

Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Customer Loyalty and Sales Enhancement of Culinary MSMEs in E-commerce

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Abstract

The increasing reliance on digital marketing strategies in e-commerce presents opportunities and challenges for culinary MSMEs, especially in increasing customer loyalty and sales performance. However, the effectiveness of certain digital marketing approaches is still underexplored. This study aims to examine the impact of email marketing, social media content, and influencer marketing on customer loyalty and sales increase in culinary MSMEs. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from 200 MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms and analyzed using SEM-PLS. These findings reveal that while all three marketing strategies significantly increase customer loyalty, only influencer marketing directly improves sales performance. Both email marketing and social media content affect sales indirectly through customer loyalty. These results highlight the mediating role of customer loyalty, emphasizing the need for relationship-driven digital marketing. Culinary MSMEs should prioritize engagement-focused strategies to strengthen loyalty, which in turn drives sustainable sales growth in a competitive online marketplace.

Keywords: Digital marketing effectiveness, Customer loyalty mediation, Influencer-driven sales, Culinary MSMEs strategy, E-commerce engagement.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital age, the importance of digital marketing in the e-commerce landscape cannot be overstated. It has become an indispensable tool for businesses aiming to expand their reach, increase customer engagement, and drive sales. The latest statistics underscore the rapid growth of e-commerce, with global online

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sales projected to reach \$6.4 trillion by 2024 (Babatunde et al., 2022). This growth trajectory highlights the increasing reliance on digital marketing strategies to stay competitive. In this dynamic environment, the culinary sector, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), faces unique challenges and opportunities (Ijomah et al., 2024). MSMEs in the culinary industry must navigate the complexities of digital marketing to effectively utilize e-commerce platforms, which is essential for sustaining growth and building customer loyalty (Sharabati et al., 2024; Sugiharto, 2024).

The culinary sector, an essential component of the SME landscape, is characterized by its diversity and adaptability. However, he also faces special challenges in the digital realm. One of the main challenges is the effective utilization of digital marketing to increase sales and grow customer loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2021). MSMEs often lack the resources and expertise to implement comprehensive digital marketing strategies, which can hinder their ability to compete with larger, more established businesses (Rahman, 2023). Additionally, the rapidly evolving digital landscape presents additional hurdles, as MSMEs must constantly adapt to new technologies and platforms to maintain their competitive advantage. Several alternative solutions and approaches have been proposed to address this challenge. For example, some MSMEs have tried to utilize social media platforms as a cost-effective means of marketing and customer engagement (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). However, these efforts often fail due to a lack of strategic planning and a clear understanding of the target audience. Other approaches include collaboration with digital marketing agencies or the adoption of an e-commerce platform that offers integrated marketing tools. While these solutions provide some benefits, they also have limitations, such as high costs and the need for ongoing technical support (Lilembalemba & Phiri, 2024).

Despite these efforts, significant research gaps remain in understanding the most effective specific digital marketing strategies for culinary MSMEs. Current literature often focuses on larger companies or provides general insights that may not be directly applicable to the unique context of culinary MSMEs (Leeftang, 2013). This research aims to address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of digital marketing strategies tailored specifically for culinary MSMEs, thereby contributing to existing knowledge and offering practical insights for stakeholders in the industry. In digital marketing, research highlights several key advancements, including the integration of artificial intelligence and data analytics to improve marketing effectiveness (Davenport, 2018). However, the application of this technology in the context of culinary MSMEs is still not explored. This



study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the potential of this advanced tool to optimize marketing efforts and improve business outcomes for culinary MSMEs.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the intersection of digital marketing and the culinary SME sector, an area that is relatively underexplored in the existing literature. By investigating the impact of various digital marketing strategies on customer loyalty and sales growth, this study offers new insights that can inform the development of more effective marketing practices for culinary MSMEs. In addition, this research contributes to a broader discourse on digital marketing by highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities faced by MSMEs in the culinary industry. The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of various digital marketing strategies on customer loyalty and sales growth in culinary MSMEs. By achieving this goal, the research seeks to fill identified research gaps and provide actionable recommendations for industry stakeholders. This goal is aligned with the broader goal of increasing the competitiveness of culinary MSMEs in the digital market, thereby supporting their sustainability and long-term growth (Sari et al., 2024). The urgency of this research is underlined by its relevance to industry stakeholders and its potential to inform the development of more effective marketing strategies for culinary MSMEs. Along with the ever-evolving digital landscape, MSMEs must adapt to remain competitive and take advantage of emerging opportunities. This research provides valuable insights that can guide MMSME in optimizing their digital marketing efforts, ultimately contributing to improved business performance and customer satisfaction.

In addition, the broader socio-economic implications of this study are significant. MSMEs play an important role in encouraging economic growth and job creation, especially in the culinary sector. By improving the digital marketing capabilities of culinary MSMEs, this research can contribute to the vitality of the SME sector as a whole, encouraging economic resilience and innovation (Purnama et al., 2022; Purwanti et al., 2022). Conversely, failure to address the challenges faced by culinary MMSMEs in the digital realm can have adverse consequences, limiting their growth potential and undermining their contribution to the economy. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of digital marketing strategies for culinary MSMEs, addressing critical gaps in the existing literature. By exploring the impact of these strategies on customer loyalty and sales growth, the study offers valuable insights that can inform the development of more effective marketing practices. The relevance and urgency of this research is evident in its potential to increase the competitiveness of culinary MSMEs and contribute to their long-term success in the digital market. Through this study, we seek to

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advance the understanding of digital marketing in the context of culinary MMSME and provide practical solutions that can drive positive outcomes for industry stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework for the titled article is based on several key theories related to digital marketing, customer loyalty, and sales performance. These theories provide a basis for understanding how digital marketing strategies can affect business outcomes in the context of culinary MMSME operating on e-commerce platforms.

