

Impact of Message Appeal on Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty through Social Media Engagement

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Received: 22/08/2026, Revised: 19/09/2026, Accepted: 03/10/2026, Published: 04/10/2026

Abstract—This study examines how marketing message appeal affects brand trust and brand loyalty, focusing on the mediating role of social media engagement in the Indonesian telecommunication sector. The research specifically evaluates Telkomsel Branch Surabaya's digital marketing through its Instagram community account for youth, @inlife.surabaya. Using a quantitative survey method, data was collected from 111 university students in Surabaya who actively follow the account. The data was gathered through online questionnaires and analyzed using regression and bootstrapping methods via the Macro PROCESS Model 4. The findings show that message appeal has a direct and positive effect on social media engagement. Interestingly, social media engagement does not mediate the relationship between message appeal and brand trust. This means that Generation Z audiences can instantly build trust in a brand just by seeing clear and high-quality promotional content, without needing further interaction. On the other hand, social media engagement significantly mediates the effect of message appeal on brand loyalty. In conclusion, while an attractive message can build initial trust on its own, creating long-term customer loyalty requires active two-way communication and consumer involvement on social media.

Keywords: Message Appeal; Social Media Engagement; Brand Trust; Brand Loyalty; Telecommunications

How to Cite: Sin, M. S. K., Thahirrah, N. N., & Hadi, H. K. (2026). Impact of Message Appeal on Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty through Social Media Engagement. *Journal of Business and Economics Research (JBE)*, 7(3), 629-636. <https://doi.org/10.47065/jbe.v7i3.11057>

1. INTRODUCTION

The way businesses approach marketing has completely changed as a result of the direct digital landscape's rapid expansion, establishing social media as the central pillar for direct and real-time consumer interaction (Elrizal & Astuti, 2024). Grounded in the grand theory of relationship marketing and digital consumer behavior, modern business ecosystems no longer rely solely on traditional transactional approaches but prioritize building long-term engagements through digital platforms. In Indonesia, the adoption of social media continues to surge at an unprecedented rate, transforming visual-centric platforms like *Instagram* from simple photo-sharing applications into highly active, competitive business ecosystems. Today's modern consumers have developed completely new purchasing habits; they heavily rely on social networks to seek out information, read peer reviews, and validate their choices before committing to a service subscription (Fajarwati & Haliza, 2024). This fundamental shift in consumer behavior has significantly impacted the telecommunications industry in Indonesia, creating both unprecedented opportunities and immense challenges. Telecom providers are currently facing intensely fierce competition in a saturated market. Because the internet data packages and services offered across different providers are frequently similar, consumers can easily switch services due to very low *switching costs* (Mandasari et al., 2024). Dealing with critical, highly informed consumers who readily jump between brands has become a major strategic challenge for these telecommunication companies. They can no longer survive by merely acquiring new users; they must aggressively cultivate long-term relationships that foster genuine brand loyalty (Chavadi et al., 2023; Masitah, 2025).

To capture consumer attention amidst the endless, fast-paced stream of *Instagram* content, telecommunication companies need to design their digital promotional posts with the precise message appeal (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2025). Fundamentally, message appeal in digital marketing blends two complementary elements: emotional appeal, which aims to evoke psychological feelings like security, happiness, or joy, and rational appeal, which focuses on delivering logical information, service quality, network coverage, and competitive pricing (Gupta et al., 2026; Singh et al., 2024). In a highly crowded social media environment, promotional content that features a strong, balanced mix of rational and emotional hooks will naturally trigger audience curiosity and capture their initial attention (chav, 2024; Qadir, 2025). When people find a marketing message relevant to their logic and feelings, they are more naturally driven to interact with it voluntarily (Singh et al., 2024). Utilizing a compelling message appeal has consistently been shown to boost consumer involvement through concrete digital actions like hitting the like button, sharing posts to their networks, or joining active discussions in the comment section (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2025). These consistent and positive social media interactions gradually serve as a foundation to build brand trust. This trust is defined as the consumers' psychological confidence that a company will consistently deliver on its promises and provide reliable, uninterrupted services (Althuwaini, 2022; Mandasari et al., 2024). A well-crafted marketing message rarely makes modern consumers believe in a brand instantly; instead, digital buyers typically need a comprehensive validation process through ongoing participation and peer observation (Althuwaini, 2022). When a message's appeal successfully draws people into engaging with the content, this very interaction slowly chips away at consumer skepticism and builds cognitive confidence (Harvina et al., 2022; Mandasari

