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Examining the Mediating Role of Social Media Engagement on Brand Loyalty: A Case Study of iPhone Users

Análisis del papel mediador de la interacción en las redes sociales en la lealtad a la marca: un estudio de caso de usuarios de iPhone

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mediating role of social media engagement on the relationship between brand-related factors and brand loyalty among iPhone users in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, it examines how perceived brand quality, customer satisfaction, and brand trust influence brand loyalty, both directly and indirectly through social media engagement. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from 344 iPhone users and analyzed using Smart PLS-SEM. The findings support all ten proposed hypotheses, demonstrating that perceived brand quality, customer satisfaction, and brand trust positively affect brand loyalty. Furthermore, these factors also positively influence social media engagement, which in turn strengthens their relationship with brand loyalty. The study confirms the significant mediating role of social media engagement, highlighting its importance in building and maintaining brand loyalty among iPhone users. These findings offer valuable insights for marketers seeking to leverage social media strategies to enhance brand loyalty in the Saudi Arabian market.

Keywords: Perceived Brand Quality; Customer Satisfaction; Brand Trust; Social Medial Engagement; Brand Loyalty; iPhone.

RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga el papel mediador de la interacción en las redes sociales en la relación entre los factores relacionados con la marca y la lealtad a la marca entre los usuarios de iPhone en Arabia Saudita. En concreto, examina cómo la calidad percibida de la marca, la satisfacción del cliente y la confianza en la marca influyen en la lealtad a la marca, tanto directa como indirectamente a través de la interacción en las redes sociales. Utilizando un enfoque cuantitativo, se recopilaron datos de 344 usuarios de iPhone y se analizaron utilizando Smart PLS-SEM. Los hallazgos respaldan las diez hipótesis propuestas, demostrando que la calidad percibida de la marca, la satisfacción del cliente y la confianza en la marca afectan positivamente la lealtad a la marca. Además, estos factores también influyen positivamente en la interacción en las redes sociales, lo que a su vez fortalece su relación con la lealtad a la marca. El estudio confirma el importante papel mediador de la interacción en las redes sociales, destacando su importancia para generar y mantener la lealtad a la marca entre los usuarios de iPhone. Estos hallazgos ofrecen información valiosa para los especialistas en marketing que buscan aprovechar las estrategias de las redes sociales para mejorar la lealtad a la marca en el mercado de Arabia Saudita.

Palabras clave: Calidad de Marca Percibida; Satisfacción del Cliente; Confianza en la Marca; Interacción en Redes Sociales; Lealtad a la Marca; iPhone.

INTRODUCTION

In today's hyper-connected world, brand loyalty, particularly in the fiercely competitive technology sector, is no longer secured through product innovation or competitive pricing.[1] Instead, it increasingly hinges on strong emotional connections and fostering active engagement with consumers.[2] Social media platforms have emerged as critical areas for these interactions, providing brands with unprecedented opportunities to connect with their target audiences, build communities, and foster lasting relationships.[3,4]

Among the many players in the tech landscape, Apple stands out for its exceptionally loyal customer base. This loyalty to the brand, particularly among iPhone users, is often attributed to a combination of factors, including perceived high quality, sleek design, and seamless user experience.[5] While existing research has established the positive impact of brand attributes like perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and brand trust on loyalty, the specific mediating role of social media engagement in this relationship, particularly within the context of iPhone users, remains underexplored. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how these core brand attributes influence loyalty, both directly and indirectly, through the mediating role of social media engagement.

This study will make several significant contributions. Theoretically, it will be expected to enhance our understanding of the relationship between brand perceptions, social media engagement, and brand loyalty within a technology-driven consumer context. Empirically, the study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on consumer behaviour in the digital age. Practically, the findings will provide valuable insights for marketers and brand managers seeking to leverage social media effectively to strengthen brand loyalty among consumers. By understanding the mediating role of social media engagement, companies can develop more targeted and impactful strategies to enhance brand experiences and foster relationships with their customers.

Hypotheses development

Perceived brand quality refers to a customer's subjective opinion of an iPhone's overall excellence, encompassing aspects like design, performance, durability, and features.[6] While brand loyalty signifies a customer's strong attachment to the iPhone brand, leading to repeat purchases and a resistance to switching to competitor products.[7] However, when iPhone users perceive the brand to have high quality, they are more likely to develop brand loyalty.[8] This is because high perceived quality often translates to satisfying user experiences.[9] Positive experiences foster trust and a belief that the brand consistently delivers on its promises.[10] Consequently, users become more attached to the brand and are more likely to remain loyal.[11] On the other hand, empirical studies consistently show that consumers are more likely to engage with brands they perceive as high-quality on social media.[12,13,14] This positive correlation is rooted in the trust and credibility associated with high-quality brands. Consumers are more likely to pay attention to and engage with content from brands they believe offer superior products or services.[15] Therefore:

H1: Perceived brand quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users.

