# Branding in the Era of Social Media: Building and Sustaining Brand Equity

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# Abstract

In today’s digital-first world, social media has grown far beyond its original purpose of connecting people—it now plays a major role in shaping how consumers perceive and interact with brands. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become essential tools for businesses looking to build strong brand equity and maintain consumer trust and loyalty. With growing online competition and consumer expectations, the need for a brand to stand out through meaningful engagement has never been greater.

This research investigates how social media influences consumer behavior, particularly in areas such as brand trust, loyalty, and purchasing decisions. A structured survey was conducted among 53 respondents, most of whom are in the 18–24 age group—a demographic known for its heavy reliance on digital platforms. The study focuses on how content types, influencer marketing, and direct brand-consumer engagement contribute to long-term brand equity. The findings also incorporate insights from existing literature to highlight emerging patterns and provide actionable strategies for brands to strengthen their digital presence.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Brand Equity, Consumer Engagement, Influencer Marketing, Digital Branding

# Introduction

Social media has transformed the way brands communicate, market, and build relationships with their audiences. Traditional one-way communication through TV, print, and billboards has given way to fast-paced, interactive platforms where consumers not only receive messages but also participate in shaping them. In this evolving landscape, brands are no longer just talking—they're listening, adapting, and forming connections in real time. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become not just spaces for visibility but vital arenas for building credibility and consumer trust.

For younger audiences, especially those between the ages of 18–24, a brand’s digital presence can make or break its reputation. This age group often bases its buying decisions on how a brand presents itself online—its tone of voice, visual identity, social values, and how it responds to customer queries or criticism. Therefore, digital branding has become just as important, if not more so, than traditional branding strategies.

This research paper focuses on how social media can be strategically used to build and sustain brand equity. It explores which aspects of social interaction—such as responsiveness, content quality, influencer partnerships, and ethical transparency—impact consumer loyalty and advocacy. The goal is to provide brands, marketers, and students with insights on what works in today’s competitive social media environment, using both primary data and supporting literature to highlight key trends and behaviors.

# Objectives

1. To understand how social media influences consumer perception of brand equity.  
2. To identify which social media platforms are most effective for brand engagement.  
3. To explore the role of content types (ads, reviews, influencer posts, etc.) in shaping trust.  
4. To analyze factors that drive brand loyalty through social media interaction.  
5. To provide actionable recommendations for brands to improve their social media presence.

# Review of Literature

Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer (2012) indicates that social media communications have a more substantial effect on brand image compared to traditional media, emphasizing the necessity for brands to integrate social media strategies to enhance brand perception.​ Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) found that interactive content on social media platforms strengthens emotional connections between consumers and brands, leading to increased loyalty and advocacy.​ Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu (2019) demonstrates that influencers' authenticity and the informative value of their content positively affect followers' perception of brand credibility and their purchase intentions.​

Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme (2012) highlight that UGC enhances brand transparency and authenticity, leading to improved consumer trust and stronger brand equity.​ Taylor, Lewin, and Strutton (2011) suggest that personalized and targeted social media ads are more effective in capturing consumer attention and fostering positive attitudes toward the brand.​ Santos, Laczniak, and Lerman (2021) emphasizes the importance of leveraging a brand's history and legacy in social media communications to build trust and credibility among business clients.​ Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) explores how these communities facilitate interactions among consumers, leading to enhanced brand loyalty and advocacy.​

Lin, Spence, and Lachlan (2016) examines how brands can utilize social media platforms to communicate during crises, thereby mitigating negative impacts on brand reputation and equity.​ Peters et al. (2013) presents a framework for identifying key social media metrics that correlate with brand performance indicators, aiding in the assessment and optimization of social media strategies.​ Gorry and Westbrook (2011) discusses how brands can craft compelling narratives that resonate with audiences, thereby strengthening brand identity and emotional connections with consumers.​ Tam and Ho (2006) investigates how personalization strategies, such as tailored content and recommendations, enhance consumer experiences and contribute to positive brand perceptions.​ Tafesse and Wien (2018) examines how different visual elements in social media posts influence consumer interactions and engagement levels, highlighting the importance of visual appeal in content strategy.​

