






# “In the digital landscape: Can social media marketing activities boost brand loyalty in the Jordanian hospitality sector?”

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# IN THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: CAN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES BOOST BRAND LOYALTY IN THE JORDANIAN HOSPITALITY SECTOR?

## Abstract

Customer loyalty is a pressing priority and strategic imperative in the Jordanian hotel sector. With the rapid technological transformation in consumer behavior, social media marketing activities have emerged as a tool for engaging with hotel guests and building long-term relationships. This paper aims to explore the impact of Social Media Marketing activities (SMM activities) on brand loyalty through the mediating role of brand love and brand trust in the five-star hotel sector. The study adopted a quantitative design, employing a descriptive correlational approach to examine the relationship between study variables. Data were collected from June 1, 2024, to September 30, 2024, using a structured online questionnaire from guests of five-star hotels in Jordan, in Amman. A purposive sample was used to select hotel guests, using social media platforms for 280 respondents. The questionnaire was designed to measure the variables of the study. Statistical analysis was conducted using Smart PLS to test the hypotheses. The study results indicate a significant impact of social media marketing activities ( $\beta = 0.299, p < 0.001$ ) on brand loyalty, as well as the mediating role of brand trust ( $\beta = 0.09, p < 0.001$ ) and brand love ( $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.001$ ) in mediating the relationship between marketing activities and customer loyalty. The results also revealed a positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty in the hotel sector. The results also indicate that brand love and trust mediate the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty, enhancing brand loyalty in the hotel industry.

## Keywords

brand trust, brand love, brand loyalty, hotel sector, Jordan

## JEL Classification

M31, M37, D12, L83

## INTRODUCTION

In the age of technology, social media platforms have presented both opportunities and challenges for the tourism sector. These platforms have become a strategic tool for the hotel industry to facilitate communication with audiences and foster continuous interaction (Azhar et al., 2023). In turn, travelers are increasingly interested in these platforms as a means of obtaining information about destinations, following others' reviews and comments, and sharing their experiences. Many hotels have adapted their various platforms, for instance (X, TikTok, and Pinterest, FB) to take advantage of the benefits they offer to their current and potential customers (Althuwaini, 2022). By increasing interaction, building long-term relationships with guests, and improving customer experience next positive feedback, the hotel industry also provides intangible services, trust, and a distinctive customer experience, which are critical in shaping customer loyalty and building long-term relationships (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). Hotels are adopting

SMM activities, including creating dynamic and interactive content, partnering with influencers, and engaging with audiences, which increases their presence and influence on potential travelers, contributing to building trust and increasing brand loyalty.

Although several earlier scholars have sought to explore the role of SMM activities on customer loyalty (e.g., Hafez, 2021; Ismail, 2017), there remains a scientific gap in identifying the broader emotional and psychological mechanisms through which marketing activities influence potential customer loyalty. The researchers have ignored brand affinity as a mediating role in existing studies. Therefore, the need to clarify this relationship is particularly pressing in the hotel industry, where intangible services and customer trust are critical.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past, brands relied on traditional marketing methods to advertise products and services through various traditional media, for example, TV, radio, newspapers, and print ads (Salehi et al., 2012). Therefore, the emergence of SMNs has altered the way individuals communicate with others and share information on social sites, for example, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter (Pfeffer et al., 2014). SMNs have allowed people to interact with relatives, family, friends, and even strangers in ways that were previously unknown (Alsoud et al., 2024; Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2015). Thus, the rising number of consumers of the Internet, SNNs, and smartphones has contributed to the emergence of companies through these platforms to increase direct interaction with the public (Stephen, 2016). Today, companies have started to appear on platforms in many sectors, for instance (hotels, restaurants, and fashion) the way to communicate with the public (Kim & Ko, 2010; Lepkowska-White, 2017; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016). This facilitated the brand to reach a larger users faster, and interact with buyers directly, which helped build stronger relationships with consumers and encouraged feedback and engagement (Hanaysha, 2022). Social media platforms provide tools that let the brand achieve its marketing goals by facilitating the process of targeting consumers, as they enable them to specify, for example, (location, age group, tendencies, and interests), which ensures that marketing efforts are directed to the target audience more accurately, which leads to better results for the company (Gautam & Sharma, 2017).

