The Impact Of Social Media Marketing, Customer Engagement, And Electronic Word -Of- Mouth On Brand Loyalty Related To Dairy Products Brands

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Abstract
Based on the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model, the study aims to investigate the effect of social media marketing (SMM) on brand loyalty (BL) through the mediation of customer engagement (CE) and electronic word-of mouth (e-WOM) on dairy products brands in Palestine.
The study Using quantitative method, purposive sampling technique, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of (173) consumers. Subsequently, the data was analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis.
The key findings of the study are Social Media Marketing (SMM) indirectly enhances Brand Loyalty (BL) through Customer Engagement (CE) and e-WOM. CE is a key mediator that both strengthens e-WOM and directly builds loyalty. Thus, firms should focus on engaging customers through social media to amplify positive e-WOM and increase long-term brand loyalty
The sample is restricted to customers who use social media in Ramallah city/Palestine. There are managerial implications that practitioners can leverage from them based on the study findings; to use social media to engage consumers, to develop marketing strategies, and to strengthen brand loyalty.
Keywords: Social media marketing, Brand loyalty, Customer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media played a vital role in transforming companies and brands to engage their customers. Social media is an effective tool for sharing information and communication for companies (Solanki & Thomas, 2025). social media is a fundamental component that integrated to marketing, that enables customers to access companies directly (Hafez, 2021). Social media activities give opportunities to consumers to interact with brands at any stage of their purchasing journey (Chiu et al., 2010). social media platforms work as a source of information about products/brands, this expands social media channel In a quick way, to reach over two billion Internet users, in order to build brand awareness (Godey et al., 2016). Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube forms important social media channels and platforms where people can share information, because of this, companies investing money to strengthen their presence and develop their strategies to engage their customers (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). Businesses by using social media can be enabled to work with media, events, entertainment, retailers, and digital services, making it much easier and cheaper to run integrated marketing campaigns than before, furthermore, social media marketing allows younger audiences to be engaged to brands, while also strengthening the emotional connection older consumers have with well-known luxury brands. It also helps reduce negative perceptions about a brand and boosts its value by giving people a space to share ideas and information online (Kim & Ko, 2012).

customer engagement is considered a major construct that builds connections in social media, in this context, customer engagement can support to develop mutual relationships between consumers and brands (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021). Social media gives customers opportunities to create and share content across online channels, also social media facilitates customer engagement, and customer engagement boosts loyalty, trust,

and brand evaluations (Harrigan et al., 2017). Social media provides useful information for business, also allows customers to have direct access to companies, brands and marketers.

Research that explores the effect of social media marketing from perspective of brand loyalty literature, and e-electronic word of mouth and customer engagement in the context of social media marketing is still lacks empirical studies (Ali et al., 2025). This research contributes to previous literature by providing a comprehensive framework that shows how social media marketing affects e-electronic word of mouth, customer engagement, and brand loyalty towards dairy products brands in Palestine.

The objective of this research is to investigate comprehensively the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty towards dairy products brands, with customer engagement and electronic word of mouth as mediators. The objectives of this study are to fill the gaps in the previous literature, and particularly to: (1) measure the relationship between social media marketing, customer engagement, and e-word of mouth. (2) evaluate the effect of customer engagement, and e-word of mouth on creating brand loyalty. (3) measure the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Research question: what is the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty through the mediation of customer engagement and electronic word- of-mouth?

The study used a quantitative method with a designed questionnaire to investigate customer populations-in Palestine. The study finds that Social Media Marketing (SMM) indirectly enhances Brand Loyalty (BL) through Customer Engagement (CE) and e-WOM. CE is a key mediator that both strengthens e-WOM and directly builds loyalty. Thus, firms should develop strategies that focus on engaging customers through social media to maximize positive e-WOM and increase brand loyalty. The study has managerial implications, by leveraging from the comprehensive model that integrates the key elements, to develop marketing strategies to use social media to engage consumers, and strengthen brand loyalty.

The study developed conceptual framework of social media marketing, customer engagement, e-word of mouth, and brand loyalty (Fig.1). Thereafter the study analyzes, explains, and concludes the results.

Literature review and development of hypothesis

Carlson et al. (2018) used Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model to understand the customers engagement response and behaviors in the social media environment. Based on (S-O-R) model, the article aims to study the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty through the mediation of customer engagement, and electronic word -of -mouth, where the social media marketing environment has stimuli (S) which affects brand loyalty that leads to customer response (R), with the mediation of customer engagement and e-WOM that represents the emotion and cognitive interpretations (O).

Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Customer engagement (CE)

The concept of Social media is defined 'a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user- generated content' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social Media Marketing is defined as an 'interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stake- holders' (Felix et al., 2017), but this definition is very general from firms' perspective. Although different definitions for social media marketing activities have been set, but the most useful one is defined by Yadav & Rahman, (2018):

   A process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver online marketing offerings via social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships that enhance stakeholders' value by facilitating interaction, information sharing, offering personalized purchase recommendations, and word of mouth creation among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services (p. 1296).

Chen & Lin, (2019) have used different dimensions to investigate SMM, one of these is word of mouth. Kim and Ko (2012) identified SMM activities into entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth (WOM), and they were applied to luxury brands.

Customer brand engagement is defined as 'the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions' (Hollebeek, 2011). Customer engagement is referred to 'Psychological process to become loyal to a service brand' (Bowden, 2009). From the first definition customer engagement is a multidimensional concept consists of three components: cognitive, emotional and behavioral, that are used to measure customer engagement.

Several researches examine the effect of social media marketing on customer engagement. Liu et al., (2021) indicates that focusing on social media marketing efforts significantly increases customer engagement. Dissanayake et al., (2019) found that using social media tools enhance customer engagement. From the literature, the following hypothesis is drawn:

H1: Social Media Marketing has significant effect on customer engagement.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) and electronic word-of- Mouth (e-WOM)

In social media there are several customer touchpoints which is known e-WOM that affects positively or negatively the brand loyalty, WOM is a powerful tool for marketing communication (Aoki et al., 2019). Positive and negative E-WOM has positive effect on brand equity (Sun et al., 2021).

H2: Social Media Marketing has significant effect on electronic word-of- mouth.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Brand loyalty (BL)

Brand loyalty is "repeated purchases of particular products or services during a certain period of time" (Yi, Youja e& Hoseong, 2003). Nilowardono et al. (2020) investigated the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty through brand trust and brand love, it found that social media marketing has an indirect effect on brand loyalty through brand trust and brand love. MOKHTARUDDIN et al. (2023) highlights the importance of adopting a strategic approach to social media marketing—one that combines personalization, high-quality content, influencer collaborations, community engagement, relevant advertising, and consistent messaging to strengthen and maintain brand loyalty. (Ali et al., 2025) found that social media marketing has significant and positive effect on brand loyalty through self-brand connection, brand equity and brand trust.

H3: Social Media Marketing has significant effect on brand loyalty.

Customer engagement (CE) and brand loyalty (BL)

Greve, (2014) tested the effect of customer engagement as a moderator on the brand image – brand loyalty relationship, it found that active and passive engagement has an impact on brand loyalty. Tuti & Sulistia (2022) found that customer engagement has a significant influence on brand loyalty, and it has an indirect influence on brand loyalty through brand trust and customer satisfaction. Kosiba et al. (2018) examined the customer engagement effect on brand loyalty through the driver's trustworthiness in retail banking, it found that trustworthiness drives customer engagement which influences brand loyalty.

H4: Customer engagement has significant effect on brand loyalty.

H5: Customer engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing and Brand loyalty.

Electronic word-of- mouth (e-WOM) and brand loyalty (BL)

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) plays a vital role in influencing consumers' brand perceptions (Sun et al., 2021). Rukshar et al. (2025) examined e- WOM as a mediating variable between customer satisfaction, trust, and brand loyalty, this indicates that positive e-WOM strengthen brand loyalty.

H6: Electronic word-of- mouth has significant effect on brand loyalty.

H7: Electronic word- of- mouth (e-WOM) mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Figure1: conceptual model
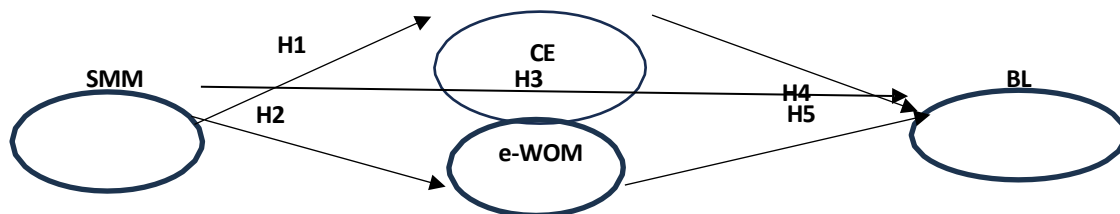
METHODOLOGY
Sample
The data were collected via customers who using social media applications, using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, a designed and structured questionnaire survey used to collect data using google forms, from sample of size 173 consumers from Palestine-Ramallah city.

