

The influence of social media marketing activities on hotel brand loyalty: The mediating role of customer engagement and brand trust on the Tiktok

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Abstract

TikTok's emergence as a social media platform has significantly influenced marketing strategies. Nevertheless, scholarly research on the use of TikTok as a marketing medium remains scarce. Consequently, this study investigates the impact of social media marketing activities on TikTok on brand loyalty, with customer engagement and brand trust serving as mediating factors. This study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing a sample of 300 respondents who actively engaged with the selected hotel on TikTok and stayed at the hotel within the past year. Data were collected through the distribution of a closed-ended questionnaire administered online. Data analysis was conducted using the SEM GSCA Pro. Mediation analysis was performed using the Sobel test. The results demonstrate that social media marketing activities positively influence customer engagement and brand trust. Customer engagement positively affects brand trust and brand loyalty, and brand trust also positively impacts brand loyalty. Additionally, the mediation analysis indicates that customer engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand trust and loyalty. Similarly, brand trust mediates the effect of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty, as well as the effect of customer engagement on brand loyalty. This study contributes to the development of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory by integrating social media marketing activities with brand loyalty, mediated by customer engagement and brand trust within the hotel industry. Furthermore, this study offers theoretical novelty by applying the SOR framework to emerging tourism regions, demonstrating its relevance in explaining consumer behavior in digital marketing contexts characterized by dynamic but regionally limited markets.

Keywords

social media marketing activities; customer engagement; brand trust; brand loyalty; Tiktok

INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media has significantly transformed the marketing strategies of companies. Organizations perceive opportunities to cultivate robust brand loyalty by leveraging social media as a marketing platform (Zha et al., 2023). This is attributed to the ability of social media to facilitate direct interaction between companies and consumers (Kim et al., 2021). Moreover, social media enable companies to establish relationships and build trust with customers

(Kristiyono et al., 2023). These consistent and authentic interactions allow companies to exhibit personalities, values, and unique offerings tailored to the specific characteristics of each consumer (Yuan et al., 2023).

Additionally, social media empowers companies to provide prompt responses to customer inquiries and complaints, thereby demonstrating the brand's commitment to customer satisfaction (Lee & Eastin, 2020). The features available on social media

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platforms allow consumers to engage directly and share content and testimonials, thereby fostering a sense of community between companies and consumers (Hanandeh et al., 2024). Over time, consumers have increasingly relied on social proofs and recommendations from fellow users, further reinforcing the influence of social media on consumer behavior. Consequently, the use of social media can affect purchasing decisions and enhance consumer loyalty.

A company's activities in utilizing social media as a marketing channel are referred to as social media marketing activities. Companies use social media marketing activities to promote products or services and increase engagement with their audiences. These activities include content creation, social media management, advertising, collaboration with influencers, promotions, contests, and brand storytelling. Such activities aim to build brand awareness, enhance customer loyalty, and strengthen the online presence (Althuwaini, 2022; Ebrahim, 2019; Susanto & Ruswanti, 2024).

Research has also explored the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Empirical evidence suggests that effective social media marketing strategies can substantially enhance brand loyalty by fostering direct engagement, building trust and establishing emotional connections with consumers (Changani & Kumar, 2024). Additionally, prior studies have demonstrated that consistent and personalized interaction on social platforms can improve brand awareness, customer satisfaction, and ultimately, loyalty (Al-Dwairi et al., 2024).

Further, findings indicate that the capacity to deliver real-time customer service and disseminate user-generated content via social media is a critical factor in strengthening the relationship between brands and consumers (Kristiyono et al., 2023). Moreover, other studies have underscored the role of social media in facilitating word-of-mouth marketing and leveraging social proof, both of which are crucial elements in the development and maintenance of brand loyalty (Susanto & Ruswanti, 2024).

Although literature has examined its impact on brand loyalty, research on social media marketing activities still needs to be conducted. The social media marketing activities carried out by a company can lead to trust in the brand (Koay et al., 2023). This can be advantageous for companies that use

social media as their marketing strategy. Additionally, social media marketing activities can lead to customer engagement (Changani & Kumar, 2024). This indicates that social media marketing not only introduces the brand to consumers, but can also increase their involvement, which in turn can lead to consumer loyalty. Brand trust and customer engagement are important factors that shape brand loyalty.

Despite the existing body of research, there remains a lack of studies integrating the effects of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty, with brand trust and customer engagement serving as the mediating factors. This study seeks to address this gap in literature. Specifically, this study investigates the role of social media marketing activities in fostering brand loyalty mediated by brand trust and customer engagement. The present study employs Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory as a foundational framework to elucidate the impact of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty, with brand trust and customer engagement serving as mediating factors.

