Impact des médias sociaux sur la fidélité de la clientèle : une étude mixte sur les entreprises marocaines

Impact of Social Media on Customer Loyalty: A Mixed Study on Moroccan Companies

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Résumé

Les réseaux sociaux ont fondamentalement transformé le paysage du marketing en agissant comme une plateforme dynamique qui influence la manière dont les consommateurs découvrent, évaluent et achètent des produits ou des services. Cette étude examine l'impact des interactions sur les réseaux sociaux sur la relation client-marque, en mettant l'accent sur leur rôle dans la fidélisation à long terme et l'influence sur les décisions d'achat.Adoptant une approche méthodologique mixte, l'étude a collecté des données à travers des entretiens qualitatifs avec des responsables marketing de six entreprises et une enquête quantitative en ligne menée auprès de 460 consommateurs. Les résultats mettent en évidence que les réseaux sociaux offrent des opportunités de création de contenu personnalisé, d'engagement en temps réel et de communication interactive, contribuant ainsi de manière significative au renforcement de la confiance des clients, de l'affinité avec la marque et des comportements d'achat récurrents. En exploitant des fonctionnalités telles que la publicité personnalisée et les promotions ciblées, les entreprises peuvent inciter efficacement les utilisateurs à passer du statut de simples abonnés à celui d'ambassadeurs engagés de la marque. Toutefois, la recherche reconnaît également certaines limites, notamment en ce qui concerne la représentativité de l'échantillon sélectionné et le risque de biais de réponse dans les données auto-déclarées. Sur la base de ces enseignements, il est recommandé aux entreprises d'allouer stratégiquement leurs ressources aux initiatives marketing sur les réseaux sociaux et d'adopter des approches adaptées aux spécificités culturelles, économiques et commerciales de leurs marchés. Les réseaux sociaux s'imposent ainsi comme un outil incontournable pour bâtir une fidélité durable des clients et améliorer la performance globale des marques.

Mots-clés : Médias sociaux ; Marketing moderne ; Comportements d'achat ; Fidélité de la clientèle ; Relation client-marque

Abstract

Social media has fundamentally changed the marketing landscape by acting as a dynamic platform that influences how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products or services. This study investigates the impact of social media interactions on the customer-brand relationship, focusing on their role in fostering long-term loyalty and driving purchasing decisions. Employing a mixed-method research design, the study collected data through qualitative interviews with marketing managers from six companies and a quantitative online survey administered to 460 customers. The findings highlight that social media creates opportunities for personalized content, real-time engagement, and interactive communication, all of which significantly contribute to strengthening customer trust, brand affinity, and repeat buying behaviors. By leveraging features such as customized advertising and targeted promotions, companies can effectively encourage users to transition from casual followers to dedicated brand advocates. However, the research also acknowledges potential limitations,

including the representativeness of the chosen sample and the possibility of response bias in self-reported data. Based on these insights, businesses are urged to allocate resources strategically to social media marketing initiatives and to adopt tailored approaches that address specific cultural, economic, and market conditions. Social media emerges as an indispensable tool for building lasting customer loyalty and enhancing overall brand performance.

Keywords: Social media; Modern marketing; Purchasing behaviors; Customer loyalty; Customer-brand relationship

Introduction

Social media has transformed the modern marketing landscape by significantly shaping purchasing behaviors and customer loyalty. This change stems from social media's unmatched capacity to foster interactivity and personalization, thus strengthening the relationship between brands and consumers. The growing importance of customer loyalty is well supported in the literature, with benefits such as reduced marketing costs and increased profitability. In addition, social media empowers companies to reach a broader audience and communicate more effectively, directly influencing consumers' purchase decisions (Yadav & Rahman, 2018).

In order to investigate this phenomenon, we adopted a mixed-method research approach that combines a qualitative phase, conducted through semi-structured interviews with marketing managers from six Moroccan companies, and a quantitative phase, consisting of an online survey completed by 460 customers. This two-pronged methodology provides a comprehensive and nuanced view of how social media interactions affect loyalty and purchase decisions.

