



A Review of Research on Brand Loyalty in Social Media Marketing

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Abstract. With the widespread adoption of social media platforms and their evolving features—such as algorithmic recommendations, short videos, live commerce, and virtual communities—understanding how these channels influence consumer behavior has become critical for marketers. This paper reviews recent scholarship (2021–2024) on the mechanisms through which social media marketing shapes brand loyalty. Employing a systematic literature review and comparative case analysis, it examines both the positive pathways—enhanced interactivity, emotional connection, brand authenticity, and community engagement—and the negative effects, including algorithm-driven information cocoons, poor-quality user-generated content, and over-commercialization that can erode consumer trust. Findings reveal that social media strategies which foster meaningful two-way communication and authentic storytelling significantly boost consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, while unchecked algorithmic filtering and homogenized content undermine long-term brand attachment. The study concludes by outlining future research directions—such as dissecting content-format effects, countering information silos, and leveraging digital intelligence—and offers practical guidance for firms aiming to balance technological empowerment with consumer-centric authenticity in social media marketing.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Loyalty, Cross Media Interactivity, Brand Trust.

1 Introduction

In recent years, the rapid development of social media has reshaped the global business ecology and become an indispensable core force in the modern marketing system. According to Statista data, by 2023, global social media users have exceeded 4.8 billion, accounting for more than 60% of the global population. China's social media user scale has reached 1.03 billion, with an average daily usage time of more than 2.5 hours. The driving force of this change mainly stems from technological innovations, such as the popularization of 5G networks, algorithm optimization, user behavioral changes, such as fragmented information consumption, community-based interaction needs, and platform function iterations such as short videos, live e-commerce, and virtual communities. Social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, TikTok, and Xiaohongshu have

disrupted the one-way logic of traditional marketing by enabling immediacy, interactivity, and content co-creation.

In this context, the psychology and behavioral patterns of consumers have changed significantly. Users have shifted from passive recipients to active participants—liking, commenting, and sharing content—and thus play an integrated ‘producer–consumer’ role. However, algorithmic recommendation and immersive experiences on social media also intensify the information-cocoon effect resulting in the convergence of consumer cognition. On the other hand, social media's algorithmic recommendation mechanism and immersive experience have intensified the information cocoon effect, leading to the homogenization of consumer perceptions, and at the same time giving rise to the phenomenon of “disappearance of the neighborhood” - local and niche brands are marginalized due to insufficient exposure. This duality poses a new challenge to brand marketing: companies need to enhance interactivity and authenticity while avoiding the risks of over-commercialization and loss of user trust.

Existing literature on social media marketing focuses on short-term effects, such as brand awareness, consumer engagement, while the long-term impact of brand loyalty is still insufficiently explored. Although some scholars start from the perspectives of emotional marketing, brand community, etc., they lack the systematic analysis of positive and negative influences, and have not explored the dynamic game between algorithmic logic and users' needs in the context of digital intelligence [1-4]. This study takes the impact mechanism of social media marketing on brand loyalty as the core issue and aims to answer the following questions through literature analysis and case study method: first, the paths through which social media marketing enhances or weakens brand loyalty; second, the optimization of brand strategy by striking a balance between technological empowerment and user needs.

2 Social Media Marketing

In the new era, with the rapid development of social media, its role in modern marketing is becoming more and more important, and it has become a key channel for brand-consumer interaction. Under the traditional marketing model, the interaction between brands and consumers is often one-way. Enterprises mainly through advertising, promotions and other means to consumers to pass information, consumers are in a relatively passive state of reception, rarely have the opportunity to timely feedback their own ideas. And now the two-way interactive nature of social media has become more widespread and common. Social media marketing makes the interaction between brands and consumers direct, immediate and two-way. On social media platforms, consumers can easily express their views on brands through likes and comments, and brands are able to respond to consumers' needs in real time. For example, when some beauty brands release new product previews on social media, consumers can ask questions about the ingredients and efficacy of the products in the comment section, and the brands can quickly answer them, which is difficult to realize under the traditional marketing model.

3 The Concept of Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is the stable tendency and continuous purchase choice of a specific brand formed by consumers in the long-term consumption process. Behavioral loyalty is manifested in the repeated purchase behavior of consumers, while attitudinal loyalty is manifested in the emotional attachment and identification of consumers to the brand, this kind of actual behavior is generally in the view of competitors, willing to pay extra, as well as recommend the brand, and even tolerate imperfections and some problems. The formation of brand loyalty is a long-term process, influenced by a variety of factors, including brand trust, consumer engagement, and the emotional connection between the brand and consumers. Therefore, brand loyalty is embodied in consumers' emotional connection to the brand and their propensity to continue purchasing, which is the core driving force for enterprises to realize sustainable development.

