Brand Loyalty in the Digital Age: Exploring Dual Mediating Mechanisms of Social Media Advertising

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Abstract

Purpose: With progressions in the digital media ecosystem, mainly the explosion in the use of social media, marketers can understand the role social media advertising plays in marketing efforts. This study seeks to gauge the direct and indirect effects of social media advertising on brand loyalty. Brand preference and perceived usefulness were modeled as mediators of the study under consideration. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** The selected method is the deductive approach. A descriptive design is chosen to advance the methodology for this study. Precisely, the data was collected from 350 respondents via survey questionnaires and yielded 285 usable forms. Six hypotheses were advanced. AMOS 22.0 and SPSS 25.00 were employed to assess the relationship among the focal variables. **Findings:** The study's findings reveal that brand preference and brand-perceived usefulness have indirect effects on loyalty. **Implications/Originality/Value:** Limitations and future research directions are highlighted, along with management and academic ramifications

Introduction

Social Media Advertising (SMA) involves communication that shapes consumers' opinions about a particular brand or service. SMA encompasses the deliberate blending of modern media, including digital marketing, blogs, and content marketing, to inform or update consumers about the brand's presence, advancements, and trends (El-zoghby & El-Samadicy, 2021; Voorveld, 2019). With the explosion of digital technologies like the Internet, marketing communication trends have undergone changes from conventional methods to contemporary and fast modes of recommending products and services (Helal et al., 2018). In today's tech-savvy world, marketing communication research has established that SMA through social media is a crucial contributor to customers' commitment to purchase and facilitates overall purchase decisions regarding brands or services (Jasin, 2022; Savitri et al., 2022). Yet, comprehensive research is limited to how SMA predominantly shapes consumers' loyalty to brands. According to Belch and Belch (2019), SMA is a means by which information is sent from the source to the recipient. In the present dynamic realm, the Internet is one of the primary channels for delivering a message to create a brand image, expanding into new potential markets, and enticing customers.

The traditional 4Ps of marketing are replaced on social networks by people, platforms, participation, and promotion. A higher-order construct, SMA is characterized by a pair of secondary constructs named firm-created advertising and consumer-generated recommendations and responses (Arya et al., 2022). Marketers, despite shaping Web 2.0 technologies to their interests, face a stark reality: the sole purpose of SMA was not merely to sell products, but to spread viral messages in virtual settings through the communal conversational web. The effects of SMA on how relationships and networks are created, mediated, and maintained between brands and customers are of major interest to managers and researchers. Over the years, studies have emphasized anticipating the dynamics that elaborate consumer-brand relationships more clearly over social media (Arya et al., 2022; Arya et al., 2018a). Brand Loyalty (BL) is influenced by prior experiences, which help shape the impressions of a particular product and influence purchase decisions. The effort required to influence the action, the ease of the process, related costs, and the time involved all impact the BL. BL can be used to predict consumer behavior and the likelihood that customers will repurchase a product. Over the past years, numerous researchers have shown BL in response to brand-related communication held over social media. The major studies in this regard were grouped around the effect of SMA in shaping the brand equity of a business (Khajuria, 2017). Traditional media and SMA have also been encapsulated to study their holistic influence over consumer-based Brand Equity (BE) (Zubair et al., 2022). Karunarathne and Thilini (2022) explain the impact of SMA efforts on BL and inclusive consumer behavior. With the incipient pursuit to study further constructs in the domain, SMA is seen to observe its impact on brand trust and brand equity as mediators (Ebrahim, 2020).

