

Clicks to Comfort: The Magic of Social Media Marketing in the Hotel Service Industry

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Abstract

Given the prominence of using social media as a marketing technique and the lack of attention to how to benefit from this method in the hospitality industry, this study aims to investigate the interrelationships between perceived social media marketing, brand attitude, purchasing intention, post-purchase behavior of hotels' customers, and brand cognition as a moderator. The data were collected from 259 customers of four international hotels in Istanbul, Turkey. The results were analyzed using the PLS-SEM approach by SmartPLS software. The findings illustrate that social media marketing had a significant effect on brand attitude, and brand attitude had a positive impact on customers' purchase and EWOM intention. Moreover, the moderation test indicates that social media marketing is more positively related to brand attitude when brand cognition increases. From a practical view, hotel managers and associated decision-makers may use these findings to develop well-designed and valuable advertising campaigns using social media.

Keywords: Brand attitude, brand cognition, consumer behavior, electronic word of mouth (EWOM), perceived social media marketing, purchase intention

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNS) have drawn more interest from brands that perceive such platforms as proprietary interaction channels with their users. Social media consumption among internet users averages 144 minutes per day (Dixon, 2022). The advent of numerous social media platforms has caused radical shifts in advertising methods. Companies now have more options for reaching, interacting with, and engaging with consumers as a result of the rapid growth of social media marketing channels. These social media channels currently reach 26 billion users media around the world and projections indicate that this will increase to six billion by 2027 (Dixon, 2022). Much reliance has been placed on social media in recent years as a prominent online platform for communicating with customers (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Stephen et al., 2019). Interacting with consumers via SNSs is generally referred to as social media marketing (SMM). Social media in the 21st century has affected many facets of customer behavior, including the recognition, acquisition, and exchange of knowledge, thoughts, perceptions, and post-buying behavior.

With social media access, businesses are now able to connect with and receive feedback from their clients. Consumers can also interact and exchange knowledge about products and services with other customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). It also offers several advantages for businesses, such as developing Word-of-Mouth (WOM) (Chu and Kim, 2011), positively influencing consumer equity (Kim and Ko, 2012), strengthening the relationship with customers (Wibowo et al., 2020), boosting customers' purchase intention and generating a favorable brand attitude (Langaro et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Lee and Jeong, 2017;). Considering the effectiveness of SMM for businesses, it is worth examining in greater depth how it can influence the behavior of consumers.

Indeed, research into SMM has revealed that companies' SMM activities can impact brand behavior (Godey et al., 2016; Stephen, 2016; Wibowo et al., 2020). Brand attitude (BA) also plays an essential role in developing the intention to buy and spreading WOM. Previous studies have specified that the attitudes of customers towards a particular brand affect their buying intentions directly (Aghaei and Namaghi, 2022; Pradhan et al., 2016). Intention to purchase (IP) is the likelihood that a consumer will actually purchase a product (Huang, 2018; Huang et al., 2011). Similarly, WOM has been a critical marketing term for decades. It is an oral method of communicating between two individuals considered to be non-commercial communication. Today, the latest type of communication is recognized as electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) (Ananda et al., 2019). The advances in online channels have made this communication medium one of the world's most prominent web-based information providers (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016; Aghaei and Namaghi, 2022). Researchers have highlighted a series of factors that determine the intention of individuals to transmit EWOM. For instance, Kim and Johnson (2016) noted that strong brand-related content created by customers could contribute to promoting EWOM behavior and demonstrated that EWOM exposure also enhances intentional consumers' contributions to disseminating EWOM in SNSs.

While some researchers have focused on SMM activities in their studies, research has rarely examined how SMM activities are perceived in order to enhance purchasing and EWOM intention in the hospitality industry. Thus, the data collected for this study contributes to the knowledge of the modern marketing strategy known as social media. Additionally, less attention has been given to the factors that can moderate the relationship between perceived SMM and brand attitude. Thus, in this study, the impact of BC has been assessed as a moderator between SMM and BA according

to the research conducted by Leung et al. (2015) that demonstrated an association between brand attitude (BA) and brand cognition (BC), and also Aad models proposed by Teng et al. (2007).

In this respect, based on the importance of SMM activities mentioned above and previous studies in the marketing literature, this study aims to investigate the relationship between perceived SMM, BA, consumers' IP and EWOM in the hotel industry of Turkey. Thus, the following questions are posed in this study:

1. Do SMM activities play a significant role in developing consumers' attitudes towards a hotel's brand?
2. Does BA make an essential contribution to increasing customers' intention to purchase and spreading EWOM in the hotel industry?
3. Is there any difference in consumers' responses to hotels' SMM activities in the presence of BC?

