

The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty in the Fashion Industry: The mediator role of Brand Love

Nguyen Thi My Linh, Nguyen Thi Hang, Le Quang Binh, Nguyen Thi My Chien, Bui Thanh

Khoa

Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

*nguyenthimylinh_tt@iuh.edu.vn, nguyenthihang@iuh.edu.vn (corresponding author),
lequangbinh@iuh.edu.vn, nguyenthimychien@iuh.edu.vn, buithanhkhoa@iuh.edu.vn*

Abstract. This study investigates the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the fashion industry by examining the mediating role of brand love. Data was collected through a survey of 532 social media users of fashion brands. The results indicate that customization, trendiness, and interaction positively influence brand love, whereas entertainment does not demonstrate a significant effect. Further, brand love strongly impacts fashion brand loyalty. Additionally, brand love partially mediates the relationships between customization, trendiness, interaction, and brand loyalty. The research provides novel evidence regarding how key aspects of social media marketing shape emotional bonding with fashion brands, leading to loyal consumer behaviors.

Keywords: Customization, Trendiness, Interaction, Entertainment, Brand love, Brand loyalty, Fashion industry.

1. Introduction

Social media marketing has become integral to fashion brands' customer engagement and communication strategies, enabling product promotions, branded content sharing, interactive conversations, and relationship building (Khoa, 2023; Angella J Kim & Ko, 2012). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube provide features to customize content as per user preferences, disseminate the latest trendiness, foster two-way interactions with followers, and entertain audiences through engaging formats (Godey et al., 2016; Hang et al., 2023). Research indicates that leveraging social media capabilities can positively influence outcomes like fashion brand awareness, image, trust, and loyalty (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). However, knowledge gaps persist regarding the processes through which specific aspects of social media marketing impact brand loyalty for fashion companies amidst declining loyalty rates across the industry (Chahal & Rani, 2017).

Despite recognizing the business imperative of social media adoption, fashion brands still face challenges involving utilizing it effectively to bolster brand loyalty (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021). Extant studies demonstrate linkages between overall social media marketing efforts and brand loyalty. However, assessments of whether focal components like customization, trendiness, interactions, and entertainment influence the mediating mechanism of brand love to nurture loyal fashion followers remain scarce in literature (Kaufmann et al., 2016). According to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), brand love reflects the passionate emotional connection satisfied consumers foster with brands. As brand love strengthens, desired outcomes like increased loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and feedback are activated (Bairrada et al., 2018). Still, no study has holistically analyzed how social media marketing dimensions first stimulate brand love development to improve brand loyalty subsequently. For instance, customization as per user preferences can heighten positive affect and perceived usefulness via personalization (Shanahan et al., 2019). Trend content enables consumers to satisfy self-expression needs by emerging as fashion leaders for others (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Interactive communication facilitates relationship-building, leading to affective commitment (Labrecque, 2014). Entertaining content boosts user engagement and brand sentiments over time (Hudson et al., 2016). Despite their merits, an integrated investigation addressing how customization, trendiness, interactions, and entertainment collectively shape fashion brand loyalty through brand love remains unaddressed. This denotes a noteworthy literature gap.

This research aims to advance academic understanding and inform fashion social media marketing practice by examining how customization, trendiness, interactions, and entertainment influence brand loyalty, with brand love as the mediator. Via structural equation modeling analysis of the conceptual framework, the objectives comprise: (i) determine the impact of customization, trend content, interaction, and entertainment on fashion brand loyalty (ii) analyze the effects of these social media marketing components on brand love (iii) test the mediating role of brand love in transmitting the influence of customization, trends, interaction, and entertainment on fashion brand loyalty. The study intends to offer insights into how customizing content alongside trendiness, conversations, and entertaining formats can elicit emotional brand love, motivating brand loyal behaviors among fashion consumers.

This paper encompasses an introduction, literature review, research model and hypotheses, methodology outlining research design, sampling, data collection tools and analysis techniques, results presentation, discussion of findings, implications for academia and practice, limitations, future research scope, and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is grounded in Kevin Roberts' Lovemarks theory (Roberts,

2005). Lovemarks represent brands consumers are intensely loyal to and highly engaged with emotionally. According to this theory, fashion brands can cultivate Lovemarks by strengthening respect and love among target consumers. Respect arises from perceptions of brand quality, innovation, performance, etc, while love stems from forging emotional connections through sensory appeals and shared values (Ahn *et al.*, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2022). Fashion brands can convert satisfied customers into Lovemark advocates when they improve respect and love.

