

## **The Impact of Social Media Marketing, Perceived Quality and Brand Awareness on Consumer's Brand Loyalty in Pakistan**

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This research aimed to examine how social media marketing (SMM) affects brand loyalty of consumers of clothing brands. Furthermore, role of brand awareness and perceived quality as the mediators affecting the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty was also explored. Convenient sampling technique was used on a sample of 202 adults (men = 88, women = 114) who had shopped from a branded clothing store from three different shopping malls in Lahore, Pakistan. Their age range was 21 to 50 years with an income level of PKR75, 000 or above. Self-report measures included Consumers' Attitude towards SMM (Kim & Ko, 2012), Brand Loyalty (Lau & Lee, 1999), Brand Awareness (Yoo et al., 2000) and Perceived Quality (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). SMM was found to be positively linked to brand loyalty. Moreover, the positive association between social media marketing and brand loyalty was mediated by consumers' brand awareness and perceived quality. Present findings suggest that brand managers should be mindful of the advantages, values and benefits they provide to the consumers in their social media campaigns in order to increase consumer loyalty to their brand.

*Keywords.* Social media marketing, brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality

In a globalized world, staying competitive is very important for a business to survive and to remain profitable today. Companies are shifting from traditional marketing techniques and moving onto social media marketing (SMM), even in developing countries like Pakistan which has a large young population who are internet users. A report by Data Reportal (2022) shows that there are 82.90 million internet users in Pakistan and internet penetration rate stands at 36.5% of the

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total population. In today's world buyers are more powerful and demanding, hence, firms should be available and readily accessible on the extensively used social networking websites and portals. Social media helps to spread positive information about brands, word of mouth, increase the sales count and return on investment. Moreover, it allows the customer to spread information and knowledge across their peers, friends and family regarding the purchased product/service (Karampini, 2018; Stileman, 2009).

Companies can endorse products and services and build a virtual community of brand advocates via numerous channels of social media which includes social networking sites, blogs, online gaming sites, news sites and forums etc. (Bratu, 2019). Organizations these days stay responsive to the impending necessity directed towards the development of proximate connection with their customers encouraging communication (Shawky et al., 2019); consequently, making consumer and company social media communication a crucial element of the marketing plan of the business (Aji et al., 2020).

Companies can use social media to advertise and grow brand loyalty beyond traditional methods by efficiently and effectively utilizing time and resources (Jackson, 2011). As a result, businesses can use social media as a cost-effective approach to raise brand awareness and hence, strengthen customer loyalty with the brand (Moncey & Baskaran, 2020). Successful SMM campaigns are critical for establishing good consumer-based brand equity, which comprises brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived quality (Koay et al., 2020). Social media marketing is described as activities amongst groups of users who virtually exchange information, opinions and knowledge using two-way communications (Safko & Brake, 2009). Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) defined social media marketing as "an emerging, yet promptly increasing platform for developing connections among consumers along with building an affirmative brand image in the consumer's eyes" (p. 6).

SMM portals include Facebook, Snapchat, Youtube, Twitter, Blogs, Vlogs, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, Tumblr, WhatsApp and many more. These discussions between the friends offer companies a new, less costly but efficient technique to arouse brand awareness, increase recognition of the brand and remember, and strengthen the loyalty towards the brand (Choi et al., 2016; De Vries et al., 2012; Kunja & Acharyulu, 2018). The features of social media communication provide businesses the ability to connect directly with their customers. Customer complaints may be handled as part of these communication initiatives, which can have a beneficial impact on their purchasing decisions (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). When a social media

brand website, page or portal consistently distributes engaging posts and engages with its followers, this activity improves the follower's perception of the company (Beig & Khan, 2018).

Brand awareness plays a crucial part in the buyer's decision-making process towards purchase of a brand (Barreda et al., 2015). Keller (1993) highlighted brand equity to be understood and expressed in terms of brand awareness. Aaker (1991) believed "brand awareness is the ability of the prospective buyer to recognize and recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (p. 62). Businesses can use social media as a cost-effective approach to raise brand awareness (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). Building customer relationships and gaining their confidence in the product creates brand awareness (Ansari et al., 2019). Bilgin (2018) has found that SMM campaigns had a favorable and substantial effect on the awareness of a brand. Various other researches (Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020) also proved that SMM strengthens the online engagements with the consumers and thus positively impacts brand awareness.