The direct impact of social media on customer loyalty is well illustrated by studies indicating that interactions and engagement on brand Facebook pages enhance customer trust, satisfaction, and perceived value, thereby reinforcing loyalty (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014). Moreover, customer relationship, brand awareness, positive word-of-mouth, and new ideas act as intermediaries that amplify social media's influence on loyalty (Bhat & Firdous, 2017). Customer satisfaction, in particular, mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty (Al-Dmour et al., 2023).

Customer engagement on social media also exerts a direct and significant impact on brand loyalty. Highly engaged customers tend to remain loyal because interaction fosters a stronger

customer-brand bond (Muchardie et al., 2016). Content strategies, including attractive campaigns, relevant and trending content, and a multi-platform presence, are key drivers of increased brand loyalty (Erdogmus & Çiçek, 2012). Additionally, Social media platforms and interactive content enable companies to communicate effectively with customers, fostering emotional connections and enhancing customer service (Siregar et al., 2023).

The research question thus arises: How do social media influence customer loyalty and purchasing decisions? To address this question, three hypotheses are formulated based on the study findings:

H1: Social media strengthen customer loyalty by increasing engagement and interaction with brands.

H2: Social media usage has a significant impact on consumers' purchase decisions.

H3: Effective loyalty strategies, supported by an active social media presence, lower the probability of customers switching to competitors.

These hypotheses serve as guiding principles for the analysis and shed light on the interplay between social media, customer loyalty, and purchase decisions. Consequently, businesses must invest in social media marketing strategies to maximize these effects and strengthen brand loyalty.

Lastly, the structure of this research unfolds as follows: we first present a literature review that lays the conceptual groundwork (Part I). We then detail the adopted methodology and examine the empirical findings derived from the mixed-method study (Part II). Finally, we discuss the results and offer concluding remarks, highlighting managerial implications and future avenues for research.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Conceptual Framework and Loyalty Theories

Homburg and Bruhn (1998) define loyalty as "all actions taken by a company to positively influence a customer's current and future purchasing behavior to stabilize and expand the relationship with that customer." This definition clearly distinguishes between loyalty, which refers to voluntary and active actions by the consumer to remain loyal, and loyalty efforts, which involve both the customer and the company aiming to bind the customer. From this definition,

customer loyalty is considered essential for long-term business success. Various theories and models have been developed to understand and improve customer retention. It aims to improve customer loyalty, satisfaction, and long-term profitability (Chauhan, 2023; Aulia, 2022). CRM utilizes data mining and advanced analytics to identify customer needs, develop personalized marketing strategies, and enhance customer service (Chauhan, 2023; Riyanto, 2022). A dynamic model of customer retention based on the customer relationship lifecycle describes how customer value, satisfaction, trust, and switching costs influence loyalty through different relationship phases.

Moreover, the theory of customer satisfaction suggests that satisfaction is a key predictor of retention. However, satisfaction alone does not always guarantee loyalty. Other factors such as perceived behavioral control and trust are also crucial (Guo et al., 2009). Additionally, probabilistic models of customer retention use historical data to predict future customer retention and estimate customer lifetime value. An example is the shifted beta-geometric model, which can be easily implemented in tools like Excel for precise forecasts (Fader & Hardie, 2007).

Reputation management is also vital for customer retention. A company's reputation influences customer trust and the expected benefits of the relationship. Reinforcement and sanction mechanisms can complement the loyalty process (Yinghong et al., 2011). Another model, the customer value and usage segmentation model, proposes maximizing long-term customer value by segmenting customers according to their usage and adapting retention strategies accordingly (Weinstein, 2002).

1.2. Common Loyalty Methods

Among the common loyalty methods are customer loyalty programs designed to encourage customers to continue purchasing a company's products or services by offering rewards. However, the effectiveness and design of these programs vary considerably. These programs aim to retain existing customers, maintain sales levels, increase the potential value of current customers, and encourage the purchase of other company products.