In social media, fashion brands can utilize features like customization, trendiness, interactions, and entertainment to elicit respect and love. For instance, tailored recommendations resonate with personal needs, fostering positive perceptions of usefulness and quality. Trendiness communicates innovation in styling, triggering admiration. Interactions enable sharing values and forming emotional bonds (Alyouzbaky *et al.*, 2022; Labrecque, 2014). Fun content spurs sensory reactions, imparting comfort and familiarity (Roy *et al.*, 2013). Eventually, accumulating respect and love motivates the desire for continued relationships and intensifies loyalty intentions (Bairrada *et al.*, 2018). Hence, social media-enabled customization, trendiness, interactions, and entertainment can facilitate the formation of love marks to boost fashion brand loyalty. The research model was proposed as Figure 1.

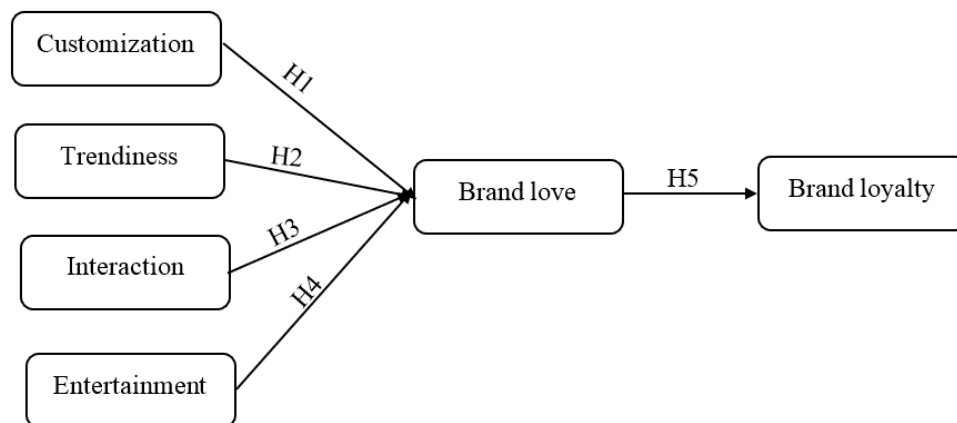


Fig.1: Research model

2.2. Hypotheses Development

Customization represents tailoring branded content, products, and communications to match individual user preferences and needs on social media (Khoa & Huynh, 2023). By leveraging user data and algorithms, fashion companies can offer customized trend recommendations, launch personalized product lines, and craft targeted messages for niche audience segments on platforms like Instagram and Pinterest. Prior research indicates that effective customization enhances positive affect, enjoyment, attachment, and brand relationships over time across industries (Ballings *et al.*, 2015; Yen *et al.*, 2022). In fashion, social media customization can communicate the understanding of exclusive tastes, boosting perceptions of usefulness and unique value addition (Tran *et al.*, 2024). By catering to specific preferences, customization enables consumers to shake off misgivings related to mass-market offerings and feel truly understood. Fashion brands can nurture emotional resonance and brand love through customized social media initiatives tailored to individual consumers or niches (Sheng & Teo, 2012). Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Customization has a positive impact on brand love in the Fashion industry

Trendiness refers to frequent updates showcasing the latest developments in styles, designs, fabrics, and innovations circulated by fashion companies via blogs, emails, and platforms like Instagram to stimulate interest among followers (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). Fashion leaders and innovators rely significantly on social media channels to disseminate trend content, given multimedia formats' swift

reach and suitability. Trendiness communicates cutting-edge offerings, originality, and understanding of evolving preferences to users (Knezevic *et al.*, 2021; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). Exposure to novel fashion trends can provide utility through style inspirations and heighten positive self-esteem by enabling consumers to emerge as pioneers among peers (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Thereby, timed trendiness on social media platforms fosters emotional connections with fashion brands by satisfying self-expression needs and cementing pioneer status. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Trendiness has a positive impact on brand love in the Fashion industry

Interactions represent two-way communications between fashion brands and users, encompassing responses to user-generated content, mentions, comments, and direct messaging (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). Social media facilitates prompt, personalized interactions with followers at scale to resolve queries, obtain feedback, and strengthen relationships. Prompt responses to comments and acknowledgment of user-created content signal caring intentions and rapport building, which consumers appreciate (Labrecque, 2014; Lee & Kim, 2022). Building such interpersonal bonds fosters intimacy and satisfaction in line with the concept of the parasocial relationship (Hudson *et al.*, 2016). Over time, positive interactions reflecting customized attention and support from real personalities behind fashion brands cultivate fondness, emotional bonds, and brand love on social media platforms (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2020). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Interaction has a positive impact on brand love in the Fashion industry