et al., 2024). Meaningful, routine interaction on social platforms serves as a crucial bridge, transforming a simple visual stimulus into a strong emotional conviction regarding the brand's overall credibility and integrity (Masitah, 2025; Shafiq et al., 2023).

Moving a step further, securing long-lasting customer loyalty requires significantly more effort than just broadcasting an attractive marketing message. True, long-term commitment and brand loyalty only materialize when the target audience is actively involved and engaged (Gupta et al., 2026). Social media engagement ensures that consumers are voluntarily dedicating their time and cognitive energy to connect with the brand on a deeper level (Fajarwati & Haliza, 2024). This active behavioral and psychological attachment is exactly what makes consumers hesitant to switch to competing telecommunication brands, ultimately forging solid, enduring loyalty (Elrizal & Astuti, 2024; Srivastava et al., 2022). Brand loyalty itself represents a genuine, unwavering commitment from consumers to continuously use and recommend a service to others, even when rival companies offer tempting promotional discounts (Gupta et al., 2026). However, while this theoretical flow appears logical, prior empirical research has yielded mixed results, leaving a notable and critical research gap. To map the *state of the art*, this study reviews several recent literatures. First, Mandasari et al., (2024) found that high social media engagement does not automatically translate into loyal customers, particularly within highly saturated service industries where *switching costs* are minimal. Second, Singh et al. (2024) highlighted an ongoing academic debate regarding whether a marketing message can directly forge loyalty or if it absolutely must be filtered through active user interaction first. Third, Qadir (2025) emphasized that cognitive trust is often shaped directly by the utilitarian value of the promotional content, sometimes bypassing the need for surrounding social interactions. Fourth, Elrizal & Astuti (2024) argued that active behavioral attachment through digital engagement is the sole predictor of making consumers hesitant to switch brands. Finally, Gupta et al. (2026) noted that true, long-term commitment only materializes when emotional and rational appeals are continuously reinforced by the audience's active involvement. These conflicting findings from recent studies reveal a substantial theoretical gap regarding the exact mediating mechanism of social media engagement.

In order to address these inconsistencies, this study's unique empirical methodology, which positions social media engagement as a crucial mediating variable to determine whether high-quality marketing messages can independently establish brand trust and brand loyalty without the bridge of secondary digital engagement (Qadir, 2025). The urgency of this research is highly pronounced for the Indonesian telecommunication sector, as companies are currently exhausting vast marketing budgets on digital campaigns without a clear, empirically backed understanding of the interaction pathways that guarantee customer retention. The primary contribution of this study is to enrich the theoretical landscape of digital marketing by providing a tested model of how message appeal works through engagement in a low-switching-cost industry. As the market leader, Telkomsel actively engages consumers not only through its national platforms but also via localized, community-driven digital strategies. Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively examine and analyze the effect of message appeal on brand trust and brand loyalty through the mediating role of social media engagement, specifically focusing on the digital content of Telkomsel Branch Surabaya via its youth-targeted community account (@inlife.surabaya).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Type of Research, Population, and Sample

This research systematically employs a quantitative associative approach designed to analyze and map the causal relationships between the primary variables involved in the digital marketing ecosystem. This approach specifically aims to quantify the degree to which the independent variable, namely message appeal, affects the dependent variables, namely brand trust and brand loyalty, while strictly evaluating the mediating role of social media engagement. The population targeted in this study comprises the active audience and digital followers of the localized, youth-targeted community account managed by Telkomsel Branch Surabaya, operating under the *Instagram* handle @inlife.surabaya. To ensure the collected data accurately represented the target demographic, the sampling technique applied was purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2023). The sample was rigorously determined based on specific criteria most suitable for the research objectives, primarily focusing on university students residing in Surabaya who have actively interacted with the aforementioned account. Based on the rigorous data collection process, a final robust sample of 111 eligible respondents was obtained, which comfortably meets the recommended minimum threshold required for conducting complex multivariate statistical analysis.

