



Research Article

Building Online Brand Loyalty Through Customer Relationship Management

Sanjeev Kumar Giri ¹, Dr. Vikas Sheoran ^{2*}

¹ Department of Business Management & Commerce, IEC University, Baddi, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India

² Supervisor, IEC University, Baddi, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author: Dr. Vikas Sheoran *

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Abstract

With the rapid expansion of the web-based economy, competition among brands has intensified to unprecedented levels. In the contemporary digital marketplace, a brand is no longer distinguished solely by the quality of its products or services; rather, it is defined by the overall experience it offers to its customers. As consumer expectations evolve, meaningful and sustained relationships have become central to gaining a competitive edge. In this environment, organisations increasingly recognise that brand loyalty is not merely an outcome but a valuable strategic asset that contributes to long-term business success.

In response to these changing dynamics, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has emerged as a crucial tool for strengthening customer engagement and enhancing brand value. CRM reflects a shift in marketing focus—from transactional exchanges to relational interactions—driven by internal organisational needs, advancements in information technology, and the growing influence of personalised digital experiences. Effective CRM systems enable firms to collect, analyse, and apply customer insights in ways that foster trust, satisfaction, and emotional connection with the brand.

This paper begins by examining the conceptual foundations and definitions of CRM in the context of modern digital markets. It then discusses the theoretical frameworks that support the idea that CRM plays a significant role in building and sustaining brand loyalty in online environments. These theories illustrate how consistent interaction, personalised communication, and customer-centric strategies contribute to loyalty formation. Based on this theoretical understanding, the paper further outlines key principles and practical approaches that organisations can adopt to strengthen brand loyalty through CRM initiatives. These include designing customer-focused processes, leveraging data analytics, integrating technological tools, and shaping experiences that encourage repeat engagement. The study highlights that a well-implemented CRM strategy not only enhances customer satisfaction but also serves as a robust foundation for cultivating long-term brand loyalty in a competitive web-driven economy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the widespread use of the internet, consumers today are able to obtain information with far greater ease than in the past. Online platforms significantly reduce search costs, allowing buyers to compare prices, evaluate alternatives, and make informed choices within minutes. In such an environment, merely offering competitive prices is no longer sufficient for businesses. To remain relevant and to retain customers in the digital marketplace, firms must invest in building and sustaining strong customer relationships.

Brand loyalty has emerged as one of the most valuable intangible assets for any organisation. It represents not only repeated purchasing behaviour but also the customer's emotional commitment to the brand. From the perspective of brand depth and breadth, developing loyalty requires consistent engagement, meaningful interactions, and a long-term approach to customer care. Loyalty does not arise instantly; it evolves gradually—from initial brand awareness, to satisfaction, to trust, and eventually to a stable and enduring relationship (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Central to this evolution is the organisation's ability to understand and fulfil customer expectations. When customers experience high levels of satisfaction, they are more likely to return to the brand, and repeated positive experiences cultivate lasting loyalty. However, marketing research has repeatedly shown that satisfaction alone does not guarantee loyalty. A customer may be satisfied with a product yet still choose a different brand if another option seems more appealing or convenient. Nevertheless, satisfaction forms the essential foundation upon which loyalty is built. This leads to an important question: how can businesses convert satisfied customers into loyal ones?

This paper seeks to explore that question by examining the link between Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and the development of brand loyalty. Although scholars and industry professionals widely acknowledge the importance of effective CRM practices, academic literature still lacks sufficient clarity on how organisations can build and operationalise a truly effective CRM framework. Many firms mistakenly equate CRM with the installation of specialised software or view it merely as a communication tool for interacting with customers. In reality, CRM is far more comprehensive. It constitutes both a strategic philosophy and a systematic management approach aimed at understanding, attracting, retaining, and deepening customer relationships (Priyambodo & Sari, 2023).

A well-designed CRM system goes beyond data collection; it integrates customer insights into every stage of decision-making, from product development and service delivery to marketing strategy and after-sales support. Its ultimate goal is to place the customer at the centre of the business model and nurture mutually beneficial relationships. By examining these dimensions, this paper aims to identify practical and effective methods through which organisations can manage customer relationships in the digital era and strengthen brand loyalty in an increasingly competitive online marketplace.

2. CRM Tools and Loyalty

Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM) refers to a strategic business approach through which organisations cultivate stronger connections with their customers, enhance loyalty, and strengthen the overall value of their brand. At its core, CRM is built upon the idea that long-term relationships with customers are far more valuable than isolated transactions. Modern CRM initiatives, therefore, focus on understanding customer expectations, collecting meaningful feedback, and using those insights to design marketing practices that foster trust and lasting engagement (Fatima et al., 2022).

