

Does Social Media Engagement Moderate Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty? Evidence from Young Consumers of Malaysian Modest Fashion Industry

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Abstract--- *The significance of branding in marketing activities is well established. The sustainability of products and services is highly dependent on the vendor's ability to create and maintain a brand. Brand loyalty has been linked to variables such as brand personality, perceived value and brand engagement. What is the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty? How does social media affect this relationship? A sample of 400 respondents were surveyed to establish the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty, and to find out the role of social media. Pitching five dimensions of brand engagement i.e. identification, interaction, absorption, enthusiasm and attention to two dimensions of brand loyalty i.e. behaviour and attitude, the role of social media was explored using four dimensions which are brand usage intent, social presence, electronic word of mouth and social brand engagement. The motivation to focus on young consumers is the assumption that they will flood the market as soon as they are gainfully employed. The result was unexpected. Contrary to common perception, the results show that social media engagement does not moderate the relationship. A focus group discussion among a sample of respondents was conducted for triangulation. The insights of the triangulation will be shared in the presentation.*

Keywords--- *Brand Engagement, Brand Loyalty, Social Media Engagement and Modest Fashion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Branding is a significant component of marketing. The sustainability of products and services is highly dependent on the vendor's ability to create and maintain a brand. With the advancement of technology, social media emerges into the business ecosystem and is often viewed as a net contributor to building brands. This study aims to establish whether social media moderates the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty. A sample of 400 respondents were surveyed to establish the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty, and to find out the role of social media. Pitching five dimensions of brand engagement i.e. identification, interaction, absorption, enthusiasm and attention to two dimensions of brand loyalty i.e. behaviour and attitude, the role of social media was explored using four dimensions which are brand usage intent, social presence, electronic word of mouth and social brand engagement.

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These concepts are explained in the literature review, followed by the methodology, findings, conclusion and discussion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study seeks to establish whether social media engagement moderates brand engagement and brand loyalty among young female consumers of Malaysia's modest fashion industry. Modest clothing, within the context of Islam, for women must cover the entire body except for the face and hands within the company of males whom are not among family members; must be loose, so the shape of the body is not seen; thick enough so that it is not see-through; should not resemble the clothing of men, and should not be ostentatious (Mohsina & Islam, 2014). The general meaning of modest fashion is as the same definition by Mohsina & Islam (2014) with plus point of dress comfortably while still looking stylish enough to connect women across religious, racial and cultural boundaries (Bauck, 2016).

Brand engagement is the customer's level of motivation and participation in connection to the offerings of the brand (Fadeh et al, 2016). The dimensions of brand engagement include identification, interaction, absorption, enthusiasm and attention, whereby identification is an individual's "perceived oneness with or belongingness to an organization" and occurs when the consumer sees his or her self-image reflected to the brand's image (So, King and Sparks, 2014). Interaction, on the other hand, is the online and off-line participation with the brand or other customers outside of purchase that involve sharing ideas, thoughts, and feelings about experiences with the brand; absorption is a high level of concentration and enjoyment to the brand; enthusiasm represents an individual's strong level of excitement and interest in the brand; and attention is the duration of focus on the brand (So, King and Sparks, 2014). Brand loyalty is the continuous propensity or tendency for consumers to keep buying a brand of product (Tabaku and Zerellari, 2015). Loyalty reaps benefit for business and can be intensified by repeat purchases by consumers, higher revenues, and customer referrals. In this survey, two dimensions of brand loyalty i.e. the positive feelings and dedication to purchase the same product in the future without much convincing needed are explored. They are behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, with each dimension having three variables each.

Brodie et.al (2013) highlighted the term "engagement" in the context of customer participation in brand communities however this term is still remain underexplored because there were limited literature to-date. From the literature review explored, the study adopted ethnographic methodology to explore the concept of brand engagement through the online community environment. The study found that the dynamic and multidimensional nature of brand engagement can emerge and form at different levels intensity at different time thus reflecting distinct engagement states. Besides, it also comprises sub-processes that also will reflecting on consumers' interactive experience in online brand communities and produce the value on community participants.

A study by Hera Anam (2016) indicated that Brand Engagement as customer-brand relationship in cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions outside of the purchase and brand engagement conceptualized as a "higher-order construct comprising five first order factors, including enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction, and identification". There were five dimensions of brand engagement included enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction and identification. Hollebeek et al (2014) stated that there is significant interest in brand engagement

because this area of study still remains underexplored in many aspects. Furthermore, it is required to get more empirical evidences to provide a coherent picture about how the brand engagement working effectively.