Entertainment represents fun, enjoyable multimedia content like videos, reels, stories, infographics, and games focused on amusing audiences published by fashion brands across social media (H. Y. Kim *et al.*, 2020). Entertainment-oriented content sparked sensory reactions through humor, drama, excitement, and aesthetic visuals (Hudson *et al.*, 2016). Further, they offer escapist relief from monotony and foster comfort through familiar characters or experiences (Roy *et al.*, 2013). Prior research illustrates that entertaining social media engagement heightens positive affect, brand attachment, and relationships across sectors (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). In fashion, humorous videos, celebrity associations, contests, and quizzes also provide sensory delight and memorable, enriching experiences that uplift brand love (Angella Jiyoun Kim & Ko, 2010). Thus, it is hypothesized:

H4: Entertainment has a positive impact on brand love in the Fashion industry

Brand love reflects passionately held positive emotional dispositions toward fashion brands, encompassing affection, connection, passion, and positive evaluation (Bairrada *et al.*, 2018; Batra *et al.*, 2012). As brand love strengthens through respect and richer emotional bonds fostered via social media, consumers become increasingly committed to fashion brands (Khoa, 2022). Brand love provides meaning through the use of favored brands for self-expression. Customers nurture loved fashion brands, seek closeness through repeated interactions, and integrate them within their identity (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2021). Thereby, intensifying brand love boosts the desire for exclusive relationships despite alternatives and motivates advocating behaviors (Roy *et al.*, 2013). Hence, higher brand love is expected to reduce switching intentions and promote loyalty toward fashion brands. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Brand love has a positive impact on brand loyalty in the Fashion industry

3. Research Method

3.1. Measurement Scales

Validated scales adapted from prior studies were utilized to measure the constructs in this research framework. Social media marketing capability encompassing customization (CUS), trendiness (TRE),

interaction (INT), and entertainment (ENT) were captured via 3 items each, adopted from Godey *et al.* (2016); Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016). Sample customization items are "Fashion brand X shares content customized as per my preferences on social media"; trendiness was measured through "Fashion brand X promptly alerts me about latest style trends on social media," among others. Brand love (BLO) was operationalized using a 5-item scale tapping passion, attachment, and positive evaluation, adapted from Bairrada *et al.* (2018). The 5-item brand loyalty (BRL) scale capturing repurchase intentions, willingness to pay premium price, and recommendation of brands was adapted from Angella J Kim and Ko (2012). All scale items used 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) presented in randomized order for controlling bias.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Using convenient sampling, a structured questionnaire containing the above described multi-item scales was administered to social media users of fashion brands in Vietnam. The survey aimed to assess perceptions regarding four popular national fashion retailers – Blue Exchange, Yame, Uniqlo, and Zara which leverage social media marketing extensively as part of their strategy. The survey link was distributed through social media sites like Facebook and TikTok over 3 weeks. Screening criteria of only frequent social media users of the chosen fashion brands in the 18-35 age group were provided. This helped eliminate bias from the inclusion of non-users. The questionnaire clearly stated the research's academic nature and voluntary participation policy to consenting respondents. IP address checks were conducted to avoid duplicate responses. Out of 620 received responses, 532 filled validated surveys were finally usable for analysis per screening norms. The response collection period was limited to avoid temporal bias from sudden strategy shifts by the surveyed brands. Shopee gift vouchers worth US\$ 10 were offered through a lucky draw to encourage participation.

3.3. Respondent Statistics

Of the 532 respondents, the majority were females (64%) and in the age group of 20-30 years (79%). Most respondents used Tiktok (86%) and Facebook (81%) most frequently to connect with fashion brands, indicating the suitability of a sampling pool familiar with social media marketing. Further, 28% of respondents actively followed Blue Exchange, 26% preferred Zara, 23% were regular Uniqlo consumers, and the rest used Yame often on social platforms. The distribution indicates an adequate mixing of brand followers to prevent biases.

4. Result

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model was tested first to determine the reliability and validity of the multi-item scales measuring social media marketing, brand love, and loyalty constructs using SmartPLS version 3.3.3 with a sample of 532 fashion brand social media users.