SOR theory offers a pertinent model for understanding how social media marketing influences brand loyalty. According to this theory, external stimuli (S) affect the internal state of individuals (O), which subsequently leads to behavioral responses (R). Within the realm of social media marketing, marketing content functions as a stimulus, initiating cognitive and emotional processes within the consumer (organism) and ultimately culminating in brand loyalty (response). Customer engagement and brand trust are critical mediating variables that represent the 'organism' component of the SOR framework. Customer engagement denotes the cognitive and emotional involvement of consumers with a brand on social media platforms, whereas brand trust signifies the confidence and perceived reliability that consumers attribute to a brand. These variables effectively encapsulate the internal processes that transpire between marketing stimuli and loyalty response.

This study examines social media engagement on the TikTok platform, which is characterized by its short-form video content and capacity to enhance user interaction. TikTok presents distinctive opportunities for brands to engage with consumers, particularly those within the younger demographic group. This study specifically addresses the hospitality industry as it emphasizes visual

content and is inherently experience-oriented, aligning well with TikTok's content format. Hotels can effectively showcase their facilities, locations, and guest experiences through creative and engaging videos that can potentially influence travel decisions and brand perceptions. Furthermore, the post-pandemic recovery of the hospitality sector underscores the necessity for innovative marketing strategies, positioning TikTok as a pertinent channel for hotels to reestablish customer relationships and attract new clientele.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory

The stimulus–organism–response (SOR) theory proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) serves as a foundational model for understanding consumer behavior across various sectors, including healthcare (Sivasothy et al., 2024). This theory posits that environmental stimuli (S) influence an organism's internal state (O), which subsequently leads to behavioral responses (R). The model has been employed to examine consumer behaviors in contexts such as tourism, where environmental awareness impacts both willingness to pay and sustainable behavior (Chakraborty et al., 2024). Furthermore, the framework analyzes the effects of atmospheric cues on consumer emotions and purchasing behavior in live-streaming environments (Gao et al., 2022). In the realm of higher education, this study investigates how campus facilities affect student satisfaction through emotions and experiences (Goi et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). The SOR model has been integrated with other theories to enhance the understanding of consumer behavior (Sivasothy et al., 2024), offering insights into psychological processes, such as compliance behavior in construction projects (Chang et al., 2024) and consumer decision-making (Duong, 2023).

The impact of social media marketing activities on customer engagement

Previous research indicates that hotels have adopted a variety of strategies to enhance customer engagement. A study by Sánchez-

Casado et al. (2019) demonstrated that personalized content according to customer profiles can augment the effectiveness of loyalty programs and marketing campaigns. Meanwhile, Rana et al. (2025) engaging in visual storytelling on social media can foster emotional engagement and positive brand perception. Additional research indicates that content strategies incorporating elements of localization, storylines capable of immersing the audience in the narrative (narrative transportation), and interactive features can enhance engagement and booking intention (Ferrer-Rosell et al., 2020; Gomez-Suarez & Veloso, 2024). Moreover, positive reviews and recommendations on social media can influence booking intention and customer loyalty (Benito et al., 2025; Han et al., 2025). Social media activities that enhance perceived value can influence customer engagement and loyalty (Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019). Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media marketing activities positively influence customer engagement

The impact of social media marketing activities on brand trust

Social media marketing activities significantly influence brand trust, thereby shaping customer loyalty and purchase intention. Empirical studies indicate that these activities foster brand trust through enhanced communication and consumer engagement. Social media platforms facilitate interactions between companies and their audiences, enabling personalized experiences and promoting transparency (Ebrahim, 2019; Kristiyono et al., 2023). Brand trust serves as a mediator between social media marketing and brand loyalty, bolstering both trust and loyalty (Puspaningrum, 2020). Research has further demonstrated that brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, suggesting that increased trust correlates with higher purchase rates (Salhab et al., 2023). The strategic use of social media enhances brand equity through audience engagement and transparent communication (Haudi et al., 2022). Influencers also play a role in affect brand trust, which, in turn, affects consumer engagement and repurchase intentions (Tarabieh et al., 2024). Thus, social media marketing activities enhance brand trust through communication, thereby mediating

their effects on brand loyalty and purchasing behavior. Based on the above explanation, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Social media marketing activities have a positive effect on brand trust