In the context of SMM activities, companies use different strategies to boost their online presence and reach their audience effectively (Alrwashdeh

et al., 2020, 2022). SMM is defined as the tools a company uses to promote goods and services and connect with potential clients (Seo & Park, 2018). SMM activities are considered a form of marketing via social media networks, as it allows the company to create content and share it with the public to reach marketing objectives, for example (increasing brand awareness and communicating with customers) (Zollo et al., 2020). SMM activities are considered an effective method for marketers and managers to analyze audience behaviors and preferences and develop strategies that are in lead with users' behaviors and preferences (Dolega et al., 2021). On the other hand, SMM not only helps in advertising products and services, but also goes beyond that to enable them to build a nexus with customers in a sophisticated way, which helps in increasing brand loyalty, and clients feel more associated with the brand they deal with personally (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Moreover, brands have realized that having social media strategies in place is crucial to reaching potential customers and growing the customer base within the company (Al-Dmour et al., 2024; Ibrahim, 2022). Social media marketing helps marketers examine the data related to audience interaction with published content, which enables the brand to improve its strategies and contributes to knowing which posts receive the most interaction through comments, likes, and shares, which enables the brand to understand audience behavior and adjust strategies to suit their preferences. Hashim and Fadhil (2017) point out that a brand that uses tools and techniques across social media platforms in its marketing campaigns, including engaging content, understanding audience behavior, using the right platform to be with the audience, and directly interacting with them through comments and direct messages,

will help build trust in the brand. In contrast, platforms offer the user instruments that enable them to evaluate and analyze the product or service before making a purchase decision.

SMM activities are tools and applications that businesses use across social networks to engage consumers through entertainment, personalization, trendiness, interaction, and WOM advertising (Seo & Park, 2018). Chi (2011) defined SMM activities as “Promotional and relational communication tools that complement organizational marketing strategies’ application by offering enhanced interactivity through online nexus among organizations and consumers”. Besides, Kim and Ko (2010) defined SMM activities as “how consumers perceive a company or brand engagement in various SMM activities”.

Previous literature has addressed the topic of SMM activities in different contexts, starting with the entertainment industry (Wijaya et al., 2021), education via Facebook pages (Manca, 2020), the service industry (Ibrahim et al., 2021), and the hospitality industry (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2024). According to Ibrahim (2021a), the study discusses the role of SMM activities to enhance the loyalty for consumer and buying intention, particularly in the field of the hospitality sector. With a particular focus on four-star and five-star hotels, the analysis finds that SMM activities have positively affected users loyalty, which enhances the effectiveness of SMM activities in enhancing brand trustworthiness. Furthermore, focusing on specific dimensions of SMM activities provides further clever insight into how different marketing strategies influence buyer perceptions and behaviors in the field of the hotel segment. Moreover, the role of social sites in driving brand loyalty in the tourism segment in Harare, Zimbabwe. Considering the interplay between social communication, consumer reviews, and buyer demographics is crucial for hospitality businesses aiming to boost customer satisfaction, as the findings found that social media platforms significantly influence users’ trustworthiness, especially among major consumers. The study underscores the significance of SMM and consumer reviews in shaping consumer experiences and consumer loyalty in the hospitality sector (Chikazhe et al., 2021).

