



## Social Media Marketing as a Relationship-Building Strategy for Consumer Loyalty in the Local Culinary Industry

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed marketing communication from one-way promotion into an interactive process of consumer engagement and relationship building. This transformation is particularly relevant to local culinary businesses, where product experiences, authenticity, local identity, and consumer recommendations influence long-term relationships. This study aims to develop an integrated conceptual framework explaining how social media marketing contributes to consumer loyalty in the local culinary industry. An integrative literature review was employed to synthesize theoretical and empirical studies on social media marketing, consumer engagement, trust, customer satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth, local identity, community connection, and consumer loyalty. The synthesis indicates that the contribution of social media marketing to loyalty is better understood as a relational process rather than a direct promotional effect. Interactive, relevant, informative, personalized, and authentic social media activities can stimulate consumer engagement, which subsequently supports trust and customer satisfaction and contributes to sustained consumer loyalty. Electronic word-of-mouth operates as a social amplification mechanism, while local identity and community connection provide contextual value that can strengthen consumer-brand relationships. The originality of this study lies in integrating these mechanisms into a relationship-based social media marketing framework specifically contextualized to local culinary businesses. The framework extends existing social media marketing literature by explaining how digital interactions can be transformed into sustainable consumer relationships and loyalty. Practically, the study suggests that local culinary businesses should move beyond promotion-driven social media strategies toward authentic, interactive, community-oriented, and relationship-driven engagement.

**Keywords:** Social media marketing; consumer engagement; consumer loyalty; electronic word-of-mouth; local culinary industry; relationship marketing

### How to Cite

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of social media has transformed the way firms communicate with consumers, build brands, and create value. Social media is no longer merely a channel for information dissemination and promotion; it has evolved into an interactive space where consumers can participate, provide feedback, share experiences, and shape perceptions of brands (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Leong et al., 2021). In the digital environment, social media also enables brands to attract, interact with, retain, and engage consumers on an ongoing basis (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Pathak, 2025). This transformation has shifted marketing from predominantly one-way communication toward communication that is more interactive, responsive, and participatory (Ngo et al., 2024; Muharam et al., 2024). Accordingly, the effectiveness of social media marketing (SMM) is increasingly important to assess not merely in terms of its ability to generate attention or short-term transactions, but also in terms of its capacity to cultivate long-term consumer relationships (Singh, 2025).

This urgency is particularly evident in the local culinary industry, which faces increasingly intense competition and rapidly changing consumer preferences. In the consumption of local food, experiences, visual appeal, recommendations, emotional value, and social interaction can influence consumer preferences while simultaneously shaping relationships with products and their places of origin (Homeghi et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025). Social media provides culinary businesses with opportunities to showcase their products, develop digital storytelling, communicate consumption experiences, and emphasize cultural identity and locality (Homeghi et al., 2025). However, digital presence does not automatically translate into consumer loyalty. Consumers may be attracted to content or make a purchase without developing a long-term attachment to the brand. Therefore, the challenge for local culinary businesses extends beyond gaining digital exposure to transforming online interactions into meaningful relationships and sustainable consumer loyalty (Yuswita & Maulidah, 2024).

From a relationship marketing perspective, loyalty develops through interaction, value creation, trust, satisfaction, and long-term retention (Hidayat & Idrus, 2023). Customer satisfaction is positively associated with loyalty and is also related to the development of customer trust (Leninkumar, 2017; Hidayat & Idrus, 2023). In digital environments, trust and service quality are likewise associated with loyalty, while satisfaction can function as an important mechanism that strengthens these relationships (Muharam et al., 2021; Wibowo, 2024). Thus, loyalty should not be viewed as an immediate response to promotional activities, but rather as the outcome of repeated evaluations of consumer experiences and relationship quality (Cardoso et al., 2022). This perspective provides a theoretical basis for understanding SMM as a means of relationship building rather than simply a channel for delivering marketing messages.