Data collection primarily relied on primary sources to ensure high originality. *Google Forms* was used to deliver structured online questionnaires that successfully collected this primary data., which were shared directly with the respondents via social media direct messages and profile links. Prior to filling out the core measurement questions, all respondents had to pass a strict screening phase to ensure they legitimately met the active digital engagement criteria. The questionnaire utilized a standardized 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), to quantify respondent perceptions. To satisfy methodological standards, the operational definitions and corresponding indicators for each variable are structurally elaborated as follows. Message Appeal (independent variable) is operationally defined as the extent to which promotional content on @inlife.surabaya strategically combines informative clarity with emotional resonance to persuade the target audience. This variable is comprehensively measured by assessing the clarity of factual information delivered, the transparency of pricing or promotions, and the digital content's ability to trigger

positive emotional responses. The measurement items for Message Appeal were adapted from Patil & Ghule (2024). Social Media Engagement (mediating variable) is operationally defined as the degree of active psychological and behavioral interaction demonstrated by followers toward the account's digital content. It involves evaluating respondents' high interest in viewing the content, active participation in sharing opinions within the comments section, and willingness to voluntarily share the brand's posts. The measurement items for Social Media Engagement were adapted Fajarwati & Haliza (2024) Brand Trust (dependent variable) is operationally defined as the consumer's cognitive confidence and belief in the integrity, honesty, and reliability of Telkomsel as represented through its localized account. It is measured by perceived brand honesty and the company's commitment to fulfilling advertised promises. The measurement items for Brand Trust were adapted from Azhar et al. (2023). Finally, Brand Loyalty (dependent variable) is operationally defined as the long-term psychological commitment and behavioral intention of consumers to consistently retain Telkomsel services over competitors. This construct is quantified through consumers' steadfast intention to maintain their subscription, consistency in making the brand their primary choice, and willingness to organically recommend the brand to others. The measurement items for Brand Loyalty were adapted Azhar et al. (2023); Fajarwati & Haliza (2024)

2.2 Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical background and the formulated research problems, this section presents the research hypotheses used to systematically test the direct and indirect causal effects within the telecommunication sector's digital marketing framework. According to the first hypothesis (H1), social media engagement among the localized digital account's followers is directly, favorably, and statistically significantly impacted by message appeal. Assuming that digital contact connects initial content exposure to cognitive confidence, the second hypothesis (H2) suggests that social media involvement serves as a substantial mediator in the relationship between message appeal and brand trust. Lastly, the third hypothesis (H3) emphasizes that active two-way digital communication is necessary for long-term behavioral commitment and claims that message appeal has a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty through the mediating role of social media participation.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is structurally designed to logically map the multi-layered causal relationships among the fundamental concepts and variables included in the research model. Message appeal serves as the primary independent stimulus initiating the digital interaction process. Social media engagement is strategically positioned as the intervening or mediating variable that potentially bridges the initial stimulus to the final consumer behavior. Subsequently, brand trust and brand loyalty act as the ultimate dependent variables representing the success metrics of the telecommunication provider's digital marketing efforts. The specific directional pathways illustrating these interconnected variables and representing the formulated hypotheses are clearly illustrated in Figure 1.

