

Outer Loadings

Matrix							
	Interaktiv...	Keinform...	Kesadara...	Loyalitas ...	Personali...	Preferens...	Tren
BAW1			0.786				
BAW2			0.782				
BAW3			0.860				
BLY1				0.792			
BLY2				0.819			
BLY3				0.826			
BLY4				0.805			
CBP1						0.714	
CBP2						0.781	
CBP3						0.700	
CBP4						0.761	
CBP5						0.752	
CBP6						0.721	
CBP7						0.722	
CBP8						0.732	
Inf1		0.854					
Inf2		0.880					
Inf3		0.807					
Int1	0.856						
Int2	0.811						
Int3	0.893						
Pers1					0.857		
Pers2					0.851		
Pers3					0.922		
Tren1							0.843
Tren2							0.842
Tren3							0.882

Discriminant Validity

	Fornell-Larcker Criter...	Cross Loadings	Heterotrait-Monotrait ...	Heterotrait-Mono			
	Interaktiv...	Keinform...	Kesadara...	Loyalitas ...	Personali...	Preferens...	Tren
BAW1	0.041	0.081	0.786	0.182	-0.063	0.240	0.049
BAW2	0.212	0.220	0.782	0.157	0.027	0.309	-0.064
BAW3	0.124	0.221	0.860	0.197	0.037	0.306	0.110
BLY1	0.257	-0.009	0.096	0.792	0.054	0.310	0.052
BLY2	0.303	0.039	0.213	0.819	0.032	0.342	0.082
BLY3	0.243	0.054	0.240	0.826	0.053	0.412	0.055
BLY4	0.179	-0.102	0.155	0.805	0.108	0.410	0.072
CBP1	0.355	0.170	0.188	0.279	0.217	0.714	0.046
CBP2	0.311	0.231	0.290	0.364	0.243	0.781	0.099
CBP3	0.262	0.206	0.273	0.375	0.134	0.700	0.000
CBP4	0.260	0.266	0.326	0.355	0.118	0.761	0.114
CBP5	0.356	0.213	0.276	0.394	0.227	0.752	0.109
CBP6	0.247	0.178	0.237	0.311	0.295	0.721	0.179
CBP7	0.250	0.185	0.215	0.316	0.161	0.722	0.191
CBP8	0.231	0.133	0.251	0.298	0.344	0.732	0.131
Inf1	0.070	0.854	0.183	-0.012	-0.112	0.239	-0.129
Inf2	0.087	0.880	0.205	-0.000	-0.086	0.260	-0.009
Inf3	0.003	0.807	0.145	-0.007	-0.012	0.171	-0.136
Int1	0.856	-0.002	0.115	0.260	0.074	0.315	-0.083
Int2	0.811	0.034	0.105	0.181	0.065	0.292	-0.123
Int3	0.893	0.130	0.156	0.308	0.097	0.378	-0.098
Pers1	0.051	-0.111	-0.008	0.043	0.857	0.252	0.078
Pers2	0.047	-0.119	-0.033	0.053	0.851	0.174	0.078
Pers3	0.127	-0.033	0.025	0.096	0.922	0.318	0.087
Tren1	-0.113	-0.100	0.012	0.109	0.166	0.098	0.843
Tren2	-0.083	-0.070	0.036	0.058	0.075	0.122	0.842
Tren3	-0.103	-0.085	0.069	0.044	0.008	0.157	0.882

Discriminant Validity

	Interaktiv...	Keinform...	Kesadara...	Loyalitas ...	Personali...	Preferens...	Tren
Interaktivi...	0.854						
Keinform...	0.070	0.848					
Kesadara...	0.150	0.213	0.810				
Loyalitas ...	0.300	-0.007	0.221	0.810			
Personalis...	0.094	-0.090	0.000	0.078	0.877		
Preferensi...	0.388	0.270	0.350	0.459	0.297	0.736	
Tren	-0.117	-0.099	0.047	0.081	0.093	0.148	0.856

Discriminant Validity

	Interaktiv...	Keinform...	Kesadara...	Loyalitas ...	Personali...	Preferens...	Tren
Interaktivi...							
Keinform...	0.094						
Kesadara...	0.200	0.272					
Loyalitas ...	0.360	0.075	0.276				
Personalis...	0.105	0.121	0.082	0.085			
Preferensi...	0.451	0.311	0.435	0.531	0.325		
Tren	0.145	0.142	0.117	0.103	0.119	0.183	

Discriminant Validity

	Kesadara...	Loyalitas ...	Moderati...	Preferens...	SMMAs
Kesadaran Merek	0.810				
Loyalitas Merek	0.223	0.810			
Moderating Effect 1	0.065	-0.054	1.000		
Preferensi Merek	0.351	0.460	-0.120	0.736	
SMMAs	0.184	0.274	-0.175	0.546	

Discriminant Validity

	Kesadara...	Loyalitas ...	Moderati...	Preferens...
Kesadara...				
Loyalitas ...	0.276			
Moderati...	0.081	0.057		
Preferensi...	0.435	0.531	0.135	

Outer Weights

Matrix						Copy
	Kesadaran Merek	Loyalitas Merek	Moderatin...	Preferensi Merek	SMMAs	
CBP3				0.152		
CBP4				0.169		
CBP5				0.201		
CBP6				0.174		
CBP7				0.151		
CBP8				0.166		
Interaktivitas					0.710	
Keinformatifan					0.419	
Personalisasi					0.440	
SMMAs * Kesadaran Merek			1.000			
Tren					0.337	

Outer Weights

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-...	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals Bias ...	Samples	Copy to Clipboard:	
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ...	P Values
CBP3 <- Preferensi Merek	0.152	0.152	0.019	7.980	0.000
CBP4 <- Preferensi Merek	0.169	0.169	0.015	11.073	0.000
CBP5 <- Preferensi Merek	0.201	0.201	0.017	11.856	0.000
CBP6 <- Preferensi Merek	0.174	0.174	0.016	10.949	0.000
CBP7 <- Preferensi Merek	0.151	0.151	0.017	8.838	0.000
CBP8 <- Preferensi Merek	0.166	0.164	0.019	8.599	0.000
Interaktivitas -> SMMAs	0.710	0.689	0.111	6.419	0.000
Keinformatifan -> SMMAs	0.419	0.410	0.121	3.470	0.001
Personalisasi -> SMMAs	0.440	0.427	0.126	3.499	0.001
SMMAs * Kesadaran Merek ...	1.000	1.000	0.000		
Tren -> SMMAs	0.337	0.331	0.127	2.647	0.008

Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Outer VIF Values	Inner VIF Values
	VIF
BAW1	1.361
BAW2	1.501
BAW3	1.657
BLY1	1.756
BLY2	1.831
BLY3	1.780
BLY4	1.624
CBP1	1.649
CBP2	1.951
CBP3	1.634
CBP4	1.888
CBP5	1.798

Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

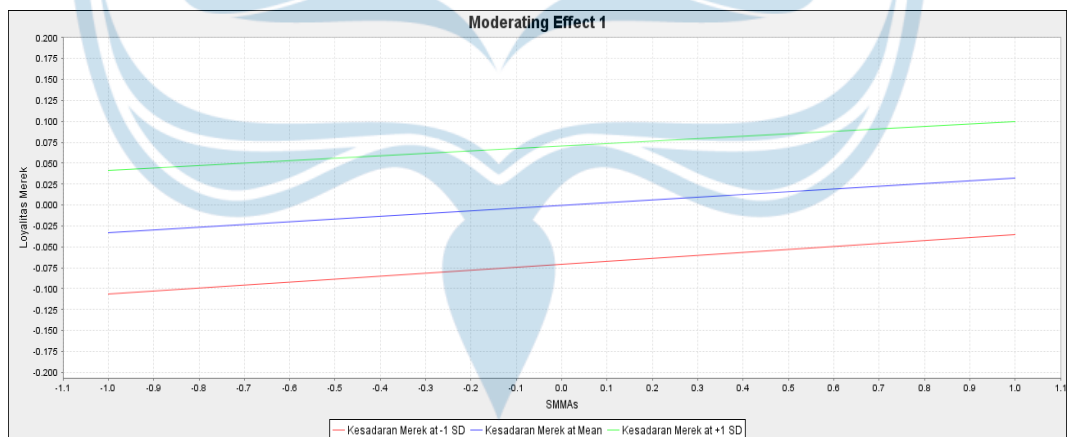
Outer VIF Values	Inner VIF Values
	VIF
CBP3	1.634
CBP4	1.888
CBP5	1.798
CBP6	1.735
CBP7	1.713
CBP8	1.721
Interaktivitas	1.015
Keinformatifan	1.010
Personalisasi	1.030
SMMAs * Kesadaran Merek	1.000
Tren	1.032

Path Coefficients

	Original ...	Sample ...	Standard ...	T Statistic...	P Values
Kesadaran Merek -> Loyalitas Merek	0.071	0.079	0.066	1.077	0.282
Moderating Effect 1 -> Loyalitas Merek	-0.003	-0.000	0.066	0.050	0.960
Preferensi Merek -> Loyalitas Merek	0.417	0.413	0.079	5.271	0.000
SMMAs -> Loyalitas Merek	0.033	0.041	0.105	0.311	0.756
SMMAs -> Preferensi Merek	0.546	0.557	0.049	11.193	0.000

