

## Social Media Marketing and Fast-Food Restaurant Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Brand Gestalt

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### Abstract

With the advancement of technology in the present era, it has become an innovation for many companies to leverage these advancements. Social media stands as evidence of technological progress in this era. Social media marketing (SMM) is a means to capture consumer attention towards brand content on social media platforms. SMM also serves to cultivate relationships with loyal customers. This study aims to investigate the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty in fast-food restaurants in Manado, with brand gestalt playing a mediating role. The research adopts a quantitative methodology, with primary data collected through online questionnaires from 135 fast-food restaurant customers in Manado, North Sulawesi. Convenience sampling is employed for sample selection. The data is then analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) utilizing SmartPLS. The findings of this analysis demonstrate that social media marketing significantly influences brand loyalty and brand gestalt. Additionally, a significant and positive relationship is detected between brand gestalt and brand loyalty. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of social media marketing and brand gestalt in shaping consumer loyalty in the fast-food restaurant industry, offering insights that can inform strategic marketing efforts in this sector.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Brand Loyalty, Brand Gestalt, Fast-Food Restaurant.

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### 1. Introduction

The rapid technological advancement in today's era has spurred innovation among companies, leading them to harness various technological advancements. Particularly in the field of information technology and communication, the use of the internet is employed in business strategy applications as a tool for electronic information exchange, notably in marketing [1]. Marketing encompasses two fundamental methods: traditional marketing [2] and digital marketing [3]. In the era of globalization, the use of traditional marketing is dwindling due to significant changes, with people increasingly turning to the internet and shifting towards digital marketing. The evolution of digital marketing is a gradual process. For instance, the emergence of Yahoo! became immensely popular, prompting businesses to consider digital marketing. This, in turn, urged them to create technologies or applications that could be utilized as marketing tools.

Social media marketing (SMM) is a means to capture consumer attention [4] towards brand content on social media platforms. Essentially, digital marketing is also a marketing tool that creates awareness [5] of a brand or product through all available digital channels. The use of social media marketing is also highly effective in advertising and plays a crucial role in developing brand image [6]. To establish a brand or product, companies must create a positive image for the brand [7]. This is necessary for consumers to recognize the products offered. Consumer behavior also plays a role in purchasing decisions. This consideration is necessary for consumers to be encouraged to purchase a product.

According to research by [8], product quality and promotion also influence consumer purchasing decisions.

Brand gestalt holds immense significance in shaping consumer perceptions and fostering brand loyalty. According to [9], brand gestalt encapsulates the holistic impression and encounter of a brand, synthesized from the collective impact of its various components. Within this framework, consumers perceive a brand's elements as interconnected, forming a cohesive entity. Further elaborating on this notion, [10] delineate four intertwined dimensions of brand gestalt: story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder engagement. Notably, research by [10] underscores the pivotal role of social media marketing in positively and significantly influencing brand gestalt.

Previous studies have sought to understand or analyze the relationship between social media marketing and other variables, but it is still unclear how brand gestalt mediates this relationship. This study also provides insights into the mediating role of brand gestalt, which is underutilized in another research. Thus, the researcher chose the topic of this study to be about the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty in fast-food restaurants with the mediating role of brand gestalt.

Based on the explanations provided, the objectives of this study are to determine the influence of social media marketing on brand gestalt and brand loyalty, to ascertain the influence of brand gestalt on brand loyalty, and to determine the mediating role of brand gestalt in the influence of social media marketing on

brand loyalty. The study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by focusing on the the interplay between social media marketing, brand gestalt, and brand loyalty within the fast-food restaurant industry. By shedding light on this novel relationship, the study not only expands theoretical knowledge but also provides practical insights for marketers and managers in leveraging social media platforms to enhance brand loyalty through the cultivation of a cohesive brand image and experience.

From a theoretical standpoint, SMM is viewed as a strategic approach to cultivating relationships with consumers and enhancing brand visibility and engagement. Moreover, empirical studies provide empirical support for the hypothesis. Previous researches found a positive and significant relationship between SMM and customer loyalty [11] [12] [13], indicating that effective social media strategies contribute to higher levels of brand loyalty among consumers. Similarly, [14] demonstrated that SMM activities positively influence brand loyalty, highlighting the role of social media in building and maintaining strong connections with consumers. These theoretical and empirical insights provide a strong foundation for the hypothesis that SMM has a positive impact on brand loyalty. These conceptualization leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> : Social media marketing has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of SMM in achieving various marketing objectives, including brand building, promotion, and customer engagement [15]. Furthermore, the concept of brand gestalt, which emphasizes the holistic perception of a brand, has garnered attention in branding literature [9]. Brand gestalt encompasses the interconnected elements of a brand that collectively shape consumers' overall impression and experience. While previous research has explored the individual impacts of SMM and brand gestalt on consumer behavior, there is a gap in understanding how SMM influences brand gestalt. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that H<sub>2</sub> : Social media marketing has a positive impact on brand gestalt.

