Blend Ibrahim

The Nexus between Social Media Marketing Activities and Brand Loyalty in Hotel Facebook Pages: A Multi-Group Analysis of Hotel Ratings

Abstract

This study advances research on social media marketing activities (SMMA) and brand trust by empirically exploring their relationships with brand loyalty, and purchase intention, among a representative cross-section of five-star (5) hotels and four-star (4) hotels Facebook profiles in Kyrenia City (Northern Cyprus). The data gathered for this research adds to our understanding of today's social media marketing as a new-generation marketing tool. This study also tests for the mediating effect of brand trust and the moderating effect of hotel ratings (five-star/four-star) on the proposed relationships. Based on 407 customers that were surveyed, the results indicate that SMMA did have a positive effect on brand loyalty, purchase intention, and brand trust. Hotel ratings (five-star/four-star) moderate the link between SMMA and brand loyalty; however, the link between SMMA and purchase intention was moderated by hotel ratings (five-star/four-star). The results showed that hotel ratings (five-star/four-star) made no difference at the model level. Therefore, the multi-group moderating effect of hotel ratings on the measurement model was tested at the path level. Lastly, the mediation outcome of brand trust was partially supported. Thus, consequential recommendations have been put forward

Keywords: social media marketing activities, brand loyalty, purchase intention, brand trust, hotel facebook pages, hospitality industry, Northern Cyprus

1. Introduction

Throughout the 21ˢᵗ century, social media has become key to the success of many companies, industries, organizations, and individuals. Its accomplishments have been confirmed by the latest statistics, which indicate that half of the world's population is active on social media (Kemp, 2018). Besides, social network platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) have become extremely popular, substantially impacting all aspects of life. To illustrate, Facebook currently has about 2 billion users worldwide, and there were as many as 1.40 billion active daily Facebook users in the fourth quarter of 2017 (Statista, 2018).

This consumer-based foundation widely influences social media amongst both users and corporations that employ social media as a marketing communications tool (Kemp, 2018; Ismail, 2017; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Moreover, many consumers depend on social media sites to obtain the latest information about certain products (Ismail, 2017) or to share information about products and service brands with a community of social media followers (Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Kozinets et al., 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Social networks and the Internet are changing communications tools for traditional marketing. These means of communication, which were previously controlled and managed by brand and marketing managers, are now predominantly controlled by consumers (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). These rapid changes within the business world have led to the application of social media in marketing plans or social media marketing (SMM).

Within the context of SMM, Kim and Ko (2010, 2012) created a new framework for certain arenas (entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth [WOM]) to determine how SMMA

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increases customer equity and purchasing intention within luxury fashion brands. Some studies have explored SMMA by applying various contextual frameworks, investigating the effects of SMMA on customer responses (Godey et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018), brand loyalty (Algharabat, 2017; Ismail, 2017), purchasing intention (Gautam & Sharma, 2017; Kim & Ko, 2010, 2012), and brand equity (Godey et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2017, 2018). This research uses a similar framework to explore the relationships between SMMA, brand loyalty, purchase intention, and brand trust in the hospitality industry. Due to the vast number of individuals on social media networks (i.e., Facebook and Instagram), hospitality businesses have developed quickly within social media platforms. In turn, this has required these businesses to engage in SMM with different communication tools, such as SMMA, which can increase customer loyalty and trust and boost their purchasing intention, increasing a business's competitive advantage. For example, the mangers of the restaurant can depend on the different social media sites Facebook, Instagram and YouTube because these sites consider as an important role to influence the customers' experiences (Mhlanga & Maloneytichaawa, 2017).

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. For the first gap, the research model responds to the most recent calls for additional empirical investigations into the consequences of SMMA, which have previously focused on general behavioral responses (Alalwan et al., 2017; Ebrahim, 2020; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2018) and particularly brand loyalty and behavior intention (Panigyrakis et al., 2020; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). This research expands upon existing studies' assessments of the relationship between SMMA and consumer responses by looking at brand loyalty, brand trust, and purchase intention.

A second gap in the literature is related to previous examinations of SMMA within the contexts of industries and brands. These studies have investigated students and customers who are active in SMM, fashion industry customers, or customers who purchase luxury brands (Ismail et al., 2018; Kim & Ko, 2010, 2012). While some studies focused on people who have experience of accessing or using social media travel agencies within the tourism industry (Sano, 2015), the others studies focused on specific facets of the tourism industry, such as customers who visit the Facebook pages of five-star hotels (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018) or passengers who use social media sites that are managed by airlines (Seo & Park, 2018). By comparison, the present study focuses on the Facebook pages of four and five-star hotels and the customers who visit them. As in other studies that have collected student data samples, the ability to generalize results to all social media users may be limited. Therefore, this study encourages a diverse demographics examination of SMMA (Algharabat, 2017; Ismail et al., 2018; Koay et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

A third gap in the literature is related to generalizability of its results with different age groups and real customer's. In order to enhance the generalizability of its results, this paper uses actual customers from different age groups who are active on Facebook pages and use the services provided by hotels. One recent study encouraged further examination into service industries, such as those in tourism (Torres et al., 2018). This study was among the first to focus on SMMA in the service industry of hospitality. By including all age groups, this study also closes the gap in research that has only evaluated a single age group (Alsaad et al., 2017; Ismail, 2017). Many recent studies have recommended conducting subsequent research on more varied and diverse demographics (Koay et al., 2020; Salem & Salem, 2019; Yadav & Rahman, 2017, 2018).

A fourth gap in the literature is related to the moderator role. The results of this study may be influenced by certain moderating influences, such as hotel ratings (i.e., four stars or five stars). Recent studies have suggested that future research on SMMA should include more moderating influences in their investigations (Alalwan et al., 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Ismail, 2017; Panigyrakis et al., 2020; Seo & Park, 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). To achieve this aim, the present paper explores the moderating role of hotel ratings on the study's construct and measures the multi-group analysis against this moderating influence to determine if there are any differences between these two groups. As a summary, because previous studies have neglected to examine the relationship between SMMA and consumer responses within the context of hospitality, the present research aims to investigate this relationship through assessments of SMMA, brand loyalty, purchase intention, and brand trust in the Facebook pages of four- and five-star hotels.

