



Content Storytelling and Community Engagement in Building Customer Loyalty: A Case Study of Cinnong Hijab

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Abstract. The digital transformation has urged brands to adopt marketing strategies that prioritise emotional engagement with customers, particularly through storytelling and online communities. This study aims to examine the role of content positive storytelling and the Teman Cinnong (TeCi) community in fostering customer loyalty within the local hijab fashion brand, Cinnong. A qualitative descriptive approach with thematic analysis was employed. Data were collected through observation of Cinnong's Instagram content and in-depth interviews with 10 active customers and 2 marketing team members, selected using purposive sampling based on their engagement level. Data validity was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. The findings reveal that Cinnong's content positive storytelling is perceived by customers as authentic, inspiring, and emotionally engaging, thereby strengthening their sense of closeness to the brand. Rather than functioning merely as promotional material, the content fosters emotional attachment and delivers positive values to the audience. Moreover, the TeCi community plays a crucial role in enhancing customer loyalty through meaningful interactions, voluntary participation, and value-driven activities that cultivate a sense of belonging. Notably, the community also attracts new members who subsequently become loyal customers. This study reinforces the relevance of Brand Relationship Theory and Customer Engagement Theory in the context of emerging markets, while providing practical insights for SMEs in the Muslim fashion industry. Consistent positive storytelling combined with community-based engagement is demonstrated to be an effective strategy for building sustainable customer loyalty.

Keywords: Content Positive Storytelling, Brand Community, Customer Loyalty

1 Introduction

In the digital era, marketing transformation has rapidly evolved from traditional methods to the utilization of social media as the primary channel. Social media is considered effective due to its ability to reach a broad audience, cost efficiency, and its role in facilitating online purchases. According to Sprout Social [1] and Demand Sage [2], it is projected that by 2025 there will be approximately 5.42 billion active social

media users, with an average of 6.83 social networks used per month. This shift has had a tangible impact on consumer behavior and has encouraged the fashion industry, particularly the hijab sector in Indonesia, to leverage social media in navigating intense competition. A dominant strategy frequently employed is influencer marketing, which has been proven to significantly influence purchasing decisions for Muslim fashion products, Mumtaza et al [3]. However, other studies emphasize that this approach tends to be transactional and more oriented toward immediate effects, without fostering long-term loyalty, Abdullah et al [4].

As consumer attention increasingly shifts toward brand quality and authenticity, marketing strategies based on informative and authentic content are considered more sustainable. Studies indicate that content quality, interactivity, and authentic communication foster engagement and build loyalty through the pathway of trust, Keda & Liyi [5]. This creates opportunities for local brands to develop strategies aligned with the preferences of a more critical and selective audience. Within this context, Cinnong, a local hijab brand from Makassar, has adopted a Content Positive Storytelling approach. Unlike instant endorsement practices, Cinnong emphasizes emotional narratives and authenticity, which have been shown to strengthen brand attachment and consumer loyalty Lundqvist et al. [6], Laurance et al. [7] & Hyunjoo et al. [8]. Furthermore, Cinnong established the TeCi (Teman Cinnong) community to enhance customer interaction. This community-based strategy aligns with the concept of brand community, which fosters emotional bonds and strengthens loyalty, Muniz & O'Guinn [9], Habibi et al. [10] & Dessart [11]. Recent research also confirms that community-based marketing generates more authentic loyalty compared to paid endorsements Hajli et al. [12].

Although the effectiveness of storytelling and brand communities has been widely demonstrated Dessart [13] & Mandung [14], most studies have predominantly focused on large corporations. Research on the integration of content positive storytelling with value-based communities in the MSME sector, particularly within the Muslim fashion industry, remains limited Rather et al. [15]. This gap is significant, given that MSMEs face resource constraints and require more sustainable marketing strategies. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how Cinnong fosters customer loyalty through storytelling and the TeCi community as a medium for voluntary participation and the strengthening of customers' emotional attachment to the brand.

Based on this background, the research is designed to address how Cinnong's content positive storytelling strategy on Instagram contributes to building customer loyalty, and how the "TeCi" (Teman Cinnong) community plays a role in shaping and maintaining that loyalty, while also encouraging voluntary participation in promoting the brand. In line with these research questions, the study seeks to expand the literature on brand storytelling and brand community within the context of emerging markets specifically Indonesia's hijab fashion industry while providing strategic guidance for local MSMEs in cultivating customer loyalty through narrative-driven approaches and community engagement.

