



# I will Always Follow You: Exploring the Role of Customer Relationship in Social Media Marketing

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the mediating role of customer relationship in social media marketing. Its affect on purchase intention and brand loyalty is also analyzed. The conceptual model was tested in the context of retail banking. Data were collected by self-administered survey with 286 respondents. The results provide evidence that social media marketing leads to customer relationship, purchase intention and brand loyalty. However, the affect of social media marketing on purchase intention and brand loyalty were stronger when it was mediated by customer relationship. From a theoretical standpoint the results of this study contribute to further understanding the importance of customer relationship in social media marketing. Whereas for managerial perspective, it determines the social media marketing strategy for improving purchase intention and brand loyalty.

**Keywords:** Customer Relationship, Social Media Marketing, Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty

**JEL Classification:** M31

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The internet and social media have significantly changed the means of communication between companies and consumers. With over 7.7 billion total population in the world, 59% are connected with the internet and about 3.8 billion or 49% of total population in the world are active social media users (Hootsuite, 2020). One of the characteristics of social media is a two-way communication that allows companies to interact and receive instant feedback from customers. Arguably, it could enhanced the relationships between them.

However, the utilization of this new media requires a thorough understanding on how it affected consumers and is somehow could enhanced business relationship that in turns positively for business outcomes as it reflected by purchase intention and brand loyalty.

As the used of social media marketing has been widely applied in various industries (see for examples, DeVries et al., 2012; Karimi and Naghibi, 2015; Pentina and Koh, 2012; Phan et al., 2011),

the context of the study is retail banking in Indonesia. Arguably, relationship marketing implicates trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) especially in the banking industry (Dia, 2011; Laksamana et al., 2012). Thus, the context of the research is Indonesia because it resembles the characteristics of how the world connected with the internet and social media. Out of 268 million of total population in Indonesia, 150 million (56%) are internet users and 130 million (48%) are active social media users (Hootsuite, 2019). The same report also found that among top four popular social media platform in Indonesia are Youtube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

One of the main purpose of social media marketing is to influence consumers for buying products. However, with this new mass communication the outcome is still somewhat dispute (see for examples, Hoffman and Fodor, 2010; Yang et al., 2014). Hence, various companies are using social media without proper strategy (Chikandiwa et al., 2013; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Nonetheless, there is still very limited information to answer some of the important issues regarding customer relationship purchase

intention and brand loyalty. The study is also in respond to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) for further investigate the impact of customer interactions and relationship outcomes in the new digital media. More spesifically, the study aims to explore the role of customer relationship in social media marketing on customer relationship for purchase intention and brand loyalty.

### 1.1. Research Questions

For the purpose of the study, the question arise:

1. Does social media marketing have an influence to customer relationship?
2. Does social media marketing have an influence to purchase intention?
3. Does social media marketing have an influence to brand loyalty?
4. Does customer relationship have an influence to purchase intention?
5. Does customer relationship have an influence to brand loyalty?

### 1.2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the impact of social media marketing on customer relationship
2. To determine the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention
3. To determine the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty
4. To determine the impact of customer relationship on purchase intention
5. To determine the impact of customer relationship on brand loyalty.

### 1.3. Research Contributions

The contribution of the study are two folded. First, theoretical contribution. From a theoretical perspective the results of this study contribute to our knowledge on how customer relationship, purchase intention and brand loyalty are influenced by this new marketing channel. Second, for managerial perspective. The findings are useful for enhancing customer relationship, purchase intention and brand loyalty with an improved social media marketing strategy.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Ground Theory

As the relationship between attitudes and behaviors could be explained in human action, the theory of reasoned action by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) is applicable for understanding communication and persuasion. Further, with the advanced of technology nowadays, the technological acceptance model by Davis (1989) is explained potential buyer 's behavior in regards of its usefulness, ease of use and its acceptance.