A well-implemented CRM framework can support the development and enhancement of customer relationships through a variety of programs. These may include personalised offerings, community-oriented activities, customer care initiatives, reward mechanisms, and structured loyalty schemes. Among these, loyalty programs often emerge as one of the most influential tools because they directly motivate customers to remain engaged with a brand. Such programs create mutually advantageous arrangements—customers receive tangible or intangible benefits, while firms secure continued patronage, recurring purchases, and positive word-of-mouth.

In understanding loyalty, it is important to recognise that true brand loyalty consists of two essential elements: attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty refers to a customer's favourable perception of a brand, which is shaped by trust, emotional attachment, and the belief that the brand consistently delivers superior value. Once customers develop this emotional commitment, behavioural loyalty generally follows, expressed through repeated purchases, frequent interactions, or long-term association with the firm. For this reason, loyalty programs must be developed in a manner that appeals not only to surface-level behaviour but also to deeper psychological motivations that strengthen a customer's positive attitudes toward the brand.

The design of a loyalty program is significantly influenced by its reward structure. Rewards form the most visible and persuasive feature of such programs and often serve as the primary reason customers choose to participate. These rewards may take several forms. On one level, programs may offer tangible or financial incentives, such as discounts, cashbacks, loyalty points, gifts, or access to exclusive deals. On another level, customers may receive psychological and symbolic rewards, including a sense of recognition, personal importance, or belonging to an exclusive group. These intangible benefits often carry strong emotional value, influencing self-esteem and shaping how individuals perceive their relationship with the brand. Ultimately, the success of a loyalty program depends on the customer's willingness to enrol in it and consistently engage with the CRM tools offered by the firm (Alqahtani & Naim, 2022).

The role of CRM software has become increasingly significant in this context. Contemporary CRM systems enable businesses to manage customer interactions efficiently, resolve customer issues more effectively, and provide more personalised services. These platforms act as centralised repositories of

customer information—storing data such as purchase patterns, service histories, personal preferences, and behavioural trends. When analysed carefully, this data helps firms in both B2B and B2C sectors design strategies that are not only customer-centric but also growth-oriented.

CRM data supports multiple departments. For instance, the marketing team can use customer insights to design targeted promotional campaigns, while the sales department can identify potential leads and trends that may improve conversions. Customer service teams, on the other hand, can offer better and faster solutions by having immediate access to a customer's history of interactions with the firm. Although many of these processes operate behind the scenes and may not be visible to customers, they significantly influence how customers experience the brand.

In order to truly enhance customer loyalty and improve retention, organisations must look at CRM from the customer's perspective. This means interpreting CRM-generated information not merely as data points but as insights that help build meaningful and personalised relationships. When CRM tools are used to understand customers more deeply and tailor services to their expectations, firms can create positive experiences that naturally foster trust, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty (Cheng et al., 2018).

3. Brand Loyalty via CRM

Understanding the influence of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) on brand loyalty first requires an appreciation of how brand loyalty itself is formed. Several theoretical perspectives—such as prospect theory, satisfaction theory, and learning theory—offer valuable insights into this process. When consumers encounter a product for the first time, their decision to purchase is generally guided by prior information, perceived value, and cognitive evaluation. If the product or service ultimately delivers utility that exceeds their initial expectations, a sense of satisfaction emerges.

This satisfaction operates as a form of positive reinforcement, gradually shaping the consumer's attitude towards the brand. Over time, with repeated satisfactory experiences, this reinforcement becomes stronger, influencing subsequent purchase decisions. Eventually, the repeated cycle of positive experiences transitions into habitual buying behaviour, and the customer develops a stable preference for the brand. In essence, brand loyalty grows through an interaction of three core dimensions—cognition, attitude, and behaviour—each contributing to the strengthening of the consumer-brand relationship (Keshvari, 2015).

A crucial element in this process is the concept of customer value. Importantly, customer value is not determined by the enterprise alone; rather, it is perceived and interpreted by the customers themselves. This perceived value is influenced by a variety of determinants, including the level of competition in the market, the organisation's market share, production and material costs, brand identity, and the customer's subjective evaluation of the benefits received. Customer satisfaction, in turn, is closely tied to how effectively expectations are

managed. When customers believe that a product or service meets or exceeds what was promised, their satisfaction increases, thereby setting the foundation for loyalty.