The impact of customer engagement on brand trust

Customer engagement significantly influences brand trust, which in turn affects brand loyalty and consumer behavior. Empirical studies have demonstrated that social media platforms enhance customer engagement by facilitating communication, thereby contributing to brand trust development. Previous research has indicated that social media marketing influences brand trust, although to a lesser extent than customer engagement (Kristiyono et al., 2023). Studies of brand communities across social media platforms have revealed that increased customer participation enhances engagement, which subsequently has a positive impact on trust and word-of-mouth activities (Islam & Rahman, 2016). Other research has also highlighted that trustworthiness is a key driver of engagement and brand loyalty (Kosiba et al., 2018). In the tourism sector, customer engagement improves the evaluations of service brands, thereby strengthening brand trust and loyalty (So et al., 2014). Research on hotel applications also reveals that their cognitive and social benefits increase engagement and trust and foster loyalty (Lee & Lee, 2018). Furthermore, another study demonstrated that customer engagement positively affects trust and experience, while serving as a mediator between engagement and loyalty (Al-Dmour et al., 2019). Based on the aforementioned explanation, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Customer engagement has a positive effect on brand trust

The impact of customer engagement on brand loyalty

Studies show that customer engagement positively influences brand loyalty. In social media marketing, customer engagement drives brand loyalty through consumer participation more effectively than promotional efforts alone (Muchardie et al., 2016). Other studies have indicated that affective and

cognitive engagement are crucial in determining brand loyalty, with emotional engagement mediating loyalty through the consumer experience (Huang & Chen, 2021).

Furthermore, trust-driven customer engagement strengthens brand loyalty through integrity and competence (Kosiba et al., 2018). These statements are also supported by other research findings that demonstrate that engagement affects satisfaction and loyalty through the brand experience (Khan et al., 2016). Engagement behavior through the connection between self and brand requires both emotional and cognitive attachment (Kini et al., 2024). In the context of tourism brands, consumer engagement enhances evaluation and trust in the brand, thereby fostering loyalty beyond direct service experience (So et al., 2014). Based on this explanation, the proposed hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Customer Engagement has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty

The impact of brand trust on brand loyalty

Brand trust is an important determinant of loyalty. It has a direct correlation with loyalty because it bridges consumer perceptions and their commitment to the brand. Previous studies have found that trust can increase loyalty and reduce perceived risk (Kim et al., 2020). Furthermore, strengthening brand trust enhances customer loyalty and improves the effectiveness of brand marketing. Other studies have shown that social media marketing reinforces brand trust, thereby increasing brand loyalty (Puspaningrum, 2020). Trust also mediates the effects of brand experience and brand image on loyalty (Marliawati & Cahyaningdyah, 2020). Based on this explanation, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty

Customer engagement as a mediator between social media marketing activities and brand trust and brand loyalty

Customer engagement serves as a mediating variable in the relationship among social media marketing activities, brand trust, and brand loyalty in various contexts. Social

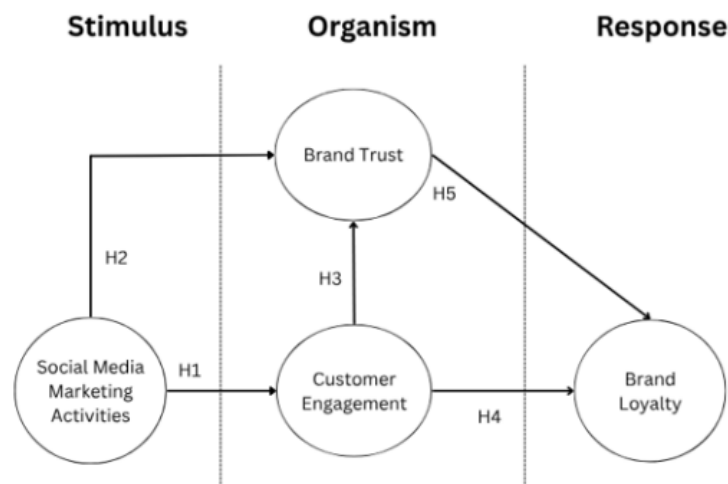


Figure 1.
Research model

media marketing activities influence brand loyalty through brand community engagement, particularly when brand identity aligns with the users' self-identity (Changani & Kumar, 2024). Other studies have indicated that social media marketing enhances customer brand engagement, which subsequently drives brand loyalty through cognitive engagement (Aljuhmani et al., 2022). Research focusing on brand Instagram pages demonstrates that social media marketing activities positively affect user engagement, thereby strengthening consumer–brand relationships (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023).