4 The Influence Mechanism of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty

4.1 Positive Influence Mechanism

In the era of rapid development of social media, social media is gradually integrated into people's lives, especially in the field of consumption. Brand loyalty is embodied in consumers' emotional identification with the brand and continuous consumption behavior, which is the core cornerstone for enterprises to achieve sustainable development in the market competition [5]. Of course, social media marketing uses several mechanisms to control brand loyalty. First, according to the self-congruity theory, if the image portrayed by a brand in social media is compatible with consumers' personal identity, it can effectively strengthen brand attraction and ultimately drive consumers' long-term loyalty to the brand through the establishment of quasi-social interaction [5]. This further suggests that brands' interactive practices in digital communities can effectively stimulate consumers' brand identity and willingness to promote by portraying an authentic and credible image.

Also social media gives a connection between sellers and buyers, and social media provides brands with a channel for instant feedback and transparent communication. This also shows that emotionally oriented marketing strategies, such as the precise communication of brand core values, can deeply fit the emotional demands of consumers, thus building a more solid consumer-brand trust relationship.

Second, in the context of the deep integration of digitalization and intelligence, user-generated short mobile videos (UGC) significantly enhance consumers' purchase propensity by reinforcing their perceived social presence, and there is a significant positive correlation between such propensity and brand loyalty [6]. This implies that social media marketing strategies, such as the precise communication of brand core values, can build a stronger consumer-brand trust relationship [6]. This implies that high-quality content posted on social media enhances consumers' identification with a brand. Ac-

cording to the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theoretical framework, the quality and presentation of user-generated content (UGC) ultimately have a significant impact on consumers' behavioral decisions by enhancing the mediating variable of social presence [6].

On the other hand, social media platforms can effectively enhance consumers' sense of belonging by constructing brand communities. Studies have shown that brand authenticity as a mediator in the communication process of virtual brand communities significantly promotes consumers' brand advocacy behavior, which is considered as an important indicator of brand loyalty.

Analysis of existing studies reveals that most of them focus on a single platform or a fixed form of content, and there is a lack of comparative analysis of different types. Future research could explore the different effects of different content formats on brand loyalty. In addition, the implementation effect of emotional marketing strategies may vary depending on individual consumers, which can be analyzed with reference to more other factors in the future.

4.2 Negative Impact Mechanism

Although social media marketing has many advantages, there are still potential negative impacts. For example, the personalized push of recommendation algorithms may confine consumers to the “information cocoon” - long-term exposure to highly homogeneous information content will weaken their ability to recognize the diversified value of the brand, thus hindering the formation of brand loyalty. Simultaneously, algorithm-driven filtering may exacerbate the ‘regional brand masking’ effect, causing consumers to overlook niche or local brands and thus homogenizing the market landscape [7]. With the change of time, the influence of the “information cocoon” is also affecting consumers in a subtle way.

On the other hand, in the context of digital intelligence, mobile short video UGC significantly increases consumers' willingness to buy by enhancing the sense of social presence, and this willingness to buy is positively correlated with brand loyalty. The quality and form of user-generated content mediate the influence of consumer behavior through social presence, while the authenticity of the brand's virtual community is the key foundation of emotional connection [7]. For example, the real-life experiences shared by users on Xiaohongshu can often influence the purchase decisions of other consumers. In a business ecosystem where digitalization and intelligence are deeply integrated, user-generated content (UGC) with quality defects is prone to trigger consumer resistance, thus weakening brand credibility [7].

In today's social media environment, if the proposed social interaction between consumers and brands is interrupted due to a lack of trust, the resulting negative public opinion will be rapidly fermented by the spreading effect of social networks, which will have an irreversible and long-term negative impact on brand reputation [7]. For example, in the case of a prospective social network, a brand may not be able to achieve the same level of trust as its competitors [7]. For example, after the breakdown of a quasi-social relationship, consumers may post negative posts about the brand on their social media accounts, affecting the brand's reputation. Second, if a brand focuses too much

on emotion-driven marketing strategies, it may lead to psychological saturation of consumers due to content homogenization, which in turn weakens the brand's market appeal. Over-reliance on emotional marketing strategies may cause consumer resentment, leading to a decrease in consumer loyalty. Certain businesses that focus on emotional marketing at the expense of product enhancement and consumer feedback will be extremely emotionally draining, leading to a loss of regular customers and consumers.

