






# “Impact of engagement motives toward loyalty among agri-food consumers: The mediating roles of educational benefits, economic benefits, trust, and commitment”

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# IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT MOTIVES TOWARD LOYALTY AMONG AGRI-FOOD CONSUMERS: THE MEDIATING ROLES OF EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS, ECONOMIC BENEFITS, TRUST, AND COMMITMENT

## Abstract

Brand communities can significantly enhance customer loyalty among agri-food customers; however, the factors driving their formation in agri-food retailers, which are often characterized by transactional relationships, remain poorly understood. This study examines how engagement motives affect loyalty, highlighting what motives influence customer engagement and how educational benefits, economic benefits, trust, and commitment mediate the relationship between customer engagement and loyalty. A cross-sectional survey was conducted between October 2024 and January 2025, involving 247 agri-food customers who followed social media brand communities, made in-store purchases in the past three months, and were over 18 years old. The findings reveal that information ( $\beta = 0.366$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and entertainment motives ( $\beta = 0.356$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) have a significant positive impact on customer engagement, whereas social relationships do not significantly affect engagement. Customer engagement positively influences educational benefits ( $\beta = 0.679$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), economic benefits ( $\beta = 0.539$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and trust ( $\beta = 0.379$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), but does not directly affect loyalty. Notably, trust significantly mediates the relationship between customer engagement and loyalty through commitment ( $\beta = 0.076$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and in the absence of commitment ( $\beta = 0.099$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). In contrast, economic benefits ( $\beta = 0.053$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) and educational benefits ( $\beta = 0.070$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) significantly mediate this relationship only when commitment is present. These findings emphasize the importance of personalized content, meaningful benefits, and trust-building activities in fostering loyalty among agri-food retailers.

## Keywords

engagement motives, customer engagement, loyalty,  
educational benefits, economic benefits, trust,  
commitment, agri-food retailer

## JEL Classification

D12, M31, Q13

## INTRODUCTION

Online agri-food retailers play a vital role in modern agriculture by shortening distribution chains and expanding target markets. In Indonesia, this sector is one of the main contributors to the digital economy. However, despite its potential, the penetration remained inadequate at approximately 0.1% in 2019 (Eastspring Investments, 2022). Many enterprises faced bankruptcy due to competitive pressure and market challenges (Bayu, 2024). This situation underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the factors that foster strong brand-customer relationships in online agri-food retailers. A critical issue is building trust among consumers who are often skeptical about purchasing perishable products online (McKinsey, 2022). Additionally,

fostering customer loyalty is challenging, as agri-food consumers tend to split their purchases across multiple stores (Lynch et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, many agri-food retailers are establishing social media brand communities (SMBCs) to strengthen customer relationships and promote their brands. Consumers often engage in SMBC to communicate, interact, and share experiences with both the brands and community members (Peeroo et al., 2017). Given the widespread popularity of social media, engaging them in SMBC presents a new opportunity to enhance brand trust and foster loyalty. However, empirical research on how customer engagement (CE) influences loyalty in this context remains scarce. This is because agri-food products are typically purchased regularly (Gazdecki & Goryńska-Goldmann, 2020), and the majority of them still shop at physical stores. This creates a significant gap, as engaging customers in SMBC can strategically strengthen customer-brand relationships amid the growing trend of online agri-food shopping worldwide (Statista, 2025).

Agri-food consumers often need significant motivation to engage in SMBC. Scholars argue that engagement motives are highly context-dependent (Farhat et al., 2023; Haverila et al., 2024), which highlights a gap in the study of the agri-food retailers' context. For agri-food consumers, learning information tends to be more prominent, as they often look for special offers (Benn et al., 2015; Park & Jiang, 2021) and food-related knowledge on social media (Jang et al., 2024). Agri-food retailers have recognized strategic opportunities from these behaviors and frequently present promotional and educational content within their SMBC. Content that aligns with customer expectations encourages interactions with brands, even passively (Park & Jiang, 2021). This interaction can enhance trust (Chou et al., 2023) and offer economic benefits from promotional content and educational benefits from educational content. However, existing research has not thoroughly examined how engagement motives and perceived benefits influence the formation of loyalty. The mediating role of economic benefits in the CE context remains unclear, and the mediating role of educational benefits in transforming CE into loyalty remains rarely studied. Therefore, this study examines a complex and often overlooked relationship, focusing on the mechanisms arising from engagement motives and the factors that sequentially mediate the development of customer loyalty toward online agri-food retailers.