In the context of online marketing, customer satisfaction becomes even more significant. Digital platforms amplify customer feedback, shape perceptions rapidly, and influence purchasing decisions across a wider audience. Consequently, organisations operating in the online space focus heavily on maintaining customer satisfaction as a key performance indicator. Their goal is not merely to attract customers but to retain them over a long period by continuously delivering value. Online businesses, therefore, prioritise capturing customer attention, offering personalised experiences, and nurturing ongoing engagement to strengthen the pathways that ultimately lead to long-term loyalty (Rafiq et al., 2012).

CRM systems play an essential role in this process. Modern CRM software enables firms to monitor, record, and analyse every interaction they have with their customers across marketing, sales, and service channels. By having a consolidated view of the customer, organisations can understand behavioural patterns, identify pain points, and deliver timely and personalised support. Effective CRM strategies help businesses create a favourable brand image and encourage positive customer sentiments—an outcome that is vital for fostering loyalty.

Moreover, CRM tools assist in managing and improving customer experiences by enabling organisations to track previous communication, service requests, and feedback. This data-driven insight empowers businesses to respond more effectively, even when facing negative feedback. With informed intervention, companies can convert unfavourable word-of-mouth into positive advocacy, thereby reinforcing customer trust and strengthening brand loyalty. CRM acts as a bridge between customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty. By enabling organisations to understand customer needs, monitor interactions, and offer consistent value, CRM systems significantly contribute to the development and sustenance of brand loyalty in both traditional and digital marketplaces (Doe & Asamoah, 2022).

4. Managing CRM Process

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has evolved into a vital strategic approach for modern businesses, as it focuses on nurturing long-term relationships with customers rather than merely facilitating transactions. At its core, CRM is about delivering consistent and meaningful service. In an increasingly competitive market, no organisation can afford to lose its loyal customers, as customer attrition directly impacts profitability, brand image, and long-term sustainability.

Once a company identifies the elements that will form the foundation of its CRM strategy, it must put in place a systematic and well-structured process for implementation. This process generally involves a series of coordinated activities such as defining roles, training employees, ensuring clear communication, and establishing performance evaluation mechanisms (Purnama, 2015).

Role definition is particularly important in CRM implementation. It involves outlining the duties and responsibilities of every participant in the relationship-building process—whether it is the organisation itself, its employees, or even the customers who form the other end of the relationship. Clear allocation of roles ensures that each individual involved understands what is expected and can contribute effectively to delivering value.

After roles are clearly specified, employees must receive appropriate training to ensure they can successfully execute the CRM strategy. Effective CRM requires staff members to possess strong interpersonal, communication, and service-oriented skills. In the digital marketplace, employees must also be equipped to deliver high-quality online services, as many customer interactions now take place through digital platforms. In essence, employees act as the face of the organisation; their actions can either strengthen or weaken customer relationships. Often, they are required to make decisions on the spot, especially when dealing with service-related issues. Therefore, they must be trained to interpret and utilise customer data accurately and meaningfully so that they can build rapport, personalise services, and enhance customer satisfaction (Shah et al., 2021).

Employees lie at the heart of CRM initiatives. For this reason, organisations must focus not only on external customer satisfaction but also on internal satisfaction. This concept aligns with the principles of Internal Marketing (IM), which suggest that employee motivation, loyalty, and satisfaction play a critical role in shaping customer experiences. When employees feel valued, informed, and supported, they are more likely to deliver superior service, thereby strengthening the organisation's relationships with its customers.

Communication, both internal and external, is another essential pillar of CRM. Within the organisation, management must clearly articulate the objectives of the CRM program, the methods for its implementation, and the expected outcomes. Proper communication ensures that every employee understands the purpose of the CRM initiatives and their personal role in ensuring their success. Externally, businesses must also communicate effectively with their customers about various CRM programs, benefits, and service improvements. Transparent and timely communication helps encourage customer loyalty behaviours such as repeat purchases, willingness to pay premium prices, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Moreover, organisations must establish robust communication channels that enable the smooth exchange of information between the business and its customers.

Evaluation of CRM performance is the final but crucial step. Since employees work diligently to cultivate stronger customer relationships, the organisation must periodically assess whether the CRM strategies are delivering the expected outcomes. If the initiatives fail to produce acceptable returns on investment or do not contribute meaningfully to long-term customer retention, the CRM approach must be re-examined and adjusted without delay (Khan et al., 2020).

