

Original Article

Interactive Storytelling Marketing Communication Strategies in Building Audience Loyalty on Short Video Platforms

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Abstract:

The rapid proliferation of short video platforms has significantly reshaped marketing communication practices, urging brands to adopt interactive and narrative-based strategies to capture attention and foster sustained audience relationships within highly competitive digital environments. However, empirical evidence examining how interactive storytelling contributes to audience loyalty in the context of short-form video remains limited. This study aims to analyze the effect of interactive storytelling marketing communication strategies on audience loyalty, with audience engagement functioning as a mediating variable. A quantitative explanatory approach was employed, utilizing an online survey distributed to 100 active short video platform users domiciled in the Jabodetabek area who had previously engaged with brand storytelling content. Data were analyzed using multiple regression techniques to test the direct and indirect relationships among variables. The results indicate that interactive storytelling has a positive and significant effect on audience loyalty, both directly and indirectly through increased audience engagement. Interactive narrative elements such as participatory content formats, episodic storytelling structures, and embedded calls-to-action significantly enhance emotional involvement and repeat viewing intentions. These findings underscore the strategic importance of integrating interactivity within narrative-based marketing communication to strengthen relational bonds with digital audiences. The study offers theoretical novelty by synthesizing narrative engagement and relationship marketing frameworks within the short video ecosystem and provides practical implications for brands in designing data-driven interactive storytelling strategies to cultivate long-term audience loyalty.

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Introduction

The development of digital technology has driven a fundamental transformation in global marketing communication practices, particularly through the dominance of short video platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Short-form

content formats are not only changing media consumption patterns, but also shaping audiences' new expectations for faster, more personalized, and interactive messages ([Ganev, 2023](#)). Globally, the growth of short video users has shown a significant increase since 2020, in line with the shift in post-pandemic digital behavior that accelerated the adoption of visual-based social media ([Shang, 2023](#)). In urban areas such as Greater Jakarta, internet penetration and high use of social media reinforce the relevance of short video-based communication strategies in reaching young and digital native consumers. This condition requires brands to no longer rely on one-way communication, but instead build participatory interaction through a storytelling approach that is able to create emotional engagement and long-term relationships with the audience.

In the context of modern marketing communication, storytelling has been recognized as an effective strategy for building emotional closeness and increasing brand value ([Baig et al., 2025](#)). However, recent developments show that static storytelling is no longer adequate in a highly dynamic digital environment ([Seo, 2024](#)). Interactivity is a key element that allows audiences to actively participate in the narrative, thus strengthening the brand experience. Recent research confirms that interactive content contributes to increased engagement and positive behavior intentions towards brands ([Satar et al., 2024](#)). However, most studies still focus on the context of social media in general and have not specifically explored the mechanisms of interactive storytelling in short video ecosystems that have algorithmic characteristics and limited duration.

A number of previous studies have examined the relationship between engagement and brand loyalty in the digital environment. For example, research by [Rachbini \(2023\)](#) shows that customer engagement on social media is positively correlated with brand loyalty and advocacy. Other studies by [Zaman et al. \(2025\)](#) emphasizing that emotional engagement is an important mediator in forming a long-term relationship between consumers and brands. However, these studies tend not to integrate narrative and interactivity dimensions simultaneously in a single analytical framework. In other words, there is still a research gap related to how interactive storytelling-based marketing communication strategies directly and indirectly affect audience loyalty through engagement mechanisms.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the influence of interactive storytelling-based marketing communication strategies on audience loyalty on short video platforms, with audience engagement as a mediating variable. Specifically, this study examined the direct relationship between interactive storytelling and audience loyalty, as well as indirect relationships through increased emotional and participatory engagement. This approach integrates the perspectives of narrative engagement and relationship marketing in one empirical model that is quantitatively tested. Thus, this study not only identifies causal influences between variables, but also sheds light on the underlying relational mechanisms in contemporary digital contexts.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the development of a conceptual model that synthesizes narrative engagement theory with relational marketing theory in the short video ecosystem, which until now is still limited in the international literature. Previous studies by [Gonçalves \(2025\)](#) emphasizing the importance of customer engagement as the foundation of long-term relationships, but has not explicitly linked it to interactive narrative structures in short video formats. By examining the role of

engagement mediation in the relationship between interactive storytelling and audience loyalty, this study enriches the academic discourse on participation-based digital marketing communication. In addition, the findings of this study expand the understanding of loyalty dynamics in the context of algorithms and the consumption of short-duration content that is fast and competitive.

