ORIGINAL ARTICLE

How does social media marketing enhance brand loyalty? Identifying mediators relevant to the cinema context

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Abstract

Social media has created a new norm for organizations to engage with their consumers and expand their businesses. In view of this, brand loyalty as an outcome of social media marketing has been acknowledged as a central theme in building long-term consumer relationships. This study focuses on this issue by exploring multiple mediators between social media marketing (SMM) and brand loyalty in the context of cinemas. An online questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 270 cinema goers who were also social media users, in Malaysia. The results of the PLS-SEM analysis revealed that brand satisfaction, brand relationship quality, brand consciousness and value consciousness are significant mediators that impact the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty. Finally, the implications of this study and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords Brand consciousness · Brand loyalty · Brand relationship quality · Brand satisfaction · Social media marketing · Value consciousness

Introduction

Social media has become progressively beneficial to the business world because it allows marketers to stay in touch with their target market. Among the most significant developments in social media is the introduction of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tik-Tok and others like them which have accelerated the potential for business to consumer communications. Consequently, many organizations have leveraged their marketing efforts on social media; these include retail stores, airlines, hotels and educational institutions (Chinje and Chinomona 2018). These changes brought

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by social media have been made possible by advanced software, algorithms, technologies, and virtual channels to generate, connect, distribute, and exchange information that are beneficial to businesses and their consumers (Tuten and Solomon 2017).

Compared to traditional marketing tools, social media has been acknowledged as the most favorable online selling platform primarily because of its cost-effective nature (Kirtiş and Karahan 2011). Also, most consumers perceive that social media platforms allow them to communicate more proactively; thus, giving consumers more control. For example, a global marketing report illustrated that more than 50% of consumers subscribe to their favorite brands on social media (Van Belleghem et al. 2011). Furthermore, more than 29% of consumers follow trends and recommendations from social media, while approximately a quarter of consumers tend to share their buying experiences on social media (Berisha-Namani 2013; Jain et al. 2018a, b). In particular, Statista's latest report (2021a) states that the penetration rate of social media in Malaysia is one of the highest in the Asia–Pacific region: 74% of the Malaysia's population have access to social media platforms where they socialize and obtain the latest market information.

In tandem with the growing marketing potential of social media, is the on-going pre-occupation with brand loyalty: How can brand loyalty be generated via social media (Atukar

2020; Kaur et al. 2020; Loureiro 2013). Aaker (1991) and Atulkar (2020) have defined brand loyalty as the attachment a consumer has towards a brand. Whereas Gremler and Brown (1996) have divided loyalty into two perspectives, i.e. behavioral loyalty and cognitive loyalty. Behavioral loyalty refers to the number of repeated purchases or commitments to revisit the brand as a primary choice (Keller et al. 2011); and cognitive loyalty refers to a brand appearing first in the minds of consumers when it is necessary to make a purchase decision; that is, it indicates the extent to which a particular brand is a consumer's first choice. As highlighted by Keller et al. (2011), when brands acquire exclusive, positive, and prominent meanings in the minds of consumers, they will become irresistible and irreplaceable. Brand loyalty, in return, brings sales revenue, market share, and profitability to organizations, thereby helping them grow; or at least, maintain their positions in the minds of consumers (Casteran et al. 2019).

Despite the general progress to better understand the factors that drive brand loyalty, empirical research in the context of cinemas has lagged behind. That is, even though many cinemas have been making extensive investments in their social media platforms, little is known about effective strategies to drive high brand loyalty among cinema goers (Vinh et al. 2019). In Malaysia, the revenue of cinemas is expected to grow at a rate of 15.30%, resulting in a total of US$21 million by 2024 (Statista 2021b); there are 169 cinemas operating in the country, with Golden Screen Cinemas being the largest operator followed by TGV cinemas, MBO cinemas and Lotus Five Star.

However, with the realization of how it can increase reach and promote upcoming movies (Keller 2019), social media has emerged as a valuable avenue for cinemas to reach current consumers and expand to potential new ones. As noted by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006), well-formulated social media marketing (SMM) activities can facilitate the achievement of brand loyalty because these virtual activities enable an organization to create a sense of community and stimulate positive word-of-mouth. Erdoğmuş and Cicek (2012) was among the earliest studies and they found a significant relationship between SMM and brand loyalty; however, this research was conducted in Turkey without a specific reference to any industry. Similarly, Tatar and Eren-Erdogmus (2016) highlighted a positive link between SMM on brand trust and brand loyalty in the context of tourism and hospitality. Despite many studies on the effects of SMM in various contexts, there is a paucity of research on how brand loyalty can be significantly improved through SMM activities in the context of cinemas.

Likewise, Ebrahim (2020) has argued that most businesses have yet to figure out proper ways of engaging consumers on social media to accomplish brand loyalty. In other words, businesses have started to use social media to improve brand loyalty and attract more consumers—with mixed results—thus, the question remains: How does one use SMM to create brand loyalty? (Sohail et al. 2020). The same concern has been addressed in Irshad e al. (2020) study where they stress the need for a comprehensive framework to provide practitioners with some idea on how to utilize social media to achieve high competitive advantage. Indeed, it is important to understand how consumers perceive the SMM efforts implemented by an organization; and equally important, how SMM can enhance the long-term relationships that consumers have with organizations.

To bridge the gap in the existing literature, our study contributes by examining the mechanisms (i.e., mediating variables) that enhance and explain the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty in the cinema industry. Grounded on the Use and Gratification Theory (U&G Theory), this study proposed six main mediators for this relationship, i.e., brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand relationship quality, brand consciousness, value consciousness and SMM attitude. The findings provide beneficial insights to organizations, especially those in the cinema industry, pertaining to appropriate mechanisms to improve brand loyalty through SMM.

