

When Social Media Marketing Drives Loyalty: the Moderating Role of Platform Usage Intensity on Brand Trust and Brand Equity in Traveloka

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Abstract. This study examines the effects of social media marketing activities on brand trust, brand equity, and brand loyalty among Traveloka users, and tests whether platform usage intensity strengthens the relationships between social media marketing and brand trust and brand equity. A quantitative causal design was applied through an online survey using purposive sampling. Eligible respondents followed Traveloka's official social media, had used the application within the previous 12 months, completed at least three travel-related transactions during that period, and regarded Traveloka as their primary travel platform. A total of 401 valid responses were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS 4 and a disjoint two-stage approach for the reflective-reflective higher-order construct. The results show that social media marketing positively and significantly affects brand trust, brand equity, and brand loyalty. Brand trust positively affects brand equity and brand loyalty, while brand equity also improves brand loyalty. Platform usage intensity significantly strengthens the effects of social media marketing on brand trust and brand equity. The findings extend the social media branding literature by identifying platform usage intensity as an important boundary condition and imply that Traveloka should combine high-quality social media content with sustained platform engagement to reinforce trust, brand value, and loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Equity; Brand Loyalty; Brand Trust; Platform Usage Intensity; Social Media Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped tourism by integrating online travel platforms, mobile applications, and social media into information search, alternative evaluation, and purchasing decisions. Tourism firms therefore need digital strategies that not only attract users but also sustain engagement and strengthen their relationships with customers (Pajorska, 2022; Bondarenko, 2024). Social media has become a strategic marketing channel because it enables direct communication, content distribution, customer participation, and rapid feedback across the customer journey.

Social media marketing activities create value when brand content is entertaining, interactive, current, personalized, and capable of stimulating electronic word-of-mouth. Such experiences shape consumers' cognitive and emotional evaluations of a brand and can ultimately strengthen long-term customer-brand relationships (Ahmed et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2020). In the online travel sector, these mechanisms are especially relevant because customers frequently compare similar platforms and depend on digital information before making travel-related decisions.

Traveloka actively uses Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, and YouTube to communicate with users and promote its services. Although the platform has maintained a strong position in Indonesia, the original market evidence used in this study indicates intensifying competition, changes in market share, and fluctuations in active-user engagement

between 2024 and 2025. To remove nonessential images while preserving their analytical role, the three original market charts are summarized in Table 1 as contextual evidence rather than reproduced as graphics.

Table 1. Contextual Market Evidence Replacing the Original Figures.

Original visual	Core information retained	Research relevance
Preferred OTA platform (2024)	Traveloka was reported as the most preferred platform among the compared online travel agencies.	Shows strong brand position but does not guarantee continuing loyalty.
Market-share change (2024–2025)	Traveloka’s share weakened while several competitors gained ground.	Indicates pressure to strengthen customer retention and brand differentiation.
User trend change (2024–2025)	Active-user patterns fluctuated and some competitors showed relatively stronger momentum.	Supports the need to examine loyalty, trust, and brand value.

Source: Synthesized from the market evidence cited in the original article (Statista, 2024; Intelligence, 2025).

The decline in market share and changing user engagement suggest that customer acquisition alone is insufficient. Customers can easily switch between platforms that offer comparable services, promotions, and digital experiences. Consequently, loyalty becomes a strategic outcome because it reflects repeat preference and resistance to competing offers. Prior studies show that social media marketing can promote loyalty by shaping favorable brand perceptions, trust, and brand equity (Haudi et al., 2022; Puspaningrum, 2020).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence is not fully consistent. The influence of social media marketing on loyalty may vary according to consumers’ evaluations and contextual conditions (Wantini & Yudiana, 2021). Ebrahim (2020) demonstrated that brand trust and brand equity explain important pathways from social media marketing to loyalty, yet evidence in Indonesia’s online travel agency sector remains limited. Furthermore, prior models have rarely tested whether the frequency and intensity of platform use determine when social media marketing becomes more effective.

This study addresses that gap by integrating Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), Brand Trust, Brand Equity, Brand Loyalty, and Platform Usage Intensity in one model. The novelty lies in positioning Platform Usage Intensity as a moderator of the effects of SMMA on Brand Trust and Brand Equity. Accordingly, the study aims to test the direct relationships among these constructs and to determine whether stronger platform usage amplifies the branding outcomes of Traveloka’s social media marketing.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Stimulus Organism Response Framework

The Stimulus Organism Response (S–O–R) framework explains how environmental stimuli affect an individual's internal state and subsequently generate behavioral responses. In this study, SMMA functions as the stimulus; Brand Trust and Brand Equity represent internal cognitive and affective evaluations; and Brand Loyalty represents the behavioral response. This logic is consistent with evidence that social media stimuli can influence repurchase intentions through consumers' internal evaluations and relationship quality (Safeer et al., 2024; Sohaib et al., 2022).