Aaker (1991) deduced that perceived quality may indicate the primary distinction of a product/service and thus growing into a demanding brand in customer's cognizance. Perceived quality is "an outcome of a consumer's personal conclusion on a product or service" (Dodds et al., 1991, p. 5). Brand awareness affects quality perceptions positively. In any industry, any product or service can turn into significant quality cues. Customers who are familiar with the brand assess the quality of its product to be high as well (Perito et al., 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that brand awareness is positively and favourably impacted by the perceived quality of a brand (Algharabat et al., 2020; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015).

Brand loyalty of consumers is critical for a business to survive, prosper and remain profitable (Aaker, 1997). Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) cited in (Ishak & Ghani, 2013, p. 3) termed brand loyalty as "a decision-making unit's subjective behavioural response over time concerning one or more substitute brands out of a set of brands and as a consequence of psychological activities". Brand loyalty enables the social media users to show their satisfaction when they consume a particular product/service (Zehir et al., 2011). When a customer has a strong perceived quality regarding a product in their mind then they will become more devoted to the brand. Another research purported consumers' perception of quality and brand loyalty shared a significant and positive association, leading to strong purchase intention (Judith & Richard, 2002). Higher quality perception can motivate a customer to select a particular brand over the competitor's

brands. Shanahan et al. (2019) in their study highlighted the role of positive perceived quality in favorably affecting the brand loyalty of the consumers. Another study by Atulkar (2020) also confirmed the above-mentioned relationship.

SMM allows productive use of time and resources and enhances two-way communication enabling buyers to improve brand loyalty (Akhtar, 2011; Jackson, 2011). Therefore, SMM campaigns benefit the companies to develop brand loyalty using connection, communication, and community building (Walpole, 2011). Businesses that aim to carry out successful social media promotions should realize the advantages, values, and benefits they offer to the customers. These added benefits and advantages are what will make the consumers loyal to the brand. Social media provides different platforms and applications so that consumers can engage with the brand. A study by Ismail (2017) revealed the importance of SMM and how these tools can be effectively used to build relationships with consumers along with building brand loyalty. Research carried out by Salem and Salem (2021) in the fast fashion industry also proved that in order to enhance buyers' loyalty towards the brand, SMM plays a vital part.

Customers are provided with information of brands on social media portals which reciprocates and aids in improving the awareness of the brand. Once the customers are aware of a particular brand, they would have a positive influence on quality perceptions. When people believe to have high quality perceptions, they tend to buy the product and hence, become loyal to the brands. Whenever companies want to engage in innovative product development or tap a newly developed market, they may invest in creating brand awareness to achieve the greatest outcome since it is reported to have a favorable impact on brand loyalty (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Chou, 2005; Peng, 2006; Wu, 2002). Another study by Khadim et al. (2018) also proposed that brand awareness and perceived quality act as significant and critical mediators between SMM and brand loyalty. These mediators help in building the loyalty of the brands and eventually benefiting the company in terms of high sales and profits.

### **Rationale**

Due to numerous benefits of SMM which include lower costs, higher reach and direct connectivity with the consumers many businesses now invest in SMM. Pakistan has been chosen as the context of this research as the country has an internet penetration rate of 36.5 percent which translates into 82.90 million citizens having

access to high-speed internet and the usage is increasing manifolds every year (Data Reportal, 2022). Therefore, Pakistan presents a lucrative platform to research the use of SMM and its impact.

While previous research has only looked at the direct influence of consumer's attitude towards perceived SMM campaigns on brand loyalty (Kim & Ko, 2012) this study examined how brand awareness and perceived brand quality mediate the association between SMM and brand loyalty. All the studies mentioned above have been conducted in different parts of the world whereas limited evidence is available in Pakistan. Studies on consumer-based equity and brand loyalty within the social media context are still finite (Halaszovich & Nel, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Although, SMM has been largely covered in the earlier studies (Wang et al., 2012; Mangold & Faulds, 2009) so far, no study has made a distinction between how it affects brand equity vs. brand attitude while taking industry-specific variations into consideration (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). This study examines the requirement to do so by focusing on branded clothing industry. Ansari et al. (2019) supported that there is a continuing need to explore the association of social media content marketing and brand awareness with the buyer's decision-making process. This research will add value by studying the effect of SMM on consumers' brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty of the consumers of branded clothing in Lahore, Pakistan.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses statements were tested in accordance, with the study objectives of this research:

1. Social media marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness among clothing brand customers.
2. Brand awareness has a positive effect on perceived quality among clothing brand customers.
3. Higher perceived quality of a brand leads to a positive effect on brand loyalty among clothing brand customers.
4. The relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty is mediated by brand awareness and perceived quality among clothing brand customers.