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2. Theoretical framework

The model (Stimulus–– Organism––Response-) S-O-R (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), which was revised by Jacoby (2002), is useful for substantiating an integrative model in this study. The S-O-R model has been used regularly in the business and tourism fields (Kim et al., 2020; Moe & Tan, 2016). In the hospitality service industry, the stimulus–organism–response framework has been recently used to explain the underlying mechanism of the relationship among online-service design characteristics pages, online reviews, and consumer responses in social media context (Carlson et al., 2018; Zhao & Peng, 2019). The S-O-R model states that specific features of an environment or stimuli (i.e., SMMA) provoke the cognitive and emotional state-organism (here, brand trust and brand loyalty) of consumers, which generate a behavioral response (i.e. brand loyalty). In the context of tourism, the S-O-R model is highly effective at clarifying the associations among stimuli (i.e., hotel ambiance), organism (i.e., emotions), and response (i.e., hotel loyalty) (Jani & Han, 2015). In the SMMA field, the S-O-R model explored recently in, the study of Yadav and Rahman (2018) and Koay et al. (2020) examined the relationship among stimuli (i.e., SMMA), organism (i.e., customer equity, brand experience), and response (i.e., customer loyalty, customer brand equity). Table 1 shows the recent literature on the (SMMA-brand loyalty) and (SMMA-purchase intention) linkage in the tourism and hospitality and non-tourism and hospitality context.

Figure 1
Proposed model
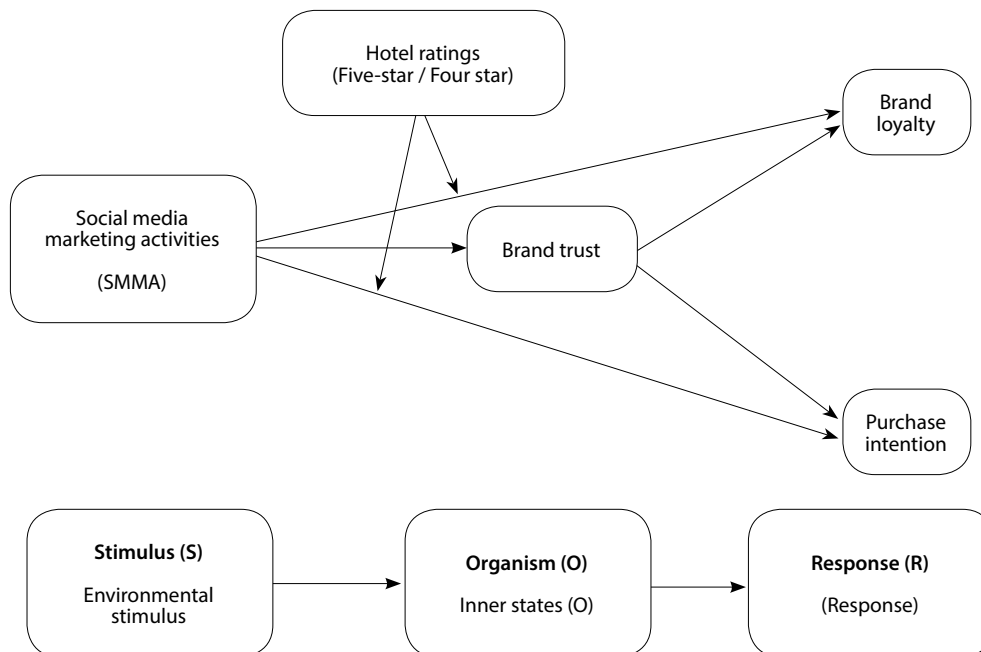
Table 1
Recent literature on the (SMMA-BL) and (SMMA-PI) linkage in the tourism and hospitality context and non-tourism and hospitality

SMMA-BL in non-tourism and hospitality context				
Articles	**Context**	**SMMA-related consequences**	**Mediators/ moderators**	**Theoretical framework**
Ismail (2017)	Students respondents who are members of a brand community in any social media platform	SMMA-BL	**Mediators:** Brand consciousness and value consciousness	-
Algharabat (2017)	Student respondents, who are consumers and followers of Facebook pages	SMMA-BL SMMA-Brand love	**Mediators:** Self-expressive brands (inner and social)	-

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Table 1 *(continued)*

	Context	SMMA-related consequences	Mediators/ moderators	Theoretical framework
Yadav & Rahman (2018)	E-commerce context	SMMA-BL SMMA-Value equity SMMA-Brand equity SMMA-Relationship equity	-	S-O-R framework
Ebrahim (2020)	Telecommunications context	SMMA-BL SMMA-Brand equity SMMA-BT	-	--
Wang et al. (2019)	Online fashion retail context	SMMA-BL	-	-
Bilgin (2018)	Different contexts (household linens), (airline), (automotive), (jewelry) (communication)	SMMA-BL SMMA-Brand awareness SMMA-Brand image		-

SMMA-PI in non-tourism and hospitality context

Articles	Context	SMMA-related consequences	Mediators/ moderators	Theoretical framework
Yadav & Rahman (2017)	E-commerce context	SMMA-PI SMMA- Brand equity	-	-
Gautam & Sharma (2017)	Luxury fashion brand context	SMMA-PI	Mediators: Customer relationships (intimacy and trust)	-
Toor et al. (2017)	Users of social network marketing websites	SMMA-PI	Mediators: Consumer engagement	-
Kim & Ko (2010)	Luxury fashion brand context	SMMA-PI SMMA- Customer relationships (intimacy and trust)	-	-

SMMA studies in tourism and hospitality context

Articles	Context	SMMA-related consequences	Mediators/ moderators	Theoretical framework
Sano (2015)	Travel agencies' social media	SMMA-Customer satisfaction SMMA- Behavior intention SMMA- Positive WOM	-	-
Seo & Park (2018)	Airlines social media	SMMA-Brand awareness SMMA-Brand image	-	-
Ibrahim & Aljarah (2018)	Hotels Facebook pages	SMMA-BL SMMA-Revisit intention	Mediators: BT	-
Moslehpour et al. (2020)	Airlines social media	SMMA-PI	Mediators: Trust and perceived value	

Contributions of this study

	Context	SMMA-related consequences	Mediators/ moderators	Theoretical framework
1 - This study is the first empirical study to test the relationship among SMMA – BL, PI and BT in the hospitality context 2 - Examine the mediation effect of brand trust and explore the mechanism of this mediation	Five and four-star hotels Facebook pages Customer of hotels Different age group Actual hotel customers	SMMA-BL SMMA-PI SMMA-BT	**Mediators:** Brand trust **Moderators:** Explore the moderator role of hotel ratings (five stars/four stars) on the construct of study and measure the multi-group analysis for this moderator if there is any difference between these two groups	S-O-R framework

Note: SMMA = Social media marketing activities, BT = Brand trust, PI = Purchase intention, BL= Brand loyalty.

