

Research Article

Social Media Marketing Activities and Brand Loyalty in Telecommunication Industry: The Mediating Role of Brand Affect.

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ABSTRACT

The effect of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty has got little attention in the telecommunication industry. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty as well as to examining the mediating effect of brand affect in the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. By using an online self-administrated questionnaire to obtain 409 customers of a telecommunication company in Palestine, the finding of this study revealed that social media marketing activities positively effect brand loyalty. Further, brand affect has been found as a partial mediator in the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Accordingly, theoretical and practical implications, as well as recommendations for future studies, have been provided.

KEYWORDS

social media marketing activities, brand loyalty, brand affect, telecommunication industry

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1. Introduction

A new era has started using Internet technology as a marketing tool which always follows up to date and sometimes sets up to date. Marketing activities have been involved in the transformation and change process with the help of internet marketing applications. However, this process did not occur suddenly; it was a cumulative, progressive, and gradual process. For example, through Use net, the first web-based technology tool, the extended nature of communication with consumers has changed extremely. This communication continued with blogs and then a different kind of social media (Alagöz, 2016; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Important for businesses and other fields they want to share features and information about their services and product with consumers, and with other stakeholders. According to social media studies, 86% of marketing experts consider social media network-

ing tools are very important tools (Alagöz, 2016).

Social media networks are digital platforms that enable a user to share information and create content through a private and public profile. otherwise, brands are regarded as agents of social media influence (Strauss & Frost, 2014). Nowadays companies and marketers can interact with customers and understand their needs and want to use social media marketing activity. The effect of social media marketing activities on consumer behavior has been well documented in the literature. For instance, the study of Algharabat (2017) investigates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand love using inner and social self-expressive as a mediator. The study found the engaging in social media marketing activities positively increases customer favorable behaviors and lets them love the brand more. Another study conducted by Kim and Ko (2012) found that social

media marketing activities play a significant role in enhancing purchase intention and customer equity. The study of Ibrahim and Aljarah (2018) revealed that social media marketing activities play a significant role in enhancing customer loyalty, trust, and revisit intention.

Regardless of the growing interest in studying brand loyalty as one of the consequences of social media marketing activities, prior studies featured several limitations. First, little attention has been paid to examining brand loyalty as a consequence of social media marketing activities in the telecommunication industry. Second, it is unclear the role of brand affect in the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of SMMA on brand loyalty and the underlying mechanism of how social media marketing activities affect brand loyalty. The research objectives addressing the purpose of this study will be based on the assumption that the effect of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty in the telecommunication industry should be considered along with brand affect. The result of this study will likely provide academic implications as well as practical implications by deepens the academia's understanding of the natural relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty as well as identifying the interaction mechanisms by which SMMA can be exploited to enhance brand loyalty through the role of brand affect. Thus, the findings of this research could provide meaningful implications for telecommunication industry managers for business practice.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Social media marketing activities

Social media is defined as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)” *Social Media (Social Media)* . It has divided into two forms; social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) and social media tools (e.g., sharing and comments) (Boone & Kurtz, 2015). It helps in storing and communicating knowledge among individuals through the online network (Peters et al., 2013).

More precisely, social media is a two-way interactive website that allows the creation, sharing, exchanging, collaborating process among individuals who form a virtual world on social media sites (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Customers using social media to contact, search, sharing information, experiences, and ideas about brands (Mihalcea & Săvulescu, 2013). Companies utilize social media by reaching their creativity and inspiration to their customers (Sigala & Marinidis, 2009). Social media marketing using social media portals to create favorable responses by customers toward the organization's brand (Boone & Kurtz, 2015). Social media marketing activities have been defined as “promotional and relational communication tools that complement organizational marketing strategies' application by offering enhanced interactivity through online relationships between organizations and consumers” (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

2.2. Brand loyalty

Brands should continuously work to ensure their competitiveness in the marketplace. Creating brand loyalty is a desire for any marketing effort, and has been recognized as one of the elements that drive the success of businesses for years (Zhang et al., 2010). Building and maintaining customer loyalty toward a specific brand has been considered as one of the central focus of research for marketers for a long time (Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012). Building a strong brand leads to a specific brand preference among customers, which may over time lead to creating brand loyalty. Loyalty includes a high level of interconnection through consumers and brands. Moreover, loyal consumers do not want to switch brands to a brand that feels satisfied and comfortable (Ingemansson et al., 2015). Brands are valuable to different companies, and marketers are on the hand trying to improve their seeing with consumers. For all companies, creating customer loyalty important, especially in sectors and companies where competition is high. Due to the high level of competition in the market nowadays, companies trying continuously to develop a long-term relationship with their consumers to increase their loyalty. The literature has differentiated among three types of brand loyalty; behavioral loyalty, attitudinal loyalty, and composite loyalty.

