



Enhancing OTA's Brand Loyalty: Brand Ambassadors, Social Media Marketing, and the Power of Trust

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Abstract. The airline and travel industry is rapidly growing due to advancements in internet technology, including Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). This study examines the impact of brand ambassadors and social media marketing on brand loyalty among OTA users in DKI Jakarta, with brand trust as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative descriptive method, data from 238 respondents were collected through an online survey and analyzed with PLS-SEM using SmartPLS4. Results show that brand ambassadors and brand trust enhance loyalty, while social media marketing has a negative and insignificant effect. Additionally, brand ambassadors and social media marketing increase brand trust, which in turn strengthens loyalty. These findings highlight the crucial role of brand ambassadors in building trust and loyalty, rather than relying solely on social media marketing.

Keywords: Online Travel Agency, Brand Ambassador, Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty.

1 Introduction

Digitalization has profoundly transformed various aspects of life, including the travel industry. As highlighted in a report by Haryanto [1], Indonesia's Communications and Information Minister, Budi Arie Setiadi, noted an increase in the Indonesian Digital Society Index (IMDI) score, reflecting the growing digital competence of Indonesians. In 2024, the IMDI score rose to 43.34 from 43.18 in 2023 [1]. Digitalization has reshaped travel operations and consumer interactions. Previously, people booked tickets, accommodations, and tours through physical agents. Now, technology allows them to access these services online, compare prices, and book more efficiently.

The internet has transformed booking through Online Travel Agents (OTAs), modernizing traditional agencies and shaping the tourism industry. In this digital era, the tourism sector operates as a dynamic global network, pushing traditional agents to adapt. As part of these adaptations, brand ambassadors now play a key role in OTA marketing, passionately promoting brands and spreading product or services information [2]. When consumers feel attached to admired public figures, they are more likely to trust the brand, build long-term relationships, and develop brand loyalty. Brand loyalty refers to the long-term commitment and connection between customers and a specific brand [3], is crucial for OTAs to maintain a competitive edge in an intensely contested market. Loyal customers resist switching despite similar promotions, valuing

convenience, trust, and benefits. OTAs can sustain brand loyalty through strategic marketing and social media.

Social media marketing has become a crucial component of modern marketing strategies. By utilizing platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, companies can distribute compelling content to capture audience interest and broaden their reach [4]. For OTAs, active engagement creates a personalized experience, while authentic interactions strengthen trust and reinforce brand trust through security and reliability. Consumers develop this perception of reliability through their experiences and interactions, which ultimately shape their confidence in the brand [5].

This study seeks to build upon previous research by exploring the connection between brand ambassadors, social media marketing, and brand loyalty among OTA users in Jakarta. Aisyah's research [6] discovered that brand ambassadors did not have a direct or indirect impact on trust and brand loyalty, whereas Juliono et al. [7] reported a positive and significant effect. By examining these varying perspectives, this study analyzes the impact of brand ambassadors and social media marketing on OTA brand loyalty, with brand trust as a mediator. The findings offer insights to help OTAs strengthen loyalty and gain a competitive edge.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Brand Ambassador and Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty

Brand ambassadors are people who demonstrate enthusiasm and dedication toward a brand and are tasked with promoting and disseminating information about its products or services [2]. Social media marketing focuses on leveraging social media platforms to develop engaging content, attract audience interest, expand a company's reach [4].

Brand ambassadors and social media marketing both play vital roles in strengthening brand loyalty by shaping consumer perceptions and fostering engagement. Studies by Astika & Nurfebiaraning [8] confirm their significant impact on brand loyalty.

Meanwhile, social media marketing enhances brand-consumer interactions by shaping consumer experiences and influencing preferences, ultimately fostering loyalty. Research by Al-Dmour et al. [9] highlights its effectiveness in strengthening brand-consumer relationships and increasing loyalty.

H1: Brand Ambassadors positively and significantly influence the Brand Loyalty of online travel agent (OTA) application users in Jakarta.