Specific Indirect Effects

	Original ...	Sample ...	Standard ...	T Statistic...	P Values
SMMAs -> Preferensi Merek -> Loyalitas Merek	0.228	0.230	0.048	4.795	0.000



LAMPIRAN 5

JURNAL ACUAN



Article

More than Likes: A Mediation and Moderation Model of Consumer Brand Preference and Awareness Among Gen Z Coffee Shop Consumers in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Background: In an increasingly digital marketplace, social media marketing activities (SMMAs) have become vital for building consumer–brand relationships, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers. Coffee shops offer a unique context because they are lifestyle-oriented and highly dependent on repeat visits, making them especially responsive to digital engagement. This study examines the impact of SMMAs on brand loyalty in the Saudi Arabian coffee shop sector, with a particular focus on the mediating role of consumer brand preference and the moderating role of brand awareness. Drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework and Generational Marketing Theory, the research explores how Gen Z consumers respond to social media efforts that are informative, interactive, trendy, and personalized. Methods: Data were collected using convenience sampling via an online survey of 412 Gen Z consumers in Saudi Arabia who follow at least one local or international coffee shop brand on social media. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS–SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships, mediation, and moderation effects. Results: The findings revealed that SMMAs have a substantial direct effect on both brand loyalty and consumer brand preference. Moreover, consumer brand preference partially mediates the relationship between SMMAs and brand loyalty, underscoring its importance as a psychological mechanism in the formation of loyalty. Additionally, brand awareness was found to significantly moderate the SMMAs–brand loyalty relationship, with more potent effects observed among consumers with higher levels of brand familiarity. Implications: The study contributes theoretically by extending the S–O–R framework with Generational Marketing Theory, demonstrating the partial mediating role of brand preference and the moderating direct effect of brand awareness. Practically, the results suggest that coffee shop marketers should design social media strategies that are informative, interactive, trendy, and personalized while also investing in awareness-building campaigns to amplify loyalty among Gen Z consumers.

Keywords: social media marketing activities; brand loyalty; brand preference; brand awareness; Generation Z; Saudi Arabia; coffee shops



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1. Introduction

Social media interactions are often measured by the number of likes, comments, or shares, yet these metrics alone provide a superficial view of consumer engagement. In reality, social media marketing activities (SMMAs) are more than likes; they have become a key element of brand communication, particularly in consumer-focused industries such as

food and beverage (Wantah & Mandagi, 2024; Al-Abdallah et al., 2024; Bushara et al., 2023). Coffee shops, in particular, are turning to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok to connect with their customers (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Evelina et al., 2023). With the growth of digital technologies, social media has become a central platform for marketing communication, offering businesses opportunities to share interactive, informative, and personalized content that reflects current cultural and digital trends (Dahl, 2021; Jaweria & Shaiq, 2023).

Among the most responsive consumer groups to this shift is Generation Z (Gen Z) (born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s), who are known for their digital skills, mobile-first habits, and constant engagement with social networks (Williams, 2015). Unlike earlier generations, Gen Z has grown entirely in the digital age, which has shaped their strong technological proficiency and digital literacy (Grigoreva et al., 2021; Nataraj & Shivanna, 2025). These characteristics make them a distinctive consumer segment with unique expectations and patterns of brand interaction.

In the competitive coffee shop market, building customer loyalty is crucial for long-term growth and sustainability (Wiraguna et al., 2024; Mansur, 2024). Coffee shops provide a particularly relevant context for studying how SMMAs foster loyalty, as they are more than just places to buy drinks—they are lifestyle spaces where people socialize, relax, and express their identity. Unlike other food and beverage outlets that rely mainly on one-time transactions, coffee shops depend on repeat visits and brand communities, making them particularly responsive to digital engagement (Wiraguna et al., 2024; Mansur, 2024).

Loyal customers not only return frequently but also recommend brands to others and are more tolerant of price increases (Desveaud et al., 2024; Rehman & Elahi, 2024). To cultivate such loyalty, coffee shops increasingly use social media marketing activities (SMMAs), focusing on informativeness, interactivity, personalization, and trendiness (Ismail, 2017). Each dimension plays a crucial role in shaping consumer experiences, whether by providing helpful content, facilitating two-way engagement, staying aligned with current trends, or tailoring messages to individual preferences. Together, they strengthen brand-consumer relationships and encourage loyalty (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Evelina et al., 2023; Wiraguna et al., 2024; Puspaningrum, 2020; Changani & Kumar, 2024; Sukidly & Achmadi, 2024). By applying these strategies, coffee shops can effectively reach Gen Z on the platforms where they are most active, creating connections that go beyond simple transactions.

Earlier studies have shown that well-implemented SMMAs not only boost consumer engagement and improve brand perception but also build emotional bonds between consumers and brands, ultimately leading to higher brand loyalty (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Evelina et al., 2023; Wiraguna et al., 2024). While SMMAs are widely recognized for increasing visibility and interaction, turning these digital interactions into genuine brand loyalty requires more than just gaining likes, shares, or followers. It involves cultivating consumer preference for the brand, a psychological tendency where consumers develop a positive attitude toward a brand, making them more likely to repurchase and advocate (Jaweria & Shaiq, 2023; Mulyanegara et al., 2009). However, this process varies among consumers. Brand awareness, or the degree to which a consumer is familiar with and recognizes a brand, may play a key moderating role. It greatly influences how consumers interpret and respond to social media content, with more familiar consumers being more likely to engage deeply and develop loyalty in response to marketing efforts (Hien & Nhu, 2022; Cuong & Khoi, 2021).

Although prior studies confirm that SMMAs positively affect outcomes such as brand image, trust, and engagement, key antecedents of loyalty, most have emphasized direct relationships while overlooking the psychological mechanisms that explain how and why SMMAs foster loyalty (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012; Ismail, 2017). In particular, the mediating

role of consumer brand preference, a crucial attitudinal factor, remains underexplored. Likewise, while brand awareness has often been treated as a mediating variable, its potential moderating role in strengthening or weakening the SMMAs–loyalty link has received little empirical attention (Wiraguna et al., 2024). Furthermore, much of the existing research has focused on Western or global contexts, with limited investigation into Gen Z consumers in emerging markets such as Saudi Arabia, where cultural values and social media behaviors differ significantly. Finally, while prior studies have examined SMMAs across various sectors, such as fashion, technology, and e-commerce (e.g., Ismail, 2017; Achmad & Jatmiko, 2025; Ebrahim, 2020), industry-specific research on the coffee shop sector—a lifestyle-oriented and highly competitive market in Saudi Arabia—remains scarce. To address these gaps, this study aims to examine how SMMAs shape brand loyalty through brand preference and brand awareness, guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How are Gen Z consumers' brand loyalty behaviors shaped by SMMAs in the Saudi coffee shop market?

RQ2: How do SMMAs influence consumer brand preference among Gen Z consumers in the Saudi Arabian coffee shop market?

RQ3: To what extent does consumer brand preference mediate the effect of SMMAs on brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers in the Saudi coffee shop market?

RQ4: How does brand awareness moderate the relationship between SMMAs and brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers in the Saudi Arabian coffee shop market?

This study may offer several key contributions to the fields of social media marketing, consumer behavior, and generational marketing theory:

- The study develops and validates a novel model, highlighting the mediating role of consumer brand preference and the moderating role of brand awareness in explaining how SMMAs shape brand loyalty among Gen Z coffee shop consumers in Saudi Arabia.
- The study contributes to Generational Marketing Theory by empirically validating how generational traits—such as a preference for personalized, trendy, and interactive content—influence digital engagement and loyalty formation among Gen Z consumers.
- For businesses in the food and beverage industry, especially coffee shops, the study demonstrates how well-designed SMMAs can strengthen brand preference and awareness, which in turn serve as foundations for long-term brand loyalty.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Gen Z: A Generational Marketing Theory Perspective

Generational marketing is a strategic approach that tailors marketing efforts to age cohorts, recognizing that individuals within a generation share experiences, values, and attitudes shaped by historical, technological, and cultural influences (Nataraj & Shivanna, 2025; Chaney et al., 2017; Zayko & Vinichenko, 2022). By addressing these generational nuances, marketers can design more effective campaigns that go beyond demographics to include psychographic factors such as values, lifestyles, and aspirations, thereby fostering deeper consumer connections and enhancing brand loyalty (Shadrina, 2024; Dimitrieska & Efremova, 2022; Okros, 2020). This approach highlights that each generation responds differently to marketing content, making it essential to tailor messages to the expectations and behaviors of the target cohort.