Zaglia (2013) explores how these communities create a sense of belonging among members, leading to increased commitment and loyalty to the brand.​ Einwiller and Steilen (2015) discusses strategies for effectively managing negative comments and reviews, emphasizing the importance of timely and appropriate responses to protect and enhance brand equity.​ Lou and Yuan (2019) investigates how consumers perceive AI influencers compared to human influencers, revealing potential risks to brand trust when utilizing AI personas in marketing.​ Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) examines how perceived transparency in brand messaging influences consumer trust and the overall strength of brand relationships.​ Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) explores the characteristics of successful viral marketing efforts and their impact on brand visibility and recognition.​

Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, and van Riel (2013) discusses how narrative techniques can be employed to create compelling brand stories that captivate audiences and foster deeper connections.​ Kim and Ko (2012) analyze how various social media marketing efforts, such as entertainment, interaction, and trendiness, contribute to building and maintaining consumer loyalty. Anisuzzaman (2022) indicates that both positive and negative online reviews can profoundly affect consumer perceptions and behaviors. The research highlights the importance for brands to actively manage and respond to online feedback to maintain and enhance their reputation in the digital marketplace.

# Research Methodology

This study follows a **quantitative research approach** using both **primary** and **secondary data** to explore how social media influences brand equity.

### Primary Data

Primary data was collected through a **structured Google Form survey** designed to capture consumer behavior, preferences, and perceptions regarding brand engagement on social media.

### Secondary Data

Secondary data was sourced from **existing academic literature**, journal articles, case studies, and industry reports that provided background, theories, and previously established insights into branding, social media marketing, and consumer trust.

### Sample

The sample consisted of **53 respondents**, primarily between the ages of **18–24**, selected using a **non-probability convenience sampling method**. These participants reflect a segment of active social media users and consumers, particularly relevant for this study.

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### Instrument Used

The research instrument was a **25-question survey** containing a mix of multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions. The survey was created and distributed using **Google Forms**. It was designed to be completed in under 5 minutes.

### Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using **Microsoft Excel and basic statistical tools**. Frequency distributions and percentage breakdowns were used to interpret trends.

# Research Gap

While there is a wealth of research surrounding digital marketing and brand communication, much of it focuses on specific platforms, campaign types, or general marketing strategies. What’s often missing is a holistic understanding of how various social media components—such as engagement, content type, influencer credibility, and brand responsiveness—interact to influence overall brand equity. Most studies analyze surface-level metrics like likes, shares, or impressions without diving deeper into how these elements contribute to long-term trust, loyalty, and consumer perception.

Moreover, few studies focus specifically on the behaviors and expectations of younger consumers, who represent the most active demographic on platforms like Instagram and YouTube. There is also limited research that examines how real-time responses—such as replying to DMs, handling negative feedback, or sharing brand values—affect brand loyalty and advocacy. This study fills that gap by combining fresh survey data with insights from existing literature to explore not just what brands post, but how they engage and how that engagement translates into consumer trust and sustainable brand value.

# Data Analysis and Interpretation

### Forms response chart. Question title: 1. Age group . Number of responses: 53 responses.Forms response chart. Question title: 2. Gender . Number of responses: 53 responses.

Fig.1(left) shows that majority of respondents (86.8%) were aged **18–24**, indicating that insights gathered in this study are highly relevant to younger, digitally native consumers. In terms of gender, fig.2 (right) shows **86.8% were male**, while **9.4% were female**, and **3.8% identified as other**.

### Forms response chart. Question title: 3. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?. Number of responses: 53 responses.Forms response chart. Question title: 5. Have you ever purchased a product because of a brand’s social media presence?. Number of responses: 53 responses.