Restraining inside the limits of this study, a subtle review of the relevant literature has recognized a few research gaps: firstly, it is observed that the mainstream studies related to SMA are heavily subjugated by social identity theory (Lee & Sara, 2022)elaboration likelihood theory (Perera et al., 2022). However, no study has been found based on Uses and Gratification Theory (Arya et al., 2022). Furthermore, the concept of SMA is related to brand sales, brand relations, and appeal building (Lee et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2022). However, there is limited literature regarding the indirect impact of SMC on BL. Secondly, scholars have stressed the necessity to focus on the indirect effects of SMA impacts on BL. Thirdly, though the link between SMA and BL has been studied before, the two constructs are mostly observed through the mediation of consumer-based BE (Arya et al., 2022). However, to the best of our knowledge, the indirect effect of SMA on BL has not been investigated in the literature. Based on the research findings drawn about the behavioral effects of SMA, it is revealed that the results obtained are not consistent; however, most of them indicate a positive relationship between them. BL can be explained as an 'emotion-laden, objective, definite link between brand and audiences/customers. This research aims to clarify the relationship between SMA and CL. We posed three questions in this study, i.e., how does SMA affect BL? Is there any mediation effect of Brand Preference (BP) among SMA and CL? And is there any mediation effect of Brand Perceived Usefulness (BPU) among SMA and BL? Based on these questions, our objectives are to investigate the impact of SMA on CL and to investigate the mediating effect of BP and BPU between SMA and BL.

Literature Review

Social Media Advertising

The concept behind SMA is that any good or service can be advertised by leveraging features that set it apart from rival products or services using social media vehicles. Mostly, customers purchase those brands that hit their memory the most; thus, SMA paves the way to connect firms and consumers in this regard (Wahed & Adnan, 2023). Winter et al. (2021) stated that communication is the most crucial yet pertinent element of the marketing mix for successfully bringing a new good or service into the market or even for building recalls. According to Mejía-Trejo et al. (2024), the evolution of SMA is driven by the revolution in technology and the different media vehicles available nowadays. Social media platforms give businesses and customers new possibilities to interact with one another. SMA refers to any chunk of a brand's marketing communication dispersed via social media that permits cyberspace users to access, engage with, share, and co-create (Fauzy, 2022). Research on firm-created brand communication held on social media is observed to place more emphasis on word of mouth, with greater mobility of electronic gadgets, and academic studies also shed light on the topic of electronic word of mouth. Brand-created word of mouth is a blend of advertising and audience-generated word of mouth, i.e., it is initiated by the firms but carried out by the customers. Businesses today value how essential it is to pay attention to establishing close-fitting connections with their customers to encourage future purchases. The prevalence of Web 2.0 technology and digital media has made social networking a major online phenomenon. SMA provides brands and customers with novel possibilities for connecting (Salhab et al., 2023).

Bandara (2021) established that brand-created SMA is a fundamental component of any brand's promotion mix. A study by Karunarathne and Thilini (2022) reveals that SMA has been confessed as a widespread occurrence with expansive demographic appeal, in contrast to conventional forms of firm-created communication. Furthermore, Salhab et al. (2023) conceptualize SMA that firms possess and broadcast on their brand sites, official social media accounts, including Facebook displays, posting videos on YouTube, and tweets. Firm-created virtual communication allows businesses and managers to increase brand recognition via messages from their social media team dispersed on the brand's official social networking accounts. A study by El-Zoghby and El-Samadicy (2021) reveals that social media is a potent avenue for managers to communicate with their potential prospects and present consumers, exchange knowledge, and engage in promotional pursuits. A conceptualization presented by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) is adopted in this study, which defines firm-created communication on social media as a type of advertising that is entirely under the control of the business and shaped through the marketing objectives of the company.

Consumer-generated social media response is defined as the material that is made publicly accessible online, secondly, content that exhibits some degree of creative exertion, and thirdly, multi-media content that is produced beyond specialized practices and procedures (Bandara, 2021). Winter et al. (2021) argued that the rise in user-generated responses has been fostered by online brand communities, including social networking sites. The consumer-generated response is a fast-expanding platform for consumers to gain insights and brand-initiating dialogues. Customers utilize social media in this information age to get the needed products and brand information. Consumer-generated social media communication is a communication produced by and between the users of social media. Consumer-generated social media communication is essentially the kind of brand-related material that is produced by some customers for the consumption of other consumers (Adetunji et al., 2018). The ability to create and share material about companies on social media confirms that customers play an active and significant part in the management of brands on these media. According to Adetunji et al. (2018), social media is a tool for marketing communication that has essentially made it possible for customers to share their opinions about a brand or service.