Gen Z (born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s) has grown up in a digital environment shaped by the internet, social media, and mobile technology, making them highly skilled digital natives who rely on these platforms for communication, information,

and commerce (Grigoreva et al., 2021; Nataraj & Shivanna, 2025; Ismail et al., 2021; Espejo et al., 2025; Thangavel et al., 2022). Further, Gen Z is a diverse and socially conscious cohort that values authenticity, personalization, and responsibility, preferring brands that are transparent, ethical, and aligned with their personal values (Salam et al., 2024; Ayu Alfyya et al., 2023; Vasan, 2023; Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024; Tata et al., 2023; Dragolea et al., 2023). Their strong preference for personalization implies that tailored content is more likely to strengthen brand preference and loyalty among this group. Their engagement with fast-changing trends suggests that trendy and culturally relevant content will enhance brand responsiveness and advocacy. Highly familiar with social and environmental issues, they expect companies to demonstrate genuine commitment to sustainability and inclusivity (Ismail et al., 2021; Espejo et al., 2025; Dragolea et al., 2023; Brand et al., 2022; Confetto et al., 2023). These traits, combined with their digital fluency and constant engagement with social media, make Gen Z a distinct consumer group that requires tailored marketing approaches. For coffee shop marketers, this means moving beyond traditional tactics toward interactive, transparent, and purpose-driven campaigns that can capture attention, build trust, and foster long-term loyalty (Dabija & Lung, 2018; Dobre et al., 2021; Thangavel et al., 2022).

2.2. Social Media Marketing Activities and Brand Loyalty

Social media marketing involves promoting products and services through various digital platforms, including websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms (Evans et al., 2021). It represents a shift from traditional marketing approaches, offering businesses the opportunity to connect with audiences in real-time and build interactive relationships (Cuong & Khoi, 2021). Digital marketing frequently applies traditional marketing concepts and provides an additional tool for businesses to reach customers and understand their behavior (Putri et al., 2024). By utilizing online platforms, companies can engage with potential customers, enhance brand recognition, and foster customer engagement (Bilgin, 2018; Ibrahim, 2022; Jaweria & Shaiq, 2023). Social media advertising is a crucial factor for firms to increase brand recognition. This involves creating and sharing content, running targeted advertising campaigns, and interacting with customers through comments, messages, and other interactive features (Jaweria & Shaiq, 2023).

Brand loyalty (BLY) refers to a customer's consistent preference for and repeated purchase of a specific brand over time, despite the availability of alternatives (Wong, 2023; Tanveer et al., 2021). It serves as a key indicator of a strong brand–consumer relationship and is critical for long-term business success (Hussain et al., 2024). The main characteristics of BLY include repeat purchase behavior, where consumers consistently choose the same brand over competitors; emotional attachment, as loyalty often stems from positive experiences, trust, or emotional connections; resistance to switching, meaning loyal consumers are less likely to be influenced by competitors' promotions or price changes; and advocacy, where loyal customers frequently recommend the brand to others and act as brand ambassadors (Desveaud et al., 2024; Rehman & Elahi, 2024; Tahir et al., 2024).

The impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty has been widely examined across industries, but findings remain somewhat inconsistent (Puspaningrum, 2020; Changani & Kumar, 2024; Sukidy & Achmadi, 2024). Several studies confirm a strong direct link, where social media activities enhance trust, emotional attachment, and repeat patronage (Puspaningrum, 2020; Ebrahim, 2020; Haudi et al., 2022). For example, Puspaningrum (2020) reported that in the food service sector, social media marketing significantly increased trust and loyalty for McDonald's in Indonesia, a result echoed by Ibrahim et al. (2021), who found positive effects on loyalty, trust, and revisit intention in coffee shops in Northern Cyprus. Similarly, Rai and Dahal (2024) showed that informativeness,

credibility, and entertainment value strengthen loyalty in Nepalese retail, suggesting that well-executed SMMAAs can cultivate favorable consumer–brand relationships.

By contrast, other studies highlight that not all SMMAAs contribute equally to loyalty. [Ebrahim \(2020\)](#), for instance, found that only trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth had a direct influence on loyalty in the Egyptian telecommunications sector, pointing to the importance of context and the selective power of certain activities. Moreover, several scholars stress indirect pathways: [Achmad and Jatmiko \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that social media marketing not only drives loyalty directly but also indirectly by fostering brand experience, love, and trust.

When focusing on Gen Z, research increasingly shows that interactivity, trendiness, and informativeness are particularly salient drivers. [Fajarwati and Haliza \(2024\)](#), for example, found these dimensions to be significant predictors of loyalty among TikTok users aged 17–26. Such evidence underscores that while some contexts confirm direct SMMAAs–loyalty effects, others highlight mediating mechanisms, suggesting that for digital-native Gen Z consumers—especially in lifestyle-oriented sectors like coffee shops—loyalty may depend both on immediate engagement and on deeper psychological processes.

2.3. Mediation of Consumer Preferences Between Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty

Consumer preference refers to an individual's subjective liking or inclination toward certain products, services, or brands over others, based on their tastes, needs, values, experiences, and perceptions ([Yang & Allenby, 2003](#); [Salam et al., 2024](#)). It reflects the choices consumers make when presented with multiple alternatives and is shaped by factors such as product features, price, quality, brand reputation, consumer personality, brand personality, corporate personality, and emotional or cultural relevance ([Ebrahim et al., 2016](#); [Banerjee, 2016](#)). In marketing, understanding consumer preferences is crucial because it helps businesses tailor their offerings and communication strategies to meet the expectations and desires of their target audience, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty ([Jaweria & Shaig, 2023](#); [Mulyanegara et al., 2009](#); [Potelwa et al., 2025](#)).

To gain a deeper understanding of the mediating role of consumer preferences in the relationship between SMMAAs and brand loyalty, this study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model as its theoretical framework. Originating from environmental psychology ([Mehrabian & Russell, 1974](#)), the S–O–R model posits that external stimuli (S) influence internal cognitive and emotional states (O), which in turn lead to behavioral responses (R). This study integrates the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework with Generational Marketing Theory to build its conceptual model. Within the S–O–R framework, social media marketing activities (SMMAAs) serve as external stimuli that influence Gen Z consumers' internal evaluations, specifically brand preference (Organism), which subsequently shape their behavioral responses in the form of brand loyalty (Response). Generational Marketing Theory complements this process by highlighting that generational cohorts differ systematically in values, attitudes, and digital behaviors. For Gen Z, who are digital natives and place a high importance on authenticity, personalization, and interactivity, SMMAAs are a potent stimulus that aligns with their expectations and consumption styles, affecting their preferences and leading to an enhancement of their loyalty to the brand.

More specifically, social media marketing activities encompass a variety of strategies that brands use to engage users, including interactivity, informativeness, customization, trendiness, and electronic word-of-mouth ([Kim & Ko, 2012](#); [Wibowo et al., 2021](#)). These components serve as external stimuli that shape consumer perceptions and behaviors. Empirical studies have demonstrated that effective SMMAAs can drive consumer engagement and positively influence brand-related outcomes. For instance, [Wibowo et al. \(2021\)](#) indi-

cate that SMMAs—specifically interaction, entertainment, customization, trendiness, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)—significantly impacted customer behavioral outcomes, including purchase intention, loyalty intention, and participation intention, mediated by relationship quality. In a study of U.S. consumers' preferences, [Liu and Lopez \(2016\)](#) found that conversations surrounding carbonated soft drink (CSD) brands and nutritional information on social media significantly influence how consumers rate and select products. Furthermore, the empirical investigation involving 160 young consumers from Nadiad and Vadodara shows that SMMAs have a significant positive impact on brand preference ($r = 0.266$). This indicates that young consumers tend to prefer brands that actively engage with them on social media platforms, suggesting that social media marketing strategies can effectively enhance their brand preference ([Parmar, 2019](#)). These findings align with the stimulus (S) aspect of the S-O-R model, where digital marketing efforts function as environmental inputs that initiate the consumer decision-making process.

Brand loyalty, the ultimate response (R) in this S-O-R framework, is a well-established concept that reflects a consumer's consistent preference for and commitment to a brand. This loyalty is often demonstrated through repeated purchases and resistance to switching, even when alternatives are available. As mentioned previously, multiple studies have confirmed that consumer brand preferences are significantly correlated with brand loyalty. For instance, in the context of the banking sector, [Amoako et al.'s \(2017\)](#) study findings reveal a significant positive relationship between brand preference and customer loyalty. Specifically, the results showed that the more customers prefer a brand, the more likely they are to remain loyal to it. Furthermore, [Chinomona et al. \(2013\)](#) demonstrate that brand preference has a strong and direct influence on brand loyalty in the South African retailing industry ($r = 0.608$). The study emphasizes that consumers with higher brand preferences are more likely to exhibit loyalty, evident through repeat purchases and their willingness to pay premium prices. Similarly, [Cuong \(2020\)](#) suggests that brand preference has a significant predictive value for brand loyalty in the laptop market in Vietnam. The study highlights that consumers who prefer a specific laptop brand are more likely to remain loyal.