H2: Social Media Marketing positively and significantly influences the Brand Loyalty of online travel agent (OTA) application users in Jakarta.

2.2 Brand Ambassador and Social Media Marketing on Brand Trust

Brand ambassadors and social media marketing play essential roles in strengthening brand trust by fostering credibility and emotional connections with consumers. Studies by Digdowiseiso et al. [10] confirm the positive and significant impact of brand ambassadors on brand trust.

Similarly, social media marketing enhances trust by providing transparent communication, engaging content, and authentic testimonials. Research by Sohail et al. [11], highlights its effectiveness in establishing credibility and strengthening consumer trust in a brand.

H3: Brand Ambassadors positively and significantly influence Brand Trust of online travel agent (OTA) application users in Jakarta.

H4: Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant influence on Brand Trust of online travel agent (OTA) application users in Jakarta.

2.3 Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty

Brand trust is defined as a consumer's belief in a brand's reliability, shaped by their experiences and interactions that meet their expectations [5]. Brand loyalty represents a consumer's lasting dedication to a brand, influenced by satisfaction and driving repeat purchases [12]. Research by Sohail et al. [11] and Aditya & Tjokrosaputro [13] confirms that brand trust has a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty.

H5: Brand Trust positively and significantly influences Brand Loyalty of online travel agent (OTA) application users in Jakarta.

2.4 Brand Ambassador and Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust

Brand ambassadors and social media marketing are crucial in building consumer trust, which strengthens brand loyalty. Ambassadors enhance relationships, build confidence, and foster loyalty, as though by Aisyah [6] found no significant mediation by brand trust. Social media marketing reinforces trust through consistent engagement, increasing purchase intentions. Studies by Wantini & Yudiana [3] confirm that brand trust mediates the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty, solidifying consumer commitment.

H6: Brand Trust has a positive and significant influence as a mediator between Brand Ambassadors and Brand Loyalty of online travel agent (OTA) application users in Jakarta.

H7: Brand Trust has a positive and significant influence as a mediator between Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty for online travel agent (OTA) application users in Jakarta.

This research model aims to provide deeper insights into how gastronomy image, memorable tourism experience, and customer satisfaction interact to influence behavioral intention with relation to Blok M culinary. The following illustrates the research model:

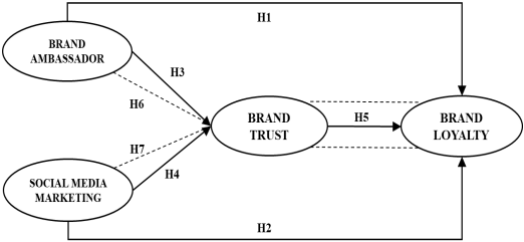


Fig. 1. Research Model

3 Method

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive approach, analyzing statistical data from specific samples. Data is gathered through online questionnaires (google form) using predetermined research tools. Employing a cross-sectional design, it examines phenomena at a single point in time. Given the unknown population size, non-probability sampling is used, where samples are selected without random procedures. The study includes 238 respondents, all online travel agent application users residing in DKI Jakarta.

Table 1. Variable Measurement

Variable	Code	Indicator
Brand Ambassador	BA1	Ji Chang Wook is a reliable person. [14]
	BA2	Ji Chang Wook has experience as a brand ambassador. [14]
	BA3	Ji Chang Wook is an interesting person. [14]
	BA4	I support Ji Chang Wook as a brand ambassador for an OTA. [14]
Social Media Marketing	SMM1	The content presented on the OTA's Instagram social media catches my attention. [15]
	SMM2	The content presented on the OTA's Instagram social media is relevant to my needs and preferences. [15]
	SMM3	The appearance of Instagram social media helps me recognize the OTA. [15]
	SMM4	The OTA's Instagram social media provides various interaction options, such as commenting or sending messages. [15]
	SMM5	The content uploaded on the OTA's Instagram social media contains easily understandable information. [15]
Brand Trust	BT1	I feel confident in the quality of the OTA. [16]
	BT2	The OTA offers services that meet consumer needs. [16]
	BT3	There is no perceived risk when using the OTA. [16]
	BT4	The OTA can solve my problems. [16]
	BT5	The OTA always takes action to protect consumer needs. [16]
Brand Loyalty	BL1	If other apps offer lower prices, I will still choose one OTA app. [17]
	BL2	I am willing to be a loyal customer. [17]
	BL3	I will use the OTA app again. [17]
	BL4	I have no intention of switching to another app that offers similar services. [17]