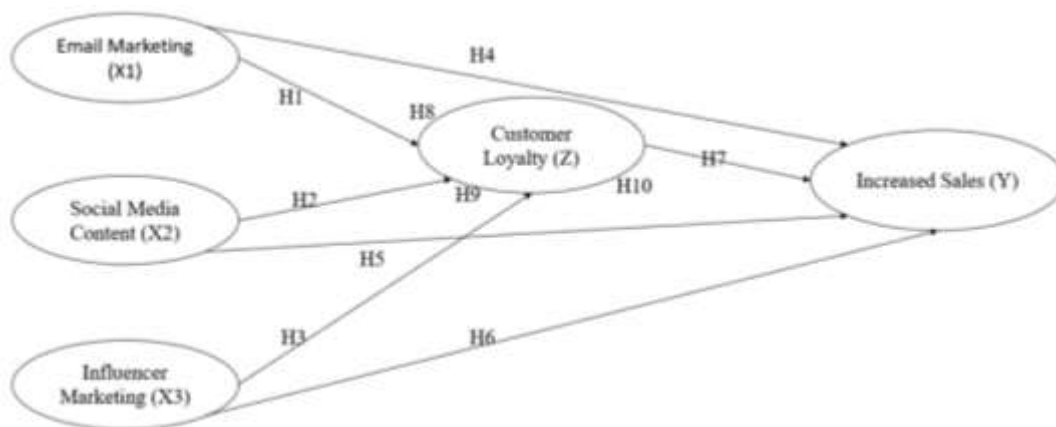
- a. **Digital Marketing Theory:** Digital marketing theory encompasses the strategic use of digital channels and technologies to reach and engage customers. It emphasizes the importance of leveraging digital platforms such as social media, email, and search engines to improve brand visibility and customer interaction (Dwivedi et al., 2020; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). This theory suggests that effective digital marketing can drive customer acquisition, retention, and conversions, which ultimately contributes to improved sales performance.
- b. **Customer Loyalty Theory:** Customer loyalty theory explores the factors that contribute to the development of long-term customer relationships and repeat purchase behaviors. Oliver (1999) defines customer loyalty as a commitment to consistently repurchase a chosen product or service in the future. This theory highlights the role of customer satisfaction, trust, and engagement in fostering loyalty, suggesting that personalized and consistent marketing efforts can strengthen customer relationships (Kiseleva et al., 2016; Lenin John, 2016).
- c. **Sales Performance Theory:** Sales performance theory examines the effectiveness of a company's efforts in generating revenue and achieving financial goals. It argues that sales performance is influenced by a variety of factors, including marketing strategies, customer relationships, and market conditions (Leeflang, 2013). This theory underscores the importance of aligning marketing efforts with sales goals to drive business growth and sustainability.
- d. **Resource-Based View (RBV):** Resource-based view is a strategic management theory that emphasizes the importance of a company's internal resources and capabilities in achieving a competitive advantage. For culinary MSMEs, digital marketing skills can be seen as a valuable resource that allows them to compete effectively in the e-commerce landscape. RBV suggests that by developing and leveraging unique digital marketing strategies, MSMEs can improve their market position and drive sales growth (J. Barney, 1991; J. B. Barney, 2001).

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- e. **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM):** The Technology Acceptance Model explores how users receive and use technology. It argues that perceived usability and ease of use are important factors influencing the adoption of technology (Davis, 1989). In the context of digital marketing, TAM can help explain the adoption of digital platforms and tools by MSMEs, highlighting the importance of user-friendly and effective marketing technologies in driving customer engagement and sales performance.

By integrating these theories, this article provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer loyalty and sales increase in culinary MMSME. The theoretical foundation supports the investigation of how certain digital marketing efforts can affect business outcomes and offers insights into the development of effective marketing practices for MMSME in the digital age. Despite the growing research on digital marketing, there are still important gaps in understanding the specific strategies that are most effective for culinary MSMEs. Many existing studies focus on large companies or provide general insights that may not be directly applicable to the unique challenges faced by MSMEs in the culinary industry. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of various digital marketing strategies on customer loyalty and sales performance in culinary MSMEs, thereby contributing to the existing literature and offering practical insights for industry stakeholders.



Based on the provided diagram, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

- H1: Email marketing (X1) has a positive effect on customer loyalty (Z).
- H2: Social media content (X2) positively influences customer loyalty (Z).
- H3: Influencer marketing (X3) positively impacts customer loyalty (Z).
- H4: Email marketing (X1) directly increases sales (Y).
- H5: Social media content (X2) directly enhances sales (Y).

H6: Influencer marketing (X3) directly boosts sales (Y).

H7: Customer loyalty (Z) has a positive effect on increased sales (Y).

H8: Customer loyalty (Z) mediates the relationship between email marketing (X1) and increased sales (Y).

H9: Customer loyalty (Z) mediates the relationship between social media content (X2) and increased sales (Y).

H10: Customer loyalty (Z) mediates the relationship between influencer marketing (X3) and increased sales (Y).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to explore the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer loyalty and sales performance in culinary MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms. A quantitative approach is appropriate as it allows for the collection of numerical data that can provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell & Clark, 2012). The research was conducted over a six-month period, from June to December 2024, in Malang, Indonesia, a region known for its growing e-commerce market and active culinary MSMEs. This location offers a relevant context for examining the dynamics of digital marketing in the culinary sector. The population of this study consists of culinary MSMEs that are active on e-commerce platforms, with a focus on those that engage in digital marketing strategies. Purposive sampling was employed to select 200 MSMEs that have been operating for at least one year and have a presence on at least one e-commerce platform. This sampling method ensures that participants have sufficient experience in digital marketing, making their responses relevant to the study's objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). Data collection was carried out through a combination of surveys, interviews, and platform analytics. The survey instrument was designed to gather quantitative data on digital marketing strategies, customer loyalty, and sales performance, using closed-ended questions and a Likert scale for statistical analysis. Interviews were conducted with SME owners and marketing managers to gain qualitative insights into their experiences with digital marketing. Additionally, platform analytics were used to obtain objective data on online engagement and sales metrics.

