Measuring Gen'Z Loyalty Using Consumer Perception of Channel Integration the Fashion Sector in Medan

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Abstract:- Engaging Generation Z customers is the greatest challenge for omnichannel retailers in the retail industry. Generation Z is known for shifting their shopping behavior from offline to online stores and frequently changing brands or products. By 2027, all of Generation Z will be of productive age, presenting both opportunities and challenges for North Sumatra. This research focuses on evaluating the impact of customer engagement variables in mediating perceptions of channel integration on Generation Z customer loyalty in Medan. Research findings reveal that the integration of information access and order fulfillment significantly influences customer engagement and loyalty. Conversely, the integration of promotions, products and prices, transaction information, and customer service does not have a significant impact on customer engagement and loyalty. Nevertheless, customer involvement has a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty. Customer involvement can mediate the relationship between order fulfillment and integration of information access on customer loyalty. On the other hand, customer engagement cannot mediate the integration of promotions, products and prices, transaction information, and customer service on customer loyalty. Understanding the factors that influence customer engagement in omnichannel retail is crucial. This research confirms that engaging Generation Z customers in various channels in the fashion retail sector in Medan can lead to increased customer loyalty.

Keywords: Channel Integration, Customer Engagement, Loyalty, Generation Z.

1. Introduction

Medan is the capital of North Sumatra Province and the third-largest city in Indonesia after Jakarta and Surabaya. According to the Central Statistics Agency of North Sumatra, the majority of the population is dominated by Generation Z, accounting for 31.70%. In 2027, the entire Z generation will enter a productive age; this will be an opportunity and challenge for North Sumatra and will play an important role in Indonesia's future development. Generation Z was born amidst the internet, grew up in an all-digital environment, and has its way of connecting by utilizing various social media platforms. Generation Z can change their values and lifestyle to become completely digital. Generation Z prioritizes emotional rather than functional factors in shopping online, does not consider product prices, and follows current trends [1]. According to a survey by the Alvara Research Center, fashion clothing products are the products most often purchased by Generation Z online. Where 56% of Generation Z regularly shop for clothing and fashion products rather than other products on e-commerce. Based on IPSOS Global Trend 2021 data, Indonesians like to shop for goods and services online [2] Fashion products are the most sought-after products of all product categories when shopping via e-commerce [3]. The use of digitalisation in the fashion industry is an opportunity and opportunity that must be taken because the phenomenon of online shopping will not stop and will continue to increase. Many purchases of fashion products are made through e-commerce and social media because many content creators promote fashion product offerings through these platforms. In response to the large number of e-commerce and social media and the ease of choosing products to buy, consumers like to switch platforms to shop or change brands. With the increasing level of competition in the fashion industry, this research looks at the loyalty side of Generation Z because this generation

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has different habits in buying products compared to previous generations. Generation Z loyalty is very important for companies because it is a positive and profitable behaviour for retailers.

Fashion product retailers who use omnichannel channels need more references, insight, and knowledge regarding the antecedents and mechanisms for building loyalty [4]. [5], Revealed no significant relationship between the quality of omnichannel integration and customer loyalty. One of the factors that form loyalty is customer engagement. Engaging customers is considered one of the biggest challenges for omnichannel retailers [6]. [7], understands the importance of customer engagement because it can strengthen the bond between the organization and customers and lead to positive results. [8], proposed a customer engagement model to describe how technology integration systems promote relationships between retailers and consumers.

In marketing, engagement highlights the role of brand communities in consumers' loyalty attitudes and repurchase intentions, claiming that consumers' motivation to interact with others will positively influence engagement with brand communities [9]. Recent studies show an innovative perspective that links engagement with its behavioral dimensions [10]–[12] and psychological processes [13]. This research aims to build a conceptual and empirical research model to measure Gen'Z loyalty using consumer perceptions regarding channel integration and customer engagement in the fashion sector in Medan.

