

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust as a Mediating Variable: Evidence from Consumers of Citra Hand and Body Lotion in Cimahi City

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty through brand trust as a mediating variable among consumers of Citra hand and body lotion in Cimahi City. This study is based on relationship marketing theory (RMT), which explains that ongoing communication between companies and consumers contributes to the development of trust and ultimately strengthens customer loyalty. A quantitative approach with a descriptive-verify design was used. Data were collected from 120 respondents who had purchased and used Citra hand and body lotion products and had been exposed to the brand's social media content. The data were analyzed using simple regression, multiple regression, and the Sobel mediation test with the aid of SPSS version 26 software.

INTRODUCTION

Changing social standards regarding healthy skin are encouraging more and more people to care for their skin so that it appears smoother and better maintained. This trend has increased public interest in achieving what is considered ideal skin (Lee et al., 2020). As attention to skin health and appearance has increased, the use of skincare products has become an integral part of daily self-care routines (Lv, 2022). This trend has also fueled the growth of the cosmetics and personal care industry in Indonesia. According to a report by Business-Indonesia.org (2025), revenue in the beauty and personal care industry is projected to rise from USD 9.17 billion in 2024 to approximately USD 9.58 billion in 2025. This growth has also intensified competition among brands, making it essential for companies to maintain consumer loyalty as a key competitive advantage.

One brand that has long been a contender in the hand and body lotion category is Citra, produced by PT Unilever Indonesia. Although it still holds the top position in this category, Citra's Top Brand Index (TBI) value shows a downward trend, dropping from 29.70% in 2023 to 28.90% in 2024, and then declining further to 26.70% in 2025 (Top Brand Award, 2025). This decline occurred even as the cosmetics industry experienced positive growth. Brand loyalty refers to consumers' commitment to consistently choosing and repurchasing a particular brand despite the availability of various alternative brands (Damaschi et al., 2025). Therefore, the decline in the TBI value is an indication that warrants attention, as it may reflect a weakening of consumer loyalty toward the Citra brand.

Advances in digital technology have transformed the way companies build relationships with their customers. Social media is no longer used solely as a promotional tool, but also as a communication channel that enables companies to engage with customers. DataReportal (2025) reports that the number of active social media users in Indonesia increased from approximately 139 million in 2024 to approximately 143 million in 2025. One of the platforms widely used in

digital marketing activities is Instagram. Social media marketing is a marketing activity that utilizes social media to introduce products, build communication, and establish relationships with consumers (Kim & Ko, 2012).

In Relationship Marketing Theory (RMT), long-term relationships between companies and customers are built through ongoing communication, thereby fostering trust, which ultimately drives customer loyalty (Berry, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In line with this theory, brand trust is the consumer's belief that a brand has the capability and integrity to consistently meet consumer expectations (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). Thus, social media marketing is viewed as a form of corporate communication that has the potential to build brand trust, which in turn fosters brand loyalty.

This relationship has been extensively studied in previous research. Kinara et al. (2023), Aribtha and Salim (2025), and Haudi et al. (2022) demonstrated that social media marketing has a positive effect on brand trust. Studies by Nandita and Setyawan (2025), Suryani (2025), and Putri and Dwita (2025) show that brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty. Furthermore, Ahmada et al. (2026), Fauzi and Evanita (2024), and Khusniah et al. (2024) found that brand trust mediates the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty. However, the phenomenon observed with the Citra brand reveals a different situation. Although Citra actively markets itself through its Instagram account, its Top Brand Index score actually declined from 2024 to 2025. Furthermore, most previous studies have focused on skincare, cosmetics, fashion, and food and beverage products, whereas research on the hand and body lotion category, particularly the Citra brand remains relatively limited.

Based on these phenomena and research gaps, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty through brand trust among consumers of Citra hand and body lotion products in Cimahi City. The novelty of this study lies in testing the role of brand trust as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty for Citra hand and body lotion products. The results of this study are expected to enrich the empirical evidence regarding the application of relationship marketing theory in explaining the relationship between social media marketing, brand trust, and brand loyalty in the context of digital marketing for personal care products.

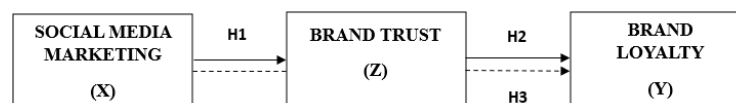


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method to examine the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty through brand trust as a mediating variable. The study population consists of Citra Hand and Body Lotion consumers in Cimahi City who have used the product and have been exposed to Citra's promotional content via the official Instagram account @cantikcitra. The research sample consisted of 120 respondents selected using purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique that allows for the selection of respondents based on specific criteria in line with the research objectives. This sample size met the recommendations of Roscoe (1975) as cited in Sekaran and Bougie (2016) regarding the for adequate sample size in

quantitative research. This study employed a cross-sectional design, as data were collected during a single observation period.