### 2.2. Social Media Marketing

With the onset of new media for marketing purpose, there are at least four characteristics of new media; they are digital, pro-active, visible, real-time and memory, ubiquitous and networks (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Further, social media consists of text,

pictures, videos and networks, it is a new media that can reach two-way communication with customers. Social media defined as *“a group of internet based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”* (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Hence, with social media, consumers enable to communicate one to another, create and share the content and even build relationships with others (Libai et al., 2010).

Although this new digital media has some positive impacts on marketing efforts such as positive word of mouth (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006), referral in online communities (Trusov et al., 2009) purchase intention (Simonshon and Ariely, 2008) and brand development (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009), consumers found to be irritated when it comes to overwhelmed efforts (Dhar and Chang, 2009).

### 2.3. Customer Relationship

A long-lasting customer relationships depends on customer's past experience, expectations, goals, desires and predictions (Crosby et al., 1990). Hence, Kim and Ko (2010) argued that customer relationship includes intimacy and trust. There are at least three types of intimacy; physical intimacy, verbal intimacy, spiritual intimacy and intellectual intimacy (Piorkowski and Cardone, 2000).

Thus, as relationships arise, interactions are growing followed by more intimate and stronger emotional bonding (Yim et al., 2008). Futher, as emotional relationship could be represented by intimacy (Elliott and Yannopoulou, 2007) and a long-term relationship is inconceivable without trust (see for examples, Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Morgan and Hunt, 1994), customer relationship in this study consists of intimacy and trust.

### 2.4. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention defined as the effort to buy a product or service (Diallo, 2012). Hence, it is considered as the predictor for actual buying behavior (Wu et al., 2011).

Consequently, an increase in purchase intention could lead in the actual purchasing of a product (Schiffman and Wisenbilt, 2009) and nowadays the effort for increasing purchase intention is enhanced through social media (Kim and Ko, 2010).

### 2.5. Brand Loyalty

In the early studies, loyalty was only defined as a repeat purchase behavior (see for examples, Farley, 1964; Jacoby and Kyner, 1973). However, in a more recent studies loyalty has been characterized as a multi-dimensional concept that includes attitude and behavior (see for examples, Oliver, 1999; Worthington et al., 2009). Whilst attitudinal brand loyalty associates to repurchase the brand psychologically, behavioral brand loyalty relates to the action of repurchase.

Customers also have been found to keep buying product not only for the product's performance, but also for their relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998). It is either for psychological or emotional reasons. Similarly, previous study has suggested that the higher involvement with brand leads to higher commitment or loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

### 3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1. Hypotheses Development

New technology and online social networks in mobile devices have transformed marketers to reach consumers through this new touch points. It enables customer to engage with retailers at any point of time (Shankar et al., 2011). Consequently, social media marketing leads to an elicit emotions between company and its customers (Batra and Keller, 2016) and it enhanced trust and intimacy with customers.

The study then posits:

H1: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and customer relationship.

It has been argued that social media become the leading digital new media platform for consumers to evaluate product including for purchase (Qualman, 2013). In addition, social media affects positively on customer spending and cross-buying (Kumar et al., 2016; Schweidel and Moe, 2014) that in turns determined company's profitability and customer's purchase intention (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012).

Therefore:

H2: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

Previous study has examined that social media could have a positive response on brand loyalty when a brand could relate and engage as an essential part of a daily life for user (Zinnbauer and Honer, 2011). In addition, customers loyal to a brand when it exists on social media with popular and relevant content (Erdogmus and Cicek, 2012). Although the impact is positive but somewhat different for several ethnicity backgrounds, brand loyalty has been found influenced by social media marketing (Godey et al., 2016).

Therefore:

H3: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

The used of social media has a positive impact on consumer attitudes and motives such as advertising responses (Chu, 2011). It also increases customer engagement. Further, interpersonal relationship leads to satisfaction and future intention (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999)

Therefore:

H4: There is a positive relationship between customer relationship and purchase intention.