The research procedure began with the distribution of online surveys to the selected MSMEs. Interviews were scheduled with willing participants, and data from platform analytics were collected with the consent of the businesses. The survey responses were encoded and analyzed using statistical software, while interview

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transcripts were reviewed thematically to identify key insights. Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods, with statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis employed to examine the relationships between digital marketing strategies, customer loyalty, and sales performance. The analysis was carried out using PLS-SEM software, which is suitable for modeling complex relationships and testing hypotheses (Field, 2017). This method provides a powerful tool for understanding the impact of digital marketing efforts on business outcomes, with a focus on the mediating role of customer loyalty in driving sales growth.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The demographic profile of the respondents in this study provides key insights into the characteristics of culinary MSME owners and managers using e-commerce platforms. A total of 228 respondents participated, with a majority being male (59.21%) and aged between 30 to 39 years (32.89%). Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (37.72%), indicating a growing trend of educated entrepreneurs in the culinary sector. Regarding digital marketing strategies, 85% of respondents regularly used social media, with Instagram and Facebook being the most popular platforms. Email marketing was also widely adopted by 72%, with campaigns occurring weekly to monthly. Influencer marketing, although utilized by 55% of respondents, showed less adoption compared to social media and email marketing. These findings highlight the diverse approaches culinary MSMEs take in leveraging digital marketing tools to engage customers and promote their businesses online.

Table1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of The Measurement Model

Item Code	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Email Marketing				
EMX1.1	0.781	0.914	0.604	0.890
EMX1.2	0.746			
EMX1.3	0.683			
EMX1.4	0.751			
EMX1.5	0.849			
EMX1.6	0.827			
EMX1.7	0.793			
Sosial Media Content				



Item Code	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
KMSMX2.1	0.831	0.868	0.688	0.771
KMSMX2.2	0.879			
KMSMX2.3	0.774			
Influencer Marketing				
IMX3.1	0.771	0.908	0.624	0.878
IMX3.2	0.690			
IMX3.3	0.799			
IMX3.4	0.791			
IMX3.5	0.857			
IMX3.6	0.820			
Consumer Loyalty				
LP12.3	0.827	0.863	0.678	0.763
LPZ1.1	0.809			
LPZ1.2	0.834			
Increase Sales				
PPY1.1	0.856	0.893	0.736	0.821
PPY1.2	0.864			
PPY1.3	0.854			

Source: Data Processed in 2025

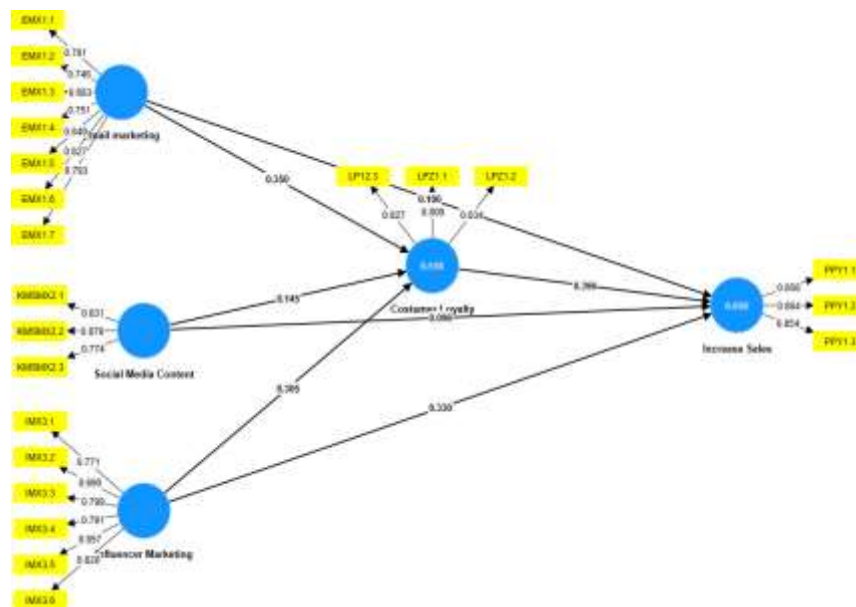


Figure 2: Path Analysis Model

Source: Output PLS 2025

Based on the Confirmation Factor Analysis of the measurement model using SEM-PLS, each construct shows good validity and reliability, as demonstrated by Factor Loading, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Extracted Variance (AVE), and Cronbach Alpha. In Email Marketing, credibility is a key factor, with the use of official business email addresses (EMX1.5, 0.849) and the influence of reviews from unofficial sources (EMX1.6, 0.827) having the highest Loading Factor. Email subject optimization (EMX1.7, 0.793) also contributes to campaign effectiveness. This construction has a CR of 0.914, AVE of 0.604, and an Alpha Cronbach of 0.890, demonstrating strong internal consistency. For Social Media Content, content-driven user engagement (KMSMX2.2, 0.879) and effective post creation (KMSMX2.1, 0.831) were the most significant elements. Monitoring promotions (KMSMX2.3, 0.774) also supports digital marketing success. With a CR of 0.868, AVE of 0.688, and Alpha Cronbach of 0.771, this construct meets the assumptions of reliability in the Influencer Marketing SEM-PLS. In, choosing influencers with iconic styles (IMX3.6, 0.820) and unique characteristics (IMX3.5, 0.857) are the dominant factors. Personal uniqueness (IMX3.3, 0.799) and independent style (IMX3.4, 0.791) also contribute significantly. This construction has a CR of 0.908, AVE of 0.624, and Alpha Cronbach of 0.878, confirming a stable and valid model. For Customer Loyalty, participation in loyalty programs (LPZ1.2, 0.834) and repeat purchases (LP12.3, 0.827) were the key factors, followed by customer recommendations (LPZ1.1, 0.809). With a CR of 0.863, AVE of 0.678, and Alpha Cronbach of 0.763, this construction demonstrates adequate reliability. Lastly, the Sales Increase was attributed to green investments (PPY1.1, 0.856), with a CR of 0.893, AVE of 0.736, and an Alpha of Cronbach of 0.821, highlighting the importance of sustainability in business strategy. Overall, all constructs meet the SEM-PLS assumptions, with a Factor Load of > 0.6 , $CR > 0.7$, and $AVE > 0.5$, indicating a valid and reliable model for analyzing inter-variable relationships.