2. Literature

2.1. Omnichannel

Omni comes from the Latin for "all or universal," which means "all channels are the same" [14]. Omni marketing channels focus on customers to display a holistic shopping experience, where the customer's purchasing journey runs smoothly and well, regardless of the channel they use [15]. Multichannel marketing, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), and omnichannel marketing have the same characteristics, especially regarding message consistency across all customer touchpoints. The difference between the three lies in the company's approach to digital channels. This distinction is important because mobile platforms are leading changes in the retail industry [16]. [17], were very influential in developing research on multichannel retailing. [18], considered offline channels (physical stores), online channels (web stores), and direct marketing channels such as catalogs. Then, the emergence of new digital channels on mobile channels resulted in other changes in the retail environment [16].

The division between two-way (interactive) and one-way communication channels becomes less clear in omnichannel. Interactive communication channels include customer touch points or customer touch points. Touchpoints involve customer-to-customer interactions via social media, called peer-to-peer communication [19]. In omnichannel channels, search, display, email, affiliate, and referral sites are used as separate channels in online media because they can facilitate one- or two-way communication or interaction [20]. Omnichannel uses communication channels simultaneously and interconnectedly to strengthen online and offline channel relationships and create a customer shopping experience [21].

2.2. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is considered profitable behavior for the company, proven by customers making repeat purchases at certain retailers, brand preference, and word-of-mouth advocacy [4]. Customer loyalty is a significant intangible asset for a company [22]. Marketing academics provide different views regarding customer loyalty [23]. [24], state that customer loyalty is a person's feeling of being attached to an object rather than repeated commercial transactions. Customer loyalty can be analyzed by customer behavior in the market, shown by repeat purchases or customer commitment to continue buying the brand as the leading choice [25].

The customer loyalty dimensions used in this research refer to loyalty behavior and attitudes with the dimensions of commitment, repeat purchases, giving recommendations, and positive E-WoM. Loyal customers will spread profitable word of mouth (WoM) through good stories about the experiences experienced by customers when making purchases and repeat purchases [25].

2.3. Channel Integration

Channel integration is defined as the extent to which a company coordinates its channels' objectives, design, and deployment to create synergies for the company and offer unique benefits to its customers [26]. Channel integration is one of the essential aspects of omnichannel retailing [15], [27]. Channel integration describes a company's efforts to ensure strong cooperation between the company's various channels to achieve synchronized operational activities [5], [28]. Channel integration is fundamental in managing omnichannel service customers [27]. Channel integration is considered one of the keys to success in implementing omnichannel retail. [29], determine channel integration by analyzing all possible retail activities in 3 (three) phases of purchasing procedures: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase, by proposing six dimensions of channel integration, namely promotion integration, product and price integration, information transaction integration, information access integration, order fulfillment integration, and customer service integration.

The six dimensions proposed by [29] were reused by studies by [30]–[32] by conceptualizing channel integration in retail trends from the consumer's perspective. The dimensions used in this research refer to studies conducted by [29]–[32], which use six dimensions, namely promotion integration, product and price integration, information transaction integration, information access integration, order fulfillment integration, and customer service integration.

2.4. Customer Engagement

The Marketing Science Institute (2016) considers customer engagement as a critical area of research that will help increase understanding of consumer behavior in complex, interactive, or creative environments. [33], define *customer engagement* in social media advertising as a psychological state that arises from interactive and creative customer experiences with social media advertising and the pursuit of facilitating utilitarian and hedonic values. [34], customer engagement is a multidimensional concept consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions that play an essential role in the relational exchange process where other relational concepts become engagement antecedents and consequences in the interaction of the engagement process in the brand community.

Customer engagement refers to the level of interaction and relationship of customers or potential customers with a brand or company's offers and activities. [27], [35], use three dimensions to measure customer engagement in online retail: conscious attention, enthusiastic participation, and social connection [36].