In this S-O-R model, the organism (O) represents the consumer brand preference, which reflects the degree to which social media content aligns with personal tastes, lifestyle, and values. [Amoako et al.'s \(2017\)](#) study findings conclude that consumer brand preference partially mediates the nexus between advertising and brand loyalty, based on data collected from 600 customers of Ghanaian universal banks. By acting as a mediating variable, consumer preferences may help explain how and why SMMAs influence brand loyalty. In line with the S-O-R model, the previous findings suggest that SMMAs function as a stimulus that shapes internal consumer responses, specifically brand preference, which in turn influences behavioral outcomes such as brand loyalty. Indeed, brand preference has been shown to strongly predict loyalty across various industries and cultural contexts ([Amoako et al., 2017](#); [Chinomona et al., 2013](#); [Cuong, 2020](#)).

2.4. Moderating Role of Brand Awareness Between SMMAs and Brand Loyalty

Brand awareness is widely described as the extent to which consumers can recognize and recall a brand under various conditions ([Aaker, 1991](#)). It constitutes a fundamental component of brand equity and acts as a prerequisite for consumer evaluation and engagement, particularly in the context of SMMAs ([Hien & Nhu, 2022](#)). In recent years, empirical studies have consistently shown that SMMAs have become a highly effective strategy for enhancing brand awareness in the digital era ([Faisal & Ekawanto, 2022](#); [Cheung et al., 2019](#); [Fatima et al., 2022](#)). [Bilgin \(2018\)](#) emphasizes that SMMAs such as interactive posts,

online contests, influencer partnerships, live video content, and user-generated content significantly enhance brand recognition and recall.

Furthermore, several studies have confirmed a strong, positive relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty. When consumers possess a higher level of familiarity with a brand, they are more likely to notice, interact with, and respond favorably to its marketing efforts, particularly those shared through social media platforms (Bilgin, 2018; Wasik et al., 2025; Buyukdag, 2021). Supporting this perspective, Hien and Nhu (2022) conclude that the effect of digital marketing attitudes on purchase intention is significantly influenced by the level of brand awareness, with higher awareness levels amplifying the influence of positive digital marketing perceptions on purchasing behavior. Brand awareness not only increases recognition but also fosters trust, strengthens commitment, enhances brand image, and cultivates deeper emotional and cognitive associations—all of which are critical to the development of brand loyalty (Cuong & Khoi, 2021; Alkhawaldeh et al., 2018).

Based on the previous findings, it can be suggested that SMMAAs have both direct and indirect effects on brand-related outcomes. Prior studies on social media marketing activities (SMMAAs) have reported mixed evidence regarding their influence on brand loyalty. On the one hand, several studies emphasize a direct impact, suggesting that SMMAAs can enhance consumer loyalty without the need for intervening mechanisms (e.g., Ibrahim et al., 2021; Ebrahim, 2020; Fajarwati & Haliza, 2024). On the other hand, other research highlights the importance of mediating processes, showing that loyalty is shaped through constructs such as trust, engagement, or brand image (Puspaningrum, 2020; Changani & Kumar, 2024; Sukidy & Achmadi, 2024). This inconsistency underscores the need for a more nuanced model that incorporates both direct and indirect pathways. Building on these contrasting perspectives, the present study proposes a mediation and moderation model, in which consumer brand preference serves as a mediator and brand awareness acts as a moderator. This approach enables testing both the direct and indirect pathways identified in the literature, while situating the analysis within the Saudi coffee shop sector, where Gen Z consumers represent a particularly relevant segment. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.** *SMMAAs are significantly associated with brand loyalty.*
- H2.** *SMMAAs are significantly associated with consumer brand preferences.*
- H3.** *Consumer brand preference is significantly associated with brand loyalty.*
- H4.** *Consumer brand preference significantly mediates the relationship between SMMAAs and brand loyalty among Gen Z coffee shop consumers.*
- H5.** *Brand awareness significantly moderates the relationship between SMMAAs and brand loyalty.*

The theoretical framework of the research is presented in Figure 1.

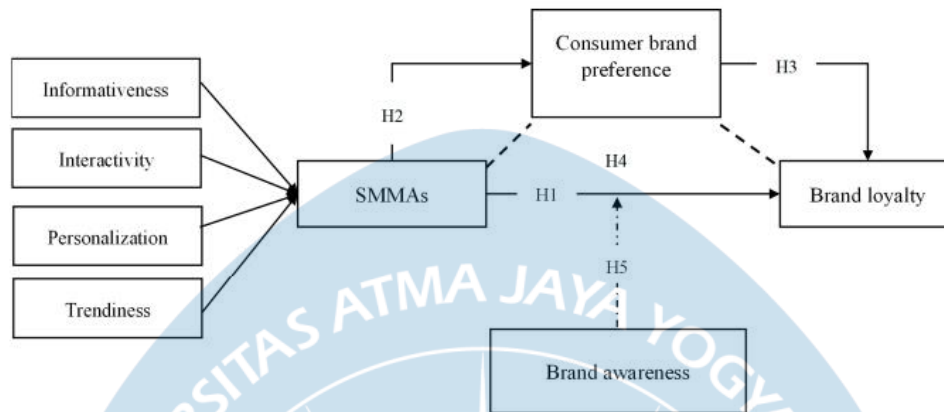


Figure 1. Theoretical framework. Note: SMMAs = social media marketing activities, ----- represents the mediation path of SMMAs → consumer brand preference → brand loyalty; - - - - - represents the moderation path of brand awareness × SMMAs → brand loyalty. solid lines represent the direct paths between constructs.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Context

Saudi Arabia is one of the most digitally connected countries in the world, with internet access deeply integrated into daily life. From communication and entertainment to shopping and social interaction, nearly every Saudi is online (Alsaadi et al., 2024). As of 2024, social media has become an essential part of daily life in Saudi Arabia, with 35.33 million active users and an average usage time of 3 h and 6 min per day (Suresh & Gupta, 2025) is widespread and intensive engagement has encouraged businesses, including those in the food and beverage sector, to utilize social media platforms as powerful tools for brand communication and customer engagement (Stefany, 2025). The demographic composition of users further supports this shift: nearly 44% of social media users are aged 18 to 24, making Gen Z the dominant online audience, particularly on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram (Suresh & Gupta, 2025). Based on Global Web Index (GWI) insights, smartphones are the primary internet access tool for 98% of Saudi Gen Z users. Rather than being passive users, they engage actively, using these platforms to share their opinions, follow trends, and connect with brands (Stefany, 2025).

Saudi Arabia's food service industry has experienced rapid and significant growth in recent years, expanding from SAR 63 billion in 2019 to SAR 111 billion by 2024. Among the various segments, coffee shops have demonstrated strong performance, evolving from a SAR 7.5 billion market—representing approximately 12% of the sector—to a SAR 17 billion market, now accounting for 16% of the total market share (Jayaprakasan, 2025). This notable growth in the coffee shop segment signifies more than just an increase in demand for coffee; it reflects broader socio-cultural shifts within the Kingdom. Changing lifestyle patterns, increased digital engagement, and the growing influence of younger generations are collectively transforming the hospitality landscape in Saudi Arabia (Jayaprakasan, 2025).

Younger generations—particularly Gen Z and Millennials—are playing a key role in reshaping Saudi Arabia's coffee culture (Perfect Daily Grind, 2025). Their evolving preferences are driving a shift toward specialty beverages and more personalized experiences,

with nearly half of Gen Z consumers customizing their coffee orders to suit their tastes. These changes are also reflected in the rise of ready-to-drink options, a growing interest in sustainability and ethical sourcing, and how they connect with brands digitally. Whether it is through app-based loyalty programs or following coffee shops on social media, today's young consumers are redefining how coffee is found, ordered, and experienced throughout Saudi Arabia (Jayaprakasan, 2025). These statistics underscore the strategic importance of SMMA in Saudi Arabia—particularly among Gen Z—making them a crucial component in shaping brand awareness, brand preference, and long-term brand loyalty in sectors such as the coffee shop industry.

3.2. Measures and Instrument Development

This study used a quantitative survey with a cross-sectional design. According to Nardi (2018), surveys are effective for gathering large amounts of data from diverse populations and analyzing complex relationships between variables. This method enables an in-depth examination of how informativeness, interaction, trendiness, and personalization influence brand loyalty. Additionally, the survey approach produces statistically significant results, supporting reliable hypothesis testing. It also helps gain a detailed understanding of Gen Z consumer preferences in social media marketing and brand loyalty. Therefore, this study employed a survey questionnaire within a quantitative research framework.

The study adopted all measurement scales from previous literature, ensuring validity and reliability. To ensure suitability for the Saudi context, the items were first translated into Arabic and then back-translated into English by two bilingual experts to verify equivalence between the original and translated versions. Further, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of Gen Z consumers, composed of 35 participants, who were excluded from the study's sample to assess clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness. Feedback from the pilot led to minor wording adjustments before the full-scale data collection began.

Section 1 of the questionnaire gathered demographic data, including gender, age, educational level, and estimated daily time spent on social media. The participants' perceptions towards SMMA were measured in Section 2. SMMA were modeled as a second-order reflective-formative construct comprising four dimensions: informativeness, interactivity, trendiness, and personalization, which were adapted from Yadav and Rahman (2017). This framework provides a strong basis for understanding Gen Z consumers' perceptions of SMMA. Specifically, the SMMA were measured using 12 items across four dimensions: informativeness (3 items, e.g., "The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand offer accurate information on products."), interactivity (3 items, e.g., "The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand enable me to share and update existing content."), trendiness (3 items, e.g., "The content visible on the (X) coffee shop brand's social media platforms is the latest trend."), and personalization (3 items, e.g., "The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand make purchase recommendations as per my requirements.").