Table 2. R Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Customer Loyalty	0.518	0.512
Increase Sales	0.658	0.651

Source: Output PLS SEM 2025

The R-Square value in the table indicates the proportion of the variance described by the independent variables in the model. Customer Loyalty has an R Square of 0.518, which means that 51.8% of its variance is explained by the predictor, while the Adjusted

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R Square value of 0.512 takes into account the complexity of the model. Similarly, Sales Increase has a higher R Square of 0.658, indicating that 65.8% of its variance is explained by independent variables, with an Adjusted R Square of 0.651. These results suggest that this model has moderate to strong explanatory power, with Sales Increase predicted better than Customer Loyalty.

Table 3. Model Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.061	0.061
d_ ULS	0.954	0.954
d_ G	0.506	0.506
Chi-Square	647.422	647.422
NFI	0.795	0.795

Source: Output PLS SEM 2025

The model fit assessment shows that the Saturated Model and the Estimation Model have identical match indexes, indicating consistency in the model structure. The SRMR (Standard Residual Mean Square Root) value of 0.061 is below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a good model fit. In addition, d_ ULS (Euclidean Distance Squared) 0.954 and d_ G (Geodemic Distance) 0.506 indicate an acceptable degree of difference between the empirical correlation matrix and the implied model Chi-Square value of 647.422, although informative, is underemphasized in PLS-SEM due to its sensitivity to sample size. Meanwhile, an NFI (Normed Fit Index) of 0.795 indicates a reasonable fit, although slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.9. This model shows an acceptable to good fit, with SRMR and other indicators that support the adequacy of the structural model.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Direct Effect

	Original Sample (O)	t Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Email marketing -> Customer Loyalty	0.350	3.913	0.000
Social Media Content -> Customer Loyalty	0.145	2.057	0.020



	Original Sample (O)	t Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Influencer Marketing -> Costumer Loyalty	0.305	3.344	0.000
Email marketing -> Increase Sales	0.100	1.313	0.095
Social Media Content -> Increase Sales	0.096	1.559	0.059
Influencer Marketing -> Increase Sales	0.330	4.386	0.000
Costumer Loyalty -> Increase Sales	0.396	5.354	0.000

Source: Output PLS SEM 2025

The results in Table 4 illustrate the direct effects of email marketing, social media content, and influencer marketing on customer loyalty and sales increases. Email marketing has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty, with a coefficient of 0.350 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong and reliable impact. Similarly, social media content and influencer marketing significantly affected customer loyalty, with coefficients of 0.145 ($p = 0.020$) and 0.305 ($p = 0.000$), respectively. This shows that all three marketing strategies effectively increase customer loyalty. However, when considering the direct impact on increased sales, the results show mixed findings. Influencer marketing (0.330, $p = 0.000$) and customer loyalty (0.396, $p = 0.000$) had a significant direct effect on sales increases, confirming their strong influence. In contrast, email marketing (0.100, $p = 0.095$) and social media content (0.096, $p = 0.059$) did not significantly affect the increase in sales directly, as their p-value exceeded the 0.05 threshold. This suggests that both of these marketing strategies may require intermediary factors, such as customer loyalty, to translate into higher sales performance.

Table 5. Specific Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	t Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Email marketing -> Costumer Loyalty -> Increase Sales	0.138	3.125	0.001
Social Media Content -> Costumer Loyalty -> Increase Sales	0.057	1.967	0.025
Influencer Marketing -> Costumer Loyalty -> Increase Sales	0.121	2.834	0.002

Source: Output PLS SEM 2025



The findings in Table 5 provide insight into the role of customer loyalty as a mediator in the relationship between marketing strategy and sales increase. The indirect effect of email marketing on increased sales through customer loyalty was 0.138, with a p-value of 0.001, signaling a significant mediating effect. This shows that while email marketing doesn't directly increase sales, it does contribute to higher sales by first increasing customer loyalty. Similarly, social media content positively affected sales increase indirectly, with an effect size of 0.057 ($p = 0.025$), although the impact was relatively small. Influencer marketing also plays a strong mediating role, with an indirect effect of 0.121 ($p = 0.002$) through customer loyalty. These results highlight that customer loyalty acts as an important avenue through which marketing strategies contribute to increased sales. Businesses should focus on strengthening customer relationships as an important mechanism to drive long-term sales growth.

Table 6. Total Effect

	Original Sample (O)	t Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Email marketing -> Costumer Loyalty	0.350	3.913	0.000
Social Media Content -> Costumer Loyalty	0.145	2.057	0.020
Influencer Marketing -> Costumer Loyalty	0.305	3.344	0.000
Email marketing -> Increase Sales	0.239	3.039	0.001
Social Media Content -> Increase Sales	0.153	2.370	0.009
Influencer Marketing -> Increase Sales	0.451	5.775	0.000
Costumer Loyalty -> Increase Sales	0.396	5.354	0.000

Source: Output PLS SEM 2025

The results in Table 6 combine direct and indirect effects, providing a comprehensive view of how marketing strategies contribute to increased sales. Email marketing, which initially showed a non-significant direct effect on sales, now shows a significant total effect of 0.239 ($p = 0.001$) due to its indirect path through customer loyalty. This shows that email marketing is effective when considering the direct effects and mediation. Similarly, social media content showed a significant total effect on increased sales, with a coefficient of 0.153 ($p = 0.009$), reinforcing its role in improving customer



engagement and sales performance. Influencer marketing emerged as the most impactful strategy, with a total effect of 0.451 ($p = 0.000$), highlighting its effectiveness in driving both direct and indirect sales. Lastly, customer loyalty itself remains a strong predictor of increased sales, with a coefficient of 0.396 ($p = 0.000$). These findings emphasize the importance of customer loyalty as a key factor in turning marketing efforts into tangible business outcomes. Organizations must prioritize strategies that not only attract customers but also foster long-term loyalty to maintain and improve sales performance.