2 Literature Review

Storytelling has been recognized as an effective strategy for establishing emotional communication with consumers, as authentic narratives strengthen both brand awareness and customer loyalty Habibi et al. [17]. In digital marketing, consumers are not merely seeking products but also experiences relevant to their lives Fournier [18], making story-based marketing a powerful means of fostering long-term emotional relationships. Theoretically, this study is grounded in Brand Relationship Theory Brodie et al. [19], which emphasizes emotional attachment as the foundation of loyalty, as well as Customer Engagement Theory, which highlights active consumer interaction in co-creating value. Thus, content positive storytelling can be understood not simply as the delivery of information, but as an instrument for cultivating emotional closeness and active consumer engagement.

Empirical findings reinforce this perspective. Agung & Lubis [20] demonstrated that emotional storytelling deepens consumer–brand relationships, while Joana et al. [21] confirmed that digital storytelling enhances consumer participation. Catia et al. [22] further found that narratives linked to social values strengthen loyalty and advocacy. Nonetheless, some studies underline limitations, such as the need for narrative consistency to ensure long-term effectiveness and the fact that digital engagement does not always translate into loyalty Calder et al. [23]. More recent literature highlights the importance of digital communities. Rather et al. [15] argue that online communities reinforce emotional attachment, whereas Hajli et al. [12] emphasize the role of user-generated content and voluntary participation in building a sense of brand ownership. Despite these insights, research examining how MSMEs—particularly within the Muslim fashion industry in emerging markets such as Indonesia—integrate positive storytelling with digital community building remains limited. Therefore, this study contributes by analyzing Cinnong’s strategy through content positive storytelling and the “Teman Cinnong” community as an effort to foster sustainable customer loyalty.

3 Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with thematic analysis to examine Cinnong’s marketing strategy in building customer loyalty through content positive storytelling and the TeCi (Teman Cinnong) community on Instagram. This approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of customer experiences and perspectives, as well as the identification of meanings underlying the marketing strategies employed Calder et al. [24]. The participants of the study consisted of two main groups. The first group included customers or TeCi community members, selected as primary informants since they directly experienced Cinnong’s marketing strategies. The second group comprised the owner and the marketing/admin team of Cinnong, who acted as supporting informants to provide internal perspectives on the communication strategies employed. The planned number of participants ranged from 10–15 loyal customers and 2–3 internal representatives from Cinnong. This sample size is consistent with the principles of qualitative research, which prioritise depth over

breadth, with the number of participants determined by data saturation, Guest & Johnson [25].

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, in which participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research focus, such as: (1) having followed Cinnong’s Instagram account for at least six months, (2) being active in engaging with content (likes, comments, shares, or reposts), and (3) being an active member of the TeCi community. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this study as it allows researchers to obtain rich and relevant data from individuals who genuinely understand the phenomenon under investigation Palinkas et al. [26]. Data were collected through observation of Cinnong’s Instagram content (content planning, communication style, posting frequency, and audience interaction), as well as in-depth interviews with participants. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to provide space for participants to share their experiences and perspectives more openly.

Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis, based on the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke [27]: (1) Familiarisation: re-reading interview transcripts and observation notes to understand the context of the data; (2) Coding: identifying initial codes related to storytelling strategies, the role of community, and forms of customer loyalty; (3) Theme Development: clustering codes into main themes (e.g., positive storytelling, sense of belonging, customer advocacy); (4) Reviewing Themes: evaluating the relevance of themes to the overall dataset; (5) Defining and Naming Themes: providing clear labels for each theme; and (6) Producing the Report: presenting findings supported by direct participant quotations to strengthen the validity of interpretation.

To ensure research credibility, several validation techniques were applied, including: (1) Data triangulation, by combining interview findings, observation, and social media documentation; (2) Member checking, by reconfirming preliminary findings with participants to ensure that the researcher’s interpretations accurately reflected their experiences; and (3) Audit trail, by maintaining detailed records of the analysis process and research decisions, allowing for transparent traceability, Lincoln & Guba [28].