Consumer brand preference was assessed in Section 3 using a scale developed by Duffett (2017). The scale consisted of eight items. A sample statement from this scale is "SMMA have a positive effect on my preference for the (X) coffee shop brand." Additionally, brand loyalty was measured in Section 4 using a 4-item scale adapted from Ismail et al. (2021), with a sample item being "I feel confident in the (X) coffee shop brand that I always buy from." Section 5 focused on examining participants' brand awareness, using a three-item scale adapted from Seo et al. (2020). One of these items is "I am always aware of the (X) coffee shop brand." All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Constructs' items are presented in Appendix A.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process for this study followed a structured approach, utilizing convenience sampling through an online survey. A well-planned sampling strategy is crucial to ensuring statistical significance and the generalizability of findings. According to Cochran (1977), for populations with unknown variance, a conservative sample size calculation based on proportions is appropriate. A minimum sample size of 384 participants was recommended for populations exceeding 500,000, using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

This study specifically targeted Gen Z consumers in Saudi Arabia, with age serving as a key inclusion criterion (18–28 years). Given Gen Z's high level of digital engagement and preference for online communication, Google Forms was used as the primary tool for distributing and collecting survey responses. This platform offered ease of access and was well-suited to the digital behaviors of the target demographic. A convenience sampling technique was employed, chosen for its efficiency and practicality in reaching a specific subset of the population—digitally active Gen Z consumers. This method aligned with the fast-paced nature of social media marketing research and has been found effective in capturing timely insights from engaged online users (Bryman, 2018).

The finalized questionnaire was distributed using a multi-channel approach, with a focus on targeting Gen Z consumers in Saudi Arabia who follow local or international coffee shop brands on social media. To reach this specific group, the survey was shared via Google Forms across popular social media platforms among Gen Z users, including Instagram, Snapchat, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook. Recruitment posts invited followers to participate voluntarily, and no paid advertisements or promotional boosts were used. A screening question was placed at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that only participants who actively followed at least one local or international coffee shop brand on social media were included. Participants were instructed to identify a single coffee shop brand they follow most and have recently purchased from before proceeding with the questionnaire. This targeted approach helped ensure the relevance and reliability of the data collected, as participants had direct and ongoing exposure to the marketing content under investigation.

To ensure ethical compliance, all participants received an informed consent form at the beginning of the survey. This form explained that participation was voluntary, responses would remain anonymous, data would be kept confidential, and participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. Only those who provided consent were eligible to continue. A total of 467 responses were collected. After data screening, valid responses were defined as those that (1) were fully completed (i.e., no missing items on key scales), (2) met the age requirement (between 18 and 28 years old), and (3) followed at one local or international coffee shop brand on social media. Following this validation, 412 responses (88.2%) were included in the analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

To describe demographic characteristics and construct perceptions, SPSS v. 22 was employed for descriptive statistics. PLS-SEM v. 4.1.1.4, supported by bootstrapping, was used to test hypotheses. This method was ideal for modeling complex variable relationships, especially in exploratory contexts. It effectively handles high-dimensional models and computes different effect types (Hair et al., 2019). In this study, SMMA were modeled as a higher-order construct. Given its tolerance for non-normal data and its focus on maximizing variance explained in dependent variables, PLS-SEM matched the study's analytical needs (Hair et al., 2019).

In line with Hair et al. (2019), the study assessed validity and reliability using established thresholds for factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Specifically, factor loadings exceeding 0.708 were considered acceptable, CR values above 0.70 indicated sufficient reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50 confirmed convergent validity.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

As shown in Table 1, a total of 412 valid responses were collected from Saudi Gen Z consumers. In terms of gender, 54.4% of participants identified as female, and 45.6% as male. Concerning their age, participants were categorized into three groups: 38.8% were between 21 and 25 years old, 32.6% fell into the older Gen Z category (26–28 years), and 28.6% belonged to the younger Gen Z group (18–20 years). Regarding educational level, the majority of participants (47.8%) were currently pursuing an undergraduate degree. Additionally, 43% had already completed an undergraduate degree, 5.1% had a high school or equivalent education, 2.4% were pursuing postgraduate studies, such as a Master's or Ph.D., and 1.7% had completed a postgraduate degree. Participants were also asked to estimate their daily time spent on social media platforms. The findings showed that 6.8% spent less than 1 h per day, 43% spent more than 1 to 3 h, 40.8% spent 3 to 5 h, and 16.7% reported using social media for more than 5 h per day. These figures indicate that the majority of Saudi Gen Z consumers are highly active on social media, making them an ideal population for research on social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Table 1. Demographic analysis.

Demographics	Categories	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	188	45.6
	Female	224	54.4
Age	18–20 years	118	28.6
	21–25 years	160	38.8
	26–28 years	134	32.6
Educational level	High school or equivalent	21	5.1
	Currently pursuing an undergraduate degree	197	47.8
	Completed an undergraduate degree	177	43.0
	Currently pursuing a postgraduate degree	10	2.4
	Completed postgraduate degree	7	1.7
Estimated daily time spent on social media	1 h	28	6.8
	More than 1 to 3 h	177	43
	More than 3 to 5 h	168	40.8
	More than 5 h	39	9.4

4.2. Common Method Bias (CMB)

To address the potential impact of common method bias (CMB) in the survey data, various procedural and statistical methods were employed. All participants' data were used solely for research purposes and handled in a confidential manner. To reduce response bias,

participants were encouraged to answer honestly (Phillips & Clancy, 1972), and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were provided, which have been shown to decrease social desirability bias (Randall & Fernandes, 1991). Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to evaluate CMB. The results indicated that the first factor accounted for only 36.18% of the variance, which is below the 50% threshold, indicating that CMB was not a major concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, to check for multicollinearity, which can distort or even reverse path coefficients (β), the variance inflation factor (VIF) was calculated. Following Hair et al.'s (2019) guideline of 3.3 as the threshold, all VIF values in this study were found to be well below the cut-off, confirming that multicollinearity was not an issue in the model (See Table 2).

Table 2. Collinearity Statistics.

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	2.50%	97.50%
Brand Awareness $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	1.812	1.842	1.537	2.201
Brand Awareness $\times$ SMMA $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	1.127	1.151	1.053	1.288
Consumer Brand Preference $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	1.952	2.002	1.654	2.446
SMMA $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	1.364	1.4	1.224	1.635
SMMA $\rightarrow$ Consumer Brand Preference	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

4.3. Assessment of Validity and Reliability

The psychometric evaluation, which included checks for reliability and both convergent and discriminant validity, was conducted after data collection using the PLS-SEM algorithm. As shown in Table 3, the psychometric evaluation indicated satisfactory results. Cronbach's alpha (α) values ranged from 0.749 to 0.883, and composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.856 to 0.936, both exceeding the 0.70 benchmark recommended by Hair et al. (2019), thus confirming high internal consistency reliability. Further, construct validity was assessed using convergent and discriminant validity metrics. According to Hair et al. (2019), convergent validity is established when factor loadings exceed 0.708 and AVE is greater than 0.50. In this analysis, factor loadings for all items were significant and above 0.708, and AVE values ranged from 0.548 to 0.787, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Figure 2 represents the first-order measurement model, and Figure 3 represents the second-order measurement model.

As SMMA was modeled as a formative second-order construct composed of four first-order dimensions (informativeness, interactivity, personalization, and trendiness), the two-stage HCM approach was employed. This method allows latent variable scores of the first-order constructs to serve as indicators of the higher-order construct. To assess the relative contribution of each dimension, outer weights and their significance levels were examined. As shown in Table 3, all the paths were found to be statistically significant. Specifically, interactivity emerged as the strongest contributor to SMMA ($\beta = 0.426$, $p < 0.001$), followed by informativeness ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.01$), personalization ($\beta = 0.199$, $p < 0.05$), and trendiness ($\beta = 0.167$, $p < 0.05$). These results suggested that while all four dimensions are relevant for shaping SMMA, interactive features play the most critical role in engaging Saudi Gen Z coffee shop consumers. The two-stage HCM approach was employed, which allows latent variable scores of the first-order constructs to serve as indicators of the higher-order construct.