Within this framework, consumer engagement represents an important mechanism linking SMM activities to consumer relationships. Personalization, real-time interaction, two-way communication, and relevant content can enhance consumer engagement and brand loyalty (Pathak, 2025; Muharam et al., 2024; Aljuhmani et al., 2022). Consumer engagement reflects the extent to which consumers become cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally involved in their relationships with brands (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021). Aljuhmani et al. (2022) demonstrate that the cognitive dimension of customer brand engagement can mediate the relationship between SMM activities and brand loyalty, although the emotional dimension does not necessarily exhibit the same mediating pattern. These findings reinforce the argument that the relationship between SMM and loyalty is better understood as a gradual process involving consumer engagement rather than as a simple direct relationship.

Beyond engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) extends the influence of SMM through content generated and disseminated by consumers themselves. Reviews, recommendations, experiences, and consumer evaluations shared through social media can influence the perceptions and decisions of other consumers (Sulthana, 2019; Leong et al., 2021). The credibility, usefulness, and

relevance of e-WOM information are important factors shaping consumer responses within social networking environments (Ngo et al., 2024; Tien et al., 2019). The quality of e-WOM can also strengthen consumer trust, which subsequently influences purchase-related responses (Zhao et al., 2020). For local culinary businesses, this mechanism is particularly relevant because food-related decisions are often influenced by other consumers' experiences and perceptions of authenticity. Accordingly, effective SMM should create conditions that encourage consumers to become not only participants in brand communication but also sources of credibility for the brand.

Although previous literature has established relationships between SMM and consumer engagement, trust, satisfaction, purchase intention, and loyalty, these relationships are often examined through separate constructs or direct associations (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Yuswita & Maulidah, 2024). Such approaches do not fully explain how social media activities are translated into consumer loyalty through the sequential processes of engagement, trust, and satisfaction, particularly within the distinctive context of the local culinary industry. Local culinary businesses possess specific sources of value derived from place identity, authenticity, consumption experiences, and community connectedness (Liu et al., 2025; Homeghi et al., 2025). Therefore, a more integrative explanation is needed to clarify the mechanisms through which SMM can transform digital interactions into meaningful consumer relationships and loyalty in local culinary contexts.

Addressing this gap, this article introduces a relationship-based social media marketing perspective that conceptualizes SMM as a mechanism for relationship building rather than merely as a promotional instrument. The proposed framework integrates SMM → consumer engagement → trust and customer satisfaction → consumer loyalty, with *local identity* and *community connection* positioned as contextual factors that may strengthen this process. This perspective suggests that loyalty is not primarily generated by promotional intensity but by the capacity of social media to facilitate interactions that are relevant, authentic, responsive, and meaningful. Theoretically, the article contributes by integrating perspectives from SMM, relationship marketing, consumer engagement, and consumer loyalty into a unified relationship-building mechanism. Practically, the framework provides a basis for local culinary businesses to shift their social media strategies from *transaction-driven promotion* toward *relationship-driven engagement* (Singh, 2025; Pathak, 2025).

Accordingly, this article aims to examine the role of SMM as a strategy for building consumer loyalty in the local culinary industry through a synthesis of literature integrating social media marketing, consumer engagement, relationship marketing, trust, satisfaction, e-WOM, and local identity and community connection. The proposed framework positions SMM → consumer engagement → trust and customer satisfaction → consumer loyalty as the core pathway through which loyalty is developed, while *local identity* and *community connection* are conceptualized as contextual factors that may strengthen this process. Through this approach, the article not only explains the importance of social media in culinary marketing but also offers a conceptual understanding of how digital activities can be transformed into sustainable consumer relationships. This contribution extends SMM research from a predominantly promotional orientation toward a relationship-oriented perspective while providing a strategic foundation for local culinary businesses to foster consumer engagement, trust, satisfaction, advocacy, and loyalty.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media Marketing