Customer relationship goal is a long-lasting relationship between a firm and a customer and also a good customer relationship is an element for a customer to remain with their service provider. Further, previous studies have determined that loyalty affected by customer relationship (Hanley and Leahy, 2008; J. Kim et al., 2003; Szczepańska and Gawron, 2011; Wang and Lo, 2004)

Thus, the final hypothesis:

H5: There is a positive relationship between customer relationship and brand loyalty.

### 4. METHOD

To test the proposed research model, a self-administered survey was conducted. A non-probability convenience was used for a mass, fast and inexpensive in an immediate time (Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000). It was conducted in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia because of its heterogeneous population characteristics such as education, ethnicity, income and lifestyle. A total 286 respondents were completed the survey. Further, a five-point Likert scale was used, where 1 for "strongly disagree", 2 for "somewhat disagree", 3 for "neutral", 4 for "agree" and 5 for "strongly agree".

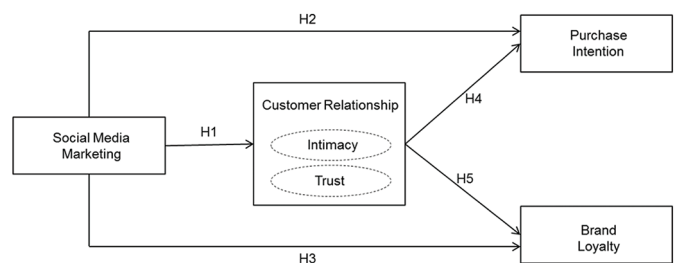
The measures of all constructs in the model were based from the literature. The social media marketing was adopted from Kim and Ko (2012). This measurement is a holistic concept because it includes entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and electronic word of mouth. Whereas customer relationship comes from Aaker et al. (2004) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), purchase intention was adopted from Bolton and Drew (1991). Finally, brand loyalty was derived from Rindfleisch et al. (2009).

For the purpose of the study, various statistical analysis were conducted, such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and reliability test. In regards of EFA, factor loading with values below.50 were rejected. Therefore, they were eliminated for advance statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2006). As for reliability, reliability test was conducted for consistency, stability and credibility of the findings (Hair et al., 2006). Consequently, reliability is better when the construct is higher and therefore, values above.60 were accepted (DeVellis, 2003). For testing hypotheses, ANOVA was used for testing a dependent variable with two or more independent variables (Zikmund et al., 2011).

### 5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A total of 352 questionnaires were distributed and 286 valid questionnaires were returned. The response rate was 81%. The sample consisted of 49.7% male and 50.3% female. Further, most of the sample were in the age range between 21-30 (59.4%), with the majority of profession was professionals in the private sectors (40.9%). As for education level, most of respondents was high school (43.7%) and bachelor degree (42.7%) background.

Figure 1: Research model



More specific questions also found that sample had bank account(s) in private commercial bank (57.7%), followed by state owned bank (33.9%), foreign bank (5.6%) and sharia bank (2.8%). As for social media platforms and as part of their daily life, many of them had more than one. Their platforms were Line (191), Facebook (135), Path (121), Twitter (87), Instagram (61), Snapchat (47), and others (1).

Although most of the items in the study have a good factor structure with loading more than 0.50 by Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), there were six items that had factor loading with <0.50. They are social media marketing 1.5 and 1.9; customer relationship 2.1, 2.2 and 2.8 and brand loyalty 4.4. Consequently, for further statistical analysis those six items were terminated (Hair et al., 2006).

The results of reliability test confirmed that all of the constructs were reliable with the highest Cronbach's alpha.820 for social media marketing, followed by brand loyalty (.811), purchase intention (.786) and customer relationship (.764).

Further, all of respondents had positive feedback for all the items in the survey. The highest mean was 3.772 for customer relationship

2.7 and the lowest was 3.132 for brand loyalty 4.4. Those all results were shown in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and customer relationship.