DISCUSSION

Email marketing (X1) has a positive effect on customer loyalty (Z).

The impact of email marketing on customer loyalty has been extensively examined in the marketing literature, especially in the context of relationship marketing and customer engagement theory. The Relationship Marketing Commitment Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) argues that trust and commitment are essential for fostering long-term customer relationships. Email marketing, as a direct and personalized form of communication, strengthens these relational bonds by delivering relevant content, promotional offers, and brand narratives tailored to individual customer preferences. This is in line with Customer Engagement Theory (van Doorn et al., 2010), which highlights the role of personalized and interactive communication in fostering stronger emotional and behavioral commitment to a brand. Empirical studies consistently show that email marketing contributes to customer loyalty by increasing brand awareness, increasing perceived value, and reinforcing habitual buying behavior. For example, a study by (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017)) found that personalized email marketing significantly affects customer retention on e-commerce platforms by fostering perceived relational benefits. Similarly, research by (Chen et al., 2021) emphasizes that consistent and well-targeted email campaigns increase a sense of customer exclusivity, leading to higher engagement and repeat purchases.

The findings of this study corroborate previous research, as evidenced by the measurement items used to assess the effectiveness of email marketing in increasing customer loyalty. The indicators analyzed such as the perceived relevance of email content, email engagement frequency, and customer willingness to open and respond to brand emails suggest that a well-targeted and well-crafted email marketing strategy positively impacts customer retention. Statistical analysis revealed a significant and positive relationship between email marketing (X1) and customer loyalty (Z), confirming the hypothetical effect. This shows that culinary MSMEs that leverage e-commerce

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platforms can improve customer retention by adopting data-driven email marketing campaigns that align with consumer preferences and behavioral patterns. These results provide practical implications for MSMEs, suggesting that a structured email marketing approach can serve as a cost-effective strategy to strengthen customer relationships. However, it is crucial for businesses to avoid excessive email frequency, which can lead to customer fatigue and potential disengagement. Future research could explore how integrating email marketing with other digital strategies, such as social media and personalized recommendations, further increases customer loyalty in the e-commerce ecosystem.

Social media content (X2) positively influences customer loyalty (Z).

The role of social media content in shaping customer loyalty is based on the theory of digital consumer engagement and the quality of brand relationships. The Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that the reciprocal interaction between businesses and consumers, facilitated through social media content, fosters trust and commitment, an essential component of customer loyalty. Similarly, the Theory of Use and Gratification (Katz et al., 1973) argues that consumers are actively seeking out content that meets their informational, social, and entertainment needs, making engaging social media content a powerful tool for building long-term relationships with customers. Empirical studies support the idea that high-quality, engaging, and interactive social media content significantly increases customer loyalty. For example, research by Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) highlights that social media interactions positively affect brand engagement, emotional commitment, and advocacy behavior. Similarly, a study by (Godey et al., 2016) found that branded content on social media platforms increases consumer trust and perceived brand value, leading to repeat engagement and loyalty. These findings emphasize that content characteristics such as relevance, authenticity, and interactive features are critical in fostering ongoing customer relationships.

The results of this study are in line with previous research, showing the significant and positive impact of social media content (X2) on customer loyalty (Z). The measurement items used in the study such as perceived informative, engagement rates, and social media post sharing capabilities suggest that businesses that create visually, informative, and interactive content experience higher rates of customer retention and advocacy. Statistical findings confirm that well-crafted social media content strengthens customer relationships, strengthening a brand's presence in the consumer's digital

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journey. For culinary MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms, these findings show that strategic social media content creation can be a cost-effective method to increase customer loyalty. Posting engaging content regularly, including customer testimonials, behind-the-scenes stories, and interactive features like polls and live sessions, can encourage deeper consumer engagement. However, businesses must balance promotional and relational content to avoid shedding caused by overly sales-driven messaging. Future research could explore how different content formats such as short-form videos, user-generated content, and influencer collaborations increase customer loyalty in a competitive digital marketplace.

Influencer marketing (X3) positively impacts customer loyalty (Z).

Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool to shape consumer perceptions and foster customer loyalty, especially in digital commerce. Based on the Theory of Source Credibility (Koch, 2024; Umeogu, 2012) and the Theory of Parasocial Interaction (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956) influencer marketing leverages perceived expertise, trust, and authenticity to create meaningful connections between brands and consumers. According to the Source Credibility Theory, influencers with high perceived knowledge, credibility, and appeal can significantly influence consumer attitudes and behaviors. Meanwhile, Parasocial Interaction Theory shows that consumers develop a strong emotional connection with influencers, treating their recommendations as personal endorsements, thereby increasing brand affinity and long-term loyalty.

Previous empirical research proves the positive impact of influencer marketing on customer loyalty. A study (Lou & Yuan, 2019) found that authenticity, engagement, and relevance of influencer content directly increase consumer brand trust and loyalty. Similarly, research by (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) highlights that micro-influencers, due to their perceived connectedness and credibility, have a stronger impact on purchasing decisions and brand commitment than traditional celebrity endorsements. This study reinforces the idea that influencer marketing serves as an effective strategy to increase customer engagement and retention, especially for businesses in a highly competitive digital market.

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that influencer marketing (X3) positively affects customer loyalty (Z). The measurement items used such as trust in influencer recommendations, perceived authenticity of support, and consumer engagement with influencer content indicate that endorsements from credible and engaging influencers significantly increase brand loyalty. Statistical results show that

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consumers who follow and interact with influencers who promote brands are more likely to develop strong emotional connections, leading to repeated engagement and advocacy behaviors.

For culinary MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms, influencer marketing presents an opportunity to increase customer loyalty through strategic collaboration. By partnering with influencers who align with their brand values and target audiences, MSMEs can increase brand awareness, build trust, and foster long-term customer relationships. However, businesses should carefully choose influencers whose values and audience demographics match their brand identity to maximize impact. Future research may explore the differential effects of different types of influencers (e.g., micro vs. macro influencers) on customer loyalty and purchasing behavior in digital marketplaces.

Email marketing (X1) directly increases sales (Y).