For smart, social media savvy brands would take advantage of the honest and unfiltered reviews and work them to their benefits through reach out to those who are positively advocating the product and offer incentives as a token of appreciation (Rishipal, 2014). Although positive feedbacks are often the ideal feedback that brand most desired, negative feedbacks are still feedbacks that carries the same weight. In short, any feedbacks are good feedbacks as customers take their time to point out areas that they are happy with and concern about. For negative feedbacks, brand would need to reach out quickly and offer some damage control measures to neutralise the dissatisfaction level so that bad reviews may not come out as bad as what the customer may experience (Rishipal, 2014).

As much as active participation and interaction are needed to create followers, the content of social media platform is also as essential. Followers are drawn to article characteristics and blogs that drives viral marketing towards emotion inclination or content that they could resonate with. However, followers are not interested in contents that sounds scripted and formal. In a study by Osei-Frimpong & McLean (2017) indicated that followers are drawn to brands that put the effort in ensuring the contents are attractive and engaging. For contents posted by brands in their official social media page signifies as critically important, as it would enhance corporate credibility and trust on the part of the firm through their direct interactions with the customers. Moreover, brands are to take into considerations of social and cultural factors which the customers associated to and design the intended social media contents strategically (Ravneet Singh, 2017)

Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the World Wide Web, and allows the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Selvarajah and Sajilan, 2014). Social Media is a platform that brands uses to influence target audience through unique photo and creative contents in effort to make impactful brand image and advertising (Durmaz, 2014; Krishnan & How, 2014) Social media is the most preferred platform by both established and uprising brands in getting up-to-date information regarding the market demand (Bourne, 2010).

Social media has interdependent relationship with fashion industry as it instils a sense of brand awareness among the public (Úblová, 2014). The brand awareness can be from series of promotions, events and advertising that are specific for certain target audience. Furthermore, the awareness can be further enhanced through utilising creative marketing strategies and approaches that create resonance with the audience personally and ultimately help in driving sales (Ahmad, Salman, & Ashiq, 2015)

The dimensions of social media used in this study are brand usage intent, social presence, electronic word-of-mouth, and social brand engagement. Brand usage intent is the customer's intention to purchase and use a particular brand for his/her good self, with others or for others (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2017). Social presence is the degree of presence by the individual interactions and presence of the interpersonal relationships towards build and strengthen consumer relationships with brands (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2017).

Electronic word of mouth is a collection of any positive or negative comments made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, that are accessible by a multitude of people and institutions via the

Internet (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2017). Words of mouth can work both ways when it comes to contribution to popularity and advertisement. Words of mouth has its own credibility to a certain extent as people are constantly expressing about what they have or need on the social media (Bashar, Ahmad, & Wasiq, 2012). Bashar et al., (2012) emphasised that the honest expression by people are often linked with their own experience, perceived level before and satisfaction level after the respective product sold or service rendered. From the honest expression, other people or followers will refer, read and react to the same product or services mentioned before purchasing decisions were made (Bashar et al., 2012).

III. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was gathered through a survey and triangulated using a focus group discussion. The survey questionnaire is divided into four parts as follows:

1. Part 1: elicits demographic information.
2. Part 2: surveys respondents' perception of brand engagement. Five dimensions of brand engagement are used in this study, namely, identification (4 variables), interaction (5 variables), absorption (5 variables), enthusiasm (5 variables) and attention (6 variables).
3. Part 3: surveys brand loyalty. Two dimensions of brand loyalty i.e. the positive feelings and dedication to purchase the same product in the future without much convincing needed, are explored in this survey. They are behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, with each dimension having three variables each.
4. Part 4: surveys the extent to which the respondents are certain about the social media presence of brands of their choice. The dimensions of social media include brand usage intent, social presence, electronic word-of-mouth and social brand engagement. There are twenty-one variables all together, four under brand usage intent, eight under social presence, four under electronic word-of-mouth, and five under social brand engagement.