The impact of social media marketing on customer relationship is significant with a significance level of almost 100% (sig. =.000). Therefore, H1 is supported. However, the correlation is weak as indicated by the multiple correlation coefficient (R) 45% and only 20% (R<sup>2</sup>) of customer relationship can be explained by social media marketing.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

The study verifies that social media marketing influenced purchase intention and this influence is statistically significant with a significance level of almost 100% (sig. =.000). This means H2 is supported. However, it has been found that the correlation between the two latter is weak with R values 42% and R<sup>2</sup> values 18%. That means only 18% of purchase intention is explained by social media marketing.

**Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis and inferential statistics**

Construct	Items in the questionnaire	Factor loading	Mean	Cronbach's alpha
Social media marketing	A. Entertainment			
	1.1 Using Bank X social media is fun	0.750	3.496	
	1.2 Content shown in Bank X's social media seem interesting	0.726	3.472	
	B. Interaction			
	1.3 Bank X social media enables information sharing with others	0.523	3.468	
	1.4 Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through Bank X social media	0.877	3.328	
	1.5 It is easy to deliver my opinion through Bank X's social media	0.426	3.521	
	C. Trendiness			
	1.6 Contents shown in Bank X's social media is the newest information	0.623	3.769	0.820
	1.7 Using Bank X's social media is very trendy	0.514	3.615	
	D. Customization			
1.8 Bank X's social media offers customized information search	0.638	3.514		
1.9 Bank X's social media provides customized service	0.125	3.769		
E. Electronic Word of Mouth				
1.10 I would like to pass along information on brand, product, or services from Bank X's social media to my friends	0.592	3.335		
1.11 I would like to upload content from Bank X's social media on my blog or micro blog	0.852	3.171		
Customer Relationship	A. Intimacy			
	2.1 I would feel comfortable sharing detailed personal info about myself with Bank X	0.475	3.328	0.764
	2.2 Bank X really understands my needs in the banking services category	0.379	3.639	
	2.3 I'd feel comfortable describing Bank X to someone who was not familiar with it	0.550	3.475	
	2.4 I am familiar with the range of products and services Bank X offers	0.809	3.496	
	2.5 I have become very knowledgeable about Bank X	0.668	3.444	
	B. Trust			
	2.6 Bank X meets my expectation	0.735	3.636	
2.7 I rely on Bank X	0.638	3.772		
Purchase Intention	2.8 Bank X never dissapoints me	0.465	3.496	
	3.1 I would intend to become Bank X customer	0.570	3.569	0.786
	3.2 My willingness to become Bank X customer is high	0.696	3.468	
	3.3 I am likely to become Bank X customer	0.600	3.489	
3.4 I have a high intention to become Bank X customers	0.668	3.507		
Brand Loyalty	4.1 The next time I am in the market for banking products, I plan to buy from Bank X	0.754	3.741	0.811
	4.2 I intend to keep buying from Bank X's for the foreseeable future	0.618	3.608	
	4.3 I am committed to Bank X	0.690	3.517	
	4.4 Next time I buy a banking product, I would be willing to pay more from Bank X than other banks	0.333	3.132	

**Table 2: Results of model tests**

	Hypotheses	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.	Results
H1	There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and customer relationship.	0.451	0.204	0.000*	Supported
H2	There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.	0.427	0.182	0.000*	Supported
H3	There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.	0.382	0.146	0.000*	Supported
H4	There is a positive relationship between customer relationship and purchase intention.	0.632	0.399	0.000*	Supported
H5	There is a positive relationship between customer relationship and brand loyalty.	0.604	0.365	0.000*	Supported

\*significant at .01

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

The study determines that brand loyalty is affected by social media marketing with statistically significant of almost 100% (sig. =.000). Consequently, H3 is supported. In addition, the correlation between the two variables is not strong with R values only 38% and R<sup>2</sup> values 14%. This indicates that only 14% of brand loyalty is explained by social media marketing.

