

Linking social media marketing activities with brand love

The mediating role of self-expressive brands

Mediating role
of self-
expressive
brands

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Abstract

Purpose – This research aims to investigate the link between social media marketing (SMM) activities and brand love. It further investigates the mediating impact of self-expressive brands (inner and social) between the relationships of SMM activities and brand love, which in turn impact brand loyalty. Using the context provided by Facebook, the author contributes in three ways to the nascent marketing literature: by linking SMM activities with brand love, by investigating the mediating impact of self-expressive brands between SMM activities and brand love and by investigating the impact of brand love on brand loyalty.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a sample of 400 followers of Facebook pages, data were collected and analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Findings – The findings reveal that SMM activities positively affect self-expressive brands (inner and social), which in turn impact brand love. The author also finds that brand love positively affects brand loyalty. The author further finds that self-expressive brand (inner) fully mediates the relationship between SMM activities and brand love, whereas self-expressive brand (social) partially mediates this relationship.

Originality/value – Previous researchers neither have the chance to link SMM activities with brand love nor to explain its role as an antecedent to self-expressive brand. Therefore, the author contributes to nascent literature by linking and investigating the mediating impact of self-expressive brands between the relationships of SMM activities and brand love which in turn impact brand loyalty.

Keywords Brand love, Brand loyalty, Self-expressive brands, Social media marketing activities

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The notion of brand love is an essential one that enhances brand attachment, brand emotions, brand evaluations, brand passion and brand declarations (Albert *et al.*, 2008); it thus helps build consumer–brand relationships (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Kohli *et al.*, 2014; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Batra *et al.*, 2012). Previous research (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Sternberg, 1997) has asserted that brand love, brand liking, brand yearning and brand decision and commitment are related to brand love. Within the context of online network-based communities, researchers (Wallace *et al.*, 2014, 2017; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015) have considered the “like” function of Facebook pages as an expression of brand love from consumers who follow the brand page; it thus reflects their emotional brand relationships. I observed that few studies have investigated the notion of brand love and its antecedents (Alalwan *et al.*, 2017; Wallace *et al.*, 2014, 2017; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015). For instance, branding scholars have identified self-expressive brands (inner and social; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), social identity (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015) and self-congruence (Wallace *et al.*, 2017) as the main antecedents of brand love. Furthermore, within the same context of online communities, few studies have investigated the impact of the notion of social media marketing (SMM) activities (second-order) on brand equity and consumer responses (Godey *et al.*, 2016) or on



customer equity dimensions (Kim and Ko, 2012). However, the nascent branding literature within online communities has not attempted to link the impact of SMM activities (entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word of mouth [WOM]) on self-expressive brands, which in turn influence brand love. What has been accomplished in this area is the linking of some SMM activities with brand love, such as relying on Facebook likes and fans to measure consumer engagement and linking them with self-expressive brands (Wallace *et al.*, 2014) or investigating the link between social interactive engagement and brand love (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015). Because of the lack of clear understanding of the relationship between SMM activities, self-expressive brands (inner and social) and brand love within the social media context, I was motivated to empirically investigate the nature of the link among these constructs. I therefore propose that SMM activities should be the main antecedents of self-expressive brands. Using online network-based communities, the current research aims:

- to investigate how SMM activities influence self-expressive brands (inner and social);
- to confirm the impact of self-expressive brands on brand love;
- to test the impact of brand love on brand loyalty; and
- to investigate the mediation effect of self-expressive brands between SMM activities and brand love.

2. Literature review

Within the context of online communities, the limited number of studies on SMM activities has driven this research on the opportunities that social media can provide for brand building. In particular, previous studies have contributed to the nascent literature by investigating the impact of SMM activities (entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and WOM) on brand equity, consumer behavior (Godey *et al.*, 2016) and customer equity dimensions (Kim and Ko, 2012). However, the study of neither Kim and Ko (2012) nor the Godey *et al.* (2016) study investigated the impact of SMM activities on brand love or link it with SMM activities. On the other hand, previous research on brand love has investigated the impact of some antecedents such as self-expressive brands (inner and social, Wallace *et al.*, 2014), social identity (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015) and self-congruence (Wallace *et al.*, 2017) on brand love. However, the conceptualization and measurement of this notion are still in their early stages in the marketing literature and in particular in the consumption context (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, a deep look at the previous research indicates that they had neither the chance to link SMM activities with brand love nor to explain its role as an antecedent to self-expressive brands. I have therefore aimed to contribute to the nascent literature by linking and investigating the impact of SMM activities on self-expressive brands and brand love, which in turn impact brand loyalty.