H4: Perceived brand quality has a positive effect on social media engagement.

Customer satisfaction measures how happy iPhone users are with their overall experience with the brand, including product, service, and interactions with the company.[16] Customer satisfaction is a key driver of brand loyalty.[17] Satisfied iPhone users are more likely to become repeat customers. This is because satisfaction indicates that the brand is meeting their needs and expectations.[18] This positive reinforcement strengthens the customer brand relationship, leading to increased loyalty.[19,20] Satisfied customers are more likely to become brand advocates, and this advocacy often manifests on social media.[21] When customers have positive experiences with a brand, they are more inclined to share those experiences, leave positive reviews, and engage in positive conversations about the brand online.[22,23,24] This positive sentiment contributes to increased social media engagement. Thus:

H2: Customer satisfaction positively affects brand loyalty among iPhone users.

H5: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on social media engagement.

Brand trust reflects the confidence iPhone users have in the brand's reliability, integrity, and ability to deliver on its promises.[25,26] Moreover, trust is fundamental to building strong, robust relationships, and the same applies to the relationship between a brand and its customers.[27] When iPhone users trust the brand, they are more likely to be loyal.[28] This trust reduces the perceived risk associated with choosing the brand, making users more comfortable with repeat purchases and less likely to consider alternatives.[29] Moreover, brand trust is a powerful driver of customer loyalty and engagement.[30] When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to follow its social media accounts, engage with its content, and participate in brand-related conversations.[22] This trust fosters a sense of connection and encourages ongoing interaction, leading to higher levels of social media engagement.[31] Based on that, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3: Brand trust positively affects brand loyalty among iPhone users.

H6: Brand trust has a positive effect on social media engagement.

Several empirical research suggests that social media engagement can be a significant driver of brand loyalty.

(30,32,33) When customers actively engage with a brand on social media through liking, sharing, commenting, or creating content, it strengthens their emotional connection with the brand.(34) This increased engagement fosters a sense of belonging and community among customers leading to higher levels of brand loyalty.(35) Active participation in brand-related conversations and experiences on social media can translate into offline loyalty, as engaged customers are more likely to choose the brand, recommend it to others, and remain resilient to competitive offers.(36) Therefore:

H7: Social medial engagement has a positive significant impact on brand loyalty.

Numerous studies suggest that social media engagement plays a mediating role in the relationship between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty.(37,38,39) While high perceived brand quality can initially attract customers, it's the active engagement on social media that solidifies their loyalty.(40) Customers who perceive a brand as high-quality are more likely to engage with its social media content.(41) This engagement provides opportunities for positive reinforcement, community building, and brand advocacy, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty.(35) Therefore, social media engagement acts as a crucial link between a customer's positive perception of a brand's quality and their commitment and loyalty to that brand.(15,42,43) Thus:

H8: Social medial engagement mediates the relationship between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty.

The relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty is significantly enhanced by social media engagement.(30,44) While satisfied customers are more likely to be loyal, social media provides a platform for this satisfaction to translate into deeper engagement and stronger loyalty.(45) When customers have positive experiences with a brand, they are more likely to engage with the brand on social media, sharing their satisfaction and connecting with other like-minded individuals.(46) This active engagement fosters a sense of community and strengthens the emotional relationship between the customer and the brand, ultimately leading to higher levels of brand loyalty.(47) Therefore:

H9: Social medial engagement mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

The positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty is significantly escalated through the mediating role of social media engagement.(34) While brand trust represents the foundation for loyalty, social media provides a dynamic space where this trust can be transformed into loyalty.(48,49) When customers trust a brand, they are more likely to engage with it on social media, actively participating in brand-related conversations and seeking out information and experiences.(50) This active engagement strengthens the emotional relationship between the customer and the brand, leading to higher levels of brand loyalty.(51) Therefore:

H10: Social medial engagement mediates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing an online survey to examine iPhone users in Jordan. The survey instrument disseminated randomly through various social media platforms aimed to validate the proposed conceptual framework and test the research hypotheses. This randomized distribution aimed to minimize sampling bias and ensure that the findings accurately reflect the broader population of iPhone users in Jordan. Out of 355 complete questionnaires, 11 were excluded due to incomplete data or quality concerns. The remaining 344 responses provided a robust sample size for rigorous statistical analysis. Table 1 provides a demographic overview of the study's participants (N=344), presenting the frequency and percentage distributions for age, educational level, and gender. The majority of participants were male (58,4 %), representing a diverse age range with a noticeable concentration in the younger demographics. Educationally, the sample was highly educated, with a significant portion holding a diploma or bachelor's degree (67,2 %).