The paper is organized as follows: In the "Theoretical background and hypotheses development" section, this study's theoretical framework and hypotheses development is discussed. Subsequently, the "Methodology" section elaborates on the research methodologies adopted; followed by the "Findings" section where the findings are presented. Finally, the limitations and implications of the study are presented along with future research directions and concluding remarks.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Use and gratification theory (U&G theory)

The U&G Theory has been widely applied to comprehend how and why users aggressively engage in the use of a technology medium to satisfy their needs (Katz et al. 1973). Gratification is defined as the total satisfaction experienced by an individual after actively using a particular media (Liu et al. 2020; Stafford et al. 2004). Hence, if a media is capable of meeting most of a user's expected needs, it is likely that the user will continue using it (Huang and Hsieh 2011). Generally, this theory offers a clear explanation of the factors that influence the use of a media, the motives that influence these factors, and the results thereon.

Despite it being originally developed in the pre-digital era, researchers have increasingly employed U&G theory as the underpinning theory for examining consumer behavior in the adoption of emerging technologies such as e-commerce

websites (Azam 2015; Roy 2009); social media (Carpentier et al. 2019; Liu et al. 2020); mobile applications (Ray et al. 2019); and artificial intelligence devices (Gursoy et al. 2019). This is consistent with Elliott and Rosenberg's (1987) meta-study on the use of U&G theory to examine: (i) motivations that have influenced the use of traditional media (e.g., television, radio, newspaper); (ii) factors related to the use of the Internet and social media; and (iii) the use of advanced media/technologies (e.g., blockchain, cloud computing, 5G data network). Besides, the U&G theory is also recognized as a time-honored media use theory which is useful to understand the motivations of users when adopting a media (Kang and Atkin 1999). For example, the study of Iyer et al. (2018) explains how the media are used to meet the needs of individuals; whilst the study of Park et al. (2009) has explored the factors that stimulate users' gratification perception from participating in social media groups. Media scholars have also reasoned that U&G theory can be applied in understanding use intentions, continuance intentions and actual use behavior (e.g., Aluri et al. 2016; Ray et al. 2019).

As such, this study extends the use of U&G Theory to the context of SMM for two main purposes: First, this theory offers a user point of view on the individual and psychological motives that drive users' intentions to continue using a media (Lo and Leung 2009; Eginli and Tas 2018). Second, to propose a generic model that is based on U&G theory. As Kaur et al. (2020) emphasized, the relationship between the media and the intention of continued use depends on the platform, which means that results vary according to the different forms of media. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers explore the mechanism that affects the use of the media using an integral framework that includes context-based variables (Wang et al. 2019).

Thus, this study suggests that the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty is affected by multiple mechanisms, including brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand relationship quality, brand consciousness, value consciousness, and SMM Attitude. A detailed justification follows in the next section.

Social media marketing and brand loyalty

Compared to traditional media, social media offers organizations remarkable opportunities to reach out to consumers in their social community and establish more personal relationships (Kelly et al. 2017). Undeniably, SMM has changed the way in which the content of the brand is created, shared, and consumed; and SMM has also transferred the power to shape a brand's image from the marketer to its consumers (Chung and Kim 2020).

Numerous marketing research have revealed that more and more organizations tend to use attractive SMM activities

to increase brand loyalty (Zollo et al. 2020); brand equity (Koay et al. 2020); and brand commitment (McClure and Seock 2020). Indeed, to be successful and to remain competitive in current markets, it is important for an organization to being actively involved in various social media platforms. This is especially true because research has found that the use of social media is more cost-effective and it has contributed better to consumer awareness and loyalty (Ismail 2017).

In this study, SMM is conceptualized to be a multidimensional construct that comprises five components, namely, entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth (Kim and Ko 2012). Specifically, entertainment refers to the fun and enjoyment when using the social media (Agichtein et al. 2008); interaction indicates the extent to which the social media provide space for discussion and the exchange of ideas; trendiness represents the opportunity to get the latest news from the social media; customization describes the extent to which the social media can be adapted to individual preferences (Schmenner 1986); and word-of-mouth describes the extent to which the social media enables consumers to exchange information and post content (Godey et al. 2016). Consequently, this study suggests that the SMM activities implemented by cinemas have the potential to generate brand loyalty. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1 There is a positive relationship between SMM and brand loyalty.

Mediating effect of brand satisfaction

Consumers have consistently been observed to feel more satisfied if their expectations have been met (Cheah et al. 2020a; Cheng et al. 2020). Brand satisfaction has been viewed as an effective response to a certain brand; thus, identifying its causes and impacts is a critical goal in marketing (Bahadur et al. 2020). Mikulić and Prebežac (2008) contended that strong brand satisfaction increases brand loyalty, which has important implications for an organization's future profits and long-term cash flow. In the context of social media, Chang and Chen (2009) reported that marketers should focus on designing interesting and credible content in their online platforms, since these efforts are expected to positively affect satisfaction and, consequently on loyalty. Following from the findings of earlier work, it is theorized that when cinemas use social media to manage consumer expectations, their consumers are more likely to be satisfied. Hence, it was hypothesized that:

H2 Brand satisfaction has a mediating effect on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty.

Mediating effect of brand trust

Substantial literature has revealed the enhancement of brand loyalty through brand trust. Brand trust is defined as consumers' perceptions or beliefs that a particular brand will accomplish its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). As highlighted by Li et al. (2020), trust refers to an emotional bond between consumers and businesses. This bond occurs because the feeling of trust induces a positive emotional attachment between the consumer and the business; it signals that the business cares, is concerned, and connects with the consumer (Casaló et al. 2007). In fact, trust has been widely acknowledged as an important catalyst for various transactional and non-transactional relationships (Cheah et al. 2020b; Lim et al. 2019). Furthermore, Casalo et al. (2007) have found that consumer participation in brand communities can improve the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. Therefore, if cinemas regularly provide accurate information on their social media sites, it would generate trust among its consumers, and they should remain loyal. Therefore, brand trust is theorised to play a mediating role in the context of cinemas. The following hypothesis was proposed:

H3 Brand trust has a mediating effect on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty.