2.1 Social media marketing activities

Recently, many online retailers have begun to use social media communities to build brand-relationships with their target audience (Kelly *et al.*, 2010). Within the social media branding context, SMM activities, as a way to communicate with customers, have the power to enhance brand image (Tsai and Men, 2013), brand equity (Godey *et al.*, 2016), customer responses (Godey *et al.*, 2016), customer equity (Kim and Ko, 2012) and brand success (Phan *et al.*, 2011). For instance, previous research (Kapferer, 2012; Kim and Ko, 2012; Godey *et al.*, 2016) on Facebook pages posits the positive impact of the videos and presentations posted

there on brand equity. Online retailers therefore use social media to enhance their consumers' experiences via social networks (such as Facebook pages) to convert them into advertisers, enhance bonds with them and to help them make decisions (Arenas-Gaitan *et al.*, 2013).

In attempting to conceptualize the main activities that enhance brand success using online communities, previous research (Kim and Ko, 2012; Godey *et al.*, 2016) has identified five dimensions of SMM activities: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and WOM. Entertainment is considered one of the main drivers to use social media (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2009); it motivates users of social networks to browse them for relaxation and escapism (Courtois *et al.*, 2009; Manthiou *et al.*, 2013; Park *et al.*, 2009). Interaction in social media has changed the way communication between a brand and its users works (Gallaughier and Ransbotham, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and facilitates consumer discussions (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008) of products and brands (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). According to Zhu and Chen (2015), social media interaction can be divided into two groups: profile-based activities (on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and others), which center on individual members with related information and topics, and content-based activities (on Flickr, Instagram, YouTube and others), centering on social media discussions, comments and contents which consumers like. Godey *et al.* (2016, p. 5835) define interaction via social media as the sharing of information and the exchange of opinions with others.

Muntinga *et al.* (2011) indicate that trendiness is the ability of social media to spread trendy information through four sub-motivations: surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information and inspiration. Godey *et al.* (2016, p. 5835) describe trendiness in terms of the dissemination of the latest and trendiest information about brands.

Within the social media context, Godey *et al.* (2016, p. 5835) describe customization as the extent to which social media channels provide customized information search and a customized service. Schmenner (1986) maintains that customization reflects the degree of individual preferences. Consumers' ability to personalize social media sites thus often enhances brand affinity and loyalty (Martin and Todorov, 2010). Zhu and Chen (2015) identify two types of post customization: customized messages (e.g. Facebook posts) targeting a specific target audience and broadcasts (e.g. tweets on Twitter) that target interested users.

Within the social media context, Godey *et al.* (2016, p. 5835) assert that WOM refers to the extent to which consumers of brands pass along information and upload content on social media. Brown (2011) asserts that social media has the ability to enhance users' ability to evaluate products, hence increasing WOM. WOM has stronger credibility, empathy and more relevance due to consumers' ability to pass on brand-related information to their contacts without restrictions (Kim and Ko, 2012; Jansen *et al.*, 2009). Chu and Kim (2011) classified the use of social media WOM in terms of three perspectives: opinion-seeking (searching for information and passing it on to others), opinion-giving by opinion leaders (who impact users' attitude and behavior) and opinion-passing behavior (forwarding information).

2.2 Brand love

As an emotional dimension of brand-consumer relationships, brand love is grounded on the triangular theory of love (Sternberg 1986, 1997) and the interpersonal theory of love (Fournier, 1998); it is considered a broader construct in the branding literature. According to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, p. 81) brand love is "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name". However, the conceptualization and measurement of this notion are still in their early stages in the

marketing literature and in particular in the consumption context (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015). Brand love is accordingly related to three components: brand liking, brand yearning and brand decision/commitment (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Sternberg, 1997). Brand love encompasses attachment, emotions, evaluations, passionate, positive evaluation, declaration and reflects a stronger consumer–brand relationship of love for a particular brand (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). The nascent literature (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Kohli *et al.*, 2014; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Wallace *et al.*, 2014) on brand love explains its importance in enhancing positive emotions and attitudes toward the brand and thus facilitates brand acceptance, brand loyalty, WOM, consumer–brand relationships, marketing opportunities and purchase intention, as well as decreasing price sensitivity. Within the context of online network-based communities, the “like button” and the “heart-shaped icon” (such as on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram) can be considered forms of brand love and thus represent positive emotional consumer–brand relationships. Previous research (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Thomson *et al.*, 2005) maintains that brand love is based on a variety of affective-laden perceptions (e.g. self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviors, positive emotional connections, a long-term relationship, positive overall attitude and separation distress).

3. Research model and hypotheses

Figure 1 shows the relationships between these research constructs – namely, SMM activity dimensions (second-order), self-expressive brands (inner and social), brand love and brand loyalty.