Table 1. Demographic profile								
Age			**Educational Level**			**Gender**		
Category	**Freq #**	**%**	**Category**	**Freq #**	**%**	**Category**	**Freq #**	**%**
18-26	118	34,3	Secondary School	39	11,3	Male	201	58,4
27-35	86	25,0	Diploma or Bachelor	231	67,2	Female	143	41,6
36-44	68	19,8	Postgraduate	74	21,5	Total	344	100,0
Age > 44	72	20,9	Total	419	100,0			
Total	344	100,0						

RESULTS

The study employed a statistical approach to assess the reliability and validity of the research model. Following established guidelines for scale development, the analysis incorporated a range of measures, including composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha (α), and average variance extracted. The results, presented in Table 2, demonstrate strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0,863 to 0,915, well

above the recommended 0,70 threshold. Similarly, CR scores ranged from 0,831 to 0,902, while AVE values all exceeded the 0,50 benchmark, indicating satisfactory convergent validity and supporting the overall robustness of the measurement model.

Table 2. Convergent validity					
Construct	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Perceived Brand Quality	PBQ1	0,778	0,915	0,831	0,836
	PBQ2	0,842			
	PBQ3	0,816			
	PBQ4	0,798			
	PBQ5	0,824			
Customer Satisfaction	CS1	0,849	0,886	0,849	0,848
	CS2	0,896			
	CS3	0,876			
	CS4	0,839			
Brand Trust	BT1	0,914	0,863	0,902	0,879
	BT2	0,897			
	BT3	0,841			
	BT4	0,897			
Social Media Engagement	SME1	0,915	0,894	0,879	0,911
	SME2	0,908			
	SME3	0,926			
	SME4	0,894			
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0,933	0,872	0,874	0,861
	BL2	0,899			
	BL3	0,915			
	BL4	0,845			

Table 3 displays the results of a statistical test examining the relationships between five constructs: Perceived Brand Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Trust, Social Media Engagement, and Brand Loyalty. The specific test used, as indicated by the table structure and values, is a Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio analysis. This technique is commonly employed to assess discriminant validity, which determines whether the constructs are distinct from each other rather than overlapping or measuring similar concepts.[52] The values within the table, all falling below the common threshold of 0,85, suggest strong discriminant validity among the five constructs. This indicates that each construct captures a unique aspect of the research model.

Table 3. HTMT test					
Construct	PBQ	CS	BT	SME	BL
Perceived Brand Quality (PBQ)					
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0,314				
Brand Trust (BT)	0,445	0,325			
Social Media Engagement (SME)	0,297	0,209	0,341		
Brand Loyalty (BL)	0,159	0,244	0,219	0,311	

Table 4 illuminates the interconnectedness of perceived brand quality, customer satisfaction, brand trust, social media engagement, and brand loyalty. The analysis reveals that strong positive perceptions of brand quality (ß = 0,354, p < 0,001), coupled with high levels of customer satisfaction (ß = 0,269, p < 0,001) and brand trust (ß = 0,468, p < 0,001), directly foster brand loyalty. Furthermore, these three drivers also cultivate robust social media engagement – perceived brand quality (ß = 0,069, p = 0,000), customer satisfaction (ß = 0,397, p = 0,000), and brand trust (ß = 0,115, p = 0,001) all have significant positive effects. This heightened

engagement emerges as a powerful mediating force (ß = 0,429, p = 0,000), supporting the positive impact of brand perceptions on loyalty. For instance, the relationship between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty is significantly mediated by social media engagement (ß = 0,098, p = 0,000). Similarly, customer satisfaction's influence on brand loyalty is amplified through social media engagement (ß = 0,254, p = 0,004). Brand trust also benefits from this mediating effect, with its impact on loyalty strengthened through social media engagement (ß = 0,081, p = 0,009). These findings underscore the crucial role of social media engagement as a bridge between positive brand experiences and enduring customer loyalty.