Brand loyalty is a pivotal concept in marketing, indicating consumers' consistent preference for a particular brand [16] [17]. It is crucial for businesses seeking sustainable competitive advantages and enduring customer relationships [18]. One factor influencing brand loyalty is "brand gestalt," which represents the holistic impression and experience of a brand formed by its various elements [9]. Previous researches also provide empirical basis on the influence of brand gestalt on brand loyalty [19] [20] [21]. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesized that H<sub>3</sub> : Brand gestalt positively influences brand loyalty.

Empirical studies have underscored the significance of brand gestalt in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors towards brands. For instance, [9] applied gestalt principles to branding, highlighting the dynamic interaction between brand elements and the

environment. Furthermore, recent research by [23] identified four dimensions of brand gestalt—story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder—which collectively influence consumer perceptions of brands. Building upon this theoretical foundation, empirical evidence suggests that brand gestalt plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and brand loyalty. Previous studies, such as those conducted by [11] [14], have demonstrated the positive impact of SMM on brand loyalty. Some studies also documented the influences of SMM on brand loyalty via brand gestalt [21] [22] [10]. Therefore, based on theoretical insights and empirical findings, this study hypothesizes that H<sub>4</sub> : Brand gestalt mediates the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty. Figure 1 presents the proposed model in this study, summarizing the relationships between variables in this research.

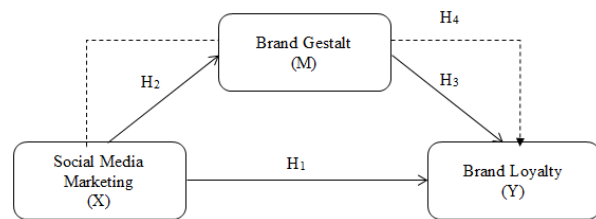


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## 2. Research Method

The research design employed in this study is quantitative descriptive. Associative research aims to explain the influence of social media marketing variables on brand loyalty through brand gestalt. In this study, the variables are social media marketing (X), the mediating variable is brand gestalt (M), and the dependent variable is brand loyalty (Y). This study analyzes primary data collected through survey methods. The data analysis used is structural equation modeling (SEM).

The population of this study consists of customers of fast-food restaurants in the city of Manado. Sampling is used as a technique to select only a portion of the population, which is then used to determine the desired characteristics of a population. In this study, the sample consists of individuals who made purchases at fast-food restaurants in the city of Manado, such as KFC and McDonald's. The sampling technique is conducted using nonprobability sampling with convenience sampling method, where sample determination is based on the availability and ease of obtaining samples.

The type and source of data to test hypotheses in this study are primary data. This primary data has been obtained through surveys. The survey instrument uses a seven-point Likert scale with options ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, the first part containing respondent demographics and some instructions. The second part includes measurement items for each variable. There are 33 questionnaire measurement items used in this study.

The data collection procedure conducted by the researcher involves distributing the questionnaire online. This questionnaire is conducted online because nowadays people prefer using smartphones as flexible electronic devices rather than using paper. In the dissemination stage of this questionnaire, a google forms link containing questions about the research object was provided. Before providing the google forms link to the respondents, the researcher explained the purpose and objectives of this survey and asked for the respondents' availability to answer the questions in detail and completely according to the researcher's instructions.

Once completed, the researcher collects the questionnaires and then double-checks by counting the number of collected questionnaires. Additionally, the collected questionnaires are rechecked to ensure they are filled out completely and in accordance with the provided instructions. Only questionnaires that have been completed in full are processed. After tabulation, the data is organized in a spreadsheet and exported to SPSS and SmartPLS.

In this study, data analysis process is performed using SPSS to analyze demographic data and evaluate data completeness and fit. Subsequently, the analysis tool used is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), operationalized through the SmartPLS program. The collected data will then be processed and analyzed to serve as the basis for discussing the research results.

