

HALAL FAST FOOD LOYALTY: BRAND IMAGE AS A MEDIATOR OF SMMA, CERTIFICATION, AND CSR

Mukhammad Rizal*, Raditha Dwi Vata Hapsari, Ida Yulianti
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), halal certification, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) influence consumer loyalty in halal fast-food, with brand image as a mediator. Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, data from 483 Muslim Generation Z consumers of KFC in Malang City were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The results show that SMMA and CSR positively affect loyalty both directly and indirectly through brand image. Halal certification has no direct effect but indirectly shapes loyalty via brand image. The findings suggest that halal certification functions as a baseline expectation rather than a differentiating factor. This study contributes to Islamic marketing by clarifying the shifting role of institutional religious standards and offers managerial implications for strengthening digital engagement, CSR authenticity, and halal communication.

Keywords: Generation Z; Halal Consumer Behavior; Customer Loyalty; Social Media Marketing

*Corresponding Author: mukhammadrizal20@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Halal food is the second largest sector in the global halal industry market after finance. According to the State of Global Islamic Economy Report SGIER (2023), the halal food industry trend over the past eleven years (2012-2023) has contributed 18.81% to the global sector's economic value. This figure is projected to continue growing to reach USD 1.94 trillion with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.2% by 2028 (SGIER, 2025).

The increasing engagement of Muslim consumers with fast-food products has become a notable phenomenon over the past decade (Awan, 2015). In Indonesia, this trend has been accompanied by rapid expansion of the fast-food industry, particularly in urban areas, with growth reaching 44.6% between 2007 and 2021 (Kemenkes, 2024). According to the (Opinion Park, 2024), the five best fast-food brands in Indonesia are Burger King, HokBen, KFC, McDonald's, and Pizza Hut. Another study conducted by (Opinion Park, 2024) found that the five fast food brands most consumed by Indonesians are California Fried Chicken, Flip Burger, Burger King, KFC, and McDonald's. Competition between KFC, McDonald's, and other restaurants is fierce as they strive to be the best in the eyes of consumers. However, based on the two analyses above, KFC has managed to establish itself as the market leader in the fast-food industry. The majority of respondents who chose KFC were Generation Z (57.8%).

KFC has successfully created high brand recall and brand association in the minds of Indonesian consumers. This is evidenced by the fact that people often refer to fried chicken as "Kentucky chicken," when in fact "Kentucky" is an abbreviation of the KFC brand name (Paramesthi & Kusumawardhani, 2024; Rahmah & Marpaung, 2022). In addition, the iconic Colonel Sanders logo forms a visual identity that is easily recognizable by consumers (Fauzi, 2023). This makes KFC superior to other fast-food brands.

Toward the end of 2023, the global business landscape experienced heightened turbulence, as multinational corporations increasingly confronted challenges extending beyond economic factors to encompass complex political and social issues. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a complex political unrest with deep historical roots involving politics, religion, demographics, and territorial disputes (Schneider et al., 2024). The boycott movement resulted in a decline in KFC sales. KFC's annual financial report in Indonesia states that it has suffered losses from 2020 to 2025.

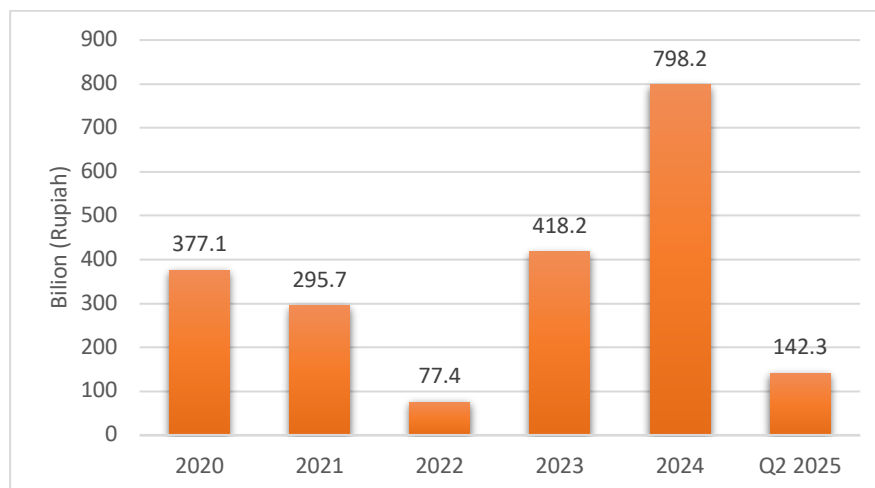


Figure 1. KFC Restaurant Current Year Loss Reports (2020-2025)

Source: KFC Financial Report (2025)

The peak of KFC's losses was Rp798.2 billion in 2024. As a result of these losses, KFC was forced to close 47 outlets and lay off 2,274 employees. PT. Fast Food cited two causes for the company's heavy losses. *First*, weak consumer purchasing power. *Second*, the worsening market situation due to the crisis in the Middle East. These losses continued into Q2 2025, reaching 142.3 billion.