3. Hypothesis development
3.1. Social media marketing activities

Kim and Ko (2010, 2012) created a new framework consisting of five measurements of SMMA: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and WOM. Additionally, Kim and Ko (2012) built a new framework to discover how SMMA improves consumer equity in the luxury fashion industry. This study suggested that communication should take place between brands and customers. Godey et al. (2016) applied

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the five SMMA components as a holistic concept in their study of pioneering brands in the luxury sector. This study found that SMMA had a significant positive influence on consumer brand equity (brand awareness and image). The concept of SMMA has been widely regarded as a presence in SMM studies. The scholarly definition of SMMA is "a subcategory of online marketing/digital marketing that supports traditional promotion approaches" (Yadav & Rahman, 2018, p. 4). A recent meta-analysis article published about SMMA viewed SMMA 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, p. 5). Moreover, several studies have found that entertainment (ENT) is a powerful motivation for the use of social media (Muntinga et al., 2011) and that entertainment encourages users of social networking sites to look to these sites for stress-relief and amusement (Courtois et al., 2009; Godey et al., 2016). On the other hand, Godey et al. (2016) defined interaction (INT) in social media as "the sharing of information and the exchange of opinions with others." Muntinga et al. (2011) discussed the trendiness as the capability of social media sites to disseminate up-to-the-minute information over four sub-drivers: monitoring, knowledge, conveying information about purchasing, and encouragement.

Moreover, Zhu and Chen (2015) devised two categories of post-customization (CUST): customized posts (e.g., Facebook services) directed toward specific spectators and transmissions (e.g., tweets on Twitter) whose objective is to involve users. Lastly, Godey et al. (2016) confirmed that WOM mentions the degree to which customers accept brand-related supplementary information and share brand-related content on social media sites. To measure the efficiency of SMMA, this study used four dimensions, which are used in Kim and Ko (2012), i.e., study interaction, trendiness, customization, and WOM. "Entertainment," which was itemized in the Kim and Ko (2010, 2012) study, was not practical to measure in this study because one can assume that consumers who regularly access hotels' social media accounts do so not just for fun but, rather, to search for useful information. This study viewed entertainment as one of the "results" aspects rather than as a "reason" aspect (Sano, 2015).

3.2. Social media marketing activities and brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is a customer's motivation to be loyal to a brand, and it is created when customers select the brand as their first choice (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Brand loyalty is "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior." (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). In this research, the definition of loyalty: in social media context entails the following loyalty is achieved through direct communication from the company or the service provider, by providing information quickly and clearly and by inspiring confidence in the customer all of these actions achieve loyalty. In terms of the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty, some recent studies have recognized a conventional link between SMMA and brand loyalty. For instance, Ismail (2017) indicated, through student samples, that SMMA has a positive influence on brand loyalty. SMMA has also been explored in the context of the hospitality industry. For example, Ibrahim and Aljarah (2018) examined five-star hotels in North Cyprus. They surveyed 389 customers who used five hotels Facebook profiles. The results showed that SMMA had a significant influence on brand loyalty and revisit intention. In addition, brand trust had a mediating effect on the relationship between SMMA and revisit intention

SMMA is a subgroup communication tool for related advertising activities (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). As a common communication framework, SMMA enables sellers to connect dynamically to consumers (Ismail et al., 2018). Furthermore, SMMA demonstrates that regular communication tools between brands and consumers may help marketers retain consumers' interest in (Merisavo & Raulas, 2004) and thereby improve brand loyalty. Thus, we propose the following:

H1: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty.

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3.3. Social media marketing activities and purchase intention

Purchase intention is the determination that falls into the hands of the customers who must purchase a particular product (Grewal et al., 1998). Purchase intention is also called a decision made by the consumer himself/herself that is affected by his/her overall valuation of goods or services (Dodds, 1995; Shao et al., 2004).

In the online environment, 'purchase intention' focuses on whether consumers have the intention to purchase, or are excited about purchasing, a product or service through the use of an online transaction platform (Pavlou & Chai, 2002). Kim and Ko (2010) studied the relationship between SMMA and purchase intention and reported that, in terms of luxury brands, SMMA had a positively influence both consumer relations and purchase intention in Korea. These positive results were supported by Gautam and Sharma (2017) and Yadav and Rahman (2017), who confirmed that SMMA influence purchase intention in India.

Toor and Hussain (2017) examined the effect of SMMA on the purchase intention of customers on social media sites in Pakistan. The results confirmed that marketers should consider social media networks to be important because these networks have a significant effect on purchase intention. As social media evolves, a company can change its marketing strategies accordingly.

Specifically, online purchase intention is a consumer's attitude toward purchasing, or intent to purchase, a product or service on the web. SMMA improves and enhances the association between a customer and a company/brand. Thus, we propose the following:

H2: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing activities and purchase intention.

3.4. Social media marketing activities and brand trust

Today, with increasing competition in the hotel industry, businesses struggle to achieve brand loyalty and struggle to consumer trust, and their marketing departments haphazardly attempt to build consumer-brand relationships on social media (Fournier & Lee, 2009). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 5), trust can be defined as "when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity." Brand trust is ''the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function'' (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). To build trust, customers need opportunities to gain confidence in the brand (Deighton, 1992) and deeply engage with company activities. This allows companies to exchange information with customers and, consequently, create a brand trust (Flavián et al., 2006).