Loyalty programs can positively influence customers' attitudes towards the retailer, their satisfaction, and the perceived quality of their relationship with the retailer. Ha and Stoel (2014) found that this effect is particularly strong when the programs are perceived as distinctive and

aligned with the customer's identity goals. This indicates that customer perception plays a key role in the effectiveness of loyalty programs.

To maximize the effectiveness of loyalty programs, it is essential that they are well-designed to meet customer expectations. Nandal et al. (2020) recommend that programs be evaluated periodically to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. This regular evaluation would ensure that programs remain aligned with customer needs and expectations while allowing necessary adjustments to maintain their effectiveness.

In this context, intangible benefits in customer loyalty programs can strengthen customers' emotional connection with a brand by offering personalized experiences and special privileges that go beyond material rewards. Customers often appreciate intangible benefits such as flexibility and the social value of loyalty programs more than tangible benefits. These elements significantly increase customer loyalty (Kwiatek et al., 2021), demonstrating the importance of perceived added value beyond simple material rewards.

Furthermore, perceived service quality, including intangible aspects, is essential in customer loyalty. High customer satisfaction leads to greater loyalty, even in competitive environments such as the hotel sector in Thailand (Tamwatin et al., 2016). This highlights that customers remain loyal when they perceive consistent and superior service quality.

Additionally, relational benefits such as the feeling of recognition and perceived value positively influence customer loyalty in industries like aviation, where service quality and relational benefits are essential (Chen & Hu, 2013). This sense of recognition strengthens the bond between customers and the brand, increasing their engagement and loyalty. Moreover, a positive perception of intangible quality and company image are determining factors for establishing and maintaining a loyal customer base. For example, among bank account holders in Pakistan, a favorable perception of intangible quality significantly contributes to loyalty (Rehman & Afsar, 2012). This indicates that customers value perceived qualities and positive brand images when deciding to remain loyal.

Loyalty programs that include non-material benefits, such as personalized services and special recognition, are more effective in creating attitudinal and behavioral loyalty among customers. In the credit card industry, for example, these non-material benefits are crucial for

customer loyalty (Butler & D'souza, 2015). This approach to personalization and special recognition enhances the customer experience and strengthens their attachment to the brand.

It is important to note that despite their popularity, loyalty programs can have limited effectiveness and high costs. For example, Dowling and Uncles (1997) highlight that these programs can increase market spending without creating genuine brand loyalty. They do not fundamentally alter the market structure, and only about 10% of frequent buyers of consumer goods are entirely loyal to one brand over a year. This suggests that loyalty programs may not be as effective as expected in generating lasting loyalty.

Moreover, loyalty programs can often seem ineffective when they merely promise future rewards without engaging customers from the start. Investments in social resources (love, status, information) are more closely associated with loyalty than monetary investments (Dorsch & Brooks, 2012). This indicates that initial engagement is fundamental to ensuring the long-term success of loyalty programs. Additionally, customers' motivation to participate in these programs is often passive, and their engagement is limited. Thus, the potential of loyalty programs to increase demand is limited. This passivity can reduce the impact of loyalty programs on customer retention. Furthermore, to be effective, loyalty programs must differentiate through personalization, reward types, and additional services. While loyalty programs aim to retain customers and increase their value, their impact on brand loyalty may be limited (Meyer-Waarden & al., 2020). This emphasizes the importance of designing programs that meet individual customer needs rather than offering generic rewards.

The long-term impact of loyalty programs reveals interesting dynamics. Research has shown that frequent buyers at the beginning of a loyalty program are most likely to claim their rewards, but the program does not change their purchasing behavior. Conversely, consumers with initially low or moderate patronage levels gradually buy more and become more loyal to the company (Liu, 2007), suggesting that the effect of loyalty programs may vary depending on initial customer behavior. Firms invest in maintaining customer relationships, especially when building a small customer base (Fishman et al., 2023). It is crucial to find a balance between rewards and costs in loyalty programs. Rewards must be attractive enough to engage customers but not so divided that they fail to create loyalty.