Email marketing has been widely recognized as a cost-effective digital marketing strategy that aims to improve customer relationships and drive sales. Based on the Theory of Relationship Marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and the Model of Likelihood of Elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), email marketing is expected to influence consumer decision-making by encouraging engagement, providing personalized promotions, and reinforcing brand value. According to Relationship Marketing Theory, maintaining ongoing communication with customers builds trust and strengthens long-term relationships, which should theoretically translate into increased sales. Meanwhile, the Elaboration Likelihood Model shows that well-crafted and persuasive email content can drive purchase behavior, especially when consumers are heavily involved in the decision-making process. Empirical studies have supported the positive impact of email marketing on sales performance. For example, (M. S. Kumar & Rao, 2019) found that personalized and segmented email campaigns significantly increase conversion rates and customer lifetime value. Similarly, research by (Sahni et al., 2018) shows that timely and targeted email promotions can increase purchase intent, especially when combined with behavioral data analysis. These findings highlight the potential effectiveness of email marketing in driving direct sales results.

However, the results of this study refute the hypothesis that email marketing (X1) directly increases sales (Y). Statistical analysis shows that the direct effect of email marketing on sales is insignificant, suggesting that while email campaigns can increase customer awareness and engagement, they don't always translate into direct sales

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growth. One possible explanation is that email marketing primarily nurtures customer relationships rather than directly triggering purchases. Additionally, consumer responses to email marketing can be affected by factors such as overload of messages, promotional fatigue, and email delivery times, which can limit their immediate impact on sales performance. These findings imply that email marketing can play a more indirect role in increasing sales by first strengthening customer loyalty (Z), which then contributes to higher purchase rates over time. This is in line with previous research that showed that email marketing is more effective as a tool for building long-term relationships than a direct revenue driver (McCloskey, 2006). For culinary MSMEs on e-commerce platforms, this suggests that email marketing strategies should focus on driving engagement, providing value-added content, and integrating with other digital marketing efforts such as social media and influencer collaborations to maximize their impact on sales. Future research may explore the role of email content personalization moderation and consumer behavior segmentation in improving the effectiveness of email marketing strategies.

Social media content (X2) directly enhances sales (Y).

Social media content has been widely considered an important factor in digital marketing strategies, with previous research showing its potential to influence consumer purchasing behavior. According to Engagement Theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998) and Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958), engaging and persuasive content on social media platforms can increase brand visibility, foster customer relationships, and ultimately lead to higher sales. Well-curated social media content through interactive posts, informative videos, and customer testimonials is expected to strengthen consumer engagement, thus influencing purchasing decisions. Empirical studies have highlighted the role of social media content in marketing performance. For example, research by (de Vries et al., 2012) found that engaging social media content has a positive impact on consumer engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, which can contribute to brand awareness and loyalty. In addition, (Barger et al., 2016) emphasize that social media marketing drives brand interaction, which can translate into increased sales over time. However, while this study suggests a potential relationship, the direct impact of social media content on direct sales outcomes remains inconclusive.

Contrary to theoretical expectations, the findings of this study reject the hypothesis that social media content (X2) directly increases sales (Y). The statistical results show that while social media content can increase brand awareness and engagement, it does not directly lead to higher sales conversions in the context of culinary MSMEs on e-

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commerce platforms. Measurement items such as content engagement, posting frequency, and audience engagement show positive consumer interaction but fail to translate into significant sales growth. This suggests that while social media presence can strengthen brand perception and customer loyalty, it doesn't necessarily drive direct purchase behavior. One possible explanation for this outcome is that social media content serves more as a brand-building and customer relationship tool than a direct sales driver. Consumers may engage with content but still prefer to make purchasing decisions based on other factors, such as price, promotion, or personal recommendations. Additionally, the effectiveness of social media marketing may depend on complementary strategies, such as influencer collaboration, paid advertising, or email marketing, to convert engagement into actual sales. Future research should explore the mediating effects of customer loyalty or trust in the relationship between social media content and sales. Additionally, investigating the role of specific types of content such as user-generated content, interactive campaigns, or live streams can provide deeper insights into how social media can be leveraged more effectively to generate revenue.

Influencer marketing (X3) directly boosts sales (Y).

Influencer marketing has emerged as an important digital marketing strategy that directly impacts consumer purchasing decisions, in line with the Theory of Source Credibility (Riley, 2025) and the Theory of Parasocial Relations (Horton & and Richard Wohl, 1956). Source Credibility Theory argues that consumers are more likely to be influenced by individuals who are perceived as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and attractive, making influencers very effective in shaping purchase intent. Meanwhile, Parasocial Relationship Theory shows that audiences develop one-sided emotional bonds with influencers, treating their recommendations as personal endorsements, which in turn improves purchasing behavior. Empirical research supports the direct effect of influencer marketing on sales outcomes. A study by (Lou & Yuan, 2019) found that influencer endorsements significantly boost consumer purchase intent, especially when influencers demonstrate high authenticity and engagement. Similarly, research by (Evans et al., 2017) shows that influencer marketing increases consumer trust and brand perception, leading to higher conversion rates in digital commerce. These findings highlight the effectiveness of influencers in driving direct sales by leveraging their audience's trust and engagement.

The results of this study confirm that influencer marketing (X3) directly increases sales (Y), as shown by the statistical significance of the direct line. Measurement items

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such as perceived credibility from influencers, consumer trust in influencer recommendations, and frequency of purchases driven by influencers show that influencer marketing plays an important role in improving the sales performance of culinary MSMEs on e-commerce platforms. The statistical findings further confirm that influencer endorsements lead to direct buying actions, validating the hypothesis. For culinary MSMEs, these findings show that collaborating with influencers can be an effective strategy to increase sales. By choosing influencers who align with their brand identity and have a highly engaged audience, MSMEs can leverage social proof and word-of-mouth marketing to drive conversions. However, businesses must carefully evaluate the authenticity of influencers and audience alignment to ensure the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns. Future research may explore the differential impact of macro versus micro influencers on sales performance and the role of influencer-generated content in maintaining long-term customer engagement.