BL5	I will recommend a certain OTA as the best online travel agent. [17]
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4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

This study initially involved 246 respondents, but 8 did not meet the criteria. The final sample consisted of 238 Jakarta-based OTA users. Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4.0. Most respondents were women (67.6%), aged 17-21 (49.2%), and students (55.5%). The majority resided in West Jakarta (32.4%), had a monthly income below Rp5,000,000 (47.1%), and expenses under Rp3,000,000 (57.1%). Over the past year, most respondents used OTA applications 1 to 3 times (64.3%). The final validity results are shown below.

Table 2. Outer Model

Variable	Indicator	Loading	CA	CR	AVE	HTMT		
						BA	BL	BT
<i>Brand Ambassador (BA)</i>	BA1	0.893	0.898	0.898	0.767	-	-	-
	BA2	0.853						
	BA3	0.876						
	BA4	0.879						
<i>Brand Loyalty (BL)</i>	BL1	0.814	0.903	0.908	0.720	0.664	-	-
	BL2	0.838						
	BL3	0.858						
	BL4	0.850						
	BL5	0.883						
<i>Brand Trust (BT)</i>	BT1	0.773	0.875	0.896	0.663	0.592	0.735	-
	BT2	0.815						
	BT3	0.778						
	BT4	0.859						
	BT5	0.843						
<i>Social Media Marketing (SMM)</i>	SMM1	0.829	0.903	0.925	0.717	0.547	0.525	0.579
	SMM2	0.874						
	SMM3	0.867						
	SMM4	0.821						
	SMM5	0.842						

Notes: Loading: Standardized loading. CA: Cronbach's Alpha. CR: Composite Reliability. AVE: Average Variance Extracted. HTMT: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations

The outer model test begins with convergent validity, assessed through AVE and Outer Loading. Discriminant validity is evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, Cross-loading, and HTMT, as described by Hair et al. [18]. This analysis confirms the

validity of brand ambassador, brand loyalty, brand trust, and social media marketing variables.

4.2 Reliability Test

Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Table 2 confirms that Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability for brand ambassador, brand loyalty, brand trust, and social media marketing meet the required thresholds, validating the reliability of the measurements.

4.3 Inner Model

R-square Test

In this study, brand loyalty has an R^2 of 0.534 (moderate), explaining 53.4% of the variance, while 46.6% remains unexplained. Brand trust has an R^2 of 0.402 (weak), leaving 59.8% of the variance unexplained.

F-square (f^2) Test

A The f^2 value is used to measure the effect size. Table 3 shows the Effect Size (f^2) analysis: the f^2 value for brand ambassadors on brand loyalty is 0.134 (modest effect), while social media marketing on brand loyalty is 0.011 (no effect). Brand ambassadors (0.156) and social media marketing (0.177) both have a moderate effect on brand trust. Lastly, brand trust on brand loyalty has an f^2 of 0.261, indicating a moderate effect.

Hypothesis Test

A hypothesis is discarded when the t-statistic is lower than 1.96 and the p-value is greater than 0.05. The data analysis results in Table 3 show that H1, H3, H4, and H5 hypotheses are supported, indicating a positive and significant relationship. However, hypothesis 2, concerning the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty, is rejected. Table 3 confirms that brand trust plays a significant mediating role in strengthening the relationship between brand ambassadors and brand loyalty, as well as between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Table 3. Inner Model

