

Understanding the Role of Social Touchpoint Contents in Influencing Brand Loyalty Among Sri Lankan Millennials

K. R. Samarasinghe

Doctoral Student, Faculty of Commerce and Management

University of Kelaniya

rangana@insharptechnologies.com

M.J.M Razi

Faculty of Commerce and Management

University of Kelaniya

razim@kln.ac.lk

D.M.R Dissanayaka

Faculty of Commerce and Management

University of Kelaniya

ravi@kln.ac.lk

Social
Touchpoint

Received 29 July 2025

Revised 20 October 2025

Accepted 01 February 2026

Published (Online) 20 February 2026

Abstract

In the digital era, social media has become the primary socializing platform for consumers, encouraging brands to establish strategic touchpoints through social media content. Social touchpoint content plays a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions and achieving marketing objectives. This study examines the impact of social touchpoint content on brand loyalty among millennials in Sri Lanka's e-tailer industry. Millennials represent a tech-savvy generation with high purchasing power and relatively low loyalty levels; therefore, understanding their behavior is essential for sustainable revenue generation. The study is grounded in attachment theory, which conceptualizes brand loyalty as an emotional bond similar to that between a child and a caregiver. Trust is identified as a critical mediating factor, and brand trust is incorporated into the research model based on prior literature. Data were collected from 384 Sri Lankan millennials using purposive sampling based on their preferred e-tailer brand. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software was applied due to non-normal data distribution. The findings reveal a relationship between social touchpoint content and brand loyalty, with brand trust partially mediating this relationship.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Digital touchpoints, Brand loyalty, Brand trust, Millennials.

© K. R. Samarasinghe, M.J.M Razi & D.M.R Dissanayaka. Published in *Sri Lanka Journal of Management Studies*. Published by the Faculty of Management Studies of the Open University of Sri Lanka. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0). The full terms of this licence may be found at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.



Sri Lanka Journal of Management
Studies

Vol. 7 – Issue II, 2025

pp. 39 – 56

ISSN (Print): 2682-7298

ISSN (Online): 2792-1093

<https://doi.org/10.4038/sljms.v7i2.123>

Introduction

The global digital landscape has been driven by rapid diversification, which has drastically changed the way brands interact with their customers (Fatma, Ruiz, Khan, & Rahman, 2020; Jobin, Ienca, & Vayena, 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Hasan, Shams, & Rahman, 2021). Search engines and social media have become the primary source of information for consumers' decision journeys (Barann et al., 2020; Fatma et al., 2020; Johnson & Ramirez, 2021; Kwak et al., 2021). The traditional decision journey of consumers starts with the first moment of truth, which begins after the awareness phase of advertisements. Then, consumers are influenced by packaging, shelf promotions, and informative banners before purchasing. However, in this era, zero moment of truth have been introduced to these decision journeys where consumers consume information from different digital sources before the first moment of truth (Biçer, 2020; Han & Kim, 2020; Condé Ricci Martinelli, 2021). Social media have become primary channels for socializing, entertainment, and news. Therefore, social media marketing has expanded as one of the main activities for brands to achieve their marketing goals (Meese & Hurcombe, 2021; Confetto et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Personalizing marketing activities with specific target segments shows significant cost and effort reduction with social media (Eigenraam et al., 2018; Ebrahim, 2020; Wu & Luong, 2021). In today's cyberspace, a vast number of social media platforms and other different channels are collaborating with different user segments. These users consume information from these channels as a part of their decision journey. To achieve their marketing goals, brands should try to absorb consumers' attention within this decision journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Pauwels & Van Ewijk, 2020; Samarasinghe, Razi, & Dissanayaka, 2024).

This should be done by carefully selecting touchpoints within these different social media platforms while maximizing return on investment. Many brands are strategically using social media as a crucial tool to connect with their customers and foster meaningful engagement in the current competitive business landscape. Rather than achieving their marketing goals, most brands are trying to increase their channel subscriber base and get user engagement with their content (Jamil et al., 2022; Goswami, 2024). According to Straker, Wrigleyand & Rosemann (2015), placing content on social media in a way that influences customers on their decision journey is considered social touchpoint content. When contents do functional diversifications of the business in the decision journey, those are considered functional touchpoints.

Most studies that follow the touchpoint categorization defined by Straker, Wrigleyand & Rosemann (2015) have conducted their studies while considering social touchpoints. However, the number of studies conducted in the Sri Lankan context is very low, especially considering Brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty is recognized as a crucial influential factor in driving sales force in the fiercely competitive industry of today. Brand loyalty can ensure that a consumer base does not shift to the competitor brands and is also willing to buy at even higher prices than the competitor's products. It illustrates the favorable behavioral or attitude motivation of customers towards a brand. (Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2018; Boateng et al., 2020; Samarasinghe, Razi, & Dissanayaka, 2024; Quoquab et al., 2020). As per the most recent definitions, brand loyalty refers to an emotional bond

between a customer and a brand, which is comparable to the emotional bonds a kid has with its carer. (Boateng et al., 2020; Samarasinghe, Razi, & Dissanayaka, 2024; Adam et al., 2018)

However, it is vital to conduct studies targeted on brand loyalty as it is showing a decreasing trend in the latest generation cohorts. (Van Bommel et al., 2014; Samarasinghe, Razi, & Dissanayaka, 2024)

In today's competitive business environment, understanding factors for influencing brand loyalty and millennials is crucial. This generation is considered to be the generation that is growing as the generation with high purchasing power (Haug, Reinecke & Tomczak, 2020; D'Arpizio & Levato, 2018). The latest studies have exposed millennials as a tech-savvy generation with a high influence on market trends and engagements. The representation of 25% of the world's population and 55% of the luxury goods market are other key points to consider millennials as the most important generation court for sustainable business.