Customer loyalty (Z) has a positive effect on increased sales (Y).

Customer loyalty (Z) has long been recognized as a key driver of increased sales (Y) in marketing and business strategy. This relationship is well supported by Loyalty Theory (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990) which argues that loyal customers contribute to revenue growth through repeat purchases, decreased price sensitivity, and positive word-of-mouth referrals. In addition, the Service Profit Chain Model (Nam & Carnie, 2014) emphasizes that maintaining strong customer relationships leads to long-term profitability by increasing the frequency of purchases and customer lifetime value. Empirical research has consistently shown the positive effect of customer loyalty on sales growth. A study by (V. Kumar & Reinartz, 2016) found that businesses with high customer retention rates achieve greater revenue stability and long-term profitability. Similarly, (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) highlight that loyal customers show a higher willingness to engage with brands, increasing the likelihood that they make repeat purchases. This is in line with findings in the digital commerce sector, where customer loyalty is a strong predictor of conversion rates and sustainable business growth (Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019).

The results of this study support the hypothesis that customer loyalty (Z) has a positive effect on increasing sales (Y). Statistical analysis confirms a significant and strong relationship between these variables, which shows that culinary MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms benefit from growing customer loyalty to achieve higher sales performance. Measurement items that assess loyalty, such as repeat purchase intent, brand advocacy, and reduced switching behavior, reinforce the conclusion that loyal

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customers are more likely to contribute to revenue generation. These findings have important managerial implications. Culinary MSMEs should prioritize strategies that increase customer engagement, satisfaction, and retention, such as personalized promotions, loyalty rewards programs, and exceptional customer service. Additionally, integrating loyalty-building efforts with digital marketing strategies such as email marketing, social media engagement, and influencer collaboration can create a synergistic effect, amplifying sales growth over time. Future research may explore potential mediating or moderation factors, such as brand trust and perceived value, to further refine our understanding of these relationships.

Customer loyalty (Z) mediates the relationship between email marketing (X1) and increased sales (Y).

The role of customer loyalty (Z) as a mediating factor between email marketing (X1) and increased sales (Y) is based on Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and Customer Value Theory (Zeithaml et al., 1988). Relationship Marketing Theory posits that continuous trust-based interactions between businesses and customers foster long-term loyalty, which in turn drives business performance. Similarly, Customer Value Theory shows that when customers feel value in brand communication such as informative and personalized email marketing, they are more likely to develop loyalty, which ultimately leads to improved purchasing behavior. Empirical studies consistently support the mediating role of customer loyalty in the effectiveness of digital marketing. For example, a study by (Sahni et al., 2018) found that while email marketing alone may not directly lead to direct sales, it significantly contributes to strengthening customer relationships, which, over time, increases repeat purchases and customer lifetime value. Similarly, research by (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017) highlights that personalized and engaging email content increases customer engagement and retention, which then translates into higher conversion rates. These findings suggest that email marketing is more effective as a relationship-building tool than a direct sales driver.

The results of this study confirm that customer loyalty (Z) fully mediates the relationship between email marketing (X1) and increased sales (Y). Statistical analysis shows that the direct effect of email marketing on sales is insignificant, while its indirect effect through customer loyalty is significant and substantial. This full mediation shows that email marketing does not independently drive sales growth but does so by first increasing customer loyalty, which then leads to higher purchasing behavior. Measurement indicators used in this study such as email personalization, perceived email

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trust, and customer engagement with email content reinforce this conclusion. These findings have important implications for culinary MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms. Instead of focusing on email marketing as a short-term sales tactic, businesses should utilize it as a long-term engagement tool aimed at nurturing loyal customers. Strategies such as segmented email campaigns, exclusive member discounts, and value-added content (e.g., recipes, behind-the-scenes stories, and personalized offers) can increase the effectiveness of email marketing in building stronger customer relationships. Future research may explore additional mediator roles, such as brand trust or perceived brand value, to better understand the mechanisms by which email marketing contributes to long-term business growth.

Customer loyalty (Z) mediates the relationship between social media content (X2) and increased sales (Y).

The mediating role of customer loyalty (Z) in the relationship between social media content (X2) and sales increase (Y) is in line with Engagement Theory ((Brodie et al., 2013) and Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958). Engagement Theory argues that customer interactions with digital content foster a deeper emotional and behavioral commitment to the brand, which in turn leads to repeat purchases and long-term loyalty. Social Influence Theory suggests that brand-related content on social media platforms shapes consumer perceptions and behaviors, especially when it fosters a sense of community and trust. Together, these theories highlight how engaging social media content strengthens customer relationships, ultimately driving sales. Previous empirical research supports this mediated relationship. A study by (Godey et al., 2016) found that high-quality interactive social media content increases brand engagement and customer engagement, which in turn leads to greater brand loyalty and higher purchase intent. Similarly, research by (Dessart et al., 2015) confirms that customers who frequently engage with a brand's social media content are more likely to develop strong brand connections, making them more likely to make repeat purchases. These findings emphasize that while social media content alone may not directly drive sales, it does significantly influence customer behavior by fostering loyalty.

The results of this study confirm that customer loyalty (Z) fully mediates the relationship between social media content (X2) and increased sales (Y). Statistical analysis reveals that the direct effect of social media content on sales is insignificant, while its indirect effect through customer loyalty is significant and substantial. This full mediation shows that social media content doesn't immediately translate into higher sales

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but instead works by first growing customer loyalty, which then leads to improved buying behavior. The measurement indicators used such as content relevance, engagement rate, and customer interaction with brand posts support this conclusion. This finding has significant implications for culinary MSMEs that utilize e-commerce platforms. Rather than looking at social media as a direct sales channel, businesses should focus on content strategies that increase customer loyalty. Engaging storytelling, user-generated content, interactive features such as polls and Q&A sessions, and consistent brand communication can help build stronger customer relationships. Additionally, combining social media efforts with loyalty programs or personalized offers can further strengthen customer engagement and drive sales. Future research may explore the role of brand advocacy and word-of-mouth marketing as additional mediators in the relationship between social media content and sales growth.