SMM with different types of online marketing activities (here, SMMA) aims to convert customers to sellers and promoters who through interactions will produce, manage, and share online information about related firms, goods, and services (Ismail et al., 2018). This interaction with social media platforms creates a form of response, such as more encouraging comments, responses, and high ratings, which advances the level of brand trust (Ba & Pavlou, 2002). Thus, we propose the following:

H3: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand trust.

3.5. Mediating role of brand trust

As stated earlier, social media sites are effective midpoints for approving goods and services; they enable marketers to dynamically connect and interrelate with customers (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Thus, SMM efforts between consumers and firms work to either increase or reduce users' trust in a social media site (Hajli, 2014; Pan & Chiou, 2011)

Similarly, SMMA supports brand trust and promotes purchase intention, which manifests when a customer places a significant amount of trust in a brand. Moreover, trust in a brand is built on confidence in that brand. Brand trust likely influences customers' purchase intention because customers can generate trust and develop passionate links to brands. In other words, "building relationships on the social Web is practically a

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guaranteed way of deepening brand loyalty." (Gunelius, 2011, p. 170). Brand trust is a significant cause of brand loyalty, and it is promoted through the formation of person-to-person marketing relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, we propose the following:

H4: Brand trust will mediate the relationship between SMMA and purchase intention.

H5: Brand trust will mediate the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty.

3.6. Moderating role of hotel ratings (five or four stars)

Hotel ratings (five or four stars) may play a moderating role on the relationships between SMMA on brand loyalty or between SMMA on purchase Intention. Guests of five-star hotels prefer to stay in the same brand hotel on their next visit, and they will give more significance to the hotel brands, they are loyal to in the future (Odin et al., 2001). Moreover, loyal customers are less likely to switch to other brand hotels simply because of the price (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). Tourists have become more prosperous and are keen to spend more on high-quality service accommodations (Liat et al., 2014). In other words, a customer of five-star hotels shows more loyalty and intention to revisit the same place; this type of customer can be more highly sensitive to high-quality service. Customers of four-star hotels tend to give more relative importance to the symbolic benefits of services (Back & Parks, 2003). Guests of four Four-star hotels can change hotels easily because they can be more sensitive to price; these customers may choose different hotels each time and loyalty may not be highly important for them. Therefore, we hypothesize;

H6: Hotel ratings (five-star or four-star hotels) will moderate the effects of SMMA on brand loyalty.

H7: Hotel ratings (five-star or four-star hotels) will moderate the effects of SMMA on purchase intention.

4. Research methodology

This study focused on the hospitality business in North Cyprus (Kyrenia City). During the distribution of the survey, there were 14 five-star and five four-star hotels in Kyrenia City (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2018). This research focused on the five five-star hotels and two four-star hotels that have the top Facebook pages (in terms of the number of followers). We gathered data from the abovementioned hotels because of the inclusion of difficulties in obtaining samples and data. First, there were many hotels that we could not obtain samples from because these hotels have no official pages on Facebook, and in our study, we focused on Facebook pages that were officially supported by the hotels. Second, many of these hotel pages do not have many people who follow them extensively and do not contain sections for interacting with hotel customers. To confirm that all survey respondents actively engaged with Facebook hotels' pages, we ensured the target population contained respondents or customers who fulfilled the following criteria:

▪ Were followers of various hotels' Facebook brand page ;

▪ Visited North Cyprus and stayed at one of the five- or four-star hotels in Kyrenia City; and

▪ Made at least one repeat visit to the hotel.

We employed non-probability purposive sampling by selecting the respondents according to the specific, relevant, previously mentioned criteria. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items, including eight items regarding social media marketing activities (SMMA) adapted from Kim and Ko (2012), four items regarding brand loyalty adapted from Ailawadi, Neslin, and Gedenk (2001), and three items regarding purchase intention adapted from McKnight and Chervany (2001), Chen et al. (2013) and Yoo et al. (2000).

All items for this study were rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The study targeted customers of five- star and four-star hotels on who used the hotels'

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Facebook pages, over three months from June to October 2019. A total of 786 surveys were distributed online to respondents, and a 51% response rate was accomplished. The last valid surveys, which comprised this research, were 408 questionnaires. Males constituted the highest percentage of respondents (69.5%); there were 284 male respondents and 124 female respondents. The demographic data indicated that 38.6% (n=157) of respondents were in the age group of 36-45, while 29.0% (n=118) of respondents were in the age group of 26-35.

5. Data analysis
5.1. Measurement model

We ran confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) and goodness-of-fit tests to determine whether the study's constructs reflect instrument, convergent, and discriminant validity. We used the goodness of model fit index to test the instrument validity of the measurement model. Although no exact cut-off criteria have been applied for these purposes (Hopper et al., 2008), the most frequently used ones are chi-square (x^2), normed chi-square (x^2/df), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the normed fit index (NFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Adedeji et al., 2016).

 All the model fit indices matched cut-off values, as identified following commonly used recommendations in the literature (Hu & Bentler, 1999). With the exception of the GFI and PCLOSE value, all the fit indices are presented in Table 1. The measurement model for the dataset is acceptable, with the x^2= 2.94 < 3, NFI = 0.92 > 0.90, CFI = 0.95 > 0.90, AGFI =0.84 > 0.80, and RMSEA = 0.07 < 0.08. We also ran a convergent validity test to evaluate the relationships among the scale items and all the scale items of the questionnaire shown in Table 2. Convergent validity can be measured by evaluating the standardized factor loadings and composite reliability (CR) of any given construct (Hair et al., 1995). The average variance extracted (AVE) values should also be greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows that standardized factor loadings in this work were above 0.50 and therefore acceptable, and the CR. scores were above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). These results indicated that our measurements had no convergent validity issues. Furthermore, we addressed reliability using Cronbach's alpha analysis, in which the cut-off used was a value higher than 0.70 for the instrument to reflect a sufficient level of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha scores ranged from 0.87 to 0.93 (Table 2), demonstrating high reliability.