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Before hypothesis testing, the validity and reliability of all items were assessed to ensure that the research instrument could measure each variable accurately and consistently.

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The analysis stages included descriptive analysis, validity testing, reliability testing, simple regression analysis, multiple regression analysis, and the Sobel test to examine the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. All hypothesis tests were conducted at a 5% significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Validity Test

Table 1 Results of Validity Tests

Variables	Item	Calculated r	Table r	Notes
Social Media Marketing (X)	X.1	0.881	0.179	Valid
	X.2	0.879	0.179	Valid
	X.3	0.836	0.179	Valid
	X.4	0.831	0.179	Valid
	X.5	0.840	0.179	Valid
	X.6	0.869	0.179	Valid
	X.7	0.875	0.179	Valid
	X.8	0.859	0.179	Valid
	X.9	0.916	0.179	Valid
Brand Trust (Z)	Z.1	0.862	0.179	Valid
	Z.2	0.805	0.179	Valid
	Z.3	0.823	0.179	Valid
	Z.4	0.847	0.179	Valid
Brand Loyalty (Y)	Y.1	0.829	0.179	Valid
	Y.2	0.864	0.179	Valid
	Y.3	0.841	0.179	Valid
	Y.4	0.885	0.179	Valid

Source: Primary data analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, 2026.

Based on Table 1, all items have a calculated r value greater than the table r value (0.179), so all items are deemed valid.

B. Reliability Test

Table 2 Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Description
Social Media Marketing (X)	0.958	9	Reliable
Brand Trust (Z)	0.853	4	Reliable
Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.877	4	Reliable

Source: Primary data analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, 2026.

Based on Table 2, all variables have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.60, so the research instrument is deemed reliable.

C. Descriptive Analysis

Table 3 Results of Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Mean	Category
Social Media Marketing	3.7963	Good
Brand Trust	3.7583	Good
Brand Loyalty	4.0958	Good

Source: Primary data analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, 2026.

Based on Table 3, the mean values for social media marketing, brand trust, and brand loyalty are 3.7963, 3.7583, and 4.0958, respectively. These results indicate that all three variables fall into the “good” category.

D. Regression Analysis

Table 4 Results of Simple Linear Regression

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	5.757	0.785	-	7.333	0.000
Social Media Marketing	0.271	0.023	0.742	12,011	0.000

Source: Primary data processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, 2026.

Based on Table 4.1, a simple linear regression equation was obtained; the results of the analysis show that social media marketing has a positive effect on brand trust, with a t-value of 12.011 and a significance level of 0.000 (<0.05).

Table 5 Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis on Brand Loyalty

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.905	0.900	-	5.449	0.000
Social Media Marketing	0.240	0.032	0.627	7,493	0.000
Brand Trust	0.218	0.087	0.209	2.494	0.014

Source: Primary data analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, 2026.

Based on Table 7, the multiple linear regression equation is: $Y = 4.905 + 0.240X + 0.218Z$. Social media marketing and brand trust have a positive effect on brand loyalty because their respective significance values are less than 0.05.

D. Coefficient of Determination

Table 5: Coefficient of Determination Results

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square
Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust	0.742	0.550	0.546
Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty	0.674	0.454	0.450
Social Media Marketing and Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty	0.794	0.631	0.625

Source: Primary data analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, 2026.

An R-squared value of 0.550 indicates that 55.0% of the variation in brand trust is explained by social media marketing. The R-squared value of 0.454 indicates that 45.4% of the

variation in brand loyalty is explained by brand trust. In the multiple regression model, the R-squared value of 0.631 indicates that 63.1% of the variation in brand loyalty is explained simultaneously by social media marketing and brand trust.

F. Sobel Test

Table 6 Results of the Sobel Test

Relationship	a	b	Sa	Sb	calculated t	p-value	Notes
Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty	0.271	0.218	0.023	0.087	2.451	0.014	Significant mediation

Source: Primary data analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, 2026.

The results of the Sobel test show a calculated t-value of 2.451 with a p-value of 0.014. Since the calculated t-value is greater than the critical t-value (1.980) and the p-value is less than 0.05, brand trust is proven to mediate the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty.

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Trust

The results of the study indicate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand trust, with a regression coefficient of 0.271, a t-value of 12.011, and a significance level of 0.000 (<0.05). These results suggest that the more effective Citra's social media marketing activities are, the higher the level of consumer trust in the brand.

These findings support Relationship Marketing Theory, which states that effective communication can build long-term relationships through the establishment of trust between companies and consumers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Informative, interactive, and responsive social media activities encourage consumers to view a brand as credible and trustworthy. These findings align with the research by Kinara et al. (2023), Aribtha and Salim (2025), and Haudi et al. (2022), which show that social media marketing has a positive effect on brand trust.

The Influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty

The results of the study indicate that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty, with a regression coefficient of 0.218, a t-value of 2.494, and a significance level of 0.014 (<0.05). These results suggest that the higher consumers' trust in the Citra brand, the higher their loyalty to the product.

These findings support Relationship Marketing Theory, which explains that trust is a key factor in building long-term relationships between companies and consumers. Consumers who trust a product's quality, safety, and benefits tend to make repeat purchases and maintain their preference for the brand. The results of this study are also consistent with the research by Tran et al. (2022) and Amoah et al. (2022), which states that brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust in the Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty

The Sobel test results indicate that brand trust mediates the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty, with a Sobel test value of 2.451 and a significance level of 0.014 (<0.05). These results suggest that social media marketing not only directly increases brand loyalty but also does so by enhancing consumer trust in the brand.

These findings support Relationship Marketing Theory, which explains that effective marketing communication builds trust first before generating consumer loyalty. Through social media, Citra can establish transparent, informative, and interactive communication, thereby increasing

consumer trust, which ultimately drives brand loyalty. These research results align with the study by Amoah et al. (2022), which states that brand trust acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty through brand trust among consumers of Citra hand and body lotion in Cimahi City. The results show that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand trust. In addition, brand trust also has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty. The results also indicate that brand trust mediates the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty. These findings suggest that effective social media marketing activities can build consumer trust in a brand, which ultimately fosters brand loyalty.

The findings of this study reinforce the concept of Relationship Marketing Theory, which explains that long-term relationships between companies and consumers can be built through effective communication and trust in the brand. Therefore, companies need to continue developing social media marketing strategies that are informative, interactive, and relevant to consumer needs in order to enhance brand trust and maintain brand loyalty amid increasingly fierce competition in the personal care industry.

This study has limitations because it only involved consumers of Citra hand and body lotion in Cimahi City; therefore, the findings cannot yet be generalized on a broader scale. Future research is recommended to expand the study area, increase the number of respondents, and consider other variables such as brand image, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), customer engagement, or customer satisfaction to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing brand loyalty.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for companies operating in the beauty and personal care industry, particularly for the Citra brand.

First, the company should continue to invest in social media marketing activities, as these have been proven to strengthen consumer trust and loyalty. Social media platforms should be utilized not only as promotional tools but also as channels for building meaningful relationships with consumers.

Second, marketing content should emphasize credibility, transparency, and educational value. Consumers are increasingly seeking reliable information before making purchasing decisions; therefore, brands must provide detailed information regarding product ingredients, benefits, usage instructions, and safety assurances.

Third, companies must encourage consumer engagement by creating interactive content, responding promptly to consumer questions, and facilitating discussions through social media platforms. Such interactions contribute to stronger consumer relationships and reinforce trust in the brand.

Fourth, initiatives to build trust must be a strategic priority. Companies must consistently maintain product quality, deliver on brand promises, and provide positive customer experiences. These efforts are essential for maintaining consumer trust and fostering long-term loyalty.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the literature on digital marketing, consumer behavior, and relationship marketing by providing empirical evidence regarding the role of brand trust as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

These findings support Relationship Marketing Theory by demonstrating that trust serves as a key mechanism linking communication activities to long-term loyalty outcomes. This study

also expands upon previous research by examining this relationship in the context of hand and body lotions a category that has received relatively little attention in prior studies.

Furthermore, this research enriches our understanding of consumer behavior in Indonesia's personal care industry, particularly among consumers exposed to digital marketing activities via social media platforms.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study.

First, this study was conducted only in the city of Cimahi. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent consumer behavior in other regions with different demographic, cultural, or economic characteristics.

Second, this study focuses exclusively on social media marketing, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Although these variables explain important aspects of consumer behavior, other factors such as brand image, perceived quality, customer satisfaction, product innovation, electronic word-of-mouth reviews, and purchasing experiences may also influence brand loyalty.

Third, this study employs a cross-sectional research design, which captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time. Future studies using a longitudinal approach could provide deeper insights into changes in trust and loyalty over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations are proposed for Citra and similar companies operating in the personal care industry:

1. Continue to strengthen social media marketing strategies through informative and engaging content.
2. Increase interaction with consumers through comments, direct messages, live sessions, and community-building activities.
3. Emphasize transparency regarding product quality, ingredients, and benefits to strengthen consumer trust.
4. Collaborate with credible influencers and brand ambassadors who can reinforce positive perceptions of the brand.
5. Continuously monitor consumer feedback to improve products and maintain trust.

For future researchers:

1. Expand the scope of the research by including respondents from various cities or regions.
2. Include additional variables such as brand image, customer satisfaction, perceived quality, purchase intent, and electronic word-of-mouth reviews.
3. Use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares (PLS) to examine more complex relationships among variables.
4. Conduct comparative studies involving various personal care brands to provide broader insights into the formation of consumer loyalty.

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