Shifts in consumer behavior toward KFC fast food have posed significant challenges for marketers in attracting and sustaining customer loyalty, which has become increasingly difficult to achieve and has contributed to declining sales performance (Banerji & Singh, 2024). Consequently, fast-food marketers are required to strengthen consumer loyalty by fostering brand trust and a positive brand image (Haseeb et al., 2024; Quoquab et al., 2020).

Research on consumer behavior toward halal food has gained increasing attention in recent years (Ahmadova & Aliyev, 2021; Ashraf, 2019; Bashir et al., 2019). Much of the existing literature focuses on halal certification (Bux et al., 2022) and the integrity of halal food supply chains (Handayani et al., 2022; Rejeb et al., 2021). Extending this discussion, Ramli et al. (2023) examined potential barriers to halal food acceptance among non-Muslim consumers. Maison et al. (2019) highlighted variations in Indonesian Muslim responses to halal-certified products based on differing levels of religiosity.

Several other studies focus on five clusters of halal food research, namely supply chain, production and quality, tourism and management, awareness and certification (Rejeb et al., 2023; Secinaro & Calandra, 2021). Mamun et al. (2021) and Hassan et al. (2022) review research on the development of Islamic marketing in the halal industry. A number of other studies discuss the behavior of halal food consumers (Amalia et al., 2020; Khan & Khan, 2021; Sherwani et al., 2018; Vanany et al., 2020). Very few researchers have discussed the behavior of Generation Z consumers towards fast food consumer loyalty from an Islamic marketing perspective. Therefore, to expand the research and fill the gaps in previous literature, this study analyzes SMMA, halal certification, and CSR as determinants of Generation Z consumer behavior towards loyalty in purchasing KFC fast food in Malang City, mediated by brand image.

Despite the centrality of halal certification in Islamic marketing theory, empirical evidence regarding its role in shaping consumer loyalty remains inconclusive, particularly in mature halal markets (Alanazi et al., 2024; Rojak et al., 2024). Conventional Islamic marketing literature conceptualizes halal certification as a key extrinsic cue that reduces uncertainty, enhances trust, and directly fosters loyalty among Muslim consumers (Latif, 2020). However, emerging evidence from Muslim-majority contexts suggests a paradoxical pattern in which halal certification no longer functions as a decisive loyalty driver, especially among younger consumer cohorts (Khasanah, 2025).

This study explicitly engages with this theoretical puzzle by examining why halal certification fails to exert a direct influence on consumer loyalty in a highly religious consumption setting. Drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, we argue that halal certification has increasingly become an institutionalized and taken-for-granted market requirement rather than a salient marketing stimulus. As a result, halal certification operates primarily at the cognitive level by shaping consumers' internal evaluations particularly brand image rather than directly triggering behavioral responses such as loyalty.

In contrast, marketing stimuli that convey symbolic meaning, social alignment, and ethical positioning, such as social media marketing activities and corporate social responsibility remain salient and emotionally engaging for Muslim Generation Z consumers. These stimuli activate organismic mechanisms related to identity, values, and moral judgment, which are more strongly translated into loyalty behavior. Based on theorizing halal certification as a baseline condition rather than a competitive differentiator, this study reconceptualizes its role in Islamic marketing and contributes to the literature by explaining the indirect, rather than direct, pathway through which halal certification influences consumer loyalty via brand image.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

According to Russell (1974), SOR theory explains how environmental stimuli affect an individual's internal state (organism), which then influences the individual's response or behavior. This theory is widely used to understand consumer behavior, making it appropriate for this study. This can be proven by several previous studies that applied the SOR theory to consumer loyalty (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Quoquab et al., 2020; Yadav & Rahman, 2018).

SOR shows that human stimulation and behavior are linked by organismic components (Buxbaum, 2016). The term “organism” refers to the internal state of perception, feelings, beliefs, and thinking practices (Bagozzi, 1986). This idea is also supported by previous researchers who

have studied the effects of marketing stimuli on retention strategies in the Malaysian restaurant industry (Abdullah et al., 2018). Halal certification is considered an effective “stimulus” marketing strategy, with trust as the organism and consumer loyalty as the response (Quoquab et al., 2020).

This study employs the SOR framework as an analytical model in which external marketing and ethical cues function as stimuli, loyalty represents the response, and brand image is positioned as the focal organismic state. Brand image is theoretically justified as the organism because it operates as a higher-order cognitive affective schema that integrates functional evaluations, symbolic meanings, and moral judgments into a coherent mental representation of the brand (Mohamed & Ünsalan, 2025). In ethically sensitive and boycott-prone contexts, such as CSR-related controversies, consumers tend to interpret corporate actions through their implications for the brand’s overall moral character rather than through isolated constructs like trust, moral congruence, or perceived hypocrisy. While these alternative constructs capture specific and situational psychological reactions, brand image consolidates them into a relatively stable internal state that is more proximal to loyalty formation. Thus, positioning brand image as the dominant organism provides a theoretically robust explanation of how value-laden stimuli are internalized and translated into consumer loyalty.