Composite reliability scores of all constructs exceeded the benchmark of 0.70, satisfying internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Cronbach's alpha (CA) values also surpassed the 0.70 cut-off, with scores ranging from 0.818 to 0.937, further establishing scale reliability. Item reliability was verified through outer loadings above 0.70 and statistical significance at 1% level (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was over the 0.50 threshold, as Fornell and Larcker (2018) recommended. For instance, composite reliability (CR) ranged between 0.808 and 0.943, and the AVE estimates varied from 0.717 to 0.804 across scales. Thus, scale evaluation confirmed measurement reliability. Convergent validity was verified to determine sufficient correlation between theoretically similar measures through three assessments. Firstly, outer loadings of all scale items exceeded 0.70 and were significant at $p < 0.01$, indicating convergence (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2016).

Secondly, AVE surpassing the 0.50 benchmark for each construct denoted that latent variables explained the majority of variance in their respective indicators on average (Fornell & Larcker, 2018). Thus, convergent validity was established.

Table 1. Result of reliability and validity

	CA	CR	AVE	Outer loading	HTMT					
					BLO	BRL	CUS	ENT	INT	TRE
BLO	0.937	0.943	0.804	0.812 – 0.977						
BRL	0.925	0.93	0.773	0.811 – 0.947	0.671					
CUS	0.803	0.808	0.717	0.82 – 0.864	0.464	0.685				
ENT	0.818	0.818	0.733	0.834 – 0.886	0.500	0.729	0.577			
INT	0.873	0.883	0.797	0.877 – 0.902	0.561	0.711	0.536	0.693		
TRE	0.828	0.841	0.744	0.829-0.908	0.494	0.668	0.561	0.657	0.449	

Discriminant validity was checked to determine empirical distinctiveness among conceptually unique constructs. HTMT ratios fell between 0.713 and 0.887, below the conservative threshold of 0.85 for conceptually different entities (Henseler *et al.*, 2014). Thirdly, an item loaded more highly on its designated construct than others. In summary, assessments affirmed empirically distinct structures among the social media marketing, brand love, and loyalty constructs, permitting structural model testing.

4.2. Structural Model Analysis

The conceptual framework encompassing hypothesized linkages between social media marketing factors, brand love, and loyalty was examined using the SmartPLS SEM technique with 5000 subsamples of bootstrapping (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2016). As Table 2, of the four exogenous constructs proposed to influence brand love, customization ($\beta = 0.119$; $t = 2.789$), trendiness ($\beta = 0.223$; $t = 4.576$), and interaction ($\beta = 0.331$; $t = 16.496$) showed significant positive effects on brand love as hypothesized at 1% level whereas entertainment effect was non-significant ($\beta = 0.067$; $t = 1.252$). About 34.6% variance in fashion brand love was explained by the predictors ($R^2 = 0.346$) in Table 3. Subsequently, per H5, brand love manifested a robust positive influence on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.253$; $t = 5.79$), explaining 66.2% variance ($R^2 = 0.662$).

Table 2. PLS-SEM result

Relationship	Beta	t-value	Hypothesis	Result
CUS -> BLO	0.119	2.789	H1	Supported
TRE -> BLO	0.223	4.576	H2	Supported
INT -> BLO	0.331	6.496	H3	Supported
ENT -> BLO	0.067	1.252	H4	Rejected
BLO -> BRL	0.253	5.79	H5	Supported

Stone–Geisser's Q2 test was also done to assess predictive relevance (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1974). Blindfolding generated cross-validated redundancy Q^2 of 0.275 for brand love and 0.505 for brand loyalty in Table 3, satisfying the criteria of being above zero. This confirmed the adequate predictive power of the structural model. After that, the relative impact of antecedents on endogenous variables was evaluated through f^2 effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). In Table 3, entertainment displayed the highest effect on brand love ($f^2=0.102$), followed by customization ($f^2=0.078$) and trendiness ($f^2=0.060$). Furthermore, brand love strongly impacted brand loyalty ($f^2=3.195$).

The mediating role of brand love was quantified through the variance accounted for (VAF) metric using the SmartPLS bootstrapping routine (Hair et Al., 2017). In Table 3, VAF ratios above 50% indicate partial mediation. Here, brand love partially mediated the relationships between customization and loyalty (VAF = 74%), trendiness and loyalty (VAF = 71%), and interaction and loyalty (VAF =

78%). Thus, brand love played a vital role in enabling social media marketing outcomes on fashion brand loyalty.