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## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

In recent years, the focus of modern marketing has extended beyond merely selling products to fostering customer engagement (CE). This shift emphasizes the integration of brands into customers' lives, underscoring the importance of relational connections. CE in SMBC strengthens social capital among them, strengthens consumer-brand ties, and increases loyalty (Chakraborty & Biswal, 2024). CE comprises three dimensions: cognitive processing (learning activities), affective (emotional responses during interactions), and activation (the time and effort invested in interactions) (Hollebeek et al., 2014). CE is highly context-dependent, so its underlying motives and outcomes vary (Hollebeek et al., 2019), potentially leading to distinct loyalty mechanisms across contexts. Customer-brand relationships in the food

and retail industries tend to be transactional, and SMBC focuses on economic and utilitarian goals, leading to passive engagement (Hausdorf & Timm, 2024). The transactional nature of communities can foster customers to engage with pragmatic goals or individualistic interests. Pragmatic motives (information and entertainment) are often the primary reasons for joining SMBC, whereas social motives tend to evolve (Tseng et al., 2017). Information seekers tend to engage passively, social seekers tend to engage actively, while entertainment seekers tend to have a more flexible engagement (Park & Jiang, 2021).

CE motives vary across different market segments, brand types, engagement types, and platforms. For example, research has shown that female consumers prioritize building social relationships and entertainment, whereas male consumers typically focus on information and

entertainment (Haverila et al., 2024). Extrinsic motives, such as social support, emerge as primary drivers of CE, particularly in the realm of luxury brands, complemented by intrinsic motivations, including entertainment seeking, lifestyle inspiration, product aesthetics, and brand authenticity (Aldhamiri et al., 2024). Moreover, studies of Facebook brand pages show that these pages predominantly feature entertaining rather than informational content, so factors such as entertainment have a strong effect on CE, whereas information motives do not (van Heerden & Wiese, 2021). Consumers tend to adopt different motives and engagement styles depending on brand type. For instance, hedonic brand customers tend to engage actively under economic and entertainment motives, whereas utilitarian brand customers often engage passively, driven by information and identification needs (Farhat et al., 2023). Additional research indicates that product brands tend to foster passive engagement, driven by economic and information needs, while non-product brands tend to cultivate active engagement, driven by social benefits and identification (Fernandes & Castro, 2020). Interestingly, both studies underscore that even passive engagement driven by these motives has a stronger direct influence on loyalty.

Furthermore, high-quality relationships strongly influence customer loyalty, where trust and commitment are essential mediators in this dynamic. A study in the fast-food industry highlights that consistent messaging across digital channels enhances trust and loyalty (Fatorachian et al., 2025). SMBC encourages consumers to interact and observe the brand, leading to an increased interest and trust in it. In this dynamic, trust becomes a critical mediator in transforming engagement into loyalty (Li et al., 2020; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022). Customers who have trust in the brand tend to demonstrate higher levels of commitment and loyalty (Chou et al., 2023). Moreover, highly committed customers are more likely to remain loyal and continue praising the overall brand performance despite disappointing experiences, and are less influenced by price increases (Ampornklinkaew, 2023). This interconnectedness of trust, commitment, and loyalty illustrates the significance of nurturing strong relationships in building a loyal customer base.

In addition to directly fostering trust, CE within agri-food SMBC can increase perceived economic and educational benefits, which are integral to fostering commitment and loyalty. Prior studies reveal that community benefits not only heighten community engagement but also encourage consumers to help their peers, recommend brands, and provide feedback (Hassan et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2024). Since food SMBCs are active in providing remunerative (i.e., discounts) and educational content (Kulikovskaja et al., 2023; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021), economic and educational benefits are promising to foster community commitment and loyalty. Agri-food consumers actively seek useful information, discounts, and the best deals within SMBC (Benn et al., 2015; Park & Jiang, 2021). Nevertheless, research suggests that while economic benefits do not significantly influence passive and active engagement within SMBC, this benefit tends to negatively impact passive engagement in certain contexts (Farhat et al., 2023). Additionally, another study also reveals that economic benefits do not promote active and passive engagement, but this benefit tends to encourage passive engagement when viewed through the lens of product brands (Fernandes & Castro, 2020). CE also does not increase economic benefit, and this benefit does not foster loyalty even when mediated by satisfaction (Gummerus et al., 2012). The variability of findings underscores that brand type can influence the perceived importance of economic benefits in the SMBC context.

Perceived educational benefits are another key aspect in the dynamics of agri-food marketing on social media. Educational content not only encourages cognitive processing but also enhances emotional attachment, ultimately influencing purchase decisions (Knihov & Knihova, 2021; Terho et al., 2022). The educational benefits of such content can be measured by the perceived increase in knowledge and skills associated with the product (Knihov & Knihova, 2021). Research indicates that educational content on food affects consumer behavior by improving knowledge and skills, and promoting healthier food choices (McManus & Pendergast, 2025). Young consumers who are passionate about food often use social media to find inspiration for food purchases, new recipes, and dining options (Jang et al., 2024). In cuttlefish marketing, for instance, retailers utilize

Instagram to promote product quality, cooking methods, and serving methods. This strategy not only provides consumers with new knowledge but also sparks their interest in purchasing products, trying recipes, creating and sharing their cooking experiences on social media, and building a more authentic promotional cycle (Gómez et al., 2023).