4.3 Strategy Optimization for Brand Loyalty Enhancement in the Context of Social Media

First of all, in the information ecology dominated by social media, brand story realizes the communication leap from one-way narrative to two-way value co-creation by constructing emotional resonance with consumers [8]. The core of brand story lies in authenticity, coherence and empathy [8]. For example, an emerging tea brand has successfully built a collective narrative of “grassroots rebellion” by recording the founder's entrepreneurial journey from the tea plantation to the store through a short video on Jittery Voice, and encouraging consumers to share their own stories with the brand by combining user-generated content (UGC). This narrative strategy not only enhances consumer participation, but also strengthens brand identity through emotional resonance. Social media platforms provide multiple channels for the three-dimensional communication of brand stories. Firstly, short videos can quickly convey brand values through visual language; secondly, community functions such as microblogging super-talk and Xiaohongshu topic tags can aggregate scattered story content into a systematic narrative; lastly, brand storytelling is just like a tripod - truth is the base, logic is the skeleton, and empathy is the soul, and all three are indispensable [8]. For example, the frequent implantation of advertisements by a beauty brand led users to question the authenticity of its story, which eventually triggered a trust crisis. Therefore, enterprises need to balance the business goals and users' emotional needs in storytelling to avoid homogenization of content.

Secondly, brand loyalty stems from consumers' emotional attachment to the brand, and the establishment of this psychological connection relies on the continuous two-way value exchange between the brand and the user and the gradual precipitation of the trust relationship [9]. The formation mechanism of consumer emotional attachment follows the progressive path of “emotional trigger-conceptual fit-practice realization [9]. For example, a sports brand regularly launches the “sports punch card challenge” through Weibo super talk, and users can get customized badges after completing the challenge. This kind of interaction not only awakens users' emotional commitment, but also strengthens their value identity through the sense of community belonging, which eventually transforms into repurchase behavior. Emotional marketing in social media needs to avoid one-way output. A mother and baby brand, for example, initially triggered user resonance through emotional ads, but the lack of follow-up interaction led to aesthetic fatigue among consumers. On the contrary, a pet food brand established a “pet health file” through a WeChat app, regularly pushed personalized parenting advice, and optimized its products based on user feedback, successfully transforming

emotional marketing into sustained trust. This shows that consumers' emotional attachment to a brand needs to be consolidated through continuous interaction and immediate need fulfillment [9].

In the era of digital intelligence, digging into users' needs and continuously promoting experience innovation have become the core driving force for enterprises to build long-term brand loyalty [10]. The essence of customer experience optimization lies in "accurately identifying needs, agilely adjusting strategies, and continuously creating value [10]. For example, an e-commerce brand analyzed the skincare pain points of Xiaohongshu users and launched an "ingredient customization" service, which allows consumers to mix and match product combinations according to their skin type, which not only improves their purchase intention, but also strengthens brand loyalty through personalized experience. The data tools of social media platforms provide real-time demand insights for enterprises. A fast food brand analyzed user reviews on takeout platforms and found that the demand for "healthy light meals" was on the rise, so it launched a "low-calorie package" on social media and invited fitness bloggers to experience it, successfully attracting young consumers. However, over-reliance on algorithms can lead to "information cocooning", for example, an apparel brand pushing similar style content for a long period of time, leading to user interest fatigue. Therefore, companies need to establish a synergistic mechanism between the accuracy of data decision-making and the diversity of content forms [10].

5 Conclusion

Social media marketing methods and strategies play an important role in enhancing brand loyalty. Through instant interaction, emotional marketing and brand community building, it can enhance consumers' sense of participation, belonging and trust, thus promoting the increase of brand loyalty. However, negative factors such as the "information cocoon", the spread of disinformation and the breakdown of quasi-social relationships in the context of the digital information age also pose a threat to brand loyalty. Future research should further explore the influence of different consumers, optimize content formats and marketing strategies, and explore solutions for algorithmic transparency and information diversity. In addition, brands need to find a balance between commercialization and authenticity to maintain long-term stable consumer relationships. The findings of this study provide help for companies to build brand loyalty in the social media era.

In the future, the impact of different demographic characteristics on consumers can be explored in greater depth, as well as, examining ways to study brand authenticity. Secondly, research on effective strategies to break the information cocoon. Including, studying the influence mechanism of new social media marketing on brand loyalty in the context of digital intelligence.

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