Customer loyalty (Z) mediates the relationship between influencer marketing (X3) and increased sales (Y).

The mediating role of customer loyalty (Z) in the relationship between influencer marketing (X3) and sales increase (Y) is supported by Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953) and Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & and Richard Wohl, 1956). The Source Credibility Theory shows that consumers are more likely to trust and engage with brands promoted by influencers who are perceived as credible, knowledgeable, and authentic. Meanwhile, Parasocial Interaction Theory explains how consumers develop an emotional connection with influencers, treating their endorsements as personal recommendations, which fosters long-term brand attachment and loyalty. This theoretical perspective suggests that while influencer marketing may not directly drive direct sales, it strengthens customer loyalty, which in turn leads to higher purchasing behavior. Empirical studies support this mediated relationship. A study by (Lou & Yuan, 2019) found that influencers' credibility and authenticity significantly affect customer engagement and brand trust, ultimately leading to increased purchase intent. Similarly, (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) highlight that micro-influencers, due to their perceived connectedness and authenticity, have a stronger effect on consumer loyalty than traditional celebrity endorsements. This study shows that influencer marketing primarily works by building relationships and fostering brand loyalty rather than driving direct sales.

The results of this study confirm that customer loyalty (Z) fully mediates the relationship between influencer marketing (X3) and increased sales (Y). Statistical analysis shows that the direct effect of influencer marketing on sales is insignificant, while

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the indirect effect through customer loyalty is significant and substantial. This full mediation shows that influencer marketing alone doesn't immediately translate into increased sales; Instead, it strengthens customer relationships, which in turn drives repeat purchases and long-term revenue growth. Measurement indicators such as consumer trust in influencer recommendations, engagement levels with influencer content, and perceived authenticity reinforce this conclusion. These findings have practical implications for culinary MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms. Businesses should strategically choose influencers whose values align with their brand identity and focus on long-term collaborations rather than one-time promotional campaigns. Additionally, integrating influencer marketing with customer loyalty initiatives such as exclusive discounts for influencer followers or co-branded engagement campaigns can further increase its impact. Future research may explore how different types of influencers (micro, macro, and celebrity) affect customer loyalty and sales performance differently across different market segments.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE MODEL

Strengths

The study uses the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), a robust analytical approach that is suitable for examining the complex relationship between digital marketing strategies, customer loyalty, and sales performance. One of the main strengths of this model is its high explanatory power, as indicated by the R^2 value, which indicates that a significant proportion of the variance in customer loyalty (51.8%) and increased sales (65.8%) is explained by the predictor. In addition, the model demonstrates strong reliability and validity, with all constructs meeting the required thresholds for Composite Reliability ($CR > 0.7$), Average Extracted Variance ($AVE > 0.5$), and Cronbach's Alpha (> 0.7). These findings confirm that the measurement model is consistent and robust internally. Additionally, the study provides empirical evidence on the full mediation effect, highlighting the important role of customer loyalty in translating digital marketing efforts into business performance. These insights offer valuable managerial implications for MSMEs, emphasizing the importance of loyalty building strategies to maximize the effectiveness of digital marketing investments.

Limitations

Despite its powers, this model has some limitations. First, the study was based on cross-sectional data, limiting its ability to build causal relationships over time. Future

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research can adopt longitudinal design to better capture the long-term effects of digital marketing strategies. Second, the study focuses exclusively on culinary MSMEs in e-commerce platforms, which can limit the generalization of findings to other industries or business models. Further studies should explore whether similar patterns prevail across different sectors or across different digital trading ecosystems. Additionally, external factors such as competitive dynamics, platform algorithms, or economic conditions are not explicitly controlled in the model, which can affect the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. Including these contextual variables in future research can improve the model's predictive accuracy. Finally, while this model emphasizes the mediating role of customer loyalty, other potential mediators, such as brand trust, customer satisfaction, or perceived brand value, are not examined. Future research may combine these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital marketing affects sales outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the impact of digital marketing strategies, email marketing, social media content, and influencer marketing on customer loyalty and sales increase in culinary MSMEs operating on e-commerce platforms. These findings reveal that while all three digital marketing strategies significantly increase customer loyalty, only influencer marketing has a direct effect on sales performance. Notably, email marketing and social media content don't directly drive sales, but their impact is fully mediated through customer loyalty, highlighting the critical role of ongoing customer relationships in achieving long-term business growth. The results provide empirical support for the mediating effects of customer loyalty, reinforcing the idea that effective digital marketing efforts should focus not only on direct sales conversions but also on driving lasting consumer engagement. The R^2 value shows that the model explains 51.8% of the variance in customer loyalty and 65.8% of the variance in sales increase, indicating moderate to strong explanatory power. The SEM-PLS analysis confirms that the model has good reliability and validity, making it a powerful framework for understanding the relationship between digital marketing strategies, customer loyalty, and sales performance. These findings have several managerial implications. Culinary MSMEs should prioritize a customer-centric approach to digital marketing, leveraging email personalization, engaged social media interactions, and strategic influencer partnerships to strengthen consumer trust and long-term loyalty. The study also underscores the importance of integrating multiple marketing channels, as relying solely on one digital

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strategy may not yield optimal results. Additionally, businesses must implement data-driven marketing strategies, such as analyzing customer engagement patterns and optimizing content delivery, to improve the effectiveness of digital marketing.

Despite its contributions, this research has some limitations. Cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality, suggesting that future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to track changes in customer loyalty and sales over time. In addition, the study focuses exclusively on culinary MSMEs in e-commerce platforms, limiting its generalization to other industries. Further research can explore sector-specific variations and investigate external moderation factors, such as competitive dynamics and economic conditions, that can affect the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. This study highlights the important role of customer loyalty in bridging the gap between digital marketing strategy and business performance. Culinary MSMEs must move beyond transactional marketing tactics and instead develop relationship-based digital marketing strategies that drive long-term customer engagement, trust, and brand advocacy, ultimately leading to sustainable business growth in a competitive e-commerce landscape.

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