Brand Preference

Marketing scholars have been researching for the last few decades to improve their understanding of BP. BP is about the consumer's belief in the brand. Priyan (2018) defines BP as 'the level of customer's favor about the product or service provided by the company, in comparison to the same products or services delivered by other firms in the relevant consideration set'. BP is a blend of characteristics related to the buyer, product/service, and market that cause a buyer to approve an alternative. Orhan and Kaplan (2018) posit that it is the favor of a brand that the consumer gives in comparison to others in the same category. BP is about certain cognitive judgments and positive feelings. Ali et al. (n.d.) define BP as the level to which a customer prefers a product of a certain company over the product of another company. BP can be explained by the self-congruity theory, which proposes that a consumer's behavior is

partly determined by an individual's assessment of self-image with the image she/he associate with a product/brand. Customers' likes and preferences establish a long-term relationship with a brand that has an image consistent with them. Shujaat et al. (2018) found that SMA can make the most significant contribution to creating BP. However, BP may not always translate into product purchase or loyalty. The interaction effect of customer, brand, and corporate personalities has a significant influence on BP. Thus, SMA could be meritoriously employed to advance positivity toward a brand, and eventually upsurge BL. That is why companies invest in SMA to develop distinctive brand propositions and connotations to obtain dominance over competitive products/brands.

Brand Perceived Usefulness

BPU can be defined as the degree to which an individual believes that using a certain brand would satisfy his/her needs. BPU is an important explanation for developing a person's intentions to consume any brand. The first sign that possibly impacts the customers' intent to purchase is BPU (Majeed et al., 2024). BPU can also be defined as the degree to which consumers trust that SMA would assist their purchase decision-making process (Keni, 2020). BPU is a key factor in developing customers' purchasing intentions (Sondakh, 2022). Previous research has also proved that customers estimate the cost and associated benefits before consuming any brand. In the field of marketing, there are several means of communication, but two are major among them: social media and interpersonal communication (face-to-face communication). These two main streams have different roles at different stages of the marketing process of a brand. Marketing researchers proved that SMA has an enormous influence on customers, especially those who want to take full advantage of and benefit from the innovation. As the valuation of BPU becomes more puzzling for customers, researchers are gradually more interested in evaluating individual factors affecting BPU, as this can impact both users and marketers who use SMA as a marketing communication tool (Kusmayanti, n.d.). In addition, researching the factors that affect the BPU is greatly pertinent in an online marketing context, as SMA offers evaluations that are perceived as more valuable (Nur Faiza & Nursani, 2023). Multiple studies have researched the factors that impact BPU and have recognized the importance of social media communication. Earlier research proposes that usefulness is not a solitary predictor of measuring customers' intent to purchase, but it is also related to the frequency of usage (Suryatenggara & Dahlan, 2022). According to Hoang et al. (2021), source credibility, and the message are also important factors in creating the perception of usefulness.

Brand Loyalty

There is somewhat diminutive agreement among researchers about the causes and effects of BL. Individuals' commitment and attitude, which affect their positive actions toward the product or brand, are characterized as BL. BL and the intent to make future purchases appear to be extremely linked. According to Rashid et al. (2020)BL and customer loyalty use the same multi-dimensional constructs of affective and behavioral approaches. BL is a prejudiced behavioral reaction developed over time. It implies a regular repurchase configuration of a certain brand as a result of positive feelings. Javed et al. (2023) contended that despite the

competitor's efforts and capacity to inspire customers to switch brands if they remain engaged with present brands and show repurchase intentions, their BL is high. BL is a virtuous predictor of future purchases and forms customer feelings. BL is a cautious behavior stimulated by the consumer's choice to repurchase. BL is a multilayered concept that predisposes both behavior and psychological variables. Ali (2019) advocates that devotion or faithfulness toward a brand is a consequence of numerous aspects, including emotional and behavioral dimensions. According to Zhang et al. (2016), BL leads to sustained profits, lower costs, increases returns, and offers a reasonable edge in the market. BL may arise independently of the brand's perceived quality and can be affected by other factors that can be psychological and subjective (Ali, 2019). That is one of the reasons why managers focus on understanding loyalty and predicting it for the benefit of the business. The customers who are loyal to the brand have less sensitivity to the changes in the prices, and this is one of the key elements to remain in business for a longer time (Bisschoff, 2020).