Behavioral loyalty refers to the patronage that results from repeated purchases over time, whereas attitudinal loyalty refers to the degree of dispositional commitment based on certain preferences of some unique value associated with the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Attitudinal loyalty represents cognitive, affective, and conative elements of loyalty (Kumar & Shah, 2004). Composite loyalty refers to the combination of behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty of the same brand over time (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). This research will use the composite type of brand loyalty as the main definition of brand loyalty.

2.3. Social media marketing activities and brand loyalty

Social media marketing has become a hub for promoting goods and services and a source of building a strong customer-brand relationship (Ismail et al., 2018). It provides consumers with relevant information and decreases their efforts to seek information (Laroche et al., 2013). In this vein, social media marketing activities have been widely discussed in the literature as one of the main predictors of brand loyalty. For instance, by contacting data from 338 customers who follow at least one brand on the social media in Turkey, the study of Erdoğmuş and Çiçek (2012) revealed that brand loyalty is positively affected by social media marketing activities. Similarly, the study of Ibrahim and Aljarah (2018) conducted in the hospitality industry and found that social media marketing activities play a significant role in enhancing brand loyalty. Therefore, in this study, we expect there is a positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Thus, we hypothesize;

H1. Social media marketing activities positively impact brand loyalty

2.4. The mediating role of brand affect

Brand affect has been defined as the ability of a brand to generate a positive emotional response in the average consumer as a consequence of its use (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). It plays an important role in recalling and recognizing a brand by consumers (Sung & Kim, 2010). In the context of brand management, several studies have argued different consequences of brand affect such as increasing brand commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002), enhancing

purchase loyalty (Matzler et al., 2008), and consumer attitude (Anwar et al., 2011).

In this study, we argue that brand affect mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. On one hand, the study of Orzan, Platon, Stefanescu, and Orzan et al. (2016) contacted data from 314 respondents and found the engaging in social media marketing is a stronger predictor of brand affect. On other hand, brand affect has been found as a significant predictor of brand loyalty. For instance, by aggregating data set for 107 brands from three separate surveys of consumers and brand managers, the study of Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) found that brand affect is one of the key drivers of brand loyalty. Similarly, by collecting data for 45 product categories in the fast-moving consumer goods sector using a panel of 4,027 Spanish consumers, the study of Singh et al. (2012) found that brand affect positively influences brand loyalty. In this study, we expect that brand affect will have a positive effect on brand loyalty. Thus, we hypothesize:

H2. Social media marketing activities positively impact the brand affect

H3. Brand affect positively impact brand loyalty

Provided that social media marketing activities may have a positive effect on brand affect and that brand affect may have a positive effect on brand loyalty, we also expect that brand affect may mediate the positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. Social media marketing activities increase brand loyalty through increased brand affect (mediation).

The research conceptual model is illustrated in Fig. 1.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Participants

The population chosen to conduct this research consisted of consumers who actively follow Ooredoo Palestine Telecommunication channels on social network platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. A well-established questionnaire has been used for data collection. A random sampling method has been used

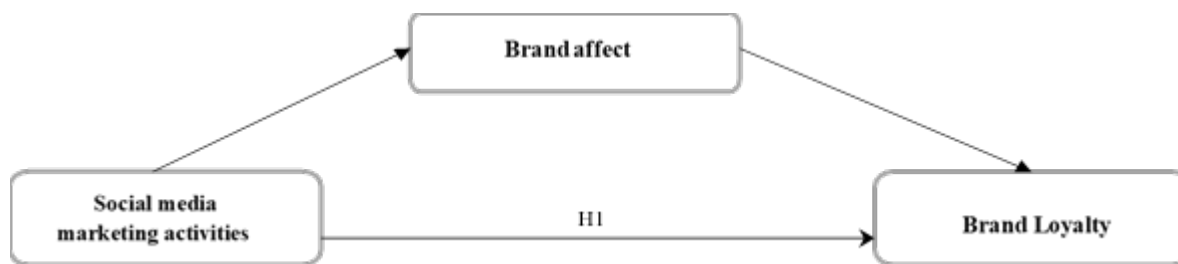


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

to get 409 valid questionnaires. The questionnaire has been divided into sections including demographics and items measuring the constructs of the study. Demographics sections included: gender, age, occupation, internet usage, platform, and best time. In the items section, eleven items have been adopted from the study of [Kim and Ko \(2012\)](#) to measure social media marketing activities. Five items were adopted from [Martínez et al. \(2014\)](#) to measure brand loyalty. Four items were adopted from the study of [Morgan and Hunt \(1994\)](#) and [Sirdeshmukh et al. \(2002\)](#) to measure brand trust. Four items have been adopted from the study of [Chaudhuri and Holbrook \(2001\)](#) to measure brand affect.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Demographic profile