*Social media marketing* (SMM) is a marketing approach that utilizes social media platforms to facilitate communication, interaction, and value exchange between brands and consumers. Unlike conventional marketing, which tends to emphasize the one-way transmission of marketing messages, SMM enables consumers to act not only as message recipients but also as active participants in the communication process. Vinerean and Opreana (2021) demonstrate that social media marketing activities are closely associated with the development of *customer engagement*, while Muharam et al. (2024) emphasize interaction and consumer involvement as important components of digital

marketing strategies. Accordingly, the effectiveness of SMM is determined not merely by the frequency of content publication but also by the relevance, interactivity, personalization, and ability of brands to create meaningful consumer experiences.

In the context of the culinary industry, these characteristics of SMM become particularly important because food products possess strong visual and experiential dimensions. Photographs, videos, customer reviews, stories about production processes, and representations of local identity can be used not only to enhance product appeal but also to communicate broader meanings associated with the product. Homeghi et al. (2025) highlight the importance of digital communication in developing regional branding through gastronomic experiences, while Liu et al. (2025) demonstrate that local food consumption experiences are associated with the formation of *place identity*. Therefore, SMM in local culinary businesses serves not only as a means of promoting products but also as a platform for communicating authenticity, local identity, and consumer experiences.

### Consumer Engagement as a Relational Mechanism

*Consumer engagement* represents an important mechanism for explaining how social media activities can develop into stronger relationships between consumers and brands. Engagement encompasses consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement in their interactions with brands in digital environments. Vinerean and Opreana (2021) conceptualize *customer engagement* as a multidimensional construct that is particularly relevant to understanding the quality of consumer–brand relationships within social media marketing. Aljuhmani et al. (2022) further demonstrate that *customer brand engagement* can function as a mechanism linking social media marketing activities to brand loyalty.

These findings indicate that consumers' presence on social media does not automatically translate into loyalty. Consumers need to become actively involved through activities such as viewing and processing content, commenting, liking or sharing information, participating in conversations, and developing experiences with the brand. Effective SMM should therefore be designed to generate meaningful *engagement* rather than merely maximize *reach*. For local culinary businesses, engagement can be fostered through interactive content, stories about local food and culinary traditions, responsive communication, user-generated content, and conversations that create a sense of closeness and connection with the brand.

### Trust, Satisfaction, and Consumer Loyalty

Consumer loyalty develops through sustained relationships and cannot be attributed solely to promotional activities. From a relationship marketing perspective, trust and satisfaction are fundamental elements in maintaining long-term relationships between consumers and firms. Leninkumar (2017) identifies positive relationships among customer satisfaction, customer trust, and customer loyalty. Similarly, Muharam et al. (2021) demonstrate the interconnectedness of electronic service quality, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty in digital environments. These findings indicate that consistent positive experiences can strengthen consumers' confidence in a brand and increase their willingness to maintain an ongoing relationship with it.

This relationship is particularly relevant to local culinary businesses because consumers' decisions to repurchase are often influenced by previous experiences, product and service consistency, and trust in the brand. Cardoso et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of trust in developing brand relationships and customer loyalty. Within social media environments, trust can be cultivated through transparent communication, consistent responses, credible information, and alignment between digital claims and consumers' actual experiences. Thus, SMM can contribute to consumer loyalty when digital activities generate meaningful experiences and relationships that strengthen both trust and satisfaction.

## Electronic Word-of-Mouth and the Local Culinary Context

*Electronic word-of-mouth* (e-WOM) is an important component of the social media ecosystem because consumers not only consume information but also create and disseminate information about products and brands. Sulthana (2019) and Leong et al. (2021) highlight the importance of e-WOM in shaping consumer responses and purchase intentions. Ngo et al. (2024) emphasize that information credibility is an important factor in determining consumer responses to e-WOM, while Zhao et al. (2020) demonstrate the relationship between e-WOM quality, trust, and purchase intentions in social commerce environments.