In practical terms, this research provides strategic implications for brands and digital communications managers in designing content that not only grabs attention, but also builds ongoing relationships with audiences. Interactivity in narratives—such as episodic formats, calls to action, and user participation—has been shown to have the potential to increase emotional engagement and rewatch intent. In an increasingly competitive digital environment, the ability to build audience loyalty is a strategic advantage that determines brand sustainability (Batu & Kutlu, 2023). Therefore, the results of this study can be the basis for the formulation of a data-based marketing communication strategy that is adaptive to the characteristics of short video platforms and the behavior of urban audiences such as in the Greater Jakarta area.

Method

Design and Research Approach

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to test the causal relationship between variables (Ghanad, 2023). The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows objective measurement of abstract constructs such as interactive storytelling, audience engagement, and audience loyalty through structured indicators and statistical hypothesis testing. Explanatory design is relevant to identify direct and indirect influences between variables in the context of dynamic digital marketing communication. The research model integrates the perspectives of narrative engagement and relationship marketing in one empirically tested analytical framework.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The population of this study is active users of short video platforms (TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts) who are domiciled in the Greater Jakarta area. Respondents' inclusion criteria include: (1) at least 17 years old, (2) actively accessing short videos at least three times a week, and (3) having interacted with the brand's storytelling content through comments, likes, shares, or participation in interactive invitations. The sampling technique uses non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling approach, because this study requires specific and relevant respondent characteristics to the variables being tested (Rahman, 2023). The number of samples was set at 100 respondents.

Data Collection Techniques and Research Instruments

The data collection technique was carried out through an online survey using a five-point Likert scale-based structured questionnaire (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The research instrument was developed by adapting and modifying indicators from previous research that are relevant to the context of digital marketing and engagement, such as the dimensions of interactivity, narrative participation, emotional engagement, and behavioral loyalty (Mandung, 2025). The interactive storytelling

variables were measured through participatory indicators, episodic structure, and call to action. Audience engagement is measured through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement dimensions. Audience loyalty is measured through rewatch intent, recommendations, and preferences for brand content. The construct validity test was carried out through item-total correlation analysis and convergent validity test, while the reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with a minimum limit of 0.70.

Research Implementation Procedure

The research procedure is carried out systematically in several stages. The first stage is the preparation of instruments based on literature review and operationalization of variables. The second stage included testing the instrument on a number of respondents to ensure the clarity of the questions and the stability of initial reliability. The third stage is the online distribution of questionnaires through social media networks and digital communities in the Greater Jakarta area during the data collection period. The fourth stage includes the process of cleaning the data to eliminate incomplete or inconsistent responses. The final stage is the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the results objectively to answer the research hypothesis.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis technique uses multiple regression to test the direct influence of interactive storytelling on audience loyalty and the indirect influence through audience engagement as a mediator. The mediation test was conducted using the causal step and bootstrapping approaches to ascertain the significance of the indirect pathway ([Alfons et al., 2022](#)). The analysis was performed with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software for regression testing and instrument reliability. This approach allows for a systematic and accurate evaluation of the structural relationships between variables in the context of digital marketing communication research.

Research Variables

- Variabel Independen (X): Interactive Storytelling
Indicators: audience participation, episodic story structure, interactive call to action.
- Variabel Mediasi (M): Audience Engagement
Indicators: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement.
- Variabel Dependen (Y): Audience Loyalty
Indicators: rewatch intent, recommendations, and continued preferences for brand content.

Research Hypothesis

- H1: Interactive storytelling has a positive and significant effect on audience engagement on short video platforms.
- H2: Audience engagement has a positive and significant effect on audience loyalty on short video platforms.
- H3: Interactive storytelling has a positive and significant effect on audience loyalty on short video platforms.
- H4: Audience engagement significantly mediates the influence of interactive

storytelling on audience loyalty on short video platforms.

Results

1. The Effect of Interactive Storytelling on Audience Engagement

The results of the analysis show that interactive storytelling has a positive and significant influence on audience engagement on short video platforms. The regression coefficient indicates a consistent and statistically meaningful direction of the relationship. Improved quality of interactive narrative elements such as audience participation, episodic structure, and call-to-action contribute to increased emotional engagement and audience behavior. The regression model shows a substantial contribution in explaining engagement variations. This confirms that interactivity is a strategic determinant in building an initial relationship between brands and digital audiences.