On the one hand, tourism plays a significant role as a social and interactive sphere in modern society. Various research endeavors have demonstrated that the progress of tourism has favorable impacts on the well-being and contentment of the population and hotels constitute one of the important aspects of the tourism industry. On the other hand, a downside of traditional tourism promotions is that they may compel tourists to verify whether the destination corresponds to what has been advertised, leading to anxiety due to the perceived risks stemming from incomplete information, inexperience, and high expenses (Núñez-Barriopedro et al., 2018; Sanagustín-Fons et al., 2020). Therefore, social media serves as a powerful instrument for hotels to establish connections with potential clients and cultivate brand recognition. By crafting compelling content and distributing it across social media platforms, hotels have the capacity to attract fresh customers while maintaining engagement with existing ones. Additionally, social media platforms serve as a means of promoting exclusive deals and discounts, as well as highlighting the distinctive features and amenities offered by a hotel.

Furthermore, social media can function as a valuable channel for collecting customer feedback and addressing their inquiries and concerns in a timely manner. This proactive approach contributes to the establishment of trust and loyalty among customers, potentially resulting in repeat business and positive recommendations through word of mouth. In summary, social media constitutes an effective avenue for hotels to reach out to new customers, enhance brand visibility, and augment revenue.

Essentially, this study will benefit the hotel sector by comprehending the efficiency of SMM on the performance of marketing and commerce. Furthermore, the findings of this paper can help hotel owners understand what will be beneficial for their businesses.

The remaining parts of this paper are organized as follows: first, the existing literature is reviewed, which is considered the foundation for our conceptual and theoretical frameworks; then, the hypotheses and research model are developed. Second, the research design, consisting of the measurement instrument, questionnaire design, sampling technique, and data collection process,

will be discussed. After that, the analysis and findings will be presented, followed by the conclusion and implications sections.

2. Literature Review

With the unrestricted availability of a vast amount of information from all over the world, social media has become part of users' everyday routines (Pentina et al., 2018). Social media are becoming increasingly valuable for creating brands, establishing brand loyalty, and managing customer relations, and thus provide businesses with advantages (Alhabash et al., 2015; Alves et al., 2016; Liadeli et al., 2023; Magno and Edu, 2023; Tang et al., 2015; Sutisna et al., 2023). The advent of the Internet has enabled corporations to extend their customer outreach on a global scale in a cost-efficient manner. Sectors closely associated with tourism, such as airlines and hotel chains, now possess the capacity to engage with international customers. Even small enterprises have the unprecedented opportunity to establish their "virtual presence" and offer their services to a worldwide audience. Within the tourism industry, there is a growing awareness of the significance of technology, and businesses within this sector recognize that the effective management of their comprehensive online presence is an essential prerequisite for achieving success (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2023; Bruns, 2012; Buhalis and Inversini, 2014). Furthermore, prior research has established a connection between conventional and digital marketing communication instruments and their impact on brand performance (Belenioti and Vassiliadis, 2017; Buhalis and Foerste, 2015; Cuesta-Valino et al., 2023). Social media has also affected customers' actions, from information attainment to post-buying behaviors. Therefore, this section will examine the existing literature on SMM and its impacts on consumer behavior, especially brand attitude, buying, and EWOM intention.

2.1 Social Media Marketing and Brand Attitude

In addition to the development of the Internet and electronic mail, the rise of social media has facilitated more communication between individuals. More and more people take part in a wide range of social activities today.

From a business perspective, as evidenced by previous research (Jamil et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Sudirjo et al., 2023), social media constitute an optimum, cost-effective, engaging, and, and most of all, focused communications platform for every company especially with the high customer engagement provided by E-WOM and web-interactivity (Belenioti et al., 2015; Belenioti, Andronikidis and Vassiliadis, 2015)

There is no consensus regarding the definition of SMM; however, it is defined as utilizing online social media channels for marketing purposes (Suharto et al., 2022; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Kim and Ko (2012) created a structure for perceived SMM emphasizing that social media as an advertising tool differs from traditional marketing channels.

SMM aims to strengthen consumer relationships, resulting in favorable attitudes towards a business or brand. BA refers to an overview of the elements and attributes of a brand that consumers create after assessment (Khan, 2022; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). Consumers who have a positive attitude toward a brand are more inclined to purchase items from that brand. They would, however, be less likely to purchase the brand's products if they had an unfavorable

attitude toward the brand (Lin et al., 2020; Walean et al., 2023). Marketing seeks to improve consumer relations through the use of social networks. Customers' perceptions of a brand have evolved in light of marketing engagement, consumption experiences, and social impacts. The effect of these variables on customer perception influences the attitude of consumers towards brands and beliefs (Yang et al., 2011) and the impact of brand messages on their minds (Bilgin, 2018). According to Duffett (2017), SMM plays an essential role in shaping a positive attitude toward brands.

The hypothetical model of SMM efficiency created by Leung et al. (2015) based on attitudes towards advertisements and site models revealed that social media impressions of hotel customers have an impact on their attitudes towards the hotel brand. The literature in the hotel sector reveals that social networks have positive marketing results on the perceptions and reservations of guests (Leung et al., 2015), trust, and loyalty to the brand (Afaq et al., 2023; Nuseir & Elrefae, 2022; Tatar and Eren- Erdoğmus, 2016). Sano (2014) also discussed the impact of SMM on the attitudes and behaviors of customers in various contexts of the hotel sector. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceived social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand attitude.