3. Research Conceptual Framework

3.1 Effect of Channel Integration (Promotions, Products and Prices, Information Access, Transaction Information, Order Fulfillment, and Customer Service on Customer Engagement

Channel integration provides a wealth of integrated information and communication mechanisms with customers and reduces customers' uncertainty and confusion. An integrated communication mechanism makes it easier for customers to obtain consistent and complete information across all channels provided by the company [37]. Well-integrated interactions between retailers and customers allow customers to have more choices and expand the information they obtain. The channel integration dimension refers to [31], [37]–[39], which uses six dimensions, namely (promotion, products and prices, access to information, transaction information, order fulfillment, and customer service, meaning that customers can find advertisements and information published in one channel and other channels in various channels provided. Information transaction interaction means that the company or retailer uses the same account to track and store all purchase records in various channels. Integration of information access means that customers can easily access information available in all channels and switch to different channels. Integration of order fulfillment, meaning that customers can complete the entire transaction process (including ordering, payment, delivery, and return of goods) using one channel or more than one channel. Customer service integration emphasizes providing consistent standards and services across all channels and aftersales service across all existing channels.

Channel integration in the retail industry can provide increased customer engagement. Customers can choose the right channel based on their needs. Convenience in online channels and offline stores: Customers can first search for product information and compare it on the website before purchasing at an offline store and checking the physical form of the product they want. Customers can complete purchase transactions by determining the time, location, delivery method, and payment method according to the customer's own choice. The essential element of customer engagement in the retail industry lies in the customer's ability to control his choices. Channel integration (promotions, products, prices, information access, transaction information, order fulfillment, and customer service) is a crucial factor influencing customer engagement [40]. From the explanation above, a hypothesis can be formulated:

H1 (a,b,c,d,e,f,g): There is a positive and significant influence between channel integration (promotions, products, and prices, information access, transaction information, order fulfillment, and customer service) on customer engagement

3.2 The Effect of Customer Engagement on Customer Loyalty

Marketing experts state that customer engagement is essential to brand loyalty [41]. Customers tend to develop a strong belief in a brand if they are involved with a brand or company [42]. Customer engagement can strengthen loyalty [41]. Previous research states that customer engagement can influence customer loyalty [27], [43]–[45]. [46] stated that loyalty is closely related to repurchase intention. [41] argue that customer engagement significantly influences customer loyalty. From the explanation above, a hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: There is a positive and significant influence between customer engagement and customer loyalty

3.2 Customer Engagement Mediates Channel Integration On Customer Loyalty

[47], use channel availability, one of the service characteristics in multichannel, as a stimulus for the customer environment. [37], used channel integration as a new characteristic in the omnichannel retail environment. Customer engagement is the extent to which customers have control during their shopping trips [37]. [48], use repurchase intention as a customer response. Repurchase intention is part of the customer loyalty dimension. Customer loyalty is a critical issue for retailers. The key to the success of an omnichannel business strategy is that customers can interact with retailers, which impacts the complexity of the purchasing process and customer loyalty to retailers [30]. The process of involving customers is one of the challenges for omnichannel retailers, so it is essential to study the factors that influence customer loyalty in omnichannel retail, especially Generation Z in Medan. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3 (a,b,c,d,e,f): Customer engagement is able to mediate the effect of channel integration on customer loyalty

4. Research Methods

This research was conducted in Medan. Medan has an area of 265.10 km2. The population in this study is Generation Z, which lives in Medan. Based on BPS data for the city of Medan in 2020, the population of Medan aged 11-27 years was 788,611. The number of samples used in this research was 440 samples. The analytical method used to test the research hypothesis with SEM PLS was completed with SmartPLS.

Table 1. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Dimensions	Indicator	
Channel Integration	Integrated Promotion	You Can find brand names, slogans, and retailer logos online/offline Can find addresses and contact information of retailers online/offline	
	Integrated Product and Price	 Find consistent product descriptions online/offline Find product category classifications online/offline Find consistent product prices online/offline 	