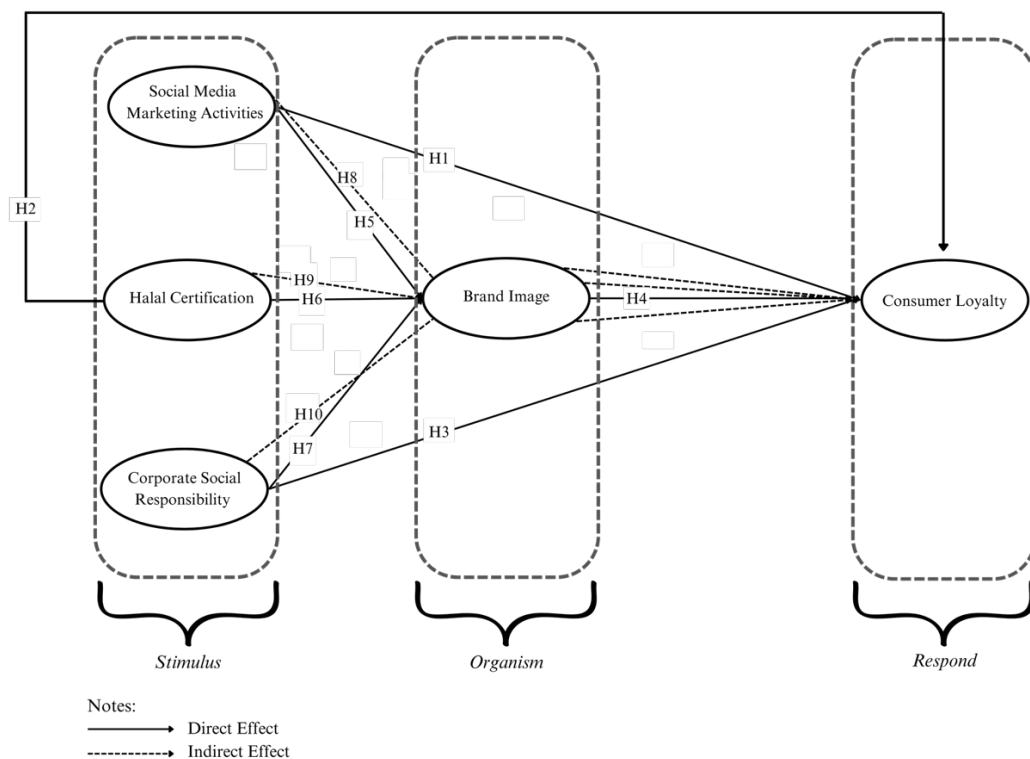


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework
Source: Authors Formulation (2025)

Hypothesis Development

Understanding the influence of consumer behavior and SMMA efforts is crucial to understanding their impact on brand loyalty (Sohaib & Han, 2023). In addition, due to the increasing importance of SMMA, there has been a surge of interest in researching the impact of SMMA on loyalty. Several researchers have studied the influence of SMMA on consumer loyalty (Gökerik, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). As conducted by Puspaningrum (2020), the findings prove that SMMA has a significant effect on increasing consumer loyalty to McDonald's in Malang City.

H1: Social media marketing activities has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty.

Halal certification leads to increased consumer loyalty. Various other studies highlight the positive effect of halal certification on consumer loyalty (Andrews et al., 2021; Marette et al., 2019; Maulida & Hapsari, 2024; Moazzam et al., 2024). Based on research by Jumeri et al. (2021), halal certification can increase meatball sales by 25-37.5% in Yogyakarta. Sales figures could grow significantly due to brand loyalty.

H2: Halal certification has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty.

CSR has evolved from a philanthropic approach to a purely strategic business approach that helps companies gain a competitive advantage (Fawad et al., 2020). According to Chi & Phan (2025), CSR is a good strategy, where its social component is the most important in building consumer loyalty. This finding is supported by Ali et al. (2021), who found that CSR has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty in the food chain industry in Pakistan. Another study states that CSR has a significant effect on consumer loyalty to food companies in China during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zhang, 2022).

Drawing on institutional theory and extensions of the SOR framework, halal certification in highly religious consumption contexts is increasingly perceived as a basic market requirement rather than a differentiating stimulus. Its presence is therefore insufficient to enhance loyalty, while its absence may trigger negative reactions (Hati et al., 2025). As a result, halal certification is expected to exert limited direct behavioral influence, functioning instead as a prerequisite that enables other value-laden stimuli, such as ethical positioning and brand-related meanings to operate effectively. This theoretical positioning informs the development of the halal-related hypotheses ex ante, allowing the study to test whether halal certification influences loyalty indirectly through internal evaluative mechanisms rather than assuming a uniform direct effect.

H3: Corporate social responsibility has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty.

The concept of brand image has been recognized for its significant influence on consumer loyalty. In the food industry, recent research shows that brand image directly and positively influences consumer loyalty (Ali et al., 2020; Barbosa et al., 2023; Espinosa et al., 2018; Mobarak et al., 2024; Peter Oppong, 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2024). Furthermore, Rehman & Elahi (2024) state that brand image significantly influences consumer loyalty to packaging semiotics (PS) in the behavior of food retail consumers in India.

H4: Brand image has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty.