2.2 Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention

The likelihood that a customer will make a future purchase of a specific product is referred to as their "purchase intention." (Lee et al., 2017). In practice, it combines customer interest and the likelihood of buying a product (Khan et al., 2023; Kim and Ko, 2012; Kurdi et al., 2022; Tseng and Wang, 2023). Purchasing intention is related to future behavior and predisposed to turn perceptions and attitudes towards a product into actual action (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). Consumers are affected by external factors when deciding on goods such as the products themselves, advertising, popularity, etc. They will demonstrate purchasing intent after a thorough assessment and selection process. With higher buying intention, customers are more likely to buy the products (Lin et al., 2020).

According to the theory of reasoned action (TRA), individuals' attitudes toward actions or objects strongly affect their intentions or behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). TRA is a more intuitive social-psychological framework to describe expected behaviors (Akther and Nur, 2022; Lau et al., 2023). Most research has demonstrated the vital impact of brand attitude on intention to purchase (Augusto and Torres, 2018; Lim et al., 2017; Machi et al., 2022; Singh and Banerjee, 2018; Taute et al., 2017).

According to a study conducted by Makanyeza et al. (2021) on the hotel sector in Zimbabwe, a favorable attitude toward a hotel increases the possibility that a customer will make a reservation. Moreover, research conducted in the food sector has revealed that disparities can be seen in consumers' intention to purchase from different locations; nevertheless, it is accepted that attitude is the most effective predictor of buying intentions (Abd et al., 2015; Asif et al., 2018; Bashir, 2019; Su et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand attitude has a positive and significant effect on customer's intention to purchase.

2.3 Brand Attitude and EWOM Intention

As the Internet became more widely available and used, more people started to use it to communicate and exchange views and knowledge about goods and services (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). EWOM refers to contact made about a product, brand, or business via social media channels by potential, current, or past customers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The extent to which customers use social media to share, transmit, and upload information is defined as EWOM (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017). EWOM occurs via various online platforms, including chat boards, product ratings, social networking pages, and emails (Dwyer et al., 2007). One of the most influential and popular examples is the large number of online, open reviews of goods and services on various websites. In terms of geographical, social, and time variables, it is less constrained compared with WOM. Therefore, EWOM can be considered equal to WOM, except that EWOM involves communicates with others via the Internet, allowing information to be shared in text, image, or even video format; however, while EWOM can access a vast number of people at once, WOM cannot (Fili and Krizaj, 2016).

Numerous researchers have explored the effect of brand attitude on WOM interaction, considering the role of WOM in marketing (Herold et al., 2016; Pace et al., 2017). However, EWOM can be considered equivalent to WOM since their nature is similar. Pookulangara et al. (2011) argued that customer attitude is an efficient element in determining online or offline behavioral intents, including WOM. Prior research has shown that a customer's attitude toward a brand has a positive effect on their WOM (Cheng et al., 2021; Moore, 2015; Pace et al., 2017).

Akar and Topçu (2011) claimed that users are ready to disseminate product information on social media, and this information (for example, favorable or unfavorable) varies based on their attitude. Similarly, An et al. (2020) conducted a study in the music sector and claimed that individuals' attitudes affect the likelihood that they will transfer relevant information on social media. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Brand attitude has a positive and significant effect on customer's intention of EWOM.

2.4 Moderating Effect of Brand Cognition

Consumers' awareness, comprehension, and familiarity with a brand are referred to as brand cognition. Brand cognition is divided into two sections: brand awareness and brand image (Li et al., 2016). The brand cognition of hotel customers is expected to influence their attitudes towards social media sites and hotel brands (Leung et al., 2015). Saad et al. (2012) stated that attitudes toward advertising and brand cognition directly affect brand attitudes. Furthermore, Teng et al. (2007) inferred that a consumer's attitude toward a brand depends on brand cognition.

Advertising studies have introduced four Ad models reflecting various Aad positions (Leung et al., 2015; Lutz et al., 1983; MacKenzie et al., 1986; Teng et al., 2007). The four models of Aad are comprised of four alternative assumptions: the affect transfer hypothesis (ATH), the dual mediation hypothesis (DMH), the reciprocal mediation hypothesis (RMH), and the independent

influences hypothesis. In all these models, advertising cognitions and brand cognitions directly affect Aad and brand attitudes. The ATH model assumes that advertising and brand cognition have a strong one-way effect on brand attitudes (Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Shimp, 1981). Additionally, the DMH model demonstrated that Aad directly affects brand attitude and indirectly via brand cognition. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Brand cognition moderates the relationship between perceived social media marketing and brand attitude significantly.

