

From Likes to Loyalty: Exploring the Pathways Linking Interactive Social Media Engagement to Consumer Loyalty

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History Received: August 02, 2025 Revised: September 28, 2025 Accepted: October 10, 2025 Published: October 29, 2025	Purpose This study examines how interactive social media marketing influences brand loyalty, focusing on the mediating roles of Brand Awareness, Perceived Value, and Brand Love. Methodology Structural Equation Modeling with PLS-SEM was employed with a sample of 385 respondents, who were administered through convenience sampling, to execute this quantitative research with a cross-sectional time order. Bootstrapping was applied to assess mediation effects. Findings Results show that social media marketing significantly enhances brand awareness and love, but does not strongly influence the perceived value. The mediation analysis confirms that social media marketing affects brand loyalty indirectly through brand awareness and brand love, with brand love as the more powerful mediator. Perceived value does not significantly mediate the relationship. Conclusion The research suggests that social media marketing enhances brand awareness and emotional involvement, although it exerts no influence on perceived value. Brand love is the most potent catalyst and mediator of loyalty, signifying that emotional connection outweighs logical assessment. Consequently, companies should prioritize cultivating authentic emotional connections over merely increasing awareness to establish enduring customer loyalty. Managers should design social media strategies that foster emotional engagement and authentic connections, as loyalty is better sustained through brand love than through awareness or value perceptions alone.
Keywords Social Media Marketing Marketing Strategy Perceived Value Brand Loyalty Brand Awareness	
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1. Introduction

In the dynamic digital era, social media has emerged as one of the most powerful tools for communication and marketing. The rapid growth of social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok has redefined how consumers engage with brands and make purchasing decisions. Social media marketing (SMM) provides a vibrant platform where users not only consume content but also interact, co-create, and share experiences, thereby reshaping traditional marketing paradigms (Appel et al., 2020; Bilgin, 2018; Weber, 2007). For firms seeking to cultivate brand loyalty in an increasingly competitive market, understanding how interactive social media engagement translates into long-term consumer loyalty has become a strategic imperative (Blend & Ibrahim, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2020).

Therefore, the Internet and communication technologies have given rise to social media, which has become an essential part of modern life (Weber, 2007; Bilgin, 2018). This development enables dynamic and real-time interactions between individuals, brands, and communities, fundamentally transforming how organizations build relationships with their audiences (Salem, S. F. & Salem, S. O., 2019). Various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn have not only reinvented marketing communication but also significantly influenced consumers' buying decisions, product perceptions, emotions, and loyalty toward particular brands (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020). Despite the immense marketing potential of social media, firms still face challenges in converting consumer engagement into sustainable brand loyalty, particularly among younger users characterized by varying preferences (Ismail, 2017; Salem & Salem, 2019). Extant literature suggests that interactive engagement on social media can stimulate consumer trust, brand awareness, and emotional attachment—all crucial precursors to loyalty (Lu & Hsiao, 2010; Hajli, 2013; Bilgin, 2018). Yet, the underlying psychological and relational mechanisms that explain how digital interactions evolve into loyalty remain underexplored. As businesses use social media marketing (SMM) to strengthen their competitive advantage, it becomes critical to examine how these activities contribute to key brand-related outcomes, which in turn lead to product preferences (Keller, 2013; Yoo et al., 2000). Moreover, perceived value is a key concept that may enhance (or weaken) brand perception and is central to business strategy (Baig et al., 2023). In this context, customer satisfaction is key to enhancing loyalty (Fakhr Uz Zaman et al., 2025; Irfan & Baig, 2023; Siddiqui & Baig, 2024).

A growing body of literature has identified several mediating variables that bridge social media engagement and brand loyalty, including brand awareness, perceived value, and brand love. Brand awareness represents the initial cognitive stage where consumers recognize and recall a brand, facilitating purchase consideration (Keller, 2009; Pires & Rosenberger, 2019). Perceived value captures the consumer's holistic evaluation of the benefits gained relative to sacrifices made, embodying both functional and emotional dimensions (Zeithaml, 1988; Chen & Lin, 2019; Bushara et al., 2023). Meanwhile, brand love reflects the affective and emotional attachment that fosters deeper, enduring consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Wallace et al., 2014; Mayasari et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study investigates the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on brand loyalty, while exploring the mediating roles of brand awareness, perceived value, and brand love in shaping this relationship. Specifically, it seeks to understand how SMM initiatives foster customer awareness, enhance perceptions of value, and cultivate emotional connections with brands, which in turn strengthen loyalty. By integrating

cognitive, emotional, and behavioral perspectives, this research contributes to a holistic understanding of how digital engagement transforms likes and shares into lasting loyalty a vital insight for marketers striving to build sustainable brand relationships in the digital economy.