Most of the brands focus on getting their consumers engaged by entertaining their user base on social media. The common problem in brand performance in social media is that most of the brands is facing a hard time creating influential content to achieve their brand objectives (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2012; Aguilar et al., 2022). High user engagement for content on touchpoints is a characteristic of a loyal consumer base. However, focusing on trendy content will not be a method that can optimize return on investment for social media management to achieve business objectives. (Aguilar et al., 2022; Liadeli, Sotgiu, & Verlegh, 2023).

Therefore, it is vital to get insights about social touchpoint content to influence brand loyalty as it can create sustainability. Influencing brand loyalty through social touchpoint contents has not taken much attention from Sri Lankan context (Thundeniya & Dissanayake, 2024; Jayawickrama et al., 2016) especially considering e-tailer brands (Thundeniya & Dissanayake, 2024; Jayawickrama et al., 2016; Wijayarathne, 2019; Jayawickrama et al., 2016).

The rise of digital era has done a significant transformation towards consumer perception of business strategies. Influencing power of world's economy has transferred from multinational brick and motor companies to e-commerce companies such as Amazon, Netflix, and Google. The retailing subsection of e-commerce business is considered as e-tails which contribute a significant amount to e-commerce (Ma et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2021; Sallnäs & Björklund, 2020). Based on 2023 statistics sales of these e-tailer brands reached \$5.8 trillion with 39% forecasted growth per year (Statista, 2023). It shows importance of results of this study to the world.

E-commerce and internet-based marketing have been recognized as a government strategy for SME empowerment in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Industry and Commerce - Sri Lanka, 2020; Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2020). But commonwealth's e-commerce readiness assessment report indicates the low readiness of Sri Lankan SMEs for e-commerce and internet-based marketing. Most empirical studies conducted in the Sri Lankan context have been focused on purchase intention (Jayathilaka et al., 2020; Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020; Randiwela & Gunarathna, 2017; Withanagamage & Wattegama, 2018). Therefore, conduct research that can get insights to create brand loyalty from social media content is vital for Sri Lanka because it is very rare in the existing literature space and also it will help SMEs to perform sustainable business.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does the social touchpoint content have an impact on the brand loyalty of e-tailer brands?

RQ2: Does the brand trust mediate the impact of social touchpoint content on brand loyalty of e-tailer brands?

Literature Review

The McKinsey model for brand loyalty also known as the Customer Decision Journey was introduced in 2009 (Court et al., 2017). It has challenged traditional linear models by demonstrating a circular process of formulating brand loyalty among consumers. Most of the traditional Brand loyalty models show a linear progression from awareness to purchase. This approach was criticized by McKensy(2009) by highlighting the unpredictable entering and existence of consumers in different stages of the cycle which emphasizes the loyalty loop where satisfied customers return without switching to other brands (Court et al., 2017; Van Bommel, Edelman, & Ungerman, 2014). In the initial level of the definitions which has been defined by Jacoby and Chestnut (1978), brand loyalty is considered as a two-dimensional construct. They have defined brand loyalty as a combination of the behavior and attitude of the consumer (Ozuem et al., 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2021; Wu & Luong, 2021). Theories introduced from other fields to marketing such as attachment theory have converted brand loyalty into a multi-dimensional construct. It has introduced the emotional connection of the consumer toward the brand as a strong construct of brand loyalty to the caregiver (Adam et al., 2018; Boateng et al., 2020; Bidmon, 2017). The bonding-based attachment which is described by attachment theory shows experience value that created by a brand can influence brand loyalty directly. Further, it shows the partial mediation effect of brand trust within this relationship (Boateng et al., 2020; Adam et al., 2018; Bidmon, 2017). By characterising brand loyalty as an emotional bond impacted by both functional and social constructions of the experience value, Aaker (1991) has reinforced this attachment theory. Further, according to Aaker (1991) this emotional connection can get resulted in long-term brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020; Wu & Luong, 2021). Brand loyalty within his brand equity model, Keller (2001) has defined brand loyalty as an outcome consumer's judgment and emotional connections toward the brand. Keller (2001) has given more strength to Aaker (1991)'s definitions by showing brand loyalty formation as an outcome of the fulfillment of functional and social needs from experience value (Keller, 2020; Wu & Luong, 2021; Aaker, 1991; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020; Wu & Luong, 2021). Khan et al. (2020) in their study on online services demonstrated brand loyalty formation with consumer experience and also the partial mediation of brand trust for this relationship confirming Aaker (1991)'s and Keller (2001)'s arguments. Khan et al. (2020) have mainly considered touchable and tangible experiences that consumers get from a brand. Lou and Xie (2021) added more valuable insights to Khan et al. (2020), considering consumers' experience as the content consumer gets from brands' online touchpoints. In this study, the online experience has been divided into social and functional, informative and entertainment, and the relationship between brand loyalty with the mediation effect of experience evaluation. This experience evaluation is the status of the satisfied and dissatisfied level of the consumer from experiential value. In other words, this study has exposed the influencing factor of brand loyalty with journey satisfaction with touchpoints (Lou & Xie, 2021). This approach to optimizing consumer experiences through digital

touchpoints has garnered significant attention in the literature (Hallikainen et al., 2019; Vannucci & Pantano, 2019; Wagner et al., 2020).