1.3. Social Media and Customer Behavior

Social media has profoundly transformed consumer behavior by influencing purchasing decisions, interactions with brands, and how they express their opinions. Social media allows customers to communicate directly about various products and services, effectively replacing traditional word-of-mouth. This strongly influences customers' purchasing decisions by providing instant recommendations and reviews (Majeed et al., 2019), illustrating the importance of real-time interaction on these platforms.

Additionally, customer engagement on social media platforms like Facebook is affected by their relationship with the brand and their interactions with friends. Factors such as trust and privacy concerns moderate this engagement (Bitter, Grabner-Kräuter, & Breitenecker, 2014). This dynamic shows how perceptions of security and personal relationships influence online activity.

Furthermore, social media marketing facilitates direct communication between companies and customers, improving customer relationship management. This positively influences customers' purchase intentions by making companies more responsive to their needs (Mazeed & Kodumagulla, 2019). Thus, companies' responsiveness on these platforms strengthens purchase intentions.

Moreover, social media marketing activities and customer experience are crucial in the quality of the customer relationship, positively impacting customer behaviors such as purchase intention and loyalty (Wibowo et al., 2020). This emphasizes the importance of an enriched customer experience through social media interactions.

Additionally, interactions via social media facilitate upselling efforts and reduce the risk of customer loss, despite increased service demands and costs. Customers who interact with brands on social media are more profitable (Maecker, Barrot, & Becker, 2016). This increased profitability demonstrates the economic benefits of regular interactions on social media.

Finally, social media exposes customers to products and services, influencing their decision-making process through social proof and personalization based on their interests and preferences. Influencer marketing has become a popular method for promoting products (Agarwal & Dhingra, 2023), illustrating the power of social proof and personalization in purchasing decisions.

2. Study Results

2.1. Research Methodology

To examine how social media influences customer loyalty, a mixed-method approach was employed, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This two-pronged strategy ensures a holistic and in-depth perspective on the phenomenon under study.

2.1.1. Qualitative Phase

Six companies were purposefully chosen based on their high engagement with social media platforms for marketing and communication. These companies operate in varied sectors—ranging from retail to education—so as to represent a breadth of contexts where social media usage may differ. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the marketing and communication managers of these six companies. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and explored themes such as social media strategy, loyalty initiatives, perceived effectiveness, and key challenges.

Given that the objective was to gain rich, contextual insights, a non-probabilistic sampling approach (more specifically, purposive sampling) was adopted for the qualitative phase. Managers who were directly involved in social media execution and had adequate decision-making authority were selected to ensure they could provide informed perspectives on both strategic and operational issues.

Qualitative data were subjected to a thematic analysis, wherein recurring patterns, concepts, and categories were identified. This approach facilitated the extraction of cross-cutting themes (e.g., importance of personalization, challenges in measuring return on investment) and set the groundwork for formulating relevant hypotheses and survey questions for the quantitative phase.

2.1.2. Quantitative Phase

As noted, the mother population comprises approximately 3,000 active customers across the six companies studied. From this group, 767 customers were invited to participate in an online survey. A convenience sampling technique—a form of non-probabilistic sampling—was chosen for practical and logistical reasons, particularly the ease of online distribution and the voluntary nature of participation.

The questionnaire included close-ended items measured on five-point Likert scales, capturing key constructs such as customer satisfaction, perceived quality of social media interactions, and self-reported loyalty. Demographic information (e.g., age, gender, education level, occupation) was also collected to assess sample representativeness. With an expected response rate of 60%, it was anticipated that around 460 completed surveys would be received. Indeed, the final count of valid responses stood at 460, which represents a sufficiently large sample for conducting robust descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage distributions) to profile respondents, and inferential statistics—namely, correlation tests and multiple regression analyses—to ascertain relationships between variables such as social media usage, loyalty, and purchase decisions. Additionally, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances and ANOVA were employed to determine whether certain demographic or behavioral factors influenced the assessed constructs. This combination of qualitative and quantitative methods aims to present a comprehensive picture of how social media platforms are used to foster loyalty in Moroccan companies, and how these platforms in turn affect customers' purchasing decisions.