To triangulate the initial findings of the statistical analysis, a triangulation was held to gather insights on reasons to explain the results of the study. The focus group discussion (FGD) approach was used for triangulation. The FGD was conducted using a four-step process comprising (1) briefing the participants on the main concept of the studies; (2) dividing the respondents into groups of four; (3) deliberating on the emerging issues of the studies by using prompts to guide group discussions; and (4) Debriefing and Question and answer session. The participants of the focus group were briefed on brand engagement, brand loyalty, social media engagement, high data social media and low social media. They are then divided into groups to deliberate on two issues, and each round of discussion lasts for 45 minutes. The issues are social media moderating role in brand engagement and loyalty, and the possible reasons why social media did not moderate brand engagement and brand loyalty in this study.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings in this study will be discussed based on the objective of the study which is to establish whether social media moderate the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty. In this study, as suggested by Zainudin Awang (2015), the moderation process multi-group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to

assess the effect of the moderator variables. To do this, the path of interest was identified where the moderator variable was to be assessed. This particular path is constrained with parameter = 1 and the model is termed as the constrained model. The procedure estimates two models separately. One is constrained model and the other one is an unconstrained model.

A. Outputs of High Data Social Media

The outputs of constrained model of high data social media are as seen in Figure 1 and Table 1. The outputs of unconstrained model of high data social media are as seen in Figure 2 and Table 2. The Moderation test for Social Media group data is as per Table 3.

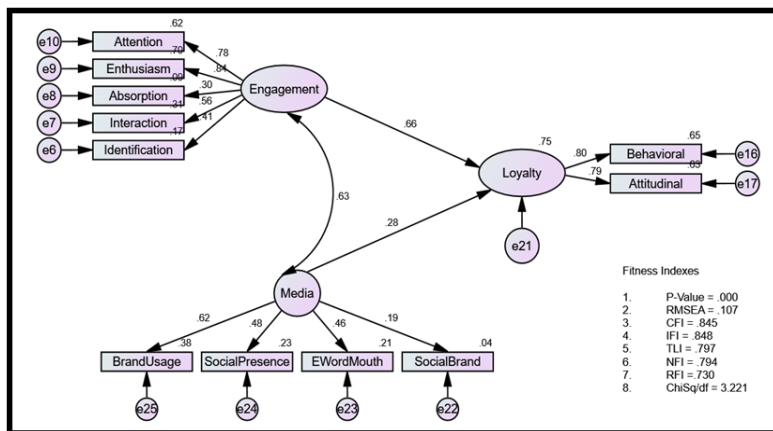


Figure 1: The output of constrained model (High Data Social Media)

Source: Analysed data from SmartPLS software

Table 1: The Chi-Square Value and DF for the constrained model

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	22	135.295	42	.0000	3.221
Saturated model	66	.0000	0		
Independence model	11	655.364	55	.0000	11.916

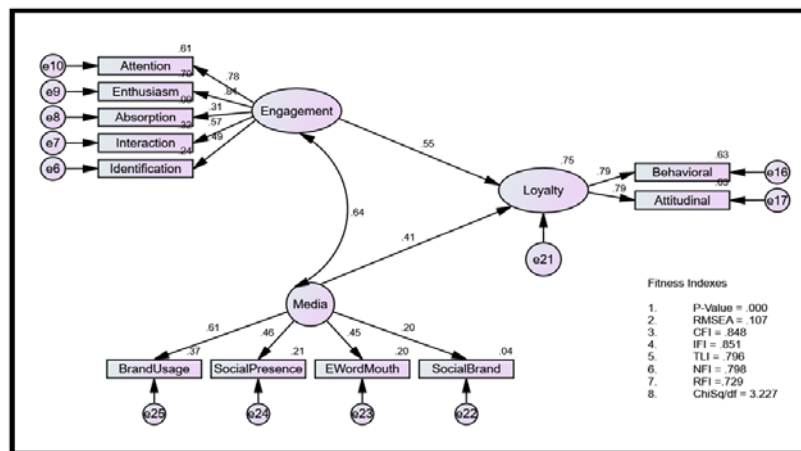


Figure 2: The output of unconstrained model (High Data Social Media)

Source: Analysed data from SmartPLS software

Table 2: The Chi-Square Value and DF for the unconstrained model

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	25	132.319	41	.0000	3.227
Saturated model	66	.0000	0		
Independence model	11	655.364	55	.0000	11.916

The moderation test for high data Social media is not significant since the difference in Chi-Square value between the constrained and unconstrained model is 2.976, while the Degree of Freedom is 42-41 = 1. For the test to be significant, the difference in Chi-Square value must be higher than the value of Chi-Square with 1 degree of Freedom, which is 3.84. Therefore, the moderator variable for high data social media does not moderate the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty.