According to the literature review and considering the role of SMM in shaping brand attitude with the moderating role of brand cognition and achieving customer purchase intention and intention of EWOM as a result of attitude toward the brand, the below conceptual model is proposed for this study:

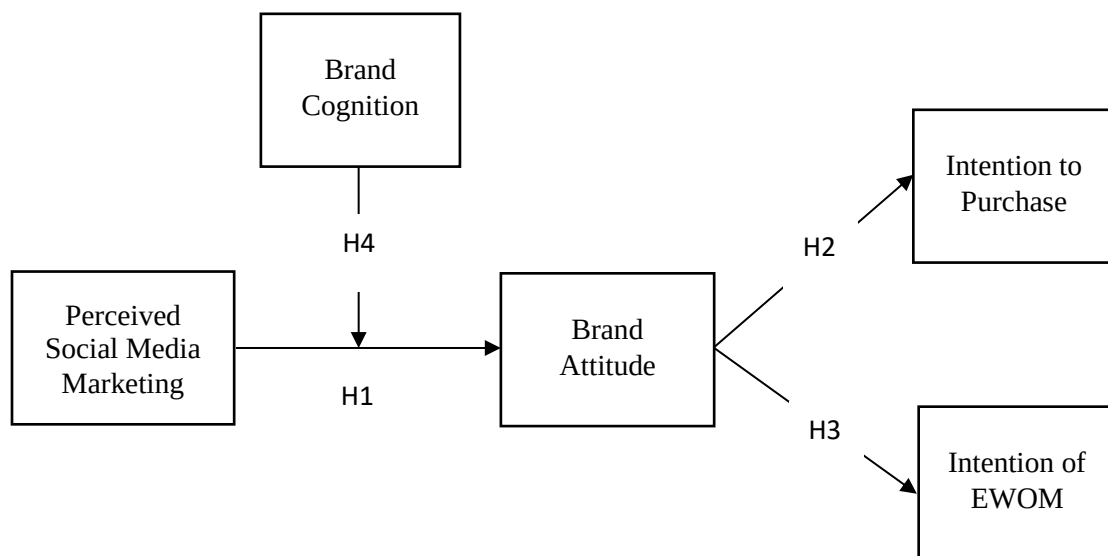


Figure 1. Research Model

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Measurement Instrument and Questionnaire Design

A questionnaire in English was utilized with a five-point Likert scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree was developed based on a critical review of relevant literature. To assure content validity, a number of scholars and industry experts were requested to confirm the corresponding items from both theoretical and practical aspects with one being strongly disagree and five strongly agree (See Appendix 1). All measuring scales are taken from previously tested scales that have also been used by other researchers recently. They were then suitably amended to meet the aspect of perceived SMM in the hospitality sector. There were 33 questions in total, separated into five categories: perceived social media marketing, brand cognition, brand attitude, intention to purchase, and intention of spreading electronic word of mouth.

The perceived SMM scale proposed by Kim and Ko (2012) was utilized to determine whether SMM boosts customer equity or not. Perceived SMM was evaluated with a nine-item scale, with one of the example items being “Contents shown in this hotel’s social media is the newest information.”

In order to measure brand cognition, a five-item scale designed by Leung et al. (2015) was used. “When I want to book a hotel, this hotel comes to mind,” was one of the sample items out of five.

The brand attitude was measured using an eight-item scale developed by Foroudi (2019). One of the samples was, “I believe, this hotel’s brand appeals to people like me.”

Six items from the scales designed by Leung et al. (2015) and Wang et al. (2019) were used to assess intention to purchase. An example of these items is, “There is a probability that I would consider buying the product or service of this hotel’s brand.”

Finally, a five-item measure established by Leung et al. (2015) and Kim and Ko (2012) was adopted to assess the sample’s perceptions of the electronic word of mouth construct. For instance, “I would like to pass along information on the brand or services from this hotel’s social media to my friends.”

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Cultural and historical attractions, and also the mild Mediterranean climate, make Turkey a popular tourist destination. The diversity of Turkey’s scenery and nature also contribute significantly to the region’s tourism industry. Over 525 billion Turkish liras were added to Turkey’s GDP thanks to the travel and tourism industry in 2021. This number increased considerably from the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it did not return to its levels before the outbreak (Dierks, 2022).

Firstly, based on the statistics regarding the significant number of social media users across the world (Dixon, 2022), the tourism and hospitality industries may greatly benefit from using social media as an advertising method, since it allows them to reach a massive audience. On the other hand, as one of the top 10 global tourist places, Turkey attracts more than 50 million tourists every

year due to its thriving hospitality industry (Bessadeg, 2022). In light of these numbers, it seems worthwhile to investigate how social media influences the purchase decisions of tourists of Turkey.