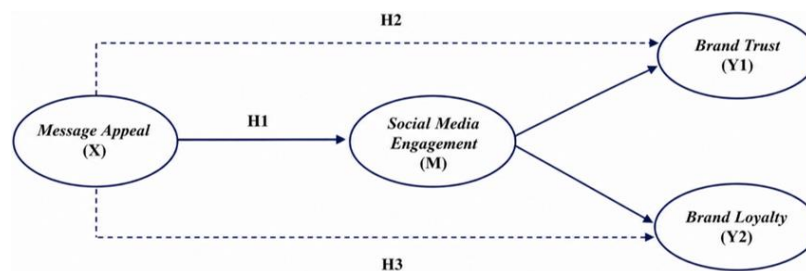


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

2.4 Data Analysis and Testing Techniques

The primary data gathered from the eligible participants were statistically processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (Hair et al., 2022). The comprehensive analytical procedure commenced with standard descriptive statistics to profile the respondents. This was immediately followed by rigorous instrument quality assessments to guarantee data integrity. These assessments included convergent and discriminant validity tests to ensure each indicator accurately measured its intended construct, as well as reliability tests utilizing the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to confirm the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. To verify that the dataset met the necessary statistical requirements for regression analysis, classical assumption tests were strictly performed. These involved checking for residual normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, detecting the absence of multicollinearity by evaluating the Tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF), and confirming the absence of heteroscedasticity through scatterplot visual inspections.

Finally, to accurately test the proposed hypotheses and specifically evaluate the complex mediation effects, this study employed a highly robust bootstrapping method. This advanced statistical procedure was executed via the Macro PROCESS extension, specifically utilizing Model 4, developed by Hayes (2022). The bootstrapping technique is exceptionally reliable for analyzing indirect effects as it generates precise confidence intervals without strictly demanding a perfectly normal distribution of the sampling distribution, thereby yielding highly accurate conclusions regarding the mediating role of social media engagement.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Results

This section presents the comprehensive empirical findings and the structured discussion derived from the quantitative data collected during the study. The primary objective of this data analysis is to thoroughly evaluate the causal relationships between message appeal, social media engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty within the digital marketing ecosystem of the telecommunication sector. The analysis encompasses the demographic profiling of the respondents, the strict evaluation of the measurement instruments' quality, the fulfillment of classical statistical assumptions, and the final hypothesis testing utilizing advanced mediation analysis.

3.1.1 Respondent Characteristics

The data collection process successfully gathered responses from a total of 111 university students currently residing in Surabaya, East Java, who actively follow and interact with the @inlife.surabaya Instagram account managed by Telkomsel Branch Surabaya. An in-depth examination of the demographic profile revealed a relatively balanced and representative gender distribution, comprising 59 female respondents, which accounts for 53.2 percent of the total sample, and 52 male respondents, making up the remaining 46.8 percent. This balanced gender ratio ensures that the findings regarding digital engagement and brand perceptions are not biased toward a specific gender's behavioral tendencies. Furthermore, the age distribution of the participants provides a highly relevant context for this digital marketing study. The majority of responders are between the ages of 19 and 24. This specific age category, generally categorized as Generation Z, perfectly aligns with the targeted active social media user demographic for the @inlife.surabaya community account. Generation Z consumers are widely recognized as digital natives who spend a significant portion of their daily routines consuming visual content on platforms like Instagram, making them the most critical and responsive audience for evaluating the effectiveness of a telecommunication provider's message appeal. Their active involvement in digital communities ensures that the data accurately reflect modern consumer behavior in response to contemporary social media marketing strategies.

3.1.2 Instrument Quality Testing

Before proceeding to evaluate the complex structural paths and mediation effects, the quality and accuracy of the primary measurement instruments were rigorously verified through validity and reliability assessments. These preliminary tests are an absolute necessity to ensure that the questionnaire effectively and consistently measures the intended variables without systematic errors. Construct validity was thoroughly assessed using the Pearson product-moment correlation technique. The validity assessment outcomes conclusively demonstrated that all specific measurement items utilized for the Message Appeal, Social Media Engagement, Brand Trust, and Brand Loyalty constructs were highly valid. This was statistically confirmed as every single indicator yielded significance values (p-values) that were located well below the strict 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the questions accurately captured the essence of the theoretical constructs they were designed to measure. Following the confirmation of validity, reliability testing was conducted to ascertain the internal consistency of the measurement scales across all respondents. A reliable instrument ensures that if the study were to be replicated under similar conditions, it would yield stable and consistent results. The reliability was evaluated using the Cronbach's Alpha statistical coefficient. The analysis confirmed an excellent level of internal consistency, as the calculated Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs comfortably exceeded the universally recommended minimum threshold of 0.60. Consequently, the entire set of questionnaire items was declared highly reliable and scientifically fit for subsequent, more complex multivariate statistical analysis.

