

# A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND TRUST ON BRAND LOYALTY AMONG INDIAN CONSUMERS

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## INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the rapid development of digital technology and internet accessibility has significantly transformed the marketing landscape worldwide. Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools that allow companies to communicate directly with consumers, promote products, and build long-term relationships with their target audience. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X (Twitter) have enabled organizations to move beyond traditional marketing methods and engage customers through interactive digital communication channels. Social media marketing enables companies to share brand-related content, interact with consumers, and encourage participation in brand communities. This interaction between consumers and brands is commonly referred to as social media brand engagement. According to Brodie et al. (2013), consumer brand engagement refers to a psychological state that occurs due to interactive experiences between consumers and brands. Social media platforms facilitate this engagement by allowing consumers to like, comment, share, and participate in discussions related to brands.

In the Indian context, the importance of social media marketing has increased rapidly due to the growth of smartphone usage and affordable internet services. India is one of the largest social media markets in the world, with millions of users actively engaging with brands online. As a result, businesses are increasingly investing in social media strategies to build brand awareness, improve customer relationships, and influence purchasing decisions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). One of the key outcomes of social media engagement is the development of brand trust. Brand trust refers to the consumer's willingness to rely on a brand based on the belief that it will deliver reliable products or services and fulfill its promises (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Trust plays a crucial role in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty in purchasing decisions. When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to maintain long-term relationships with it.

Social media platforms play an important role in building trust because they allow brands to communicate transparently and respond quickly to customer feedback. According to Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2013), interactions within social media brand communities can strengthen customer relationships and increase trust toward the brand.

Another critical concept in marketing is **brand loyalty**, which refers to a consumer's commitment to repurchase or continue using a particular brand despite the presence of competing alternatives. Loyal customers not only repeatedly purchase products but also promote the brand through positive word-of-mouth and recommendations (Oliver, 1999). Developing brand loyalty is essential for companies because loyal customers contribute to long-term profitability and reduce marketing costs.

Previous studies suggest that social media engagement can positively influence brand loyalty by strengthening emotional connections between consumers and brands. However, the relationship between engagement and loyalty is often mediated by brand trust. In other

words, when consumers engage with brands on social media platforms, they develop trust in the brand, which ultimately leads to stronger loyalty (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014).

Despite the growing importance of social media marketing, limited research has examined the combined relationship between social media brand engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty in the Indian market. Understanding these relationships is important for businesses that aim to develop effective digital marketing strategies and build long-term customer relationships.

## **NEED OF THE STUDY**

The rapid growth of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X has significantly changed the way companies communicate with their customers. Social media has become a powerful marketing tool that allows brands to interact directly with consumers, create meaningful engagement, and build long-term relationships. According to Vanessa Hudson and Lester Johnson, social media engagement helps organizations strengthen customer relationships and increase brand value.

Brand engagement on social media enables consumers to participate in brand-related activities such as liking, commenting, sharing, and creating content about brands. These interactions contribute to stronger emotional and psychological connections between consumers and brands. Research by Linda D. Hollebeek suggests that higher levels of consumer engagement with brands on social media can positively influence consumer attitudes and behaviors toward the brand.

Brand trust is another critical factor that influences consumer decision-making and long-term relationships with brands. Trust reduces perceived risk and increases consumers' willingness to rely on a brand. According to Chaudhuri Arjun and Morris B. Holbrook, brand trust plays a vital role in developing brand loyalty and encouraging repeat purchase behavior. In a highly competitive market like India, businesses increasingly rely on social media platforms to build strong brand relationships. However, there is still limited research that specifically examines how social media brand engagement contributes to building brand trust and how these factors collectively influence brand loyalty among Indian consumers. Therefore, this study is necessary to analyze the relationship between social media brand engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty in the Indian context. The findings will help marketers and organizations develop more effective social media strategies to enhance customer loyalty and long-term brand success.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To examine the level of social media brand engagement among consumers using platforms such as Instagram and Facebook.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How do social media brand engagement influence consumer perception of brands?
2. What is the relationship between social media brand engagement and brand trust?
3. Does brand trust significantly affect brand loyalty among consumers?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the era of digital connectivity, social media has emerged as a pivotal arena for brands to cultivate and nurture relationships with consumers. The rapid evolution of online platforms has prompted scholars to delve into the intricate dynamics of customer-brand interactions in the virtual realm. Central to this exploration is the concept of customer brand engagement