	<i>Variable Relationship</i>	<i>Path</i>	f^2	t-Statistics	p-Values	Explanation
H ₁	BA → BL	0.311	0.134	2.913	0.002	Accepted
H ₂	SMM→BL	0.089	0.011	0.844	0.199	Rejected
H ₃	BA → BT	0.354	0.156	3.822	0.000	Accepted
H ₄	SMM→BT	0.377	0.177	4.052	0.000	Accepted
H ₅	BT→BL	0.451	0.261	4.315	0.000	Accepted
H ₆	BA→BT →BL	0.160		2.960	0.002	Accepted
H ₇	SMM→BT→BL	0.170		3.079	0.001	Accepted

Discussions

This research applies the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen [19] to examine the influence of brand ambassadors, social media marketing, and brand trust as mediators of brand loyalty among Online Travel Agent (OTA) users in Jakarta. A survey of 238 respondents found that the majority were female (67.6%) and aged 17-21 years (49.2%). Most participants were students (55.5%), with nearly half earning below IDR 5,000,000 per month (47.1%) and spending under IDR 3,000,000 monthly (57.1%). Additionally, 64.3% of respondents had used OTA applications 1-3 times in the past year.

The first hypothesis test (H1) confirmed that brand ambassadors have a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty, aligning with previous research by Astika & Nurfebriaraning [8] in Indonesia, which also identified a strong correlation between the two variables. This finding reinforces the TPB framework, as brand ambassadors shape perceived behavioral control and attitude, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty.

The second hypothesis test (H2) found that social media marketing had a negative and insignificant impact on brand loyalty among OTA users, consistent with Daya et al. [20] in Indonesia but contrasting with Al-Dmour et al. [9], where a positive effect was observed. This discrepancy may stem from OTA content lacking relevance to user needs, limiting its influence on loyalty. As the TPB framework suggests, social media marketing is most effective when it aligns with user interests and exerts meaningful influence.

The third hypothesis (H3) confirmed that brand ambassadors exert a positive and significant influence on brand trust, consistent with the findings of Digdowiseiso et al. [10] in Indonesia. Brand ambassadors shape user attitudes by embodying trust and appeal, aligning with TPB, which links attitude to behavior. Their positive image reinforces brand trust.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) revealed that social media marketing has a positive and significant impact on brand trust, which aligns with research by Sohail et al. [11] in Indonesia. This finding aligns with TPB, indicating that clear and consistent communication on social media builds trust. Transparent content on promotions, features, and services enhances engagement.

Hypothesis five (H5) demonstrated that brand trust significantly influences brand loyalty, consistent with studies by Aditya & Tjokrosaputro [13] in Indonesia. Brand trust minimizes perceived risk and enhances user confidence in OTA services, leading to stronger loyalty. This aligns with TPB, which emphasizes the role of trust in shaping both behavioral intentions and actual behavior. Maintaining trust ensures users feel secure, further reinforcing their loyalty.

The sixth hypothesis (H6) revealed that brand trust plays a significant role in mediating the connection between brand ambassadors and brand loyalty, which aligns with research by Kamila & Indrawati [21] in Indonesia. This result supports TPB, highlighting brand trust as a key mediator in converting positive attitudes toward brand ambassadors into loyalty. When brand ambassadors attract attention and build trust, they strengthen commitment and encourage continued product or service use.

Similarly, hypothesis seven (H7) confirmed that brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty, consistent with Srivastava et al. [22] in India. As outlined in the TPB framework, brand trust plays a crucial role in strengthening emotional connections and fostering long-term loyalty. Effective social media marketing enhances consumer trust through consistent and positive engagement, ultimately reinforcing brand loyalty.

5 Conclusion & Suggestion

In conclusion, this study finds that brand ambassadors positively influence brand loyalty among OTA users in Jakarta, while social media marketing has a negative impact. Brand trust plays a crucial role in strengthening brand loyalty and mediating the effects of brand ambassadors and social media marketing. These findings provide valuable insights for refining marketing strategies to enhance brand loyalty. Future research should focus on improving social media content quality, leveraging brand ambassadors through exclusive loyalty programs, and exploring more complex mediation models with larger samples for broader applicability across Indonesia.

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