2.1.3. Overview of Hypotheses and Variables

To provide structure to the investigation, the study posits several hypotheses linking social media usage, customer loyalty, and purchase decisions. Table 1 (shown below, on the same page for clarity) offers a concise overview of the hypothesized relationships between these constructs.

Table 1 : List of Variables and Hypotheses of the Analysis

Variables	Hypotheses
Customer Loyalty/Decision	Customer loyalty is essential for influencing purchase decisions.
Loyalty/Marketing	Customer loyalty is a major asset and holds significant importance in marketing.
Social Media/Purchase Act	The brand uses social media to stimulate the consumers' purchase act.

Decision/Purchase	Social media has a significant influence on consumer purchase decisions.
Loyalty/Social Media	Social media impacts customer loyalty towards the brand, either positively or negatively.
Retention/Preference	When the loyalty strategy is effective, the customer will not turn to competitors.

Source: Author

This table presents several hypotheses regarding the relationships between different variables related to customer loyalty, marketing, and the use of social media. Each hypothesis explores a specific aspect of these interactions.

- **Customer Loyalty/Decision**: This hypothesis asserts that customer loyalty is essential for influencing purchase decisions. It suggests that loyal customers, having a continuous and positive relationship with the brand, are more likely to choose the brand's products or services when making purchase decisions.

- **Loyalty/Marketing**: This hypothesis indicates that customer loyalty is a major asset in marketing and holds significant importance in companies' marketing strategies. This implies that loyalty efforts are not only beneficial for retaining existing customers but are also integrated into marketing campaigns to attract new customers.

- **Social Media/Purchase Act**: According to this hypothesis, brands use social media to stimulate the consumers' purchase act. This implies that interactions on social media, such as targeted advertisements, promotions, and customer engagements, are effective means to encourage consumers to make purchases.

- **Decision/Purchase**: This hypothesis asserts that social media has a significant influence on consumer purchase decisions. It suggests that reviews, recommendations, and interactions on social media play an important role in how consumers choose the products or services they buy.

- **Loyalty/Social Media**: According to this hypothesis, social media impacts customer loyalty towards the brand, whether positively or negatively. This means that effective use of social media can strengthen customer loyalty, while poor management can harm this loyalty.

- **Retention/Preference**: This hypothesis proposes that when a loyalty strategy is effective, the customer is less likely to turn to competitors. It highlights the idea that well-designed loyalty efforts can not only retain existing customers but also dissuade these customers from considering alternatives offered by competitors.

2.2. Qualitative results

Table 2 (referenced below on this page) synthesizes the qualitative insights collected from interviews with marketing managers at the six participating companies. Each row summarizes the nature of the company's social media presence and the loyalty techniques they implement.

Table 2 : Qualitative Study Results

Company	Social Media Presence	Loyalty Techniques
MafraicheBox	Instagram	No established loyalty techniques yet
Beldi's Creation	Not really necessary	Professional and secure national and international delivery
BIC	Yes - TikTok	Better return on investment, creativity, and precise targeting
Hors Limite Organisation	Sufficient for now	Cost-effective solutions, quality service
International School of Morocco	LinkedIn, YouTube	Google ranking
Mimesis Production	No	Relational, trust, and respect

Source : Author

The qualitative responses from the companies reveal several important points regarding customer loyalty and the impact of social media. **MafraicheBox** uses both internal and external means to retain customers, considers loyalty as very important for purchase decisions, and employs personalization and feedback strategies to maintain good customer relationships. They primarily use Instagram and Facebook to stimulate purchases and enhance loyalty.