Based on other studies, SMMA has been proven to have a positive effect on brand image. Bilgin (2018) found that marketing activities through social media, such as interaction, entertainment, and content personalization, can strengthen consumers' positive perceptions of brands in Turkey. Meanwhile, Cheung & Iii (2019) emphasized that social media marketing dimensions such as trendiness, customization, and electronic word of mouth significantly influence the formation of brand image in the minds of Facebook users in Hong Kong, Brazil, and Australia.

H5: Social media marketing activities has a positive and significant effect on brand image.

Based on the results of research by Desmaryani et al. (2024), halal certification has a positive and significant effect on brand image. This is influenced by halal certification, which provides assurance of halal status, safety, and product quality in accordance with sharia principles, thereby fostering trust and positive perceptions in the minds of consumers. The provision of halal labels or certification not only serves as a religious identity, but also as a symbol of the manufacturer's integrity and responsibility to its consumers (Falajabudien & Mas, 2020; Kurniawan, 2022).

H6: Halal certification has a positive and significant effect on brand image.

CSR is a corporate strategy to fulfill economic, social, ethical, and environmental responsibilities that can improve consumers' positive perception of a brand (Araújo et al., 2023). The implementation of CSR can create strong brand associations and enhance the functional and symbolic image of a brand in the eyes of consumers (He & Lai, 2014).

H7: Corporate social responsibility has a positive and significant effect on brand image.

Research conducted by Bilgin (2018) shows that marketing activities on social media not only increase brand awareness but also build a strong brand image and ultimately drive consumer loyalty. These findings are reinforced by Tarabieh (2022), who found that brand image serves as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between SMMA and loyalty.

H8: Brand image positively and significantly mediates SMMA on consumer loyalty.

Based on research by Desmaryani et al. (2024), halal certification has a positive influence on brand image formation, which in turn has an impact on increasing consumer loyalty. Halal certification not only serves as a guarantee of product halalness, but also as a symbol of the manufacturer's credibility and responsibility towards Muslim consumers. The brand image formed from trust in halal certification then fosters a sense of security and confidence in consumers when consuming products, which ultimately increases their loyalty.

H9: Brand image positively and significantly mediates halal certification on consumer loyalty.

In the context of the restaurant and food retail industry, CSR initiatives that focus on health, transparency, and sustainability have been shown to strengthen the positive image and customer trust in a brand (Kim & Ham, 2016). In line with this, Gürlek et al. (2017) emphasize that CSR indirectly creates customer loyalty through corporate image, which serves as a psychological bridge between corporate social activities and customer behavior. Similar findings are also confirmed by recent research in the Malaysian food retail sector, which shows that CSR perceptions have a significant effect on loyalty through brand image mediation (Min & Leong, 2024).

H10: Brand image positively and significantly mediates corporate social responsibility on consumer loyalty.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with explanatory research. This study explains the analysis and relationship between SMMA, halal certification, CSR, brand image, brand trust, and consumer loyalty to KFC food products in Malang City, Indonesia. This research was conducted in November-December 2025 among Generation Z KFC consumers in Malang City. Malang City was chosen as the research location because there is a total of four KFC outlets in Malang City, namely KFC Soekarno Hatta, KFC Kawi, KFC Sarinah, and KFC Malang Town Square. Additionally, considering that KFC's primary target consumers are teenagers (Simplilearn, 2025). Malang City is a strategic research location because the majority of Malang City's population is Generation Z, accounting for 24.8% of the total population of 885,270 people, or 219,540 people. Generation Z has characteristics that are inseparable from digital technology, so they have many options when choosing fast food (Andrea et al., 2016; Drive Research, 2023).

The sampling technique used is non-probability sampling with purposive sampling. The criteria used in this study were: Individuals who had purchased KFC products in Malang City more than once in the last six months; Generation Z aged 17 years and above; Muslim; Had seen KFC's CSR and product promotion content on social media. The Likert scale was applied to this research questionnaire to measure the perceptions of respondents who met the criteria regarding the consumer behavior of Generation Z in Malang City towards brand loyalty to KFC. In this study, questionnaires were administered through an online survey using Google Forms and face-to-face interviews with consumers. The respondents in this study were KFC consumers who had purchased KFC fast food products in Malang City, with a sample size of 503 respondents, but only 483 respondents met the criteria.

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) has been applied in various studies to analyze several marketing factors that influence halal food purchasing behavior (Hair et al., 2022), as done by (Febriandika et al., 2023; Puspaningrum, 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2024). The software used in this study was SmartPLS 4, which was used for SEM analysis using a two-step approach to assess the measurement model (outer model) and structural model (inner model) (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent and discriminant validity tests were conducted to evaluate the measurement model. To test convergent validity, this study used outer loading, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and Cronbach's

alpha. Structural model analysis was performed to ensure the robustness of the model developed during the study. All exogenous (independent) variables can significantly explain the variation in endogenous (dependent) variables and the existence of mediating variables as a link between the two.

RESULTS

The respondents in this study were consumers who had purchased KFC fast food products in Malang City at least once, totaling 483 respondents. Respondent characteristics reveal personal data about fast food consumers of the KFC brand who were respondents in this study. The characteristics of respondents in this study were grouped based on gender, subdistrict of residence in Malang City, education, occupation, and income.