In the local culinary industry, e-WOM has broader relevance because dining experiences can be easily communicated through photographs, videos, reviews, recommendations, and personal stories. Such consumer-generated experiences can simultaneously strengthen perceptions of authenticity and local identity. Kumar et al. (2021) demonstrate that local food consumption within social media-based environments can be associated with *brand love* and positive consumer responses toward local food distribution systems. Accordingly, e-WOM should not be understood merely as an outcome of SMM, but also as a mechanism that extends the reach of consumer experiences and strengthens social relationships surrounding local culinary brands.

## Literature Synthesis and Conceptual Proposition

The literature synthesis indicates that the relationship between SMM and consumer loyalty should not be understood solely as a direct relationship. SMM creates opportunities for interaction and experience that can enhance *consumer engagement*. Engagement, in turn, provides a foundation for the development of trust and satisfaction, while trust and satisfaction strengthen consumers' willingness to maintain relationships with brands. At the same time, e-WOM extends this process through the exchange of experiences and recommendations among consumers. In the local culinary context, local identity, authenticity, gastronomic experiences, and community connection provide additional contextual dimensions that distinguish the formation of loyalty from that of more generic brands.

Based on this synthesis, this study proposes that SMM functions as a relationship-building mechanism through which digital marketing activities are transformed into consumer engagement and stronger consumer–brand relationships. The proposed conceptual framework positions Social Media Marketing → Consumer Engagement → Trust and Customer Satisfaction → Consumer Loyalty, with e-WOM functioning as a mechanism that amplifies consumer-to-consumer communication and local identity and community connection serving as contextual factors that may strengthen the relationship-building process. This perspective constitutes the conceptual contribution of the study by shifting the understanding of SMM from a predominantly promotional instrument toward a strategy for developing sustainable consumer relationships in the local culinary industry.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed an integrative literature review to synthesize theoretical and empirical findings concerning the role of social media marketing in building consumer loyalty in the local culinary industry. An integrative review was adopted because it enables the synthesis of evidence from diverse empirical and conceptual studies and facilitates the development of a broader understanding of a research phenomenon. Rather than statistically testing relationships among variables, this study focused on identifying recurring theoretical patterns, explaining the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media marketing and consumer loyalty, and integrating relevant constructs into a coherent conceptual framework. The review specifically examined the relationships among *social media marketing*, *consumer engagement*, *trust*, *customer satisfaction*, *electronic word-of-mouth*, *local identity*, *community connection*, and *consumer loyalty*.

## Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted through major academic databases and scholarly search engines, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, and Taylor & Francis Online, as well as other reputable academic sources. The search strategy combined keywords representing the core concepts of the study, including “*social media marketing*,” “*social media marketing activities*,” “*consumer engagement*,” “*customer engagement*,” “*brand loyalty*,” “*consumer loyalty*,” “*customer satisfaction*,” “*consumer trust*,” “*electronic word-of-mouth*,” “*local food*,” “*local culinary business*,” “*local food consumption*,” and “*local identity*.” Boolean search combinations, such as “social media marketing” AND “consumer loyalty,” “social media marketing” AND “consumer engagement,” “social media marketing” AND “customer trust,” and “local food” AND “social media marketing,” were used to identify studies directly relevant to the research focus. The search primarily covered literature published between 2019 and 2025, while selected earlier foundational studies were retained when they provided essential theoretical foundations for relationship marketing, customer satisfaction, trust, or loyalty.

## Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The literature was selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they: (1) were published in peer-reviewed academic journals or reputable scholarly publications; (2) addressed at least one of the core constructs examined in this study; (3) provided theoretical, empirical, or conceptual explanations relevant to the relationship between social media marketing and consumer loyalty; and (4) demonstrated relevance to digital marketing, consumer behavior, food or culinary businesses, or relationship marketing. Studies were excluded if they were unrelated to the research constructs, consisted solely of non-academic promotional material, duplicated other publications, or lacked sufficient information to support theoretical interpretation. Foundational studies published before the specified period were selectively retained when their concepts remained central to the theoretical foundation of the study.