Mediating effect of brand relationship quality

Brand relationship quality refers to the degree to which consumers establish a continuous relationship with a brand after the fulfillment of their expectations (Algesheimer et al. 2005). Many past findings have stressed that brand relationship quality significantly influences relational outcomes such as consumer retention (Habibi et al. 2016); sharing of positive word-of-mouth (Lo et al. 2017; Tho et al. 2016); and loyalty (Ng et al. 2019).

In addition, previous studies have reported that brand relationship quality plays a mediating role, *inter alia*, in the context of music festival attendees (Hudson et al. 2015) and franchise-based brand equity (Nyadzayo et al. 2016). Habibi et al. (2016) further emphasized that brand relationship quality exhibits a mediating effect on brand loyalty, where it was seen to heighten consumer relationships with brands. It is, therefore, reasonable to propose that, in regard to cinemas, brand relationship quality plays the same mediating role when SMM is used as a marketing tool. That is, when SMM provide a better management of consumer relationships, it should result in higher levels of brand loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4 Brand relationship quality has a mediating effect on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty.

Mediating effect of brand consciousness

Brand consciousness is known as a mental orientation that drives consumers to select goods that are more popular or familiar (Sprotles and Kendall 1986). Research conducted by Ismail (2017) have found that brand consciousness demonstrates a mediating influence on the link between SMM and brand loyalty. As a result, to raise brand consciousness, many organizations are increasingly using social media as a tool to attract followers, increase relations with consumers, and encourage lively user participation (Kautish et al. 2020). In the context of cinemas, the use of SMM is expected to make a brand occur frequently on social media platforms, and this is expected to have a strong impact on consumer consciousness, thus leading to enhanced brand loyalty. Thus, it was hypothesized that:

H5 Brand consciousness has a mediating effect on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty.

Mediating effect of value consciousness

Lichtenstein et al. (1990) defined value consciousness as the concern of consumers to pay lower prices, subject to some quality constraint. Indeed, scholars believe that an individual may not necessarily purchase a product or service by means of the maximum ratio of quality to price; because it might not be the best perceived value to him or her (Cham et al. 2020). According to Sharma (2011), consumers who emphasize value consciousness tend to be fairly concerned about product quality and low prices. This segment of consumers often relies on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Tik-Tok, Twitter, etc.) to purchase products or services at low-priced deals. Consistent with this, Delgado-Ballester et al. (2014) have posited that value consciousness is one of the significant factors affecting the way consumers process information and make decisions. SMM, in this case, offers organizations more opportunities to boost value consciousness and thus impact positively on brand loyalty. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H6 Value consciousness has a mediating effect on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty.

Mediating effect of SMM attitude

Brand attitude is defined as the overall evaluation of a brand by consumers. The significant effect of attitude on consumer behavior has been captured in the Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen (TRA) (1991). TRA suggests that a positive attitude can lead to more substantial online behavior such as participation and engagement. Similarly, Seo and Lee's (2016) study have revealed that brand loyalty and buying

intention are influenced by individuals' attitudes toward advertising. Other studies by Kujur and Singh (2017) and Hakimi et al. (2019) have reported that attitude mediates the effect of consumer online participation on engagement. Yeng and Mat (2013) further tested the determinants of consumer loyalty in the Malaysian context and found that favorable attitudes among consumers do exert a strong influence on cognitive/attitudinal loyalty. In this study, SMM attitude refers to the overall consumer rating of a cinema's activities on various social media platforms; thus, effective implementation of SMM by cinemas could improve consumer attitudes and thereby strengthen their loyalty to the cinemas. Thus, it was hypothesized that:

H7 SMM Attitude has a mediating effect on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty.

Methodology

Data collection and analysis procedures

Judgmental sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was employed in this study. The purpose of judgmental sampling is to handpick respondents based on the researcher's knowledge and judgment. The target respondents of this study were social media users who are active followers of any cinema social media platform (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.). Following previous studies (Osei-Frimpong 2019; Bilgihan et al. 2016), an online questionnaire was distributed to the target respondents. Of the total of 300 responses received, 270 completed questionnaires were deemed usable after an initial screening. The sample size of 270 corresponded to the minimum sample size of 153, i.e., with an effect size of 0.15 and a power of 95% in the post-hoc power analysis (Fink 2017; Memon et al. 2020).

Two statistical software were utilized for data analysis. First, SPSS v.26 was used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the sample. Second, PLS-SEM using Smart-PLS software was used to evaluate the reliability of each instrument as well as the significance of the hypotheses. PLS-SEM is considered more appropriate for examining research that are prediction-oriented and exploratory in nature (Hair et al. 2019). Owing to its composite modeling approach, this technique is particularly focused on estimating path coefficients and maximizing the variances explained (R^2) of the dependent variables (Hair et al. 2019). In addition, recent studies by Hair et al. (2019) and Chin et al. (2020) have suggested that studies should adopt the PLS-SEM approach when evaluating complex models, i.e., models that comprise higher-order constructs and multiple mediators. Following the two-step approach in PLS-SEM, the data analysis was divided into two parts: (1) assessment

of the measurement model (outer model), and (2) assessment of the structural model (inner model) (Hair et al. 2019; Sarstedt et al. 2019).

Measures

All the measurement items for this study were adapted from previous literature (refer Appendix Table 7). The scale for SMM (11 items) was adapted from Kim and Ko (2012) with five dimensions, namely entertainment, interaction, trendiness and customization, and word of mouth. Whereas the five-item brand satisfaction scale, five-item brand consciousness scale, four-item value consciousness scale, and four-item brand loyalty scale were measured using scales proposed by Fornell (1992), Sproles and Sproles (1990), Lichtenstein et al. (1993), and Aaker and Equity (1991) respectively. Next, the scale for brand trust (three items) was adopted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), whilst the brand relationship quality scale (three items) was adopted from Algesheimer et al. (2010). Finally, SMM attitude was measured using three-item scale developed by Davis et al. (1989).