To explore these dynamics, this study integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Katz et al., 1973) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1959). UGT posits that individuals interact with media to satisfy cognitive, affective, and social integrative needs (Katz et al., 1973). This study frames these needs into three primary engagement motives: information for cognitive needs, entertainment for affective needs, and social relationships for social integrative needs. Information motives include seeking and learning information, entertainment motives involve visiting the community during leisure time for enjoyment or relaxation, and social relationship motives reflect an individual's desire to connect with others (Kamboj, 2020). Uses and gratification motives can indirectly influence trust, purchase intention (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022), and loyalty (Farhat et al., 2023). Moreover, SET emphasizes that con-

sumers interact with a brand based on perceptions of costs and rewards (Harrigan et al., 2018; Homans, 1958). This study employs the reward concept to develop economic and educational benefits, following previous studies that developed similar constructs (Hassan et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2024). Economic benefits refer to perceived monetary benefits, e.g., discounts, and non-monetary benefits, such as time savings in product search (Gwinner et al., 1998), whereas educational benefits refer to perceived knowledge and skills from SMBCs' engagement. This theory also highlights trust as a critical predictor of commitment and loyalty (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Trust reflects consumer confidence in a brand's honesty and reliability (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), commitment indicates maintaining interaction and emotional attachment (Cook et al., 2006), whereas loyalty involves behaviors such as recommending the brand, repurchase intention, and continued purchasing (Cossío-silva et al., 2016).

CE in SMBC is driven by diverse motives, which have been widely studied. However, its significance is highly context-specific, underscoring the need to understand its role in the agri-food retailer context. Although previous research indicates that

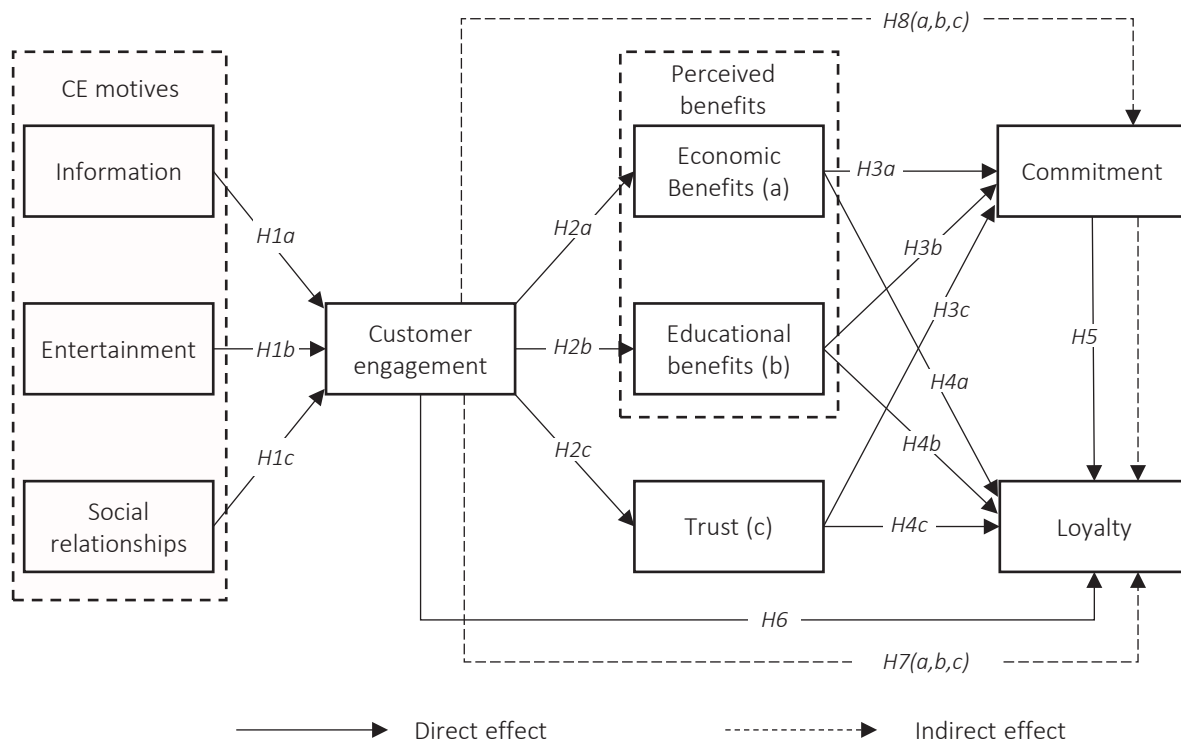


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

CE, driven by uses and gratifications motives, directly affects loyalty, SET highlights that critical mediators, including trust and perceived benefits, mediate the relationship between CE and loyalty. The literature shows that the debate surrounding the role of economic benefits warrants clarification, and the lack of comprehensive studies examining educational benefits creates a gap in our understanding of how they foster commitment and loyalty within agri-food SMBC.