The definition of touchpoints can be considered through the definitions of Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Hallikainen et al., (2019). Based on two of these definitions' touchpoints can be considered as direct or indirect interactions that initiate between the customer and the brand/company within the customer journey. When these touchpoints are placed on online platforms those considered digital touchpoints (Vannucci & Pantano, 2019; Hallikainen et al., 2019). Based on the different categorizations of digital touchpoints, Straker et al. (2015) describe functionality-driven categorization as functional touchpoints, social touchpoints, community touchpoints, and corporate touchpoints. This definition does not reflect ownership of the touchpoints therefore Lemon and Verhoef (2016) have suggested an ownership-based model that includes brand-owned touchpoints, partner-owned touchpoints, customer-owned touchpoints, and social/external touchpoints (Hallikainen et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2020). This ownership-based model does not address the emerging technologies in the new digital era (Vannucci & Pantano, 2019). The emotional aspect of customer experience has been ignored in this model, which is a key factor in the latest brand loyalty theories. According to Straker et al. (2015), social touchpoints are defined as a company's or brand's social media information that is positioned so that the consumer can absorb it during the decision-making process. (Hallikainen et al., 2019; Vannucci & Pantano, 2019).

A study by Ibrahim, Aljarah, and Sawafah (2021) on social media marketing activities to revisit intention can be considered as a study that has attempted to create journey satisfaction from digital touchpoints. The theoretical background of this study is (S-O-R framework). This study was conducted through undergraduates from Northern Cyprus who followed the Facebook page of a coffee shop. The findings have demonstrated not only a favorable correlation between social touchpoints and brand loyalty, but also the role of brand trust as a mediating factor in this relationship. However, in this research, Ibrahim et al., (2021) have only focused on the responses based on the Facebook page. Different social media have different user groups and feature therefore generalization of these results will be problematic due to this limitation. A study conducted by Yoshida et al. (2018) which was constructed based on social identity theory focuses on social media engagement. It shows the relationship of brand-related content on social media as an influencing factor for behavioral brand loyalty. This study has focused mainly on entertainment content on social media. There are other content types that consumers refer to on social media therefore generalizing these results to overall social media content will be a biased decision.

Ebrahim (2020) looked into the connections between social media content and brand loyalty as well as how brand trust functions as a mediator in these relationships. The findings of this study show a significant direct relationship between social media content to brand loyalty and partial mediation of brand trust in this relationship. Based on these implications, the study highlights the importance of trust in leveraging social media as a critical tool for brand loyalty.

According to the literature, social media content has a big impact on brand loyalty, which is frequently mediated by brand trust. Few studies, nevertheless, have looked at social media content as a means of fostering brand loyalty. This gap is especially noticeable in Sri Lanka, where

there is a dearth of research on millennials, making it challenging to create digital strategies tailored to the local context. Considering some of the studies conducted to analyze the social media content's effect on brand loyalty, Thundeniya and Dissanayake (2024) examined the influence of Facebook content marketing on e-brand loyalty in Sri Lanka's telecommunication industry. This has been conducted because there were no proper solutions given to "How Facebook content marketing impact to e-brand loyalty". However, this is conducted through the telecommunication industry in Sri Lanka which has 3-4 players in the market with high competition. Also, this study only discusses Facebook marketing but current social media holding many platforms. Therefore, the suitability of these results to the e-tailer industry is problematic. Wijayarathne (2019) investigated how social media marketing affected consumers' brand loyalty in the personal care and home sector. The results of this study demonstrate a strong positive relationship between social media content and brand loyalty. However, this study was conducted through 148 respondents, which is not a good representation of the population. Surprisingly 49.3% of the sample has spent 1-2 hours daily on the internet which shows a debatable position on generalizing this study.

Therefore, this study focuses on filling this literature gap by conducting a study to find out the impact of the brand loyalty focusing e-tailer industry.

Methodology

Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding brand loyalty as a profound emotional connection between consumers and brands, comparable to the bond between an infant and a caregiver. Trust serves as a critical component in establishing a secure and enduring relationship (Adam et al., 2018; Bidmon, 2017; Boateng et al., 2020). In line with this theory, Boateng et al. (2020) have examined the relationship between experiential value and brand loyalty. Additionally, Adam et al. (2018) have reinforced this notion by illustrating the correlation between social value experiences and brand loyalty. Furthermore, Boateng et al. (2020) highlight the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, a concept that is also partially discussed by Bidmon (2017). This research emphasizes that content derived from social touchpoints significantly enhances the consumer experience. Consequently, by leveraging the relational aspects of attachment theory, this research is conceptualized to reflect these insights.

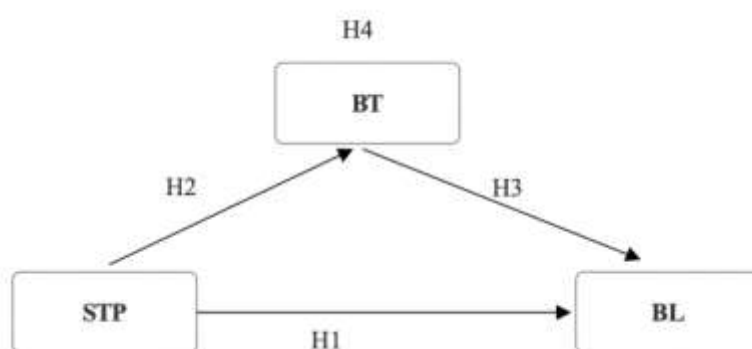


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Source: Authors' presentation