Table 2
Summary of the measurement model

Variable	Scale item	Standardized loading	Cronbach's	CR	AVE
Social media marketing activities (SMMA)			0.93	0.93	0.64
Interaction (INT)					
	INT 1	0.91			
	INT 2	0.88			
Trendiness (TRE)					
	TRE 1	0.78			
	TRE2	0.84			
Customization (CUS)					
	CUS 1	0.77			
	CUS 2	0.72			
Word of mouth (WOM)					
	WOM 1	0.79			
	WOM 2	0.73			
Brand trust (BT)			0.93	0.93	0.78
	BT 1	0.84			
	BT 2	0.87			
	BT 3	0.93			
	BT 4	0.90			

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Table 2 *(continued)*

Variable	Scale item	Standardized loading	Cronbach's	CR	AVE
Purchase intention (PI)			0.90	0.90	0.71
	PI 1	0.74			
	PI 2	0.91			
	PI 3	0.93			
	PI 4	0.78			
Brand loyalty (BL)			0.87	0.86	0.62
	BL 1	0.69			
	BL 2	0.84			
	BL 3	0.83			
	BL 4	0.79			
x^2= 2.94< 3,NFI =0.92>0.90, CFI =0.95>0.90,AGFI =0.84>0.80,and RMSEA=0.07<0.08					

A discriminant validity tests involve examining how observed variables load higher on corresponding latent variables than on other latent variables in a research model (Tallon, 2008). Discriminant validity can be assessed by evaluating the AVE, the maximum shared variance (MSV) of each latent variable, squared correlations, and the inter-correlation coefficient of a construct (below .80) (Kline, 2011). In this research, discriminant validity was examined based on tested recommendations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The square root of the AVE for each construct should be higher than the correlations between a construct and any other construct. The AVE value should be also higher than 0.50 for an instrument to exhibit a suitable level of discriminant validity. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Assessing discriminant validity

	CR	AVE	MSV	BL	PI	BT	SMMA
1-Brand loyalty (BL)	0.86	0.62	0.34	**0.79**			
2-Purchase intention (PI)	0.90	0.71	0.46	0.35	**0.84**		
3-Brand trust (BT)	0.93	0.78	0.25	0.50	0.33	**0.88**	
4-SMMA	0.93	0.64	0.37	0.59	0.51	0.34	**0.80**

5.2. Structural equation model

SEM has gained attention from academics and scholars in various scientific disciplines. As a multivariate analytical method, SEM can simultaneously "test and estimate complex causal relationships among variables, even when the relationships are hypothetical, or not directly observable" (Hair et al., 2010). All the model fit indices in this work matched the cut-off values determined based on recommendations commonly used in the literature (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The goodness of model fit for all the indicators and the measurement model was acceptable, with the x^2 = 2.29 < 3, CFI = 0.96 > 0.90, NFI = 0.94 > 0.90, CFI = 0.96 > 0.90, AGFI = 0.87 > 0.80, RMSEA = 0.06 < 0.08, and PCLOSE = 0.05 > 0.05 (Table 4). The hypotheses were tested using the following indicators: the standardized beta coefficient (β) which compares the strength of effects among the constructs of a study; the standard error, which is an estimate of the standard error of the covariance between constructs and the p-value, which pertains to the probability of obtaining results as extreme as the observed results of a statistical hypothesis test.

The results revealed that the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty was accepted and significant at the 0.001 level (β= 0.50, p < 0.001), providing empirical support for H1. Similarly, the relationship between SMMA and purchase intention was acceptable and significant at the 0.001 level (β= 0.37, p < 0.001), thus corroborating H2. The relationship between SMMA and brand trust was accepted and significant at the 0.001 level (β= 0.40, p < 0.001), providing support for hypothesis H3. The results also indicated that H4 was accepted and significant at the 0.01 level (β= 0.16, p <0.01).

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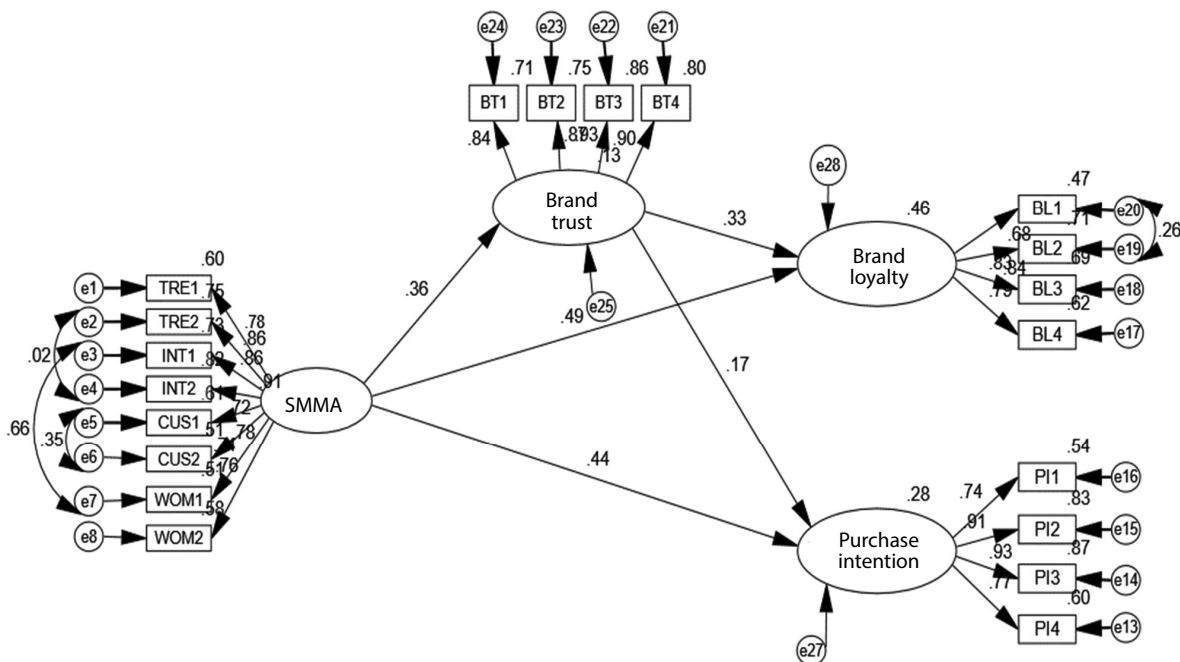Vol. 69/ No. 2/ 2021/ 228 - 245