Other findings have revealed that social media engagement mediates the relationship between brand-related factors and loyalty (Alhomaid & Hammouri, 2025). Social media marketing activities also influence brand trust and loyalty, which in turn mediate revisit intentions and foster long-term engagement (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Research by Fetais et al. (2022) has demonstrated that social media marketing activities exert a positive influence on community engagement, which, in turn, affects brand loyalty. Similar conclusions were drawn by Muchardie et al. (2016), who elucidated that customer engagement can enhance the efficacy of social media marketing, thereby leading to increased brand trust and loyalty. Based on this explanation, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6: Customer engagement mediates the influence of social media marketing on brand trust

H7: Customer engagement mediates the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty

Brand trust as a mediator between social media marketing activities and customer engagement toward brand loyalty

Previous research investigated the role of brand trust as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media marketing and customer engagement with respect to brand loyalty. Empirical evidence suggests that brand trust mediates the effect of social media marketing on loyalty. For instance, previous studies have demonstrated that social media marketing enhances brand trust and loyalty (Puspaningrum, 2020). Social media marketing also influences customer engagement, and ultimately affects brand loyalty. Other research has revealed that customer engagement exerts a stronger effect on brand loyalty than the direct influence of social media marketing (Muchardie et al., 2016).

Additionally, other studies have found that social media marketing predicts brand trust and loyalty, indicating that effective marketing strategies foster trust and encourage customer retention (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Another study shows that brand interactivity and involvement influence trust, thereby

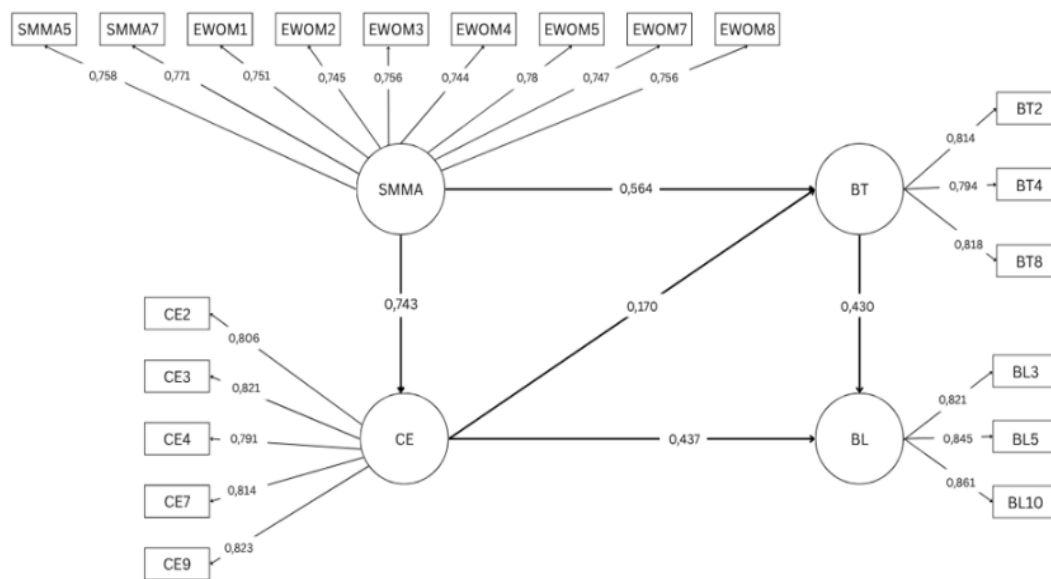


Figure 2.
Research model with statistical results

increasing loyalty through customer engagement (Samarah et al., 2021). Moreover, customer engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty across hospitality sectors (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). Based on the above explanation, we propose the following hypothesis:

H8: Brand trust mediates the influence of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty

H9: Brand trust mediates the influence of customer engagement on brand loyalty based on the literature review, the research model used is as follows.

Based on the literature review, the research model used is illustrated in Figure 1.

METHODS

Population and sampling technique

The study population comprised consumers who followed the official TikTok accounts of selected hotels and stayed at one of these establishments in the preceding year. The respondents were restricted to individuals residing on the island of Java because of accessibility considerations and the high concentration of potential customers in this region, despite TikTok's broader audience.

The selection of the Karanganyar Regency as the research site was informed by the observation that prior studies have predominantly concentrated on hotels in major urban centers, while empirical investigations into emerging tourism destinations remain scarce.

This study employed a purposive selection of five hotels based on two criteria: (1) each hotel maintains an official TikTok account actively utilized for marketing purposes, and (2) each is a star-rated hotel situated within Karanganyar's primary tourism area. The five selected hotels were Jawa Dwipa Heritage Resort (@jawadwiparesort), Nava Hotel Tawangmangu (@navahotel), Allura Azana Resort Tawangmangu (@alluraazana tawangmangu), Anaya Azana Boutique (@anayaazanaboutique), and Facade Hotel Tawangmangu (@facadehoteltawangmangu).