Note: *BL-Brand loyalty, BT-Brand trust, STP-Social touchpoints.*

Hypothesis developments

Based on attachment theory Adam et al., (2018) shows the relationship between consumer experience from social value as an influencing factor for brand loyalty. Based on attachment theory Boateng et al., (2020) conceptualized the relationship between experience value and brand loyalty. Social media content of a brand creates the interface for customers to get information and emotional bond with the brand (Dissanayake et al., 2019b; Purani et al., 2019; Wu & Luong, 2021.; Yoshida et al., 2018). Therefore, social touchpoints create the experience for the brand. This can combine with conceptualization of Boateng et al., (2020) thus, I argue

H₁: Social touchpoint content have an impact on the brand loyalty of e-tailer brands

Trust is considered a major factor in attracting customers, especially in online business. Prior studies conducted by researchers like Kwon & Kim, Joonho, Jung Seung-Hye (2020), Ebrahim (2020) show brand trust as an outcome of social media marketing and communication. According to Boateng et al., (2020) who conceptualized their study through attachment theory, trust as a factor that is influenced by experience value. This experience value can develop through social media content brands (Dissanayake et al., 2019b; Purani et al., 2019; Wu & Luong, 2021.; Yoshida et al., 2018). Thus, I argue that,

H₂: Social touchpoint content have an impact on the brand trust of e-tailer brands

The widely accepted definition of brand trust, proposed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002), describes it as the average consumer's willingness to rely on a brand and the services it offers for their intended purposes. A study by Chinomona (2016) provided empirical evidence supporting this concept, aligning with the findings of Boateng et al. (2020) through the lens of attachment theory. Additionally, Kwon et al. (2020) identified brand trust as a crucial component of brand loyalty and a primary factor influencing attitude loyalty. Therefore, I contend that,

H₃: Brand trust has an impact on the brand loyalty of e-tailer brands

Based on the study of Boateng et al., (2020) trust is a mediator between experience value of a brand and the brand loyalty of the consumers. This experience value is what social media content of the brand is creating for their consumers (Dissanayake et al., 2019b; Purani et al., 2019; Wu & Luong, 2021.; Yoshida et al., 2018). Studies that have conducted with social media content based on SOR theory describes the mediation effect of brand trust between social touchpoint content stimuli and brand loyalty response (Fitriani et al., 2020; Khadim, Hanan, Arshad, Saleem, & Khadim, 2018; Kwon et al., 2020). Thus, I argue that,

H₄: Brand trust mediates the impact of social touchpoint content on brand loyalty of e-tailer brands

To operationalize this study, Anser,Tabash, Nassani, Aldakhil & Yousaf (2023) have conducted research recently, taking brand loyalty into account in an online setting, considering the

mediation effect of brand trust. They have deemed e-loyalty based on e-service quality in an e-commerce environment, which has similarities to this research. Therefore, scales of brand loyalty and brand trust have been adopted for this research. Social touchpoint content is the independent variable in this study. According to the literature findings, to fulfil the social touchpoint content, it should include rational content, emotional content, and transactional content. To cover all these content types of scales are adapted from the study of Kwon et al., (2021) and replaced “Social media content” from each content type. Kwon et al., (2021) has assessed the effect of social media content from three questions which expanded to nine questions. Anser,Tabash, Nassani, Aldakhil & Yousaf (2023) research has been done recently considering brand loyalty in an online environment while considering the mediation effect of brand trust. They have deemed e-loyalty based on e-service quality in an e-commerce environment which has similarities to this research. Therefore, scales of brand loyalty and brand trust have been adopted for this research. The majority of the questionnaire's items used a 5-point Likert scale to accurately measure responses. Other than that, it consists of five questions to get the birth year, education level, Internet usage per day, Social media usage per day and number of active social media accounts to maintain the quality and reliability of the responses. Another three questions have been added to maintain the quality of the responses which can ensure that the responder has recently only gone through an online decision journey before purchasing a product from an e-tailer brand. Another question has been added to see the favorite e-tailer brand of a particular responder which show loyalty toward the brand. According to the guidelines established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 384 is deemed adequate for any population exceeding 1,000,000 (Ahmad & Halim, 2017). According to the Mi-year population estimate by the Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka in 2018, the millennial population is 6.6 million which shows a sample size of 384 is articulate. Based on purposive sampling Google Forums based questioner has distributed more than 600 millennials in Sri Lanka and got 466 responses which exceed the expected sample size. Based on this responses 384 has selected removing results that has not done online transaction within 3 months and who responded as not searching about the brand online before purchasing.

IBM-SPSS Statistics v- 25 software was utilized to perform descriptive analysis, while PLS-SEM analysis was conducted using SmartPLS version 4 software.

Selected sample shows that more than half of the sample contains early-stage millennials which was born between 1980 and 1985. The lowest density of millennials in this sample are mid-level of the millennial cohort which is 19.5%. Respondents born between 1992-1997 represent 29.1% of the sample. The Gender distribution of this sample shows 48.2% males and 51.8% females. According to the statistics from the Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, the millennial population's female percentage is 51.3%. Therefore, the gender separation of this sample closely aligns with the population. Based on education level, the minimum education level of this sample respondent is General Certificate of Education Advanced Level, which consists of 9.6% of the sample. The maximum qualification is Doctoral level qualifications, which consists of 10.2%. The highest portion consists of Master's degree holders, which consists of 40.9%. The lowest percentage, 8.6%, consists of Vocational diploma holders and 30.7% represent Bachelor's degree holders. The daily internet and social media usage in this sample is significantly high, which requires reliable responses to the study. Based on the table, 90% of the sample respondents have more than

4 hours of daily internet usage, and 54.8% of the sample respondents have more than 3 hours of social media usage per day.