Furthermore, the study addresses important questions: How does SMM influence brand loyalty directly and indirectly? To what extent do perceived value and brand awareness mediate this relationship? And how does brand love, as an emotional dimension of consumer–brand interaction, contribute to sustaining long-term loyalty? By integrating these perspectives, the study offers valuable insights into the mechanisms through which interactive social media strategies shape consumer behavior, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of loyalty in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social media is a digital platform where users with shared interests socialize and exchange perceptions and ideas (Weber, 2007; Bilgin, 2018). Recognizing its popularity, many companies see social media as a lucrative way to connect with potential customers. This has made social media the preferred channel for marketers aiming to reach specific audiences (Blend & Ibrahim, 2021). Companies now view social media as the most effective marketing tool for achieving success (Vernuccio et al., 2015; Salem, S. F., & Salem, S. O., 2019). However, despite these opportunities, many firms struggle to build lasting brand loyalty among youth, who often display only temporary allegiance through these platforms (Ismail, 2017; Salem, S. F., & Salem, S. O., 2019). Research confirms that social media affects customer trust and decision-making, while also enabling customers to interact and share experiences (Lu & Hsiao, 2010; Hajli, 2013; Bilgin, 2018). As social media platforms grow, they are predicted to dominate marketing strategies, eclipsing traditional approaches (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Ibrahim, 2021). Companies not only post corporate content but also use social media to turn users into active marketing participants, encouraging them to engage more deeply and share ideas.

2.2. Brand Awareness (BA)

According to Keller (2009), brand awareness can be defined as “the extent to which a brand is embedded into the consumers’ brain, meaning their ability to recall or identify the brand in various circumstances” (Bilgin, 2018). Brand awareness is developed through consumers’ frequent encounters with the brand that are strong enough to leave a positive impression (Aaker, 1991; Pires & Rosenberger, 2019). These interactions can be triggered through different brand elements such as the brand name, slogan, packaging, various advertising forms, and social media marketing campaigns (Keller, 2013; Yoo et al., 2000; Bruhn et al., 2012; Pires & Rosenberger, 2019). In the economic aspect, businesses can use social media as a cost-effective strategy to strengthen brand recognition (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012; Khan et al., 2022). Brand awareness reduces the time that people would typically spend searching for the product they are about to buy (Verbeke et al., 2005; Bilgin, 2018). Brand recognition plays a key role in the buyer’s purchase intention when selecting a brand for shopping (Barreda et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2022). Brand awareness is considered the first stage at which brands must be for consumer consideration during the buying process (Langaro et al., 2018; Pires & Rosenberger, 2019).

2.3. Perceived Value (PV)

As PV (perceived value) first appeared in 1980, it has gained growing recognition from both academics and professionals (Bushara et al., 2023). The commonly listed definition of PV could include “the overall assessment of the product utility based on the perception of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14; Ajina, 2019). It is the measurement of what the customer has invested versus what they have been given in return (Bushara et al., 2023). The perceived value domain comprises five theoretical areas of value, such as functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value (Ledden et al., 2007; Chen & Lin, 2019).

Many scholars have examined perceived value (PV) as a crucial component of corporate marketing. Consequently, marketers are increasingly interested in perceived value due to the rise of price-value consumers (Bushara et al., 2023). According to Wang et al. (2004), e-commerce has both economic and psychological implications, providing competitive advantages to enterprises (Ajina, 2019). Certain studies have recognized this as the fundamental element for analyzing customer behavior (Wang et al., 2004; Ajina, 2019).