Fig.1(left) shows Social Media Usage Patterns, **41.5%** spend **1–3 hours daily**, **26.4%** use social media for **5+ hours**, **20.8%** use it **3–5 hours**, Only **11.3%** spend **less than 1 hour**

Fig.2 (right) shows Influence of Social Media on Purchasing Decisions; **71.7%** have purchased a product due to a brand’s social media presence, only **28.3%** said no.

### Forms response chart. Question title: 7. How important is a brand’s social media presence in shaping your trust and loyalty? . Number of responses: 53 responses.

Above fig. shows Perceived Importance of Social Media for Trust and Loyalty; **37.7%** find it **somewhat important**, **32.1%** say it’s **very important**, **24.5%** are **neutral**, Only **5.7%** find it **not very important**

### Forms response chart. Question title: 8. Do you follow brands on social media?. Number of responses: 53 responses.Forms response chart. Question title: 9. What is the main reason you follow a brand on social media? . Number of responses: 53 responses.

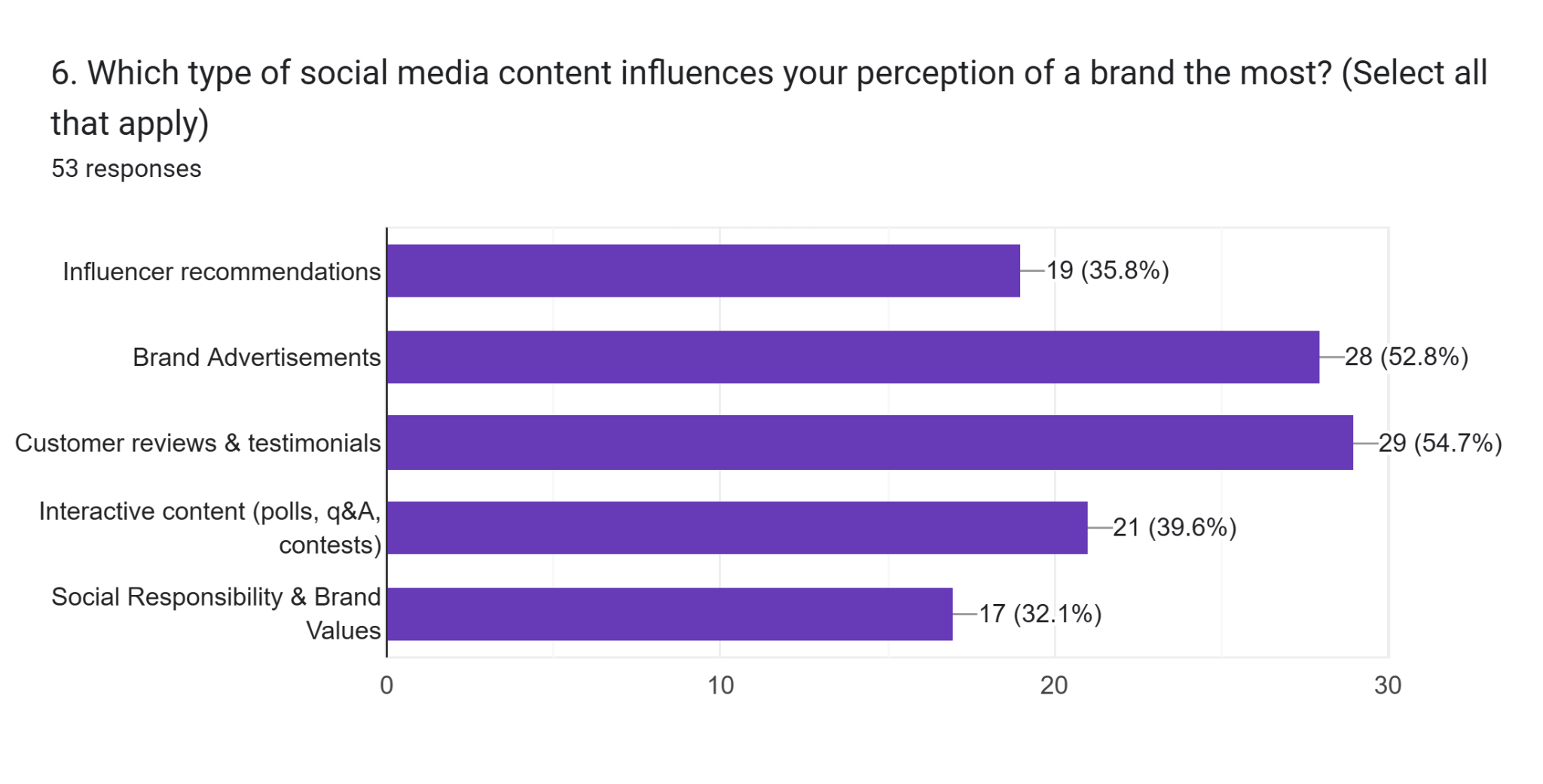
Fig.1(left) shows Brand Following Behavior; **52.8%** follow brands **occasionally**, **22.6%** follow brands **regularly**, **24.5%** don’t follow any brands