Common method bias (CMB)

Since the data collected in this study was self-reported, and the same questionnaire was administered at a single point, the data was examined for CMB using Harman's Single-Factor Test (Podsakoff et al. 2003). The results revealed that the largest variance explained by the first factor was 42.59% of the total variance. This indicates that the variables were not loaded on one factor; that is, one factor did not explain a majority of the variance. Further, the CMB issue was assessed using the full collinearity approach, suggested by Kock (2015). From the analysis, the result revealed that none of the constructs exhibited a variance inflation factor (VIF) value above 5 (see Table 2). Therefore, it can be concluded that CMB was not significant in this data set (Podsakoff et al. 2003; Kock 2015) (Fig. 1).

Findings

Respondent profile

Of the 270 respondents (refer Table 1), most were females (68.90%) who were in their early twenties (81.50%). The preference for the cinema chains was: Golden Screen Cinema (65.90%); TGV Cinema (20.40%); MBO cinema (13.00%); and the least-preferred was Lotus Five Star (0.70%). With regards to social media platforms, Facebook (70.70%) was
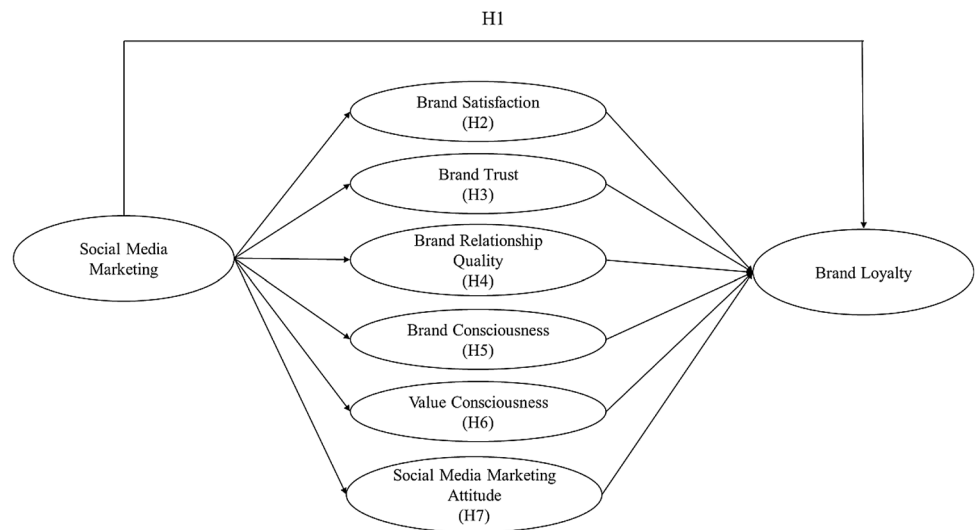
Fig. 1 Research framework

Table 1 Profile of respondents

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	84	31.10
Female	186	68.90
Age		
Below 25 years	220	81.50
25–30 years	31	11.50
31–40 years	8	3.00
41–50 years	8	3.00
51 years and above	3	1.10
Preferred cinema		
Golden screen cinema	178	65.90
TGV cinema	55	20.40
Lotus five star	2	0.70
MBO cinema	35	13.00
Preferred social media platform		
Facebook	191	70.70
Instagram	69	25.60
Twitter	6	2.20
Others	4	1.50
Total	270	100.00

by far the most popular social media platform, followed by Instagram (25.60%), Twitter (2.20%) and others (1.50%).

Assessment of measurement model

In the measurement model, analysis on convergent validity and reliability of the reflective constructs was conducted. All indicators exhibited satisfactory results for outer loadings (above 0.70) (Hair et al. 2019). In terms of convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from

0.609 to 0.870, surpassing the threshold score of 0.50. Next, the values for both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were above the 0.70 rule of thumb, indicating sufficient internal reliability and consistency (Hair et al. 2019; Ramayah et al. 2016) (see Table 2).

Next, discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach, prescribed by Henseler et al. (2015). Table 3 shows that all the values met the HTMT < 0.85 requirement. Thus, Discriminant Validity was achieved.

Assessment of higher-order construct

To assess the higher-order construct, SMM, the steps outlined by Sarstedt et al. (2019) and Cheah et al. (2018) were applied. First, all the dimensions (i.e. customization, entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and word-of-mouth) were checked for collinearity issues. As presented in Table 4, the VIF values ranged between 2.030 and 2.452 (less than the threshold limit of 3) and therefore indicated that no collinearity issues existed among the sub-dimensions. Next, the outer weights and significance values of the dimensions were examined. Four of the dimensions (i.e., customization, entertainment, trendiness and word-of-mouth) were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.001$) whilst the interaction dimension was not ($p = 0.179$). However, this dimension was retained to wholly capture the domain of SMM, as stipulated by its theoretical conceptualization.

Assessment of structural model

In the structural model assessment stage, it is crucial to first address collinearity issues of all constructs. The VIF outputs were found to be below the threshold of 5 (ranging between