### **Method**

#### **Sample**

The participants for this research were consumers of clothing brands ( $N = 202$ ) approached from the three different shopping malls

in Lahore which include: Mall of Lahore, Emporium Mall and Fortress Square mall. Majority of the respondents were men (56.4 %) and had an age range between 21-30 years (62.9 %). The participants (67.8%) had an income range between Rs. 75,000 to Rs.100, 000 and most of them had a graduate degree and were employed in different positions in numerous organizations.

To develop a sampling frame consumer were chosen on the basis that they had shopped from a clothing brand. Different brands of clothing were mentioned on the questionnaire (e.g., Khaadi, Sapphire, Beechtree, Outfitters, Bareeze, Nishat Linen, Sana Safinaz, Zellbury, Limelight and Maria B.) and consumers were asked to fill the questionnaire taking these brands into account. The inclusion criteria also included that the participants had a smartphone and must be aware of SMM through any portal such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube. Hence, a total of 220 consumers were found to be qualified to fill up the research instruments. The respondents were chosen through convenience sampling for data collection. Numerous studies used a convenient sampling technique when any specific member of the population is not known (Bilgin, 2018) and due to the benefits affiliated with the method (Algharabat et al., 2020). Table 1 depicts the summary of the demographics of the participants.

Table 1  
*Demographic Profiles of Participants (N=220)*

Demographic Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Men	88	43.6
Women	114	56.4
Age		
21-30 years	127	62.9
31-40 years	60	29.7
41-50 years	15	7.4
Income Range		
Rs. 75,000 to 100,000	137	67.8
Rs. 101,000 to 150,000	25	12.4
Rs. 151,000 and above	40	19.8

Table 1 shows that majority of the participants are women, have 21-30 years of age, and have income between Rs. 75,000 to Rs.100, 000.

### **Instruments**

Apart from the demographic variables (gender, age, income), this study used the following instruments.

***Perception of SMM Scale***

SMM was measured by employing the scale developed by Kim and Ko (2012). This scale is rated on five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The items were modified in context of the clothing brands. This study used five different constructs of SMM activities of clothing brands which included: Entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth. A total of 10 items were used to calculate this variable. The reliability for all the social media marketing sub-dimensions ranged from .70 to .94 (Kim & Ko, 2012). For each of these five types a total of two items were used to measure them. The instrument has been found reliable and valid with CR = .86 and  $\alpha = .87$  (Hair et al., 1998); the higher the score, the better the perception of SMM.

***Brand Loyalty Scale***

To assess brand loyalty, four items based on Lau and Lee (1999) were employed. Five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*) was used to evaluate the construct. These items were modified according to the context of study. Respondents were asked to keep in mind the clothing brand that they have shopped in while answering the questions. In this study, the instrument brand loyalty was found to be valid and reliable with  $\alpha = .76$ . High score pointed to higher brand loyalty as reported by consumers.

***Brand Awareness Scale***

Brand awareness scale is developed by Yoo et al. (2000) consisting of six-item. This research measured brand awareness using the three items from Yoo et al. (2000) and modified them accordingly. The items that included comparisons of different brands were deleted since this study focused on the brand that the customer purchased. Five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) was used to compute this construct. The self-reported score ranges from 6 to 30. Higher scores reflected higher brand awareness. The results of the analysis show that the construct brand awareness was valid and reliable with  $\alpha = .92$ .

***Perceived Quality Scale***

Lastly, two items modified from the study by Yoo and Donthu (2001) were used to measure perceived quality. The responses for this

scale are rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The score ranges for this scale ranged from 2 to 10. Higher scores were associated with higher customer perception of quality. This scale is found to be reliable and valid with the CR = .82, AVE = .70 and  $\alpha = .82$

### Procedure

The data were collected from consumers who had experience of shopping for a clothing brand through purposive convenient sampling. For ethical consideration, an informed consent was included in the printed questionnaire right at the top, which consisted of the title, purpose, and possible consequences. Additionally, the questionnaire also clearly addressed the respondents' concerns regarding their privacy and confidentiality; after data screening a sum of 202 respondents were deemed valid for analysis. Data acquired for analysis represented a rate of 95.6 percent. The process of distribution and collection for data took two months.

### Results

The collected data was assessed for any missing value, normality, or outliers to ensure it was suitable for subsequent analysis. This research used Structural Equation Modeling technique to inspect the study model (Hair et al., 2017; 2020). Standardized factor loadings of all the variables were found to be significant and exceeded the value of .50, which is the benchmark (Wu et al., 2011). The constructs' internal consistency and reliability was also verified.