The data analysis based on SEM procedures is conducted in several stages. First, instrument validity testing is conducted to ensure that each respondent's answer is valid and can depict the actual situation. Instrument validity testing in this study is performed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation technique with the assistance of the SPSS program. This procedure is performed by correlating each question with the total score for each variable. Instrument validity is met if the correlation coefficient is statistically significant [24].

Second, testing convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is met if the factor loading values of all indicator variables are above 0.7 [24]. Discriminant validity testing is performed using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and cross-loading. According to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, discriminant validity is met when the square root of AVE (average variance extracted) is greater than the correlation between different variables. Furthermore, based on cross-loading criteria, if there is a better correlation between a variable and its indicators than between that variable and the indicators of other variables, then the measurement model has good discriminant validity.

The next step is reliability testing, which is done by analyzing Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values. Variables are considered reliable if they have CA and CR values > 0.7 and AVE > 0.50. Once all validity and reliability indicators are met, structural model testing is

conducted. Structural model testing or hypothesis testing is done by examining the significance of path coefficients using the Bootstrapping feature in the SmartPLS statistical software. The relationship between variables in the model is significant if the path coefficient is statistically significant [24].

### 3. Result and Discussion

The number of respondents in this study is 135 respondents. Based on Table 1, the characteristics of the respondents are as follows: the majority of respondents are female, totaling 112 individuals or 83%, while males are only 23 individuals (17%). In terms of age, the majority of respondents are aged 15 to 25 years old (114 individuals or 84.3%), and the least represented age group is respondents over 45 years old, comprising only 1 individual (0.7%). Out of 135 respondents, the majority reside in the city of Manado, totaling 74 individuals (54.8%). Based on the respondents' occupations, the largest group is private sector employees, numbering 51 individuals (37.8%), followed by students (26.7%), entrepreneurs (11.9%), government employees/state-owned enterprise workers (6.7%), housewives (6.7%), others (6.5%), and unemployed individuals (3.7%). The most frequently used social media platform is Instagram (88.1%), followed by Facebook (46.7%), and Twitter with (18.5%).

Table 1. Respondent Demographic

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	23	17
	Female	112	83
Age	15-25	114	84.3
	26-35	17	12.6
	36-45	3	2.2
	< 45	1	0.7
Domicile	Bitung	9	6.7
	Kotamobagu	21	15.6
	Manado	74	54.8
	Minahasa	10	7.4
	Minahasa Utara	15	11.1
	Other	6	4.2
Occupation	House wife	9	6.7
	Government employee	9	6.7
	Private employee	51	37.8
	Students	36	26.7
	Entrepreneur	16	11.9
	Other	14	10.2
SMM Platform	Facebook	63	46.7
	Instagram	119	88.1
	Twitter	25	18.5

Based on the data in Table 2, the descriptive statistic results indicate the minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation for each variable from the analysis below can be summarized as follows. Based on the table, it can be seen that the variables in the Social Media Marketing (SMM) study have mean values greater than the standard deviation. For example, the mean value of the SMM variable is 5.72 and the standard deviation is 0.92. This indicates that

the study is homogeneous, and there is no significant gap in the SMM variable. The same is also observed for other variables in this study such as Brand Loyalty (BL), story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder, which have mean values greater than the standard deviation. The minimum value of the SMM, BL, story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder variables is 1 and the maximum value is 7.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SMM	135	1	7	5.72	0.92
BL	135	1	7	5.44	1.09
Story	135	1	7	5.32	1.05
Sense	135	1	7	5.53	1.05
Serve	135	1	7	5.83	0.94
Stake	135	1	7	5.98	0.86

Before testing the structural model, the measurement model is first examined. The purpose of testing this measurement model is to assess the validity and reliability of each variable, namely SMM, BL, story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder. To analyze this measurement model, Partial Least Squares (PLS) method is used with the assistance of SmartPLS 3.2 statistical software. Based on the results of the first-stage measurement model testing, out of the 33 indicators used in this study, the majority of indicators for each variable have loading factor values greater than the recommended minimum value of 0.7. The results of the measurement model testing indicate that the loading factor values for all indicators are above 0.7. Thus, convergent validity for all variables in this study has been fulfilled.