Table 2 Assessment of measurement model

Construct	Item	FC	Outer loading	Cronbach' Alpha	CR	AVE
Entertainment	E1	2.908	0.930	0.851	0.931	0.870
	E2		0.936			
Interaction	IT1	2.394	0.812	0.818	0.892	0.734
	IT2		0.875			
	IT3		0.881			
Trendiness	T1	2.596	0.925	0.848	0.929	0.868
	T2		0.938			
Customization	CUST1	2.177	0.919	0.824	0.919	0.850
	CUST2		0.925			
WOM	WOM1	2.340	0.906	0.727	0.879	0.785
	WOM2		0.865			
Brand satisfaction	BS1	4.051	0.879	0.898	0.925	0.711
	BS2		0.891			
	BS3		0.850			
	BS4		0.766			
	BS5		0.824			
Brand trust	BT1	2.052	0.890	0.854	0.911	0.774
	BT2		0.922			
	BT3		0.825			
Brand consciousness	BC1	2.600	0.809	0.788	0.862	0.609
	BC2		0.821			
	BC3		0.735			
	BC4		0.753			
Value consciousness	VC1	2.258	0.706	0.841	0.895	0.683
	VC2		0.798			
	VC3		0.907			
	VC4		0.880			
Social media marketing attitude	BA1	2.479	0.904	0.869	0.920	0.792
	BA2		0.876			
	BA3		0.890			
BRQ	BRQ1	1.792	0.922	0.901	0.938	0.835
	BRQ2		0.924			
	BRQ3		0.895			
Brand loyalty	BL1	2.682	0.786	0.839	0.892	0.675
	BL2		0.745			
	BL3		0.882			
	BL4		0.866			

FC full collinearity, *CR* composite reliability, *AVE* average variance extracted, *BRQ* brand relationship quality, *WOM* word-of-mouth

1.708 and 3.428), suggesting collinearity was not a concern in the model (Hair et al. 2019) (see Table 5).

Using the bootstrapping technique, the path estimates and t-statistics were calculated to assess the hypothesized relationships. From the analysis, it was found that SMM ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.400$) was insignificantly related to brand loyalty; thus, H1 was rejected. Next, multiple mediators were assessed. As shown in Table 5, four out of the six indirect effects were supported. Specifically, brand satisfaction ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), brand relationship quality ($\beta = 0.076$,

$p < 0.05$), brand consciousness ($\beta = 0.117$, $p < 0.05$), and value consciousness ($\beta = 0.109$, $p < 0.05$) significantly mediated the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty, supporting H2, H4, H5, and H6. However, brand trust ($\beta = -0.016$, $p = 0.526$) and SMM attitude ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.677$) were not found to mediate the link between SMM and brand loyalty. Thus, H3 and H7 were rejected (see Table 5 and Fig. 2).

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for brand loyalty was 0.622, demonstrating that 62.2% of its variance was

Table 3 Discriminant validity (HTMT)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
(1) SMM attitude												
(2) BRQ	0.428											
(3) Brand consciousness	0.627	0.720										
(4) Brand loyalty	0.506	0.584	0.781									
(5) Brand satisfaction	0.607	0.530	0.771	0.842								
(6) Brand trust	0.661	0.292	0.463	0.515	0.732							
(7) SMM-customization	0.651	0.523	0.623	0.567	0.651	0.530						
(8) SMM-entertainment	0.797	0.555	0.657	0.569	0.641	0.519	0.739					
(9) SMM-interaction	0.660	0.477	0.628	0.520	0.614	0.459	0.654	0.809				
(10) SMM-trendiness	0.718	0.449	0.603	0.536	0.715	0.629	0.722	0.749	0.793			
(11) Value consciousness	0.561	0.420	0.666	0.751	0.799	0.563	0.453	0.572	0.575	0.609		
(12) SMM-WOM	0.625	0.673	0.795	0.617	0.661	0.458	0.786	0.782	0.778	0.668	0.500	

SMM social media marketing, *BRQ* brand relationship quality, *WOM* word-of-mouth

Table 4 Assessment of higher-order construct

Sub-dimension of SMM	Outer weight	*t* value	*p* value	Outer VIF
Customization	0.165	2.324*	<0.050	2.055
Entertainment	0.327	3.848**	<0.001	2.452
Interaction	0.066	0.921	0.179	2.345
Trendiness	0.380	4.501**	<0.001	2.211
Word-of-mouth	0.254	3.529**	<0.001	2.030

SMM social media marketing, *VIF* variance inflation factor

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.001$

explained by SMM and mediators. In tandem with this, SMM was found to explain 46.8% of the variance in brand satisfaction; 29.00% of the variance in brand trust; 30.50% of the variance in brand relationship quality; 42.40% of the variance in brand consciousness; 29.70% of the variance in value consciousness; and 50.70% of the variance in SMM attitude (Table 6).

To assess effect size (f^2), Cohen's (1988) guideline was used; where 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent trivial, small, and medium effect sizes, respectively. Effect size is calculated based on the R^2 change when a specified exogenous construct is omitted from the model. Looking at the f^2 values in Table 5, all the relationships showed substantive impact: there were three relationships with trivial effect sizes (i.e., SMM, brand trust and SMM attitude); three with small effect sizes (i.e., brand relationship quality, brand consciousness and value consciousness) and one with a medium effect size (i.e., brand satisfaction).

Next, the predictive relevance of the model was examined using the blindfolding procedure and PLSpredict (Chin et al. 2020; Shmueli et al. 2019). All the Q^2 values for the constructs were larger than 0, including that brand loyalty ($Q^2 = 0.386$), brand satisfaction ($Q^2 = 0.310$), brand trust ($Q^2 = 0.212$), brand relationship quality ($Q^2 = 0.238$), brand consciousness ($Q^2 = 0.236$), value consciousness ($Q^2 = 0.188$) and SMM attitude ($Q^2 = 0.379$) (refer Table 5) have predictive relevance for brand loyalty; thus, this study's model demonstrates predictive relevance

Table 5 Assessment of structural model and mediation effects

Path relationship	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Std. error	*t* value	*p* value	VIF	f^2	R^2	Q^2
H1) SMM → BL	− 0.018		0.072	0.254	0.400	3.131	0.001(T)	0.622	0.386
H2) SMM → Brand satisfaction → BL		0.319	0.055	5.822**	<0.001	3.428	0.168(M)	0.468	0.310
H3) SMM → Brand trust → BL		− 0.016	0.028	0.634	0.526	2.009	0.001(T)	0.290	0.212
H4) SMM → BRQ → BL		0.076	0.032	2.379*	<0.050	1.708	0.029(S)	0.305	0.238
H5) SMM → Brand consciousness → BL		0.117	0.045	2.596*	<0.050	2.436	0.035(S)	0.424	0.236
H6) SMM → Value consciousness → BL		0.109	0.037	2.968*	<0.050	2.042	0.052(S)	0.297	0.188
H7) SMM → SMM attitude → BL		− 0.018	0.044	0.416	0.677	2.339	0.001(T)	0.507	0.379