Ibrahim (2021b) concluded the nexus among SMM activities and user loyalty. The results indicate the strength of SMM strategies, the significance of using SMM activities to improve buyer engagement and loyalty through customized marketing strategies that suit their target audiences, and the focus on the need for marketing plans that take advantage of social sites to enhance buyer engagement and satisfaction, as marketing strategies specifically designed based on the factors of the target consumer can significantly improve the effectiveness of SMM efforts. Perceived SMM activities effect customer loyalty in the field of e-commerce. Perceived SMM activities significantly and positively influence brand equity, brand value, and ultimately attractive buyer loyalty. The study summarizes the significance of effective SMM activities in improving customer loyalty by improving value dimensions (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Bilgin (2018) explored the effect of SMM activities on brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty. The study points to the significance of SMM as a communication platform where the public interacts with companies and with each other, thereby influencing purchase intentions and brand perception. SMM activities positively affect consumers’ loyalty through the role of image and awareness of brand. This underscores the need for brands to efficiently force social media to improve consumer engagement and brand communication.

Brand love is a pivotal factor in improving consumer brand connection through brand emotions, brand evaluations, and brand statements (Algharabat, 2017). Hence, brand love is a deep emotion with customers and a devoted nexus among clients and the brand (Arghashi et al., 2021). Many previous authors such as Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have defined brand love as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name”. Several previous researchers have surveyed the impacts of brand love as a mediating nexus among SMM activities and brand loyalty.

Arghashi et al. (2021) reveal how SMM activities influence consumer behavior. Emphasize the search for the influential role of SMM activities in building emotional connections with consum-

ers by creating positive interactions and experiences with customers to enhance brand love. Algharabat (2017) highlights the role of SMM activities in expressing self-branding and its impact on brand love, as the findings support the important role of social media platforms in determining brand perceptions plus strengthening emotional connections between consumers, which contributes to creating loyalty. Also, the significant influence of brand love on creating brand loyalty and the existence of a direct relationship between emotional associations with the brand and consumer loyalty gave priority to creating love and connection through marketing efforts. The study carried out by Salem et al. (2019) proved the effect of SMM activities on brand loyalty through brand love in the fashion sector and found that the impact is positive on brand loyalty, which leads to increased customer loyalty. The research highlighted the importance of SMM activities to strengthen emotional connections with consumers, which increases brand loyalty. Also, the contribution of interactive content in building brand communities across social media platforms. Hsu and Chen (2018) point out that brand love plays an influential role in mediating the correlation among SMM activities and brand loyalty, highlighting the strong emotional connections with customers that can increase brand loyalty and enhance engagement.

Brand trust is a pivotal variable among companies and customers (Monfared et al., 2021). Brand trust is the buyer's feeling of confidence in the products offered by companies (Juhaidi et al., 2024). Brand trust is the customer's perception of confidence in the reliability of a product provider. Trust is divided into two components: first, reliability, which refers to the buyer's trust in the promise that the brand makes to its buyer, and second, intention, which indicates the belief that the brand creates with its buyers. Additionally, several previous literatures have addressed the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty in different backgrounds (Hafez, 2021).

Sohaib and Han (2023) discuss the power of brand trust among SMM activities on purchase intentions in the luxury brand sector in Iran, where the findings revealed the significant impact of brand trust in building consumer loyalty

and focusing on creating authentic and engaging content to enhance consumer trust. Althuwaini (2022) emphasized the cruciality of brand trust in building trust through SMM activities on social media platforms, which positively impacts consumer loyalty, as the results indicate the pivotal role that brand trust plays in the nexus among SMM activities and brand loyalty. Puspaningrum (2020) discusses the contribution of brand trust in mediating the correlation among SMM activities and brand loyalty. The results indicate a significant impact of brand trust in mediating the relation among direct variables, as brand trust enhances consumer engagement and increases loyalty.

The objective of this research paper is to investigate how the hotel industry in Jordan has leveraged SMM activities to boost customer loyalty in the hospitality industry as an intangible service. Specifically, the study examines the influence of SMM activities on customer brand loyalty and the role of brand trust and admiration in the relationship among SMM activities and customer loyalty.