Fig.2(right) shows Respondents follow brands mainly for: **Exclusive offers & discounts (26.4%)**, **Entertaining or relatable content (24.5%)**, **Strong brand values & ethics (22.6%)**, **Product updates (17.0%)**, **Customer service & quick responses (9.4%)**

### Forms response chart. Question title: 13. Which type of brand content are you most likely to engage with? (Select all that apply) . Number of responses: 53 responses.

Above Fig. shows Types of Content Consumers Engage With (Adjusted for Survey Flaw):

**Informative content:** 79.2% (adjusted from two duplicate options 1&3), **Entertaining content:** 41.5%, **Promotional content:** 34.0%, **Customer stories/testimonials:** 30.2%, **Social responsibility content:** 26.4%



Above fig. shows Content Types That Influence Brand Perception (Q6), While answers were mixed due to multiple selections, the most recurring influential content types were: **Customer reviews & testimonials (54.7%)**, **Brand advertisements(52.8%)**, **Interactive content (polls, contests, Q&A)(39.6%)**, **Influencer recommendations(35.8%)**, **Social responsibility messages(32.1%)**

### Forms response chart. Question title: 11. Do you trust brands more when they actively engage with customers on social media? . Number of responses: 53 responses.Forms response chart. Question title: 10. How likely are to recommend a brand that has a strong social media presence? . Number of responses: 53 responses.

Fig.1(left) shows, Does Brand Engagement on Social Media Build Trust? (Q11); **64.2%** said Yes, it builds trust, **22.6%** said Sometimes, but not a major factor, **13.2%** said No, it doesn’t affect my decision

Fig.2(right) shows Likelihood of Recommending Brands That Engage; **43.4%** were somewhat likely, **17%** were very likely, **35.8%** were neutral, **3.8%** were not very likely

### Forms response chart. Question title: 18. How do you feel about brands using influencers to promote products? . Number of responses: 53 responses.Forms response chart. Question title: 20. What do you do if a brand responds negatively to customer feedback online? . Number of responses: 53 responses.

Fig.1(left) shows Impact of Influencer Marketing (Q18); **49.1%** said It depends on the influencer, **26.4%** said It makes me trust the brand more, **18.9%** said It doesn’t influence me, **5.7%** dislike influencer marketing entirely

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Fig.2(right) How People React to Negative Feedback from Brands (Q20); **56.6%** said They ignore it, but it affects perception, **35.8%** said They stop supporting the brand, **7.5%** said It doesn’t matter to them

### Forms response chart. Question title: 21. How important is a brand’s social responsibility (e.g., sustainability, ethical practices) in your purchasing decisions? . Number of responses: 53 responses.Forms response chart. Question title: 24. How likely are you to purchase from a brand that responds to your comments/messages on social media? . Number of responses: 53 responses.

Fig.1(left) shows Importance of Social Responsibility (Q21); **39.6%** rated it very important, **34%** said- somewhat important, **20.8%** were neutral.