2.4. Brand Love

Wallace, Buil, and de Chernatony (2014) pointed out, brand love is defined as a consumer's emotional tie and favorable personality toward the brand (Salem & Salem, 2019). Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015) have argued that a brand deeply rooted in its consumers facilitates the development of sustainable brands and creates greater loyalty towards it (Salem & Salem, 2019). The basis for the brand-consumer relationship is the principles of interpersonal theory of love and triangular theory of love (Fournier, 1998; Sternberg, 1986, 1997; Fetais et al., 2023). As a result, brand loyalty will increase and help prevent the spread of negative information relating to the brand (Mayasari et al., 2023). Consumers tend to be understanding when it comes to any marketing technique blunder made by their favorite brand (Mayasari et al., 2023). According to Huang (2017), customers can develop attachment and loyalty to a brand if businesses understand the processes through which consumers typically become attached and remain devoted to it (Salem & Salem, 2019). Therefore, the available research on brand affection demonstrates a pivotal link between attitudes and related behavioral responses, leading to the construction of strong ties between customers and brands. This involves changing the attitude and emotions of customers towards the brand, promoting the acceptance of the brand, building loyalty, stimulating e-word of mouth (eWOM), generating actual purchases and purchase intentions, and discouraging people from being overly price-conscious (Albert et al., 2008; Ahuvia, 2005; K. Altrainabat, 2017; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace et al., 2014; Fetais et al., 2023).

2.5. Brand Loyalty

Studies reveal that brand loyalty among customers is shown by their intent to purchase the same brand above others and their promise to always choose the same brand when they shop (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016; Salem & Salem, 2019). The customer who repeatedly takes the same brand is a good example of loyalty (Lam et al., 2004; Jones & Taylor, 2007; Bilgin, 2018). Aaker (2014) asserts that brand loyalty represents the apex of brand management. To assess consumer loyalty, the company can adjust the product's

price relative to comparable competitor products to derive conclusions (Yegin, 2019). According to Kang, Tang, and Lee's theory on brand loyalty, the concept spans a three-phased process that culminates in achieving the previous phase. In the first stage, which is cognitive loyalty, patrons consider their personal experiences with this brand and how it meets their expectations (Taghipourian & Bakhsh, 2015; Salem & Salem, 2019). A second stage of this loyalty, named affective loyalty (AL), is where the consumers exhibit a real emotional attachment to the brand. This emotional bond essentially provides a positive attitude and favorable experience to the customer, leading to the brand's satisfaction (Lee et al., 2015; Salem & Salem, 2019). Another major aspect of today's marketing landscape is the concept of customer brand loyalty. When consumers create a strong bond or addiction to a brand, this results in loyalty sales, which are an indispensable drive for business persistence (Yegin, 2019).

2.6. Social Media Marketing, Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty

Contrary to traditional face-to-face marketing methods, the development of social media marketing activities has adhered to an interaction approach and now engages consumers in the process through actions such as liking, commenting, and sharing (Dulek & Saydan, 2019). Social networking sites do that amazingly as they bring together present customer communities and others on their site (Assael, 2001; Maria et al., 2019). Due to its accessibility, it is often easier for companies to implement the actions necessary for brand building on social media platforms (Nyekwere et al., 2013; Dulek & Saydan, 2019). Businesses like Dell and Starbucks equally apply social network websites for promotional purposes, such as to build and maintain brand awareness among clients (Maria et al., 2019). Numerous previous studies have demonstrated that social media marketing actions typically enhance brand awareness. Because of this behavior, social media users' online friends are more likely to voluntarily share any content available with them, expanding the reach (Bruhn et al., 2012; Hutter et al., 2013; Barreda et al., 2015; Bilgin, 2018; Seo & Park, 2018).

H₁: Social Media Marketing (SMM) has a positive effect on Brand Awareness (BA).

H₇: Brand Awareness mediates the relationship between SMM and BL.

2.7. Social Media Marketing & Perceived Value and Brand Loyalty

The concept of customer value and its significance to firms has recently received considerable attention, being regarded as a fundamental pillar of corporate sustainability (Baig et al., 2023). An assessment of company value is a cognitive process wherein incoming information is organized, processed, and subsequently analyzed to provide meaning for persons (Juliana et al., 2021). The relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and customers' perceived value (PV) is intricate. The advent of the internet and social media has transformed the dynamics between firms and their customers, prioritizing connections above transactions (Bushara et al., 2023). A customer's sense of belonging to a product or company correlates positively with their satisfaction about the organization's offerings (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012; Chen & Lin, 2019; Fakhr Uz Zaman et al., 2025; Kashif Baig et al., 2023).

H₂: SMM has a significant positive impact on customers' PV.