This survey was carried out in Istanbul, Turkey's most visited city during July 2022. In order to create a more accurate dataset resulting in more reliable and comprehensive results, questionnaires were delivered face-to-face in person to the customers of six hotels (four- and five-stars hotels) in Istanbul. The researchers approached respondents around the entrance of three large shopping centers of Istanbul to request them to participate in the survey. They asked them about their accommodation and whether they either stayed or are staying in one of those targeted hotels over the past 6 months or not. If their response to this filter question was 'Yes', then they would be eligible to participate in the survey. The researchers were existing to give participants help in the survey form completion and then collected filled forms. All participants were well-informed about the research aims and guaranteed anonymity and security. The respondents' participation was fully voluntary, and filling up the questionnaire was conducted "informed consent". A non-probability judgmental sampling technique was applied for conducting the survey to approach study participants since the entire population was not accessible (Sekaran, 2002). Judgmental sampling is a type of convenience sampling method in which the sample unit is chosen based on the information and judgment of researchers (Ürer Erdil et al., 2021). The sample size was determined based on a rule of thumb. The guidelines for minimum sample size requirements suggested by Hair et al. (2019), which is ten times the maximum number of structural relations targeted at a construct's model was followed. The structural relations/paths in our proposed model are four. In total, 284 questionnaires were handed out and collected, however, due to excessive missing data 259 completed questionnaires were retrieved for analysis, representing a 91% response rate which is still adjusted to satisfy the requirements of the proposed model according to the suggestion of Teimouri et al. (2018) that recommends for each question in the questionnaire a minimum of 5 respondents and a maximum of 10 are sufficient sample size. Also, because the dataset is analyzed by applying partial least squares-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS statistical software, there is no more concern about sample size. PLS does not necessitate a very large sample size, thus, it could handle smaller sample sizes (Hair et al., 2013; Ringle et al. 2015)

3.3 Sample Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 illustrates that among the total of 259 respondents, the highest percentage in terms of gender was male, with 57.5 percent. While in the age group, most of the respondents were between 41-50 with 34 percent. Regarding academic degrees, bachelor's degrees obtained the highest percentage with 44 percent, and in the respondents' yearly income, most of them earn 20,000-100,000 with a portion of 47.5. Finally, concerning participants' work experience, the highest portion had 5-10 years experience with 42.1 percent.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants (n = 259)

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		

	Male	149	57.5
	Female	110	42.5
Age			
	21-30	58	22.4
	31-40	79	30.5
	41-50	88	34.0
	Above 51	34	13.1
Academic Degree			
	Diploma	47	18.1
	BSc	114	44.0
	MSc	71	27.4
	PhD	27	10.4
Annual Income level			
	Less than \$ 20,000	85	32.8
	\$ 20,000 - \$100,000	123	47.5
	More than \$ 100,000	51	19.7
Years of Work Experience			
	Less than 5 years	57	22.0
	From 5-10 years	109	42.1
	More than 10 years	93	35.9

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The proposed structural model has been analyzed through partial least squares regression. Partial least squares-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is considered a variance-based technique that evaluates parameters using total variance (Hair et al., 2013). PLS-SEM is a favored and commonly utilized method of analysis due to its robustness (Ringle et al., 2015). In order to conduct path coefficient analysis, we opted to utilize SmartPLS 3 software. One of the key advantages of employing this technique is its potential to address real issues such as data noise, missing data, and skewness. In addition, PLS does not require large samples; thus, it handles

smaller sample sizes better. The higher statistical power of PLS makes it easier to examine complex models like the model proposed in this study, which is prediction oriented.

The measurement model and the structural model were both tested using a two-stage analytical procedure (Hair et al., 2017) because of a number of comparative strengths over a one-step approach which allows more robust inferences to be conducted as follows:

Primarily, the two-stage method provides assessment of the significance of all pattern coefficients. The following, it permits a test of whether any structural model would demonstrate a reasonable fit. A third advantage, one can conduct an asymptotically independent evaluation of the theoretical model of interest. Lastly, the two-stage method supports a particularly effective framework for formal evaluations of the practical model of interest with the next most likely theoretical alternatives (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

4.1 Evaluation of Measurement Model

Data presented in Table 2 shows means and standard deviations analysis of the causative factors: mean scores of 3.531 (SD = 1.082) for Perceived SMM, 3.593 (SD = 1.063) for BC, 3.659 (SD = 1.057) for BA, 3.523 (SD = 1.045) for IP, and 3.721 (SD = 1.062) for the EWOM. Furthermore, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity are all criteria that should be considered before examining the structural model. Reliability examines the degree to which the items evaluate a particular latent construct (Ramayah et al., 2016). As suggested by Hair et al. (2017), composite reliability (CR) was evaluated as a criterion of construct consistency. CR with a value greater than 0.7 as the threshold for each construct is regarded as acceptable (Sinkovics et al., 2016). The findings in Table (2) demonstrate that CR values for all the constructs were higher than the cut-off value of 0.7.

