2	-	-	-	31	69	4.69	
	Z2.3	-	-	-	31	69	4.69	
	Z2.4	-	-	-	34	66	4.66	
	Z2.5	-	-	-	29	71	4.71	
Customer Loyalty	Y1	-	-	-	40	60	4.60	4.63
	Y2	-	-	-	38	62	4.62	
	Y3	-	-	-	36	64	4.64	
	Y4	-	-	-	34	66	4.66	
	Y5	-	-	-	35	65	4.65	

Table 2 explains that the average respondent chose the answer alternatives agree and strongly agree. Meanwhile, the answer alternatives strongly disagree, disagree, and quite no respondents chose. This result is very interesting to be a finding that shows that the variable aspects submitted to respondents show very good answers and show that social media marketing, brand image, brand awareness, and customer loyalty are very much in accordance with consumer desires. This is very visible in the total average value of each variable with a value > 4.20, thus the value is in the very high category (between 4.20 - 5.00).

3.3 Factor and reliability analysis

The measurement model in this study consists of a reflective measurement model which is carried out through an evaluation of the reflective measurement model consisting of a loading factor ≥ 0.70 , composite reliability ≥ 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 as well as an evaluation of discriminant

validity, namely the Fornell and Lacker criteria and Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) below ≤ 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. Validity and reliability

Variable	Indicator Items	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media Marketing	X1	0.840	0.934	0.950	0.793
	X2	0.926			
	X3	0.887			
	X4	0.919			
	X5	0.876			
Brand Image	Z1.1	0.846	0.896	0.923	0.707
	Z1.2	0.892			
	Z1.3	0.767			
	Z1.4	0.878			
	Z1.5	0.815			
Brand Awareness	Z2.1	0.820	0.917	0.938	0.752
	Z2.2	0.824			
	Z2.3	0.861			
	Z2.4	0.892			
	Z2.5	0.934			
Customer Loyalty	Y1	0.933	0.934	0.951	0.795
	Y2	0.930			
	Y3	0.927			
	Y4	0.897			
	Y5	0.758			

In table 3, the variables of social media, brand image, brand awareness and loyalty are measured by 5 (five) valid measurement items above 0.70, which indicates that the measurement items are strongly correlated. The level of reliability is acceptable with a composite reliability value above 0.70 and Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 and convergent validity indicated by $AVE > 0.50$ (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Evaluation by Fornell and Lacker Criteria and HTMT Results.

Criteria and results	Brand Awareness	Brand Image	Customer Loyalty	Social Media Marketing
Fornell and Lacker criteria				
Brand Awareness	0.867	-	-	-
Brand Image	0.816	0.841	-	-
Customer Loyalty	0.825	0.920	0.892	-
Social Media Marketing	0.720	0.797	0.845	0.890
HTMT Results				
Brand Awareness	-	-	-	-
Brand Image	-	-	-	-
Customer Loyalty	3.114	4.104	-	-
Social Media Marketing	1.000	1.000	2.854	-

According to table 4, evaluation of discriminant validity needs to be done by looking at the Fornell and Lacker criteria (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The Fornell and Lacker criteria are that the AVE root of the variable is greater than the correlation between the variables. In addition, Table 4 also shows the HTMT value in testing the structural model hypothesis used to see whether there is multicollinearity between variables, namely with a statistical measure of the inner-VIF value. The estimation results show an inner VIF value < 5.00 , so the level of multicollinearity between the variables is low (Hair et al., 2019).

These results strengthen the results of parameter estimation in SEM PLS which are robust or free from bias. And then, an evaluation of the structural measurement model is carried out by evaluating the testing of the research hypothesis. The structural model follows a procedure that produces a research hypothesis that shows that the social media marketing hypothesis, brand image, brand awareness and customer loyalty produce an analysis of the influence between the variables depicted in the path coefficient as in Figure 1.

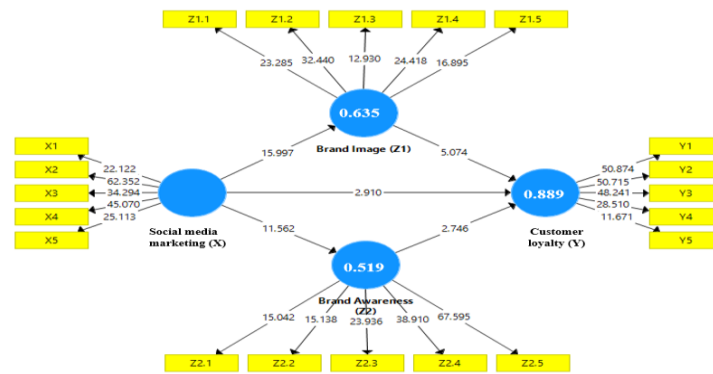


Figure 1. PLS-Structural Equation Modelling Results.