Therefore, the study aims to investigate how engagement motives influence loyalty by examining what motives affect CE and how educational benefits, economic benefits, trust, and commitment mediate the relationship between CE and loyalty.

The conceptual framework is in Figure 1, and the hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: (a) Information, (b) entertainment, and (c) social relationships positively impact CE.*
- H2: CE positively impacts (a) economic benefits, (b) educational benefits, and (c) trust.*
- H3: (a) Economic benefits, (b) educational benefits, and (c) trust positively impact commitment.*
- H4: (a) Economic benefits, (b) educational benefits, and (c) trust positively impact loyalty.*
- H5: Commitment positively impacts loyalty.*
- H6: CE positively impacts loyalty.*
- H7: CE positively impacts loyalty through mediating (a) economic benefits, (b) educational benefits, and (c) trust.*
- H8: CE positively impacts loyalty through mediating (a) economic benefits-commitment, (b) educational benefits-commitment, and (c) trust-commitment.*

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study used a cross-sectional, quantitative design targeting agri-food consumers who follow agri-food SMBC on Instagram, made a purchase at the store in the last three months, and are over 18 years

old. Instagram is the most popular social platform for agri-food retailers in Indonesia. These criteria are relevant to ensure that respondents are actively engaged in agri-food SMBC, allowing for accurate measurement of their engagement and loyalty based on recent shopping experiences. In social research, the Research Ethics Committee at our university mandates that participants should be over 18 years old. At this age, individuals can make independent decisions and complete questionnaires without parental supervision. We did not restrict our study to a specific area, as it aimed to explore the behavioral mechanisms underlying relationships among variables while prioritizing theoretical generalization.

Data were collected through an online survey employing non-probability purposive sampling from October 2024 to January 2025. This sampling method allows researchers to select a particular sample that aligns with the research objectives. Because the survey was conducted online, we collected data through a two-stage process. First, we used Instagram ads to identify potential participants and minimize the risk of qualification fraud, resulting in 1,667 responses. After data validation, we sent the survey link to individuals who met our criteria and agreed to participate, resulting in 395 responses. To ensure relevance, screening questions were used to identify only qualified participants, and they were also asked to provide proof of the transaction. Following data validation, we retained 247 valid responses for analysis. The validation process involved verifying transaction records and removing duplicate and incomplete data. Each respondent who completed the survey received IDR 25,000 credited to their e-wallet. We adopted a 20:1 sample-to-ratio variable as a minimum sample size for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019), yielding a minimum sample size of 160.

The University Ethics Committee approved the procedures of this study (Approval Number: KE/UGM/118/EC/2024). Written consent was obtained from all respondents prior to completing the questionnaire. They were informed about the study's aims, the voluntary nature of their participation, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, and anonymity. This study collects personal data, but we ensured its confidentiality and anonymity for publication.

The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire, including: (1) screening questions, (2)

demographic data, (3) engagement motives (information, entertainment, social relationships), (4) customer engagement within SMBCs, (5) educational benefits, (6) economic benefits, (7) trust, (8) commitment, and (9) loyalty. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” and adapted from prior studies to suit the agri-food SMBC context (the complete item measurements are provided in Appendix A1):

1. Information, entertainment, and social relationships: modified from (Kamboj, 2020) to measure consumer motives for SMBCs’ engagement.
2. Customer engagement: modified from Hollebeek et al. (2014) to assess cognitive, affective, and behavioral activities within agri-food SMBCs.
3. Educational benefits: derived from Knihov and Knihova (2021) to measure perceived knowledge and skills related to agri-food products from the brand community.
4. Economic benefits: adapted from Gwinner et al. (1998) to assess perceived monetary and non-monetary benefits from the brand community.
5. Trust: modified from Chou et al. (2023) to measure beliefs in the brand’s reliability and integrity and in the brand community.
6. Commitment, adapted from Sui & Baloglu (2003) to assess the desire to maintain a relationship and emotional attachment.
7. Loyalty, adapted from Castañeda (2011) to measure behaviors such as repurchase intent, store recommendations, and purchase action.