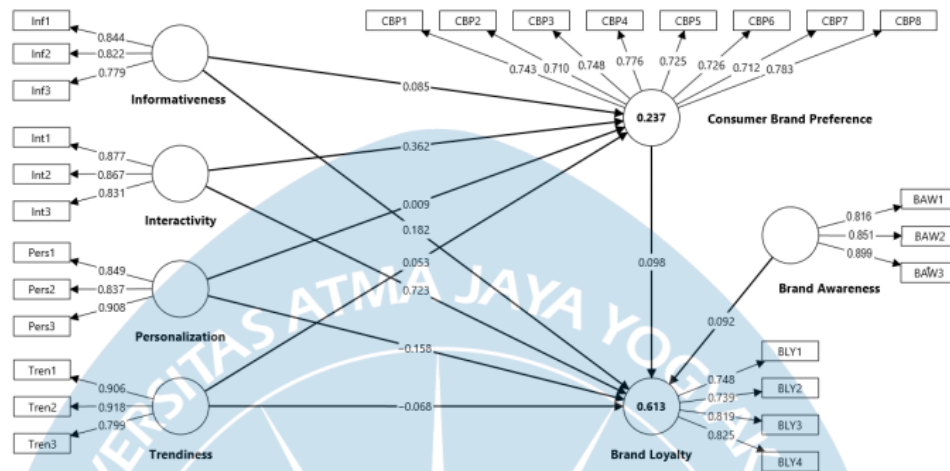


Figure 2. The first-order measurement model. Note: Inf = informativeness, Int = interactivity, Pers = personalization, Tren = trendiness, CBP = consumer brand preference, BLY = brand loyalty, BAW = brand awareness. Standardized path coefficients (β values) are displayed on the paths. Values on the arrows of indicators reflect outer loading. Values inside the circles represent R^2 .

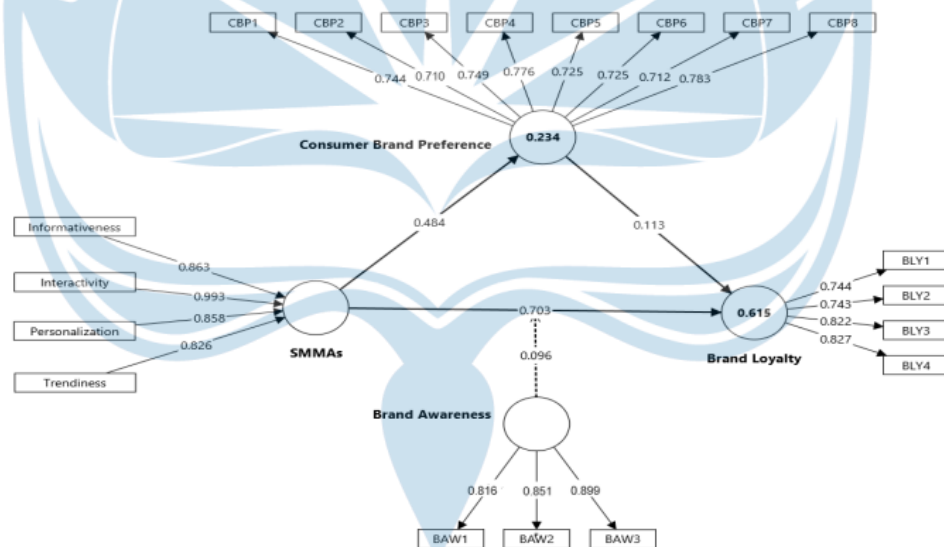


Figure 3. The second-order measurement model. Note: SMMA = social media marketing activities, CBP = consumer brand preference, BLY = brand loyalty, BAW = brand awareness. Standardized path coefficients (β values) are displayed on the paths. Values on the arrows of indicators reflect outer loading. Values inside the circles represent R^2 .

Table 3. Measurements of validity and reliability.

First-Order Construct	Second-Order Construct	Item	Outer Weight	Outer Loading	CIs		α	CR	AVE	VIF
					2.5%	97.5%				
	SMMAs	Informativeness	0.226 **	0.863 ***	0.802	0.912	0.876	0.936	0.787	2.663
		Interactivity	0.426 ***	0.993 ***	0.977	0.998				2.583
		Personalization	0.199 *	0.858 ***	0.794	0.909				3.186
		Trendiness	0.167 *	0.826 ***	0.757	0.884				3.188
Informativeness		Inf1		0.844 ***	0.784	0.886	0.749	0.856	0.665	1.564
		Inf2		0.822 ***	0.776	0.859				1.487
		Inf3		0.779 ***	0.688	0.839				1.455
Interactivity		Int1		0.877 ***	0.839	0.906	0.823	0.894	0.737	2.064
		Int2		0.867 ***	0.839	0.892				1.760
		Int3		0.831 ***	0.776	0.873				1.817
Personalization		Pers1		0.849 ***	0.807	0.883	0.832	0.899	0.749	1.968
		Pers2		0.837 ***	0.795	0.873				1.774
		Pers3		0.908 ***	0.884	0.928				2.544
Trendiness		Tren1		0.906 ***	0.882	0.926	0.846	0.908	0.768	3.172
		Tren2		0.918 ***	0.902	0.933				3.211
		Tren3		0.799 ***	0.745	0.842				1.529
Consumer brand preference		CBP1		0.743 ***	0.676	0.799	0.883	0.906	0.548	2.408
		CBP2		0.710 ***	0.619	0.765				2.631
		CBP3		0.748 ***	0.683	0.801				2.488
		CBP4		0.776 ***	0.716	0.823				2.279
		CBP5		0.725 ***	0.655	0.782				1.997
		CBP6		0.726 ***	0.666	0.778				1.761
		CBP7		0.712 ***	0.651	0.762				1.812
		CBP8		0.783 ***	0.731	0.824				2.354
Brand loyalty		BLY1		0.748 ***	0.709	0.778	0.813	0.864	0.614	1.130
		BLY2		0.739 ***	0.653	0.807				2.126
		BLY3		0.819 ***	0.754	0.866				2.156
		BLY4		0.825 ***	0.759	0.871				3.150
Brand awareness		BAW1		0.816 ***	0.291	0.628	0.843	0.891	0.733	3.012
		BAW2		0.851 ***	0.698	0.891				2.125
		BAW3		0.899 ***	0.551	0.782				3.125

Note: CIs = confidence intervals, α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

To establish discriminant validity, the HTMT ratio was applied, following the recommendation by Henseler et al. (2015) that the threshold should not exceed 0.85. The data in Table 4 reveal that each HTMT ratio was below the recommended limit of 0.85, supporting the presence of discriminant validity.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity.

Construct	HTMT Ratio				
	1	2	3	4	5
1—Brand Loyalty					
2—Brand awareness	0.648 ***				
3—Consumer brand preference	0.519 ***	0.804 ***			
4—Social media marketing	0.765 ***	0.421 ***	0.484 ***		

Note. The HTMT ratio is less than 0.85. *** $p < 0.001$.

4.4. The Structural Model Assessment

To test the research hypotheses, the study employed a bootstrapping technique with 5000 sub-samples and a maximum number of iterations. The study used a 5% significance level and a 95% confidence interval, so the t-value should be greater than +1.96, and the p-value should be less than 0.05. As shown in Table 5 and Figure 4, the direct effects

demonstrated the strong and significant impact of SMMAs on brand loyalty [$\beta = 0.703$, $t = 19.619$, $p < 0.001$]. This robust finding supported the acceptance of H1, confirming that when coffee shops provide informative, interactive, trendy, and personalized content on social media, Gen Z consumers are more likely to become loyal. Additionally, the analysis supported Hypothesis 2, indicating that SMMAs significantly contributed to improving consumer brand preference [$\beta = 0.484$, $t = 10.657$, $p < 0.001$]. This means that well-designed SMMAs make Gen Z consumers more likely to like and prefer a coffee shop brand. Furthermore, the results further validate Hypothesis 3, demonstrating that consumer brand preference is significantly associated with brand loyalty [$\beta = 0.113$, $t = 2.285$, $p < 0.05$], suggesting that when consumers prefer a brand, they are also more likely to remain loyal to it.

Table 5. Structural Parameter Estimates.

Hypothesized Path	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	p Values	Confidence Intervals		f ²	Result
					2.5%	97.5%		
Direct effect								
H ₁ : SMMAs → BLY	0.703	0.036	19.619	0.000	0.624	0.764	0.741	Accepted
H ₂ : SMMAs → CBP	0.484	0.045	10.657	0.000	0.396	0.574	0.305	Accepted
H ₃ : CBP → BLY	0.113	0.049	2.285	0.022	0.115	0.312	0.021	Accepted
Mediation effect								
H ₄ : SMMAs → CBP → BLY	0.055	0.025	2.171	0.030	0.017	0.106		Accepted
Moderation effect								
H ₅ : BAW × SMMAs → BLY	0.096	0.033	2.888	0.004	0.029	0.161	0.026	Accepted

Note: SMMAs = social media marketing activities, CBP = consumer brand preference, BLY = brand loyalty, BAW = brand awareness.

Regarding the indirect pathway from SMMAs to brand loyalty via consumer brand preference, the results revealed significant partial mediation, leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 4 [$\beta = 0.055$, $t = 2.171$, $p < 0.05$]. This suggested that SMMAs not only influence loyalty directly but also indirectly by shaping consumers' preferences first. In other words, Gen Z consumers who view SMMAs positively are more likely to prefer the brand, and this preference leads them to become more loyal. This highlights the psychological path through which digital marketing helps strengthen the bond between consumers and brands.