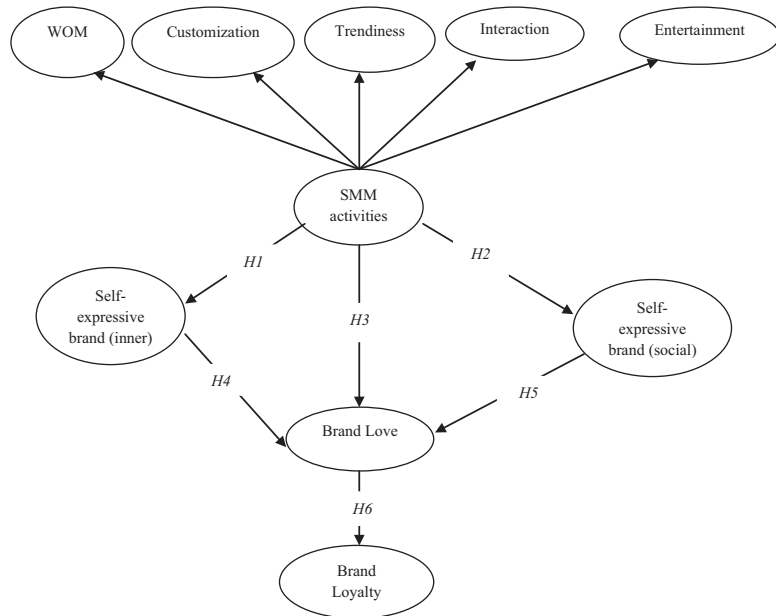


Figure 1.
The conceptual
framework

Source: Adapted from Wallace *et al.* (2014); Kim and Ko (2012); Godey *et al.* (2016)

3.1 Social media marketing activities, self-expressive and Brand love

Previous research on the link between SMM activities and self-expressive brands has been very limited and lacks clear results. However, self-connection sheds some light on this relationship and helps to understand the nascent literature. For instance, Fournier (1998, 364) posits that self-connections with both self and others are related to “the degree to which the brand delivers on important identity concerns, tasks or themes”. Research suggests that such experience is usually coupled with emotional connection and excitement (Albert and Merunka, 2013). Thus, social media members actively interact with the brands they have liked on Facebook to share their experiential experiences (Belk, 2013). Furthermore, as part of SMM activities, consumers liking a brand on Facebook could be attributed to several reasons, such as having a value-expression, as the liked brand is often associated with community members, seeking more relevant information and constructing identity (Roblek *et al.*, 2013; Parker, 2012). Cha (2009) maintains that there is a relationship between entertainment level, using social media, and customers’ intention to continue browsing on social media. As a result of using SMM activities, consumers may begin to spread WOM to their community members and other friends (Godey *et al.*, 2016) to enhance their self-expressivity toward the brand – in particular, if the liked brand is characterized by customization and trendiness. Huber *et al.* (2015) assert that there is a positive relationship between hedonic, utilitarian values and the inner-self and social-self. Richard and Guppy (2014) assert that consumers’ liking for a brand often reflects their willingness to receive information and updates regarding the brand. As a result of practicing SMM activities, I expect that consumers will become more involved with the brand and thus facilitate expressing their selves to specific brands and sending messages to others “publicly and deliberately” about the brands (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012, p. 397). For instance, consumers’ interaction with a particular brand, in the form of liking it on Facebook, is a tool that informs friends on Facebook about the brand and hence affects consumers’ self-congruence (Wallace *et al.*, 2017). I therefore maintain that the five dimensions of SMM activities are among the main antecedents of self-expressivity. I thus hypothesize:

- H1. Perceived SMM activities have a positive and direct impact on self-expressive brands (inner-self).
- H2. Perceived SMM activities have a positive and direct impact on self-expressive brands (social-self).

3.2 The mediating role of self-expressive brands

Building consumer–brand relationships within the context of social media is considered essential (Fournier and Lee, 2009) on account of its benefits, which include facilitating an interactive communication (Evans, 2012) and providing appropriate levels of search and information (Merisavo and Raulas, 2004; Laroche *et al.*, 2013). Such benefits thus often result in a satisfied consumer spreading positive WOM, thus boosting brand loyalty via the online brand community (Fournier, 1998; Merisavo and Raulas, 2004; Schau *et al.*, 2009; Lee *et al.*, 2014). However, the extant literature on the relationship between SMM activity dimensions (second-order) and brand love is not clear. For instance, Okazaki *et al.* (2015) posit that marketers use social media such as Twitter to enhance the notion of consumer engagement. The studies of Wallace *et al.* (2014; 2017) rely on Facebook likes to reflect customer engagement and to link self-expressive brands with brand love. Within the context of luxury brands, Godey *et al.* (2016) investigated the relationship between SMM activities (measured as a multidimensional, second-order) and consumer responses (brand loyalty, preference and