Table 3: The Moderation test for Social Media group data

	Constra-ined model	Unconst-rained model	Chi-Square Differe-nce	Result on Moder-ation	Result on Hypothes-is
Chi Squ-are	135.295	132.319	2.976	Not Signific-ant	Not Supported
DF	42	41	1		
H1 Social Media moderates the relationship between Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty.					Not Supported

B. Outputs of Low Data Social Media

The outputs of constrained model of low data social media are as seen in Figure 3 and Table 3. The outputs of unconstrained model of low data social media are as seen in Figure 4 and Table 4. The Moderation test for Social Media group data is as per Table 6.

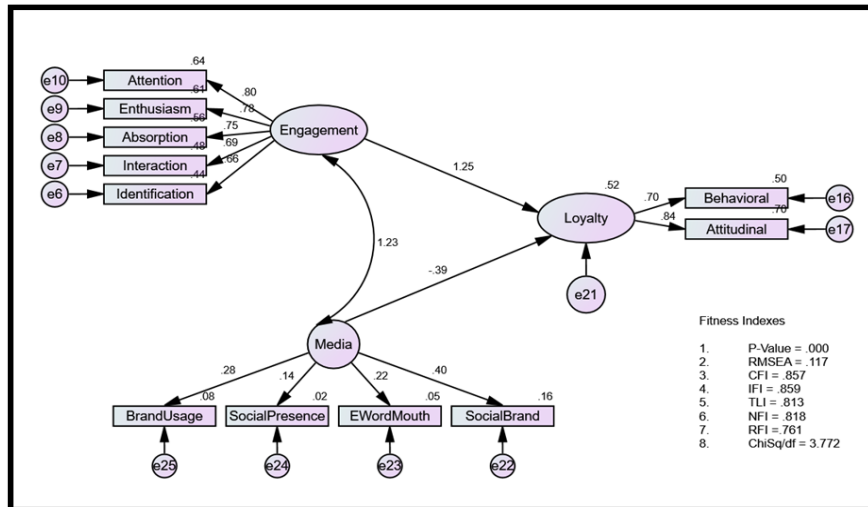


Figure 3: The output of constrained model (Low Data Social Media)

Source: Analysed data from SmartPLS software

Table 4: The Chi-Square Value and DF for the constrained model

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	24	158.414	42	.0000	3.772
Saturated model	66	.0000	0		
Independence model	11	869.270	55	.0000	15.805

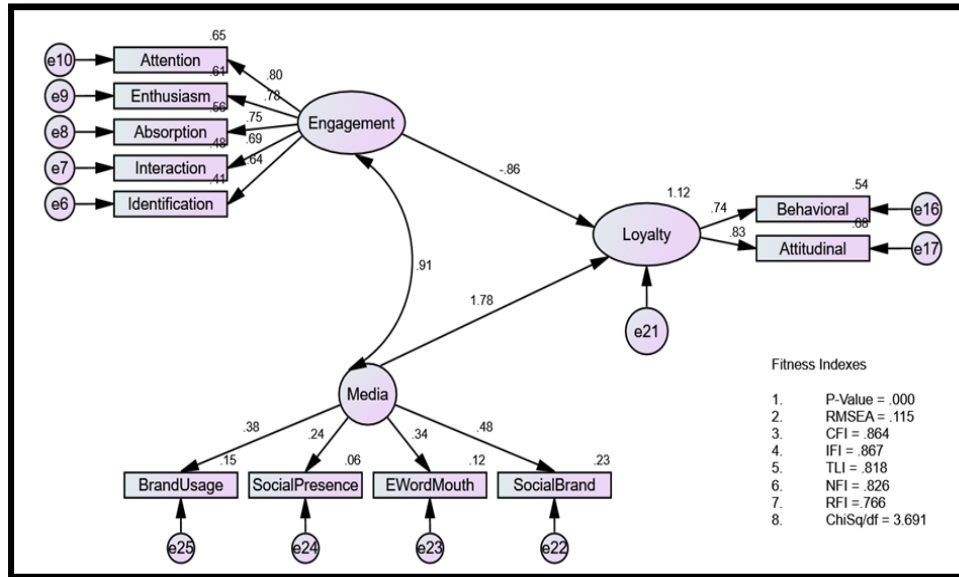


Figure 4: The output of unconstrained model (Low data Social Media)