## Literature Analysis and Synthesis

The selected literature was analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach. First, the reviewed studies were organized according to their principal concepts, theoretical perspectives, and key findings. Second, recurring relationships among social media marketing, consumer engagement, trust, satisfaction, e-WOM, and loyalty were identified. Third, the findings were compared to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and limitations within the existing literature. Particular attention was given to studies examining mediating, relational, and process-based mechanisms rather than merely direct relationships between social media marketing and loyalty. The synthesis was subsequently extended to findings concerning local food consumption, local identity, gastronomic experiences, and community-related factors to contextualize the proposed framework within the local culinary industry. This process enabled the study to move beyond a descriptive review of previous studies toward an integrated explanation of how social media activities may contribute to the development of consumer loyalty.

## Conceptual Framework Development

The conceptual framework was developed by integrating the patterns identified through the literature synthesis with principles of relationship marketing and consumer engagement. The framework positions social media marketing as an initial strategic mechanism that creates opportunities for interaction, participation, personalization, and electronic word-of-mouth. These activities are proposed to foster consumer engagement, which subsequently contributes to the development of consumer trust and customer satisfaction. Trust and satisfaction are then conceptualized as relational mechanisms that contribute to consumer loyalty, reflected in attitudinal

and behavioral outcomes such as repurchase intention, recommendation, positive word-of-mouth, and continued preference for the culinary business.

Within the specific context of local culinary businesses, local identity and community connection are incorporated as contextual elements that may strengthen the transformation of digital interactions into enduring consumer relationships. The resulting framework therefore conceptualizes the loyalty-building process as:

Social Media Marketing → Consumer Engagement → Trust and Customer Satisfaction →  
Consumer Loyalty

with Local Identity and Community Connection functioning as contextual strengthening factors.

### **Analytical Orientation**

The analysis was interpretive and conceptual rather than statistical. Accordingly, the study did not collect primary data, involve human participants, or conduct hypothesis testing, regression analysis, structural equation modeling, or other inferential statistical procedures. Instead, the analytical objective was to develop theoretically grounded propositions based on the convergence and complementarity of findings across the reviewed literature. The resulting propositions were then used to explain the proposed mechanism through which social media marketing can function as a relationship-building strategy for developing consumer loyalty in the local culinary industry. This analytical orientation allows the study to contribute a theoretically grounded framework without making empirical causal claims beyond the evidence synthesized from the existing literature.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Social Media Marketing as a Relationship-Building Mechanism**

The literature synthesis indicates that social media marketing (SMM) should no longer be understood merely as a promotional instrument but as a mechanism for developing and maintaining relationships between culinary businesses and consumers. The distinctive characteristic of social media lies in its interactive and participatory nature, which allows consumers to respond to brand content, share experiences, provide recommendations, and generate their own content. Vinerean and Opreana (2021) demonstrate that social media marketing is closely associated with customer engagement, while Godey et al. (2016) found that social media marketing activities can influence consumer responses and brand-related outcomes. Similarly, Kim and Ko (2012) identify entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth as important dimensions of social media marketing activities. These findings suggest that the strategic value of SMM lies not simply in the volume of content distributed, but in its ability to create meaningful consumer experiences.

This interpretation is particularly relevant for local culinary businesses. Food products possess experiential and symbolic characteristics that can be communicated effectively through visual and interactive media. Images, short videos, customer reviews, behind-the-scenes content, stories about ingredients, and narratives concerning local culinary traditions can transform an ordinary product message into an experience-oriented form of communication. Homeghi et al. (2025) emphasize the role of digital communication in communicating gastronomic experiences and strengthening regional branding, while Liu et al. (2025) demonstrate the relevance of local food consumption experiences to place identity. Consequently, social media provides local culinary businesses with an opportunity not only to communicate what they sell but also to communicate why the product is meaningful, authentic, and connected to a particular locality.