4 Result

In my qualitative descriptive research with a thematic analysis approach, here are 2 types of tables describing and categorizing my research informants as well as the findings or themes that emerged from the data :

Table 1. Informant Profile Descriptive Table

Informant Group	Number of Informants (N)	Characteristic (Age)	Details
Group I: Customers	10	5 people aged 24 years 3 people aged 23 years 1 person aged 28 years 1 person aged 22 years	

Group II: Brand Party (Cinnong)	3	1 Brand owner 1 Admin staff 1 Marketing team member
Total Informants	13	

Table 2. Descriptive Table of Qualitative Findings by Group

Informant Group	Main Focus (Theme)	Summary Description of Key Findings	Supporting Evidence (Sample Response)
Group I: Cinnong Customers (N=10)	1. Brand Content Appeal	I like positive storytelling content because it is moving, inspiring, and creates emotional closeness.	<i>"Very touching, inspiring, closer to customers."</i>
	2. Recognition/Reinforcement (Reward)	Feeling happy and appreciated when their post about Brand Cinnong was reposted by the Brand.	<i>"...especially when their posts about the Cinnong brand were reposted."</i>
	3. Active Consumer Behavior	Tend to recommend Cinnong Brand to their social circle (friends and family).	<i>"Tend to recommend the Cinnong brand to their friends and family."</i>
	4. Community Involvement	Some informants (N=3) have participated in community activities organized by Brand.	<i>"...these 3 customers have participated in community activities..."</i>
Group II: Cinnong Brand Party (N=3)	1. Philosophy of Bonding Development	Viewing the importance of building strong bonds between customers and brands as a key strategy.	<i>"Building a bond between customers and brands is very important."</i>

2. Strategic (Outcomes)	Objectives	Building bonds aims to increase customer loyalty (regular customers) and maintain activity/interactio n on social media.	<i>"Not only does it increase brand awareness, but it also makes customers loyal to Cinnong products and always actively provide feedback."</i>
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In addition, this research, in the form of a thematic analysis of interview data with customers and the marketing team, along with observations of Cinnong's Instagram content, produced three main themes that explain the brand's strategy in fostering customer loyalty. These themes include positive storytelling through content, which emphasizes authentic and emotional narratives; the role of the Friends of Cinnong (TeCi) community as a platform for collective engagement; and active social media interactions that strengthen the closeness between the brand and its customers. Together, these three themes complement each other and provide a comprehensive understanding of how Cinnong integrates storytelling and community-based strategies in a digital marketing context.

4.1 Content Positive Storytelling

The findings indicate that Cinnong’s Instagram content is perceived by customers as authentic, warm, and inspirational narratives. Rather than being limited to product promotion (hard selling), the content conveys simple stories that evoke positive emotions. One participant expressed: *“The content feels more natural. When Cinnong creates content, it seems as though they are selling a product, but not directly. There are positive storytelling elements woven into it first.”*



Fig. 1 Storytelling Content on Cinnong’s Instagram

In addition, many respondents described Cinnong’s content as a “mood booster” because it provides positive energy in every post. The brand has indeed focused its content planning on encouraging customer interaction more frequently through stories or Instagram reels in creative ways, such as quizzes, outfit recommendations, and other types of content that are then packaged in the form of storytelling. This approach has proven to be highly engaging for Cinnong’s customers, as evidenced by the increase in Instagram insights. These findings support the argument of Singh and Sonnenburg [16], who state that authentic storytelling can strengthen the emotional bond between consumers and brands, as well as Dessart [13], who emphasizes that meaningful narratives enhance customer attachment. Thus, Cinnong’s positive storytelling plays an important role both as a medium of brand communication and as a mechanism for fostering emotional closeness.