Measures
Measures were adapted from previous literature to design the questionnaire (Appendix 1) to suit the social media context. Measures for social media marketing (SMM) were drawn from (Zeqiri et al., 2025), measures for customer engagement (CE) were drawn from (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021), electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) from (Zhang et al., 2017) , and measures for Brand loyalty were drawn from (Tran & Strutton, 2020) and (Nam et al., 2011). All items were measured using seven-point Likert scale.

Sample profile
Totally, 173 of responses were received have the following characteristics: 38.7% male, 61.3% female, percentages of age were: 0.6% for respondents under 18 years, 21.3% for 18-24 years, 20.8% for 25-34 years, 30.9% for 35-44 years, 18.5% for 45-54 years, and 7.9% for above 55 years. Additionally, 87.9% of respondents prefer the Palestinian dairy products brands, 1.7% of respondents prefer non-national brands, and 10.4% of respondents have no preferences.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
Data was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), The data had been examined for reliability and validity. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized in the quantitative analysis.

1. Model Specification
The hypothesized model was developed to examine the effect of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on Brand Loyalty (BL) through the mediating roles of Customer Experience (CE) and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM). The structural model included both direct and indirect paths:
- SMM → CE
- SMM → EWOM
- CE → BL
- EWOM → BL
- SMM → BL (direct effect)

2. Measurement Model Assessment
Before testing the structural paths, the reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed:
- Indicator Reliability: the reliability of all items was examined. The scales of all constructs achieved reliability with loadings ≥ 0.70, this indicating that is a good reliability.
- Internal Consistency: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) scales exceeded the threshold of 0.70 for all constructs, confirming strong internal consistency.

• Convergent Validity: The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were greater than 0.50, demonstrating sufficient convergent validity.
• Discriminant Validity: The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were below the threshold of 0.85, ensuring that each construct was distinct from the others.

3. RESULTS

The following table shows the results for the hypothesized structural model, including path coefficients (β), p-values, significance levels, and R2 values for the constructs.

Path / Effect	β (Estimate)	Boot SE	p-value	Significance	R2
SMM → CE	0.635	0.056	0.0	***	
SMM → EWOM	0.7	0.058	0.0	***	
CE → BL	0.08	0.101	0.4027	Ns	
EWOM → BL	0.208	0.094	0.0333	*	
SMM → BL (direct)	0.51	0.087	0.0	***	
Indirect via CE	0.051	0.065	0.4027	Ns	
Indirect via EWOM	0.146	0.065	0.0333	*	
Total Indirect	0.196	0.073	0.0073	**	
Total Effect (SMM → BL)	0.706	0.054	0.0	***	
R2 CE					0.496
R2 EWOM					0.461
R2 BL					0.587

Note: Significance levels are indicated as follows:
*** $p < 0.001$ (highly significant)
** $p < 0.01$ (moderately significant)
* $p < 0.05$ (significant)
ns = not significant

4. Interpretation of Results

1. SMM → CE
- The path coefficient is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).
- This indicates that Social Media Marketing (SMM) has positive influence on Customer Engagement (CE).
- The stronger the SMM activities, the higher the customer engagement.

2. CE → BL
- The path coefficient is not significant (P>0.05), this means that CE has no significant effect on BL.

3. CE → EWOM
- The path coefficient is positive and highly significant ($p < 0.01$ or $p < 0.001$).
- This shows that engaged customers are more likely to share positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM).
- CE plays a central role in motivating customers to talk about the brand online.

4. EWOM → BL
- The path coefficient is significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that e-WOM strongly contributes to Brand Loyalty

(BL).

· Customers exposed to positive e-WOM are more loyal to the brand.

5. SMM → BL (Direct Effect)

· The direct path SMM → BL is significant, and the indirect path is significant, so SMM has both direct effect on Brand Loyalty (BL), and indirect effect on Brand Loyalty through CE and e-WOM as mediators.

5. R² Interpretation

· R^2 (CE = 0.50): SMM explains 50% of the variance in Customer Engagement, CE has a strong effect on SMM.

· R^2 (e-WOM = 0.48): CE explains 48% of the variance in e-WOM, indicating a moderate–strong effect.