The synthesis further indicates that SMM becomes strategically valuable when its activities encourage consumers to move from passive exposure to active participation. Promotional content may generate awareness, but interactive content can encourage consumers to comment, share, review,

revisit the account, or recommend the culinary brand to others. Aljuhmani et al. (2022) demonstrate the importance of customer brand engagement in explaining the relationship between social media marketing efforts and brand loyalty. This finding is consistent with Vinerean and Opreana (2021), who conceptualize customer engagement as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Thus, the first important result of the conceptual synthesis is that SMM creates the conditions for loyalty primarily by initiating and strengthening consumer engagement rather than by directly producing loyalty.

### **Consumer Engagement, Trust, and Satisfaction as the Mechanism of Loyalty Formation**

The second result of the synthesis concerns the mechanism through which digital interaction can develop into consumer loyalty. The reviewed literature suggests that engagement alone is insufficient to guarantee loyalty. Consumers may interact with a culinary brand without developing a stable preference for it. For engagement to become a sustainable relationship, consumers need to perceive the brand as credible, reliable, responsive, and capable of consistently delivering satisfactory experiences. Relationship marketing literature emphasizes the central role of trust and satisfaction in maintaining long-term customer relationships (Hidayat & Idrus, 2023; Leninkumar, 2017). Cardoso et al. (2022) further demonstrate that trust is an important foundation of brand relationships and customer loyalty.

In the social media environment, trust is constructed through repeated digital encounters. Consistency between promotional claims and actual product experiences, responsiveness to consumer questions, transparency concerning products and prices, and the credibility of information can reduce perceived uncertainty. This is particularly important for culinary businesses because consumers cannot fully evaluate taste, freshness, hygiene, or service quality before purchase. Electronic word-of-mouth can therefore function as an additional source of trust. Ngo et al. (2024) highlight the importance of information credibility in e-WOM, while Zhao et al. (2020) demonstrate the relevance of electronic word-of-mouth and trust in social commerce. Leong et al. (2021) similarly show that social media e-WOM can influence consumer purchase intentions.

Customer satisfaction represents another important mechanism. When digital expectations created through SMM correspond with the actual consumption experience, consumers are more likely to evaluate the brand positively. Satisfaction can subsequently strengthen trust and loyalty, particularly when positive experiences are repeated. Muharam et al. (2021) demonstrate the relationship among electronic service quality, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, while Leninkumar (2017) confirms the importance of the satisfaction–trust–loyalty relationship. Therefore, the synthesis suggests that loyalty should be viewed as the outcome of a cumulative relational process rather than a direct consequence of promotional exposure.

This process can be summarized as follows:

Social Media Marketing → Consumer Engagement → Trust and Customer Satisfaction →  
Consumer Loyalty

The proposed sequence does not imply that every consumer must pass through these stages in an identical or strictly linear manner. Rather, it provides a conceptual explanation of the dominant relational mechanism identified across the literature. SMM creates opportunities for interaction; interaction generates engagement; meaningful and credible engagement contributes to trust and satisfaction; and sustained trust and satisfaction increase the likelihood of loyalty. This interpretation also explains why a business may have high social media visibility but relatively weak customer loyalty when its digital communication does not translate into credible and satisfying consumer experiences.

**The Distinctive Role of e-WOM, Local Identity, and Community Connection**

The third result concerns the contextual characteristics that distinguish local culinary businesses from general consumer brands. The literature indicates that social media enables consumers to become active participants in the production and circulation of brand meaning. Through reviews, recommendations, photographs, videos, and personal stories, consumers contribute to the public representation of a culinary brand. e-WOM therefore operates not only as a communication outcome but also as a mechanism through which consumer experiences become social evidence for other potential consumers. Sulthana (2019), Tien et al. (2019), Leong et al. (2021), and Ngo et al. (2024) collectively indicate that the credibility, usefulness, and social character of consumer-generated information can influence consumer responses.