Table 1. Daily Internet and Social Media Usage of the Respondents

Daily Usage	Internet	Social media
Less than 1 hour	2.3%	12%
1+ to 2 hours	12.5%	20.6%
2+ to 3 hours	5.2%	12.8%
3+ to 4 hours	8.9%	23.7%
More than 4 hours	71.1%	31%

Source: Authors' estimation

The variables STP, BL, and BT do not fit the requirements for a normal distribution, according to the findings of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test performed with SPSS version 26. Therefore Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) methodology has been used with SmartPLS 4.0 software.

Validly and Reliability of Scales

As the first step, the measurement model was tested with outer loadings which confirmed that all indicators are grouped well to measure the particular endogenous or exogenous variables. In an initial analysis of outer loadings, one social touchpoint-related indicator (SR1) and two brand loyalty-based indicators (BL1, BL2) had to be removed due to loading in different groups. After these modifications, the outer loading of the indicators was loaded well as below table.

Table 2. Outer Loadings of Indicators

Indicators	BL	BT	STP
BL3	0.886		
BL4	0.903		
BL5	0.850		
BT1		0.898	
BT2		0.917	
BT3		0.897	
SE1			0.856
SE2			0.810
SE3			0.790
SR2			0.771
SR3			0.838
ST1			0.824
ST2			0.847
ST3			0.787

Note: Brand loyalty, BT-Brand trust, STP-Social touchpoint contents

Source: Authors' estimation

Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability have both been used to assess the measurement model's dependability. Table 2 displays the corresponding values.

Table 3. Reliability and Validity Test Results

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	(AVE)
BL	0.854	0.854	0.774
BT	0.888	0.889	0.817
STP	0.928	0.929	0.665

Source: Authors' estimation

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values are shown in Table 2. For all BL, BT, and STP, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha are higher than 0.70, suggesting a satisfactory degree of dependability. (Hair et al., 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2021). The average variance extracted (AVE) of Table 1 shows values greater than 0.5 which indicates the validity of the data set at an acceptable level(Hair et al., 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2021). Therefore it shows this data set it an acceptable level of validity and reliability

Data Analysis

To conduct the analysis of the hypothesis structural model has been created with bootstrapping with configuring a subsample size of 5000 with a 5% significance level.

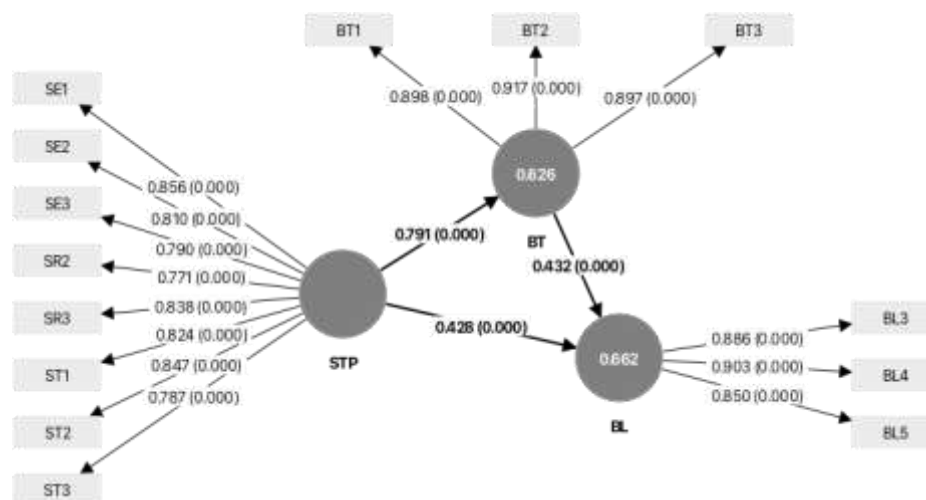


Figure 2. Structural Model

Source: Author's presentation

Hypothesis Testing

H1 (Social touchpoints to Brand Loyalty) - The path coefficient is calculated at 0.428. Additionally, the t-value of 6.697 exceeds the critical threshold of 1.96, while the p-value of 0.000 is below the significance level of 0.05. These findings demonstrate a significant influence of social touchpoint content on brand loyalty. Consequently, we accept hypothesis H1.

H2 (Social touchpoints to Brand Trust) - The path coefficient has been determined to be 0.791. The t-value is 31.432, which exceeds the threshold of 1.96, and the P-value is 0.000, indicating it is below the significance level of 0.05. These results suggest that the content of social touchpoints significantly influences brand trust. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is accepted.

H3 (Brand Trust to Brand Loyalty) - The analysis reveals a path coefficient of 0.432. The t-value is 7.026, which surpasses the critical threshold of 1.96, and the P-value is 0.000, indicating it is below the significance level of 0.05. These results suggest a significant influence of brand trust on brand loyalty. Therefore, we accept hypothesis H3

H4 (Social touchpoints to Brand Trust to Brand Loyalty) - The specific indirect path has a t-value of 7.434, which exceeds the threshold of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating statistical significance as it is below 0.05. This evidence supports the acceptance of hypothesis H4. Furthermore, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) for this path is 44.47%, which suggests the presence of partial mediation (Hair et al., 2017).