3.1.3 Classical Assumption Testing

To ensure that the dataset met all the mandatory parametric statistical requirements for conducting regression-based mediation analysis, a series of classical assumption tests were strictly performed and evaluated. The first assumption tested was the normality of the data distribution, which dictates that the residual values generated by the regression model must be normally distributed to prevent biased estimations. The normality check was executed using the robust Kolmogorov-Smirnov non-parametric statistical method. The test output yielded an asymptotic significance value that was situated above the 0.05 alpha level, thereby statistically confirming a perfectly normal distribution of the regression residuals. Subsequently, the multicollinearity test was conducted to ensure that there was no strong or perfect linear relationship among the independent variables within the proposed model. High multicollinearity can severely distort the true individual effects of the predictors. The analytical results showed that the Tolerance values for all variables were entirely above the critical limit of 0.10, and the corresponding Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) stayed well below the maximum acceptable threshold of 10. These metrics definitively confirmed the complete absence of multicollinearity issues among the tested variables. Finally, the assumption of homoscedasticity was verified to ensure that the variance of the residual terms remained constant across all levels of the independent variables. Visual inspections of the scatterplot graphs displayed randomly dispersed data points spreading evenly above and below the zero line on the Y-axis, without forming any distinct or systematic patterns. This visual evidence successfully proved the absence of heteroscedasticity, confirming that the regression model is robust, unbiased, and fully capable of generating highly accurate predictive conclusions.

3.1.4 Hypothesis Testing and Mediation Analysis

Following the successful validation of all preliminary statistical prerequisites, the study proceeded to evaluate both the direct impacts and the complex mediating mechanisms. To achieve a high degree of precision in testing the indirect effects, this study applied a sophisticated bootstrapping approach using the Macro PROCESS statistical extension, specifically utilizing Model 4, originally developed by Hayes (2022). The bootstrapping method was selected over the traditional Sobel test because it does not rigidly assume a normal distribution of the indirect effect's sampling distribution, thereby generating much more accurate, powerful, and reliable confidence intervals. In this analytical procedure, the significance of the indirect effect is determined by evaluating the Bootstrap Lower Level Confidence Interval (BootLLCI) and the Bootstrap Upper Level Confidence Interval (BootULCI). A mediating effect is statistically declared significant and supported if the numerical range between the BootLLCI and BootULCI does not contain the value of zero. The detailed statistical outcomes of the comprehensive hypothesis testing, encompassing both the direct and mediating pathways, are systematically summarized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Hypothesis Testing (Bootstrapping via Macro PROCESS)

Hypothesis	Structural Path	p-value	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Conclusion
H1	Message Appeal > Social Media Engagement	0.000	-	-	Supported
H2	Message Appeal > Social Media Engagement > Brand Trust	-	-0.0588	0.0941	Rejected
H3	Message Appeal > Social Media Engagement > Brand Loyalty	-	0.0355	0.3703	Supported

As explicitly detailed in Table 1, the analytical output generated distinct conclusions for each of the three proposed hypotheses. For the first hypothesis (H1), the direct pathway from message appeal to social media engagement yielded a highly significant p-value of 0.000, which is far below the 0.05 threshold. Consequently, H1 is fully supported. For the second hypothesis (H2), which tested the mediating role of social media engagement on brand trust, the bootstrapping interval produced a BootLLCI of -0.0588 and a BootULCI of 0.0941. Because this specific confidence interval range crosses the value of zero, the indirect effect is deemed statistically insignificant, leading to the clear rejection of H2. Conversely, for the third hypothesis (H3), which evaluated the mediating effect of social media engagement on brand loyalty, the analysis generated a BootLLCI of 0.0355 and a BootULCI of 0.3703. Since both values are positive and the interval strictly does not contain zero, the indirect effect is proven to be highly significant, meaning H3 is firmly supported. These complex statistical findings provide a deep foundational basis for the subsequent theoretical discussions.