Theoretical Bones of the Study

The Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory was fabricated to recognize the significant role that individuals play in the usage of media. U&G theory is an effective theoretical framework for investigating media usage motives or behaviors. It diverges from earlier mass media theories to presuppose that the audience enthusiastically selects media to meet certain needs rather than passively receiving media. The theory postulates that media consumers are driven to selectively expose themselves to media depending on their demands and gratification-seeking objectives, consciously working to attain those goals by utilizing certain media channels and material. In the age of the Internet and mobile technology, U&G theory is the paradigm that best measures consumers' urge to use new and cutting-edge tools to make better-informed decisions. Earlier studies have encapsulated the gratification needs of using social and mobile media into five major categories: information seeking, self-expression, entertainment, social interaction, and impression management.

The Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) model was advanced to describe how people react to their surroundings in various circumstances. It illustrates how environmental stimuli (S) trigger a human's inner organism/emotional response (O) and compel a consumer to respond (R) favorably or unfavorably.

According to the paradigm, a person's perception and interpretation of their surroundings dictate how they feel in that setting, which in turn affects how they behave generally. Based on this model, S can affect an organism's (consumer's) attitude, reaction, and emotional state. The O is concerned with internal mechanisms and structures that mediate between external inputs and each person's final reaction, which is based on perception, experience, and appraisal. The response represents consumer behavior, including approaches and avoidance behavior. The model examines how technological impulses influence cognitive, emotional, and participation intentions in social media environments. This study proposes SMA on BL as stimuli that provoke emotional or cognitive reactions, like BP and BPU, that additionally lead to consumer behavioral outcomes such as BL.

Integration of Variables

Linking SMA and BL

SMA has emerged as a non-conventional mode of communication and as a widespread phenomenon with a broad demographic appeal. Consumers are using the Internet, which has a significant impact on their decision-making. Through online search engines and social networking site searches, consumers find their way to making purchases for their desired products (Xu et al., 2021). Businesses today are competitive and eager to expand into locations, whether those locations are actual or virtual. Brands now have access to a wider range of business opportunities due to the media available on social media. These podiums permit marketers to engage with customers, forge bonds with them, and improve the reputation and reliability of their offerings (McManus et al., 2022). The personalized delivery of information through firm-created SMA can impact the customer's awareness level of a brand, knowledge seeking, and purchase decisions (Arya et al., 2022). To attain superior attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, marketers must recognize the value of developing a social media strategy and utilizing the concept of SMA (Cheung et al., 2020). Moreover, Alalwan (2018) opined that consumers are more likely to purchase the offerings advertised on social media if they are useful and relevant to them. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H$_1$: SMA has a positive impact on BL

Linking SMA and BP

There is a relationship between what firms claim and how audiences/customers interpret brand messages on social media platforms (Paul, 2015). Through SMA, consumers get satisfaction and experience that shapes how they see a brand. Japutra et al. (2018) contended that the brand encounter that each customer has via social media channels is the kind of experience that can affect their attitude. Furthermore, consumers' screen time over online avenues such as social networking sites is comparably much greater than watching TV or reading. Customers' increased presence on these sites is creating fruitful circumstances for BP in consumers (Huang et al., 2018). Seemingly, this pattern is sticking around since a growing number of people have access to cellular phones and other portable wireless internet-capable gadgets (Arya et al., 2022). SMA in today's times contends that consumers' frequent existence in an online space inclines them to have frequent brand encounters, which ultimately leads to creating a preference for a brand and spending some extra money (Hwang et al., 2019). Thus, built on this discussion, we hypothesize that

H$_{2a}$: SMA has a positive effect on BP

Linking BP and BL

Consumer-brand link is termed an attitude (Japutra et al., 2018) that produces favorable results, including brand contentment (Belaid & Temessek Behi, 2011), loyalty to a brand (Japutra et al., 2018), and buying intent (Correia Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2012). Furthermore, studies revealed that attitude also has a positive association with important consumer behavior outcomes. According to previous research, BP forecasts a variety of consumer behavior-related outcomes,

including favorable word of mouth, intention to repurchase, and willingness to pay more (Levy & Hino, 2016). A study by Bian and Haque (2020) concluded that BP considerably raises BL. Furthermore, based on previous studies relating BP to BL, it is concluded that BP is a key influencer of consumer purchasing behavior. Thus, grounded upon past literature, we developed a hypothesis that:

H_{2b}: BP has a positive effect on BL.