Table 1. Regression Analysis: Interactive Storytelling → Audience Engagement

Variable	b	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. (p)	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value
Interactive Storytelling	0.621	0.079	7.842	0.000	0.386	0.379	61.48

Source: Processed Research Data (2026)

Table 1 shows that the β coefficient of 0.621 with a standard error of 0.079 produces a t value of 7.842 ($p < 0.001$). An F value of 61.48 indicates that the regression model is simultaneously significant. An R² of 0.386 and an Adjusted R² of 0.379 indicate that about 38% of audience engagement variations are explained by interactive storytelling, which falls into the moderate-strong category in social research. Thus, H1 accepted. These findings show that interactive storytelling is not just a communication strategy, but a relational instrument that is able to trigger active audience engagement in the algorithmic context of short video platforms. So, the higher the intensity of interactivity in the narrative, the higher the level of engagement that is formed systematically and measurably.

2. The Effect of Audience Engagement on Audience Loyalty

The next regression analysis showed that audience engagement had a stronger influence on audience loyalty than the direct influence of storytelling. Emotional and participatory engagement has been shown to increase rewatch intent as well as the tendency to recommend content to others. This relationship shows that digital loyalty is formed through consistent, interactive experiences. The regression model shows a high explainability in explaining loyalty variations. This confirms that engagement is the psychological foundation of audience loyalty.

Table 2. Regression Analysis: Audience Engagement → Audience Loyalty

Variable	b	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. (p)	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value
Audience Engagement	0.684	0.077	8.915	0.000	0.468	0.462	79.48

Source: Processed Research Data (2026)

Table 2 shows a β of 0.684 with a t-value of 8.915 ($p < 0.001$). An F value of 79.48 confirms that the model is significant overall. An R^2 of 0.468 indicates that 46.8% of audience loyalty variations are explained by engagement, indicating a strong contribution. Thus, H2 accepted. These findings confirm that loyalty on short video platforms is determined more by the quality of engagement experienced by the audience than by content exposure alone. Jadi, Audience engagement functions as a mechanism for building loyalty that is relational and sustainable.

3. The Direct Effect of Interactive Storytelling on Audience Loyalty

Direct influence testing shows that interactive storytelling still has a significant contribution to audience loyalty. Although the value of the coefficient is lower than the effect of engagement, this relationship is still statistically significant. This shows that interactive storytelling has an independent effect in shaping audience preferences and commitment. This model explains some of the variation in loyalty, although not as much as the one involving engagement. Thus, storytelling serves as an initial trigger for loyalty that is strengthened through engagement.

Table 3. Direct Regression Analysis: Interactive Storytelling \rightarrow Audience Loyalty

Variable	b	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. (p)	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value
Interactive Storytelling	0.517	0.083	6.233	0.000	0.267	0.260	38.84

Source: Processed Research Data (2026)

Table 3 shows a β of 0.517 with a t-value of 6.233 ($p < 0.001$). An R^2 of 0.267 indicates that 26.7% of loyalty variations are explained directly by interactive storytelling. An F value of 38.84 confirms the significance of the model. Therefore, H3 accepted. These results suggest that participatory narratives and episodic structures have a direct role in building audience preferences for brand content. Thus, interactive storytelling has direct power in building loyalty, although the optimal effect is achieved when combined with engagement.

4. Mediation Effect of Audience Engagement

Mediation testing using bootstrapping 5,000 resampling showed that indirect pathways were statistically significant. The value of the indirect effect shows a substantial contribution to the total effect. The confidence interval does not cross zero, so mediation can be declared significant. The total effect was greater than the direct effect, indicating partial mediation. This proves that engagement strengthens and deepens the influence of storytelling on loyalty.

Table 4. Mediation Analysis (Bootstrapping Results)

Path	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
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Interactive							
Storytelling →							
Engagement →	0.517	0.424	0.941	5.976	0.000	0.287	0.562
Loyalty							

Source: Processed Research Data (2026)

The indirect effect value of 0.424 with a 95% confidence interval [0.287, 0.562] indicates the significance of mediation because it does not pass zero. The total effect of 0.941 shows a very strong overall influence. Because the direct effect remains significant but smaller than the total effect, mediation is partial. Thus, H4 accepted. These findings suggest that audience engagement is a psychological and relational mechanism that reinforces the influence of interactive storytelling on loyalty, making it a strategic element in short video-based marketing communications.