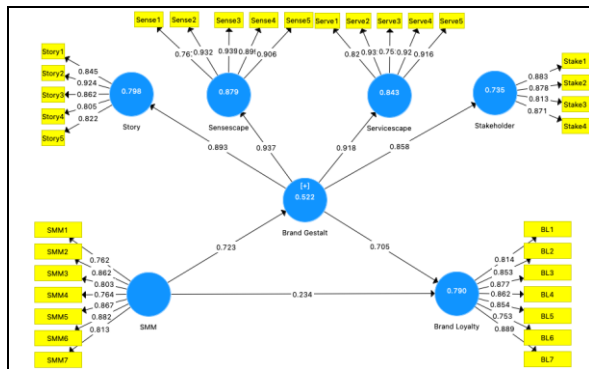


Figure 1. Database Mirroring Architecture

Table 3. Loading Factor Values of the Measurement Model

Variable	Category	N
SMM	SMM1	0.762
	SMM2	0.862
	SMM3	0.803
	SMM4	0.764
	SMM5	0.867
	SMM6	0.882
	SMM7	0.813
Story	Stor 1	0.835
	Stor 2	0.846
	Stor 3	0.821
	Stor 4	0.851
	Stor 5	0.822
Sensescape	Sense 1	0.767
	Sense 2	0.932
	Sense 3	0.939
	Sense 4	0.899
	Sense 5	0.906
Servicescape	Serve 1	0.820
	Serve 2	0.932
	Serve 3	0.752
	Serve 4	0.927
	Serve 5	0.916
Stakeholder	Stake 1	0.883
	Stake 2	0.878
	Stake 3	0.813
	Stake 4	0.871
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.814
	BL2	0.853
	BL3	0.877
	BL4	0.862
	BL5	0.854
	BL6	0.753
	BL7	0.889

Discriminant validity testing in this study is conducted by examining criteria, namely the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. Table 4 below depicts the validity test based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion used in this study. The values presented in the table are the correlations between variables and the square root of AVE on the diagonal of the table. Based on the results shown in Table 4, the square root of AVE is greater than the correlation between variables. Thus, it can be stated that the variables and indicators used in this study have good discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Brand Gestalt (1)	0.78					
Brand Loyalty (2)	0.87	0.84				
SMM (3)	0.72	0.74	0.82			
Sensescape (4)	0.93	0.88	0.69	0.89		
Servicescape (5)	0.91	0.78	0.67	0.81	0.87	
Stakeholder (6)	0.85	0.65	0.60	0.71	0.78	0.86

Reliability testing of variables in this study was conducted by analyzing the values of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE. The results of reliability testing for these three indicators are



presented in the following Table 5. Based on the data in Table 5, each indicator shows values above the recommended minimum threshold. The Cronbach's alpha value is higher than 0.70, composite reliability is above 0.70, and AVE is above 0.50. Therefore, it can be said that all variables in this study have good reliability.

Table 5. Reliability Test Result

	CA	Rho_A	CR	AVE
Brand Gestalt	0.965	0.968	0.968	0.618
Brand Loyalty	0.933	0.937	0.945	0.713
SMM	0.920	0.923	0.936	0.677
Sensescape	0.934	0.940	0.950	0.793
Servicescape	0.920	0.925	0.941	0.761
Stakeholder	0.884	0.893	0.920	0.742
Story	0.906	0.914	0.930	0.727

3.4 Structural Model Test Results

After ensuring the validity and reliability, the structural model (inner model) is also tested to determine whether hypotheses are accepted or rejected. Structural model testing or hypothesis testing involves examining the significance of path coefficients using the PLS Bootstrapping feature in the SmartPLS statistical software. The results of the structural model testing are shown in Figure 3 and Table 6 below.

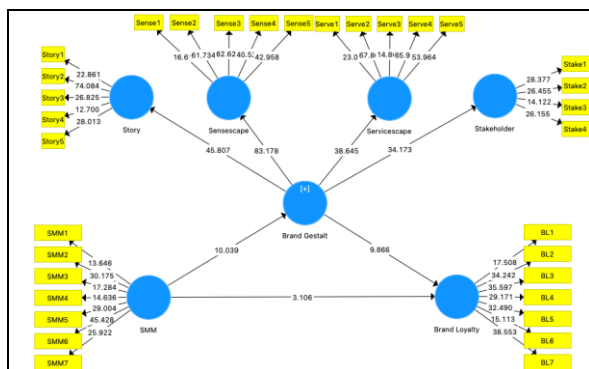


Figure 3. Structural Model Results

Table 6. Structural Model

Path Relation	Estimate	P Values	Conclusion
Brand Gestalt -> Sensescape	83.178	0.000	Significant
Brand Loyalty -> Servicescape	38.645	0.000	Significant
Brand Gestalt -> Stakeholder	34.173	0.000	Significant
Brand Gestalt -> Story	45.807	0.000	Significant
SMM -> Brand Gestalt	10.039	0.000	Significant
SMM -> Brand Loyalty	3.106	0.002	Significant
Brand Gestalt -> Brand Loyalty	9.866	0.000	Significant