Mediation Perspective of BP between SMA and CL

Customers expect firms to communicate online in this digital age (Kim & Ko, 2012). They prefer proactive brands in reaching out to them, sharing valuable information, and being eager to establish positive interactions with them (Japutra et al., 2019). This influences their decision to engage with the company through the brand's multiple social media channels (Arya et al., 2022). Utilizing social media as a communication medium is increasingly preferred over conventional ways (Holbrook 2000). By offering content like photographs, text, and videos, and involving customers through various gamification techniques, SMA has established two-way contact with its customers (Arya et al., 2022). U&G theory suggests that brand loyalists seek personal benefits and value, and SMA is a vehicle to connect customers and build relationships (Tang et al., 2019) while hedonic rewards and social advantages are key factors that make consumer-brand interactions and engagement on social media more effective. Additionally, these advantages help consumers develop a favorable attitude and have a better brand experience (Kaldeen 2019), which ultimately leads to a positive BL. Thus, the hypothesis has been proposed as:

H_3: *BP mediates the relationship between SMA and CL.*

Linking SMA and BPU

To set their goods and services apart from rivals, marketers today talk about generating 'experiences' for their brands. With traditional media, which allows one-way communication, it seems a bit challenging; marketers are seeking ways to engage with their consumers based on dialogue and interactivity through SMA. Lin et al. (2021) argued that social media has simplified and facilitated interactions with customers. Instead of serving as a one-way information tool, social networking sites have an impact on how internet users engage through a two-way participation channel. As stated by Eisend (2015)Marketing communication is a crucial stimulus that creates the brand experience and usefulness. Brand-related stimuli are mainly a source through which consumers attain these experiences (Khan & Rahman, 2016). Online buyers may learn about a retailer's brand even before they visit the website by observing some brand-related indicators of communication on social media in addition to the firm's website. Past research has found multiple antecedents of BPU, including storytelling, event marketing, brand contact, and brand-related stimuli, mainly marketing communications (Belch & Belch, 2019). Tang et al. (2019) stated that marketers employ social media platforms to promote brands and influence BPU. Thus, considering this discussion, we hypothesize that:

H_{4a}: SMC has a positive effect on BPU

Linking BPU and BL

In the expanding online buying environment, creating a BPU has received widespread recognition (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). Firms through SMA are creating perceptions through appealing website design, simple website navigation, 24/7 availability, secure transactions, availability of an extensive variety offering information, quick returns, and many other advantages (Khan & Rehman, 2016). Fathima et al. (2022) opined that, owing to the absence of creating positive perception elements on the brand's official website, many visitors give up on finalizing their online purchases. According to prior investigations, SMA has a favorable impact on customers' purchase intention, specifically in the online purchasing environment. Moreover, different researchers reveal that consumers' virtual experiences with destination brands significantly influence their decision to visit or suggest a location. BPU impacts customers' online buying behavior (Rose et al., 2012). In previous studies, BPU has already received substantial discussion (Nofal et al., 2020). Scholars have notably emphasized the need for greater research on BPU and its customer-related consequences in different settings (Khan & Rahman, 2015). Existing research has identified CL as a crucial outcome of BPU. Thus, a current study posits the hypothesis that:

4_{4b}: BPU has a positive effect on CL

Mediation Perspective of BPU between SMA and BL

Currently, the Internet's rapid expansion and the creation of contemporary network-connected gadgets like tablets and smartphones have contributed to the quick growth of communication media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube (NGO et al., 2022). From a psychological standpoint, Chand and Fei (2021) Investigated BL and discovered that it is an effect or outcome of BPU. As a novel active tool for marketing managers to reposition their brands from conventional interaction to experiential engagement, the setting of online social media networks predominates. According to the S-O-R model, a stimulus-organism link proposes that peripheral stimuli may have an impact on how consumers perceive a brand's image, service, experience, etc. This notion lends credibility to the idea that BPU improved when marketers and brand users offered informative and captivating material about their brands on their pages and regularly engaged with customers and followers (Gilal et al., 2021). The internal and subjective reaction related to BL is captured through BPU (Mishra, 2019). Some major outcomes of a positive BPU include loyalty (Fatima et al., 2022), purchase intentions, and re-purchase intentions (Kim & Ko, 2012). Based on this, we hypothesized that