Convergent validity is the next step to evaluate the validity of the structural model which examines “the extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same constructs” (Hair et al., 2017, p.112). The evaluation of convergent validity needs monitoring of the outer loading values of the items and the average variance extracted (AVE). As suggested by Hair et al. (2017), variables with lower outer loadings can be removed if other variables with high loadings explain at least 50 percent of the variance. Thus, five items were eliminated with lower outer loadings, two items from the perceived social media marketing construct (SMM6 and SMM8), two items from the brand attitude construct (BA6 and BA8), and one item from the intention of electronic word of mouth construct (EWOM5). After removing the mentioned items, AVEs above 0.50 were achieved. The AVE was proven to be sufficient for all constructs: Perceived SMM (0.641), Brand Cognition (0.564), Brand Attitude (0.628), Intention to purchase (0.700), and intention of electronic word of mouth (0.824). As a result, the constructs’ convergent validities were confirmed.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and measurement analyses

Construct	Measurement item	Mean	SD	Loading	CR	AVE
	SMM1	3.212	1.216	0.715	0.902	0.560

Construct	Measurement item	Mean	SD	Loading	CR	AVE
Perceived social Media Marketing [Mean = 3.531; SD = 1.082]	SMM2	3.332	1.170	0.721	0.837	0.521
	SMM3	3.606	1.056	0.775		
	SMM4	3.726	1.052	0.639		
	SMM5	3.788	1.025	0.714		
	SMM6	-	-	Item deleted		
	SMM7	3.672	1.002	0.838		
	SMM8	-	-	Item deleted		
	SMM9	3.382	1.051	0.715		
Brand Cognition [Mean = 3.593; SD = 1.063]	BC1	3.328	1.029	0.501	0.874	0.537
	BC2	3.262	1.152	0.505		
	BC3	3.822	1.007	0.842		
	BC4	3.861	0.982	0.872		
	BC5	3.691	0.998	0.806		
Brand Attitude [Mean = 3.659; SD = 1.057]	BA1	3.649	1.047	0.745	0.878	0.547
	BA2	3.753	1.038	0.781		
	BA3	3.676	0.950	0.830		
	BA4	3.618	1.040	0.698		
	BA5	3.629	1.103	0.637		
	BA6	-	-	Item deleted		
	BA7	3.626	0.895	0.691		
	BA8	-	-	Item deleted		
Intention to purchase [Mean = 3.523; SD = 1.045]	IP1	3.626	0.860	0.727	0.914	0.730
	IP2	3.375	1.028	0.753		
	IP3	3.363	1.041	0.706		
	IP4	3.560	1.045	0.784		
	IP5	3.533	1.065	0.797		
	IP6	3.680	0.973	0.664		
Intention of electronic word of mouth [Mean = 3.721; SD = 1.062]	EWOM1	3.784	1.063	0.942	0.914	0.730
	EWOM2	3.591	1.101	0.916		
	EWOM3	3.788	1.027	0.837		
	EWOM4	3.722	1.057	0.655		
	EWOM5	-	-	Item deleted		

Notes: CR, composite reliability, AVE, average variance extracted, SMM6, SMM8, BA6, BA8, EWOM5 deleted due to low factor loadings.

Discriminant validity means that the employed constructs are different (Hair et al., 2017). The assessment of discriminant validity is carried out in two ways: first, Fornell and Larcker (1981) measure and latter, the Heterotrait- Monotrait Ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). Based on the suggestion of Fornell and Larcker (1981), in order to confirm the discriminant validity, the square root of each latent variable's AVE must be greater than the correlation value of the same construct. It is evident from Table (3) that for a particular latent variable, the square root value of AVE is greater than the correlations given in all rows and columns, i.e. (BA = 0.733, BC = 0.722, EWOM = 0.854, IP = 0.740, SMM = 0.748).

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	BA	BC	EWOM	IP	SMM
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BA	0.733				
BC	0.852	0.722			
EWOM	0.644	0.451	0.854		
IP	0.821	0.598	0.695	0.740	
SMM	0.761	0.653	0.579	0.757	0.748

Notes: Bold values on the diagonal represent the square root of AVE, whereas other entries represent the correlations; BA: brand attitude, BC: brand cognition, EWOM: Intention of electronic word of mouth, IP: Intention to purchase, SMMA: social media marketing activities.

In addition, the HTMT ratio was set at 0.85, which means that numbers should be less than 0.85 because it is considered to be the most conservative cut-off value for HTMT (Henseler et al., 2015), a result greater than 0.90 for the HTMT indicates a paucity of DV (Hair et al., 2017). The outcomes were achieved for the HTMT (0.85), as demonstrated in Table 4. Thus, the current study supported all of DV's assumptions, as evidenced by the HTMT value.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT criterion)

Construct	BA	BC	EWOM	BC	SMM
BA					
BC	0.826				
EWOM	0.641	0.440			
IP	0.826	0.613	0.692		
SMM	0.753	0.673	0.572	0.756	

Notes: BA: brand attitude, BC: brand cognition, EWOM: Intention of electronic word of mouth, IP: Intention to purchase, SMM: Perceived social media marketing.

Ultimately, the overall results of the measurement model evaluation demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity.