To answer the item measurements, participants were asked to refer to their most frequently used agri-food online store. Then, data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4 through two steps: reflective measurement model evaluation to examine validity and reliability, and structural model evaluation for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2021). Table 1 summarizes respondents’ profiles. They were customers of various agri-food retailers, such as Segari, Kedaimart, and Sayurbox, with 70.45% residing in metropolitan cities.

**Table 1.** Respondent profiles

Profiles	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	16	6.48 %
	Female	231	93.52 %
Age	19-40	226	91.50%
	> 41	21	8.50%
Education	High school	46	18.62%
	Diploma/Bachelor	167	67.61%
	Postgraduate	34	13.77%
Occupation	Housewife	104	42.11%
	Employee	65	26.32%
	Others	78	31.57%
Shopping frequency*	Weekly	65	26.32%
	Monthly	169	68.42%
	Irregularly	13	5.26%
Number of stores used	1	141	57.09%
	2	64	25.91%
	> 2	42	17.00%
Long-time shopping at the store* (year)	<1	66	26.72%
	1-2	89	36.03%
	>2	92	37.25%
Long-time following the SMBC* (year)	< 1	100	40.49%
	1-2	78	31.58%
	>2	69	27.93%

Note: \*Refers to one store most frequently used.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Measurement model evaluation and model fit

Measurement model evaluation revealed that loadings for each item were > 0.7, indicating good convergent validity (Table 2). One item of entertainment (EN2) was identified as collinear (VIF > 5), and three CE items of CE (CE6-8) were found to be invalid (loadings < 0.7), excluded from further analysis to enhance construct reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) was > 0.5, indicating good convergent validity. Cronbach’s Alpha (CA) values for all constructs were within the 0.7–0.95 range, and composite reliability (CR) values were > 0.70, indicating that internal consistency validity was met. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), the most conservative criterion among the discriminant validity tests (Henseler et al., 2015). The results show that all HTMT values were < 0.85, indicating that discriminant validity has been established (Table 3).

The results of the model fit evaluation indicated a good fit, with a Standardized Root Mean Square

Residual (SRMR) of 0.093. A value of SRMR < 0.10 is an acceptable fit (Ringle et al., 2024). The model fit was also evaluated using the Normed Fit Index (NFI), which was 0.712; higher values are better (Kline, 2016). The NFI value > 0.9 indicates a good fit; however, the NFI is often influenced by model complexity (Ringle et al., 2024).

**Table 2.** Measurement model evaluation

Construct	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Information	IN1	0.867	0.809	0.888	0.725
	IN2	0.884			
	IN3	0.801			
Entertainment	EN1	0.908	0.802	0.910	0.835
	EN3	0.920			
Social relationships	SR1	0.945	0.910	0.943	0.848
	SR2	0.920			
	SR3	0.897			
Economic benefits	ECB1	0.827	0.874	0.914	0.726
	ECB2	0.901			
	ECB3	0.867			
Educational benefits	EDB1	0.860	0.874	0.914	0.726
	EDB2	0.850			
	EDB3	0.845			
	EDB4	0.853			
Trust	T1	0.829	0.821	0.882	0.651
	T2	0.822			
	T3	0.819			
	T4	0.757			
Customer engagement	CE1	0.870	0.910	0.932	0.734
	CE2	0.846			
	CE3	0.839			
	CE4	0.880			
	CE5	0.849			
Commitment	C1	0.798	0.831	0.888	0.665
	C2	0.824			
	C3	0.877			
	C4	0.759			
Loyalty	LOY1	0.820	0.818	0.879	0.646
	LOY2	0.763			
	LOY3	0.802			
	LOY4	0.828			

**Table 3.** HTMT criterion

Constructs	C	CE	ECB	EDB	EN	IN	LOY	SR	T
C									
CE	0.726								
ECB	0.541	0.595							
EDB	0.561	0.755	0.598						
EN	0.433	0.667	0.512	0.583					
IN	0.607	0.633	0.811	0.671	0.505				
LOY	0.647	0.385	0.220	0.277	0.202	0.223			
SR	0.310	0.495	0.410	0.491	0.730	0.403	0.130		
T	0.702	0.438	0.279	0.294	0.223	0.323	0.601	0.094	

Note: IN: Information, EN: Entertainment, SR: Social Relationships, ECB: Economic Benefits, EDB: Educational Benefits, T: Trust, C: Commitment, LOY: Loyalty.

