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Examining Brand Loyalty and Brand Consciousness through the Lens of Social Media Marketing

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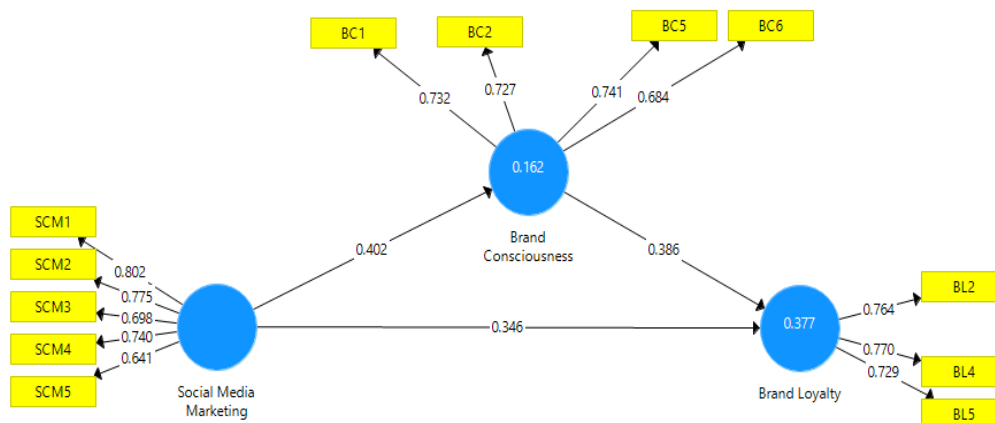
Research Highlights





The study explores how social media marketing activities build brand loyalty and how this relationship is mediated through brand consciousness. The empirical investigation involves a self-administered and a structured questionnaire, distributed through a convenience sample of 320 under-graduate and graduate students. Data analysis was conducted through SPSS 23.0 for demographic comparisons and SmartPLS 3 for evaluating the measurement and structural model of the study. The findings show that social media marketing has a significant positive influence on brand loyalty but this relationship is partially mediated by brand consciousness. In the same manner, social media marketing exerts a significant positive impact on brand consciousness and resultantly, brand consciousness also exerts a significant positive impact on brand loyalty. The results provide valuable insights for marketers in integrating social media as a driving tool for developing brand engagement strategies that not only provide awareness about products/services but also generate a cult following for them.

Graphical Abstract



Research Objectives

Although social media marketing has been extensively deployed to enhance reach and engagement, but a series of questions remain unanswered. They basically include: Q1) How





social media marketing (SMM) activities generate brand loyalty and how this relationship is mediated by brand consciousness; Q2) What is the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on brand consciousness; and lastly; Q3) What is the underlying impact of brand consciousness on brand loyalty. Companies hence fail to address the role of branding while devising and formulating their strategies over social networks. This means that the issues pertaining to consumer engagement and loyalty remain unaddressed and thus demand considerable energy and effort. Moreover, academically, the research with regard to social media and branding also remains poor (Pan, Meng, & Lee, 2017) and the current study aims to fill this gap by constituting a conceptual model, that empirically tests the relationships amidst social media marketing (SMM), brand consciousness and brand loyalty.

Methodology

A structured set of survey questionnaires were emailed in the major universities of the twin cities, namely Bahria University, Comsats University, Capital University, Riphah International University and Arid Agriculture University. Using Google Docs, 320 questionnaires were floated and as a result 250 usable responses were deployed for data analysis. A convenience sampling was considered to be the most appropriate method for data collection. As the sample comprised of under graduate and graduate students, this technique was the most viable for conducting behavioral investigations. College students are also regarded as an idyllic subjects of choice for social psychology and consumer behavior research (Peterson & Merunka, 2014). This segment is highly techno-literate, well-educated and possess easy access to internet (Bolton et al., 2013). Furthermore, college students have earlier been considered as a pragmatic sampling frame while analyzing consumer trends over social networking communities (Jung, Shim, Jin, & Khang, 2016; Luna-Nevarez & Torres, 2015; Mao & Zhang, 2017).

Statistical Package for the Social Science v. 23.0 (SPSS) was incorporated to perform a demographic analysis of the sample under study. Moreover, for measurement and structural model, variance-based structural equation modelling technique using SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015) was incorporated. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted and tests for convergent validity, composite reliability and discriminant validity were undertaken. To test the significance of indirect effects, bootstrapping method (5000 samples) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) was applied





Results

With regard to the measurement mode, the average variance extracted (AVE) scores and constructs' factor loadings were above 0.5 and 0.7 respectively; which reflected a fairly good convergent validity. The composite reliability scores and Cronbach's alpha scores were also above 0.7, indicating acceptable reliability and validity measures (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). With regard to discriminant validity, the square root of AVE values was also higher than the correlation coefficients between the latent variables, showing that they were conceptually and empirically unrelated (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The structural model represents the significance of the proposed relationships i.e. both direct and indirect effects. Social media marketing (SMM) is positively related to brand loyalty with t-statistic above 2 and p-value less than 0.05 i.e. confirming our first hypothesis. SMM also had a significant positive relationship with brand consciousness which also confirmed our second hypothesis. In the same manner, brand consciousness also had a significant positive relationship with brand loyalty, which further verified our third hypothesis. For verifying the study's fourth hypothesis, which stated that brand consciousness had a mediating effect on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty; specific indirect effects need to be observed. The specific indirect effect between SMM and brand loyalty, mediated through brand consciousness is significant. This proved that there is mediation between the aforementioned paths. For verifying, full or partial mediation; the direct effect between SMM and brand loyalty needs to be analyzed too. As mentioned earlier, the study's first hypothesis proved that SMM also had a significant positive relationship with brand loyalty, showing that there is a presence of partial mediation; with both direct and indirect effects being statistically significant. Hence, our fourth hypothesis is also substantiated, with an effect of partial mediation of brand consciousness between the relationship of SMM and brand loyalty.

Findings

The results of the study confirm that perceived social media marketing (SMM) activities play a vital role in building brand loyalty. SMM turns out to be a key antecedent of brand loyalty as fans of brand communities tend to be committed to the pages they follow and like (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). The proposed conceptual framework also examines the impact of SMM on brand consciousness which is also believed to be pragmatically true. The previous research conducted by Yoo et al. (2000) demonstrates that mass media communication mediums exert an impact on brand associations and brand loyalty. However,





the young and energetic consumers of today are highly brand conscious as they have experienced the shift from traditional marketing mediums (television, radio, print) to modern ones (Bolton et al., 2013), through the uplift of social media. The study also attests the positive relationship of brand consciousness and brand loyalty. It is quite simple to understand that consumers who turn out to be aware and conscious through social media branding programs, will be more loyal to the brand they like and admire.

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