Table 1. Respondents Demographics

Demographic Variable	Description	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	109	22.6
	Female	374	77.4
Subdistrict	Blimbing	85	17.6
	Klojen	111	23
	Lowokwaru	132	27.3
	Sukun	93	19.3
	Kedungkandang	62	12.8
Education	SMA/SMK/Equivalent	3	0.6
	Diploma	33	6.8
	S1	208	43.1
	S2	221	45.8
	S3	12	2.5
Job	Graduated	6	1.2
	Civil Servant/TNI-POLRI	6	1.2
	Public Sector Official	4	0.8
	Private Enterprise Officer	144	29.8
	Lecturer/Instructor	2	0.4
	Entrepreneur	39	8.1
	Student	3	0.6
	Graduate	247	51.2
	Housewife	2	0.4
	Non-Civil Servant Officer	28	5.8
Income	Others	8	1.7
	≤ Rp2.000.000	98	20.3
	Rp2.000.001 < Rp4.000.000	137	28.4
	Rp4.000.001 < Rp6.000.000	182	37.6
	Rp6.000.001 < Rp8.000.000	37	7.7
	Rp8.000.001 < Rp10.000.000	24	5
	≥ Rp10.000.000	5	1

Source: Authors' Compilation (2025)

Based on Table 1, there were 483 consumer respondents, with female respondents dominating at 374 respondents (77.4%). Based on the respondents' domicile in Malang City, Lowokwaru sub-district had the most respondents at 132 respondents (27.3%), due to its proximity to several campuses and its location in the city center. In terms of education level, the largest number of respondents were master's students, with 221 respondents (45.8%). Based on the respondents' occupations, the largest number were students, with 247 respondents (51.2%), followed by private company employees, with 144 respondents (29.8%).

Before testing hypotheses that reflect the structural relationship between variables, researchers need to ensure that the measurement model used meets the requirements of reliability and validity. This means that each indicator must be able to accurately represent the variable being measured. Therefore, evaluation of the measurement model is an important step in assessing convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability to ensure that the accuracy and consistency of the measurement results can be validated.

Convergent validity is based on the principle that the indicators used to measure a variable must show a high level of correlation with each other (Hair et al., 2021). In general, an indicator is said to have convergent validity if the outer loading value exceeds 0.70, indicating that the indicator is capable of explaining more than 50% of the variance of the variable it measures (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. Outer Model Evaluation (Construct Reliability & Validity)

Laten Variable	Indicator	Loading	VIF	Alpha	CR	AVE
Social Media Marketing Activities (X1)	SMMA1	0.694	1.601	0.853	0.876	0.541
	SMMA2	0.741	1.691			
	SMMA3	0.775	1.593			
	SMMA4	0.658	1.387			
	SMMA5	0.779	1.742			
	SMMA6	0.758	1.824			
Halal Certification (X2)	HC1	0.595	1.442	0.759	0.834	0.504
	HC2	0.696	1.515			
	HC3	0.785	1.590			
	HC4	0.749	1.602			
	HC5	0.709	1.267			
Corporate Social Responsibility (X3)	CSR1	0.680	1.478	0.858	0.894	0.586
	CSR2	0.821	2.169			
	CSR3	0.750	1.748			
	CSR4	0.772	1.796			
	CSR5	0.797	1.893			
	CSR6	0.765	1.752			
Brand Image (Z)	BI1	0.764	1.587	0.853	0.901	0.695
	BI2	0.853	2.210			
	BI3	0.882	2.555			
	BI4	0.831	1.973			
Customer Loyalty (Y)	CL1	0.775	1.840	0.818	0.869	0.528
	CL2	0.797	2.018			
	CL3	0.671	1.403			
	CL4	0.577	1.307			
	CL5	0.712	1.621			
	CL6	0.800	1.901			

Source: Adapted SmartPLS 4 Output (2026).

Based on Table 2, it shows that of the 27 indicators, 7 indicators (SMMA1; SMMA4; HC1; HC2; CSR1; CL3; CL4) show outer loading values below 0.70, indicating that these indicators do not meet the convergent validity criteria (invalid). Therefore, the researcher chose to eliminate indicators that were considered invalid, as explained in the theory by Hair et al. (2017). After elimination, 20 questions were retained to produce acceptable reliability and validity.

Several indicators were removed due to low outer loadings to ensure measurement reliability and convergent validity. However, this procedure did not alter the conceptual domain of the core constructs. Indicator elimination across social media marketing activities, halal certification, corporate social responsibility, and consumer loyalty was conducted based on both statistical criteria and content validity considerations. Each removed indicator was assessed against the theoretical definition of its respective construct to ensure that exclusion did not narrow

the conceptual domain or omit core dimensions. The retained indicators continued to capture the essential facets of interactive engagement (SMMA), perceived halal compliance, ethical responsibility (CSR), and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Following PLS-SEM guidelines, indicator elimination was conducted conservatively and guided by both statistical criteria and conceptual consistency (Hair et al., 2021).