Performance measurement in CRM poses certain challenges, as the relationship-building process is complex and influenced by many intangible factors. Although there is no single established method that can measure CRM success with complete accuracy, firms must adopt multi-dimensional evaluation tools that capture both quantitative and qualitative outcomes. A balanced set of performance indicators may include customer satisfaction levels, loyalty patterns, repeat purchase rates, complaint frequencies, and perceived value. From a process perspective, performance can also be assessed by examining customer acquisition, retention, and expansion. Together, these metrics provide a comprehensive view of how well the CRM strategy aligns with the organisation's broader relationship marketing goals. CRM is an ongoing commitment rather than a one-time initiative. Its success depends on a company's ability to integrate human resources, technology, communication, and customer insights into a cohesive system that continually enhances customer relationships and drives business growth.

5. Enhancing Online Brand Loyalty

Online marketing has transformed the way businesses interact with consumers by offering unparalleled convenience and efficiency. Digital platforms allow companies to advertise without the traditional limitations of physical space, while customers benefit from quick purchasing options, effortless access to information, and the ability to compare products at any time. However, despite these advantages, the online environment also presents serious challenges. In the digital marketplace, customers can easily shift from one brand to another, and years of brand loyalty or relationship-building can be lost in a matter of moments. Because each organisation operates with its own distinct culture, strategic orientation, and internal processes, businesses must adopt a well-designed Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to sustain meaningful engagement and long-term success (Yu, 2014).

A crucial starting point in CRM implementation is online customer identification. Understanding who the customers are and recognising their behavioural characteristics forms the foundation of all relationship-building efforts. William Band (1998) emphasised that not every customer contributes equally to a firm's profitability. Hence, CRM does not merely focus on attracting new consumers; its core philosophy lies in nurturing and retaining valuable existing customers. Principles such as the Pareto Principle (20/80 rule), the commerce cycle theory, and the Lai-li classification method support the idea that a small proportion of regular customers often accounts for a majority of revenue. Identifying this valuable segment enables marketers to channel their efforts more strategically and establish a strong base of loyal customers.

Once the right customers are recognised, the next essential step is understanding them through well-structured databases. A CRM database goes beyond storing basic information; it integrates customer data from multiple touchpoints to form a comprehensive and real-time profile. This includes past purchases, browsing history, service requests, feedback, and communication preferences. In a highly competitive digital

environment where marketing emails often end up filtered as spam, it becomes necessary for businesses to maintain updated records so that communication remains relevant, personalised, and effective. Online customer service, which aims to support and guide customers through their purchasing journey, relies heavily on accurate data integration (Magatef et al., 2023).

The third significant phase involves data analysis. Raw data, when interpreted through the CRM system, reveals behavioural patterns, unmet needs, and even sources of dissatisfaction. Modern CRM tools process scattered information and present it in the form of charts, dashboards, and analytical summaries, enabling employees and decision-makers to respond quickly. By interpreting trends and identifying issues early, firms can address customer grievances before they escalate. Studies and practical experience show that acknowledging and resolving customer complaints in a timely and empathetic manner not only enhances satisfaction but also establishes trust, which is vital for cultivating long-term loyalty.

The fourth step is the ability to offer customised solutions. Unlike traditional mass production approaches, CRM encourages companies to tailor their offerings according to the specific needs and preferences of individual consumers. In today's diverse marketplace, where customers expect brands to understand their personal tastes, customisation becomes a powerful tool for differentiation. When customers perceive that a firm is making genuine efforts to understand and respond to their unique requirements, they are more likely to remain loyal and develop an emotional connection with the brand.

Furthermore, CRM enhances customer-delivered value, a concept emphasised by Philip Kotler through the theory of "Customer Value Delivery." As competition intensifies across industries, businesses must consistently create and offer superior value to maintain customer satisfaction and outperform rivals. The perceived value that customers derive from a product or service significantly influences their level of satisfaction, and ultimately, the strength of their loyalty. A higher value perception leads to deeper trust, stronger emotional attachment, and greater likelihood of continued patronage (Fauziyyah & Khusna, 2022).

Finally, ongoing communication plays a crucial role in sustaining long-term relationships and fostering brand loyalty. While customer satisfaction alone does not automatically result in loyalty, it serves as its most important foundation. Effective CRM strategies strive to exceed customer expectations by engaging them through meaningful interactions—such as loyalty programmes, community-building initiatives, online forums, and personalised messages. These initiatives encourage repeated engagement and create a sense of belonging. Additionally, customers often derive symbolic satisfaction from being recognised and valued by a brand. This emotional and psychological fulfilment—reflecting aspects of self-esteem, social identity, and personal expression—strengthens the bond between consumers and the organisation, making them more likely to remain loyal in the long run.