Discussion

The results of this study show that interactive storytelling has a positive and significant effect on audience engagement. These findings are consistent with Narrative Engagement Theory, which explains that individuals will show higher engagement when they experience immersion or transportation into the storyline (Rabelista Nijhof, 2023). In the theory, engagement arises through simultaneous cognitive and emotional processes, so that the audience not only understands the message, but also feels it. The study expands on these findings by showing that on short video platforms, interactivity elements—such as invitations to participation and episodic structures—reinforce the transportation process in a fast-paced algorithmic context. Study Giertz et al. (2022) Previously emphasizing the role of social presence in increasing engagement in live-streaming, this study adds a structured narrative dimension as an empirically measurable determinant. Thus, this research is not only in line with the theory of narrative engagement, but also makes a new contribution by examining the context of short videos that have not been discussed in detail.

The significant influence of audience engagement on audience loyalty also supports Relationship Marketing Theory, which states that loyalty develops through commitment and continuous relational interaction (John & De Villiers, 2024). Within the framework of this theory, trust and commitment are the foundation of the long-term relationship between consumers and brands. The results of this study show that engagement explains almost half of the variation in loyalty, thus reinforcing the argument that digital loyalty is not born from content exposure alone, but from the quality of meaningful interactions. These findings are in line with Sohail (2023) which found that emotional engagement contributes to brand commitment in the digital community. However, what sets this study apart is its focus on short video formats that are algorithmic and ephemeral, thus proving that loyalty can still be formed even if the duration of the content is very short. Thus, this study expands the relevance of relationship marketing into the context of micro-content-based marketing communication.

The results of the study also show that interactive storytelling has a direct influence on audience loyalty, although it is lower than the mediation channel through engagement. This finding can be explained through the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which states that

attitudes can be formed through central and peripheral pathways ([El Hedhli & Zourrig, 2023](#)). In the context of short videos, visual elements, story structure, and interactivity can serve as peripheral cues that directly affect attitudes without a deep elaboration process. These findings are in line with research [Rehman et al. \(2022\)](#) which states that the format of media affects the effectiveness of marketing communications. However, the difference lies in the integration of storytelling as a key construct that is quantitatively tested, not just as a characteristic of content. This means that the study shows that interactive narratives have intrinsic persuasive power that can build loyalty even before engagement is fully mediated.

Findings on partial mediation of audience engagement reinforce the relevance of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model in digital contexts ([Duong et al., 2024](#)). In this model, interactive storytelling acts as an external stimulus, engagement as an internal response (organism), and loyalty as a behavioral response. The results show that engagement mediates significantly but does not completely remove the direct influence of storytelling. This suggests the existence of a dual mechanism: the affective pathway through engagement and the direct persuasion pathway through narrative attraction. Research [Atiq et al. \(2022\)](#) It previously found full mediation in the context of digital experiences, while this study found partial mediation, which suggests that storytelling has relatively independent direct power. This difference is likely due to the characteristics of short videos that combine visual and participatory elements simultaneously.

Conceptually, this study contributes by integrating narrative engagement and relationship marketing in one empirical model based on mediation regression. [Garczarek-Bak et al., \(2024\)](#) It has previously emphasized the importance of interactivity and personalization in the digital customer experience but has not explicitly tested storytelling structure as an independent variable that impacts loyalty. This study fills this gap by showing that the combination of episodic structure and active participation creates a stronger loyalty effect. Another contribution is empirical proof that loyalty can still be formed in a short-form video ecosystem that theoretically has a high level of distraction. Thus, this study expands the discourse of digital marketing communication by providing quantitative evidence on relatively new media formats.

Although the results support all hypotheses, there are some limitations that need to be examined. Relatively limited sample sizes can affect the generalization of results in a wider population. In addition, cross-sectional design does not allow for long-term analysis of loyalty dynamics. External factors such as platform algorithms and industry categories also have the potential to affect engagement intensity but have not been specifically analyzed. Further research is recommended using longitudinal design or structural equation modeling to test for more complex and stable relationships. In addition, exploring moderation variables such as content type or audience demographic characteristics can provide a deeper understanding of the variation in the influence of storytelling in different contexts.

Conclusion

This study concludes that interactive storytelling-based marketing communication strategies have a positive and significant effect on audience loyalty on short video platforms, both directly and through audience engagement as a mediating variable. The

findings show that interactive narrative elements such as participatory formats, episodic structures, and call-to-action are able to increase emotional engagement and audience behavior, further strengthening rewatch intent and commitment to brand content. These results confirm that loyalty in the short video ecosystem is formed through interactive experiences that create a relational connection between the brand and the audience. Thus, the integration of interactivity in storytelling is a key factor in building sustainable relationships in an increasingly competitive digital marketing communication environment.

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