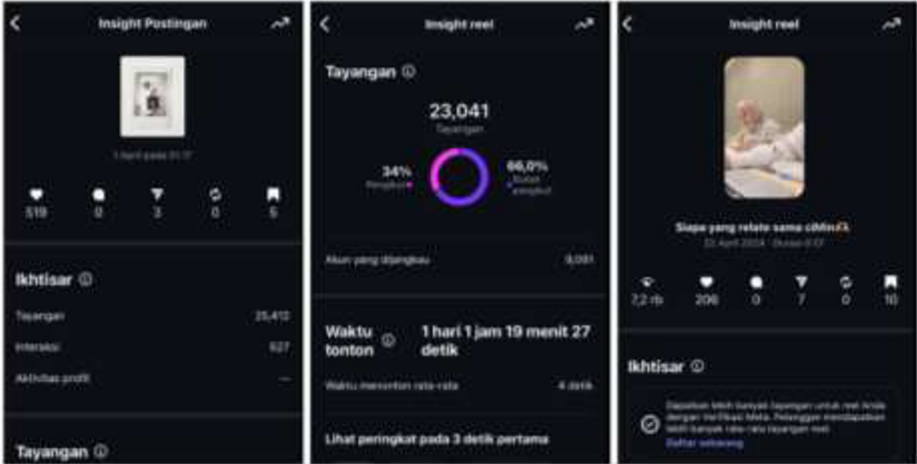


Fig. 2 Insight Cinnong’s Instagram

The findings highlight that Cinnong does not use storytelling merely as a branding technique, but as a positive affective strategy that deliberately embeds emotional reinforcement, optimism, and relatability into every content piece. This approach differs from the majority of previous storytelling studies, which often analyze narrative techniques at the level of brand identity or message persuasion. In contrast, this study reveals that positive emotional tonality expressed through mood-boosting captions, warm visuals, and everyday-life narratives acts as a driver of engagement and emotional closeness.

This nuance expands current understanding in storytelling literature Dessart et al [13], which primarily focuses on the emotional bonding effect but seldom examines the specific role of positive affect as a loyalty-building mechanism in MSMEs. The novelty here lies in demonstrating that micro-positive storytelling, when executed consistently on Instagram, can generate both interaction and emotional resonance even without high production cost or influencer involvement.

4.2 The Role of Cinnong’s Brand Community in Building Customer Loyalty

The “Teman Cinnong” (TeCi) community is perceived by customers as a key factor in fostering sustainable loyalty. Participants described this community not merely as an online group, but as a shared space that creates a sense of being valued and included. One participant emphasized: “In TeCi, it feels like family. We can support each other, not only regarding products but also in everyday life.” Interestingly, several community members admitted that they were initially unfamiliar with Cinnong and its products. However, after actively engaging in TeCi’s activities, they began following Cinnong’s Instagram account, understood the brand’s values, and eventually became customers.

This illustrates the dual role of the community: retaining existing loyal customers while also attracting new ones.

These findings are consistent with Rather [15], who highlights the importance of online communities in strengthening emotional bonds and consumer commitment, as well as Hajli et al. [12], who emphasize the role of voluntary participation in creating a sense of brand ownership. In Cinnong's case, the TeCi community serves as a medium of engagement that fosters organic loyalty without relying on paid marketing strategies.



Fig. 3 Community Activities of TeCi with Cinnong Customers

Prior studies on brand communities Habibi et al, typically emphasize structured online communities built by large brands, where consumers already possess prior familiarity with the brand. However, the present findings provide a unique insight: the TeCi community not only retains loyal customers but also converts non-users into customers through value-based interactions. This demonstrates a novel mechanism: community participation precedes purchasing behavior, which contrasts with traditional loyalty models where purchase typically occurs first before community involvement. Thus, TeCi operates as a dual-path loyalty engine : Upstream loyalty (community, awareness, trust, purchase) and Downstream loyalty (purchase, community, emotional bonding, repeat purchase).

This dual role of a community within an MSME context represents an important theoretical contribution that has not been widely discussed in existing digital community literature, which often assumes communities serve primarily post-purchase bonding functions.

4.3 Interaction with Customers through Social Media

Active interaction on Instagram represents another strategy that strengthens the emotional bond between Cinnong and its customers. Observations revealed that the admin consistently responds to comments, replies to messages, and reposts customer-generated content. According to participants, such practices create a sense of being

valued. One respondent noted: *“When my comment is replied to, it feels like Cinnong truly cares, not just about selling.”* This form of interaction reinforces customers’ perception that they are part of a two-way conversation rather than merely the target of promotion. Several participants even emphasized that their trust and loyalty grew as a result of the brand’s friendly and responsive communication. This finding supports Brand Relationship Theory (Fournier [18]), which underscores the role of emotional attachment in fostering loyalty.