Hence, this study developed the following hypotheses:

- H1: SMM activities affect brand loyalty in the Jordanian hospitality industry.*
- H2: SMM activities affect brand love in the Jordanian hospitality industry.*
- H3: Brand love affects brand loyalty in the Jordanian hospitality industry.*
- H4: SMM activities affect brand trust in the Jordanian hospitality industry.*
- H5: Brand trust affects brand loyalty in the Jordanian hospitality industry.*
- H6: Brand love mediates the relationship among SMM activities and brand loyalty in the Jordanian hospitality industry.*
- H7: Brand trust mediates the relationship among SMM activities and brand loyalty in the Jordanian hospitality industry.*

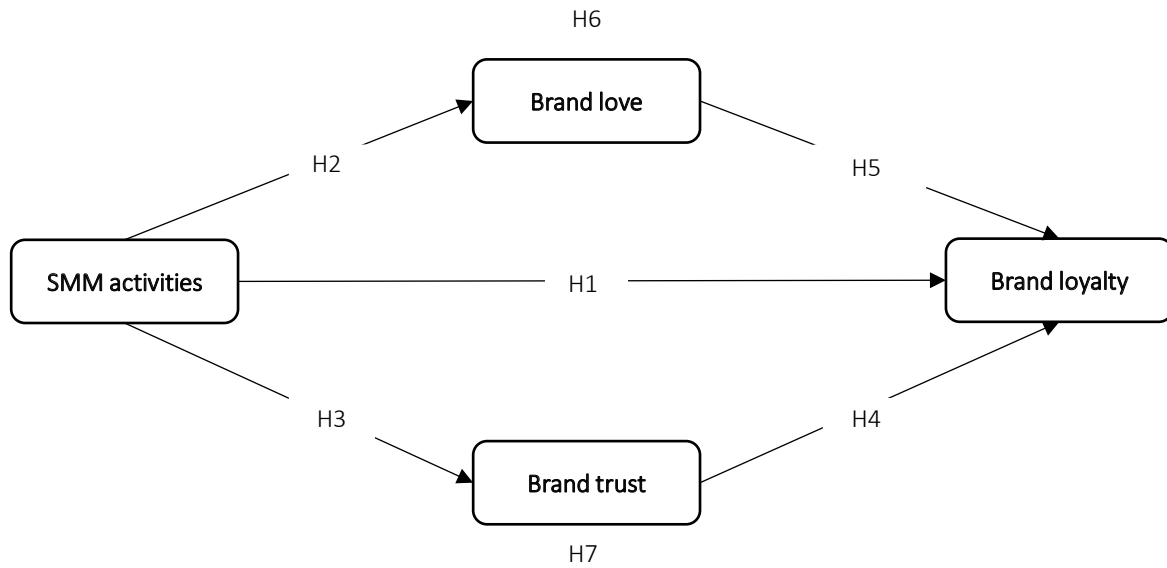


Figure 1. Research model

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the role of SMM activities on brand loyalty, through brand trust, and love in the hospitality sector. The research targeted guests staying at 5-star hotels in Amman, Jordan, from June 1, 2024 to September 30, 2024. Data was gathered through the online questionnaire utilizing Google Forms distributed using QR codes placed at key customer touchpoints within the selected hotels. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Firstly, the demographic questions consisted of questions regarding the age, gender, and nationality region. In the next section, items adapted from the literature were asked to assess the constructs within the study (SMM activities, brand loyalty, brand love, brand trust) using a 5-point Likert scale, extending from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” A sum of 280 responses were collected during the study period. Furthermore, a filter question, “Do you follow hotels on social media?”, was used to ensure that only respondents who engage with hotels on social media platforms were included in the investigation. The questionnaire was made available in both Arabic and English to accommodate the diverse guest demographics. The current study consisted of 20 items, slightly modified to fit the current context. The study used a 5-item SMM activities scale adapted from Ismail (2017). Brand

trust also included a 5-item scale adapted from Puspaningrum (2020). Arghashi et al. (2021) developed a 5-item brand love scale, which was adopted by the study to measure brand love. Brand loyalty consisted of 5 items adapted from Salem et al. (2019).

The sampling for the hotels followed a simple random sampling method. Out of the 27 five-star hotels in Amman listed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (2024), 12 hotels were randomly selected to participate in the research. Then, purposive sampling method was applied for the guests, targeting those who were readily available and willing to participate. Table 1 illustrates the respondent’s profile.