· R^2 (BL = 0.59): Together, CE and EWOM explain 59% of the variance in Brand Loyalty, which is substantial.

The results confirm that Social Media Marketing (SMM) indirectly enhances Brand Loyalty (BL) through Customer Engagement (CE) and e-WOM. CE is a key mediator that both strengthens e-WOM and directly builds loyalty. Thus, firms in their strategies should focus on engaging customers through social media to maximize positive e-WOM and increase the brand loyalty.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that social media marketing is not only advertising tool, it is a way of building connections with people, which shapes how they feel and act toward a brand. The results reveal that social media affects the brand loyalty directly. And indirectly social media strengthen customer engagement, which encourages people to talk positively about the brand through (e-WOM). Together, these two forces — engagement and e-word-of-mouth — play the strongest role in creating brand loyalty.

Implications

Managerial Implications

Companies should design SMM campaigns that encourage interaction, and active customer participation. Interactive posts, and personalized responses can foster deeper customer engagement. Furthermore, encourage Positive e-WOM in order customers can share their experience related to brand. Firms can benefit from results in developing their marketing strategies to use social media to engage consumers, and strengthen brand loyalty.

Theoretical Implications

The study extends SMM research by confirming dual mediating roles (CE and e-WOM) in driving BL. In addition, it demonstrates that CE is not only an outcome of SMM but also a precursor to stronger behavioral intentions such as e-WOM and loyalty.

Limitations of the Study

The data was collected from a specific group of respondents; the sample is restricted to customers who use social media in Ramallah city/Palestine, this may limit the generalizability of the results. The model examined the factors: social media marketing, customer engagement, electronic word of mouth, and brand loyalty, while other important factors such as: brand trust, perceived quality, or cultural influences were not included, this may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings. The study treated social media marketing as a general construct, but in reality, different platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) may have varying effects on customer engagement and loyalty, which were not separately analyzed.

Since the focus was on dairy products, consumer behavior in other product categories or industries might not follow the same patterns, this limits the broader applicability of the results.

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Appendix 1
Social media marketing (SMM)
    (Zeqiri et al., 2025)
1.   I prefer sharing content about the brand that I like on social media.
2.   Social media provides me with opportunities to share information about my preferred brand.
3.   Sharing information about my preferred brand on social media feels trendy.
4.   Advertisements for my preferred brand on social media attract my attention.
5.   I enjoy using social media to share information about my preferred brand with my friends.
6.   I can easily find the information I need about my preferred brand on social media.
7.   I find it interesting to share posts or information about my preferred brand on social media.

   Electronic -word of mouth (e-WOM)
    (Zhang et al., 2017)
8.   I will share my experience with my preferred dairy product on social media networks.
9.   I will tell my friends on social media networks about my satisfaction with my preferred dairy product.
10.   I will let my friends know via social media networks about this good dairy product brand or provider.

   Brand loyalty (BL)
    (Tran & Strutton, 2020)
    (Nam et al., 2011)
1.   The I like is preferred over other dairy product brands available in the market.
2.   I consider myself loyal to my preferred brand of dairy product
3.   My preferred brand is my first choice when buying products in this category.
4.   I would recommend My preferred brand to friends or family who are looking for quality Palestinian dairy products.
5.   In the future, I intend to continue purchasing products from this brand.

   Customer engagement (CE)
    (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021)
   Cognitive Dimension
1.   Using the social media pages of my preferred dairy product stimulates my interest in learning more about these companies and their products.
2.   Time flies whenever I visit the social media pages of my preferred dairy product because I want to explore more about them.
3.   I use my preferred dairy product and visit their social media pages because they capture my attention with useful and engaging information.
4.   It seems to me that the social media posts shared by my preferred dairy product are very informative and useful.
   Emotional Dimension
1.   I'm very pleased to use my preferred dairy product and interact with them through their social media pages.

2.	I feel enthusiastic whenever I visit the social media pages of my preferred dairy product.
3.	The posts I see in my feed from my preferred dairy product are interesting and catch my attention.
4.	My emotional attachment to my preferred brand engages with on social media is... 1 (weak) to 7 (strong).

Behavioral Dimension

1.	I'm willing to participate in social media campaigns or initiatives by my preferred brand to help develop new products, services, or features.
2.	I have 'Liked,' 'Commented,' or 'Shared' different posts from my preferred brand on social media.
3.	In general, I feel motivated to actively engage with social media content posted by my preferred Brand