Table 2

*Correlations Matrix for all Study Variables (N = 200)*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 Brand Awareness	-	.37**	.61**	.23**
2 Social Media Marketing		-	.24**	-.12
3 Perceived Quality			-	.25**
4 Brand Loyalty				-

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Correlation analysis in Table 2 shows that brand awareness is significantly positively related with SMM, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Whereas SMM illustrates a positively significant relationship with perceived quality. Perceived quality and brand loyalty had a positive and significant relationship as well.

Table 3  
*Model Fit Statistics for CFA (N = 200)*

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model fit	236.95	142	1.67	.89	.95	.95	.94	.06

*Note.* GFI = Goodness of Fit Index, CFI = Comparative Fit Index, IFI = Incremental Fit Index, TLI = Tucker Lewis Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Table 3 shows that the proposed model was recognized to be satisfactory and validated to be an adequate fit as suggested by Hair et al. (1998; 2020). The  $\chi^2/df$  measure fell between 1 and 3; RMSEA was also less than .08 while TLI and GFI were higher than .90. All these values match the criteria for excellent fit of the model.

All the study’s path coefficients were calculated in the structural equation model. In our analytical model, a three-path mediated model was examined (Lau & Cheung, 2012; Taylor et al., 2008). This method enabled to single out the indirect impact of the two mediators: brand awareness and perceived quality. Table 4 displays all the path coefficients and indirect effects of the mediation model. Altogether, the hypothesized structural model is satisfactorily explaining variance ( $R^2$  of brand awareness = 11 percent,  $R^2$  of perceived quality = 38 percent, and  $R^2$  of brand loyalty = 12 percent). H1 stated SMM had a favorable association with brand awareness, which was supported ( $b = .41, p < .001$ ). Moreover, brand awareness is a key indicator of perceived quality ( $b = .61, p < .001$ ), supporting H2. Additionally, perceived quality was positively linked to brand loyalty hence, showing support for H3 ( $b = .19, p < .05$ ).

Table 4  
*Path Coefficients and Indirect Effects for Mediation Model (N = 202)*

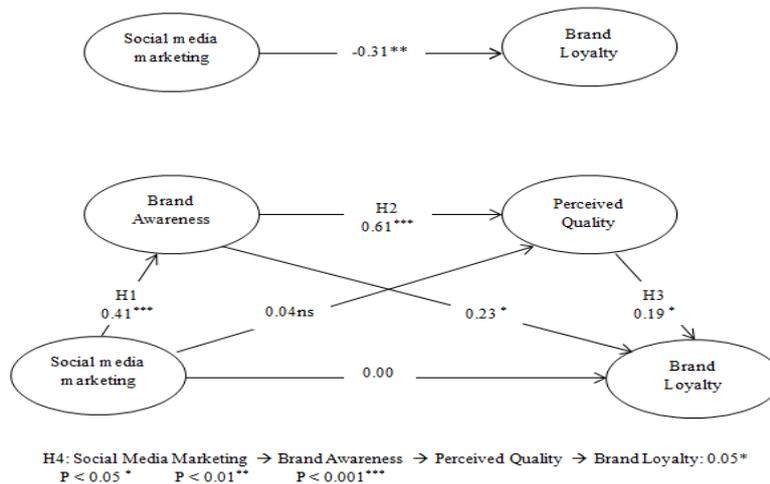
	Standard Estimates		Conclusion
	Path Coefficients	Indirect Effects	
H1: SMM → BA	.41***		Accepted
H2: BA → PQ	.61***		Accepted
H3: PQ → BL	.19*		Accepted
Total indirect effects		.15*	
SMM → BA → BL		.09*	
SMM → PQ → BL		.01 ns	
H4: SMM → BA → PQ → BL		.05*	Sequential mediation

*Note.* SMM = Social Media Marketing; BA = Brand Awareness; PQ = Perceived Quality; BL = Brand Loyalty.  
 \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

An analytical strategy was applied (Shrout & Bolger, 2002) for testing the mediation model. This approach enabled testing the indirect link of the dependent and the independent variables via the mediating variable through a bootstrapping procedure (Mooney et al., 1993) between consumers’ attitude to SMM and brand loyalty becomes strong and positive.

The indirect effects estimate with the symmetric and 95 percent bias corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals for the study’s path estimates are reported in Table 4. H4 suggested and proved that brand awareness and perceived quality sequentially mediated the link between social media marketing and brand loyalty ( $b = .05, p < .05$ ).

Figure 1. *Mediation Role of Brand Awareness and Perceived Quality between SMM and Brand Loyalty.*



*Note.* The estimates from the structural path coefficients are depicted in Figure 1. Findings indicate that in the presence of brand awareness and perceived quality the association between consumers’ attitude to SMM and brand loyalty becomes strong and positive.