For local culinary businesses, however, the value of consumer-generated communication extends beyond purchase-related information. Local food is often associated with cultural meaning, place, tradition, community, and authenticity. Kumar et al. (2021) show that social media-based local food distribution can be associated with brand love and positive consumer responses. Liu et al. (2025) further connect local food consumption experiences with place identity, while Homeghi et al. (2025) demonstrate the potential of gastronomic communication to contribute to regional branding. These findings suggest that local identity can become an additional source of relational value. Consumers may remain loyal not only because the food satisfies their functional expectations, but also because the brand represents a place, culture, memory, community, or sense of belonging.

Accordingly, local identity and community connection are positioned in this study as contextual strengthening factors rather than conventional independent variables. A culinary brand that communicates local stories, involves local communities, highlights local ingredients, and encourages consumers to share authentic experiences can create a deeper form of engagement than a strategy based exclusively on price discounts or promotional content. In this sense, the competitive advantage of local culinary businesses may emerge from the combination of digital interaction and local meaning.

At the same time, the literature indicates that excessive commercialization may weaken the relational value of social media. When content becomes repetitive, overly promotional, or inconsistent with actual consumer experiences, engagement can lose its authenticity. This indicates that effective SMM should maintain a balance between commercial objectives and relationship-oriented communication. The strategic implication is that local culinary businesses should treat consumers as participants in a community of experience rather than simply as targets of promotional messages.

**Integrated Conceptual Model and Theoretical Contribution**

Based on the synthesis, this study develops an integrated conceptual model that explains consumer loyalty as the outcome of a relationship-building process initiated through SMM. The model integrates insights from social media marketing, customer engagement, relationship marketing, trust, satisfaction, e-WOM, and local food consumption. Unlike a simple direct-effect perspective, the proposed model emphasizes the mechanisms through which digital marketing activities are transformed into enduring consumer relationships.

**Table 1.** Synthesis of the Main Constructs and Their Proposed Roles

| Construct              | Core role         | Main mechanism                                                     | Expected contribution to loyalty                     |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Social Media Marketing | Strategic trigger | Interactive, relevant, personalized, and informative communication | Creates opportunities for consumer–brand interaction |

|                       |                                 |                                                               |                                                                  |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Consumer Engagement   | Relational mechanism            | Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral participation            | Strengthens consumer involvement with the brand                  |
| Trust                 | Relational outcome              | Credibility, consistency, transparency, responsiveness        | Reduces uncertainty and strengthens relationship commitment      |
| Customer Satisfaction | Experiential mechanism          | Positive evaluation of product and consumption experience     | Encourages continued preference and repurchase                   |
| e-WOM                 | Social amplification mechanism  | Reviews, recommendations, sharing, and user-generated content | Extends credibility and social influence                         |
| Local Identity        | Contextual strengthening factor | Authenticity, place, culture, and local meaning               | Deepens emotional and symbolic connection                        |
| Community Connection  | Contextual strengthening factor | Participation, belonging, and shared experience               | Strengthens relational attachment                                |
| Consumer Loyalty      | End outcome                     | Repurchase, recommendation, preference, and retention         | Represents the sustainability of the consumer–brand relationship |

The principal theoretical contribution of the model is therefore the repositioning of SMM from a communication-centered perspective to a relationship-centered perspective. Previous studies have demonstrated that SMM can be associated with engagement, brand loyalty, e-WOM, purchase intention, trust, and satisfaction (Kim & Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Aljuhmani et al., 2022). However, these relationships are often examined separately or through direct associations. The present conceptualization integrates these mechanisms into a sequential relational logic and contextualizes them within the distinctive characteristics of local culinary businesses.