Variable	Dimensions	Indicator			
	Integrated Transaction Informasi	Customers can access purchase history online/offline Customers receive purchase recommendations from online/offline retailers Customers can easily find the retailer's web page/store online/offline			
	Integrated Information Access	Customers can easily search for products via websites/shops online/offline Customers can check their inventory status online/offline Customers can access information on the website/retail store online/offline			
	Integrated Order Fullfillment	Customers can exchange coupons/vouchers online and offline Customers can choose the delivery location online/offline			
	Integrated Customer Service	 Can return/exchange products online/offline Can access retail service assistants in online/offline stores Post-purchase service available 			
Customer Engagement	Conscius Attention	Desire to interact with retailers Desire to focus on retailers			
	Entused Participation	Customer response when interacting with retailers A strong desire to continue interacting with retailers			
	Social Connection	 Promote the retailer's products to others Invite other people to buy products at retailers 			
Customer Loyalty	Comitment	Strong desire to purchase at the same retailer Don't want to move to another retailer/store			
	Repeat purchases	 Consider retailers as the main choice Repurchase the same product/retailer in the future 			
	Recommen- dations	Encourage others to make purchases at known retailers Invite friends and family to experience shopping at known retailers			
	Positive E-WoM	Provide positive reviews on online/offline stores from known retailers Share retailer posts on social media that customers have			

5. Research Results and Analysis

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

Female respondents were the most significant number, with 314 people (71.36%); the most extensive age range was between 17-20 years, 238 people (54.09%); the most significant type of fashion product purchased online/offline was clothing, with 261 people. (59,325), the most considerable duration of purchases made 2 - 4 times online/offline in 1 month was 214 people (48.64%), and the costs spent on shopping for fashion products online/offline were between IDR 100,000 – IDR 500,000 with a total of 386 (87.73%).

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents

No	Demografic Data		F	(%)
1	Sex	Female	314	71,36
1	1 Sex	Man	126	28,64
		17 - 20 Year	238	54.09
2	Age	21 - 24 Year	145	32.95
		25 - 27 Year	57	12.95
		Clothes	261	59.32
		Shoe	63	14.32
	Fashion products purchased online/offline.	Accessories	36	8.18
3		Bag	14	3.18
		Watch	6	1.36
		Waist strap	2	0.45
		And others	58	13.18
		1 time	199	45.23
1	Online/offline purchases within 1 month	2 - 4 time	214	48.64
4		5 - 7 time	16	3.64
		More than 8 time	11	2.50
		Rp 100.000 – Rp 500.000	386	87.73
5	Costs used to shop	- KD 000.000 - KD 1.000.000		8.41
٥	for fashion products online/offline	Rp 1.000.000 – Rp 1.500.000	11	2.50
		Rp 1.500.000 – Rp 2.000.0000	4	0.91

4.2 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity testing aims to complete hypothesis testing—criteria for measuring internal consistency by calculating Cronbach's alpha. Alpha and composite reliability were higher than 0.6. This study's alpha score and reliability coefficient were above the required criteria. Other reliability indices, such as composite reliability and AVE, are within accepted criteria. The results are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Test

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Promotion Integration	0.923	0.925	0.937	0.651
Product and Pricing Integration	0.917	0.918	0.932	0.633
Information Transaction Integration	0.888	0.892	0.915	0.642
Information Access Integration	0.902	0.902	0.924	0.671
Order Integration	0.875	0.875	0.914	0.728
Service Integration	0.926	0.927	0.942	0.731
Customer engagement	0.876	0.878	0.906	0.618
Customer loyalty	0.889	0.892	0.913	0.601

Table 3 shows that the Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability values are more significant than the rule of thumb values, so it can be concluded that each construct variable in this research has good reliability values.

Table 4. Model Fit Test Results Based on Standardized Root Mean Square (SRMR

	Saturated model	Estimated model	
SRMR	0.063	0.066	
d_ULS	5.202	5.752	
d_G	3.253	3.261	
Chi-square	6954.294	6968.686	
NFI	0.690	0.689	

The results of the fit model test show that the SRMR value is smaller than 0.08, namely 0.066. This means that this research model has met the model fit testing assumptions.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted
Customer engagement	0.518	0.511
Customer loyalty	0.580	0.579

The test results show that the R-square value of the loyalty variable is 0.580 (58.0%), and the value of the customer engagement variable is 0.518 (51.8%).