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The findings further indicated that SMMA exerted a significant indirect impact on brand loyalty through brand trust. The beta coefficient of the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.16$, p <.01) reflected that brand trust partially mediated the link between SMMA and brand loyalty. With regard to the mediating effect of brand trust on the indirect relationship between SMMA and purchase intention, the beta coefficient of this relationship, occurring through brand trust, was acceptable significant at the 0.01 level ($\beta = 0.16$, p < 0.01). This result denoted that that brand trust partially mediated the link between SMMA and purchase intention. Thus H5 was accepted and significant at the 0.01.

Table 4
Hypothesis testing

	Relationship		β	S.E.	P	Result
	Direct relationship					
H₁	SMMA	Brand loyalty	.50	.05	***	Accepted
H₂	SMMA	Purchase intention	.37	.05	***	Accepted
H₃	SMMA	Brand trust	.40	.06	***	Accepted
	Mediation analysis		β		P	
H₄	**Direct: SMMA-Brand trust**		0.40		***	Partial mediation
	Indirect: SMMA-Brand trust-Brand loyalty		0.16		**0.00**	
	Mediation analysis		β		P	
H₅	**Direct: SMMA-Brand trust**		0.40		***	Partial mediation
	Indirect : SMMA-Brand trust-Purchase intention		0.05		**0.00**	

Note: S.E = Standard error; β = standardized beta coefficient; p = significance level; *p<0.05; ** = p < 0.01; *** = p < 0.001.

Figure 2
Results of hypothesis testing

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5.3. Moderator analysis

Given that we hypothesized moderation, our SEM analysis included a moderating test that was implemented following the steps set forth by Aiken, West, and Reno (1991). First, hotel ratings (four stars/five stars) were standardized to reduce multicollinearity, after which "the standardized estimates were multiplied by the moderators to produce interaction terms (interaction effect). The author included the main effects while modeling the moderating effects to prevent a biased estimate of the interaction terms" (Aiken et al., 1991).

Through H6, we predicted that hotel ratings would moderate the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty. We found that social media marketing activities × hotel ratings suggested that hotel ratings dampened the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty (β =.08, p < 0.05; Table 5); Thus, H6 was acceptable significance at the 0.05 level. H7 posited that hotel ratings moderate the relationship between SMMA and purchase intention. We found the same dampening as that observed in the case of H6 (β =.11, p < 0.01), reflecting the acceptability of H7 at the 0.01 level.
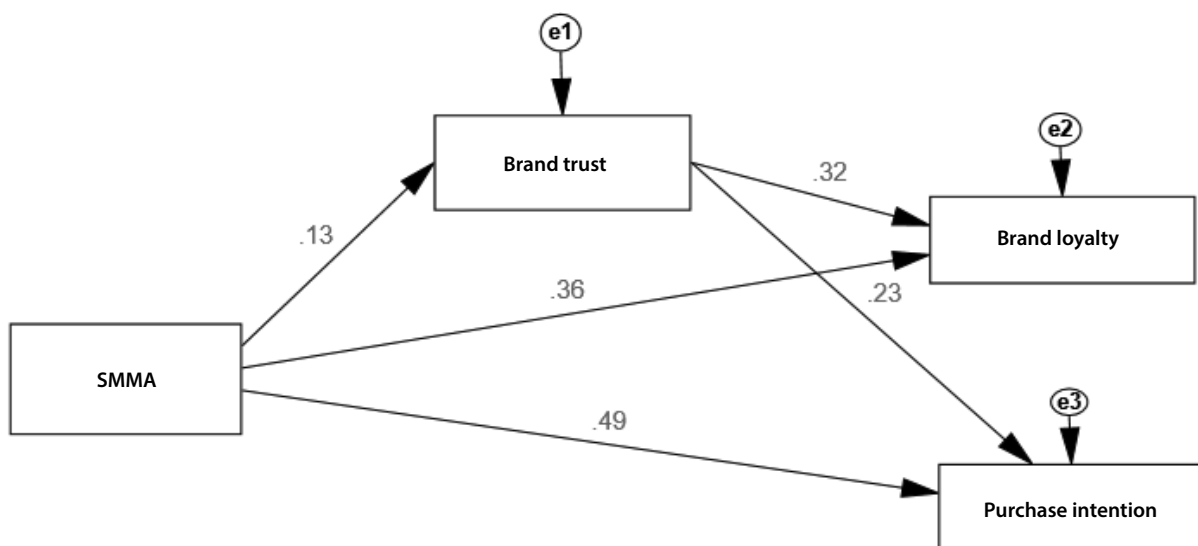
Table 5
Interaction effect in the model

Moderator analysis		Estimate	S.E.	CR	p
Hypothesis H6					
Interaction effect in the model					
Hotel ratings × SMMA	Brand loyalty	.08	.03	2.38	**.02**
Hypothesis H7					
Interaction effect in the model					
Hotel ratings × SMMA	Purchase intention	.11	.04	2.49	**.01**