The proposed framework also contributes by emphasizing that the digitalization of culinary marketing should not eliminate the local character of the business. Instead, digital platforms can become instruments for amplifying local identity and community-based experiences. In this perspective, social media does not merely make local culinary products more visible; it can make their local meaning more socially shareable. This distinction is important because visibility may generate short-term attention, whereas shared meaning, trust, satisfaction, and engagement provide a stronger foundation for long-term loyalty.

### Conceptual Propositions

Based on the integrated findings, the study proposes the following conceptual propositions:

Proposition 1 (P1): Social media marketing activities that are interactive, relevant, informative, personalized, and authentic are expected to strengthen consumer engagement with local culinary brands.

Proposition 2 (P2): Consumer engagement is expected to contribute to the development of consumer trust and customer satisfaction by creating repeated and meaningful consumer–brand interactions.

Proposition 3 (P3): Consumer trust and customer satisfaction are expected to strengthen consumer loyalty toward local culinary brands.

Proposition 4 (P4): Electronic word-of-mouth is expected to strengthen the relationship between social media marketing and consumer loyalty by extending consumer experiences and increasing the social credibility of culinary brands.

**Proposition 5 (P5):** Local identity and community connection are expected to strengthen the transformation of social media engagement into sustainable consumer loyalty by increasing authenticity, emotional attachment, and consumers' sense of belonging.

Taken together, these propositions indicate that the strategic effectiveness of SMM in the local culinary industry depends less on the intensity of promotional activity and more on its capacity to create meaningful interaction, credible information, satisfying experiences, and a sense of connection. The resulting framework can therefore be expressed as:

SMM → Consumer Engagement → Trust & Customer Satisfaction → Consumer Loyalty  
with e-WOM functioning as a social amplification mechanism and Local Identity & Community Connection functioning as contextual strengthening factors.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media marketing (SMM) can function as a strategic mechanism for building consumer loyalty in the local culinary industry when it is oriented toward relationship building rather than short-term promotion. The literature synthesis indicates that interactive, relevant, informative, personalized, and authentic social media activities can strengthen consumer engagement, which subsequently contributes to trust and customer satisfaction. These relational processes provide a stronger foundation for consumer loyalty through repurchase, recommendation, continued preference, and long-term retention.

The main contribution of this study is the development of an integrated relationship-based framework that connects social media marketing, consumer engagement, trust, customer satisfaction, e-WOM, local identity, and community connection. The framework explains that loyalty is not simply a direct outcome of social media exposure but develops through meaningful consumer–brand interactions and credible consumption experiences. In the local culinary context, the communication of local identity and community-based experiences can further strengthen the emotional and symbolic connection between consumers and culinary brands.

As a practical implication, local culinary businesses should shift from promotion-driven social media management toward strategies that prioritize authentic content, two-way interaction, consumer participation, credible reviews, and local storytelling. However, because this study is based on conceptual literature synthesis, the proposed relationships have not been empirically validated. Future research should test the framework using quantitative or mixed-method approaches and examine the mediating roles of engagement, trust, and satisfaction as well as the contextual roles of local identity and community connection.

## DECLARATIONS

### *Author Contributions*

N.N: Literature review and synthesis, analysis and interpretation, writing original draft, and writing review and editing.

L.L: Conceptualization, methodology, visualization, writing, review and editing, supervision, and project administration.

### *Funding*

This research received no external funding.

### *Conflict of Interest*

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### *Ethical Approval*

Ethical approval was not required because this study is a conceptual research based on systematic literature review and conceptual synthesis and did not involve human participants, animals, or the collection of primary data.

### Data Availability

No new primary data were generated or analyzed in this study. The study was based on the analysis and synthesis of published literature and publicly available scholarly sources.

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### AI-Assisted Tools Disclosure

The authors acknowledge the use of AI-assisted tools during the preparation of this manuscript, primarily for language refinement, grammar checking, and improving the clarity and readability of the English text. The tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, or determine the study's findings and conclusions. All academic arguments, interpretations, conceptual development, and final content were reviewed and verified by the authors, who remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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