The demographics of the participants are detailed in Table 1. Out of 409 participants, around 64.1 % of respondents were male and the rests were female (35.9%). The majority of participants (42.5 %) were aged between 24 to 38 years old, followed by participants aged between 30 and 58 years old (30.1%), then by participants below 23 years old (23%). Only 8.4 % of participants aged above 56 years old. Regarding the occupation of participants, the majority were from the public sector (29.1 %), followed by the private sector (25.9 %), then by 15.6 % of the self-employed participant. Only 12.2 of the participants were retired. Around 171 participants (41.8 %) were using the internet for 1-5 years, 150 participants were using the internet for 6 to 10 years, and only 41 participants were using the internet for more than 11 years. Facebook has the majority portion among other platforms in the usage rate (88.8 %), followed by Instagram (65.8 %).

The majority of participants were using the internet in the morning time (46.2 %). Finally, the majority of participants were using the internet 1 to 5 times a day (37.5%).

3.2.2. Validity and reliability analysis

As shown in Table 2, the correlation coefficients are significant at the level of 0.05, where the probability value of each paragraph is less than (0.05). Therefore, it can be said that the paragraphs of the test are consistent and valid to measure what they were set for. The internal consistency of each construct of the study has been examined by imputing the coefficient alpha of a given construct. Following [Nunnally \(1978\)](#) rule of thumb, a Cronbach's value of greater than 0.7 refers to a high level of the measurement scales. As shown in Table 2, the alpha value of each construct reported 0.96 for social media marketing activities, 0.93 for brand loyalty, and 0.93 for brand affect. Hence, the research instrument is valid and reliable.

3.2.3. Hypothesis testing

The regression analysis has been conducted to test the proposed hypotheses using statistical software SPSS 24.00. As shown in Table 3, social media marketing activities are a statistically significant predictor of brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.06$; $p < 0.05$). Thus, we accept hypothesis 1. Similarly, social media marketing activities positive and significant effect on brand affect ($\beta = 0.07$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is strongly accepted. Our third hypothesis has been also accepted as the relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty reported for a positive and significant value ($\beta = 0.36$; $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 4 has been tested by examining the indirect effect of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty through brand affect. As shown in

Table 1. Demographic profile

Variables	Category	N	%
Gender	M	262	64.1%
	F	147	35.9%
Age	Below 23	88	21.5%
	24-38	147	42.5%
	30- 58	115	28.2%
	59 and above	32	7.8%
Occupation	Public sector	119	29.1%
	Privet sector	106	25.9%
	Self-employed	64	15.6%
	Student	70	17.1%
	Retired/homemaker	50	12.2%
Internet Use	Less the 1 year	47	11.5%
	1 to 5 years	171	41.8%
	6 to 10 years	150	36.7%
	11 years and above	41	10%
Social media Platforms	Facebook	363	88.8%
	Instagram	269	65.8%
	Others	226	65%
Social media Use	Never	1	0.02%
	1-5 times a day	153	37.5%
	6- 10 times a day	138	33.7%
	More than 10 times a day	117	28.6%
Best time	At Morning	189	46.2%
	At noon	73	17.8%
	At the evening	146	35.7%
Total	Category	409	100 %

Table 3, the indirect effect reported for statistically significant effect ($\beta = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$) lower than the direct effect of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty without brand affect ($\beta = 0.87$; $p < 0.05$), indicating for a partial mediation effect of brand affect on the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Thus, we accept hypothesis 4.

4. Discussion

Nowadays, using social media platforms has associated part of our life as a method of interaction in which customer explain their preferences, opinions, habits, experiences, and likes in their overview and interact with other customers. This wide area of communication, where individuals communicate with each other, provides a great chance for brands to achieve benefits such as time, cost, and accessibility to consumer life. That’s why a growing number of companies create their pages on a social network and develop new activities that could link consumers with the page’s contents and sharing such contents,

advertise, and promote it. This study was carried out to identify the significant role of social media marketing activities in enhancing brand affect and brand loyalty in the telecommunication industry in Palestine. By collecting data from 409 customers through an online self-administrated questionnaire, the findings of this study revealed that engaging in social media marketing activities plays a significant role in enhancing brand loyalty and brand affect. Further, the result of the mediation effect revealed that the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty is partially mediated by brand affect. The findings of this research have several theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature by uncovering the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty in the telecommunication industry. This is important as little attention has been paid to this sector (Ebrahim, 2019). In parallel with the findings of studies contacted in other sectors (Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018), the finding this study revealed that social media marking activities is a predictor of brand loyalty in the telecommunication companies. The telecommunication companies that engage in social media marketing activities can positively increase the loyalty of customers toward their brand. Furthermore, the finding of this study also contributes to the literature by indicating that social media marketing activities play a significant role in stimulating and enhancing brand affect. Brand affect has been defined as the ability of a brand to generate a positive emotional response in the aver-