Source: Analysed data from Smart PLS software

Table 5: The Chi-Square Value and DF for the unconstrained model

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	25	151.341	41	.000	3.691
Saturated model	66	.0000	0		
Independence model	11	860.270	55	.000	15.805

The moderation test for low data Social media is not significant since the difference in Chi-Square value between the constrained and unconstrained model is 2.976, while the Degree of Freedom is $42 - 41 = 1$. For the test to be significant, the difference in Chi-Square value must be higher than the value of Chi-Square with 1 degree of Freedom, which is 3.84. Therefore, the moderator variable for low data social media does not moderate the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty.

Table 6: The Moderation test for Social Media group data

	Constra-ined model	Unconst-rained model	Chi-Square Differe-nce	Result on Moder-ation	Result on Hypothes-is
Chi Squ-are	158.414	151.341	2.976	Not Significant	Not Supported
DF	42	41	1		
H1 Social Media moderates the relationship between Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty.					Not Supported

Hypothesis 1 is rejected as the high and low data for social media is not significant.

V. INSIGHTS GAINED FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

The focus group discussion (FGD) gathered some insights on why social media does not moderate brand engagement and brand loyalty. Firstly, due to their tight budget, the respondents shared that they do not buy many things. A major portion of their money is spent on rent, food and transportation. Therefore, they do not use social media to source for things to buy. Some mentioned that the online advertisements are annoying, and they often block promotion sites. Usually they do not approve friend requests from 'sellers'. The discussants also admitted that

they were easily influenced but brands are not able to effectively engage them nor gain their loyalty as there are so many brands trending at any one time. Brands tend to change their messages quickly and they feel there is not enough time for time to be engaged with the brands, less so to be loyal. They feel that they only have 'fleeting' interest in online business platform. The main reasons why they would try a new brand is to gain new experience and knowledge about the brand.

Another interesting insight shared by the participants in the FGD was about how they participate online by choosing 'like' to react to both social and commercial postings. Some admitted that they chose 'like' just to be trendy or polite. Following a brand also creates a sense of belonging for the FGD participants – they feel like they belong to the 'tribe'. How this sense of belonging is rather short. Choosing 'Like' does not relate to brand engagement or brand loyalty. It is merely to have a sense of belonging to the online community of which they are a participant.

A few of the FGD participants also claimed that shopping online can help them release stress, and occasionally they do buy online stuffs. However, due to their financial situation, they are unlikely to repeat orders of the same brand.

VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Social media engagement turned out to be less crucial as an additional factor to enhance brand engagement and brand loyalty. Hence the hypothesis is rejected. The results from the analysis indicated a non-significant relationship between social media engagement as a moderator between brand engagement and brand loyalty. The result of this study indicated that social media engagement does not enhance the engagement-loyalty relationship. This results of this support a study by Karjaluoto, Munnukka, & Tiensuu (2015) which found that while community experience is a key driver of brand engagement, there was no findings to support the effect of information or social media as a method to enhance brand engagement. The community experiences are in the form of testimonials or product reviews post usage whereby information would strengthen the brand engagement level. According to Y. Kim, Hsu, & de Zúñiga (2013) role of social media in facilitating the way in which people talk and participate depends to their personality traits. Introvert individuals tend to use social media often and communicate online more frequently than extrovert individuals. Extrovert individuals use social media to expand their networking from time to time when needed. Despite the use of social media is to reach out and enhance communication and engagement, the magnitude is small (Y. Kim et al., 2013).

Another explanation could be that younger Gen Y users use social media such as Facebook to socialise among friends and the older Gen Y users are more likely to engage in consumption-related activities (Bitter, Kräuter, & Breitenecker, 2014).

According to Mohr (2013), Gen Y customers are not drawn to commentary or endorsements by social media influencers as there is an element of paid advertising or biasness. In the context of modest fashion in Malaysia, many fashion brands use celebrities and social media influencer as the spokespersons, ambassadors or endorsers as part of their marketing gimmick. Perhaps the brand owners could enhance their brand by having the contents or copy

writing written in formal marketing terms to relate the contents to the lifestyle or personality of the target market. From there, the Gen y customers could feel closer to the narration of the advertisements as if they are drawn to a 'person' who understands them. This is also evident in the focus group discussion.

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