Considering the mediation effect of brand trust, all H2, H3, and H4 hypotheses are significant and accepted. This shows that both direct paths and the mediation path across brand trust have shown significant relationships, which demonstrate this mediation effect of brand trust as a partial mediation. Result of R-Square values shows BL= 0.662 and BT=0.626, indicating that the independent variable (social touchpoint contents) can affect the dependent variable (brand loyalty) by as much as 66.2%. This means brand trust significantly partially mediates influence of social touchpoint contents of e-tailer brands in Sri Lanka to the brand loyalty.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has been conducted based on purposive sampling. The selected sample contains people with high education levels. The minimum education qualification of a responder in this sample is GCE Advanced level and more than 80% of the sample responders hold a bachelor's degree or higher qualification. Therefore, it is a limitation of this sample that could not get the responses from millennials of less education qualification and recommended conducting future research with having balanced education qualifications.

Due to the removal of the brand loyalty-based indicators in measurement model scales that used to get insights on repeat purchases and advocacy has been removed. Therefore, brand loyalty in this study does not reflect repeat purchase and advocacy. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct future research including these factors.

This study explains 66% of the influencing factors contributing to brand loyalty for e-tailer brands in Sri Lanka. However, 34% of the factors remain unexplored, indicating the need for further research. Future studies should look into other elements like brand engagement, as these could be crucial in determining brand loyalty. Our comprehension of consumer behaviour in the context of e-commerce may be improved by including these components in the analytical model. Additionally, integrating qualitative insights may enhance the depth of analysis and offer valuable implications for both researchers and practitioners.

Limitations

The sample used in this research exhibits a notable bias in favor of millennials born between 1980 and 1985. The percentage of this group in the entire sample is 51.3%. Given that they make up over half of the sample, this indicates that early-stage millennials are overrepresented in this study, which is a limitation.

The sample of this study comprises 10.2% of millennials who hold a PhD or DBA as their highest educational qualification, while a sizable portion (40.9%) have a Master's degree. This might not accurately reflect Sri Lanka's larger millennial population. Who might be less educated than others? The results may not apply to millennials with lower levels of education. Future scholars can conduct research on the same topic by overcoming this limitation.

This model can explain 66.2% of the brand loyalty among millennials. Another 37.8% can be represented by factors not mentioned in this study. Consequently, future scholars could incorporate additional factors, such as brand engagement, to enhance explanatory power.

References

- Aaker, J. (1991). The negative attraction effect? A study of the attraction effect under judgment and choice. In R. H. Holman & M. R. Solomon (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research* (Vol. 18, pp. 301–306). Association for Consumer Research.
- Adam, D. R., Ofori, K. S., Okoe, A. F., & Boateng, H. (2018). Effects of structural and bonding-based attachment on brand loyalty. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 9(3), 305–318. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEMS-06-2017-0153>
- Aguilar, N. R. S., Ongon, C. M. M., Samulde, H. G., Cleofe, B. M. S., Gerpacio, A. E., & Melo, M. C. F. (2022). Influence of social media marketing on the brand performance of the students' small online businesses. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 16(2), 876–886. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2022.16.2.1306>
- Ahmad, H., & Halim, H. (2017). Determining sample size for research activities: The case of organizational research. *Selangor Business Review*, 2(1), 20–34.
- Anser, M. K., Tabash, M. I., Nassani, A. A., Aldakhil, A. M., & Yousaf, Z. (2021). Toward the e-loyalty of digital library users: Investigating the role of e-service quality and e-trust in digital economy. *Library Hi Tech*, 41(4), 1006–1021. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LHT-07-2020-0165>
- Barann, B., Hermann, A., Heuchert, M., & Becker, J. (2020). Can't touch this? Conceptualizing the customer touchpoint in the context of omni-channel retailing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 65, 102269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102269>
- Biçer, F. (2020). The impact of Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) on smartphone buying decision. *Journal of International Trade, Logistics and Law*, 6(2), 153–167.

- Bidmon, S. (2017). How does attachment style influence the brand attachment–brand trust and brand loyalty chain in adolescents? *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(1), 164–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2015.1077608>
- Boateng, H., Kosiba, J. P., Adam, D. R., Ofori, K. S., & Okoe, A. F. (2020). Examining brand loyalty from an attachment theory perspective. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 38(4), 479–494. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-10-2019-0527>
- Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2002). Product-class effects on brand commitment and brand outcomes: The role of brand trust and brand affect. *Journal of Brand Management*, 10(1), 33–58.
- Chinomona, R. (2016). Brand communication, brand image and brand trust as antecedents of brand loyalty in Gauteng Province of South Africa. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 7(1), 124–139.
- Condé Ricci Martinelli, N. (2021). *The zero moment of truth and its impact on the consumer decision-making process* (Doctoral dissertation, Dublin Business School).
- Confetto, M. G., Conte, F., Vollero, A., & Covucci, C. (2020). From dual marketing to Marketing 4.0: The role played by digital technology and the Internet. In *Beyond multi-channel marketing* (pp. 141–161). Springer.
- Court, D., Elzinga, D., Finneman, B., & Perrey, J. (2017). The new battleground for marketing-led growth. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 11(1), 64–74. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/the-new-battleground-for-marketing-led-growth>
- D’Arpizio, C., Levato, F., & Zito, D. (2015). *Luxury goods worldwide market study, fall–winter 2015: A time to act—How luxury brands can rebuild to win*. Bain & Company.
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Hughes, L., Ismagilova, E., Aarts, G., Coombs, C., Crick, T., ... Williams, M. D. (2021). Artificial intelligence (AI): Multidisciplinary perspectives on emerging challenges, opportunities, and agenda for research, practice and policy. *International Journal of Information Management*, 57, 101994. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.08.002>
- Ebrahim, R. S. (2020). The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 19(4), 287–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2019.1705742>
- Eigenraam, A. W., Eelen, J., Van Lin, A., & Verlegh, P. W. J. (2018). A consumer-based taxonomy of digital customer engagement practices. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 44, 102–121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2018.05.002>
- Fatma, M., Ruiz, A. P., Khan, I., & Rahman, Z. (2020). The effect of CSR engagement on eWOM on social media. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 28(4), 941–956. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-10-2019-1914>