4.3 Hypothesis test

The results of direct testing showed that not all hypotheses in this study were accepted. Promotional integration has no significant effect on customer engagement with a P-value of 0.125 and a T statistic of 1.536, (H1a) are rejected. Product and price integration has no significant effect on customer engagement with a P-value of 0.054 and a T statistic of 1.931; (H1b) are rejected. Integration of information access significantly affects customer engagement with a P-value of 0.001 and a T statistic of 3,459; (H1c) are accepted. Information transaction integration has no significant effect on customer engagement with a P-value of 0.586 and a T statistic of 0.544, (H1d) are rejected. Integration of customer orders significantly affects customer engagement with a P-value of 0.027 and a T statistic of 12,207; (H1e) are accepted. Customer service integration has no significant effect on customer engagement with a P-value of 0.335; (H1f) are rejected. Customer engagement significantly affects customer loyalty, with a P-value of 0.000 and a T statistic of 22.785, and H2 is accepted.

The test results, based on indirect relationships, indicate that customer engagement does not mediate the influence between promotion integration, product and price, and transaction information on customer loyalty. Additionally, in the indirect relationship between customer engagement and customer loyalty, mediated by customer service integration, there is a negative influence. On the other hand, testing the indirect relationship shows that customer engagement does mediate the influence between information access integration and order fulfillment on customer loyalty.

Table 6. Direct and Indirect Relatinship Variables

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Information
Promotion Integration -> Customer Engagement (H1a)	0.113	1.536	0.125	NS
Product & Price Integration -> Customer Engagement (H1b)	0.193	1.931	0.054	NS

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Information
Information Acces Integration -> Customer Engagement (H1c)	0.311	3.459	0.001	S
Information Transaction Integration -> Customer Engagement (H1d)	0.051	0.544	0.586	NS
Fullfilment Integration -> Customer Engagement (H1e)	0.203	2.207	0.027	S
Customer Service Integration -> Customer Engagement (H1f)	-0.091	0.965	0.335	NS
Customer Engagement -> Customer Loyalty	0.761	22.785	0.000	S
Promotion -> Customer Engagement -> Loyalty (H3a)	0.086	1.535	0.125	NS
Product & Price ->Customer Engagement -> Loyalty (H3b)	0.147	1.917	0.055	NS
Transcation Information -> Customer Engagement -> Loyalty (H3c)	0.039	0.542	0.588	NS
Information Access -> Customer Engagement -> Loyalty (H3d)	0.237	3.323	0.001	S
FulFilment-> Customer Engagement -> Loyalty (H3e)	0.154	2.194	0.028	S
Customer Service -> Customer Engagement -> Loyalty (H3f)	-0.069	0.961	0.336	NS

Information: S = Supported Hypotesis

NS = Not Supported Hypotesis

6. Discussion

This research provides information that channel integration (promotions, products and prices, information access, information transactions, customer orders, and customer service) is essential to forming customer engagement. Retailers with integrated channels must pay attention to customer needs and engage customers more than ever. Through channel integration, retailers can reduce friction within a single retail channel. When prices and information about fashion products are integrated online and offline, customers can no longer shop on whichever channel has the lowest price. If boundaries between channels no longer exist, customers have freedom and choice in shopping. There are many ways that retail retailers of fashion products in an omnichannel context can build familiar relationships or build customer engagement, such as offering live chat, carrying out direct communication when retail retailers of fashion products in an omnichannel context carry out live streaming, and creating digital communication such as through live streaming. , live chat or chat, holding events or business events by inviting customers, and greeting customers on social media. Building customer communication is essential as it can shape customer engagement with retailers.

The theory used in this research is the social exchange theory. Social exchange theory proposes that each individual engages in social exchange based on perceptions of tangible and intangible costs and leverages relationships from such engagement [49]. Customers are expected to reciprocate positive thoughts, feelings, and behavior towards objects (e.g., brands or products and services) after receiving benefits from a relationship with a company or brand [50]. Social exchange theory aims to understand why individuals participate in various economic platforms [51].