Table 4. Path coefficient results						
Hypo. No	Path Analysis	Beta Value	STDEV	T-value	P-value	Result
Direct Effect						
H1	PBQ > BL	0,354	0,073	1,465	0,000	Yes
H2	CS > BL	0,269	0,088	2,334	0,001	Yes
H3	BT > BL	0,468	0,099	2,145	0,003	Yes
H4	PBQ > SME	0,069	0,101	5,360	0,000	Yes
H5	CS > SEM	0,397	0,091	10,641	0,000	Yes
H6	BT > SEM	0,115	0,071	7,159	0,001	Yes
H7	SME > BL	0,429	0,068	4,308	0,000	Yes
Indirect Effect						
H8	PBQ > SEM > BL	0,098	0,088	5,109	0,000	Yes
H9	CS > SEM > BL	0,254	0,110	11,036	0,004	Yes
H10	BT > SEM > BL	0,371	0,081	8,197	0,009	Yes

DISCUSSION

This study's primary goal was to investigate the mediating role of social media engagement in the relationship between perceived brand quality, customer satisfaction, brand trust, and brand loyalty among iPhone users. The findings offer valuable insights into the complex interplay of these factors. The results supported H1, indicating a positive relationship between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty among iPhone users. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of quality in shaping brand loyalty. For instance, a study by [16] demonstrated a similar positive correlation between perceived quality and loyalty of I Phone users, suggesting that this relationship holds across different contexts.

H2, proposing a positive link between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, was also supported. This finding aligns with several studies highlighting the strong association between satisfaction and loyalty.[53,54,55] Such studies found that higher levels of customer satisfaction predicted stronger brand loyalty. Our results reinforce this established relationship within the context of iPhone users. The study also found support for H3, which demonstrated a positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. Trust is widely recognized as a key driver of loyalty.[56] Research by [57] demonstrated that consumers who trust a brand are more likely to exhibit loyalty behaviors, such as repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth. Our findings corroborate this notion among iPhone users.

Hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 explored the impact of perceived brand quality, customer satisfaction, and brand trust, respectively, on social media engagement. The results confirmed all three hypotheses, indicating that these brand-related factors positively influence engagement on social media platforms. This suggests that users who perceive a brand positively are more likely to engage with the brand on social media. H7, which proposed a positive relationship between social media engagement and brand loyalty, was also supported. This finding supports the growing importance of social media in shaping consumer behavior and fostering brand loyalty. Finally, the study found support for the mediating role of social media engagement. H8, H9, and H10, which posited that social media engagement mediates the relationships between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty, customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, and brand trust and brand loyalty, respectively, were all confirmed. This suggests that social media engagement acts as a conduit through which these brand-related factors influence brand loyalty. While some studies have examined the direct effects of these factors on loyalty, our findings highlight the importance of considering the mediating role of social media engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the mediating role of social media engagement in the relationship between perceived brand quality, customer satisfaction, brand trust, and brand loyalty among iPhone users. The findings confirm

the significant influence of these factors on brand loyalty, both directly and indirectly through social media engagement. Specifically, the study found that perceived brand quality, customer satisfaction, and brand trust all positively influence brand loyalty. Furthermore, these factors also positively affect social media engagement, which in turn strengthens the relationship between these factors and brand loyalty. This highlights the crucial role of social media engagement as a mediating variable in the formation of brand loyalty among iPhone users.

The study's findings have important implications for both researchers and practitioners. For researchers, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on the impact of social media on consumer behavior and brand loyalty. It supports the need to consider the mediating role of social media engagement when examining the relationship between brand-related factors and loyalty. For practitioners, particularly marketers, the findings suggest that fostering social media engagement among customers can be a valuable strategy for strengthening brand loyalty. By encouraging customers to actively participate in brand-related social media activities, companies can leverage the mediating effect of engagement to enhance the impact of brand quality, satisfaction, and trust on loyalty.

However, the study also has limitations. The focus on iPhone users limits the generalizability of the findings to other brands and consumer segments. Future research should explore the mediating role of social media engagement in different contexts, including other product categories and cultural settings. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases. Future research could incorporate behavioral data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media engagement and brand loyalty. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between brand-related factors, social media engagement, and brand loyalty among iPhone users. The findings suggest that social media engagement plays a crucial mediating role, reinforcing the importance of social media strategies in building and maintaining strong brand loyalty.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST
None.

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