(CBE) within social media, a multifaceted construct that intertwines cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. As brands increasingly recognize the significance of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours, there is a need for a comprehensive examination of the components that define and drive engagement within this unique context. In recent decades, the importance of social networks has expanded significantly, shifting from a concentration on extremely narrow communities such as open-source software networks to a generalization in very varied areas of activity. Social media is an internet-based software platform that allows internet users worldwide to communicate, interact, and share their opinions, ideas, experiences, relationships, and information (Abdulalem Mohammed, 2019). This study expanded on the work of Van Asperen et al. (2018), who investigated consumer involvement from an online viewpoint (i.e., via social networking websites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook), which are among the most popular platform brands in social media (Abdulalem Mohammed, 2019). Customer engagement on these sites consists of two main elements: contributions to social media content or actively using social media (e.g., conversing, reacting, recommending, sharing, and adding) and consumption of social media content or passively using social media (e.g., reading, viewing, and watching) (Abdulalem Mohammed, 2019). This literature review explores the subtle threads of social media engagement, with a specific focus on its impact on brand loyalty. Grounded in the multidimensional nature of CBE, our exploration encompasses cognitive processing, affective responses, and behavioural manifestation. By delving into the cognitive willingness of consumers to invest in interactions with specific brand objects, we aim to capture the essence of engagement—both positive and constructive.

The conceptualization of social media engagement within this review extends beyond a mere transactional perspective; rather, it hones in on the formation of online brand communities fostered through various social media platforms (Dessart, 2017). Recognizing the nascent stage of research on negative engagement, our focus lies on understanding the positive outcomes and experiences that engender brand loyalty in the digital domain. As brand loyalty emerges as a pivotal outcome of effective social media engagement, the researcher pays attention to its significance in measuring the strength of customer-brand relationships. While acknowledging the dual nature of loyalty -encompassing both behavioural and attitudinal intentions - the author orients discussion towards the behavioural dimension, aligning with the prevalent measurement trends in the social media marketing literature (Samarah et al., 2022). Researcher identifies Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs) as noteworthy players, who utilize social media as a conduit for building robust, mutual relationships with customers, thereby solidifying the positive effects of social media brand engagement on brand loyalty. Thereafter, the study exploration takes a deeper dive into the building blocks of social media engagement – that is, brand interactivity and brand involvement. The author examined perceived brand interactivity, a relatively novel concept, for its potential to elevate customer engagement by strengthening brand-customer relationships (Siddik Bozkurt, 2021). Also, brand involvement—how important a consumer thinks a brand is to them because of their own needs, values, and interests—becomes to light as an important factor that needs to be looked at in the context of CBE (Samarah et al., 2022). In the realm of social media, the intertwined relationship between customer brand engagement and brand trust forms the crux of our investigation. Recognizing brand trust as a linchpin in buyer-seller relationships, we set out to unravel the impact of CBE on brand trust, considering its pivotal role in shaping strategic brand decisions (Dessart, 2017). As the exploration unfolds, the study examines the mediating role of brand trust, positioning it as a critical factor that not only enhances purchase intention but also acts as a cognitive bridge between customer engagement and brand loyalty (Dessart, 2017). This literature review, thus, navigates the complex landscape

of social media engagement, brand loyalty, and the pivotal role played by brand trust - a triad that forms the bedrock of effective brand-consumer relationships in the digital age.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**

The concept of customer brand engagement (CBE) in social media is introduced as a multi-dimensional construct with cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions, emphasizing the need for further investigation. The study adopts a multidimensional approach to measure CBE, focusing on cognitive processing, affection, and activation dimensions (Pongpaew, 2017). The study begins by defining consumer engagement as a psychological willingness to invest in interactions with specific objects, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. Author contextualized Social media engagement as a unique occurrence within the broader spectrum of consumer engagement, with a focus on online brand communities formed through social media platforms (Dessart, 2017). The study prioritizes on positive engagement experiences focusing solely on positive engagement experiences, and the study explores the positive outcomes of engagement, while excluding negative engagement. Analyzing the impact of social media engagement on brand loyalty involves understanding how organizations utilize various channels to foster open communication with consumers. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for engaging target audiences, leading to enhanced brand experiences and increased loyalty. Active engagement allowed consumers to express feedback, strengthening their commitment to the brand. Maintaining a strong social media presence and facilitating meaningful interactions can positively impact brand loyalty (Ajina, 2019).