Respondents were subsequently screened using two verification questions to ensure data quality: (1) "Do you follow any of the official TikTok accounts of Nava Hotel, Allura Azana, Facade, Anaya Azana, or Jawa Dwipa in Karanganyar, Central Java?", and (2) "Have you stayed at one of the following hotels in Karanganyar — Nava, Allura Azana, Facade, Anaya Azana, or Jawa Dwipa — within the past 12 months or less?". Purposive sampling was used in this study. A total of 443 respondents participated in the survey. However, 143 did not complete the questionnaire in its entirety and were

Table 1.
Constructs and measurement items

Variabel	Measurement Item	Source
Social Media Marketing Activities	Interacting with Hotel X's TikTok account feels trendy (trendy)	Lima et al. (2024)
	I like the advertisements published by Hotel X on TikTok	
	I talk about Hotel X more often than other hotels	
	I talk about Hotel X with other people	
	I am proud to tell others that I am a customer of Hotel X	
	I recommend Hotel X to others	
	I usually share positive things about Hotel X with other people	
	I discuss the variety of services offered by Hotel X with others	
Customer Engagement	I discuss the service quality of Hotel X with others	Ruiz et al. (2023)
	I enjoy participating in events related to this hotel	
	I want to learn more about this hotel	
	I pay a lot of attention to matters related to this hotel	
Brand Trust	My involvement with this hotel is very high	Zehir et al. (2011)
	My days feel different without this hotel	
	I feel confident in Hotel X	
	Hotel X guarantees my satisfaction	
Brand Loyalty	Hotel X will provide compensation for any problems related to their products or services	Zehir et al. (2011)
	I regard this hotel as my primary choice among hotels in Karanganyar	
	I will remain a loyal customer of this hotel	
	I consider this hotel to be my main choice for the next several years	

Source: Lima et al. (2024); Ruiz et al. (2023); Zehir et al. (2011)

consequently excluded, resulting in 300 valid responses for further analyses.

Data collection procedure

Data were collected using an online closed-ended questionnaire disseminated via the Populix platform, adhering to specified respondent criteria. The data collection period spans from June to August 2025. All questionnaire items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Research instrument

All constructs utilized in this study were adapted from instruments that had been validated in previous research. The Social Media Marketing Activities questionnaire comprised of nine items adapted from et al. (2024). The Customer Engagement questionnaire includes five items derived from Ruiz et al. (2023). The constructs of brand

loyalty and trust were adapted from Zehir et al. (2011). All the items were translated into Bahasa Indonesia to ensure linguistic and contextual appropriateness. Content validity was evaluated through expert judgment, involving one academic expert and one digital marketing practitioner.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the GSCA Pro software, which is well suited for handling complex structural models and is capable of efficiently estimating parameters even with relatively small sample sizes. The evaluation of the model adhered to specific criteria: Convergent validity was established if all factor loadings exceeded 0.70 (Wu & Ko, 2013). Reliability was confirmed when Cronbach's alpha surpassed 0.70 (Naik et al., 2016). Model fit was deemed satisfactory when the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) was ≥ 0.90 , and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was ≤ 0.08 (Kim et al.,

Table 2.
Respondent demographic characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	
Gender	
Male	134 (45%)
Female	166 (55%)
Age	
< 18 years old	0 (0%)
18 – 24 years old	56 (18,7%)
25 – 30 years old	114 (38%)
31 – 35 years old	79 (26,3%)
36 – 40 years old	33 (11%)
41 – 45 years old	13 (4,3%)
46 - 50 years old	3 (1%)
51 – 55 years old	2 (0,7%)
>55 years old	0 (0%)
Marital Status	
Single	54 (18%)
Married	246 (82%)
Education	
Elementary School	0 (0%)
Junior High School / Equivalent	3 (1%)
Senior High School / Equivalent	97 (32,33%)
Diploma / Bachelor's Degree / Equivalent	190 (63,33%)
Master's / Doctoral Degree	10 (3,33%)
Income	
< Rp. 2.000.000,00	7 (2,33%)
Rp. 2.000.000,00 – Rp. 3.999.999,00	17 (5,66%)
Rp. 4.000.000,00 – Rp. 5.999.999,00	63 (21%)
Rp. 6.000.000,00 – Rp. 8.000.000,00	94 (31,44%)
>Rp. 8.000.000,00	119 (39,66%)
Currently Followed Tiktok Account	
Jawa Dwipa Heritage Resort (@jawadwiparesort)	111 (37%)
Nava Hotel Tawangmangu (@navahotel)	103 (34,3%)
Allura Azana Resort Tawangmangu (@alluraazanatawangmangu)	60 (20%)
Anaya Azana Boutique (@anayaazanaboutique)	11 (3,66%)
Facade Hotel Tawangmangu (@facadehoteltawangmangu)	15 (5%)