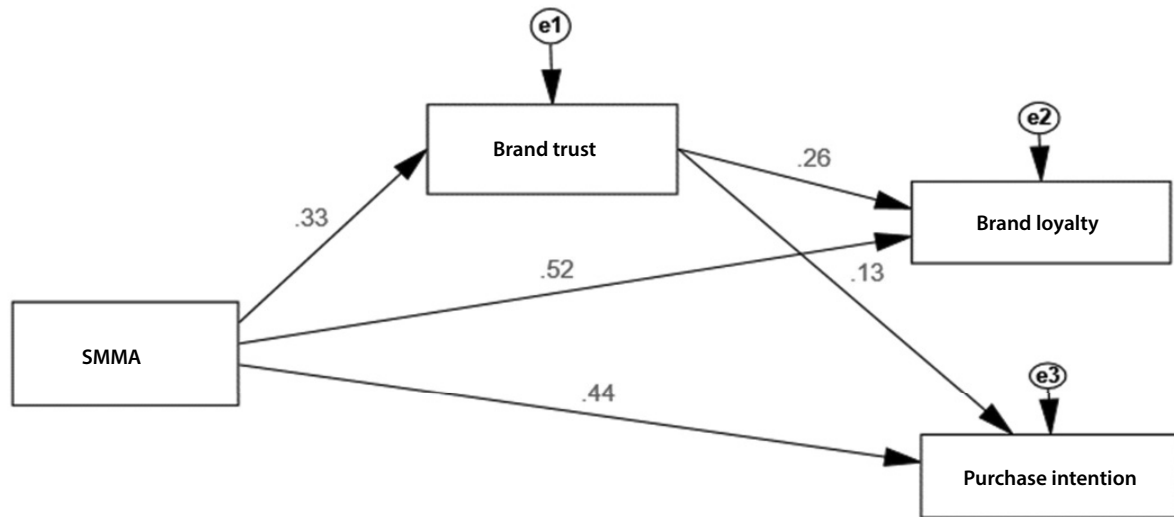*Note:* S.E = Standard error; p = significance level; *p<.05; ** = p < 0.01; *** = p < 0.001.

5.4. Multi-group moderation (hotel ratings)

The respondents were structured into two groups, with the first comprising customers who visited for five-star hotels, and the second group consisting was customers who visited four-star hotels. The multiple group analysis demonstrated that the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty. The second group was strongly associated with the group (five-star hotel) and the relationship between SMMA and purchase intention was stronger among the customers of five-star hotels than those among customers of four-star hotels (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3
Standardized regression weight (five-star hotel)

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Utilizing multi-group moderation analyses, we assess the link to see if there was any difference in the strength of the relationship for hotel ratings (five-star or four-star). For this, the authors used the method of Gaskin (2016) to know the value of chi-square and p-value of difference between two groups related to the model of study. The difference of Chi-square equals 29.5, and the p-value (p=0.91) shows that five stars or four stars were not different at the model level. Please see Table 6 below.

Table 6
Regression weights: (Five-star hotels/four-star hotels)

Relationships		Five stars groups		Four stars groups	
Path name		Estimate	P	Estimate	P
SMMA	→ Brand trust	**0.13**	0.12	**0.33**	***
SMMA	→ Brand loyalty	0.36	***	**0.52**	***
SMMA	→ Purchase Intention	**0.49**	***	0.44	***
Brand trust	→ Brand loyalty	0.32	***	**0.26**	***
Brand Ttrust	→ Purchase intention	**0.23**	0.00	0.13	0.02

Note: p = significance level; *p <0.05, ** = p < 0.01; *** = p < 0.001.

As shown in Table 6, most of the relationships between the construct of study are significant in the two groups, but there is some relationship changed from non-significance level in five-star hotels to significance level in four-star hotels and acceptable. Besides, much like the relationship between SMMA and brand trust was non-significance with (p =.12) in five-star hotel groups, but it changed to an accepted and significant level with (*** = p < 0.001). In four-stars hotel groups. The resulting p values for the differences in regression estimates between five- star hotels and four-star hotels indicate that any observed differences as in the case of the relation between SMMA and brand trust are rendered statistically insignificant and non-acceptable.

6. Discussion

Earlier research suggested that a positive relationship exists among the construct of the studies which focused on samples interested in social media platforms. The data of these studies were collected from different contexts, such as students (Algharabat, 2017; Ismail, 2017; Ismail et al., 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2017, 2018), customers of luxury fashion products (Kim & Ko, 2010, 2012), students interested in e-learning social media

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sites (Spackman & Larsen, 2017), customers of airline companies (Seo & Park, 2018), and customers of automobile products (Ural & Yuksel, 2015). However, little effort has been made to incorporate SMMA as a key antecedent of behavioral outcome as evidenced by the literature review that examined SMMA literature in the tourism sector and found little scholarly effort to examine SMMA and behavioral outcomes (brand loyalty and purchase intention). Previous studies in the tourism industry focused on a specific part of travel agencies, a specific level of hotel ratings, or on passengers who used social media managed by airlines (B. Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Sano, 2015; Seo & Park, 2018). Thus, the present study encompasses the current understanding of the antecedents of brand loyalty and purchase intention in the tourism and hospitality industry by investigating SMMA as a key antecedent of brand loyalty and purchase intention.

The outcomes of this study established that SMMA will help marketers enhance brand loyalty, purchase intention, and brand trust. The results also confirmed that a positive and significant relationship exists between SMMA and brand loyalty. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies, which found that social media communities can strengthen a customer's loyalty to a brand (Algharabat, 2017; Bilgin, 2018; Ismail et al., 2018). Therefore, this study concluded that SMMA, as a useful communication tool, offers more potential for interactive relationships between consumers and brands. With SMMA, the consumer, via social media, has a chance to engage with the brand's online community to get the latest news about products or services. The consumer can also contribute his or her voice to the brand community, which can be used to build brand loyalty dependably.

The results confirmed the positive association between SMMA and purchase intention. This association was significant, and the outcome was consistent throughout the mainstream of previous revisions related to this relationship (Gautam & Sharma, 2017; Kim & Ko, 2010; Toor et al., 2017). Owing to consumer's great use quick transitions to social media platforms, companies must develop plans or use activities to market brands and share them via platforms. Consumers use these platforms to share their purchase choices or comments about brands, which directly or indirectly affect those interested in brands and those who have the intention to purchase products or services.

The outcomes here confirmed the positive relationship between SMMA and brand trust. These results are consistent with those of previous studies that established a positive connection (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Yazdanian et al., 2019). Brand trust can be a fundamental factor in creating a functional and long-standing relationship between customers and companies on social media platforms. However, customers might find it difficult to trust a brand. In such a case, SMMA can lead to effective plans that boost trust. Thus, the practical activities of social media marketing can result in more trust from customers. Accordingly, this study established that brand trust acts as an integration mechanism in the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty by affecting how customers respond to the potential of SMMA efforts. Hence, achieving the endorsement SMMA efforts and high levels of brand trust allows tourism businesses to improve the attitudes and confidence of customers, thus generating more safe feeling for the customer to repurchase the service or product.