As shown in Table 1, the largest proportion of guests are from Arab regions (53.6%). Jordan comes in second with over 28%) after Arab regions. Next, Europe follows with (9%). Guests from Africa are less than (1%) and America are more than (2%), Asia (3.2%) is considered low, affecting the diversity of the sample. The 25-34 age group is the most represented, representing over 35%. This is followed by the 35-44 age group, representing 25%, and then the 45+ age group, representing 17.9%. The 18-24 age group represents the youth segment, representing over 21%. The highest percentage of visitors is typically male, at 55.7%, compared to female, at 44.3%. The gender gap is roughly equal.

**Table 1.** Demographics

Region	N	Percent	Age	N	Percent	Gender	N	Percent
Africa	1	0.4%	18-24	61	21.8%	Male	156	55.7%
America	8	2.9%	25-34	99	35.4%	Female	124	44.3%
Asia	9	3.2%	35-44	70	25.0%			
Europe	31	11.1%	45+	50	17.9%			
Arab	150	53.6%						
Jordan	81	28.9%						

### 3. RESULTS

The researchers assessed the measurement model by examining item loadings within constructs, along with internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). In Table 2, the factor loadings for all constructs, brand love, brand loyalty, SMM activities, and brand trust, range from 0.729 to 0.835, which exceeds the commonly recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Further, Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values for each construct range from 0.820 to 0.851, surpassing the 0.70 threshold. Similarly, the composite reliability (CR) values range from 0.874 to 0.894, exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.70. Further, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all factors ranges from 0.581 to 0.628, all above the recommended 0.50 threshold (Monroe & Cai, 2015), supporting convergent validity.

**Table 2.** Convergent validity

Factors	Items	Loadings	$\alpha$	CR (rho_c)	AVE	Mean
Brand love	Lov1	0.736	0.838	0.885	0.607	3.33
	Lov2	0.82				
	Lov3	0.8				
	Lov4	0.786				
	Lov5	0.752				
Brand loyalty	Loy1	0.785	0.820	0.874	0.581	3.28
	Loy2	0.765				
	Loy3	0.784				
	Loy4	0.729				
	Loy5	0.747				
SMM activities	Sm1	0.835	0.851	0.894	0.628	3.4
	Sm2	0.759				
	Sm3	0.779				
	Sm4	0.835				
	Sm5	0.749				
Brand trust	Trt1	0.792	0.836	0.884	0.604	3.25
	Trt2	0.749				
	Trt3	0.772				
	Trt4	0.777				
	Trt5	0.795				

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity

Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)				
	1	2	3	4
1. Brand love				
2. Brand loyalty	0.68			
3. Brand trust	0.56	0.58		
4. SMM activities	0.68	0.68	0.63	

Table 3 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios, which assess discriminant validity. All values are below the threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Moreover, in Table 4, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values range from 1.00 to 1.74, all below the commonly accepted threshold of 5 (McQuitty, 2018); both assessments’ results indicated that all the variables in the model do not have collinearity issues.

**Table 4.** Hypotheses testing

	Path	VIF	f <sup>2</sup>	β	Confidence intervals		STDEV	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	SMM activities → brand loyalty	1.74	0.09	0.299	0.185	0.411	0.059	5.071	0.000	Accepted
H2	SMM activities → brand love	1.00	0.50	0.579	0.481	0.643	0.041	14.218	0.000	Accepted
H3	Brand love → brand loyalty	1.59	0.11	0.319	0.209	0.433	0.058	5.454	0.000	Accepted
H4	SMM activities → brand trust	1.00	0.40	0.535	0.427	0.597	0.040	13.275	0.000	Accepted
H5	Brand trust → brand loyalty	1.48	0.03	0.169	0.058	0.257	0.049	3.418	0.001	Accepted