SMM social media marketing, *BL* brand loyalty, *BRQ* brand relationship quality, f^2 (*T* trivial, *S* small, *M* medium)

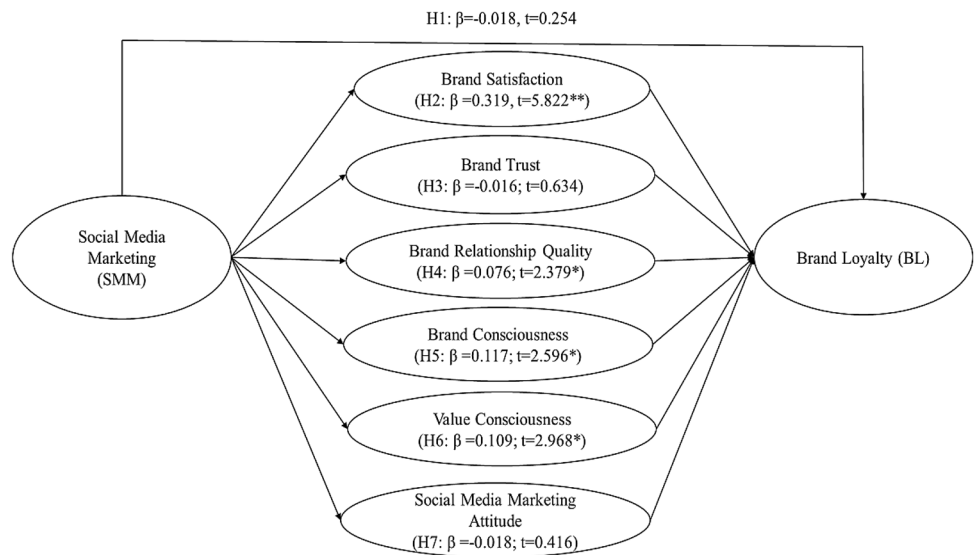*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.001$

Fig. 2 Results for research model

Table 6 PLSpredict

Construct	Item	PLS		LM		PLS-LM		Predictive power
		RMSE	Q^2_predict	RMSE	Q^2_predict	RMSE	Q^2_predict	
Brand satisfaction	BS1	0.869	0.351	0.870	0.349	− 0.001	0.002	High
	BS2	0.874	0.331	0.882	0.319	− 0.008	0.012	
	BS3	0.893	0.279	0.902	0.264	− 0.009	0.015	
	BS4	1.051	0.304	1.058	0.295	− 0.007	0.009	
	BS5	0.943	0.315	0.949	0.306	− 0.006	0.009	
Brand trust	BT1	0.594	0.229	0.600	0.211	− 0.006	0.018	Low
	BT2	0.587	0.236	0.584	0.244	0.003	− 0.008	
	BT3	0.646	0.169	0.643	0.176	0.003	− 0.007	
Brand relationship quality	BRQ1	1.885	0.217	1.871	0.228	0.014	− 0.011	Low
	BRQ2	1.918	0.219	1.897	0.236	0.021	− 0.017	
	BRQ3	1.876	0.287	1.911	0.260	− 0.035	0.027	
Brand consciousness	BC1	1.066	0.357	1.075	0.347	− 0.009	0.010	Medium
	BC2	0.991	0.328	1.011	0.302	− 0.02	0.026	
	BC3	1.481	0.138	1.481	0.138	0.000	0.000	
	BC4	1.28	0.133	1.247	0.177	0.033	− 0.044	
Value consciousness	VC1	1.059	0.186	1.051	0.200	0.008	− 0.014	Medium
	VC2	1.277	0.162	1.295	0.138	− 0.018	0.024	
	VC3	1.091	0.182	1.106	0.159	− 0.015	0.023	
	VC4	1.071	0.223	1.071	0.222	0.000	0.001	
SMM attitude	SMA1	0.747	0.384	0.737	0.400	0.010	− 0.016	Low
	SMA2	0.710	0.404	0.721	0.387	− 0.011	0.017	
	SMA3	0.793	0.391	0.787	0.401	0.006	− 0.010	

Low PLS < LM for minority of the items, *Medium* PLS < LM for majority of the items, *High* PLS < LM for all the items

(Geisser 1974; Stone 1974). Additionally, the model's predictive relevance for out of sample prediction was analysed using PLSpredict (Shmueli et al. 2019). According to the prediction guidelines, the results can be summarized thus: There is (i) low predictive power for brand trust, brand relationship quality, and SMM attitudes; (ii) medium predictive power for brand consciousness and value consciousness; and (iii) high predictive power for brand satisfaction.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings begins with the direct relationship between SMM and brand loyalty; followed by the mediated relationships of brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand relationship quality, brand consciousness, value consciousness, SMM attitude.

Firstly, despite many studies that have contended SMM to be a powerful tool to develop consumer relations and build brand loyalty among social media-based brand communities, (Ismail 2017; Godey et al. 2016; Ebrahim 2020), this study, however, found SMM to have no significant effect on brand loyalty ($H1 : \beta = -0.018, t = 0.254, p > 0.05$). This might have been due to the sample composition of this study, where most of the respondents (38%) were new followers of their preferred cinema's social media platforms (1–2 months). As noted by Jain et al. (2018a, b), building brand loyalty requires long term exposure to social media. In addition, the insignificant finding may be because a majority of the respondents were students with income levels below RM1000 per month. In Malaysia, this indicates low purchasing power; as such, the respondents may have been more price-sensitive and less loyal to any one cinema brand. Also, this indicated that SMM alone does not drive loyalty. It only drives loyalty if the SMM activities are targeted with clear objectives (i.e. enhance satisfaction, relationship quality, brand consciousness and value consciousness).