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The results of this study are not in line with research [26], [27], [37], stating channel integration (which consists of the integration of promotions, products, and prices, information transactions, information access, order fulfillment, and customer service) have a positive and significant influence on customer engagement. This research is in line with [8], which states that channel integration, as seen from intelligent quality, human interaction quality, and content quality, significantly affects cognitive and emotional engagement, while higher service quality has no significant effect on cognitive and emotional engagement.

This research provides information that engagement is significant in forming customer loyalty. The form of engagement that retailers obtain is by establishing digital communication, such as through live chat or chat. Every day, Generation Z is exposed to so much information on social media that Generation Z finds it challenging to remember this information. This information is obtained through various means, such as posts on social media, news from other parts of the world, and entertainment products such as music videos, films, and foreign television shows. The large amount of information obtained makes it difficult for Generation Z to focus on one piece of information received. Therefore, retailers can leverage social media to shape customer engagement by being humorous, responsive social media agents and providing personalized discounts and offers to create customer loyalty.

Retailers can carry out visually appealing video marketing campaigns to retain Generation Z customers. Visual customer engagement is critical to attracting and retaining customers. Generation Z likes video marketing and enjoys funny and exciting content. Retailers must be able to move quickly in following developments in fashion products so that Generation Z likes the products offered. In addition, retailers can take advantage of influencers and testimonials from other customers to influence Generation Z customers to engage with retailers.

From the results of indirect testing, only two hypotheses were accepted, namely customer engagement, which was able to mediate the influence of the integration of information access on customer loyalty with a P-value of 0.001 and a T statistic of 3.323. Customer engagement can mediate between order integration and loyalty with a P-value of 0.028 and a T statistic of 2.194. Customer engagement cannot mediate between the integration of promotions, products and prices, information transactions, and customer service on customer loyalty, with a P-value greater than 0.05.

The results of this research align with research [36], which explores the nature and scope of customer engagement, which has a positive and significant impact on loyalty as seen from affective commitment and word of mouth (WoM). [52] stated that customer engagement positively influences transactional (repurchase intention) and emotional (intention to spread word of mouth) loyalty or E-WoM). [53] state that millennial customer engagement significantly influences brand loyalty for fashion clothing in India.

This research differs from [54], showing that customer engagement does not positively and significantly affect customer loyalty in B2C e-commerce. [55] show that high engagement with the enthusiasm dimension does not positively and significantly affect offline loyalty. From a marketing perspective, customer engagement is used to analyze the relationship between a company and customers, focusing on exchange and progress in creating shared value and loyal behavioral intentions. The final results of customer engagement include advocacy [56], which aims at loyalty [39], as well as brand usage intentions [49]. With the emergence of social media, companies have new opportunities to connect with customers through interactions other than services and experiences [30].

7. Conclusion

The research results show that not all hypotheses in this study are accepted. Integration of promotions, products and prices, information transactions, and customer service has little effect on customer engagement and loyalty. Integration of information access and customer orders has a significant effect on customer engagement and customer loyalty. Customer engagement can mediate the influence of information access integration on customer loyalty, and customer engagement can mediate between order integration and loyalty. Meanwhile, customer engagement cannot mediate between integrating promotions, products and prices, information transactions, and customer service on customer loyalty.

Retail retailers use several ways to engage customers, such as offering live chat, creating digital communication through live streaming, live chat or chat, and holding events or business events by inviting and greeting customers on social media. Building customer communication is essential as it can shape customer engagement with retailers. The characteristics of Generation Z are that they are digital natives, expressive, multitasking, and able to interact intensely through social media. Therefore, retailers can utilize omnichannel channels with social media to reach the Generation Z market.

Customer engagement can significantly create customer loyalty. In this study, Generation Z is expected to reciprocate positive thoughts, feelings, and behavior towards objects (for example, brands or products) after receiving benefits from relationships with retailers or product brands. Social exchange theory aims to understand why someone is willing to participate in various economic platforms [25]. This research confirms that the engagement of Generation Z customers who have participated in various channels owned by fashion product retailers in Medan can create customer loyalty. To understand the form of Generation Z customer loyalty in the city of Medan, future researchers can use a focus group discussion approach to obtain more concrete information.

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