price premium). The authors assert that there is a positive relationship between SMM activities and brand equity (measured through brand image and brand awareness) and SMM activities and consumer responses (measured through consumer preferences and consumer ability to pay premium prices). Using social media in the luxury sector, [Kim and Ko \(2012\)](#) posit a positive relationship among SMM activities (multidimensional, second-order) and value equity, relationship equity and brand equity which together impact in turn customer equity and purchase intention. [Laroche et al. \(2013\)](#) maintained that the relationships established in social media enhance consumer loyalty. In the offline context, [Huber et al. \(2015\)](#) investigated the link between hedonic, utilitarian values and brand love. However, previous research into online network-based communities did not link, to the best of the author's knowledge, the relationship between SMM activities and brand love. What has been accomplished in this area is to link some SMM activities with brand love, such as relying on Facebook likes and fans to measure consumer engagement and linking this with self-expressivity ([Wallace et al., 2014](#)) or else investigating the link between social interactive engagement and brand love ([Vernuccio et al., 2015](#)). Further, [De Vries et al. \(2012\)](#) assert that the number of likes on a particular brand page is determined by its vividness, interactivity and the proportion of positive comments in brand posts; information, entertainment and proportion of negative comments did not affect the number of likes. I thus consider that the link, between SMM activities (five dimensions) and brand love has not been tested. Such an unexplored path could be described as follows: SMM activities may indirectly influence brand love via the mediating effect of self-expressive brands. I therefore hypothesize as follows:

H3. Self-expressive brands (inner and social) have a mediating impact on the relationship between SMM activities and brand love.

3.3 Self-expressive brands and brand love

According to [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006, p. 82\)](#), the self-expressivity of a brand is “a consumer's perception of the degree to which the specific brand reflects one's inner self”. Consumers think about the consumed brand as an extension of their selves and thus use the brand to construct their self-identities ([Belk, 1988](#)). The relationship between self-expressive brands and brand love has been reported in the extant literature. For instance, [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#) found a positive relationship between self-expressive brands (inner and social) and brand love. [Batra et al. \(2012\)](#) suggest there is a positive link between the current and desired self-identity, which is stimulated by using a particular brand and by brand love. [Hwang and Kandampully \(2012\)](#) assert that the self-concept connection enhances brand love. Within the online communities, [Wallace et al. \(2014\)](#) relied on “likes” to provide insights about the relationship between inner, social self-expressive brands and brand love. They posited that self-expressive brands (inner and social) are antecedents of brand love. [Leckie et al. \(2016\)](#) found a positive relationship between self-expressive brands (inner) and affective behavior. [Jahn and Kunz \(2012\)](#) maintain that there is a positive relationship between the self-concept value and fan page participation. [Lipsman et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Trusov et al. \(2009\)](#) assert that a “like” for a brand on a Facebook page indicates consumer engagement with the brand; consumers thus considered the brand as part of their self-expression. [Schau and Gilly \(2003\)](#) posit the importance of the online communities in facilitating consumers' “ideal self” to express their engagement with the brand. Evidence from the nascent literature ([Escalas and Bettman, 2005](#); [Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006](#); [Vernuccio et al., 2015](#); [Huber et al., 2015](#)) indicates that brands that reflect consumers' inner selves (that is, where the brand reflects the users' personality) and/or social selves (where the brand

contributes to the user's image) are significantly associated with brand love. The consumer-brand relationship thus becomes strong and favorable. Brands are accordingly symbols used to reflect users' real or ideal selves (private), as well as to express their social selves (public) via the approval of groups (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Joji and Ashwin, 2012). Consumers thus use certain brands to support their self-images or aspirational self-images (Escalas and Bettman, 2005), distinguishing themselves from others. For instance, Wallace *et al.* (2014) maintain that brands to which consumers are emotionally attached enhance their self-perceptions and encourage them to communicate such perceptions to others and thus be loved by them (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Huber *et al.*, 2015). I hypothesize:

- H4. A self-expressive brand (inner-self) on Facebook has a positive influence on brand love.
- H5. A self-expressive brand (social-self) on Facebook has a positive influence on brand love.

3.4 Brand love and brand loyalty

According to Liu *et al.* (2012), brand loyalty is related to the customer's level of attachment to a specific brand. I followed Yoo and Donthu's (2001) study, which measures brand loyalty via the overall attitudinal loyalty. Furthermore, attitudinal loyalty in this context includes consumers' commitment to the brand they love and their intention to buy the loved brand. In the offline context, the literature (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson *et al.*, 2005) has supported the relationship between feelings of brand love and brand loyalty. Notwithstanding that, such studies provide limited knowledge of this relationship within the context of Facebook social network. There is thus limited empirical work on the link between brand love and brand loyalty within the social media context. For instance, Wallace *et al.* (2017) investigated the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty, finding a positive impact of brand love on brand loyalty. I hypothesize:

- H6. There is a positive relationship between loved brands on Facebook and brand loyalty.