- Fitriani, W. R., Mulyono, A. B., Hidayanto, A. N., & Munajat, Q. (2020). Reviewer's communication style in YouTube product-review videos: Does it affect channel loyalty? *Heliyon*, 6(9), e04880. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04880>
- Goswami, S. (2024). *User engagement in interactive media: Trends, innovations and personalization*. In *Media convergence and design skills* (p. 53). Swami Vivekananda University. <https://www.swamivivekanandauniversity.ac.in/resource/assets/pdf/books/Media%20Convergence%20and%20Design%20Skills.pdf#page=58>
- Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Gudergan, S. P. (2017). *Advanced issues in partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)*. SAGE Publications.
- Hallikainen, H., Alamäki, A., & Laukkanen, T. (2019). Individual preferences of digital touchpoints: A latent class analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 50, 386–393. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.07.014>
- Han, S. L., & Kim, K. (2020). Role of consumption values in the luxury brand experience: Moderating effects of category and the generation gap. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 57(July), 102249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102249>
- Hasan, R., Shams, R., & Rahman, M. (2021). Consumer trust and perceived risk for voice-controlled artificial intelligence: The case of Siri. *Journal of Business Research*, 131, 591–597. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.12.012>
- Haug, L., Reinecke, S., & Tomczak, T. (2020). Strategic touchpoint management: How luxury brands can successfully attract Millennials (Doctoral dissertation, Universität St. Gallen). Alexandria Research Platform. <https://www.alexandria.unisg.ch/server/api/core/bitstreams/5bad4002-ef88-4d96-9c82-1ffbea9c76af/content>
- Ibrahim, B., Aljarah, A., & Sawaftah, D. (2021). Linking social media marketing activities to revisit intention through brand trust and brand loyalty on coffee shop Facebook pages: Exploring a sequential mediation mechanism. *Sustainability*, 13(4), 2277. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13042277>
- Jacoby, J., Chestnut, R. W., & Fisher, W. A. (1978). A behavioral process approach to information acquisition in nondurable purchasing. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 15(4), 532–544
- Jamil, K., Dunnan, L., Gul, R. F., Shehzad, M. U., Gillani, S. H. M., & Awan, F. H. (2022). Role of social media marketing activities in influencing customer intentions: a perspective of a new emerging era. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 808525
- Jayathilaka, R., Dharmasena, T., Rezahi, N., & Haththotuwegama, S. (2020). The impact of online reviews on inbound travellers' decision making. *Quality & Quantity: International Journal of Methodology*, 54(3), 1005–1021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-00971-1>

- Jayawickrama, M. T. N., Kodippili, G., Yugandari, O. W. D., Pamudini, S. D. H., & Samarasinghe, H. M. U. S. (2016). *The influence of social media marketing on customer loyalty towards clothing stores*. NCTM-2016 Conference Paper, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology. <https://rda.sliit.lk/bitstreams/fb3c4af9-4765-49f7-8022-f1fcad3910fb/download>
- Jobin, A., Ienca, M., & Vayena, E. (2019). The global landscape of AI ethics guidelines. *Nature Machine Intelligence*, 1(9), 389–399. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-019-0088-2>
- Johnson, O., & Ramirez, S. A. (2021). The influence of showrooming on millennial generational cohorts' online shopping behaviour. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 49(1), 81–103. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-03-2020-0085>
- Keller, K. L. (2001). Building customer-based brand equity: A blueprint for creating strong brands. *Journal of Marketing*, 65(2), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.65.2.3.18329>
- Keller, K. L. (2020). Consumer research insights on brands and branding: a JCR curation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(5), 995-1001.
- Khadim, R. A., Hanan, M. A., Arshad, A., Saleem, N., & Khadim, N. A. (2018). Revisiting antecedents of brand loyalty: Impact of perceived social media communication with brand trust and brand equity as mediators. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 17(1), 1–16.
- Khan, I., Hollebeek, L. D., Fatma, M., Islam, J. U., & Rahman, Z. (2020). Brand engagement and experience in online services. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 34(2), 163–175. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-03-2019-0106>
- Kwak, K. T., Lee, S. Y., Ham, M., & Lee, S. W. (2021). The effects of internet proliferation on search engine and over-the-top service markets. *Telecommunications Policy*, 45(8), 102146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2021.102146>
- Kwon, J., Kim, J., Jung, S.-H., & Hong, C.-H. J. (2020). Antecedent factors that affect restaurant brand trust and brand loyalty: Focusing on US and Korean consumers. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 42, 116–125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2019.10.008>
- Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69–96. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0420>
- Liadeli, G., Sotgiu, F., & Verlegh, P. W. J. (2023). A meta-analysis of the effects of brands' owned social media on social media engagement and sales. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(3), 406–427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221125247>
- Lou, C., & Xie, Q. (2021). Something social, something entertaining? How digital content marketing augments consumer experience and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 376–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1788315>