The results in Table 4 provided the hypothesis testing for the structural model. All hypotheses were supported, with significant p-values ( $p < 0.001$ ) across the board. Notably, SMM activities had a strong significant effect on brand loyalty ( $H1$ ,  $\beta = 0.299$ ,  $t = 5.071$ ), and brand love ( $H2$ ,  $\beta = 0.579$ ,  $t = 14.218$ ), as well as the effect on brand trust ( $H4$ ,  $\beta = 0.535$ ,  $t = 13.275$ ). Brand love ( $H3$ ,  $\beta = 0.319$ ,  $t = 5.454$ ) and brand trust ( $H5$ ,  $\beta = 0.169$ ,  $t = 3.418$ ) also had significant positive impacts on brand loyalty.

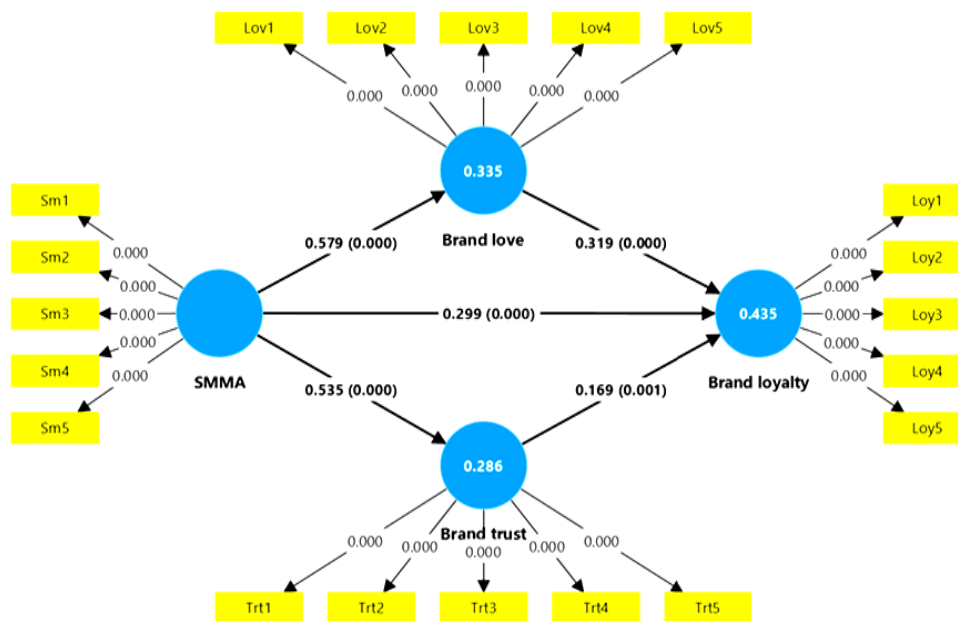
Regarding effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), SMM activities showed large effects on both brand love ( $f^2 = 0.50$ ) and brand trust ( $f^2 = 0.40$ ), while brand love had a medium effect on brand loyalty ( $f^2 = 0.11$ ), and finally, brand trust demonstrated a small effect on brand

love ( $f^2 = 0.03$ ). Additionally, as seen in Figure 2, the  $R^2$  values indicate that 33.5% of the variance in brand love, 28.6% of the variance in brand trust, and 43.5% of the variance in BL are explained by their respective predictors.

Table 5 showed significant indirect effects for both hypotheses. Hypothesis 6 confirmed that SMM activities positively influenced brand loyalty through brand love ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), while Hypothesis 7 explained a similar positive effect of SMM activities on brand loyalty mediated by brand trust ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Since the direct effects in Table 4 were also significant, these results imply partial mediation (Zhao et al., 2020), stressing the roles of both brand love and brand trust in fostering loyalty through SMM activities.