Reliability testing in this study was conducted to assess the extent to which the indicators used consistently and accurately measure the intended construct. Two statistical indicators were used: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Based on the results shown in Table 2, all variables in this study have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70. Thus, it can be concluded that all constructs in the model are reliable (Hair et al., 2022). In addition, collinearity testing was performed by examining the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. Hair et al. (2019) recommend a maximum VIF value of 5.0. Table 2 shows that all indicators have VIF values < 5.0, which means that there is no indication of collinearity between the independent variables in the structural model.

One approach used to assess discriminant validity is through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. Based on Table 2, all variables tested in this study showed AVE values exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021). In addition, discriminant validity was also evaluated using the Fornell & Larcker Criterion approach.

Table 3. Fornell & Larcker Criterion Test (Discriminant Validity)

Constructs	Brand Image	CSR	Consumer Loyalty	Halal Certification	SMMA
Brand Image	0.834				
CSR	0.827	0.792			
Consumer Loyalty	0.730	0.681	0.801		
Halal Certification	0.666	0.708	0.575	0.785	
SMMA	0.549	0.544	0.585	0.611	0.783

Source: Adapted SmartPLS 4 Output (2026).

Based on Table 3, all AVE square root values for each variable are greater than all correlations between that variable and other variables. Thus, the discriminant validity between constructs in this model has been fulfilled in accordance with the criteria recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1981). The R-square (R^2) test is performed to evaluate the predictive power of the structural model namely the extent to which the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable in the model. A high R-square value indicates that the model has good predictive ability. According to Hair et al. (2021), an R-square value of 0.75 is categorized as strong; 0.50 is moderate; and 0.25 is considered weak.

Table 4. R-square (R^2) and adjusted R-square results

Laten Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Brand Image	0.706	0.704
Customer Loyalty	0.640	0.637

Source: Adapted SmartPLS 4 Output (2026).

Based on Table 4, the results of the R-square and adjusted R-square tests show that the brand image variable has an R-square value of 0.706 and an adjusted R-square of 0.704, so it can be categorized as a moderate model. Similarly, customer loyalty is categorized as moderate, because it has an R-square value of 0.640 and an adjusted R-square of 0.637 (Hair et al., 2021). Hypothesis testing was conducted to identify the effects of all proposed hypotheses, both direct and indirect. In the SEM-PLS approach, the algorithm used produces estimates of relationships in the structural model in the form of path coefficients that represent the relationships between constructs as hypothesized (Hair et al., 2022). Direct effect testing was conducted using the criterion that the relationship between variables is considered significant if the t-statistic value is greater than the t-table value of 1.96 (at a significance level of 5%) and the p-value is less than 0.05.

Table 5. Direct Effect Test Results

Paths	Effect (β)	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
<i>H1</i> : SMMA → Consumer Loyalty	0.240	4.958	0.000
<i>H2</i> : Halal Certification → Consumer Loyalty	0.004	0.078	0.938
<i>H3</i> : CSR → Consumer Loyalty	0.173	2.732	0.006
<i>H4</i> : Brand Image → Consumer Loyalty	0.452	7.186	0.000
<i>H5</i> : SMMA → Brand Image	0.105	2.784	0.005
<i>H6</i> : Halal Certification → Brand Image	0.115	2.257	0.024
<i>H7</i> : CSR → Brand Image	0.688	15.819	0.000

Notes: Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Source: Adapted SmartPLS 4 Output (2026).

Based on Table 5, all direct relationship hypotheses were accepted, except for *H2*, which links halal certification to a positive but insignificant effect on consumer loyalty (0.938, p -value = 0.938). The hypothesis accepted with the highest level of influence is that CSR has a significant positive effect on brand image (0.688, p -value = 0.000). In addition, there is also a direct relationship between brand image and a significant positive effect on consumer loyalty (0.452, p -value = 0.000).

Table 6. Indirect Effect Test Results

Paths	Effect (β)	<i>t</i> -statistic	<i>p</i> -value
<i>H8</i> : SMMA → Brand Image → Consumer Loyalty	0.047	2.463	0.014
<i>H9</i> : Halal Certification → Brand Image → Consumer Loyalty	0.052	2.122	0.034
<i>H10</i> : CSR → Brand Image → Consumer Loyalty	0.311	6.745	0.000

Notes: Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Source: Adapted SmartPLS 4 Output (2026).

Based on Table 6, all indirect relationship hypotheses are accepted. The *t*-statistics value for the relationship between brand image mediating SMMA and consumer loyalty is 2.463, with a p -value of $0.014 < 0.05$ and an original sample value of 0.047, indicating a positive relationship. Therefore, *H8* is accepted. The *t*-statistic value for the relationship between brand image mediating SMMA and consumer loyalty is 2.122, with a p -value of $0.034 < 0.05$ and an original sample value of 0.052, indicating a positive relationship. Therefore, *H9* is accepted. The final hypothesis, the *t*-statistics value for the relationship between brand image mediating CSR and Consumer Loyalty is 6.745, with a p -value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and an original sample value of 0.311, indicating a positive relationship. Therefore, *H10* is accepted. Figure 3, summarizes the findings in the study relationships with substantial acceptance of all direct relationships.