## **BRAND LOYALTY**

For several decades, a new movement from transactional to relationship marketing has been observed, e.g., creating long-term ties through client contacts and interactions. Customer engagement is one of the new concepts that have received significant attention in academic research and industry, such as technological environments, making it one of the fastest-growing research areas in recent years. Consumers act as co-creators for brands and companies by providing information about the brand and the product to other consumers (Mishra, 2019). Consumer co-creation is fuelled by publishing evaluations on social media, which increases their engagement. It can also raise awareness about client preferences on social media channels. Social interactivity is linked to various elements such as family influence, TV ads, peer influence, and society. These elements are crucial in increasing consumer involvement. The study's findings highlighted television advertisements as a crucial influence in influencing customer engagement behaviour, which leads to the creation of brand loyalty. Behavioural and cognitive intentions are both included in the concept of brand loyalty, which has been proven to be an essential component in determining the strength of customer-brand interactions (Samarah et al., 2022). A focus on behavioural intentions is adopted in this study, which is in line with the widespread measurement of loyalty in the literature on social media marketing.

Ting, Abbasi, and Ahmed (2021) highlighted the evolving dynamics of social interactions between organizations and consumers, emphasizing the transformative effects of social media marketing strategies. Their findings underscored the significance of understanding social interactivity's impact on customer engagement behaviour, elucidating its role in fostering lasting relationships between consumers and brands. Furthermore, they proposed a research framework that emphasizes the importance of social interactivity in driving customer engagement behaviour, ultimately influencing brand loyalty. Ahmed (2019) identifies small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs) as successful techniques for creating mutual

relationships with customers using social media. This reinforces the positive influence that social media brand engagement has on brand loyalty. Park and Ha (2021) emphasized the pivotal role of consumer engagement within brand-hosted social media communities in fostering brand loyalty. They highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of consumer engagement, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects. The authors argued that consumer engagement with brand-hosted social media communities has a positive impact on brand loyalty, suggesting that active participation and meaningful interactions within these communities lead to stronger brand allegiance.

## **BRAND INTERACTIVITY AND CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

Researchers have determined that perceived brand interactivity, a relatively recent concept, can enhance customer engagement in social media. Marketers are currently highlighting the interactive feature of social media as a tool for improving relationships between brands and their customers. This research suggests that there is a favourable connection between social media brand engagement and customer behaviour evaluation (CBE), with response speed and message type being important factors. Although there has been a lot of discussion in the academic literature, there is no agreement on the exact definition of interactivity. Interactivity is defined by researchers based on various processes, traits, and perceptions (Siddik Bozkurt, 2021). Interactivity can be defined in two ways. Some people define it as a website's technical features, such as its speed. Others refer to it as a perceptual aspect. As per (Siddik Bozkurt, 2021), the speed at which a response is given and the type or quality of the communication, increase the perception of involvement. Consumers expect prompt and efficient responses when they send messages via a chatbot or any other online interface. When the website meets consumers' expectations, they perceive it as interactive. Similarly, if a business can offer customers information that is relevant to their previous message or inquiry on social media, they are more inclined to see the brand as interactive. In this analysis, it explores the level of interaction on social media platforms by examining both the substance of the messages and the pace at which they are responded to. Receivers form the impression that the sender is actively listening and engaging with them promptly by analyzing the substance of the communication and the speed of the answer (Ahmed, 2019). The conceptualization aligns with the perspective, which suggests that the way customers perceive interactivity is more important than specific aspects of a medium, such as a website. Perceived social media interactivity, as defined by Ahmed (2019), refers to the customer's perception of the brand's level of interaction in terms of message relevancy and reaction speed on social media.

## **BRAND INVOLVEMENT AND CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

The concept of brand involvement and customer brand engagement in social media, defined as an individual's perceived relevance of an object based on their inherent needs, values, and interests, is gaining significant attention. The study recognizes brand involvement as an influential antecedent, distinguishing it from customer engagement, and explores its relationship with CBE on social media. Brand involvement in social media is crucial for fostering long-term relationships and sustaining brand loyalty. Social media platforms serve as key arenas for customer participation and co-production, facilitating interactive relationships with brands. On social media, customer brand engagement (CBE) influences brand satisfaction and loyalty, underscoring the importance of active customer engagement. Integrating brand involvement and CBE in social media strategies is essential for enhancing brand satisfaction and fostering long-term loyalty. (Apenes Solem, 2016).