Table 2. Results of the Pearson correlation coefficient (Pearson correlation) matrix link each paragraph with the total degree of the field and Cronbach alpha

Items	r	α
<i>Social media marketing activities</i> Kim and Ko (2012)		
SMMA1 Using social media channels of Ooredoo is fun	0.87**	0.96
SMMA2 Contents shown in Ooredoo social media channels seem interesting	0.86**	
SMMA3 Ooredoo social media channels enable information sharing with others	0.86**	
SMMA4 Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through Ooredoo social media channels	0.83**	
SMMA5 It is easy to deliver my opinion through Ooredoo social media channels	0.85**	
SMMA6 Contents shown in Ooredoo's social media channels are the newest information.	0.84**	
SMMA7 Using Ooredoo's social media channels is very trendy.	0.84**	
SMMA8 Ooredoo customization social media channels offer customized information searches.	0.83**	
SMMA9 Ooredoo social media channels provide customized services.	0.84**	
SMMA10 I would like to pass along information on the brand, product, or services from Ooredoo social media channels to my friends	0.83**	
SMMA11 I would like to upload contents from Ooredoo social media channels on my blog or microblog	0.83**	
<i>Brand loyalty</i> (Martínez et al., 2014)		
BL1 I usually use Ooredoo as my first choice compared to other cellular phone companies	0.83**	0.93
BL2 It would be costly in terms of money, time, and effort to end the relationship with Ooredoo	0.85**	
BL3 I shall continue considering Ooredoo as my main cellular phone services brand in the next few years	0.84**	
BL4 I would recommend this Ooredoo if somebody asked my advice	0.84**	
BL5 I am willing to pay more than any other brand to get this particular brand	0.86**	
<i>Brand affect</i> (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001)		
BA1 Ooredoo makes me feel happy	0.86**	0.94
BA2 I feel better when I use Ooredoo	0.80**	
BA3 Ooredoo makes me feel at peace	0.89**	
BA4 Ooredoo makes me feel entertained	0.88**	

Note: **: $p < 0.01$

age consumer as a consequence of its use [\(Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001\)](#). Prior studies argued different antecedents of brand affect such as personality traits [\(Matzler et al., 2006\)](#), and consumer perceived ethicality [\(Singh et al., 2012\)](#). However, little attention has been paid to examine the role of social media marketing activities as one of the critical antecedents of brand affect. The findings of this study indicated that

the brand affect of a telecommunication company is affected by its social media marketing activities. Hence, this study uncovers a new antecedent of brand affect. Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that the positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty is partial mediated by brand affect. Two contributions have been driven by this finding. First, this is the first study, to the best of the

Table 3. Regression analysis

From → To Independent variables	Brand Loyalty	Brand Trust	Brand Affect
SMMA	0.064***	0.072***	0.073***
Brand Affect	0.38*		
Mediation effect: SMMA → Brand Affect → brand loyalty			
Direct effect	0.87**	Partial mediation	
Indirect effect	0.16**		

None: *= $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$

author's knowledge, to examine the mediation effect of brand loyalty on the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. prior studies have examined different variables that may mediate the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty such as customer trust (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018), value, and brand consciousness (Ismail et al., 2018), brand image and brand awareness (Bilgin, 2018). Yet, the mediation role of brand affect in the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty has been ignored. This study empirically found the brand affect plays an important role in assimilating and exploiting social media marketing activities and using them to improve brand loyalty.

Practically, the findings of this research indicate that for telecommunication to increase brand loyalty they have to invest more in engaging in social media marketing activities. Social media marketing activities should be one of the organization's core strategies to boost brand loyalty. Further, according to the findings of this study, telecommunication companies should also pay attention to increase the brand affect for most effective social media marketing activities. That because brand affect plays a critical role in transferring the effect of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty.

5. Limitation and directions for future studies

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, data has been collected from only one telecommunication company in Palestine, which could limit the generalizability of the research findings. Research involving a wide range of telecommunication companies will allow the clearer dissemination

of findings. The research focused on only two social networking platforms; Facebook and Instagram. This could challenge the diversity in social media networking platforms and exclude customers using different platforms. Future studies may include the excluded social media networking platforms such as LinkedIn, Snapchat, Twitter. This study has not examined the effect of control variables (e.g., education level, gender, usage time, or type of social media platform) in the relationship among research constructs. Future studies may include such variables.

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