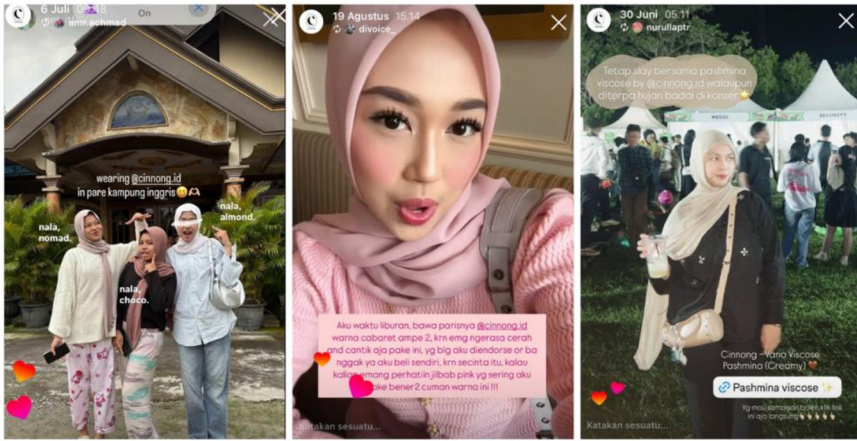


Fig. 4 Interaction With Cinnong Customers on Instagram

Although responsiveness on social media is known to influence trust, this study finds that the micro interactions performed by Cinnong’s admin function as relational rituals that strengthen customer–brand intimacy. Customers interpret simple actions such as replying to comments, acknowledging user-generated content, or sending friendly messages as signals of personal care. These repeated patterns create a perceived sense of mutual recognition, transforming the brand–customer relationship into a ritualized exchange. This advances Fournier’s relationship theory by illustrating how, in MSME contexts: small scale, low cost interaction rituals can substitute for heavy marketing investments and still produce strong loyalty outcomes.

5 Discussion

Most prior research examines storytelling, community engagement, and social media interaction as distinct constructs. This study offers novelty by showing that in the context of a small Muslim fashion brand in Indonesia: Positive storytelling acts as the emotional trigger, Community engagement acts as the relational container, and Social media interaction acts as the maintenance mechanism.

The integration of these three creates a holistic loyalty system that does not rely on paid influencer marketing or large-scale promotional campaigns—elements often

assumed necessary in competitive fashion markets. Thus, the novelty of this study is the formulation of a resource-efficient loyalty framework where: Emotional narratives stimulate attention and resonance, Community identity reinforces belonging, and Interaction rituals sustain relational closeness. This framework contributes new insights to the literature on MSMEs, particularly in emerging-market digital ecosystems where financial resources are limited, community culture is strong, and consumer expectations for authenticity are high.

Overall, the findings confirm that Cinnong's customer loyalty is built through the combination of three key elements: (1) authentic and inspirational positive storytelling content, (2) the TeCi community, which fosters a sense of togetherness and emotional attachment, and (3) active social media interaction, which creates a personal connection with customers.

These results support Customer Engagement Theory Brodie et al. [19] & Hollebeek et al. [19], which emphasizes that active consumer engagement with brands on social media can generate co-created value. Through this strategy, Cinnong not only strengthens the loyalty of existing customers but also attracts new ones through community-based experiences. This study expands the literature on brand storytelling and brand community in emerging markets, particularly within Muslim fashion MSMEs in Indonesia. Its practical contribution lies in demonstrating that MSMEs can cultivate sustainable customer loyalty not by relying on large-scale promotional campaigns, but through positive narratives, digital communities, and consistent interaction.

6 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the content positive storytelling strategy implemented by Cinnong on Instagram has successfully created strong emotional connections with its customers. The simple, natural, and positive-toned content functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a medium that strengthens closeness, a sense of being valued, and inspiration for the audience. In addition, the presence of the Teman Cinnong (TeCi) community plays a crucial role in building and maintaining customer loyalty. The community provides a shared space, voluntary participation, and meaningful activities that cultivate a sense of belonging to the brand. Notably, the community has also been able to attract new members, who eventually come to know and purchase Cinnong's products.

Theoretically, these findings affirm the relevance of Brand Relationship Theory and Customer Engagement Theory in explaining how storytelling and community engagement can strengthen brand loyalty. Practically, the study contributes to the context of Muslim fashion MSMEs in Indonesia by demonstrating that consistent positive narratives, combined with the establishment of digital communities, can serve as an effective strategy for fostering sustainable customer loyalty.

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