## **CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND TRUST IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

The study acknowledges customer brand engagement and brand trust in social media as critical variables that influence customer relationships and acts as a glue to hold buyer-seller relationships together. The study emphasizes the need to investigate the impact of CBE on brand trust over social media platforms, considering its significant role in strategic brand decisions (Dessart, 2017). Lima, Irigaray, and Lourenco (2019) provided valuable insights into consumer engagement on social media, particularly within virtual brand communities (VBCs). They highlight the evolving dynamics of online interactions and the significance of engagement in shaping consumer-brand relationships. The study underscored the need for empirical research in understanding and measuring consumer engagement, especially within the context of VBCs. By exploring the various dimensions of engagement, such as learning, sharing, advocacy, socializing, and co-creation, the authors offered a comprehensive framework for analyzing consumer behaviour on social media platforms. This framework elucidates the multifaceted nature of engagement and its potential implications for brand loyalty. Consumer engagement on social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook plays a pivotal role in shaping brand loyalty (Jayasingh, 2019). As consumers actively participate in online brand communities through activities such as liking, commenting, and sharing, they develop stronger emotional connections with the brand. This engagement behavior not only enhances perceived brand value and customer satisfaction, but also fosters brand loyalty.

## **ONLINE INTERACTION PROPENSITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**

Online interaction propensity refers to an individual's inclination, based on their traits, to engage in online social interactions. Online interaction propensity refers to an individual's inclination to engage in online interactions. Although one individual may have a propensity to participate, another individual may have a predisposition to not participate, even when they have equal access and incentive circumstances (Abuljadail and Ha, 2019). Because online interaction propensity is trait-based, everyone should exhibit distinct characteristics in this regard. Interaction is the fundamental element for achieving success in social media. The website's interactive features and the firm's marketing initiatives can serve as facilitators for user interactions (Mishra, 2019). However, it is important to note that not all users engage with similar frequency or intensity when presented with the opportunity. Users can have different tendencies to either engage or avoid online contact. Companies mistakenly assume that all users on social media are uniform. Furthermore, the user has the ultimate authority to choose to engage in online communication; the medium and the firm's social media marketing efforts may only assist in facilitating that decision (Mishra, 2019). Consumers' interaction with social media information that is associated with a certain brand's social media engagement with brand-related material, also known as consumers' engagement with brand-related social media content, specifically gauges the level of user interaction with brand-related content on social media platforms rather than just measuring their overall engagement with the brand itself. In addition, it assesses involvement solely as a behavioural construct, disregarding its cognitive and affective aspects (Gligor and Bozkurt, 2019). Social media engagement refers to the relatively easier and more economical framework of consumers' online behaviours related to a brand. As initially described by marketers, firms can use social media engagement to measure consumers' level of involvement on social media platforms. Consumers' online brand-related activities encompass a variety of online actions they undertake that are associ

associated with a brand. These activities can involve different levels of interaction and engagement, including consuming, contributing to, and creating media content. Social media participation encompasses three fundamental aspects: consumption, contribution, and

production. These elements encompass a consumer's brand-related actions, ranging from minimal to significant levels of consumer involvement. The act of using or consuming something: These brand-related actions indicate the lowest level of consumer involvement on social media. It applies to people who consume brand-related content without actively contributing (Mishra, 2019). The consumer's interaction with content on social media encompasses both the company's and users' content. This has been identified as the most common form of brand-related behaviour among consumers (Mishra, 2019). The act of passively observing a brand's images, advertising, and videos on social media platforms exemplifies the consumption aspect of brand-related activities. Contribution: The contribution encompasses both interactions between peers and interactions between peers and content regarding brands (Mishra, 2019). This form of brand-related social media engagement refers to consumers actively contributing to pre-existing brand-related material published by a firm or another individual.