H₉: PV mediates the relationship between SMM and BL.

2.8. Social Media Marketing, Brand Love and Brand Loyalty

Researchers have identified several essential aspects underlying this association, including the brand's identity and its effectiveness in communicating customer values (Wallace & de Chernatony, 2014; Sikandar & Ahmed, 2019). The author characterizes the brand's trustworthiness through a transformative lens, delineating the customer-brand connection as a three-tier framework: subjective engagement, individual focus, and societal emphasis (Sikandar & Ahmed, 2019). Research on social media indicates that consumers with a strong affinity for their brand are inclined to publish content related to their products on their social media profiles (Baena, 2016; Ercis et al., 2020). The favorable responses of customers to the "love" sign on Instagram and the "like" symbol on Facebook may be interpreted as expressions of brand affinity (Vernuccio et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2014; Ercis et al., 2020). Social media marketing is a valuable tool for marketers, as it is crucial for garnering millennial support for local firms (Mayasari et al., 2023). Consumers join the brand community to be informed about the most intriguing and recent brand developments. When customers receive trustworthy information and establish an emotional connection with the company, it ultimately fosters brand loyalty (Nilowardono et al., 2020). Researchers have identified several essential aspects underlying this association, including the brand's identity and its effectiveness in communicating customer values (Wallace & de Chernatony, 2014; Sikandar & Ahmed, 2019). The author characterizes the brand's trustworthiness through a transformative lens, delineating the customer-brand connection as a three-tier framework: subjective engagement, individual focus, and societal emphasis (Sikandar & Ahmed, 2019). Research on social media indicates that consumers with a strong affinity for their brand are inclined to publish content related to their products on their social media profiles (Baena, 2016; Ercis et al., 2020). The favorable responses of customers to the "love" sign on Instagram and the "like" symbol on Facebook may be interpreted as expressions of brand affinity (Vernuccio et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2014; Ercis et al., 2020). Social media marketing is a valuable tool for marketers, as it is crucial for garnering millennial support for local firms (Mayasari et al., 2023). Consumers join the brand community to be informed about the most intriguing and recent brand developments. When customers receive trustworthy information and establish an emotional connection with the company, it ultimately fosters brand loyalty (Nilowardono et al., 2020).

H₃: Social media marketing has a significant influence on brand love

H₈: BLV mediates the relationship between SMM and BL.

2.9. Brand Awareness & Brand Loyalty

Consumers recognize brand awareness through consistent usage, positive sentiments, preferences, and the brand itself. Notably, the consequences of peer-to-peer influence are so powerful that they can directly affect purchase decisions over time, resulting in long-term loyalty (Mathew et al., 2014). However, this finding contradicts the conventional perspective that devoted and familiar customers should exclusively contemplate the brands (Macdonald & Sharp, 2003). Meanwhile, Chang (2012) and Barreda et al. (2015) assert that brand awareness is paramount, surpassing brand image and brand loyalty, and serves as the critical determinant of brand strength. In essence, research suggests that brand loyalty for firms is generated through a synthesis of brand awareness and brand image (Baldauf et al., 2003). Furthermore, supporting this view, Perera and Dissanayaka's (2013) research indicates a significant association between brand awareness and brand loyalty (Bilgin, 2018).

H4: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

2.10. Perceived Value & Brand Loyalty

Loyalty programs give retailers insight into consumer purchase behavior and brand satisfaction, as reflected by perceived value. Ashraf et al. (2018), referencing Ishak et al. (2014), found that product value, rooted in customer trust, significantly influences brand loyalty. Trust thus acts as a precursor to loyalty (Ashraf et al., 2018; Ishak et al., 2014; Jian Li, 2021).

Hypothesis 5 (H₅): Perceived value has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

2.11. Brand Love & Brand Loyalty

Thomson, MacInnis, and Whan Park (2005) confirmed that brand love and brand loyalty exhibit a robust positive correlation across multiple studies. Likewise, Back and Park (2003) undertook a study in the hospitality sector that yielded analogous findings. Researchers argue that consumers who are content with their preferred brand and possess a profound emotional connection to it exhibit greater loyalty than those who do not share such an emotional affiliation (Roy, Eshghi, & Sarkar, 2013). Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) and Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) further substantiates the notion that customers' affection for a brand correlates with brand loyalty. Bıçakcıoğlu, İpek, and Bayraktaroğlu (2018) offer pertinent observations regarding this relationship.