3.4 Structural model

The results of the collinearity analysis of the R-square (R²) values of 0.635, 0.519 and 0.889 in Figure 1, show that the interpretation value of R square qualitatively shows a high influence above 50% (Hair et al., 2019). The results of the hypothesis testing are as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results.

No	Hypothesis Statement	Path Coefficients	t-statistics	p-value	Result
H1	Social media marketing influences customer loyalty $X \rightarrow Y$	0.276	2.910	0.004	Hypothesis accepted
H2	Social media marketing influences brand image $X \rightarrow Z1$	0.797	15.997	0.000	Hypothesis accepted
H3	Brand image influences customer loyalty $Z1 \rightarrow Y$	0.566	5.074	0.000	Hypothesis accepted
H4	Social media marketing influences brand awareness $X \rightarrow Z2$	0.720	11.562	0.000	Hypothesis accepted
H5	Brand awareness influences customer loyalty $Z2 \rightarrow Y$	0.165	2.746	0.007	Hypothesis accepted
H6	Social media marketing influences customer loyalty through brand image $X \rightarrow Z1 \rightarrow Y$	0.451	5.205	0.000	Hypothesis accepted
H7	Social media marketing influences customer loyalty through brand awareness $X \rightarrow Z2 \rightarrow Y$	0.119	2.604	0.011	Hypothesis accepted

According to table 5, hypothesis testing is carried out based on the results of structural model testing. To see whether a hypothesis can be accepted or rejected, namely by considering the path coefficient value, t-statistics, and p-values. These values can be seen from the bootstrapping results. The rule of thumb used in this study is t-statistics > 1.96 with a significance level of p-value 0.05 (5%). Testing the first hypothesis about the use of social media marketing has an effect on customer loyalty. The test results obtained a t-statistic of 2,910 with a significance value of p-value 0.004.

This shows that the t-statistic is greater than the bootstrapping process (2,910 > 1,960) and the significance value of the p-value is smaller than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive sign of 0.276. Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted. This proves that the use of social media marketing has a positive effect on customer loyalty. Testing the second hypothesis about social media marketing has an effect on brand image. The test results obtained a t-statistic of 15,997 with a significance value of p-value 0.000. This shows

that the t-statistic is greater than the bootstrapping process ($15,997 > 1,960$) and the significance value of the p-value is smaller than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive sign of 0.797.

Thus, the second hypothesis is accepted. This proves that social media has a positive influence on brand image. Testing the third hypothesis about brand image positively influences customer loyalty. The test results obtained a t-statistic value of 5.074 with a significance value of p-value 0.000. This shows that the t-count value is greater than the bootstrapping process ($5.074 > 1.960$) and the significance value of the p-value is smaller than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive sign of 0.566. Thus, the third hypothesis is accepted.

This proves that brand image has a positive effect on customer loyalty. Testing the fourth hypothesis about social media marketing positively influences brand awareness. The test results obtained a t-statistic value of 11.562 with a significance value of p-value 0.000. This shows that the t-count value is greater than the bootstrapping process ($11.562 > 1.960$) and the significance value of the p-value is smaller than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive sign of 0.720. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is accepted. This proves that social media marketing has a positive influence on brand awareness.

Testing the fifth hypothesis about brand awareness has a positive effect on customer loyalty. The test results obtained a t-statistic value of 2,746 with a significance value of p-value 0.007. This shows that the t-count value is greater than the bootstrapping process ($2,746 > 1,960$) and its significance value is smaller than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive sign of 0.165. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is accepted. This proves that brand awareness has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Testing the sixth hypothesis about social media marketing has an effect on customer loyalty through brand image. The test results obtained a t-statistic value of 5,205 with a significance value of p-value 0.000. This shows that the t-count value is greater than the bootstrapping process ($5,205 > 1,960$) and its significance value of p-value is smaller than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive sign of 0.451. Thus, the sixth hypothesis is accepted. This proves that social media marketing has an impact on customer loyalty through brand image.

Testing the seventh hypothesis on social media marketing influences customer loyalty through brand awareness. The test results obtained a t-statistic value of 2,604 with a significance value of p-value of 0.011. This shows that the t-count value is greater than the bootstrapping process ($2,604 > 1,960$) and its significance value is less than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive sign of 0.119. Thus, the seventh hypothesis is accepted. This proves that social media influences customer loyalty through brand awareness.