2014). Hypothesis testing was performed using the GSCA output, with significance set at $p \leq 0.05$ (Hwang et al., 2010). Furthermore, mediation analysis was conducted using the Sobel test. The calculated z-value was compared to the critical z-value of 1.96, and if the calculated z-value exceeded this critical threshold, the variable was confirmed as a mediating variable between the other constructs (Mackinnon et al., 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 2 presents the distribution of the respondents' demographic characteristics. After data collection, we conducted validity and reliability assessments. The findings

indicated that certain questionnaire items were eliminated because the loading values were below 0.7. These items were excluded to ensure integrity of the results. As shown in Table 1, all the questionnaire items in this study exhibited loading values exceeding 0.7, thereby confirming their validity. Furthermore, reliability was evaluated by comparing Cronbach's alpha values with research outcomes. The results, as presented in Table 3, demonstrate that the alpha value in this study exceeded 0.7, indicating that the reliability test was successfully completed.

Subsequently, we evaluated the model fit in this study, as presented in Table 4. The findings revealed that The FIT value was 0.59, indicating that this research model accounted for 59% of the phenomenon, while the remaining 41% was attributable to other

Table 3.
Results of validity and reliability tests

Variables	Loadings	Alpha	PVE	Rho
Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)		0,906	0,571	0,923
SMMA1	0,758			
SMMA2	0,771			
EWOM3	0,751			
EWOM4	0,745			
EWOM5	0,756			
EWOM6	0,744			
EWOM7	0,78			
EWOM8	0,747			
EWOM9	0,756			
Customer Engagement (CE)		0,87	0,658	0,906
CE1	0,806			
CE2	0,821			
CE3	0,791			
CE4	0,814			
CE5	0,823			
Brand Trust (BT)		0,736	0,654	0,85
BT1	0,814			
BT2	0,794			
BT3	0,818			
Brand Loyalty (BL)		0,796	0,71	0,88
BL1	0,821			
BL2	0,845			
BL3	0,861			

Source: Processed GSCA Pro Data Output, 2025

variables not included in this model. The GFI value was 0.993 (≥ 0.90), and the SMRM value was 0.042 (≤ 0.08), suggesting that the research model satisfied the fit criteria.

Subsequently, we evaluated the model fit in this study, as presented in Table 4. The findings revealed that The FIT value was 0.59, indicating that this research model accounted for 59% of the phenomenon, while the remaining 41% was attributable to other variables not included in this model. The GFI value was 0.993 (≥ 0.90), and the SMRM value was 0.042 (≤ 0.08), suggesting that the research model satisfied the fit criteria.

After satisfying the aforementioned indicators, hypothesis testing was conducted, based on the model structure presented in Table 5. The findings of this study indicate that the values of all relationship paths between

variables are positive, and that the CI value does not exceed the threshold. Consequently, it can be concluded that all proposed hypotheses H1 through H5 exhibit a positive and significant effect. Analyzing the β coefficient values, the SMMA variable exerts a direct impact on the CE variable, with a β value of 0.743, and on BT, with a β value of 0.564. Examining the f^2 values, the SMMA path to CE was 1.231 and the SMMA path to BT was 0.466, signifying that SMMA had a substantial influence on both CE and BT. The β value of CE to BT was 0.170 with an f^2 value of 0.030, indicating a minor influence of CE on BT. Furthermore, the β value of CE to BL was 0.437 with an f^2 value of 0.237, suggesting that CE had a moderate influence on BL compared to BT. Nonetheless, CE continues to affect both BL and BT. The value of BT to

Table 4.
Model fit

Indicator	Value
FIT	0,59
AFIT	0,587
FITs	0,41
FITm	0,626
GFI	0,993
SMRM	0,042
OPE	0,411
OPEs	0,597
OPEm	0,374

Source: Processed GSCA Pro Data Output, 2025

Table 5.
Structural model testing

Path	Coefficient β	SE	95% CI	f ²	Decision
SMMA – CE	0,743	0,034	0,675–0,816	1,231	Supported
SMMA - BT	0,564	0,086	0,387–0,725	0,466	Supported
CE - BT	0,170	0,081	0,025–0,319	0,030	Supported
CE - BL	0,437	0,054	0,336–0,537	0,273	Supported
BT – BL	0,430	0,052	0,332–0,526	0,227	Supported

Source: Processed GSCA Pro Data Output, 2025

BL shows a β value of 0.430, with an f² value of 0.227, indicating that BT moderately influences BL.

Subsequently, we examine the mediating effects of this study. The research model comprised of three mediation pathways, and the mediation effects were assessed using the Sobel test. The results, as listed in Table 6, reveal that all computed z values exceed the critical z value of 1.96. This finding suggests that CE and BT function as partial mediators between SMMA and BL, albeit with differing effects. As illustrated in Table 4, CE exerted a more substantial influence on the SMMA – CE – BL pathway (7.588) than on the SMMA – CE – BT pathway (2.089). Additionally, BT demonstrated a more pronounced effect on the SMMA – BT – BL pathway (5.138) than on the CE – BT – BL pathway (2.034). These results further corroborate H6 – H9.