In addition to validity and reliability, multicollinearity must also be tested before evaluating the structural model. Multicollinearity can be evaluated by the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF value higher than 10.0 represents the multicollinearity issue according to Burns and Burns (2008); however, Hair et al. (2014) advocates a cut-off value of 5.0 for multicollinearity. The VIF findings are presented in Table 5. Since VIF values were below the 5.0 threshold value, no multicollinearity issue among latent constructs was identified.

Table 5. Inner VIF Values

Construct	BA	BC	EWOM	IP	SMMA
BA			1.000	1.000	
BC	1.742				
EWOM					

Construct	BA	BC	EWOM	IP	SMMA
IP					
SMMA	1.742				

4.2 Structural Model

The structural model evaluates the causal relationships between the pair of constructs. In order to assess the statistical significance of the hypothesized model, Hair et al. (2017) recommended using a bootstrapping approach with a resampling technique, and path coefficient to evaluate the structural model, R^2 , and matching t-values.

R^2 is a number that can range from zero to one. A higher R^2 value indicates a more accurate prediction. According to Hair et al. (2017), assessing the change in R^2 value is important (see Table 6). Apart from focusing on the importance of the R^2 , Stone Geisser's Q square (predictive sample reuse technique) can effectively be used as a criterion for predictive power. According to Hair et al. (2013) all Q^2 scores greater than zero (0) obtained from this study's analysis show that the exogenous constructs are predictive of the endogenous constructs (Table 6).

Table 6. Predictive relevance

Endogenous Construct	Relationship	R^2	Q^2
BA	SMMA $\rightarrow$ BA	0.460	0.427
BA	BC $\times$ SMMA $\rightarrow$ BA	0.823	0.580
IP	BA $\rightarrow$ IP	0.675	0.439
EWOM	BA $\rightarrow$ EWOM	0.415	0.313

Table 7 shows the findings of assessing the structural model. The findings show that, as hypothesized, SMM (H1: $\beta = 0.678$, $P < 0.01$) has a significant positive impact on BA. Next, BA (H2: $\beta = 0.726$, $p < 0.01$) was positively influences IP. Similarly, the findings display that BA has an important direct impact on EWOM (H3: $\beta = 0.583$, $p < 0.01$).

Consistent with H4, BC positively moderates the direct association between SMM and BA. As shown in Table 7, the interaction between SMM and BC is positively related to BA (H4: $\beta = 0.113$, $P < 0.01$). The moderation test result indicates that SMM is more positively related to BA when BC is high. Accordingly, H4 is supported.

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypothesis	Relationship	coefficient	t-value	CI (LL, UL)	Decision
H1	SMM $\rightarrow$ BA	0.678**	17.890	(0.680,0.751)	Supported
H2	BA $\rightarrow$ IP	0.726**	20.536	(0.656,0.795)	Supported
H3	BA $\rightarrow$ EWOM	0.583**	12.100	(0.486,0.671)	Supported

H4	BC × SMMA → BA	0.113**	2.583	(0.036,0.210)	Supported
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Notes: Model fit summary: SRMR = 0.068 (Threshold → < 0.080); LL: lower limit, UL: upper limit; CI: confidence interval, **Significant at 0.01 (2-tailed); BA: brand attitude, EWOM: Intention of electronic word of mouth, IP: Intention to purchase, BC: brand cognition, SMM: Perceived social media marketing.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The increasing pace of digital advancements necessitates that companies who seek a competitive advantage must align their decision-making processes with both corporate experience and academic rigor. This alignment is crucial to provide insights into a rapidly evolving field (Núñez-Barriopedro et al., 2023).

In an effort to comprehend customers' behavioral intentions such as IP and EWOM, this study sheds light on the effect of hotels' SMM on customers' attitude towards a hotel's brand and in turn, how BA can stimulate customers to book a hotel and spread EWOM. Furthermore, this study explores the moderating effect of BC on the relationship between SMM and BA.

The findings of this research demonstrate that SMM in the hospitality industry will significantly enhance consumers' attitudes toward the hotel brand, which is in line with the studies of Hsu (2012) and Ravina-Ripoll et al. (2021). They found that SNSs have been an essential technique for endorsing the hotel brand and improving customer-brand communications. Moreover, some research on the subject has indicated that companies that administer SMM usually exhibit better performance without requiring substantial investments in costly advertising (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015; Buhalis and Inversini, 2014; Chan and Guillet, 2011; Galiano-Coronil et al., 2023; Ghouse et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2015; Minazzi and Lagrosen, 2013; Upadhyay et al., 2022).

In turn, a positive brand attitude leads to an increase in consumers' intention to book a room in the hotel and recommend the hotel brand online (Buhalis and Inversini, 2014; Haryanto et al., 2022; Su et al., 2023). As Mangold and Faulds (2009) proposed, customers recognize social media as a more authentic source of attaining information regarding brands than advertiser-generated content transmitted through the traditional form of marketing promotions. Therefore, hotel managers should benefit from SMM so as to enhance their sales and market share.