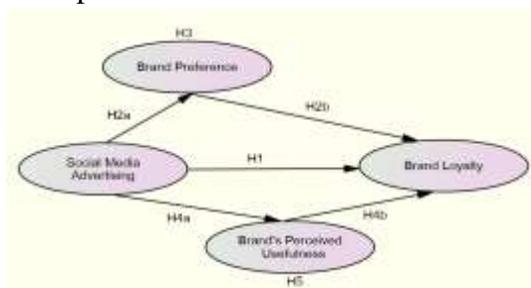H_5: BPU mediates the relationship between SMA and BL.

Figure 1: Research Model

Research Methodology

Survey Instrument

SMA is examined by a scale adopted from the study by Arya et al. (2022). Adopting the scale from the Park et al. (2010) A five-item scale was used to measure BP. The items of the BPU are captured from the studies of Fathima et al. (2022). The items of BL are adopted from the study by Wong (2023). Using a structured questionnaire, this study included closed-ended questions. Respondents were defined as those who interact with a brand's Facebook and Instagram sites. For measuring constructs, the 'five-point Likert scale,' ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree,' is used.

Population and Sampling

Users of social networking sites make up the study's population. Based on the nature of this investigation, a non-probability sampling technique was used in this study. A questionnaire survey was given to respondents involved in brand pages on social networking sites and who had experience with them. For data gathering, a responder who interacts with the brand on Facebook and Instagram is chosen.

Data Analysis and Results

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 and the Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) version 22.0 were used to evaluate the data-related statistics. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to inspect the proposed model. SEM allowed us to develop associations between the anticipated variables. The technique also allowed us to measure the level to which BP and BPU act as mediators between SMA and BL. In addition, SEM helped us to determine the compatibility of the proposed model. We evaluated our model in two successive phases, i.e., measurement validation (measurement of unidimensionality) and hypotheses testing (structural model) based on the guidelines provided by Byrne (2001) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2001b). Unidimensionality was measured through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and the structural model was measured through path analysis, again based on the guidelines provided by Schumacker and Lomax (2004) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2001a). The goodness-of-model fit was checked using absolute fit and relative fit indices as suggested by Schumacker and Lomax (2004).

Table 1

Data Normality Assessment (N=285)

Variables	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	SD	Tolerance VIF	SMA	BP	BPU	BL
							Descriptive Statistics		Correlations and Discriminant Validity		
SMA	4.00	20.00	-0.72	0.07	14.96	3.90	0.55 1.80	1	0.66**	0.51**	0.59**
BP	6.00	30.00	-0.45	-0.22	21.20	5.46	0.37 2.66	-	1	0.71**	0.70**

BPU	5.00	25.00	-0.21	-0.48	25.00	16.32	0.49	2.03	-	-	1	0.78**
BL	9.00	45.00	-0.42	-0.23	29.79	7.70	Constant		-	-	-	1

Source: Authors' findings

The numeric values in Table 1 provide the data normality check details. SMA has a Min=4.00, Max=20.00, skewness=-0.72 and kurtosis=0.07. Similarly, BP has a Min=6.00, Max=30.00, skewness=-0.45, and kurtosis=-0.22. BPU has a Min=5.00, Max=25.00, skewness=-0.21 and kurtosis=-0.48. BL has a Min=9.00, Max=45.00, skewness=-0.42 and kurtosis=-0.23. The tolerance value for SMA=0.55 and VIF=1.80. The tolerance value for BP is 0.37, and VIF is 2.66. The tolerance value for BPU=0.49 and VIF=2.03. Durbin-Watson's Value was 1.90. The items did not encounter multicollinearity issues as the correlation between any two variables is not higher than 0.80 (Grewal et al., 2004). The highest correlation between two variables, i.e., BPU and BL, was 0.78. See Table 1.

Assessment of Measurement Model

Table 2 represents the fit indices for individual and nested models. All the final values to ascertain the model fitness are within the range as prescribed by the SEM literature. Results of the final nested CFA model assimilated 24 items about SMA, BP, BPU, and BL. Table 2 also denotes Cronbach's alpha values of individual constructs and the nested 24 items. The alpha values are above the threshold value of 0.70, meeting the reliability criteria.