Table 7 indicates that the coefficient of determination (R²) for CE is 0.552, signifying that 55.2% of the variance in CE is accounted for by SMMA. Similarly, BT exhibited an R² value of 0.490, suggesting that 49% of the BT

variance was explained by SMMA and CE. Furthermore, the BL demonstrated an R² value of 0.599, indicating that 59.9% of the variance in BL was explained by SMMA, CE, and BT. Figure 2 illustrates the research model and the statistical results. Figure 2 presents the research model along with the results of statistical calculations.

Discussion

This study investigates the influence of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) conducted by hotels in Karanganyar Regency on Brand Loyalty, focusing on the mediating roles of customer engagement and brand trust. The findings indicate that SMMA exerts a positive effect on customer engagement, with TikTok marketing by hotels particularly effective in enhancing consumer engagement. The TikTok content stimulates consumer actions through cognitive engagement, interest development, and active participation, as evidenced by likes, comments, and shares. The f² value quantifies the strength of the

Table 6.
Mediation test results

Path	z Value	Decision
SMMA – CE - BT	2,089	Mediated
SMMA – CE - BL	7,588	Mediated
SMMA – BT - BL	5,138	Mediated
CE – BT - BL	2,034	Mediated

Source: Processed GSCA Pro Data Output, 2025

Table 7.
Coefficient of determination

Variables	R ²
CE	0,552
BT	0,490
BL	0,599

Source: Processed GSCA Pro Data Output, 2025

relationship between TikTok's marketing activities and user engagement. Trendy interactions, information accessibility, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) significantly augment consumer engagement.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Muchardie et al., (2016) and (Kumar & Aravamudhan, 2024), who identify the positive influence of social media marketing on customer engagement. Existing research corroborates the notion that social media marketing content effectively captures consumers' attention and enhances their engagement (Jung et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021). The results indicate that social media marketing significantly affects brand trust, suggesting that TikTok marketing activities effectively cultivate consumer trust in hotel brands. The f^2 value demonstrates the substantial influence of social media marketing on brand trust. These findings are consistent with those of Ebrahim (2019), Ibrahim, 2021), and Althuaini (2022), who also found that social media marketing activities enhance brand trust. Furthermore, research indicates that customer engagement positively affects brand trust, albeit with only a small effect. This suggests that consumers' psychological involvement enhances hotel brand trust, which is consistent with Islam & Rahman's (2016) findings. According to So et al. (2014) and Lee & Lee (2018), customer engagement reinforces brand trust in the tourism sector.

These findings suggest that customer engagement positively influences brand loyalty, and enhances hotel loyalty. These results are consistent with the studies by Alhomaïd & Hammouri (2025) and Muchardie et al. (2016), which demonstrate that customer engagement on social media affects brand loyalty. The f^2 value indicates that the effect of engagement on loyalty is moderate compared to that of brand trust, with social media engagement having a more substantial impact on hotel loyalty than trust. Brand trust positively influences brand loyalty, as consumers who trust hotels tend to develop loyalty towards them, corroborating the findings of Kim et al. (2020) and Puspaningrum (2020). Customer engagement mediates the relationship among social media marketing activities, brand trust, and loyalty. Hotel marketing content on TikTok enhances consumer engagement and trust when viewers interact with the content by liking, commenting, and sharing. These findings are consistent with those of Samarah et al. (2021), confirming that customer engagement through social media influences brand trust.

These findings indicate that customer engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Specifically, social media marketing conducted through TikTok has the potential to enhance consumer engagement, thereby fostering loyalty to hotels. The pathway from social media marketing to brand loyalty, facilitated by customer engagement,

exhibited a stronger influence than other mediation pathways. Consumers exposed to hotel content in TikTok experience heightened engagement, which subsequently leads to increased loyalty. These findings are consistent with the work of Muchardie et al. (2016) and other studies, such as Changani & Kumar (2024), which demonstrate that social media marketing impacts loyalty through community engagement. These findings indicate that brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Marketing initiatives for TikTok have the potential to enhance hotel trust, thereby fostering loyalty. These results are consistent with those of Althuwaini (2022), Puspaningrum, (2020), Ebrahim (2019), and Sohail et al. (2020), Ibrahim (2021) and (Kristiyono et al., 2023). Furthermore, brand trust mediates the impact of customer engagement on loyalty, as engagement in TikTok enhances hotel trust and loyalty. This finding is corroborated by Lee & Lee (2018), who found that customer engagement and brand trust contribute to brand loyalty.