3.2 Discussion

This section critically elaborates on the statistical findings presented in the previous subsection, contextualizing them within the broader theoretical landscape of digital marketing and comparing them extensively with prior empirical studies. The discussion systematically unpacks the mechanisms behind why certain hypotheses were supported while another was notably rejected in the context of the telecommunication industry.

3.2.1 The Effect of Message Appeal on Social Media Engagement

The analytical output undeniably confirms that the first hypothesis of this study is fully supported. The empirical findings reveal a massive, direct, and significantly positive relationship between the quality of the marketing message appeal and the target audience's genuine willingness to interact digitally. In the context of Telkomsel Branch Surabaya's digital community account, @inlife.surabaya, when the brand successfully combines logical, factual information regarding internet packages with an emotional resonance tailored for the youth demographic, consumers do not merely view the digital content passively. Instead, they are naturally and psychologically triggered to respond actively. This specific behavioral outcome strongly aligns with the recent theoretical literature proposed by Singh et al. (2024) and Vijayalakshmi et al. (2025), which consistently highlights that emotionally and rationally stimulating digital content drastically boosts active audience participation, such as sharing posts, saving content, or leaving organic comments. In a highly saturated telecommunication market where consumers scroll rapidly through their feeds, a bland or purely transactional advertisement is easily ignored. However, providing clear utilitarian value alongside a strong emotional or community-driven hook serves as the absolute core driver for initiating digital interaction (Khusniah et al., 2024). This confirms the assertion by Qadir (2025) that visual and textual marketing stimuli must possess a dual-appeal structure to successfully break through the noise of social media algorithms and capture the modern consumer's fleeting attention span.

3.2.2 The Mediating Role of Social Media Engagement on Brand Trust

Interestingly, and perhaps contrary to traditional digital marketing assumptions, the empirical data led to the absolute rejection of the second hypothesis. The advanced bootstrapping intervals explicitly demonstrate that social media engagement completely fails to act as a significant mediating variable between message appeal and the formation of brand trust. This finding presents a highly fascinating and critical dynamic regarding modern consumer psychology: digital

audiences do not actually need to execute an interactive action such as liking, commenting, or sharing a promotional post, in order to genuinely believe in the telecommunication brand's overarching credibility. A high-quality, transparent, and rationally appealing marketing message is apparently powerful enough to independently establish cognitive trust upon the very first glance. Consumers feel a strong sense of confidence about the telecommunication services and data packages solely based on the clear, unambiguous information presented in the content, without requiring any secondary validation through personal digital engagement or peer interaction in the comment sections. This direct, unmediated pathway robustly supports the bold theoretical assertions previously made by Mandasari et al. (2024), who astutely noted that overt interactive behaviors on social platforms do not necessarily dictate deep-seated brand relationship variables like trust. Furthermore, cognitive trust in the telecommunication sector is often shaped directly by the transparent utilitarian value and the perceived honesty of the promotional content itself, rather than the surrounding social interactions or community hype (Qadir, 2025; Sijabat et al., 2023). This implies that if a brand communicates its pricing, network coverage, and terms of service clearly and attractively, the Gen Z audience will instantly grant their trust, regardless of whether they physically engage with the Instagram post or simply scroll past it after reading. Trust, in this specific digital context, is a rapid cognitive evaluation rather than a slow, behaviorally mediated process (Althuwaini, 2022).

3.2.3 The Mediating Role of Social Media Engagement on Brand Loyalty

In stark contrast to the rapid trust-building dynamic, the statistical analysis successfully supported the third hypothesis. The data conclusively prove that active audience engagement serves as a highly crucial, non-negotiable bridge connecting initial message appeal to the formation of long-term brand loyalty. While an attractive Instagram post can effortlessly catch the audience's eye and build initial cognitive trust, securing unwavering, long-lasting customer loyalty in an industry notorious for its extremely low switching costs requires active, continuous two-way digital communication. When young consumers willingly invest their personal time and psychological energy to interact with Telkomsel's community posts, it significantly deepens their emotional bond with the provider and meticulously cultivates a profound sense of brand belonging. This robust finding perfectly echoes and validates multiple prior empirical studies conducted by Elrizal & Astuti (2024); Fajarwati & Haliza (2024); Tuti & Sulistia (2022). These studies consistently confirm that active consumer engagement is the fundamental, irreplaceable stepping stone toward effectively retaining customers in a highly saturated and fiercely competitive digital market. Despite some existing counter-arguments in the broader marketing field, this current study solidifies the vital premise that interactive, community-driven content is an absolute necessity for translating initial marketing interest into steadfast, long-term behavioral loyalty (Gupta et al., 2026; Masitah, 2025). Without the mediating force of social media engagement, an appealing message only creates a fleeting moment of trust that quickly evaporates when a rival telecommunication provider offers a cheaper data package. Therefore, engagement acts as the psychological anchor that transforms a casual, trusting observer into a highly loyal, retention-proof brand advocate.

4. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study was conducted to empirically evaluate the impact of message appeal on brand trust and brand loyalty, specifically examining the crucial mediating role of social media engagement within the highly competitive digital landscape of the Indonesian telecommunication industry. By focusing on the youth-targeted digital community account of Telkomsel Branch Surabaya (@inlife.surabaya), the research successfully provides definitive answers to the formulated research problems. The empirical findings robustly confirm that a well-crafted and dual-structured message appeal, combining transparent rational information with relatable emotional resonance, directly and significantly drives active consumer engagement on social media. However, the most compelling novelty of this research lies in its discovery of a distinct, bifurcated pathway in how modern digital consumers process brand relationships. The statistical analysis explicitly reveals that social media engagement does not mediate the relationship between message appeal and brand trust. This phenomenon indicates that digital audiences, particularly Generation Z consumers, have the capacity to build cognitive confidence in a telecommunication brand instantaneously, relying purely on the clarity, transparency, and utilitarian value of the promotional content itself, without requiring any secondary digital interactions or community validation. Conversely, the study conclusively proves that social media engagement serves as an absolute, vital mediator in shaping long-term brand loyalty. While initial brand trust can be established rapidly through passive observation of high-quality marketing cues, securing a customer's unwavering, long-term behavioral commitment strictly demands active, two-way communication and continuous psychological involvement. Consequently, these findings offer significant managerial implications for telecommunication marketers. To survive in an industry characterized by exceptionally low switching costs, management must strategically optimize their digital campaigns; they should provide clear, straightforward factual content to rapidly establish consumer trust, while simultaneously heavily prioritizing interactive and community-driven content, such as open discussions, interactive polls, and responsive Q&A sessions, to slowly transform that initial cognitive trust into enduring, retention-proof behavioral loyalty. Despite offering these valuable insights, this study acknowledges several methodological limitations that provide clear opportunities for future academic exploration. The research is currently constrained to a highly specific demographic consisting solely of 111 university students residing in Surabaya, and it evaluates only a single digital platform (*Instagram*) through a specific youth-targeted community account. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future researchers systematically expand the geographical scope to a national level and deliberately explore more diverse consumer characteristics, encompassing

various age groups and professional backgrounds. As a result, it is highly advised that future researchers intentionally investigate more varied consumer characteristics, including a range of age groups and professional backgrounds, and methodically broaden the geographical reach to a national level.

5. DECLARATIONS

5.1 Author Contributions

Conceptualization: M. S. K. S., N. N. T., and H. K. H.;

Methodology: M. S. K. S., N. N. T., and H. K. H.;

Software: M. S. K. S.;

Validation: N. N. T., and H. K. H.;

Formal Analysis: M. S. K. S.;

Investigation: M. S. K. S.;

Resources: M. S. K. S.;

Data Curation: M. S. K. S.;

Writing Original Draft Preparation: M. S. K. S.;

Writing Review and Editing: N. N. T., and H. K. H.;

Visualization: M. S. K. S.;

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

5.2 Data Availability

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

5.3 Funding

This research received no external funding. All publication and manuscript processing fees associated with the preparation and publication of this scientific manuscript were funded independently by the author.

5.4 Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

5.5 Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

5.6 Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

5.7 Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in The Writing Process

The authors used Generative AI to improve the writing clarity of this paper. They reviewed and edited the AI-assisted content and took full responsibility for the final publication.

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