Table 2

Results of Individual and Nested CFA's (N=285)

Variable	Items	Unidimensionality and Convergent Validity						Reliability	
Nested CFA		χ^2	χ^2/df	CFI	GFI	TLI	NFI	RMSEA	FL	α
Nested CFA1 Initial		514.1	2.51	0.90	0.87	0.91	0.89	0.06	FL [0.51-0.73]	0.95
Nested CFA2 Final		504.2	2.02	0.94	0.90	0.93	0.90	0.06	FL [0.57-0.82]	0.95
SMA	4	47.51	2.61	0.99	0.99	0.96	0.99	0.06	FL [0.51-0.79]	0.88
BP	6	17.33	1.92	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.05	FL [0.55-0.64]	0.89
BPU	5	11.72	2.34	0.98	0.98	0.97	0.98	0.06	FL [0.50-0.60]	0.86
BL	9	78.50	2.65	0.96	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.07	FL [0.57-0.80]	0.90

Source: Authors' findings

Convergent and Discriminant Validity Testing

Convergent validity is measured by examining the constructs' factor loadings, as proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). All the indicators have statistically significant loadings on their respective latent constructs (p<0.001) (see Table 2). The discriminant validity of the

measurement model is determined by NFI values, as can be seen that all NFI values are greater than the threshold value of 0.90.

Structural Models

To test the hypothesized relationship, we followed the guidelines provided by Byrne (2001), Kline (2004), and Tabachnick and Fidell (2001b) for model fitness. To test the mediation effects, we developed two models (i.e., direct and indirect). In the first step, we examined the model without linking mediators with the dependent variable, and in the second step, we linked mediators with the dependent variable. We compared the direct and indirect model fitness indicators. Table 3 shows the results of direct and indirect effects. We followed the approach established by Shrout & Bolger (2002) to test mediation between the constructs.
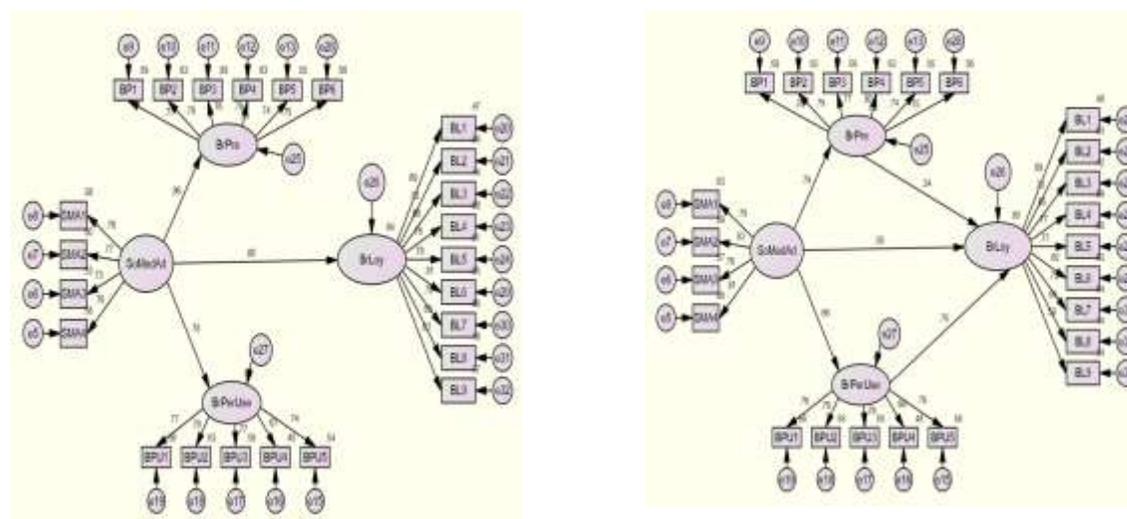

Figure 2: Assessments of Direct and Indirect Effect Models

Table 3

Results from Two Competing Models' Structural Equation Analysis (N=285)