## **BRAND TRUST**

Brand trust is defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (June-Hyuk Kwon, 2021). Trust is a crucial factor for success in any strategic alliance, and trust is the cornerstone of strategic partnerships. Trust, therefore, is a critical factor between the two parties in a successful relationship. Trust includes feelings that consumers can rely upon the company, and the lack of such feelings leads to hesitations in getting into exchanges with companies. Concerning the implications of trust (or the lack of it) on business exchanges, we use the trust construct as an important factor in predicting consumers' future intentions. Trust eases discomfort and facilitates customers' purchase decisions. Trust is central to achieving cooperation, and it leads to higher levels of loyalty. Trust is the most important antecedent to brand loyalty because it creates an ongoing process for the continuation and maintenance of the relationship. Hence, the literature provides support for the role of trust in moderating loyalty and strengthening customer commitment. A consistent brand identity (e.g., brand heritage) can have a positive impact on trust, loyalty, and commitment (June-Hyuk Kwon, 2021).

A brand represents all intangible trust-generating activities, and in the absence of human interaction, it can be a symbol of quality and assurance that helps build trust. Brand trust is expressed in the consumer's belief that a brand will perform a specific function, and develops from past experiences and previous interactions. Consumers' belief in the brand's ability to perform its specified functions is a key factor in their interactions with business relationships (Ahmed et al., 2019). (June-Hyuk Kwon, 2021) has demonstrated the importance of establishing trust in maintaining buyer-seller relationships Trustworthy brands consistently provide value to consumers by developing, producing, selling, servicing, and advertising their products, even in the face of brand crises. Consumers build brand trust based on expectations of the organization's behaviour and positive beliefs about the brand's product performance (June-Hyuk Kwon, 2021). Brand trust is also important in promoting purchases over the Internet which has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and experiences. The process by which an individual builds a trusting image of a brand is based on the customer's experiences with the brand. Brands influence consumers through their experience attributes, which include direct contact (evaluation, use, consumer satisfaction, etc.) and indirect contact (advertising, word of mouth, and brand reputation) (June-Hyuk Kwon, 2021). Having contact with a brand through a variety of consumer experiences is the source of brand trust, resulting in the brand becoming more relevant and important to consumers. This leads to the brand having higher "self-relevance" in the eyes of the consumer; that is, consumers have more positive associations with the brand (June-Hyuk Kwon, 2021). When the business fulfils its

promises, consumers experience greater overall satisfaction, and the brand fosters trust by safeguarding their welfare and interests. Brand trust recognition extends beyond the consumer's satisfaction with the functional performance and characteristics of the product. Research on trust provides an appropriate schema for conceptualizing and measuring qualitative brand value. Trust conceptualizes brand value between consumers and brands and is one of the most important factors in this relationship. The characteristics of trust include ability, benevolence, and integrity, and trust is one of the determinants of brand loyalty because it forms a substantial bond between the brand and the customer (June-Hyuk Kwon, 2021).

## **MEDIATING EFFECT OF BRAND TRUST**

The mediating effect of brand trust establishes brand trust as a vital factor in enhancing purchase intention and is positively related to customer experience and satisfaction. The author emphasizes the positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty, where trust mediates the relationship between customer engagement and brand loyalty (Dessart, 2017).

## **HYPOTHESES**

A list of the hypotheses formulated for testing and proving relationships is as follows:

*H1: Brand interactivity positively influences customer brand engagement on social media.*

*H2: Brand involvement positively influences customer brand engagement on social media.*

*H3: Online interaction propensity positively influences customer brand engagement on social media.*

*H4: Customer brand engagement positively influences brand trust on social media.*

*H5: Brand trust positively influences brand loyalty on social media.*

*H6: Customer brand engagement positively influences brand loyalty on social media.*

*H7: Brand trust mediates the positive influence of customer brand engagement on brand loyalty on social media.*

## **VARIABLES IN THE STUDY**

The independent variables used in the study were social media brand involvement; social media brand interactivity, and online interaction propensity. The mediating variable was brand trust, and the dependent variable was brand loyalty.

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF VARIABLES**

The operational definition of the variables used in the study is detailed as follows:

1. **Social media brand involvement:** social media brand involvement refers to the extent to which an individual actively participates, engages, and interacts with a brand on social media platforms (Dessart, 2017).

Active participation: this involves actions such as liking, sharing, commenting, or creating content related to the brand on social media platforms. Frequency of engagement: it considers how often an individual interacts with the brand on social media, reflecting the depth of their involvement.

2. **Social media brand interactivity:** social media brand interactivity is defined as the degree to which a brand on social media facilitates two-way communication, engagement, and responsiveness with its audience (Samarah et al., 2022). Two-way communication: the

brand's responsiveness to customer comments, messages, and feedback, creates a dialogue rather than one-sided communication. Engagement Features: This includes features like polls, quizzes, or interactive content that encourage user participation and interaction.