4. Methodology

Using online communities, and in particular Facebook, the current study has three aims:

- (1) to link SMM activates with brand love;
- (2) to investigate the mediating impact of self-expressive brands between SMM activates and brand love; and
- (3) to investigate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty.

To do this, I designed a quantitative survey targeting Jordanian consumers and followers of different Facebook page brands. In Jordan, 90 per cent of the population use social media, of which the majority using Facebook and are students (Zain, 2016). Following a pilot test with 15 Facebook users, I send e-mail messages to students containing a link to an online survey (hosted on the SurveyMonkey service) with a request to respond to the survey directly. I asked the respondents to think about the "liked" brands on Facebook of which they are followers when responding to the questionnaire.

I decided to adopt this methodology to test the impact of SMM activity dimensions on self-expressive brands which in turn impact brand love. Therefore, I followed [Godey et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Wallace et al.'s \(2014\)](#) methodologies. For instance, [Godey et al. \(2016\)](#) study focused on identifying followers of prominent brands in SMM to measure the impact of SMM activities. While [Wallace et al. \(2014\)](#) considered the likes as a manifest variable to measure brand love and its antecedents on online social communities. To achieve the aims of my research, I decided to combine the methodologies of [Godey et al. \(2016\)](#) to reflect the measurement of SMM activities and [Wallace et al. \(2014\)](#) to reflect the measurement of brand love (antecedents and consequences). To encourage responses, I offered five prizes of 50 Jordanian Dinars.

My sample offered the following categorization for their liked and followed brands: fashion (30 per cent), food and tea/coffee (20 per cent), hair care and cosmetics (18 per cent), sportswear (10 per cent), music, including artists and equipment (9 per cent), sport (6 per cent), automotive (4 per cent) and others (3 per cent). The sample was gender-balanced, being 49 per cent men and 51 per cent women; it consisted of 70 per cent undergraduates, 25 per cent master degree students and 5 per cent doctoral students. Furthermore, my sample respondents reported that they spend, on average, 3 h per day on Facebook and that they have an average of 350 friends on Facebook.

To measure the current research constructs, I adopted well-established measures and used multiple-item measures to measure my study variables. Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale. For instance, to measure SMM activities, I adopted [Kim and Ko's \(2012\)](#) scale, which consists of 11 items distributed among five dimensions (entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and WOM). I adopted this scale as it was one of the earliest scales and the majority of researchers have adopted it ([Godey et al., 2016](#)). I used the scale of [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#) to measure self-expressive inner brand and self-expressive social brand; each consists of four items. For brand love, I used the ten items established by [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#). This scale was the first in this area and is widely adopted in the marketing literature. Finally, to measure brand loyalty, I used four items developed by [Yoo and Donthu \(2001\)](#). [Table I](#) illustrates the items used and their sources.

4.1 Data collection and sample

Using an English self-administered online questionnaire, I collected data from a convenience sample of 400 Jordanian student respondents, who are consumers and followers of Facebook pages. The use of a student sample has been supported in the context of social media; for instance, [Gallagher et al. \(2001\)](#) posited the importance of student samples in enhancing understanding of the field. Facebook was designed for students from its early stages and is thus very popularity among them; young users connect to Facebook to attract others attention ([Hunt et al., 2012](#)). Moreover, the extant literature on Facebook users has widely employed student populations (e.g. [Hunt et al., 2012](#); [Lewis et al., 2008](#); [Patterson, 2011](#)). For instance, [Wallace et al. \(2014\)](#) and [Batra et al. \(2012\)](#) employed university student samples to investigate brand love, brand love antecedents and their consequences. Using the convenience sampling technique with students thus seems relevant in measuring the constructs of the current study, as students are easy to access for little cost ([Bhattacharjee, 2012](#); [Castillo, 2009](#); [Dwivedi et al., 2006](#)), are shoppers of tomorrow ([Algharabat and Dennis, 2010](#)) and are generally willing to help researchers understand the social network ([Gallagher et al., 2001](#)); researchers can also easily reach targeted respondents (i.e. [Bryman and Bell, 2007](#); [Castillo, 2009](#); [Purwanegara et al., 2014](#)).