Additionally, we evaluate the proposed model's predictive relevance and capability using R<sup>2</sup> and Q<sup>2</sup> for the endogenous constructs. The R<sup>2</sup> values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 imply large, moderate, and weak explanatory power, while the predictive significance of Q<sup>2</sup> values should be more than zero (Hair et al., 2021). Table 4 shows that R<sup>2</sup> values ranged between 0.144 and 0.497, indicating an acceptable range with weak to moderate explanatory power. The Q<sup>2</sup> values range from 0.038 to 0.433, indicating that the model's prediction accuracy is sufficient. Our model accounted for 35.3% of the variance in loyalty among agri-food consumers. Commitment showed the most substantial mediation effect, as indicated by the highest R<sup>2</sup> (0.497), while CE had the most significant predictive power in the model, as indicated by the highest Q<sup>2</sup> (0.433).

**Table 4.** R<sub>2</sub> and Q<sub>2</sub> prediction

Constructs	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup> <sub>predict</sub>
Customer engagement	0.453	0.433
Economic benefits	0.291	0.335
Educational benefits	0.461	0.367
Trust	0.144	0.056
Commitment	0.497	0.208
Loyalty	0.353	0.038

### 3.2. Direct effect testing

Table 5 shows that information ( $\beta = 0.366$ ) and entertainment ( $\beta = 0.356$ ) motives have a significant and positive affect CE. However, social relationships did not show a significant impact. We also measure the effect size ( $f^2$ ), where  $f^2$  of 0.35 indicates a large effect, 0.15 a medium effect, 0.02 a small effect, and <0.02 no effect (Cohen, 1988). The effect size often shows essential findings in PLS-SEM (Haverila et al., 2024). The results indi-

**Table 5.** Direct effect analysis

Hypotheses	Relationship	$\beta$	p-value	t-value	$f^2$	Conclusion
H1a	IN → CE	0.366*	0.000	6.266	0.201 <sup>M</sup>	Supported
H1b	EN → CE	0.356*	0.000	5.548	0.131 <sup>S</sup>	Supported
H1c	SR → CE	0.107	0.073	1.792	0.012 <sup>N</sup>	Unsupported
H2a	CE → ECB	0.539*	0.000	11.171	0.410 <sup>L</sup>	Supported
H2b	CE → EDB	0.679*	0.000	18.295	0.856 <sup>L</sup>	Supported
H2c	CE → T	0.379*	0.000	7.173	0.168 <sup>M</sup>	Supported
H3a	ECB → C	0.232*	0.000	4.045	0.076 <sup>S</sup>	Supported
H3b	EDB → C	0.240*	0.000	4.275	0.080 <sup>S</sup>	Supported
H3c	T → C	0.469*	0.000	9.940	0.404 <sup>L</sup>	Supported
H4a	ECB → LOY	-0.076	0.283	1.074	0.006 <sup>N</sup>	Unsupported
H4b	EDB → LOY	0.002	0.971	0.037	0.000 <sup>N</sup>	Unsupported
H4c	T → LOY	0.262*	0.000	3.652	0.070 <sup>S</sup>	Supported
H5	C → LOY	0.431*	0.000	5.352	0.144 <sup>S</sup>	Supported
H6	CE → LOY	0.010	0.904	0.120	0.000 <sup>N</sup>	Unsupported

Note: Significant at \* $p < 0.01$ , L = large effect, M = medium effect, S = small effect, N = no effect.

cate that information motives have a medium effect on CE ( $f^2 = 0.201$ ), while entertainment has a small effect ( $f^2 = 0.131$ ). CE shows a significant and positive influence on economic benefits ( $\beta = 0.539$ ), educational benefits ( $\beta = 0.679$ ), and trust ( $\beta = 0.379$ ), but did not significantly influence loyalty. The  $f^2$  indicates that CE has a large effect on economic ( $f^2 = 0.410$ ) and educational benefits ( $f^2 = 0.856$ ), whereas trust has a medium effect ( $f^2 = 0.168$ ). Moreover, economic benefits ( $\beta = 0.232$ ), educational benefits ( $\beta = 0.240$ ), and trust ( $\beta = 0.469$ ) significantly positively affect commitment. Trust ( $f^2 = 0.070$ ) and commitment ( $f^2 = 0.144$ ) have a significant positive influence on loyalty, albeit with small effects, whereas economic and educational benefits do not have a significant impact. Economic ( $f^2 = 0.076$ ) and educational benefits ( $f^2 = 0.080$ ) have a small effect on commitment, while trust ( $f^2 = 0.404$ ) has a large effect.