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Fig.2(right) Likelihood to Purchase from Responsive Brands (Q24); **34%** said very likely, **32.1%** said somewhat likely, **26.4%** were neutral, **7.5%** were not very likely

# Findings

1. **Young users are driving brand interaction on social media** A large majority of the respondents (86.8%) were between 18–24 years old, confirming that this age group is highly active in shaping how brands are perceived online.
2. **Social media has a strong impact on buying decisions** Around 72% of participants said they’ve purchased a product after seeing it on a brand’s social media — showing just how powerful digital presence can be.
3. **People spend significant time on social platforms** Most respondents reported spending more than an hour daily on social media, with over 25% using it for more than 5 hours — giving brands plenty of chances to reach them.
4. **Instagram and YouTube are the go-to platforms** These two platforms were mentioned most often for following and engaging with brands, making them top priorities for marketing strategies.
5. **Informative content performs best** Even after adjusting for a survey design error, informative content still led the way with 79.2% of users engaging with it — more than any other content type.
6. **Customer reviews and interactive posts shape brand perception** Feedback from real users and posts like polls, contests, or Q&As were some of the most influential types of content according to respondents.
7. **Direct engagement from brands builds trust** Over 60% said that when brands respond to comments or messages, it improves their trust and connection with the brand.
8. **Influencers can help — if they’re the right fit** Nearly half of the participants said influencer marketing works only if the influencer is relatable or trustworthy — not just famous.
9. **Brand values matter more than ever** About 74% of people said a brand’s ethics and social responsibility influenced how they felt about it — showing that doing good is good for business.
10. **Poor response to criticism can hurt the brand** The majority of respondents said that ignoring or mishandling negative feedback damages brand perception and might even make them stop supporting it.

# Recommendations

1. **Create content that adds real value** Focus on informative, educational, or helpful content rather than just promotions. Content that teaches, inspires, or solves a problem earns more trust and engagement.
2. **Engage with your audience regularly** Replying to comments, DMs, and feedback shows the brand is present and human. Even simple acknowledgments build stronger loyalty.
3. **Choose influencers based on authenticity, not just reach** Consumers care more about whether the influencer seems genuine than how many followers they have. Partner with creators who align with your brand values.
4. **Showcase social responsibility and transparency** Share what your brand stands for. Talk about causes you support, ethical practices, or sustainability efforts—but do it genuinely and in moderation.
5. **Listen, track, and adapt your content strategy** Keep an eye on what content your audience engages with most. Use that data to adjust and improve future posts and campaigns.
6. **Leverage visual-heavy platforms like Instagram and YouTube** Since these platforms were the most preferred by survey respondents, tailor strategies around short-form videos, reels, and interactive visuals.
7. **Offer followers exclusive perks** Things like early access, giveaways, or discounts encourage users to follow and stay connected with your brand.
8. **Use interactive tools to boost engagement** Features like polls, Q&As, or contests help increase participation and foster a sense of community.
9. **Be consistent in tone and style across platforms** Maintain a clear and cohesive brand voice in all your content. It helps improve brand recall and builds a familiar relationship with your audience.
10. **Handle criticism gracefully** Don’t ignore or delete negative comments. Address them politely and professionally—it shows accountability and earns respect.

# Conclusion

This research reaffirms that social media is not just a marketing channel—it’s a powerful relationship-building tool. In today’s hyperconnected world, consumers are looking for more than good products; they’re looking for meaningful brand experiences, consistent communication, and values they can align with.

The insights gathered from this study clearly show that young consumers value informative content, personalized interactions, and ethical branding. Social media has given brands the opportunity to create direct, authentic connections with their audience, and those who use this channel wisely stand to gain not just followers, but loyal customers and long-term brand equity.

As digital spaces continue to evolve, so must brand strategies. The brands that embrace transparency, adapt quickly to feedback, and consistently provide value will rise above the noise and remain relevant in the minds of their consumers.

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