Secondly, this study found that, in the context of cinemas, brand satisfaction is a significant mediator that links SMM and brand loyalty ($H2 : \beta = 0.319, t = 5.822, p < 0.001$). This result parallels past studies that have reported the mediating role of brand satisfaction between consumer participation and brand loyalty (Ebrahim 2020; Jain et al. 2018a, b). Besides that, a similar study conducted by Huaman-Ramirez and Merunka (2019) also demonstrated that brand satisfaction does play an important mediating role in enhancing consumer involvement and loyalty.

In contrast to the previous work of Menidjel et al. (2017) which reported brand trust to be a critical mechanism underscoring brand loyalty, this study found results to the contrary (H3: $\beta = -0.016, t = 0.634, p > 0.05$). In the context of cinemas, we found that brand trust does not mediate the path between SMM and brand loyalty. This could be because most Malaysian cinemas' SMM strategies are similar, resulting in similar level of trust perceived across all cinemas. Accordingly, it is important for cinemas to implement unique SMM activities such as immediate responses to consumer inquiries, live chats, and consumer feedback sessions to strengthen consumer trust.

The bootstrapping findings indicate that brand relationship quality plays a mediating role between SMM and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.076, t = 2.379, p < 0.05$); that is, when organizations actively connect with consumers through various social media sites, the quality of the relationship between consumer and organization is enhanced, which leads to brand loyalty. This finding aligns with previous studies that evidenced the mediating role of brand relationship quality in the context of music festival attendees (Hudson et al. 2015); and franchise-based brand equity (Nyadzayo et al. 2016).

Next, the significant mediating effect of brand consciousness between SMM and brand loyalty ($H5 : \beta = 0.117, t = 2.596, p < 0.05$) was consistent with previous findings (Ismail 2017). In the context of cinemas, consumers are inclined to recognize the cinemas' symbols when these cinemas make frequent appearances on social media. By actively promoting themselves on social media, cinemas enhance consumers' consciousness and thereby increase brand loyalty.

Furthermore, value consciousness was identified as a significant mediator between SMM and brand loyalty ($H6 : \beta = 0.109, t = 2.968, p < 0.05$). This supports past research conducted by Ismail (2017) which demonstrated the mediating effect of value consciousness on consumers' positive behavior (i.e., loyalty). When cinema companies demonstrate their product value through SMM activities, consumers become convinced that they can obtain useful information by following cinema social media sites.

Lastly, a result of this study contradicted that of earlier studies (i.e., MacKenzie et al. 1986; Kujur and Singh 2017); namely, the mediating effect of SMM attitude between SMM and brand loyalty ($\beta = -0.018, t = 0.416, p > 0.05$) was found to be insignificant. This indicates that even though cinemas provide adequate information to consumers and receive positive attitudes from them via SMM, it is not sufficient to ensure loyalty behavior. Today, consumers are becoming more sophisticated because of the emergence of new technologies which give them instant access to information; and, especially, consumers can compare benefits across cinema websites. Consequently, consumers may like the SMM of a particular cinema but that does not limit them to compare and buy from other cinemas, the consumers of today are more likely to switch between vendors who offer them the best deal; loyalty might be a challenge in cinema context.

Overall, the results from PLSpredict indicated that brand satisfaction had a high predictive power in estimating brand loyalty behaviour. This concurs with those of Lin (2015) and Kuikka and Laukkanen (2012), which emphasize that the loyalty is based on the constant satisfaction that has emerged from the functions and performance of the brand. In addition, both brand and value consciousness presented a medium predictive power in forecasting brand loyalty in the context of cinema. These results agree with the contentions

of Ismail (2017) that value and brand consciousnesses will be substantially predicted in brand loyalty. On the one hand, our findings also agree with some earlier works which reported a low predictive power between brand trust, brand relationship quality and SMM attitudes on loyalty (Akrout and Nagy 2018; Khoa 2020).

Implications, limitations and future research directions

Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this study adds to SMM literature in the following ways. Firstly, earlier studies have identified the positive effect of SMM on brand loyalty (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Erdoğmuş and Cicek 2012; Tatar and Eren-Erdogmus 2016); but these researches have not expounded on the mediating factors that could enhance the relationship. Responding to the call for additional (empirical) research on how to utilize social media in achieving desirable outcomes (i.e., Ebrahim 2020; Sohail et al. 2020; Irshad et al. 2020), this study offers a framework for incorporating mechanisms to build effective SMM activities, based on the U&G theory. In relation to social media, brand satisfaction, brand relationship quality, brand consciousness and value consciousness are important gratifications that can enhance brand loyalty.

Secondly, this study shows that mediating factors are crucial in enhancing the path between SMM and brand loyalty. Specifically, brand satisfaction, brand relationship quality, brand consciousness, and value consciousness are key mechanisms that should not be ignored, in the context of cinemas. Apart from that, our works also highlighted brand satisfaction, brand consciousness and value consciousness are substantial factors (i.e. high and medium predictive power) that can predict in brand loyalty. In particular, the outcomes of this study offer a clearer understanding of specific mechanisms that could influence the relationship between SMM activities and brand loyalty.

Finally, since most SMM research have been carried out in developed countries such as United Kingdom, United States and China (e.g. Denizci Guillet et al. 2016; Eid et al. 2019), this study offers a fresh perspective of SMM activities in a developing country—Malaysia. This study extends the extant literature to examine multiple mediators that affect brand loyalty in the cinema industry among consumers in Malaysia.