Table 3. Results of f^2 , R^2 , Q^2 , and VAF

	f^2		R^2	Q^2	Relationship	VAF
	BLO	BRL				
					CUS -> BLO -> BRL	0.74
BLO		0.124	0.662	0.275	TRE -> BLO -> BRL	0.71
BRL			0.346	0.505	INT -> BLO -> BRL	0.78
CUS	0.015					
ENT	0.004					
INT	0.102					
TRE	0.05					

5. Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

This study offered valuable insights into the mechanism through which social media marketing impacts fashion brand loyalty by examining the mediating role of brand love. Firstly, customization, trendiness, and interaction content on social media positively influenced brand love, supporting hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. These results align with prior research demonstrating the roles of customization, trendiness, and interaction in shaping positive brand attitudes and emotional bonding across industries (Ballings et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2016; Labrecque, 2014). However, entertainment was surprisingly non-significant in predicting fashion brand love, contrasting premises of parasocial relationship theories (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Plausibly, consumers react more strongly to one-way, customized, and entertaining social media initiatives by fashion retailers currently rather than two-way conversations.

Secondly, brand love strongly impacted fashion brand loyalty intentions, evidencing the pivotal role positive brand-related affect plays in driving loyal consumer behaviors (Sarkar et al., 2012; Bairrada et al., 2018). This reinforces the conclusions of existing studies regarding brand love's capability to reduce switching intentions across sectors.

Thirdly, brand love partially mediated social media marketing outcomes on loyalty, highlighting the underlying process through which customized and engaging online initiatives shape committed brand followers. Specifically, customization, trends, and entertainment first foster emotional positivity towards brands, which in turn motivates loyal purchase and recommendation intentions. Such empirical demonstration of the step-by-step mechanism strengthens theoretical perspectives on hierarchical brand relationship-building models (Fetscherin, 2019).

5.2. Contributions

5.2.1. Theoretical Contributions

Firstly, the study expands scholarly understanding of social media marketing outcomes for fashion brands by empirically demonstrating nuanced effects of key attributes like customization, trendiness, and entertainment—which have scarcely received holistic attention in the literature. Examining these specific components better informs theoreticians and academics regarding levers brands can utilize on digital platforms for positive returns. Secondly, investigating the step-by-step mechanism involving brand love formations leading to enhanced loyalty intentions contributes to relationship marketing and consumer-brand engagement theories. Findings provide confirmatory evidence regarding brand love's role as an emotional conduit within hierarchical loyalty frameworks in the fashion industry. Thirdly, integrating customized content, trendiness, and interaction features collectively to explain brand loyalty

outcomes via emotional brand love deepens academic knowledge regarding synergistic leveraging of social media. Findings showcase how aligning personalization elements with timely fashion updates and fun engagement jointly shapes passion-infused consumer-brand relationships progressing into loyalty.

5.2.2. Practical Implications

Firstly, fashion retailers are informed that investments into social media marketing strategies encompassing customization per niche preferences, prompt trend updates and entertainment pay off by nurturing favorable brand love perceptions, ultimately incentivizing loyal behaviors. So, resources must focus on these impactful components. Secondly, marketers should map consumers according to their price segments, style orientations, and demographics to tailor recommendations to respective groups through profiles like Pinterest and Instagram to foster emotional connections. Thirdly, brand managers should develop capabilities for quickly alerting target followers regarding new arrivals, runway designs or styling trends through blogs, emails and YouTube channels to capture interest. Overall, research-backed insights into customization, trendiness, and interaction-focused social media marketing as gateways for strengthening fashion brand love, leading to retention, delivers actionable best practices for the industry.

5.3. Limitations and Further Research

Although this study offers valuable additions, a few limitations Provide scope for further research. Firstly, using convenience sampling of social media users restricts the findings' generalizability. Probability sampling procedures should be deployed in future studies to enable better representation. Secondly, assessing a handful of fashion retailers limits the granularity of conclusions- examining more brands can refine understanding. Thirdly, retrospective perceptions were captured rather than longitudinal tracking of real-time marketing efforts, limiting insights into evolving consumer opinions. Future scholars can consider panel data gathering.

Additionally, some areas open up avenues for further investigation. Firstly, a comparative analysis between fast fashion and luxury brand consumers regarding the relative effectiveness of customized and entertaining social media content for brand love formation can offer industry-specific insights. Secondly, studying the impacts of virtual influencers posting trendiness or real celebrity endorsements fostering online engagement can clarify optimal digital communication strategies for fashion marketers. Thirdly, exploring the synergistic effects of social media-based customization, trends, and entertainment elements collectively in strengthening brand equity can take research to the next stage regarding optimizing resource allocation. Fourthly, investigating the relative persuasiveness of textual versus audio-visual social media content types and formats for garnering fashion brand love can inform content marketing decisions. Finally, evaluating spillover implications of digital marketing efforts targeted at young consumers for their brand loyalty towards retailers patronized by family members can shed light on cross-generational effects.

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