Construct	Author(s)
<p>Social media marketing activities (SMMa) <i>Entertainment (ENT1–ENT2)</i> ENT1: Using brand X's social media is fun ENT2: The content of brand X's social media seems interesting</p> <p><i>Interaction (INT1–INT3)</i> INT1: Brand X's social media enables information-sharing with others INT2: Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through brand X's social media INT3: It is easy to give my opinion through brand X's social media</p> <p><i>Trendiness (TRE1–TRE2)</i> TRE1: The content of brand X's social media is the newest information TRE2: Using brand X's social media is very trendy</p> <p><i>Customization (CUST1–CUST2)</i> CUST1: Brand X's social media offer a customized information search CUST2: Brand X's social media provide customized services</p> <p><i>WOM</i> WOM1: I would like to pass information on brand, product, or services from brand X's social media to my friends WOM2: I would like to upload content from brand X's social media to my blog or microblog</p> <p><i>Social self (SS1–SS4)</i> SS1: This brand contributes to my image SS2: This brand adds to a social role I play SS3: This brand has a positive impact on what others think of me SS4: This brand improves the way society views me</p> <p><i>Inner Self (IS1–IS4)</i> IS1: This brand symbolizes the kind of person I really am inside IS2: This brand reflects my personality IS3: This brand is an extension of my inner self IS4: This brand mirrors the real me</p> <p><i>Brand love (BL1–BL4)</i> BL1: This is a wonderful brand BL2: This brand makes me feel good BL3: This brand is totally awesome BL4: I have neutral feelings about this brand (–) BL5: This brand makes me very happy BL6: I love this brand! BL7: I have no particular feelings about this brand (–) BL8: This brand is a pure delight BL9: I am passionate about this brand BL10: I am very attached to this brand</p> <p><i>Brand Loyalty (BLOY1–BLOY4)</i> BLOY1: This is the only brand of this product that I will buy BLOY2: When I go shopping, I do not even notice competing brands BLOY3: If my store is out of this brand, I will postpone buying or go to another store BLOY4: I will “do without” rather than buy another brand</p>	<p>Kim and Ko (2012)</p> <p>Carroll and Ahuvia (2006)</p> <p>Yoo and Donthu (2001)</p>

Table I.
Research construct
operationalization

Furthermore, Table IV shows standardized estimates, *t-values*, CR and AVE. Table V shows discriminant validity through the Pearson correlation between constructs against the square roots of AVE across diagonal, all of which proved to be acceptable.

5.2 Structural analysis

The results from the structural model revealed acceptable fit indices: $\chi^2 = 754.433$, $df = 318$ and $\chi^2/df = 2.410$, CFI = 0.911, GFI = 0.904, TLI = 0.930, IFI = 0.912 and RMSEA = 0.059. I find that all of my hypotheses are supported (Table VI). For instance, I find a positive relationship between SMM activities and both self-expressive brand inner (*H1*, $\beta = 0.87$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.76$) and self-expressive brand social (*H2*, $\beta = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.58$). The relationship between self-expressive brand inner (*H4*, $\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$) and brand love and self-expressive brand social and brand love (*H5*, $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$) were supported with $R^2 = 0.47$. Further, I found that brand love has a significant impact on brand loyalty (*H6*; $\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.50$).

Indicator	Direction	Construct	Standardized estimate	SE	<i>t</i> -value	P	CR	AVE (%)
ENT	←	SMMa	0.87				0.90	65.27
INT	←	SMMa	0.85	0.071	17.541	***		
TRE	←	SMMa	0.75	0.081	10.571	***		
CUST	←	SMMa	0.73	0.073	9.451	***		
WOM	←	SMMa	0.83	0.061	12.555	***		
SSI	←	SS	0.76				0.89	67.23
SS2	←	SS	0.89	0.063	18.572	***		
SS3	←	SS	0.87	0.064	17.441	***		
SS4	←	SS	0.75	0.065	13.642	***		
IS1	←	IS	0.76				0.90	69.14
IS2	←	IS	0.82	0.069	14.942	***		
IS3	←	IS	0.84	0.069	14.453	***		
IS4	←	IS	0.90	0.064	18.807	***		
BL1	←	BL	0.91				0.93	77.93
BL2	←	BL	0.89	0.069	18.178	***		
BL3	←	BL	0.88	0.068	18.956	***		
BL4	←	BL	0.85	0.064	16.873	***		
BLOY1	←	BLOY	0.87				0.87	63.49
BLOY2	←	BLOY	0.82	0.079	14.753	***		
BLOY3	←	BLOY	0.75	0.078	13.353	***		
BLOY4	←	BLOY	0.74	0.074	11.544	***		

Table IV.
Results of the CFA
within the five latent
factors

Note: Significant at *** $p < 0.001$

Construct	SMMa	SS	IS	BL	BLOY
SMMa	0.85				
SS	0.22	0.87			
IS	0.23	0.34	0.78		
BL	0.24	0.41	0.29	0.87	
BLOY	0.19	0.27	0.20	0.31	0.89

Table V.
Convergent and
discriminant validity:
SMM activities and
other constructs