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between customer relationship and purchase intention.

The affect of customer relationship on purchase intention is statistically significant with sig. =.000. It concludes that H4 is supported. Hence the relationship between the two latter is strong with correlation at 63% (R). The R<sup>2</sup> is implying that 39% of purchase intention predicted by customer relationship.

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between customer relationship and brand loyalty.

Finally, the study determines that brand loyalty influenced by customer relationship with statistically significant of almost 100% (sig. =.000). Therefore, H5 is supported. The correlation between the two variables is strong at 60% (R) and 36% (R<sup>2</sup>) of brand loyalty was contributed by customer relationship.

In conclusion, the study has determined that all of the hypotheses were supported with statistically significant as indicates in Table 2.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study tested social media marketing effect on customer relationship, purchase intention and brand loyalty respectively. Hence, it also examined the impact of customer relationship to purchase intention and brand loyalty. Therefore, the findings extend the knowledge for both research and managerial perspectives.

The results show that social media marketing indeed affect customer relationship, purchase intention and brand loyalty. The social media marketing is in fact, a relevant marketing effort for customer relationship. Based on this, the study extends prior findings that social media marketing is not only about customer's

social media marketing communication processed (Batra and Keller, 2016) and the outcomes on sales (Kumar et al., 2016; Naylor et al., 2012) but also on customer relationship. As we live in the new digital era, bank still needs to maintain a good customer relationship. In the old days, the relationship between a bank and a customer is rely upon a customer service or a relationship manager. But nowadays it could be replaced by social media for more efficient, faster and a twenty-four hours interactions.

Further, the findings imply that social media marketing have a positive impact on purchase intention and brand loyalty. As for social media marketing affected purchase intention, the results is in consistent with previous studies (Hutter et al., 2013; A. J. Kim and Ko, 2010). Likewise, the findings also suggest that brand loyalty affected by social media marketing. This is in accordance from the study Godey et al. (2016) on luxury brands for Chinese, French, Indian and Italian population.

Interestingly, the findings also suggest that the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention and brand loyalty are stronger when they are mediated by customer relationship. Unlike any traditional marketing efforts that is only apply one-way communication from a firm to consumers, social media enables two-way communications between a firm, in this case a bank, to its consumers. Accordingly, the interaction has a positive influence on product valuations, financial oucomes (Zhu and Zhang, 2010) and loyalty (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997; Roberts et al., 2003).

From a managerial perspective, the findings in this study confirm that social media marketing is relevant for purchase intention and brand loyalty. The positive effects of social media marketing efforts on customer relationship, purchase intention and brand loyalty are strong arguments for the relevance to this new digital phenomenon.

More specifically, regardless the existence of customer relationship, the impact of social media marketing to purchase intention has been found greater than the impact of social media marketing to brand loyalty. Accordingly, social media marketing is more relevant for potential customer than loyalty attempt.

Marketing managers when it comes to social media marketing efforts need to take into consideration the importance of customer relationship. Nonetheless, it should be noted that for a better impact in using two-ways digital communication, it is has been argued that

the content must be entertaining, customized and yet interactive (Hutter et al., 2013; Zhu and Zhang, 2010). Finally, with a good customer relationship, the outcomes would then improved the financial outcomes for banks.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The major limitation of this study is its generalizability beyond retail banking industry. Although the results are tend to be useful in the industry, they may have different results to other industries. Therefore, study in various industries is needed for further understand and confirmed in other contexts.

Second, whilst the current study on social media marketing is expanding our knowledge, more specific studies on social media is needed. These includes social media types, processing implications and outcomes (DeVries et al., 2012; Stephen and Galak, 2012).

Finally, as social media marketing is important for brand equity (Godey et al., 2016), the study employed brand loyalty only. Future research should include other branding components such as brand awareness, brand preference, brand trust, brand credibility and brand image.

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