3.5 The effect of social media marketing on customer loyalty.

The findings in this study indicate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty at Harian Berita in Ambon City. Social media marketing can help businesses get closer to customers, thereby increasing profits, marketing, and communication strategies (Evans et al., 2021). With the social media marketing owned by Harian Berita in Ambon City, customers can interact directly online, so that two-way communication occurs between customers and the company. This is in line with the findings stating that there is a positive and significant effect of social media marketing on loyalty (Mehrabi et al., 2014; Khoa & Huynh, 2023).

3.6 The effect of social media marketing on brand image.

The findings in this study indicate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand image. Social media marketing can also provide information to consumers about the products being promoted (Ghoshal, 2019). If the information is interesting and in accordance with consumer needs, consumers will be more interested in making purchases. Social media marketing can be a forum for conveying information to customers about the advantages, characteristics, differences and uniqueness of Harian Berita in Ambon City compared to other newspapers in Ambon City. This is in line with the findings stating that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand image (Bilgin, 2019; Heskiano et al., 2020).

3.7 The effect of brand image on customer loyalty

The findings in this study indicate that brand image has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. Consumer loyalty can be formed when customers feel that the products or services they receive are in accordance with consumer expectations. Consumer loyalty to a brand will be more likely to buy the product repeatedly and recommend it to others (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017). This can help increase sales and strengthen brand image. This is in line with the findings stating that there is a positive and significant effect of brand image on customer loyalty (Durmaz et al., 2018; Azizan & Yusr, 2019).

3.8 The effect of social media marketing on brand awareness

The findings in this study indicate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness. Social media marketing has an effect on brand awareness because social media marketing can create various forms of communication and information for all who use it. The various information presented in social media makes it easier for customers to find out all the information about what customers need. Social media marketing can help increase brand awareness by attracting the attention of people who may have never heard of the business. This is in line with the findings stating that there is a positive and significant influence of social media marketing on brand awareness (Bilgin, 2018; Cheung et al., 2019).

3.9 The effect of brand awareness on customer loyalty

The findings in this study indicate that brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. Brand awareness is something that can attract customers because of their high awareness of product quality. The higher the level of brand awareness owned by customers, the higher the level of customer loyalty to the company. Brand awareness by customers is related to brand equity and affects customer loyalty. This is in line with the findings stating that there is a positive and significant influence of brand awareness on consumer loyalty (Haque et al., 2018; Armah & Attafuah, 2020).

3.10 The effect of social media marketing on customer loyalty through brand image

The findings in this study indicate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty through brand image. In addition to being used as a medium for interaction, social media can also be used as a marketing medium. Informing or promoting products through social media is one way for the *Harian Berita* in Ambon City to have a positive image in the eyes of consumers. A good image will benefit the company because consumers will always subscribe directly and customers will also recommend it to others.

Customer loyalty will be the key to success not only in the short term but also a sustainable competitive advantage (Bilgin, 2018; Heskiano et al., 2020). Social media marketing in the *Harian Berita* in Ambon City will make customers more loyal because with social media that has useful content, customers feel they no longer need to look for other newspapers in Ambon City because their promotional content is very much liked by customers.

3.11 The effect of social media marketing on customer loyalty through brand awareness

The findings in this study indicate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty through brand awareness. Social media marketing owned by *Harian Berita* in Ambon City has content that can provide interesting and entertaining information that can encourage consumers or customers to always see, follow or even always read the news. Social media marketing allows companies to reach a wide audience at a lower cost than conventional marketing methods (Mehrabi et al., 2014; Khoa & Huynh, 2023).

Interesting and informative content shared on social media can increase brand visibility and encourage interaction with customers. This creates a strong brand community where customers connect and support each other, and enhances brand reputation through positive reviews and proactive responses to negative comments. With an effective social media marketing strategy, companies can increase brand awareness in driving customer engagement, building a strong community, and improving brand reputation.

This can ultimately lead to increased customer loyalty, sales, and profits. The better the brand awareness, the more opportunities users will have to make repeated usage decisions. Brand awareness is important in increasing customer loyalty because consumers or customers usually tend to buy and use products with familiar brands compared to products whose brands are foreign to the consumer. This is done by consumers because the brand has high brand awareness

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights a finding about the relationship between social media marketing that has a positive effect on customer loyalty through the development of brand image and brand awareness. When a company develops brand image and brand awareness on its products and promotes them through social media marketing, it can have a positive impact on increasing customer loyalty. These results indicate that companies can develop social media marketing strategies by promoting the advantages of their brands so that they have an impact on customer loyalty and increased revenue for the company.

This study makes an important contribution to the development of marketing management literature by highlighting the role of social media marketing in relation to customer loyalty through the development of brand image and brand awareness. This offers new insights for companies to implement social media marketing in overcoming the challenges of customer loyalty in the era of digital progress. In addition, a more holistic and product quality-oriented approach is needed to increase customer loyalty through social media marketing and improve product quality based on local wisdom.

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