5.3 Mediating test

To test the mediation impact of self-expressive brands (inner and social) between SMM activity and brand love (H3), I asked Amos to generate a 1,000-sample bootstrapping using phantom variables and bias-corrected 95 per cent confidence intervals (Mallinckrodt *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, I followed Holmbeck's (1997) procedures and my results show that all the four conditions were met. Furthermore, I used Sobel's (1982) test to examine the significance of the mediation effect of self-expressive brands (inner and social). Sobel's test tells whether the indirect effect of the SMM activities on brand loyalty through self-expressive brands (inner and social) is significant. I found that the effect of SMM activities on brand loyalty did drop from 0.79 (without the mediator) to 0.12 (with the mediator) at ($p < 0.22$), indicating support for the full mediating influence of self-expressive brand (inner) on the relationship between SMM activities and brand loyalty. While I found that the effect of SMM activities on brand loyalty did drop from 0.79 (without the mediator) to 0.25 (with the mediator) at ($p < 0.001$), indicating support for the partial mediating influence of self-expressive brand (social) on the relationship between SMM activities and brand loyalty. The findings support that SMM activities affect brand loyalty and self-expressive brands (inner and social) mediate this relationship which proves that SMM activities lead to higher self-expressive brands (inner and social) which in turn lead to brand loyalty. I found that the indirect effect of SMM activities on brand loyalty mediated by self-expressive brand (inner) was significant (0.001) and that the effect of SMM activities on brand loyalty mediated by self-expressive brand (social) was also significant (0.002). Thus, the indirect effects in both cases are stronger and enduring. Table VII summarizes the main results.

6. Discussion and implications

The limited number of studies on SMM activities has driven this research on the opportunities that social media can provide for brand building. In particular, previous studies have investigated the impact of SMM activities (second-order) on brand equity and consumer behavior (Godey *et al.*, 2016) or its impact on customer equity dimensions (Kim and Ko, 2012). However, previous researchers had neither the chance to link SMM activities with brand love nor to explain its role as an antecedent to self-expressive brands. I have therefore aimed to contribute to the nascent literature by linking and investigating the

Table VI.

Structural model results

Hypothesized relationships	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	Result
H1. SMMa → self-expressive brand inner	0.87	0.057	12.527***	Supported
H2. SMMa → self-expressive brand social	0.76	0.238	6.567***	Supported
H3. self-expressive brand inner → brand love	0.56	0.084	0.167 ^{ns}	Not supported
H4. Self-expressive brand social → brand love	0.25	0.044	5.237***	Supported
H5. Brand love → brand loyalty	0.71	0.069	9.540***	Supported

Note: Significant at *** $p < 0.001$, (two-tailed test); ns, not significant; β , standardized path coefficients; SE, standard error

Table VII.

Mediating test

Relationship	Direct without mediator	Direct with mediator	Indirect	Result(s)
SMMa-IS-BL	0.79 (0.001)	0.12 (0.22)	0.001	Supported
SMMa-SS-BL	0.79 (0.001)	0.25 (0.001)	0.002	Supported

impact of SMM activities on self-expressive brands and brand love, which in turn impact significant branding goals, such as brand loyalty.

I have used a second-order scale to conceptualize and define SMM activity (Kim and Ko, 2012; Godey *et al.*, 2016). My results are in accordance with those of previous research (Kim and Ko, 2012; Godey *et al.*, 2016), indicating that the five dimensions of SMM activities reflect a holistic experience within social media. Therefore, the SMM activities scale should reflect entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and WOM. As expected, SMM dimensions enhance customers' ability to engage with the Facebook page and hence increase consumer experience. For instance, I found that entertainment has the strongest impact on creating SMM activities. To increase consumer engagement with a particular Facebook page, marketers should thus enhance the feelings of fun they experience. I have found that interactivity is the second most important construct to affect SMM activities. This dimension focuses on information-sharing and opinion-exchange with others via Facebook. The result is in accordance with those of the study of Godey *et al.* (2016), which posit the importance of this dimension of SMM activities. I found that WOM is the third most significant construct affecting SMM activities. This could be attributed to the fact that my sample likes to pass along information and to upload content on social media about the brands they have consumed. Trendiness is the fourth most important construct to impact SMM activities: consumers' liking to disseminate the latest and trendiest information about brands is one of main constructs to enhance SMM activities. Customization is the least significant construct to affect SMM activities within Facebook context. This result can be attributed to the fact that, in my study customization, as a construct is related to the ability of social media channels to provide customized information search, posts, messages and services. This means that SMM activities are significant tools not only for enhancing consumers' images (both inner and social) but also as an antecedent of brand love.