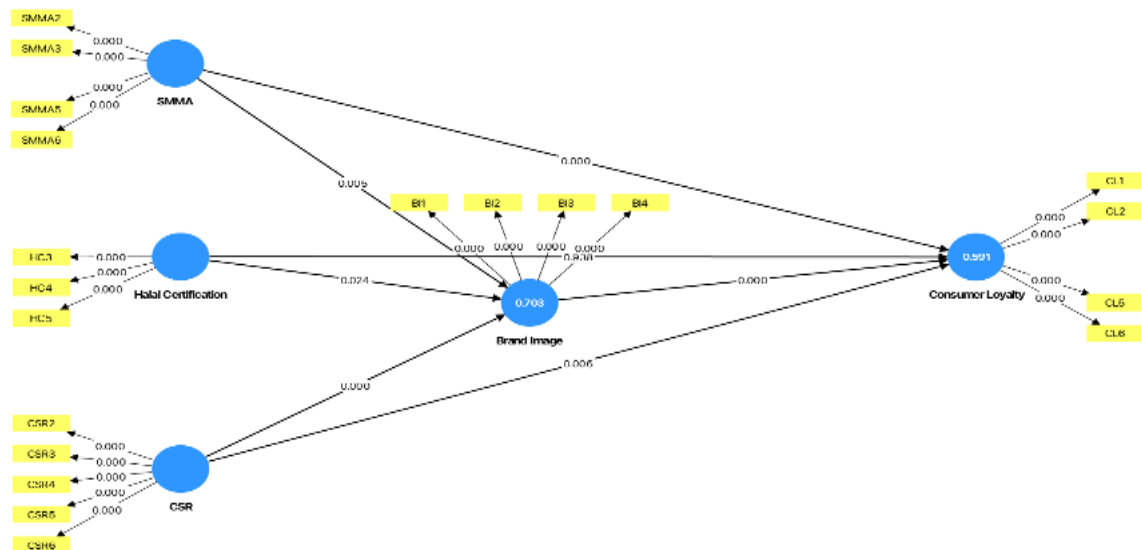


Figure 3. Depicts the relationship between the variables studied

Source: SmartPLS 4 Output (2026)

DISCUSSION

The results of the H1 test show that SMMA has a significant positive effect on KFC consumer loyalty in Malang City. These findings indicate that the more effective KFC's marketing activities are through social media, the higher the level of loyalty among Muslim Generation Z consumers. Empirically, these results reinforce the assumption that social media not only functions as a marketing communication tool, but also as a strategic instrument in building long-term relationships between brands and consumers, especially in the highly competitive and socially sensitive halal fast food industry. The results of this study are in line with the findings of previous studies that formed the basis for the formulation of hypotheses, such as those conducted by Lafontaine et al. (2025), which revealed that children and adolescents are widely exposed to food advertisements through social media, with a predominance of promotions for ultra-processed food products. Furthermore, Ibrahim et al. (2021) found that the effective implementation of SMMA by coffee shops through Facebook was able to strengthen brand loyalty. Meanwhile, Puspaningrum (2020) produced findings that proved that SMMA had a significant effect on increasing consumer loyalty to McDonald's.

Another finding from this study shows that halal certification does not have a significant effect on KFC consumer loyalty in Malang. Therefore, H2 is rejected. These results indicate that the existence of halal certification, although important normatively, has not been able to directly encourage consumer loyalty. The characteristics of the Indonesian market have considered halal certification as a basic requirement, rather than a key differentiating factor. For Muslim consumers, especially Generation Z, the halal status of major fast-food brands such as KFC is considered a "given" or something that should already exist. This finding is in line with several previous studies, such as the study by Sholeh et al. (2024), which shows that the existence of halal certification does not have a significant effect on consumer loyalty to skin care products in Indonesia. Furthermore, Hakim & Rosyadi (2023) argue that news reports about the delay in Mie Gacoan's halal certification did not have a significant effect on consumer loyalty. This study's primary theoretical contribution lies in reconceptualizing halal certification from a differentiating marketing cue to a taken-for-granted hygiene factor within Muslim-majority consumption contexts. Rather than treating the non-significant effect of halal certification as an anomalous empirical outcome, the findings demonstrate how institutionalized religious standards reshape the hierarchy of marketing stimuli, rendering compliance-based attributes insufficient for loyalty formation. This reframing elevates Indonesian halal consumption norms from contextual background to theoretical mechanism, thereby aligning the study's hypotheses, results, and discussion within a coherent conceptual narrative. By integrating this perspective with the S-O-R framework, the study advances Islamic marketing and ethical consumption literature by explaining why value-expressive and symbolic stimuli, rather than regulatory compliance, increasingly drive loyalty among Muslim Generation Z consumers.

The significance of CSR's influence on consumer loyalty reflects the increasing social sensitivity and ethical consumption among Muslim Generation Z. Therefore, H3 is accepted. In the context of KFC, CSR programs such as social activities, community care, and the company's efforts in responding to humanitarian and environmental issues are perceived as a reflection of the company's moral values, which ultimately strengthen emotional bonds and consumer loyalty. Chi & Phan (2025) found that CSR is an important component in company operations, particularly its social aspect, which plays a dominant role in building customer loyalty. Furthermore, several other studies also support this research, showing that there is a positive and significant relationship between CSR and consumer loyalty to McDonald's in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2021); the food industry in Spain (Castro-gonzález et al., 2021); VietJet Air and Pacific Airlines based in Vietnam (Nhat et al., 2024); and the fashion and textile industry in Pakistan (Huo et al., 2022).