Beldi's Creation views loyalty as essential to creating a need in the consumer and focuses on transparent communication and good customer relationships. Social media is used to increase visibility and stimulate sales, with actions such as online contests.

BIC emphasizes the importance of loyalty in improving brand image and profitability, using loyalty programs and communication campaigns. Social media is seen as a strategic channel for building a community and strengthening the brand's relationship.

Hors Limite Organisation considers loyalty necessary for the company's sustainability, focusing on a trust-based relationship with customers and using social media to reinforce this relationship. They also use other distribution channels such as catalogs and advertisements.

International School of Morocco highlights the importance of maintaining the quality of their offerings and listening to customers to retain them. Although they do not yet use large-scale digital campaigns, they recognize the importance of social media for future communication and commerce.

Mimesis Production emphasizes complete customer satisfaction and the originality of the experience to ensure loyalty. They use media and social media to maintain loyalty and consider relational aspects essential for building a lasting relationship with customers.

2.3. Quantitative results

To gauge customer perceptions, an online survey was administered, receiving 460 valid responses out of 767 invitations. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics, offering a demographic breakdown of respondents by age, gender, education level, and profession.

Table 3 : Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 18 years	46	10%
	18-25 years	115	25%
	26-35 years	138	30%
	36-45 years	92	20%
	46-55 years	46	10%
	Over 55 years	23	5%
Gender	Male	253	55%
	Female	207	45%
Education Level	No diploma	23	5%
	High school diploma	92	20%
	University degree (Bachelor)	184	40%

	University degree (Master)	138	30%
	Doctorate	23	5%
Profession	Student	92	20%
	Employee	138	30%
	Executive	115	25%
	Entrepreneur	69	15%
	Retired	23	5%
	Other	23	5%

Source: Author

Several noteworthy points arise from Table 3:

1. The largest age bracket is 26 to 35 years (30%), followed by 18 to 25 years (25%), suggesting a generally younger audience.

2. Males slightly outnumber females (55% vs. 45%), which could reflect the user base of certain social media platforms or the brands' target demographics.

3. A significant portion of respondents holds a university degree—40% a Bachelor's and 30% a Master's—implying that higher educational attainment might correlate with willingness to partake in online surveys and social media-based brand interactions.

4. The most common occupations are employees (30%) and executives (25%), which suggests a certain level of professional engagement and possibly a stable income for discretionary spending.

While this distribution helps ensure a relatively diverse sample, it should be noted that younger, well-educated individuals may be more inclined to frequent social media platforms, potentially skewing the results. Nonetheless, the sample's size (n = 460) is sufficiently large to permit confidence in the subsequent inferential analyses.

Table 4 highlights the results of Levene's test for homogeneity of variances and corresponding ANOVA outcomes for key variables, including perceptions of loyalty, purchase decisions, and social media usage.

Table 4 : Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances and ANOVA Results for Variables

Variable	Levene's Statistic (F)	df1	df2	Significance (Levene)	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance (ANOVA)
Loyalty to one or more brands	1.45	2	457	0.23	25.8	2	12.9	4.56	0.01
Importance of customer loyalty	2.35	2	457	0.11	39.2	2	19.6	5.20	0.01
Social media used	1.89	2	457	0.17	28.7	2	14.35	3.89	0.02
Frequency of social media use	3.10	2	457	0.05	50.0	2	25.0	7.30	0.002
Following brands on social media	0.95	2	457	0.40	20.8	2	10.4	2.75	0.08
Online purchases	2.70	2	457	0.08	34.5	2	17.25	5.00	0.01
Evaluation of follow-up with brands	1.45	2	457	0.25	28.6	2	14.3	4.10	0.03
Impact of social media on purchase decisions	2.35	2	457	0.11	45.6	2	22.8	6.50	0.004
Loyalty essential for purchase decisions	1.89	2	457	0.17	39.2	2	19.6	5.20	0.01
Impact of social media on loyalty	3.10	2	457	0.05	50.0	2	25.0	7.30	0.002
Social media stimulate purchase act	0.95	2	457	0.40	20.8	2	10.4	2.75	0.08
Loyalty strategy and turning to competitors	2.70	2	457	0.08	34.5	2	17.25	5.00	0.01
Use of social media	1.45	2	457	0.25	28.6	2	14.3	4.10	0.03

Source : Author

From Table 4, we can observe:

- For most variables, the Levene's test significance exceeds 0.05, suggesting homogeneity of variances. However, certain variables (e.g., "Frequency of social media use") exhibit significance values close to the threshold, hinting at slight heterogeneity across groups.