**Table 5.** Indirect effects

	Path	β	Confidence intervals		STDEV	T value	P value	Result
H6	SMM activities → brand love → brand loyalty	0.18	0.04	4.84	0.04	4.84	0.00	Accepted
H7	SMM activities → brand trust → brand loyalty	0.09	0.03	3.24	0.03	3.24	0.00	Accepted



**Figure 2.** Structural model

## 4. DISCUSSION

The hotel sector is witnessing fierce competition across all fronts, with customer loyalty gaining significant attention from stakeholders and marketers to build profitable relationships with guests and sustain customer relationships. SMM activities have emerged as an interactive tool that enhances guest engagement, contributes to building trust among customers, and builds emotional bonds with brands.

The results indicate that SMM activities can be highly effective for Jordanian hotels in building customer loyalty. The results indicate that SMM activities have a significant impact on brand loyalty for Jordanian hotels, consistent with existing literature that supports the use of SMM strategies to enhance brand loyalty. Ibrahim (2022), as described in a comprehensive analytical study that examined several articles over several years to determine the final sample size, summarizes the important relationship between social media marketing activities and customer loyalty. Furthermore, SMM activities are recognized as effective tools for enhancing brand loyalty within brand communities (Ismail, 2017). Furthermore, the results of the current study, related to Hypotheses 2 and 3, are consistent with previous studies (Monfared et al., 2021; Puspaningrum, 2020; Sohaib & Han, 2023; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016), which highlighted the mediating role of trust in building trust in marketing activities, thereby enhancing loyalty among hotel guests. In addition, brand trust plays a crucial role in building trust with hotel guests through the promise made by the brand through

social media platforms, which contributes to building a sustainable relationship with customers. For example, the use of social media marketing activities has been shown to improve customer trust in cafes and increase brand trust, thus enhancing customer loyalty to the brand (Ibrahim, 2021b).

The results related to Hypotheses 4 and 5 indicate that SMM activities can positively impact hotel brand perceptions, enhancing brand love. These findings are consistent with existing literature, which states that customer brand loyalty is positively influenced by brand love (Algharabat, 2017; Arghashi et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2019). This convergence may be attributed to the context used in these studies, which examined cafes, luxury brands, and hotels visited by younger respondents. This suggests that hotels in Jordan can leverage social media to enhance their brand image by building stronger relationships with their customers.

Turning to the indirect effects through Hypotheses 6 and 7, limited previous research has explored the mediating role of social media marketing activities and customer brand loyalty within the hotel industry. The results reveal a significant mediating effect for both hypotheses. In Hypothesis H6, social media marketing activities positively impact customer brand loyalty through the mediation of customer brand liking, consistent with published studies. For example, the studies conducted in Turkish hotels (Yadav & Rahman, 2018; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016) proved the positive effect of SMM activities on brand trust, which sequentially enhances customer loyalty.

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## CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is to explore the impact of SMM activities on brand loyalty through the role of brand love and brand trust in the hotel industry in Jordan. In today's highly competitive environment, brand loyalty has become an invaluable asset for businesses across various sectors, and the Jordanian hotel industry is no exception. Cultivating and sustaining brand loyalty is a critical challenge in an era characterized by rapid change, as retaining customers in the service sector, especially within the hospitality industry, poses significant difficulties. As consumer preferences evolve and competition intensifies, hotels must implement effective strategies to foster loyalty among their guests to ensure long-term success.

This study contributes to the marketing literature by discovering the direct impact of SMM activities as a key factor in building and maintaining brand loyalty. Also, it examines the roles of two mediating variables: brand love and brand trust. The findings demonstrate a significant effect on brand loyalty,

highlighting the significance of both brand trust and love. Furthermore, this research adds value by considering the specific context of the industry and the regional setting in which the study was conducted. For future research, the recommendations are derived from the limitations identified in this study. First, the researchers are encouraged to explore other contexts within the hospitality industry. Second, most studies have focused on younger respondents; it would be valuable to investigate other age groups as well. Third, it is believed that incorporating moderating variables such as cultural and demographic factors could enhance the understanding of how to develop effective social media marketing strategies.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Muneer Alrwashdeh.

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Formal analysis: Lu'ay Al-Mu'ani.

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Software: Nesrin Almatarneh.

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Writing – review & editing: Ayman Hindieh.

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