**3. Online interaction propensity:** this refers to an individual's inclination or likelihood to engage in online interactions, discussions, or activities related to a brand on social media platforms (Dessart, 2017). Frequency of online interaction: these measures how often an individual initiates or participates in discussions, polls, or other online activities related to the brand. Active contribution: reflects the individual's willingness to contribute their thoughts, ideas, or content to the online brand community.

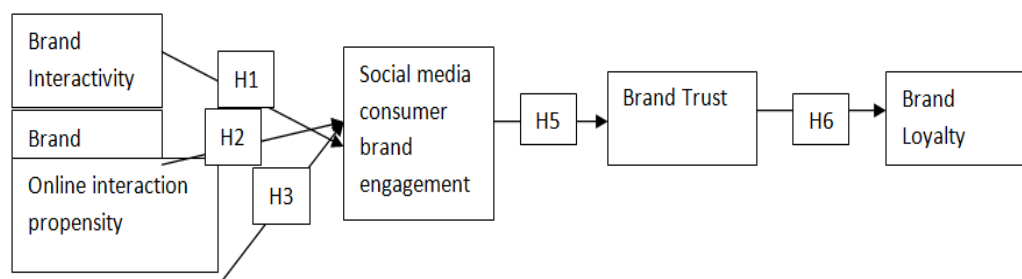
**4. Brand trust:** brand trust is the confidence and reliance that consumers place on a brand, considering its credibility, reliability, and the perceived sincerity of its interactions on social media (Samarah et al., 2022).

**Credibility:** the perceived believability and authenticity of the brand's content and interactions on social media.

**Reliability:** consistency in delivering on promises, providing accurate information, and meeting customer expectations.

**5. Brand loyalty:** On social media, a consumer demonstrates a consistent and enduring commitment to a brand, often manifested through repeated engagement, positive word-of-mouth, and resistance to switching to competing brands (Samarah et al., 2022).

**Repeated engagement:** the frequency with which a consumer continues to interact with the brand over time. **Positive word-of-mouth:** the likelihood that a consumer will recommend the brand to others based on their positive experiences. **Resistance to switch:** the level of commitment that makes a consumer less likely to switch to competing brands, even when there are alternatives.



## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used for this study was quantitative, aiming to investigate the impact of social media engagement on brand loyalty. The study utilized surveys to gather information from consumers in Kerala, who engaged with brands on social media platforms. The population under consideration consisted of consumers within the state of Kerala who actively engage with brands on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The sample size was 300 consumers, who actively engaged with brands on social media. We employ convenience sampling, selecting participants based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. The screening question, which concentrates on the frequency and duration of social media usage, guaranteed the active engagement of the selected participants with the platforms. Practical considerations and the desire for a representative sample within the constraints of the study determined sample size. The researcher obtained the respondents' input through structured questionnaires as the primary data source for this

research. The researcher designed the questionnaires to capture information on social media engagement, brand involvement, brand interactivity, online interaction propensity, purchase intentions, brand loyalty, and brand trust. The data collection method involved distributing these questionnaires to selected sample of consumers in Kerala. The data collection period was set at four weeks to ensure a focused and timely gathering of responses. Google Forms were designed to collect the data online by sending the forms through email to the chosen respondents. The researcher measured the responses on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The data collected was analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The researcher conducted the data analysis using the software SMART PLS 4.0. The researcher employed SPSS to generate descriptive statistics for the data collected.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

### **DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Descriptive statistics offer concise information about characteristics and value distribution within one or more datasets. Classical descriptive statistics provide analysts with a comprehensive overview of the central tendency and the degree of variation in datasets. They are valuable for interpreting the distribution of data and for comparing different data distributions (Lee and Roberts, 2020).