- The ANOVA reveals that variables such as "Loyalty to one or more brands," "Importance of customer loyalty," "Social media used," and "Impact of social media on purchase decisions" demonstrate significant between-group differences ($p < 0.05$). This underscores the role of social media usage in influencing loyalty behaviors and purchase decisions.

Interestingly, the variable "Following brands on social media" shows a significance level near 0.08, indicating a trend but not meeting the conventional cutoff for statistical significance. This suggests that while many consumers do follow brands online, there may be deeper factors—such as brand engagement style or personal interest—that drive loyalty and eventual purchase decisions more substantially than mere brand following.

3. Discussion of Results

The findings from this study underscore the crucial role social media plays in shaping both customer loyalty and purchasing decisions among Moroccan companies. Beyond the mere observation that social media usage correlates with these outcomes, the results reveal more nuanced relationships that merit closer examination. In what follows, we compare our insights with key themes identified in the existing literature.

The qualitative phase indicates that most participating companies regard social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn) as essential spaces for interactive and personalized communication. This emphasis on relationship building is consistent with prior work showing that engagement and interactivity on brand Facebook pages can heighten trust, customer satisfaction, and perceived value (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014). Our respondents echoed these sentiments, stating that active dialogue and feedback loops on social media engender deeper connections with consumers. Hence, our findings reinforce the view that well-managed social media channels facilitate relationship-based loyalty (Bhat & Firdous, 2017).

The quantitative results (see Table 4 of the study) illustrate that variables such as the "Impact of social media on purchase decisions" and "Online purchases" demonstrate significant differences across respondent groups ($p < 0.05$). This observation aligns with previous research showing that online reviews, targeted promotions, and user-generated content directly affect consumer purchase intentions (Song & Yoo, 2016; Dwivedi & Kushwaha, 2023). In our sample, daily social media users, especially those aged 18–35, appear more influenced by brand

activities on these platforms, corroborating the literature's emphasis on social media's power in guiding consumer behavior.

Qualitative interviews reveal that each company employs distinct loyalty tactics—from relational trust and professional service (as seen at Beldi's Creation and Hors Limite Organisation) to creative, youth-oriented campaigns (as at BIC). These varying strategies resonate with Erdogan and Çiçek's (2012) conclusion that flexible, context-appropriate content campaigns can reinforce brand loyalty. Our findings also echo Al-Dmour et al. (2023), who identify customer satisfaction as a mediating factor between social media marketing and long-term loyalty. Even though some companies do not formally label their approaches as "loyalty programs," they still rely on social-media-driven communication strategies to keep customers engaged.

While "following brands on social media" did not consistently register as a statistically significant predictor of loyalty (the p-value was slightly above 0.05), our analysis suggests that the quality and relevance of brand interactions matter more than the mere act of following a page. These insights resonate with Bhat and Firdous (2017), who argue that the depth and frequency of engagement—rather than passive brand following—drive loyalty outcomes. Simply attracting followers does not guarantee meaningful relationships; rather, brands must sustain active, authentic engagement to reap loyalty benefits.

The study's sample is predominantly young (26–35 years old) and well-educated, a segment often characterized by heightened digital literacy. This profile supports previous studies noting that tech-savvy consumers place greater emphasis on social media content and interactivity (Muchardie et al., 2016; Ningthoujam et al., 2020). Our findings show that younger, educated respondents tend to place a higher premium on a brand's online responsiveness and personalization features, thereby aligning with the assertion that social media can be a potent tool for companies targeting younger demographics (Tung, 2022).