Social Media Marketing Activities

SMMA refers to brand-managed activities on social platforms that deliver entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and E-WOM opportunities. Entertainment creates enjoyment, interaction facilitates two-way communication, trendiness provides current information, customization increases relevance, and E-WOM encourages users to share brand-related experiences. Collectively, these dimensions can enhance the accessibility, relevance, and persuasiveness of brand communication (Ebrahim, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2020).

Brand Trust, Brand Equity, and Brand Loyalty

Brand Trust reflects consumers' confidence that a brand is reliable and capable of fulfilling its promises. Brand Equity represents the added value created by consumers' knowledge, associations, and evaluations of a brand, whereas Brand Loyalty captures a sustained preference and intention to continue using the brand. Trust reduces perceived risk and supports favorable brand evaluations; stronger equity, in turn, makes customers more willing to maintain the relationship despite competitive alternatives (Puspaningrum, 2020; Sohaib et al., 2022).

Platform Usage Intensity and Research Hypotheses

Platform Usage Intensity indicates how frequently and deeply consumers use Traveloka in their travel-related activities. Repeated platform experience can provide more opportunities to verify marketing claims, evaluate service consistency, and integrate brand information into actual usage. Therefore, high usage intensity is expected to strengthen the translation of SMMA into Brand Trust and Brand Equity. The original conceptual figure is replaced by Table 2, which presents the structural relationships in an editable textual format while retaining the same model logic.

Table 2. Research Model and Hypotheses Replacing the Original Conceptual Figure.

Code	Hypothesized relationship
H1	Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust (+)
H2	Social Media Marketing → Brand Equity (+)
H3	Social Media Marketing → Brand Loyalty (+)
H4	Brand Trust → Brand Equity (+)
H5	Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty (+)
H6	Brand Equity → Brand Loyalty (+)
H7a	Platform Usage Intensity strengthens Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust
H7b	Platform Usage Intensity strengthens Social Media Marketing → Brand Equity

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach under the positivist paradigm and a causal research design. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The unit of analysis was the individual Traveloka user in Indonesia.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that respondents had relevant experience with both Traveloka services and its social media. Respondents were required to follow at least one official Traveloka social media account, have used the Traveloka application during the previous 12 months, have completed at least three travel-related transactions during that period, and regard Traveloka as their primary travel platform. A total of 401 valid responses met these criteria. The sample exceeded the minimum requirement for the complexity of the PLS-SEM model (Hair et al., 2022).

The model comprised SMMA, Brand Trust, Brand Equity, Brand Loyalty, and Platform Usage Intensity. SMMA was specified as a reflective-reflective Higher-Order Construct formed by five Lower-Order Constructs: Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customization, and Electronic Word-of-Mouth. Measurement items were adapted from validated scales used by Ebrahim (2020), Ibrahim et al. (2020), and related studies.

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. The disjoint two-stage approach was applied to estimate the higher-order construct. The measurement model was assessed through outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and HTMT. The structural model was evaluated using inner VIF, R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 predict, bootstrapped hypothesis tests, moderation analysis, and Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) (Hair et al., 2022).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation

In the first stage, all lower-order constructs were assessed. Indicators BL4 and BT6 were removed because their outer loadings were below 0.70. After refinement, the retained loadings ranged from 0.709 to 0.869. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.756 to 0.913, composite reliability from 0.846 to 0.932, and AVE from 0.545 to 0.723. These values demonstrate satisfactory indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity.

Table 3. Summary of Lower-Order Construct Measurement Quality.

Construct	Loading range	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	AVE
Brand Equity	0.716–0.781	0.795	0.859	0.549
Brand Loyalty	0.709–0.801	0.756	0.846	0.579
Brand Trust	0.717–0.774	0.833	0.878	0.545
Platform Usage Intensity	0.736–0.796	0.863	0.897	0.593
Customization	0.798–0.856	0.885	0.915	0.684
Entertainment	0.802–0.852	0.913	0.932	0.696
Interaction	0.771–0.840	0.877	0.910	0.670
Trendiness	0.816–0.850	0.911	0.931	0.692
E-WOM	0.831–0.869	0.904	0.929	0.723

Source: Research data processed using SmartPLS 4 (2026), unless otherwise stated.