### Discussion

SMM plays an essential part in enhancing customers’ brand loyalty. The main aim of this research was to find the impact of SMM on brand loyalty. To comprehend the impact of consumer’s attitude towards SMM on brand loyalty two mediators; brand awareness and perceived quality were introduced. To investigate these effects, four hypotheses were established and tested.

Hypotheses 1 result claim that consumer's attitude towards SMM has a significant and favorable impact on brand awareness. Social media campaigns not only provide information about the brand but also engage with the consumers in a two-way communication. SMM acts as a medium of increasing the awareness of a brand and reaching prospective customers. These campaigns help the customers by producing them with knowledge about the product/brand and hence improve the perception of the brand. These results are supported by numerous studies (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Godey et al., 2016; Li & Bernoff, 2011). This research also depicted that consumers were aware of the SMM activities done by the clothing brands that they shopped, and these activities lead to enhance the awareness of the brand in the opinion of the customers.

The outcome of hypotheses 2 of the study depicts that awareness of a brand leads to a favorable influence on quality perceptions. Respondents in this research also believed that once the consumers have brand awareness via its social media activities, the perception of the brand's quality also increases. Brand awareness plays an integral role in customer's purchase decisions, such as quality evaluation (Van Osselaer & Janiszewski, 2001). It acts as an important quality cue when the consumers are finalizing the products. Findings show that perceived quality has a favorable influence on brand loyalty this supports hypothesis 3. Customer's perception has a central part in increasing or reducing brand loyalty (Wu, 2007). Consumers with higher perceived quality regarding a product in their mind will become more loyal to the brand. Research indicates that perceived consumers' quality perception and brand loyalty have a strong relationship, leading to higher purchase intention (Atulkar, 2020; Judith & Richard, 2002; Loureiro, 2013).

This research also supported that perceived quality and brand awareness sequentially mediated consumer's attitude towards SMM and brand loyalty's relationship. SMM aids the buyers by giving them knowledge about the brand/product. This information benefits them by enhancing the awareness of the brand in the minds of the consumers. This favorable awareness of the brand leads to positive quality perceptions of the brand and hence favourable brand loyalty. These findings confirm earlier studies' results carried out by Loureiro (2013) and Khadim et al. (2018) that brand awareness and perceived quality act as mediating variables for brand loyalty. In the presence of brand awareness and perceived quality the association between consumer's attitude towards social media marketing and brand loyalty is strong and positive.

The result of the study shows that now consumers in Pakistan are responsive to the social media marketing campaigns done by these brands on various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. which aids to improve the brand awareness, improve quality perceptions thus, making the consumers loyal to these brands.

### **Implications**

Social media is omnipresent and therefore understanding its impact on all spheres of life and businesses is pertinent. This study adds to the current conceptual work and empirical studies being conducted around the world and Pakistan, in particular, which are trying to measure the true effect of SMM on businesses and organizations growth and profitability. Furthermore, this research has crucial practical implications for companies and brand managers. These findings can help marketing managers to increase positive information concerning their brands, and to engage consumers as loyal consumers.

### **Suggestions for Future Research and Limitations**

This is an introductory study on the influence of consumer's attitude towards SMM on brand loyalty. Future academics can use this study as a reference to analyze sophisticated research models with various other variables that impact brand loyalty to produce deeper insights. For example, potential variables such as brand image, service quality, after sales services and purchase intention can also be used to study their effect on brand loyalty. This research only focused on a few brands of clothing mentioned above, future studies may focus on more brands and choose different industries like fast moving consumer goods to analyze the influence of SMM campaigns on these products/brands. This research was undertaken in Lahore, Pakistan, thus it may be difficult to generalize the result to other cultures. Differences in different groups of customers should also be examined for further exploration of factors affecting the consumers' attitude towards SMM and its influence on brand loyalty. Researchers will have to consider cultural, social, and economic variances when relocating this study. Therefore, a similar study should be conducted in several nations to create stronger generalization of the outcomes and check their validity.

## Conclusion

Findings showed the positive association between SMM and brand loyalty, brand awareness and perceived quality. Findings showed that how consumer's attitude towards SMM via brand awareness and higher perceived quality leads to favorable brand loyalty. Results of the research exhibited that clothing brands, has a favorable and substantial effect on SMM, awareness of brand, quality perceptions and loyalty of the brand. Another finding suggested that the two mediators; brand awareness and perceived quality sequentially mediated the relationship of SMM and brand loyalty.

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