Hypothesis 6 (H₆): brand love has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

2.12. Research Framework

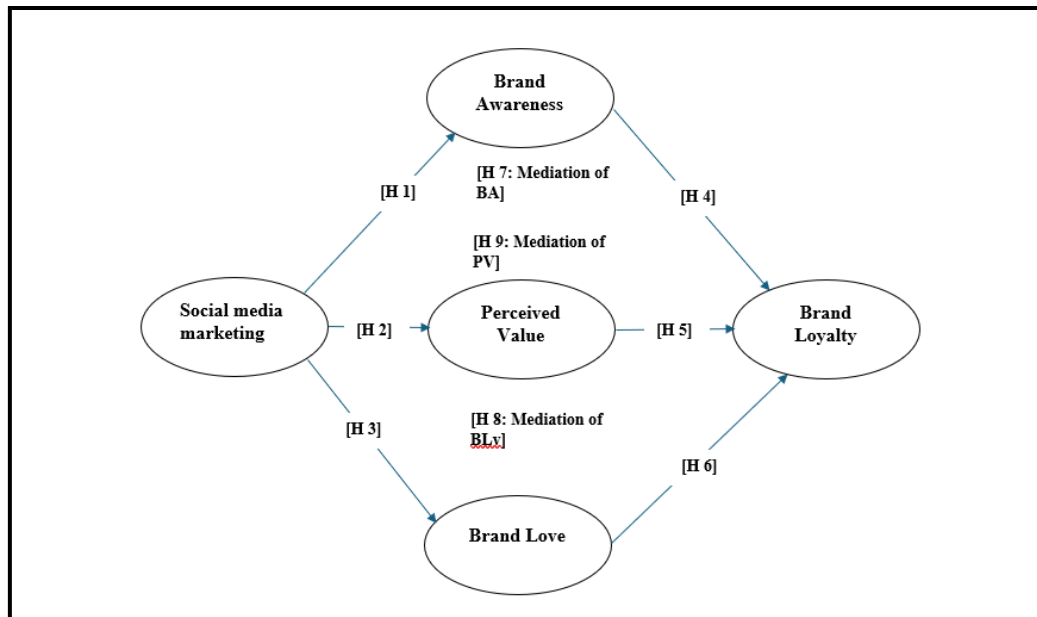


Figure.1. Research Framework
Source: Author's own elaboration

3. Methodology

The main methodological consideration was the Research Onion model (Saunders et al., 2019). The methodological preferences aligned with the study's aim of examining the

impact of social media marketing (SMM) on brand loyalty, considering the mediating roles of perceived value, brand awareness, and brand love.

3.1. Research Design

The research used a positivist approach focused on objectivity, quantification, and hypothesis testing. This method tests if social media marketing initiatives directly influence brand preferences. The deductive approach turned established theories into quantifiable constructs for systematic analysis of causal links. The study's quantitative cross-sectional design collected data at a single point to evaluate relationships between SMM, brand awareness, perceived value, brand love, and brand loyalty. This approach provided an overview of customer attitudes in the changing digital landscape. Data was gathered with an online structured survey, efficiently reaching many social media users in Pakistan.

3.2. Research setting and Population

To ensure accessibility and participation from a variety of demographic groups, the survey was administered online using Google Forms shared on Facebook, WhatsApp, and other platforms. Active social media users were targeted in Pakistan. The Digital 2023 Pakistan Report by DataReportal indicates that this population consists of over 87 million users, providing a substantial framework for analyzing the influence of social media marketing on loyalty development.

3.3. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Due to the group's diversity, the study used convenience sampling, a common non-probability method for exploratory online research. Participants were selected based on availability and willingness to participate. The Survey Monkey sample size calculator (www.surveymonkey.com) recommended 385 participants for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This approach allowed the results to represent the population's characteristics while addressing resource and time limits.

3.4. Measures

The survey questionnaire was designed around established measurement scales, employing a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items for SMM were adapted from Yadav and Rahman (2017), Wibowo et al. (2021), and Mayasari et al. (2023). Brand awareness items were drawn from Keller (1993) and Dulek and Saydan (2019). Perceived value was measured using items from Zeithaml (1988) and Bushara et al. (2023). Measures for brand love were adapted from Mayasari et al. (2023), while brand loyalty items were sourced from Jain et al. (2018), Kotler and Gertner (2002), Ibrahim (2021), Zehir et al. (2011), and Khan et al. (2022). This ensured that constructs were operationalized using validated and widely cited scales.