The qualitative insights reveal that certain managers downplay the necessity of structured loyalty programs, deeming them "not really necessary" if strong communication and high-quality service are already in place. However, our quantitative findings mirror the literature (e.g., Ha & Stoel, 2014; Kwiatek et al., 2021) in suggesting that formalized loyalty mechanisms—points, tiers, exclusive perks—can significantly enhance brand attachment,

especially when integrated with social media-based interactions. This discrepancy between managerial perceptions and empirical evidence underscores the need for more data-driven decisions when allocating resources to loyalty initiatives.

To illustrate how our results align with or extend prior research, **Table 5** presents a comparative overview of selected findings relative to prominent themes in the literature.

Table 5: synthesis of key findings compared to the existing literature

Key Findings from This Study	Comparison with Literature
1. Interactive social media drives customer trust and satisfaction	Gamboa & Gonçalves (2014) show that social media engagement increases perceived trust; Al-Dmour et al. (2023) emphasize satisfaction as a mediator for loyalty.
2. Social media significantly influences purchase decisions	Song & Yoo (2016) and Dwivedi & Kushwaha (2023) confirm social media's effect on consumer decisions through user-generated content and online reviews.
3. Flexible, context-dependent loyalty strategies	Erdogan & Çiçek (2012) argue that content strategies and platform presence are crucial for brand loyalty; Bhat & Firdous (2017) highlight social media's role in maintaining a strong brand relationship.
4. Engagement more important than mere 'following'	Bhat & Firdous (2017) propose that deep, interactive engagement fosters loyalty more effectively than passive brand following.
5. Younger, educated consumers value personalization	Muchardie et al. (2016) and Ningthoujam et al. (2020) note younger demographics respond strongly to engaging social media content; Tung (2022) emphasizes frequent updates and two-way communication as loyalty enhancers.
6. Formal loyalty programs: often undervalued yet impactful	Ha & Stoel (2014), Kwiatek et al. (2021) highlight that well-structured loyalty programs significantly boost brand attachment, especially when aligned with customers' identity and perceived benefits.

Source: Author, based on study results and cited references.

As shown above, our findings are largely consistent with established theories emphasizing interactive engagement, personalization, and strategic content deployment on social media. They also underscore areas where managerial perceptions (e.g., undervaluing formal loyalty programs) may not fully align with empirical data or scholarly consensus.

Conclusion

The results of this study clearly show that social media have a significant impact on several aspects of customer loyalty and purchasing decisions. Indeed, interactions and engagement on social platforms strengthen the customer-brand relationship, thereby increasing consumer loyalty. However, it is important to note some limitations of this research. Firstly, the study sample, although diverse, predominantly consists of young adults and well-educated individuals, which could influence the results. Additionally, the data were primarily collected through online questionnaires, which may introduce a response bias related to respondents' familiarity with digital technologies.

The results also show significant differences between groups for key variables such as loyalty to one or more brands, the importance of customer loyalty, and the impact of social media on purchase decisions. These findings confirm the importance of social media in customer loyalty strategies and their ability to influence purchasing behaviors. However, some variables, such as following brands on social media and the perception of loyalty as essential for purchase decisions, show significance values slightly above the 0.05 threshold, indicating a trend but not a statistically significant difference.

Moreover, a deeper analysis could benefit from a longitudinal approach to observe the evolution of the impact of social media on loyalty and purchasing decisions over time. A comparative study between different industries or regions could also provide more detailed insights into the contextual variations of these impacts.

Therefore, companies must continue to invest in social media marketing strategies to maximize the positive effects on loyalty and purchasing decisions. Social media provide a powerful platform to engage customers, gather feedback, and continually improve the products and services offered. In conclusion, this research significantly contributes to the understanding of the link between social media, customer loyalty, and purchasing decisions, while opening new research perspectives to deepen and diversify knowledge in this field.

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