### 3.3. Mediation effect testing

Table 6 shows that trust ( $\beta = 0.099$ ) and trust-commitment ( $\beta = 0.076$ ) positively mediate the

relationship between CE and loyalty. Nevertheless, economic and educational benefits did not significantly mediate these relationships, whereas economic benefits-commitment ( $\beta = 0.053$ ) and educational benefits-commitment ( $\beta = 0.070$ ) did, positively and significantly. This finding indicates that commitment is a key mediator between CE relationships and loyalty, particularly regarding economic and educational benefits.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The study’s findings emphasize that engagement motives indirectly affect loyalty among those who engaged with SMBC, as also found by Farhat et al. (2023) and Fernandes and Castro (2020). However, this study offers a new nuance by demonstrating that, in the agri-food retailer context, key mediators, including trust, economic benefits, educational benefits, and commitment, play an essential role in transforming customer engagement (CE) into loyalty, a factor not addressed in their studies. These findings align with SET (Cropanzano

**Table 6.** Mediation analysis

Hypotheses	Relationship	$\beta$	p-value	t-value	Conclusion
H7a	CE → ECB → LOY	-0.042	0.314	1.006	Unsupported
H7b	CE → EDB → LOY	-0.001	0.981	0.024	Unsupported
H7c	CE → T → LOY	0.099*	0.002	3.133	Supported
H8a	CE → ECB → C → LOY	0.053*	0.005	2.822	Supported
H8b	CE → EDB → C → LOY	0.070*	0.003	2.963	Supported
H8c	CE → T → C → LOY	0.076*	0.000	3.708	Supported

Note: Significant at \* $p < 0.01$ .

& Mitchell, 2005), which underscores the importance of mediating factors in transforming social exchanges into loyalty. Additionally, the findings provide new insights into the integration of UGT and SET, thereby enhancing our understanding of how engagement motives contribute to customer loyalty.

Agri-food customers primarily engage in SMBC to satisfy their information and entertainment needs, rather than seeking social relationships. This is a significant finding for the agri-food retailer context, as it contrasts with research conducted by Haverila et al. (2024) in non-agri-food brands, such as automotive and travel, where social motives are identified as the main drivers of CE among female consumers, despite the majority of respondents in our study being women. Moreover, this study shows that information motives have the most significant impact on CE, while van Heerden and Wiese (2021) found that this motive does not promote CE. For agri-food consumers, their need to gain value is more important than building social relationships. In addition, the significance of entertainment motives aligns with existing research (Aldhamiri et al., 2024; Haverila et al., 2024; van Heerden & Wiese, 2021), indicating that entertainment is critical for agri-food consumers. Even though they are shopping for daily necessities, they still need an enjoyable shopping experience. These findings enrich UGT (Katz et al., 1973) by showing that CE motives are highly context-specific, as also supported by existing studies.

Interactions within SMBC driven by information and entertainment motives significantly enhance trust, economic benefits, and educational benefits. The essential finding is the significance of educational benefits, which show the largest effect size ( $f^2 = 0.856$ ), followed by economic benefits ( $f^2 = 0.410$ ) and trust ( $f^2 = 0.168$ ). This finding enriches the concept of rewards in SET (Homans, 1958) by showing that educational benefits are a strong outcome of social exchanges between consumers and brands within SMBC. This finding indicates that for agri-food consumers, SMBC serves not only as a source of economic benefits but also as a trusted learning environment. Most respondents in this study are young consumers, suggesting that their perspectives play an important role in this finding, as they often learn new food-related knowledge on

social media (Gómez et al., 2023; Jang et al., 2024). Moreover, in line with the idea that customers' food knowledge influences purchasing behavior (McManus & Pendergast, 2025), the findings show that educational benefits ultimately encourage them to continue shopping at the store, but only when they are committed to the community.

The significance of the CE to economic benefits suggests that consumers also view their engagement in SMBC as an economic transaction. This finding offers a new perspective on the concept of brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) by highlighting that in the context of agri-food retailers, brand communities are based not only on shared awareness and tradition but also on monetary incentives, reflecting the transactional nature of community support. Further, the results indicate that this benefit indirectly enhances loyalty when customers have committed to the community. This suggests that, for agri-food consumers, economic benefits can encourage them to continue shopping at the store. This finding contrasts with previous research on non-agri-food retail that did not find a significant relationship between CE and economic benefits (Farhat et al., 2023; Fernandes & Castro, 2020; Gummerus et al., 2012). This highlights that differences in brand context not only trigger distinct motives but also result in varied engagement outcomes. Agri-food consumers, who actively seek special offers, engage with SMBCs that frequently offer economic benefits, might support the significance of the finding.

Another interesting finding is that although CE within SMBC has a smaller effect on trust than those benefits, trust can directly influence loyalty, with an effect size larger than those benefits. This indicates that establishing trust is crucial for transforming CE into loyalty. In the context of agri-food SMBC, trust tends to be lower because engagement is often passive. Trust in this community might primarily be built through interactions with the content and its effectiveness in meeting promises and reducing customer risk. On the other hand, higher trust levels are strongly fostered by social interactions among community members (Sethi et al., 2024), but agri-food consumers show less interest in building social relationships in SMBC that might result in lower trust. However, agri-food customers may have a foundational lev-

el of trust based on their shopping experiences, which strongly enhances commitment and loyalty. These findings align with existing research indicating that trust driven by customer engagement has strongly contributed to loyalty (Chou et al., 2023; Li et al., 2020; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022).