3.5. Pilot Testing

A pilot test involved 23 participants. Cronbach's alpha was 0.776, exceeding the minimum of 0.70 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Subscale reliabilities ranged from 0.635 to 0.847, showing acceptable to strong internal consistency. Participants completed the test in 10 to 15 minutes, and feedback confirmed that this timing was suitable. Minor changes improved clarity and flow, as shown in the table.

Table.1.Pilot Testing

S. No	Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha
1	Social media marketing	4	0.789
2	Brand awareness	4	0.752
3	Perceive value	4	0.654
4	Brand love	5	0.637
5	Brand loyalty	5	0.847

Source: Author's own elaboration

3.6. Data Collection and Analysis

Data gathering spanned six months, enabling participation from a diverse demographic. Demographic information—age, gender, education, and income—was collected to analyze any discrepancies in responses. After data cleaning and encoding, statistical methods for quantitative research, including correlation analysis (measuring variable relationships) and regression analysis (predicting values from other variables), were used to evaluate proposed relationships. The analysis also examined how brand awareness, perceived value, and brand love mediate the connection between social media marketing and brand loyalty. Analyses were conducted using SPSS 26 and Smart PLS 4, specialized statistical tools.

3.7. Ethical Consideration

Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, with no personal identifiers disclosed. Furthermore, participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time. In addition, informed consent, inclusion criteria, and estimated completion time were clearly communicated. Data were securely stored in password-protected files and accessible only to designated authorized researchers. Finally, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, ensuring compliance with established research standards and protection of participant rights.

4. Analysis

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table.2.Demographic Profile

Category	Items	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	Male	258	67 %
	Female	127	33 %
Age	15-25 years	218	56.8 %
	26-36 years	153	39.8 %
	37-47 years	10	2.4 %
	48-60 years	4	1 %
	60-65 years		0 %
Profession	Student	158	41 %
	Employed	148	38.3 %
	Self-Employed	45	11.7 %
	Business Owner	26	6.9 %
	Home Maker	6	1.6 %
	Other	2	0.5 %
Income	Below 50k Rs	122	31.6 %
	50k - 100k Rs	112	29.1 %
	101k - 200k Rs	64	16.5 %
	201k - 300k Rs	35	9.1 %
	Over 300k Rs	21	5.4 %
	Prefer not to say	31	8.3 %

Source: Author's own elaboration

The demographic profile demonstrates a male-dominated sample (67%), with females comprising 33%. The majority of respondents were young adults aged 15–25 years (56.8%), followed by 26–36 years (39.8%), indicating that social media engagement is highest among youth. Students (41%) and employed individuals (38.3%) formed the bulk of participants, reflecting active digital users. Income distribution was diverse, with most earning below 100k PKR (60.7%), suggesting representation from middle- to lower-income groups. The presence of self-employed (11.7%) and business owners (6.9%) further adds heterogeneity. Overall, the demographics highlight a youthful, educated, and socially active cohort—ideal for studying social media marketing’s influence.

4.2. Measurement Model

The assessment of the measurement model was conducted using the PLS-SEM algorithm (Hair et al., 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2021), as exhibited by figure 2.