To test whether brand awareness moderates the relationship between SMMAs and brand loyalty, a simple slopes analysis was conducted. As shown in Figure 5, the positive effect of SMMAs on brand loyalty becomes stronger as brand awareness increases. The relationship was significant at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of brand awareness, with the steepest slope observed at the high level. In other words, the strength of the SMMAs–brand loyalty link depends on consumers' level of brand awareness. Those who are already familiar with the brand demonstrate a significantly stronger response to SMMAs, whereas the effect is comparatively weaker among consumers with low awareness. These findings provide clear support for Hypothesis 5, confirming that brand awareness functions as a positive moderator in this relationship.

The results in Table 5 also revealed the effect size (f^2). According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The results of PLS-SEM indicated that SMMAs played a substantial role in shaping brand loyalty, with an f^2 value of 0.741. Furthermore, SMMAs also shaped consumer brand preference (medium to large effect), with an f^2 value of 0.305. Meanwhile, the

roles of CBP (direct effect) and brand awareness (moderation) were statistically significant but relatively smaller in size, with f^2 values of 0.021 and 0.026, respectively.

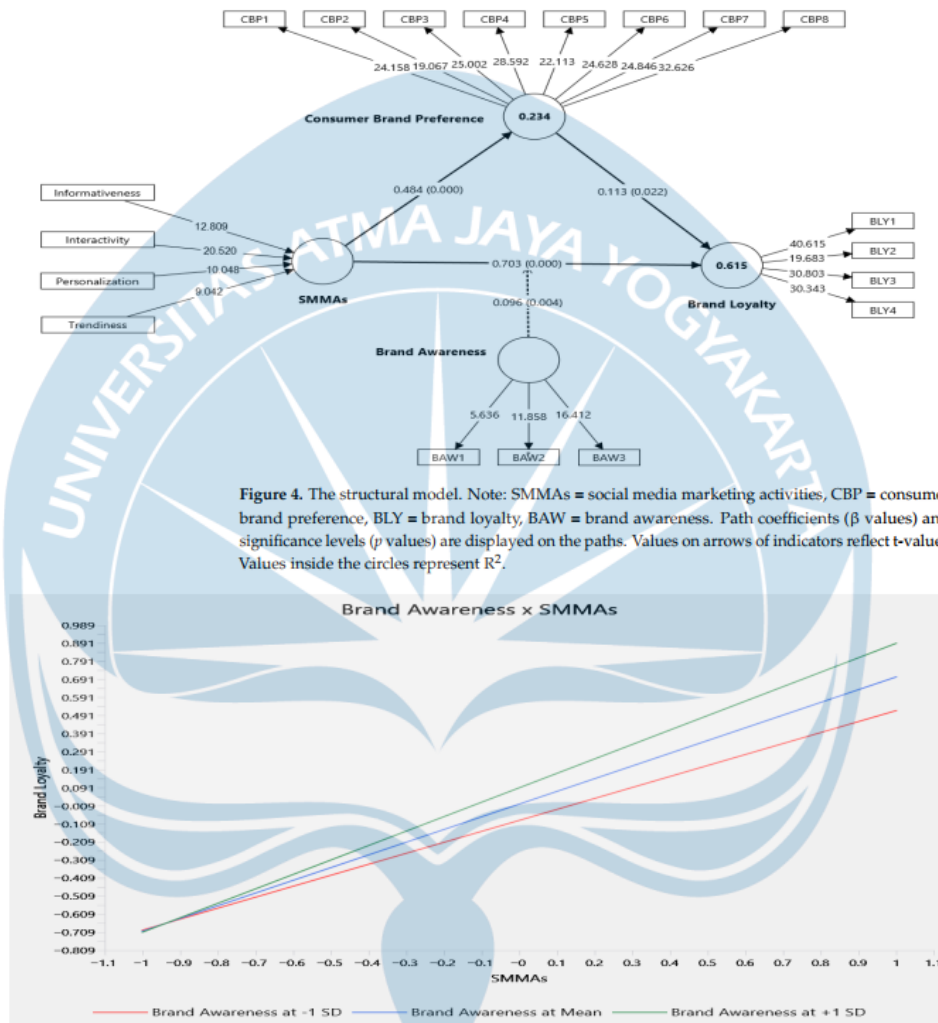


Figure 4. The structural model. Note: SMMAs = social media marketing activities, CBP = consumer brand preference, BLY = brand loyalty, BAW = brand awareness. Path coefficients (β values) and significance levels (p values) are displayed on the paths. Values on arrows of indicators reflect t -values. Values inside the circles represent R^2 .

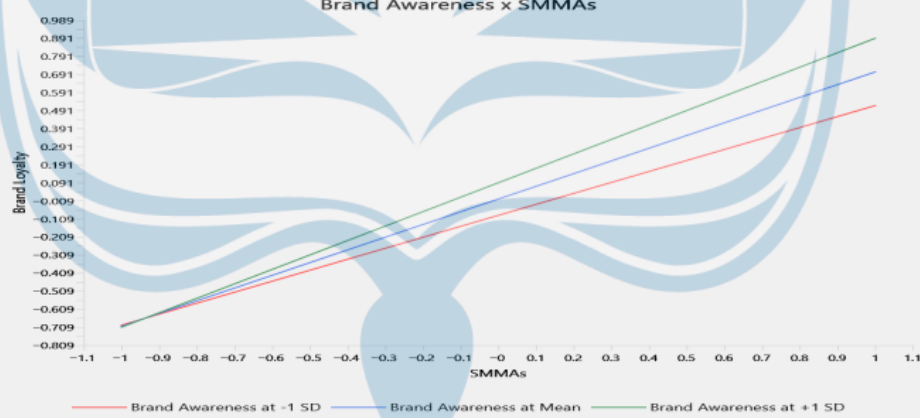


Figure 5. The moderating effect of brand awareness on the linkage between SMMAs and BLY.

4.5. The Model Quality Indices

To evaluate the model quality, several measures were calculated, including R^2 to assess the explanatory power, and Q^2_{predict} to gauge the out-of-sample predictive performance. According to the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019), R^2 values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are considered weak, moderate, and substantial, respectively. As shown in Table 6, the current

study indicates that SMMAs explained 23.4% of the variance in CBP, indicating a weak but acceptable level of explanatory power. Additionally, 61.5% of the variance in brand loyalty is explained by the combined effects of SMMAs, CBP, and BAW, suggesting a moderate to substantial explanatory power.

Table 6. Explanatory and predictive power of the model.

Construct	R ²	Q ² _{predict}
Consumer brand preference (CBP)	0.234	0.222
Brand loyalty (BLY)	0.615	0.590

In terms of the out-of-sample predictive performance, Hair et al. (2019) demonstrated that values above zero indicate that the model has predictive relevance for a specific endogenous construct. As shown in Table 6, Q²_{predict} values for both CBP (0.222) and brand loyalty (0.590) are higher than zero, confirming the model's predictive relevance.

5. Discussion and Implications

Focusing on Gen Z consumers in Saudi Arabian coffee shops, this research aims to investigate the direct effect of SMMAs on both brand loyalty and consumer brand preference. It also examines the direct link between consumer brand preference and brand loyalty, while exploring the mediating role of consumer brand preference in the SMM-brand loyalty relationship. Moreover, the study considers the moderating impact of brand awareness on the direct link between SMMAs and brand loyalty.

Based on the hypotheses tested, this study identified the following major findings: first, the substantial positive effect of SMMAs on brand loyalty demonstrates that digital marketing stimuli can directly trigger behavioral outcomes without always requiring intervening mechanisms. This result aligns with existing scholarly work that highlights the contribution of social media efforts in enhancing customer-brand relationships in general, and specifically in the context of the coffee shop sector (Ambarawati et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2021; Evelina et al., 2023; Wiraguna et al., 2024). This enhanced loyalty is often reflected in repeated visits, favorable word-of-mouth, and active brand advocacy (Wiraguna et al., 2024; Hidayah & Astuti, 2023). Theoretically, this finding contributes to the S-O-R framework by demonstrating that the “stimulus” component (informativeness, interactivity, personalization, and trendiness) possesses sufficient persuasive power to generate loyalty. For practitioners, this means that high-quality social media content is not merely a communication tool but a loyalty-building strategy. Coffee shops should therefore invest in sustained SMMAs that go beyond attracting likes to foster repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth, and advocacy. For example, interactive Instagram stories, personalized TikTok campaigns, digital loyalty programs through apps, gamification strategies for brand engagement, or trend-driven Snapchat content can directly translate into customer loyalty in highly competitive Saudi markets.

Second, the findings also revealed that SMMAs significantly enhance consumer brand preference. This demonstrates that SMMAs act not only as direct drivers of loyalty but also as psychological stimuli that shape attitudinal outcomes. By linking digital marketing efforts with consumer preferences, the study bridges the gap between external stimuli and internal evaluations (the “organism” in the S-O-R model). This result fosters prior studies (e.g., Utomo et al., 2023; Liu & Lopez, 2016; Parmar, 2019), which emphasize that value-driven social media content plays a pivotal role in cultivating favorable brand perceptions and preferences among consumers. For managers, this highlights the importance of crafting content that resonates with the values and aspirations of Gen Z. Social media campaigns

that emphasize authenticity, personalization, and alignment with cultural trends can drive preference and make consumers more inclined toward one brand over competitors. Coffee shops can achieve this through value-driven content, creative storytelling campaigns aligned with Saudi cultural values, or limited-time offers tailored to the lifestyles of Gen Z.