The study's findings have important practical implications for community managers seeking to manage their SMBC effectively to enhance customer loyalty. First, fulfilling the information and entertainment needs is essential to enhancing CE. The important point is that incorporating entertaining elements into all types of digital marketing content in SMBC is essential for effectively engaging customers (Lou & Xie, 2021). To enhance

CE, managers can prioritize educational value as a core value proposition offering. Second, although economic benefits are important, companies should implement this strategy primarily as a response to market demands and competition. To ensure sustainable loyalty, marketing managers must stay focused on continuously improving their store performance to increase customer trust. Finally, a key implication is that companies need to enhance trust-building activities. They can improve interpersonal interactions within SMBC by addressing inquiries and responding positively to negative feedback. Additionally, leveraging credible influencers in marketing campaigns that resonate with the target market segment can further enhance customer trust.

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## CONCLUSION

This study examines how engagement motives affect customer loyalty among agri-food retailers, focusing on the impact of engagement motives on CE, and the roles of educational benefits, economic benefits, trust, and commitment in mediating the relationship between CE and loyalty. The findings underscore that CE within SMBC is essential for customer loyalty among agri-food retailers. The results show that engagement motives, including information and entertainment, positively influence CE, whereas social relationships do not have a significant impact. Moreover, CE positively affects economic benefits, educational benefits, and trust. Ultimately, trust directly influences loyalty and is mediated by commitment, while economic and educational benefits affect loyalty only through commitment.

The findings indicate that engagement motives directly enhance CE and indirectly foster loyalty through complex mechanisms. When CE is driven by the need for information and entertainment, it fosters loyalty among customers who perceive the brand as reliable and trustworthy, regardless of their commitment to the brand community. In contrast, customers who perceive economic and educational benefits from their engagement tend to exhibit loyalty only when they are committed to the brand community. Therefore, trust serves as the key mediator that transforms CE in SMBC into loyalty, whereas the perception of economic and educational benefits necessitates a commitment mediator before leading to loyalty.

Although this research makes a significant contribution, it still has limitations. The use of purposive sampling and a focus solely on Instagram users in Indonesia may create bias and limit the generalizability of the results. However, this method was the most effective way to obtain a relevant sample for the study objectives. Additionally, relying exclusively on self-reported survey data may limit the depth of analysis. To enrich the findings, future research should consider incorporating interviews with representative customers and observations of SMBC activities. This approach could not only enhance the findings but also refine the conceptual framework by analyzing additional factors that influence the relationships among model constructs.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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# APPENDIX A

**Table A1.** Measurement items

<b>Items</b>
<b>Information</b>
I visit the brand community to stay up to date on products and services
I visit the brand community to learn information about products and services
I visit the brand community to find out about the store's events that align with my interests
<b>Entertainment</b>
I visit the brand community to spend my leisure time
I visit the brand community to get entertainment
<b>Social relationship</b>
I visit the brand community to interact with other followers who share my interest in this store
I visit the brand community to share information with other followers
I visit the brand community to make new friends
<b>Customer engagement</b>
I am excited to learn many things in this brand community
Exploring this brand community piques my curiosity about the store's various aspects
I feel positive when visiting this brand community
I feel joy when visiting this brand community
I feel happy when visiting this brand community
<b>Economic benefits</b>
I get updated information on discounts or promos more easily in this brand community
This brand community helps me get discounts, promos, or bonuses more easily during this period
This brand community saves me time on product searches
<b>Educational benefits</b>
This brand community enhanced my knowledge about the benefits of certain agri-food products
This brand community increases my understanding of the origins of agri-food products (such as cultivation, harvesting, or processing)
This brand community enhances my knowledge of agri-food products (such as new recipes or other helpful information)
This community enhances my expertise in agri-food products (such as healthier recipe preparation)
<b>Trust</b>
I believe the brand community posts share reliable information
I believe that this store will not harm me
I believe the store's products and services are reliable for fulfilling my needs
I feel secure shopping at this store
<b>Commitment</b>
I will continue to follow this brand community because it offers many benefits
I will maintain a positive relationship with this store despite the numerous other agri-food stores available
I will continue to visit this brand community
I feel an emotional connection to this store that makes me not want to leave it
<b>Loyalty</b>
I recommend this store to others
This store is my top choice for online agri-food shopping
I encourage friends and relatives to shop at this store
I will continue shopping at this store in the future