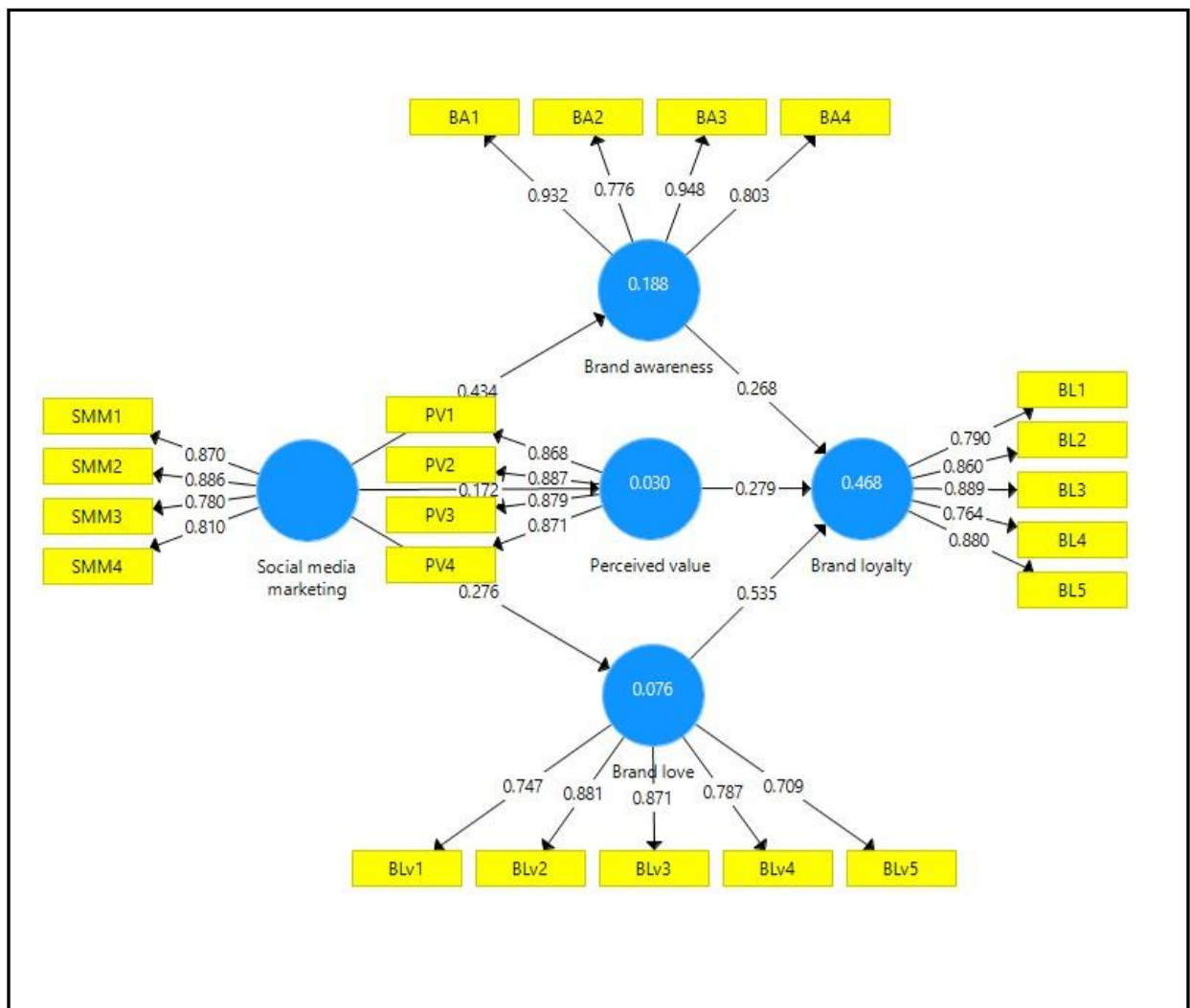


Figure.2.Measurement Model
Source: Author’s own elaboration

4.3. Factor Loadings, Reliability and Convergent Validity.

The quality criteria were checked through the PLS-SEM algorithm (Hair et al., 2022) based on outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability, as shown in Table 3.

Table.3.Factor Loadings

	Factor Loadings	α	CR	AVE
BA1	0.932	0.888	0.924	0.754
BA2	0.776			
BA3	0.948			
BA4	0.803			
BL1	0.790	0.893	0.922	0.702
BL2	0.860			
BL3	0.889			
BL4	0.764			
BL5	0.880	0.867	0.899	0.643
BLv1	0.747			
BLv2	0.881			
BLv3	0.871			
BLv4	0.787			
BLv5	0.709	0.899	0.930	0.768
PV1	0.868			
PV2	0.887			
PV3	0.879			
PV4	0.871	0.864	0.904	0.701
SMM1	0.870			
SMM2	0.886			
SMM3	0.780			
SMM4	0.810			

Note:Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Loyalty (BL), Brand Love (BLv), Perceived Value (PV), Social Media Marketing (SMM), Cronbach Alpha > 0.7, Composite Reliability (CR) > 0.7, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.5.