The mean value of variables was measured on a 5-point scale and is shown between 3.52 and 3.83. The standard deviation of the variables is small, indicating that the point is close to the mean value. Most of the 300 respondents surveyed (57.33%) fell within the 18–25 age range. This indicates that a significant proportion of the sample comes from a younger demographic. The 26-33 age group comprises 10.33% of the respondents, the 33-40 age group constitutes 14.67% of the sample, and the 40-47 age group makes up 17.67%. The income level data revealed that a significant portion of the 300 respondents (46.33%) reported no income, indicating that despite their lack of personal income, this group actively engaged with social media and demonstrated brand specificity. Additionally, there were notable percentages in the income ranges of INR (Indian Rupees) 1,00,000 to INR 2,00,000 (20.00%), INR 2,00,000 to INR 3,00,000 (12.33%), INR 3,00,000 to INR 4,00,000 (14.33%), and above INR 4,00,000 (7.0%). The data descriptive analysis results showed that most respondents who responded (68.33%), use social media platforms multiple times a day. This high frequency meant that many of the respondents surveyed regularly used platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. On the other hand, fewer people said they used social media once a day (17.67%), a few times a week (12.33%), or not at all (1.67%). The result implied that consumers are actively engaging in social media.

### **RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

The reliability and validity tests for all the variables.

Cronbach's alpha is a statistical measure used to assess the reliability of Likert scale questions used to measure variables. The alpha score quantifies the degree of interrelation among a set of items and serves as a metric for assessing internal consistency. Authors generally regard a score of 0.60 or above as appropriate and indicative of dependable data. From the value of Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.754 to 0.927 which indicates the internal consistency and reliability among the variables. Many statisticians have indicated that Cronbach's alpha over 0.6 is also, acceptable (Shelby, 2011). The highest Cronbach's alpha value of 0.927 is for social media consumer brand engagement, and then comes online interaction propensity at 0.865, brand loyalty at 0.754, followed by social media interactivity and brand trust. From the

value of composite reliability ranges from 0.783 – 0.927 which implies that all constructs have met the recommended criterion and it indicates that the model fits the data well. The highest composite reliability is for Social Media Customer Brand engagement, and then comes the Online Interaction Propensity variable at a score of 0.867.

### **CONVERGENCE VALIDITY**

The convergence validity quantifies the extent to which each variable captures variance. The collective convergence validity from all variables must exceed 0.5. Based on **Table 2**, it is evident that the convergence validity of all the variables is greater than 0.5, as evidenced by the values of AVE (average variance extracted). This suggests that the underlying concept explains a substantial portion of its variance.

### **DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY**

The purpose of the discriminant validity assessment is to verify that a reflective construct has stronger relationships with its indicators than with those of any other construct in the PLS path model (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity assessment has become a generally accepted prerequisite for analysing relationships between reflectively measured constructs.

According to the Fornier-Larcker criterion (the square root of the AVE of the construct should be greater than the correlation between the construct and other constructs), the AVE for each variable along the diagonal elements, is greater than the squared correlations with all other latent variables. As diagonal values are higher than the values in their respective columns, the study proves discriminant validity. Thus, discriminant validity was established among the variables. This implies that all constructs (brand loyalty, brand trust, online interaction propensity, social media brand interactivity, social media brand involvement, and social media customer brand engagement) in the model have discriminant validity, indicating that they are distinct from each other.

### **THEORETICAL IMPLICATION**

The results of the study contributed value addition to academic knowledge and added practical application and value addition to social media brand-customer engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty. There are many specific theoretical contributions to the study. Brand involvement positively affected customer brand engagement on social media. This suggests that when brands actively involve customers in their social media activities and initiatives, it leads to higher levels of engagement and interaction. Online interaction propensity also showed a positive influence on customer brand engagement. This indicates that customers who are more inclined to engage in online interactions are likely to engage more with brands on social media platforms. Moreover, customer brand engagement significantly contributed to increased brand trust, which, in turn, positively influenced brand loyalty. This suggests that when customers actively engage with a brand on social media, it fosters trust in the brand, leading to stronger brand-consumer relationships. Brand trust positively influences brand loyalty on social media. This implies that when consumers trust a brand on social media platforms, they are more likely to exhibit loyalty towards that brand, which may lead to repeat purchases. The study establishes that customer brand engagement has a positive influence on brand loyalty in the context of social media. This suggests that active customer engagement on social media platforms builds stronger brand loyalty among consumers. Brand trust emerged as a crucial mediator, indicating that a trusting relationship between consumers and brands on social media enhances brand loyalty. The findings reflect the importance of social media consumer brand engagement, the mediating role of trust, and the distinct impact of demographic factors. By analysing and adapting to these insights,

organizations can refine their social media strategies to navigate and thrive in the evolving landscape of brand-consumer relationships.

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