The results of the structural model testing are summarized in Figure 3 and Table 6. These results provide support for all hypotheses in this study. Regarding the first hypothesis, the variable SMM has a significant and positive influence on brand loyalty ( $\beta=3.106$ ,  $p$ -value  $<0.001$ ). The testing results of the second hypothesis also indicate a significant and

positive influence of the SMM variable on brand gestalt ( $\beta=10.039$ ,  $p$ -value  $<0.001$ ). The analysis also supports the third hypothesis, showing that brand gestalt has a significant and positive influence on brand loyalty ( $\beta=9.866$ ,  $p$ -value  $<0.001$ ).

Based on these findings, it can be explained that the testing results of the first hypothesis found that social media marketing has a positive and significant influence on brand loyalty. These results indicate the significant role of social media marketing in brand loyalty. Based on this, several aspects of SMM become drivers of loyalty in the online context. Loyal customers have a positive attitude and an intention to revisit the KFC and McDonald's social media platforms triggered by content, usefulness, ease of obtaining information, and exchanging up-to-date information. These findings reinforce previous research results on the importance of social media influence in building brand loyalty [11] [13] [14].

Secondly, the testing results of the structural model indicate that SMM has a significant and positive influence on brand gestalt. Based on these findings, it can be explained that when customers have pleasant impressions and experiences in using social media platforms, where customers have strong and positive perceptions of KFC and McDonald's restaurants. These results confirm previous research findings on the positive influence of SMM on brand gestalt [10].

Thirdly, the testing results for the influence of brand gestalt on brand loyalty were found to have a significant and positive effect. These results indicate that brand gestalt positively influences brand loyalty, where the more positive the brand gestalt, the higher the customer loyalty to KFC and McDonald's restaurants. These results confirm previous research findings that brand gestalt significantly influences brand loyalty [10].

Table 7 shows the results of the goodness of fit model test. The main purpose of this goodness of fit model test is to measure the accuracy of the data distribution of the sample in estimating the actual values statistically. It is known that the criteria for each goodness of fit indicator are: SRMR should be less than 0.08,  $d_{ULS}$  should be greater than 2.00,  $d_G$  should be more than 0.90, chi-square should be less than 5, and NFI should be less than 0.9. Based on the results displayed in Table 8, it is found that most of the goodness of fit indicators are within the recommended value range (SRMR = 0.093;  $d_{ULS}$  = 12.022;  $d_G$  = 1.854; NFI = 0.709), indicating that the structural model has a high level of conformity with the input data in the research sample.

Table 7. Uji Goodness of Fit Model

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.091	0.093
$d_{ULS}$	11.295	12.022
$d_G$	1.412	1.854
Chi-Square	853.079	1027.648
NFI	0.759	0.709

#### 4. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the fast-food restaurant industry with brand gestalt as a mediating role. Research hypotheses (H1-H3) were formulated to achieve this objective. To test these hypotheses, and to answer the research problem formulation questions, data were collected through surveys and processed using the statistical software SPSS version 25.0 and SmartPLS version 3.2. The results of data analysis show several significant findings. Firstly, social media marketing has a significant and positive impact on brand loyalty. Secondly, social media marketing has a significant and positive impact on brand gestalt. Lastly, it is indicated that brand gestalt has a significant and positive influence on brand loyalty. This research has significant contributions, although there are some shortcomings that can be improved in future studies. Firstly, when data is collected from respondents through questionnaires, it sometimes does not reflect the actual opinions of the respondents. This occurs due to differences in ideas, assumptions, and understanding among each respondent. Additionally, there are other factors such as honesty in filling out respondents' opinions in the questionnaire. Furthermore, this study only uses a few theories that explain the relationship between variables, but there are still many other theories that can explain different views on the researched topic. Future research is expected to improve the model tested in this study regarding the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty and the mediating role of brand gestalt by incorporating additional variables that potentially relate to all three variables. Secondly, based on the analyzed data results showing that social media marketing has a significant influence on brand loyalty and brand gestalt, these empirical findings can be considered as a reference for further research on the relationship between the same variables as in this study.

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