Theoretical implication

This study advances the development of stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory within the realm of digital hospitality marketing. Theoretically, the findings enhance the comprehension of how external stimuli, specifically Social Media Marketing Activities on the TikTok platform, can affect consumers' internal psychological states (Organism), which subsequently results in loyal behavioral responses toward the brand (Response). Marketing activities on TikTok have been demonstrated as effective stimuli that elicit both engagement and trust. The results broaden the application of SOR Theory—originally utilized predominantly in offline behavior or e-commerce contexts—into the sphere of social media-based marketing within the hospitality industry. Moreover, this study underscores that customer engagement and brand trust constitute two essential components of the organizational phase within the SOR framework. Customer engagement reflects cognitive and emotional reactions to digital stimuli, whereas brand trust signifies a deeper and more enduring affective response. Finally, this research offers an empirical contribution by applying the SOR Theory to hotels in emerging tourism destinations such as the Karanganyar Regency. By extending

the framework to a developing tourism area, this study illustrates that stimulus–organism–response dynamics can effectively elucidate marketing phenomena in regional contexts characterized by limited yet dynamic market conditions.

Practical implication

The findings of this study offer strategic implications for hotel management to optimize digital marketing through TikTok. Hotel managers are advised to design social media marketing activities that are visually appealing, informative, and aligned with consumer lifestyles. Content that integrates elements of entertainment, information, and interaction has been demonstrated to be the most effective in capturing attention and stimulating engagement. Hotels are encouraged to leverage trending TikTok content by employing emotionally engaging narrative-based approaches such as storytelling marketing to enhance consumer connection with the brand. Furthermore, hotel management should create digital experiences to foster customer engagement and build brand trust. This can be accomplished through active interaction in the comments section, prompt responses to customer feedback, and presentation of authentic content that highlights real guest experiences. High levels of engagement facilitate the establishment of emotional connections, while honest and consistent communication reinforces customer trust in the hotel. Finally, to cultivate brand loyalty, hotel management must ensure consistency in messaging, service quality, and customer experience, both in digital environments and during in-person stays. By aligning online engagement with offline service quality, hotels can sustain long-term relationships, increase repeat visits, and enhance positive word of mouth among guests.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that hotels' social media marketing activities on TikTok positively influence customer engagement and brand trust. Customer engagement positively affects brand trust and loyalty, and brand trust further enhances brand loyalty. The effect of social media marketing activities on customer engagement was found to be the most significant, as evidenced by the coefficient of determination, highlighting its pivotal role. The

mediation analysis revealed that customer engagement serves as a mediator between social media marketing activities and brand trust and loyalty. Additionally, brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty and between customer engagement and loyalty. The mediation pathway from social media marketing activities to customer engagement and brand loyalty had the highest value. These findings corroborate all the proposed hypotheses and are consistent with prior research.

This study has significant practical implications for industry practitioners. Hotels must implement TikTok-based social media marketing strategies to enhance customer loyalty. The features of TikTok have significantly transformed consumers' perspectives and engagement patterns. Practitioners are advised to create engaging "edutainment" content, such as room tours and staff activities, while incorporating functional information regarding rates and facilities. Regular content uploads and utilization of real-time features, such as live Q&A sessions, enhance emotional engagement and demonstrate service transparency, thereby reinforcing brand trust. Engaging consumers through user-generated content campaigns further amplifies their engagement and fosters loyalty. TikTok should be optimized to facilitate direct bookings by engaged and loyal customers. This study contributes to the literature by examining the impact of social media marketing on customer engagement and brand trust, which, in turn, affects loyalty. This study investigates hotels in developing regions and focuses on TikTok, thereby expanding the perspectives of hospitality marketing research.

This study also contributes to the development of stimulus–organism–response (SOR) theory. These findings extend the understanding of how social media marketing activities on the TikTok platform serve as external stimuli that influence consumer engagement and trust toward hotels, ultimately leading to customer loyalty. This study broadens the application of the SOR framework to social media–based marketing within the hospitality industry. Moreover, it expands the theory's relevance to emerging tourism regions, demonstrating that the SOR framework remains applicable to regional marketing contexts characterized by smaller yet dynamic market segments.

This study had several limitations. Data were collected using a cross-sectional approach to capture consumer perceptions at a single point in time. This study was confined to hotels in Tawangmangu, Karanganyar Regency, Central Java, indicating the need for studies in other locations to enhance generalizability. This study exclusively examines TikTok, highlighting the need for research on additional social media platforms. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies on consumer perceptions and extend them to diverse contexts such as urban luxury hotels. Furthermore, studies should investigate other platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, and consider additional variables, such as generational differences, hotel service quality, and operational reliability, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer loyalty.

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