From the perspective of SOR theory, brand image can be positioned as part of an organism, namely the internal psychological condition of consumers that is formed from exposure to various marketing stimuli. A positive brand image reflects the internalization of these stimuli, which then results in a response in the form of consumer loyalty. Therefore, H4 is accepted. The results of this study are in line with previous research findings which state that brand image has a significant effect on consumer loyalty in the food industry (Ali et al., 2020; Barbosa et al., 2023;

Espinosa et al., 2018; Mobarak et al., 2024; Peter Oppong, 2020; Singh & Singh, 2024; Watson et al., 2024). Furthermore, Rehman & Elahi (2024) state that brand image has a significant effect on consumer loyalty to packaging semiotics (PS) in the behavior of food retail consumers in India.

The results of H5 are accepted and in line with previous studies, such as Bilgin (2018), who found that marketing activities through social media, such as interaction, entertainment, and content personalization, can strengthen consumers' positive perceptions of brands in Turkey. Meanwhile, Cheung & Iii (2019) emphasized that social media marketing dimensions such as trendiness, customization, and electronic word of mouth significantly influence brand image formation by creating strong, positive, and unique brand associations in the minds of Facebook users in Hong Kong, Brazil, and Australia. Similarly, H6 is accepted and in line with the research by Desmaryani et al. (2024), which found that halal certification has a positive and significant effect on brand image. The results of the H7 test show that CSR has a significant positive effect on the brand image of KFC in Malang. Araújo et al. (2023) showed that corporate investment in CSR programs can significantly improve brand image among consumers who purchase products from companies that implement CSR actions during the pandemic. Furthermore, He & Lai (2014) found that legal and ethical responsibilities are important requirements for consumers in forming brand image in Hong Kong.

The results of H8 show that brand image significantly mediates the positive effect of SMMA on KFC consumer loyalty in Malang City. This finding indicates that social media marketing activities not only directly influence consumer loyalty but also work through the mechanism of forming a positive brand image. This finding is reinforced by Tarabieh (2022), who found that brand image functions as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between SMMA and loyalty. Furthermore, H9 is accepted. Based on the research by Desmaryani et al. (2024), halal certification has a positive influence on brand image formation, which in turn has an impact on increasing consumer loyalty. Halal certification not only serves as a guarantee of product halalness but also becomes a symbol of the credibility and responsibility of producers towards Muslim consumers.

Finally, H10 was accepted. These findings indicate that the mediating role of brand image reflects that consumers do not only view CSR as a philanthropic activity, but also as a representation of brand values and character. In the context of the restaurant and food retail industry, CSR initiatives that focus on health, transparency, and sustainability have been proven to strengthen positive brand image and customer trust (Kim & Ham, 2016). Similar findings are also confirmed by recent research in the Malaysian food retail sector, which shows that CSR perceptions significantly influence loyalty through brand image mediation (Min & Leong, 2024).

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

This study concludes that consumer loyalty toward KFC halal fast food among Muslim Generation Z in Malang City is significantly influenced by Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), both directly and indirectly through brand image formation. These findings highlight that interactive digital communication and authentic CSR initiatives play a crucial role in shaping positive brand perceptions, which subsequently foster consumer loyalty. In contrast, halal certification does not exert a significant direct effect on loyalty, although it remains influential through brand image as a psychological mechanism. The results theoretically support the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework in explaining halal fast-food consumer behavior. From a managerial perspective, this study emphasizes the strategic importance of strengthening digital marketing engagement and consistently implementing meaningful CSR programs to sustain consumer loyalty amid increasing social sensitivity and competitive market dynamics.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting and generalizing the findings. First, this study uses a cross-sectional survey, in which data collection is conducted at a specific point in time. This condition limits the study's ability to capture the dynamics of changes in consumer perceptions, attitudes, and loyalty over time, especially in the highly dynamic fast-food industry. Second, this study relies on questionnaire-based primary data, making it highly dependent on the subjectivity of respondents in providing assessments. Third, the scope of this study is limited to KFC consumers in Malang City, so the results of the study cannot necessarily be generalized directly to all KFC consumers in Indonesia.

Further studies are recommended to use a longitudinal design to capture the dynamics of changes in consumer perceptions, trust, and loyalty over time, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the relationships between variables. Future researchers may expand the scope of their research to other regions or other halal fast food brands. Future research is also recommended to add other variables that may influence consumer loyalty, such as customer satisfaction, service quality, product quality, brand experience, or price factors. In addition to quantitative approaches, future research can combine qualitative or mixed methods to explore this topic in greater depth.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE

All participants provided written informed consent prior to their participation in this study. They were clearly informed about the research objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences, and the assurance that all responses would be kept confidential and used solely for academic research purposes. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants, ensuring the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and data confidentiality throughout the research process.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest in relation to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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