As to brand cognition effects, we found that brand cognition positively strengthens the relation between SMM and BA. The more people know a hotel's brand, the more positive attitude they will have toward that hotel. Thus, the effects of hotels' social media advertisements will be more effective with the presence of brand cognition.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

In light of the new ways in which people use media in the modern world, brands are devoting a greater proportion of their marketing budgets to digital channels. If advertisers and organizations are to make the most of the new investment paradigm, they need a more detailed assessment of the relative values of these online platforms. In light of this, and regardless of the fact that SNSs are being increasingly integrated into media strategies, there is still a dearth of information regarding

their actual value to companies. This study is among the first to examine the impact of SMM on consumer attitude towards a brand, as well as their propensity to make purchases and spread positive word of mouth (EWOM) in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, by addressing a research path not yet fully investigated, we offer a new understanding of social media marketing activities for international hotels and help them legitimize their presence within the digital media market.

The major contribution of this study is that it shows that SMM has a favorable and statistically significant impact on consumers' brand attitudes. Considering the energizing effects of brand cognition, this study supports the idea that social media can be a valuable communication method for enhancing customers' pre-existing cognitive brand impressions, which in turn affects sales. In addition, certain results concerning the moderation of brand cognition between SMMA, and brand attitude need further attention because they contribute to an increase in the efficiency of marketing activities. In terms of the second relationship, the fact that brand attitude has such an impact on EWOM shows how effective it is at motivating customers who have a favorable attitude as a result of social media marketing. According to our findings, social media can be regarded as a relationship channel that increases the value of these platforms in terms of customer retention, increased purchase rate, boosting sales, and brand referrals.

The scope of social media is directly associated with its capacity to influence hard-to-reach customers, who tend to spend more time online instead of watching TV channels or reading magazines. Given the continued proliferation of mobile devices (smartphones and tablets), this trend is likely to improve the position of social media's ability to retain and activate vast volumes of brand information, which is an advantage over the simple messages delivered by conventional media and contributes to their complementary nature with other communication channels. In turn, this may lead to a more holistic and nuanced perception of the brand among SNS users.

5.3 Practical Implications

Companies that can effectively utilize technological tools to promote two-way communication and engagement, resulting in a satisfying and profitable interaction among all parties involved in communication, will gain a significant competitive advantage in the tourism industry.

Social media has empowered consumers. Travelers now meticulously assess the previous tourism experiences shared by other travelers, enabling them to make more informed decisions. They rely on a combination of official sources, such as destination and hotel websites, as well as unofficial platforms like social media (Inversini and Buhalis, 2009), to inform their choices.

In such competitive industries like hotels, the key to boosting and retaining profitability is to concentrate on enhancing consumers' intention to purchase, since intention leads to actual purchases in the future. Social media marketing seems crucial in the hotel sector as it allows consumers to see and know the hotel and it shapes their attitudes. They are more likely to consider the hotel on their next trip and are more willing to recommend it to others.

Social media represents a significant component of search results, necessitating that conventional providers of travel-related information incorporate social media into their online marketing efforts. Looking ahead, successful tourism entities must swiftly identify consumer needs and engage with potential clients through comprehensive, personalized, and up-to-date online communication channels to design products that cater to tourism demand effectively. Social media platforms are

emerging as essential destination marketing tools for tourism organizations as they exert influence on key markets.

The Internet, particularly through the use of social media, has empowered consumers, granting them the ability to offer comments and reviews on their travel and tourism experiences. Social media has facilitated a dynamic feedback system that bridges the gap between the supply and demand sides of the travel and tourism industry. Customers have the opportunity to provide feedback and review their experiences, while the industry can respond and, when feasible, enhance its services. This continuous and interactive engagement fosters the co-creation of experiences, personalizes generic products and services, and generalizes individual experiences.

From a practical view, hotel managers and associated decision-makers may use the current study's findings to develop well-designed and valuable advertising campaigns using social media platforms since SMM has been illustrated to remarkably affect consumers' attitudes toward a hotel brand, and in turn, a favorable attitude will lead to their intention to prefer one hotel over another, as well as their intention to recommend the hotel to others online. More precisely, the results of this research can be used by hotel managers to enhance their social media advertising strategies. For instance, the social media experience is a highly essential component in social media marketing. Consequently, hotels ought to place more emphasis on the design of their social media pages in order to improve their consumers' experiences. They also need to be helpful, interesting, and advantageous to customers. Social media can also help give more information about the location and increase the hotel's sales. However, if managers can utilize social media effectively, such as through using ads on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc., this can facilitate the process of publicizing the hotel and attracting more customers.

Brand cognition is another significant factor that influences a person's desire to book a hotel room. We confirmed that brand cognition can strengthen the effect of SMM in creating a favorable attitude toward hotel brands. The strength of brand attitude does not entirely represent the degree to which a brand has efficiently penetrated a customer's heart. When analyzing consumer-brand relations, managers have to consolidate brand cognition in their brand assessment process. The developing markets, customers, organizations, and social media are contemporary phenomena that marketing practitioners and researchers should frequently track since they provide areas of opportunity for firms of all sizes and around the globe.

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