Hypotheses	Direct effects			Indirect effects		
	β	S. E	Decision	β	S.E	Decision
H1: SMA→ BL	0.79***	0.07	Accepted	Not Applicable		
H$_{2a}$: SMA→ BP	0.86***	0.07	Accepted	Not Applicable		
H$_{4a}$: SMA→ BPU	0.78***	0.07	Accepted	Not Applicable		
H$_{2b}$: BP→ BL	Not Applicable			0.24**	0.06	Accepted
H$_{4b}$: BPU→ BL	Not Applicable			0.70***	0.06	Accepted
H$_3$: SMA→ BP→BL H$_5$: SMA→ BPU → BL	Goodness-of-fit indices of the Structural Model without BP and BPU as Mediators χ^2=818.48, χ^2/df=3.28, GFI=0.78, CFI=0.86, TLI=0.85, RMSEA=0.09			Goodness-of-fit indices of the Structural Model with BP and BPU as Mediators χ^2=684.39, χ^2/df=32.77, GFI=0.91, CFI=0.90, TLI=0.90, RMSEA=0.06		

Source: Authors' findings

Results and Discussion

This study evaluates the effect of SMA on BL. Additionally, the mediational role of BP and PBU has been studied. Based on the U&G theory and S-O-R model, the study was conducted in a social media environment. The following crucial insights have been established. First, SMA significantly influences BL. The more a firm is involved in SMA, the higher the propensity of consumers to develop BL. The study demonstrates that customers are stimulated by SMA, thus tending to boost the BL of customers. Second, the research indicated a significant positive link between SMA and BP. This indicates that the more the firms communicate about their offerings, the higher BP levels from their consumers. Thus, by employing SMA in a brand's marketing strategies, marketers can develop BP. Third, this study tends to hypothesize a significant positive relationship between BP and BL. The findings of this study are consistent with the earlier investigations, where BP was found to have a significant positive impact on BL. Consumers may develop strong BP for a brand, resulting in acceptance to try new products or brands. In the current study, it is revealed that SMA provides valuable brand information and access to a brand in real-time, escalating BPU by drifting the brand to connect with consumers and build relationships with them. The stronger the BPU, the higher the propensity of BL fifth, and SMA has a positive effect on BPU. SMA is a critical stimulus for BPU. SMA allows communication between firms and their audience. It enables users to provide feedback, ask questions, and share their experiences directly with the brand. SMA provides an avenue for firms to engage with their audience, creating a sense of community and connection. When users experience engaging brand communication through SMA, it positively influences their BPU of the brand. Sixth, BPU has a significant positive impact on BL. When customers can easily navigate through the website or advertisement, find the information they need, and have a seamless experience, it creates a positive impression of the brand. BPU increases the likelihood of customers developing trust and confidence in the brand, leading to higher loyalty. Engaging experiences, interactive features, and positive interactions further enhance CL.

Implication

This study, which focuses on SMA, demonstrates that it improves the exposure of brands through SMA and enables a brand to communicate digitally with customers, to strengthen the bond between them and the brand. SMA can be seen as a great channel for companies to interact with customers, which helps customers make decisions. Furthermore, this study was conducted using the S-O-R framework in the context of SMA, which affirms brand communication through SMA as stimuli, BP and PBU as an organism, and BL as a reaction to stimuli. The result of this study adds to the previous literature on SMA. With the rise of social media, new channels for SMA have emerged. The suggested model considers consumer perceptions between SMA and BL. The research aimed to provide managers with the important aspects they need to map and capture the minds of their customers through SMA. Firms should investigate the tech-savvy attributes of consumer segments based on their social media usage and inclinations while focusing on developing stronger BL as part of a marketing strategy. The research indicates that when consumers actively engage with SMA, it has a positive impact on their loyalty to the brand.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study focuses exclusively on exploring the influence of SMA on BL. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of the broader SMA landscape, future research could investigate the roles of various other marketing channels or touchpoints. This could entail investigating the impact of brand communication on other relevant platforms. By examining multiple channels, researchers can gain deeper insights into the overall dynamics of SMA strategies. Additional mediating and moderating factors that affect the association between SMA and BL should be explored in future studies. To offer a more thorough knowledge of the underlying mechanisms, elements like trust, social impact, or cultural aspects should be considered. Furthermore, comparative research across several sectors or product categories may give information on the particular characteristics and difficulties that brands confront. It may be possible to detect industry-specific implications and opportunities by comparing the results with those from other industries.

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