Managerial implications

The findings of the research are relevant and important to practitioners, especially marketing managers of cinemas in Malaysia. Firstly, this study reveals that brand satisfaction had a high predictive power that can facilitate the development of brand loyalty of consumers through SMM. Specifically, managers of cinemas are encouraged to use SMM to manage consumer expectations. For example, to provide convenience to the consumers, managers need to ensure that all the information on their social media sites (e.g., movie dates, ticket availability, movie promotions) are accurate; and this, in turn, will enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty to the cinema. Apart from this, satisfaction can also be developed by introducing attractive loyalty programs such as rewarding consumers with points for each purchase, and providing non-monetary incentives for repeat customers.

Secondly, brand relationship quality should not be ignored when stimulating brand loyalty. The consumers of today, are ready to engage with organizations beyond the mere purchase of goods and services. This is a clear sign that building relationships should be the cornerstone of any organization's social media marketing strategy. Ideally, SMM should be included in relationship quality management efforts. For instance, marketers can use social media sites (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc.) as platforms to increase consumer awareness, provide memorable experiences, share interesting and/or valuable information and develop brand identity to drive desired loyalty.

Thirdly, since brand consciousness had a medium predictive power in brand loyalty through SMM activities, managers of cinemas should constantly reach out to consumers by sharing cinema information that are designed to raise brand consciousness. For example, managers can promote their brand names, logos and/or symbols on newly created merchandise like t-shirts, stationery, umbrellas and give them free of charge to loyal followers in exchange for their participation on social media; where activities such as these could enhance the consumers' consciousness toward the cinema and make the cinema a socially recognized symbol.

Finally, indifferent consumers can be converted to loyal consumers if they are convinced of the high benefits in a cinema's SMM activity, supported by a medium predictive power between value consciousness and brand loyalty. In contemporary markets, consumers constantly seek out ways to make better, beneficial buying decisions. It is important for cinema managers to understand what consumers value (e.g. value for money, premium quality, special attention) by paying attention to their feedback; for example, managers are advised to use different social media platforms when dealing with different consumer segments; managers also have a responsibility to be transparent and provide consumers with reliable information to make beneficial decision. Thus, managers should strive to provide consumers with outstanding SMM experiences that resonate with the company's core values.

Conclusion and future research directions

Social media have become an integral part of marketing strategy. With the intense competition in the social media marketing market, it is important for business operators to figure out proper ways of engaging consumers on social media to accomplish brand loyalty. As such, our study adds value to the ongoing literature that attempts to examine the mediating effects that enhance the effect between SMM and brand loyalty. The findings evidenced that, in the context of cinemas, brand loyalty can be enhanced through mediating effects of brand satisfaction, brand relationship quality, brand consciousness, and value consciousness.

This study is not without limitations that affect its generalizability. The first issue is sample bias: more than 80% of the study respondents were aged below 25, and almost 70% were females, resulting in an imbalanced demographic distribution. To reduce sample bias, future studies are encouraged to improve the representativeness of the sample. In fact, researchers can use quota sampling (instead of judgmental sampling) to ensure that gender and age categories are fairly distributed. Quite importantly, moderators were not explored in this study. The examination of moderators such as brand type, culture, consumer characteristics, and community facilities on social media is expected to engender a deeper understanding of the link between SMM and brand loyalty. Lastly, this study focused on a specific country—Malaysia. Comparative studies between developed and developing countries should lead to more interesting findings because the objectives of SMM activities may be different. It is therefore recommended for future research to investigate the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty, between countries of differing economic development.

Appendix

See Table 7.

Table 7 Measurement item

Measurement item	Source
Social media marketing	Kim and Ko (2012)
(i) Customization	
My preferred cinema's social media offers a customised information search	
My preferred cinema's social media provides customised service	
(ii) Entertainment	
Using my preferred cinema's social media is fun	
Content of my preferred cinema's social media seems interesting	
(iii) Interaction	
My preferred cinema's social media enable information sharing with others	
Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through my preferred cinema's social media	
It is easy to provide opinion through my preferred cinema's social media	
(iv) Trendiness	
Content of my preferred cinema's social media is the newest information	
Using my preferred cinema's social media is very trendy	
(v) Word of mouth	
I would like to pass information on brand, product, or services from my preferred cinema's social media to my friends	
I would like to upload content from my preferred cinema's social media on my Facebook or Instagram	

Table 7 (continued)

Measurement item	Source
Brand satisfaction	Fornell (1992)
Overall, I am satisfied with my preferred cinema	
Being a customer of my preferred cinema has been a good choice for me	
My preferred cinema has lived up to my expectations	
My preferred cinema is concerned with what movie that is the best for me	
My preferred cinema offers me good solutions when I want to go to watch movie	
Brand trust	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001)
My preferred cinema is an honest brand	
I trust my preferred cinema	
My preferred cinema is safe	
Brand relationship quality	Algesheimer et al. (2010)
My preferred cinema says a lot about the kind of person I am	
My preferred cinema's image and my self-image are similar in many respects	
My preferred cinema plays an important role in my life	
Brand consciousness	Sproles and Sproles (1990)
I pay attention to my preferred cinema	
My preferred cinema's name tells me something about the quality of the services	
Sometimes I am willing to pay more money for my preferred cinema because of its brand name	
My preferred cinema 's services that cost a lot of money are good quality	
Value consciousness	Lichtenstein et al. (1993)
I am very concerned about low prices, but I am equally concerned about my preferred cinema service quality	
When watch a movie, I compare the prices of different cinemas to be sure I get the best value for the money	
When having movie in my preferred cinema, I always try to maximize the quality I get for the money I spend	
When I go to watch movie in my preferred cinema, I like to be sure that I am getting my money's worth	
Social media marketing attitude	Davis et al. (1989)
I like my preferred cinema's social media	
I respect my preferred cinema's social media	
I love my preferred cinema's social media	
Brand loyalty	Aaker and Equity (1991)
I would rather stick with my preferred cinema where I usually choose to go to watch movie than try other cinemas, I am not very sure of	
I have certain types of cinemas that I always choose to have my movie	
I consider myself to be loyal to my preferred cinema	
I feel confidence in my preferred cinema that I always choose to watch movie	

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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