- Ma, C., Dai, Y., & Li, Z. (2022). Financing format selection for electronic business platforms with a capital-constrained e-tailer. *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, 162, Article 102720. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2022.102720>
- Meese, J., & Hurcombe, E. (2021). Facebook, news media and platform dependency: The institutional impacts of news distribution on social platforms. *New Media & Society*, 23(8), 2367–2384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820926472>
- Ministry of Industry and Commerce – Sri Lanka. (2017). *National policy framework for small and medium enterprise (SME) development*. Government of Sri Lanka. https://www.sed.gov.lk/sedweb/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SME-framework_eng.pdf
- Mostafa, R. B., & Kasamani, T. (2021). Brand experience and brand loyalty: Is it a matter of emotions? *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 33(4), 1033–1051. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-03-2020-0133>
- Nawaz, S. S., & Kaldeen, M. (2020). Impact of digital marketing on purchase intention. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(4), 1113–1120.
- Ozuem, W., Willis, M., Howell, K., Lancaster, G., & Ng, R. (2021). Determinants of online brand communities' and millennials' characteristics: A social influence perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(5), 794-818.
- Pauwels, K., & Van Ewijk, B. (2020). Enduring attitudes and contextual interest: When and why attitude surveys still matter in the online consumer decision journey. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 52, 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.05.002>
- Pratiwi, A. E., Ufairah, N. N., & Sopiah, R. S. (2021, April). *Utilizing TikTok application as media for learning English pronunciation*. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education of Suryakencana* (pp. 372–382). IConnects 2021. <https://jurnal.unsur.ac.id/cp/article/view/1374>
- Purani, K., Kumar, D. S., & Sahadev, S. (2019). *e-Loyalty among millennials: Personal characteristics and social influences*. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 48, 215–223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.02.006>
- Quoquab, F., Mohammad, J., & Mohd Sobri, A. M. (2021). Psychological engagement drives brand loyalty: Evidence from Malaysian ecotourism destinations. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(1), 132–147. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-10-2019-2595>
- Rajapakse, P., & Wijayarathne, S. (2019, July). *Impact of social media marketing on customers' brand loyalty: With special reference to the home and personal care industry*. In *Proceedings of the Commerce Research Symposium 2019* (pp. 38–42). University of Sri Jayewardenepura. <https://mgt.sjp.ac.lk/com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Commerce-Research-Symposium-Proceeding-Online-View.pdf>

- Randiwela, P., & Gunarathna, D. (2017, July). *Millennial involvement in cause related marketing in Sri Lanka*. In *Proceedings of the Oxford Business & Economics Conference*. Oxford Business & Economics Conference.
- Sallnäs, U., & Björklund, M. (2020). Consumers' influence on the greening of distribution. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 48(11), 1177–1193. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-01-2020-0027>
- Samarasinghe, K. R., Razi, M. J. M., & Dissanayaka, D. M. R. (2024). Utilizing digital functional touchpoints to formulate brand loyalty among millennial consumers. *Sri Lanka Journal of Management Studies*, 6(1), 125–141. <https://doi.org/10.4038/sljms.v6i1.131>
- Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Hair, J. F. (2021). Partial least squares structural equation modeling. In C. Homburg, M. Klarmann, & A. Vomberg (Eds.), *Handbook of market research*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05542-8_15-2
- Sri Lanka Export Development Board. (2020). *Exporter assistance 2020 and digital platform promotion*. Sri Lanka Export Development Board. <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/pdf/reports/Exporter-Assistance-2020-and-Digital-Platform-Promotion.pdf>
- Statista. (2023). *Retail e-commerce sales worldwide from 2014 to 2027 (in trillion U.S. dollars)*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/379046/worldwide-retail-e-commerce-sales/>
- Straker, K., Wrigley, C., & Rosemann, M. (2015). Typologies and touchpoints: designing multi-channel digital strategies. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 9(2), 110-128.
- Thundeniya, L. G. D. T. B., & Dissanayake, D. M. R. (2024). Influence of Facebook content marketing on e-brand loyalty: Examining the mediating effect of online consumer engagement. *Asian Journal of Marketing Management*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.31357/ajmm.v3i01.7308>
- Van Bommel, E., Edelman, D., & Ungerman, K. (2014, June). *Digitizing the consumer decision journey*. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 1–8. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/digitizing-the-consumer-decision-journey>
- Vannucci, V., & Pantano, E. (2019). Digital or human touchpoints? Insights from consumer-facing in-store services. *Information Technology and People*, 33(1), 296–310.
- Wagner, G., Schramm-Klein, H., & Steinmann, S. (2020). Online retailing across e-channels and e-channel touchpoints. *Journal of Business Research*, 107, 256–270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.12.002>
- Wei, J., Lu, J., & Wang, Y. (2021). How to choose online sales formats for competitive e-tailers. *International Transactions in Operational Research*, 28(4), 2055-2080.
- Withanagamage, L. V. K., & Wattegama, E. J. (2017, August). *A study on e-shopping behaviour among Sri Lankan consumers*. In *Proceedings of the 9th Symposium on Applied Science, Business & Industrial Research* (pp. 6–9). Wayamba University of Sri Lanka.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326399118> A Study on e-Shopping Behaviour among Sri Lankan Consumers

- Wu, K. W., & Luong, D. B. (2021). Establishing brand loyalty through social media groups in Vietnam. *International Journal of Business*, 26(1), 24–41.
- Yoshida, M., Gordon, B. S., Nakazawa, M., Shibuya, S., & Fujiwara, N. (2018). Bridging the gap between social media and behavioral brand loyalty. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 28, 208–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2018.02.005>
- Zailskaitė-Jakštė, L., & Kuvykaitė, R. (2012). *Consumer engagement in social media by building the brand*. In *Proceedings of the Electronic International Interdisciplinary Conference* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 194–202). Electronic International Interdisciplinary Conference. <https://www.eiic.cz/archive/?vid=1&aid=2&kid=20120126-11>