Third, the findings emphasized a significant relationship between consumer brand preference and loyalty, highlighting the importance of consumer attitudes as antecedents of behavioral outcomes. This reinforces the idea that preference is not only a predictor but a necessary condition for sustaining loyalty over time. These results reinforce existing research (e.g., Amoako et al., 2017; Chinomona et al., 2013; Cuong, 2020; Mansur, 2024), which highlights the positive and significant impact of consumer brand preference on brand loyalty. Theoretically, it extends the Generational Marketing Theory by demonstrating that the loyalty behaviors of Gen Z consumers are rooted in a deeper psychological commitment, rather than just transactional interactions. For practitioners, this means that loyalty cannot be achieved solely by offering promotions or discounts. Coffee shops must first cultivate preference by creating strong brand identities and delivering experiences that Gen Z consumers genuinely value. Preferred brands are more likely to enjoy repeat visits, favorable recommendations, and resilience against competitors.

Fourth, the study provided evidence that consumer brand preference plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between SMMAs and brand loyalty. The results indicate that SMMAs not only influence loyalty directly but also indirectly through shaping brand preference. However, the size of the indirect effect ($\beta \approx 0.055$) is much smaller than the direct effect of SMMAs on loyalty ($\beta = 0.703$). This confirms that the dominant pathway is direct, while brand preference serves as an additional channel that helps explain part of the relationship. This dual pathway enriches the S-O-R model by showing that the organism (preference) both complements and enhances the stimulus-response (SMMAs $\rightarrow$ BLY) link. Furthermore, this study fosters and extends previous research that explored the indirect relationship between SMMAs and brand loyalty (BLY) through constructs such as brand gestalt, brand experience, affect, brand love, and brand trust (Achmad & Jatmiko, 2025; Wantah & Mandagi, 2024). For coffee shop marketers, this indicates that successful SMMAs should not only focus on immediate behavioral outcomes but also aim to nurture positive attitudes and preferences. Campaigns that provide value, emotional resonance, and alignment with Gen Z's social identity are more likely to sustain long-term loyalty. For example, value-driven initiatives focused on sustainability or cultural relevance can strengthen preference, which in turn reinforces loyalty.

Fifth, the finding that brand awareness shapes the direct impact of SMMAs on loyalty brings an important insight. It shows that social media marketing does not work the same way for everyone—its effect is more potent when consumers already know and recognize the brand. In contrast, for consumers with low brand awareness, the influence of SMMAs on loyalty was comparatively weaker. This aligns with previous studies (e.g., Hien & Nhu, 2022; Cuong & Khoi, 2021; Alkhawaldeh et al., 2018), emphasizing the substantial effect of brand awareness on marketing outcomes and providing valuable insights for marketers targeting Gen Z consumers in competitive markets like the coffee shop sector. For coffee shops, this means social media marketing works best when paired with efforts to build brand awareness. When consumers already know and recognize a brand, they are more likely to become loyal after seeing its social media campaigns. Marketers should therefore start by making the brand visible—through influencer collaborations, local partnerships, or blending offline and online promotions—before focusing heavily on engagement content. In Saudi Arabia's competitive coffee market, where local, regional, and global chains compete side by side, being easily recognizable is the first step to maximizing the benefits of social media marketing.

Additionally, this study contributes to the advancement of generational marketing theory by providing empirical insights into how SMMA's impact brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers within the Saudi Arabian coffee shop market. By focusing on Gen Z, a cohort known for its digital fluency, preference for authenticity, and demand for personalization, the study reinforces the idea that generational characteristics significantly shape how consumers interpret and engage with marketing content. The findings highlight that SMMA's, particularly those that are informative, interactive, trendy, and personalized, are especially effective in fostering brand preference and loyalty among Gen Z consumers.

Overall, the study's findings are best understood within the context of Saudi culture and society. The direct and indirect effects of SMMA's on loyalty fit well with Gen Z's group-oriented mindset, religious values, and desire for honest, value-driven engagement, making interactive and transparent campaigns especially effective. The moderating role of brand awareness also reflects the influence of Saudi youth culture under Vision 2030, where well-known and trendy brands earn stronger loyalty from tech-savvy young consumers. Together, these cultural factors show that the unique values and lifestyles of Saudi Gen Z shape the success of SMMA's in Saudi coffee shops.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

While this study offers valuable insights into the role of SMMA's in shaping brand loyalty among Gen Z coffee shop consumers in Saudi Arabia, some limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study's reliance on convenience sampling of Gen Z consumers in Saudi Arabia who follow local or international coffee shop brands on social media introduces a potential self-selection bias and limits the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, regions, or industries. Future research should consider using probability or stratified sampling techniques and replicate this model across different cultural contexts or service sectors to enhance its broader applicability. Further, future studies could benefit from comparative analyses across generational groups (e.g., Millennials) to understand how digital marketing strategies resonate with different consumer segments. Additionally, detailed information on the geographic distribution of participants and the share of those following local versus international coffee shop brands was not collected, which limits the extent to which we can compare different groups. These issues should be addressed in future research to enhance generalizability and provide deeper insights into consumer behavior in the Saudi coffee shop market. Second, while the study reported basic demographics, such as age, gender, education, and social media use, it did not capture coffee shop-specific behaviors, including how often people visit, how much they spend, or whether they prefer local or international chains. Including these measures in future research as control variables in the structural model would provide a clearer understanding of brand loyalty. Third, although steps were taken to adapt the measurement scales through translation, back-translation, and pilot testing, cultural differences may still have influenced how participants interpreted some items. Future research should address this issue by employing cross-cultural validation techniques, such as qualitative pretesting, to ensure more robust generalizability. Fourth, the use of a cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causality between the variables studied. Further research should focus on longitudinal and experimental studies, which could provide deeper insight into how consumer brand preferences and loyalty evolve in response to sustained SMMA's. Fifth, while the study examined the mediating role of consumer brand preference and the moderating role of brand awareness, it did not account for other potential psychological or behavioral variables, such as psychological ownership, perceived innovativeness, emotional attachment as mediators, and digital literacy, influencer exposure, frequency of social media use, and perceived relevance of content as moderators. Including these variables

could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the loyalty-building process in digital environments. Sixth, the study focused on examining brand awareness only as a moderator of the direct relationship between SMMAs and brand loyalty. Future research could extend this by exploring whether awareness also moderates the links between SMMAs and brand preference or between brand preference and loyalty.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Study constructs and their related items. Instruction: Dear participant, please think of the one coffee shop brand that you follow the most on social media and have recently purchased from. All the following questions should be answered with this brand in mind.

Construct	Items	Statement
Informativeness	Inf1	"The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand offer accurate information on products."
	Inf2	"The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand offer useful information."
	Inf3	"The information provided by the social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand is comprehensive."
Interactivity	Int1	"The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand enable me to share and update existing content."
	Int2	"The (X) coffee shop brand interacts regularly with its followers and fans."
	Int3	"The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand facilitate two-way interaction with its customers."
Personalization	Pers1	"The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand make purchase recommendations as per my requirements."
	Pers2	"I feel my needs are met by using the social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand."
	Pers3	"The social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand facilitate personalized information search."
Trendiness	Tren1	"The content visible on the (X) coffee shop brand's social media platforms is the latest trend."
	Tren2	"Using social media platforms of the (X) coffee shop brand is really trendy."
	Tren3	"Anything trendy is available at the (X) coffee shop brand's social media platforms."



Table A1. Cont.

Construct	Items	Statement
Consumer brand preference	CBP1	"SMMAs have a positive effect on my preference for the (X) coffee shop brand."
	CBP2	"I am interested in the (X) coffee shop brand that is promoted through SMMAs."
	CBP3	"SMMAs increase my preference for the (X) coffee shop brand."
	CBP4	"SMMAs improve the overall image of the (X) coffee shop brand."
	CBP5	"I am willing to try products of the (X) coffee shop brand that are promoted through SMMAs."
	CBP6	"SMMAs of the (X) coffee shop brand are relevant to me and my personal interests."
	CBP7	"SMMAs are effective in stimulating my preference for the (X) coffee shop brand."
	CBP8	"I prefer the (X) coffee shop brand that actively uses SMMAs for promotion."
Brand loyalty	BLY1	"I usually buy from certain coffee shop brands, especially the (X) coffee shop brand."
	BLY2	"I consider myself to be loyal to the (X) coffee shop brand."
	BLY3	"I would rather stick with the (X) coffee shop brand I usually buy than try something I am not very sure of."
	BLY4	"I feel confident in the (X) coffee shop brand that I always buy from."
Brand awareness	BAW1	"I am always aware of the (X) coffee shop brand."
	BAW2	"I am aware of the unique characteristics of the (X) coffee shop brand."
	BAW3	"I can always remember the logo of the (X) coffee shop brand."

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