The second-stage evaluation confirmed the quality of the higher-order SMMA construct. The five lower-order latent scores loaded between 0.809 and 0.836, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.883, composite reliability of 0.914, and AVE of 0.681. All HTMT values were below 0.85, showing that the constructs were empirically distinct and suitable for structural-model evaluation.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Inner VIF values ranged from 1.025 to 1.804, indicating no critical multicollinearity. The model explained 37.8% of Brand Trust, 54.8% of Brand Equity, and 51.1% of Brand Loyalty. All Q^2 predict values were positive, demonstrating predictive relevance. As presented in Table 4, every direct and moderating hypothesis was supported.

Table 4. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing.

Hypothesis	β	t-value	p-value	f ²	Decision
H1 SMMA $\rightarrow$ Brand Trust	0.315	7.459	<0.001	0.154	Supported
H2 SMMA $\rightarrow$ Brand Equity	0.182	4.480	<0.001	0.061	Supported
H3 SMMA $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	0.219	5.223	<0.001	0.082	Supported
H4 Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ Brand Equity	0.383	9.394	<0.001	0.202	Supported
H5 Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	0.348	7.413	<0.001	0.138	Supported
H6 Brand Equity $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	0.308	6.149	<0.001	0.108	Supported
H7a PUI $\times$ SMMA $\rightarrow$ Brand Trust	0.172	3.429	<0.001	0.051	Supported
H7b PUI $\times$ SMMA $\rightarrow$ Brand Equity	0.146	3.889	<0.001	0.048	Supported

Source: Research data processed using SmartPLS 4 (2026), unless otherwise stated.

Table 5. Model Explanatory and Predictive Quality.

Endogenous construct	R ²	Q ² predict
Brand Trust	0.378	0.364
Brand Equity	0.548	0.444
Brand Loyalty	0.511	0.320

Source: Research data processed using SmartPLS 4 (2026), unless otherwise stated.

Discussion

The positive effect of SMMA on Brand Trust indicates that informative, entertaining, interactive, current, personalized, and shareable content helps users perceive Traveloka as a reliable platform. This finding supports Ebrahim (2020) and Haudi et al. (2022), and is consistent with the S–O–R mechanism in which marketing stimuli shape consumers' internal evaluations before influencing behavior.

SMMA also improves Brand Equity and Brand Loyalty. Effective social media communication makes the brand more salient and meaningful while strengthening customers' willingness to continue using the platform. These results correspond with Puspaningrum (2020) and Ibrahim et al. (2020), who emphasize that social media activities can create relational and value-based outcomes rather than merely short-term promotional responses.

Brand Trust exerted the strongest direct effect on Brand Equity and a substantial effect on Brand Loyalty. Trust therefore functions as a central mechanism in the Traveloka context: users who believe that the platform is dependable develop more favorable brand evaluations and stronger continuation intentions. Brand Equity also significantly increased Brand Loyalty, confirming that perceived brand value and positive associations help users resist competing alternatives.

The moderation results constitute the main theoretical contribution. At high Platform Usage Intensity (+1 SD), the effect of SMMA on Brand Trust increased from $\beta = 0.315$ to $\beta = 0.487$, whereas the effect on Brand Equity increased from $\beta = 0.182$ to $\beta = 0.328$. Under low usage intensity (–1 SD), the relationships weakened to $\beta = 0.143$ and $\beta = 0.036$, respectively. Thus, repeated use provides customers with more opportunities to connect marketing messages to actual service experiences, making SMMA more credible and consequential.

The IPMA results indicate that E-WOM is the highest managerial priority because it combines the greatest importance (0.106) with the lowest performance (66.987). Customization and Entertainment follow closely (importance = 0.105), while Trendiness (0.104) and Interaction (0.092) remain relevant. Platform Usage Intensity falls within the possible-overkill area, implying that usage acts primarily as an amplifier; increasing activity

alone will not maximize loyalty unless the quality of social media marketing is simultaneously improved.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that Social Media Marketing Activities significantly strengthen Brand Trust, Brand Equity, and Brand Loyalty among Traveloka users in Indonesia. Brand Trust increases both Brand Equity and Brand Loyalty, and Brand Equity further strengthens Brand Loyalty. Platform Usage Intensity positively moderates the effects of SMMA on Brand Trust and Brand Equity, demonstrating that the value of social media marketing becomes greater when customers interact more intensively with the platform. Traveloka should prioritize authentic E-WOM, personalized recommendations, engaging content, and timely travel information while encouraging meaningful platform engagement. The study is limited by its cross-sectional design, purposive sample, and focus on one online travel agency; future research should use longitudinal or experimental designs, compare several platforms, and test other boundary conditions such as perceived risk, promotion sensitivity, and service recovery. The theoretical contribution lies in extending the S–O–R and relationship-marketing perspectives by establishing platform usage intensity as a boundary condition, while the practical implication is that content quality and platform engagement must be managed jointly to build sustainable loyalty.

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