6. Online Customer Communities and Service Quality

In today's intensely competitive market, many organisations find themselves struggling to distinguish their products or services from those of their rivals. When price, features, and availability no longer offer a meaningful advantage, truly forward-thinking businesses turn to customer service as their key differentiator. Exceptional customer service not only enhances a company's reputation but also has a profound impact on customers' long-term loyalty and willingness to repurchase.

Research continues to highlight the central role of service quality in shaping brand loyalty. For instance, a Microsoft survey conducted in 2015 revealed that nearly 97% of consumers worldwide consider customer service a crucial factor when deciding which brands, they trust and remain loyal to. Additionally, 62% of customers reported discontinuing business with a company due to unsatisfactory service. These findings underscore the need for service excellence that goes beyond traditional service hours or routine support mechanisms (Dewnarain et al., 2018).

In the digital era, customers expect swift responses, personalised attention, and easy access to assistance at any time of the day. Relying solely on conventional support channels—such as phone lines limited to business hours—makes it difficult for organisations to meet these heightened expectations. This is where the concept of an online customer community becomes invaluable.

An online community provides a platform where customers can engage with the brand and with one another, seek solutions, share experiences, and access support without time constraints. Such communities help companies cultivate a strong sense of belonging among their customers while enabling the delivery of support that is accessible, timely, and interactive. By fostering digital spaces where users can learn, ask questions, and exchange ideas freely, organisations can significantly elevate their overall service experience and position themselves far ahead of competitors who rely solely on traditional customer service models.

7. Online Communities and Quality Customer Support

Online customer communities generally follow three predominant models, each catering to different levels of customer engagement and organisational goals. The first model involves a support-centric community, where customer questions are addressed directly by the company's service team. The second model is the peer-to-peer or customer forum model, where users help one another by sharing knowledge, troubleshooting issues, and offering practical advice based on personal experience. The third and most versatile model is a hybrid structure, combining direct support from the company with peer-driven interactions among customers (Wongsansukcharoen, 2021).

Brands that enjoy a strong and dedicated customer base often find significant value in the peer-to-peer approach. Such communities naturally develop trusted leaders or "community champions"—long-term users who voluntarily guide others,

share best practices, and help new customers navigate the product or service more effectively. Their contributions create a sense of collaboration and belonging, reinforcing the community's overall strength.

However, the hybrid community model tends to offer the greatest flexibility and impact. It provides customers with the option to seek help from fellow users while still maintaining a clear line of communication with official customer service representatives. This dual layer of support enriches the overall service environment. Customers receive rapid peer responses while also having the reassurance of formal assistance when needed.

By establishing a well-structured online community that integrates both peer support and direct company interaction, organisations can deliver a social, dynamic, and customer-centric service experience. This approach not only empowers customers but also strengthens the brand's image as one that genuinely values accessibility, transparency, and meaningful engagement (Tweneboah-Koduah & Farley, 2015).

To maximise the benefits of such communities, companies must thoughtfully incorporate customer service practices into the community structure. Effective community management, timely responses from support teams, active moderation, and encouragement of peer participation all play a role in creating a space that consistently enhances the customer experience. When done well, an online community becomes more than just a support channel—it evolves into a strategic asset that elevates customer satisfaction and drives long-term loyalty.

8. Conclusion

An effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system plays a significant role in fostering brand loyalty; however, brand loyalty itself is a multidimensional construct shaped by several interconnected factors. CRM primarily contributes to loyalty by enhancing customer value and improving overall customer satisfaction—both of which serve as fundamental pillars in the formation of long-term loyalty towards a brand.

At its core, CRM focuses on understanding, engaging, and retaining existing customers. This emphasis on sustaining enduring relationships carries substantial implications for brand-building, as loyal customers are more likely to repeat purchases, advocate for the brand, and resist switching to competitors. Through consistent interaction, personalised service, and timely support, CRM enables companies to cultivate a sense of trust and belonging among their customer base.

Given these advantages, it becomes essential for businesses to integrate a well-designed CRM framework into their broader brand loyalty strategies. When organisations align CRM activities with loyalty programs—such as reward systems, tailored offers, and after-sales support—they create a cohesive approach that strengthens customer commitment. In essence, the successful implementation of CRM not only improves day-to-day customer interactions but also contributes meaningfully to the long-term development of strong, resilient brand loyalty.

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