I find that SMM activities positively influence self-expressive brands (inner and social: *H1-H2*). The path coefficient analysis indicates that SMM activities have most significant impact on self-expressive brands (inner), with a coefficient value of 0.87 and an R^2 -value of 0.76. This is followed by the impact of SMM activities on self-expressive brands (social), with a coefficient value of 0.76 and an R^2 -value of 0.58. This means that consumers are using SMM activities (interaction, trendiness, customization, and WOM) to reflect their inner self-expressivity toward brands via Facebook. Thus, the availability of SMM activities on social media sites enhances consumer's perception of the brand's reflection on consumers' inner self, regarding the brand as an extension of their selves; it is used as a tool to send messages to other friends and relatives about particular brands.

My results support the hypotheses on the relationship between self-expressive brands (*H4-H5*) and brand love. For instance, I find that self-expressive brand inner has a stronger impact on brand love (*H4*; $\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$) than do social self-expressive brands (*H5*, $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$) with $R^2 = 0.47$. My results thus show that social media brands that allow users to express themselves on Facebook pages encourage their consumers to love them. My results are in accordance with Wallace *et al.* (2014). Further, I found that brand love has a significant impact on brand loyalty (*H6*, $\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.50$). This result could be attributed to the fact that, whenever consumers find themselves involved with a brand reflects their selves; they are likely to have more loyalty to that brand. The reflections of self-expressive brands thus lead to brand love and consumers evaluate the brand positively, leading to brand loyalty (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006). The positive relationship between brand love and brand loyalty is also in line with previous research (Wallace *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, as a result of consumers loving the brand within the Facebook context, they must also have attitudinal loyalty.

My findings regarding the mediating effect of self-expressive brands (inner and social) on brand love show that self-expressive brands (inner) fully mediate the relationship between SMM activities and brand love, whereas self-expressive brands (social) partially mediate this relationship. The results therefore also corroborate that self-expressive brands have a mediating role on the link between SMM activities and brand love, which signifies that SMM activities enhance the impact of self-expressive brands on brand love. In other words, customers who are highly engaged with SMM activities intend to love the brand as their self-expressive brands increase.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical implications

I have contributed to the nascent branding and social media literature by achieve the following. First, this study is the first to examine how SMM activities impact self-expressive brands. Thus, my research discovered an unexplored path between SMM activities and self-expressive brands. Second, my study has improved the nascent knowledge on the antecedents of brand love in the context of social media. Thus, the relationships among self-expressive brands (inner), self-expressive brands (social) and brand love are in accordance with previous research (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Wallace *et al.*, 2014). Third, my results regarding the mediating impact indicate that self-expressive brands (inner and social) mediate the relationship between SMM activities and brand love. Fourth, the significant relationship between brand love and brand loyalty is another theoretical contribution. For instance, this relationship has not been tested for brands in virtual communities (Schau and Gilly, 2003), and I thus provide evidence for this relationship, supporting the results of Wallace *et al.* (2017).

7.2 Managerial implication

From a managerial perspective, this study has the following contributions. For managers who are seeking to build brand relationships via social media, SMM activities are the main tools for enhancing brand love within the context of Facebook. Entertainment counts for the highest loading, followed by interaction, and then trendiness. Thus, within Facebook pages in a Middle Eastern context, marketing strategists should pay attention that the Facebook page contains more entertainment, as this is a major factor for enhancing and stimulating brand love via self-expressive brands. As a result, brand managers should promote different SMM activities for their brand on social media sites and should invest in such activities to reflect consumers' self-expressive brands. Brand strategists can in this way encourage consumers to express themselves by communicating associations with the brand, interacting with the brand and sharing their stories. Marketing managers and brand strategists seeking to increase brand engagement on Facebook can help customers to reflect the self-expressive nature of the brand by encouraging them to associate their engagement with the brand through self-expression and to share messages about the brand with networked friends.

The mediation influence of self-expressive brands suggests strategies for segmenting and targeting followers' pages. Thus, strategic brand managers could target different types of self-expressive brands consumers to experience powerful emotional responses resulting in consumers loving the brand and helping to create the appropriate brand positioning strategies. Furthermore, the finding that self-expressive brands mediate the effect SMM activities have on brand love suggests that branding managers should focus more on designing social media Facebook page to reflect users' inner and social status because the

ability of a brand's Facebook page to utilize this advantage has a critical role on the link between SMM activities and brand love.

8. Limitations and future research

The current research faced the following limitations: First, I used students to investigate the relationships and so my results may not be generalizable. I asked the students to consider the brands they like on Facebook in answering the questionnaire. However, using liked pages to measure SMM activities could lead to a limitation. Furthermore, my results may not be applicable to a variety of industries. I therefore suggest the need for future studies to investigate my model in other contexts. Second, I focused on a Middle Eastern country and future research should therefore focus on other countries. Finally, testing for socio demographic variables as moderators could be useful.

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