The tourism sector primarily depends on tourism promotion, which depends on coordination between the efforts of the seller and the tourist in establishing outlets for information to facilitate the sale of the product to the tourists. However, with the presence of social media, such as Facebook, that keeps the actual customer away from searching for brochures, travel agencies, airports, exhibitions and hotels, because they are readily available in our mobile phones and computers, and the advertising on these sites depends on elements that usually consist of texts, pictures, videos, maps and drawings. During marketing activities via social media that give customers a sense of the company's activities, the feelings of the customers and their interaction through the communication pages are used to motivate creation loyalty and future purchase intention by assuming trust as a crucial medium in this relationship. These efforts may contribute to recommendations into how a marketer in the tourism industry can effectively emphasize and implement certain SMMA (i.e., entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and WOM) within social media platforms. These efforts can be, the speed of offer the information's, and quick response to the customers, providing the latest

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information, customize the information for different behavior level and giving the customer the sharing of information with others. All these activities are an important incentive to create positive consumer behavior. These suggestions may also serve to provide an overview of the best marketing strategies for achieving interaction and efficacy on social media.

In summary, SMMA can enable companies to facilitate effective communication amongst consumers or improve their communications with consumers (Ibrahim et al., 2020). This study also exposes the boundary conditions that qualify the relationship between SMMA and behavioral outcome (brand loyalty and purchase intention) by examining the moderating role of hotel star ratings in the SMMA–brand loyalty or SMMA-purchase intention relationship. This study discovered that hotel star rating has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between SMMA and behavioral outcomes (brand loyalty and purchase intention). As the moderator role did not examine the SMMA field, this study is considered as one of the first to explore the moderator role of SMMA with consumer behavior. In the hospitality context, the findings indicated that the effect of SMMA on brand loyalty in four-star hotels is stronger than that in five-star hotels. They also revealed that SMMA is a stronger predictor of purchase intention in four-star hotels than in five-star ones. For relationship SMMA and brand trust, there is a non-significant relationship in five-star hotels and a significance one in four-star samples.

This result may be explained the higher number of Facebook page hotels followers with a four-star rating compared to five- star rating as well as the virtue of their professionalism when dealing with customers via the Facebook pages. Moreover, the history of four-star Facebook pages hotels created before those five ones, which are considered new in terms of their existence and the launch of their social media sites. For these reasons, loyalty and trust for the brand can be greater in four-star hotels.

7. Practical implications

The findings of this study have several implications that can help practitioners understand the effect of SMMA on brand loyalty in terms of a social-media-based brand community and eventually advance a company's business performance or marketing effectiveness. To increase the efficiency of their marketing campaigns, marketers might use social media platforms to create marketing plans for their products or services, thereby benefiting from the advantages that social media marketing activities offer. Marketers can also use social media platforms to approach and attract customers by offering enjoyable experiences and entertainment options, thereby providing a more straightforward interaction method through the sharing and exchanging of content and opinions with users, as well as supporting customers with customized information and stimulating them to spread positive word of mouth. Marketers in the hotel industry should use Facebook pages, or other social media platforms, to create action plans for their hotels because customers find social media to be a useful tool for receiving product updates. Brand managers should also promote different social media marketing activities for their brand on various social media networks (i.e., Facebook, Instagram). Through various social media platforms, marketers can offer additional support to consumers by sharing related experiences and opinions about products or services. Hotel managers can benefit from the challenges Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to improve the content to exploit the new opportunities through multiple channels like social media sites (offer guest trip, starting with holiday planning) (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019).

8. Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study offers some scientific benefits in terms of strengthening the understanding of the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty. However, the present study is not without limitations. First, it only examined five-star hotels and four-star hotels and operating in North Cyprus, so its findings cannot be generalized to other industries. Future studies should, therefore collect data from different industries. The nature of tourism industry customers is unique; the model of study can lead to different results and interpretations for other

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industries (fashion, technology equipment, online purchasing). Second, because of the sampling method (purposive sampling), the results of the research cannot be generalized the data was obtained from respondents, and these respondents are not characteristic of the whole population. Third, we did not consider a control variable (e.g., age, gender, income). Therefore, future studies should examine the model by using different control variables. Fourth, we approached the research as a cross-sectional study. There is a strong seasonality effect on tourism in North Cyprus. Therefore, this model could be replicated at different times throughout varying seasons (e.g., summer and winter). Future research could implement this model in a longitudinal study lasting for longer than one year or two seasons. Fifth, the suggested model was advanced and established in a precise setting, such as specific star rating (five-star and four-star), one social media site (hotel Facebook page), a purposive sample, and the relationship between constructs concerning hotel Facebook fan pages in the hospitality industry. Therefore, with notice of these limitations, the model of this study can be applied in the different contexts within the hospitality industry (e.g. travel agents, restaurants). Besides, the model of study can be explored in more than one city, and used to compare results between more than one social media site (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Trip Advisor) . In tourism filed, the future study can explore SMMA in destination management organization for different popular city destinations through destination website (e.g. TripAdvisor, booking.com) and/or on social media websites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram). Also, we recommend examining the different tourist visitor behaviors like (e.g. satisfaction, intention to recommend, revisit intention and destination attachment) in social media marketing. Sixth, we recommend studying the differences and variations in countries' levels of globalization (high globalization, less globalization) and levels of wealth (high wealth, less wealth). Sixth, the study carried out in an emerging country (i.e., North Cyprus), considered to be a Middle Eastern country. Future investigation should focus on highly-developed and less-developed nations in this regard. Seventh, we recommend conducting a meta-analytic review of the relationship between SMMA and consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). Besides, there is some number of studies which examine the relationship between SMMA and consumer responses for this we recommend to explore meta-analytic review study for the consequence of SMMA Finally. Future studies can investigate the contextual factors through moderating analyses, using socio-demographic groups such as gender, age, income, or personality traits.

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