Source: Author's own elaboration

The measurement model reveals satisfactory reliability and validity across all constructs. Factor loadings for items exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), confirming strong indicator reliability, with the exception of a few items (e.g., BLv5 = 0.709) that still met the minimum acceptable level. Cronbach's alpha (α) values ranged from 0.864 to 0.899, surpassing the 0.70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating internal consistency. Composite Reliability (CR) values were consistently above 0.90, exceeding the 0.70 benchmark (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), thus confirming construct reliability. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores ranged between 0.643 and 0.768, all above the 0.50 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), establishing convergent validity. Specifically, Brand Awareness ($\alpha = 0.888$, CR = 0.924, AVE = 0.754) and Perceived Value ($\alpha = 0.899$, CR = 0.930, AVE = 0.768) showed particularly strong measurement properties. Overall, these results affirm that the constructs—Brand Awareness, Brand Loyalty, Brand Love, Perceived Value, and Social Media Marketing—were measured reliably and validly, supporting further structural model analysis.

4.4. Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity was assessed through the Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), Fornell-Larcker criterion and Cross Loadings as shown in tables (Hair et al., 2024).

Table.4.Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Brand Awareness	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Value	Social Media Marketing
Brand Awareness					
Brand Love	0.240				
Brand Loyalty	0.122	0.597			
Perceived Value	0.165	0.397	0.501		
Social Media Marketing	0.469	0.334	0.149	0.199	

Source: Author's own elaboration

Discriminant validity was confirmed as all HTMT values (0.122–0.597) fell below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), indicating a clear distinction among Brand Awareness, Brand Loyalty, Brand Love, Perceived Value, and Social Media Marketing constructs.

Table.5.Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Brand Awareness	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Value	Social Media Marketing
Brand Awareness	0.868				
Brand Love	0.225	0.802			
Brand Loyalty	-0.105	0.586	0.838		
Perceived Value	0.151	0.399	0.452	0.876	
Social Media Marketing	0.434	0.276	-0.054	0.172	0.838

Source: Author's own elaboration

The Fornell–Larcker criterion confirmed discriminant validity. Each construct's square root of AVE (0.802–0.876) exceeded its correlations with other constructs. This shows Brand Awareness, Brand Love, Brand Loyalty, Perceived Value, and Social Media Marketing are empirically distinct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table.6.Cross Loadings

	Brand Awareness	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Value	Social Media Marketing
BA1	0.932	0.247	-0.072	0.194	0.425
BA2	0.776	0.200	-0.104	0.117	0.322
BA3	0.948	0.176	-0.106	0.123	0.389
BA4	0.803	0.154	-0.089	0.081	0.363
BL1	-0.084	0.413	0.790	0.302	-0.054
BL2	-0.143	0.544	0.860	0.347	-0.083
BL3	-0.036	0.562	0.889	0.447	0.056
BL4	-0.069	0.472	0.764	0.343	-0.074
BL5	-0.110	0.445	0.880	0.442	-0.085
BLv1	0.096	0.747	0.240	0.085	0.334
BLv2	0.274	0.881	0.464	0.459	0.296
BLv3	0.136	0.871	0.606	0.381	0.164

	Brand Awareness	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Value	Social Media Marketing
BLv4	0.237	0.787	0.637	0.406	0.114
BLv5	0.108	0.709	0.188	0.087	0.317
PV1	0.082	0.344	0.417	0.868	0.104
PV2	0.059	0.315	0.417	0.887	0.081
PV3	0.131	0.343	0.384	0.879	0.151
PV4	0.252	0.395	0.367	0.871	0.263
SMM1	0.442	0.315	0.051	0.267	0.870
SMM2	0.336	0.271	-0.037	0.109	0.886
SMM3	0.249	0.118	-0.205	-0.078	0.780
SMM4	0.361	0.141	-0.108	0.136	0.810

Source: Author's own elaboration

The cross-loadings analysis confirmed discriminant validity. Each indicator loaded highest on its intended construct (0.709–0.948). This satisfies the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019). An indicator's loading should be higher on its own construct than on any other. Thus, the measurement items uniquely represent their respective constructs.

4.5. Model's Explanatory Powers

Table.7.R-Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Brand Awareness	0.188	0.186
Brand Love	0.076	0.074
Brand Loyalty	0.468	0.463
Perceived Value	0.030	0.027

Source: Author's own elaboration

Table.8.F-Square

	Brand Awareness	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Value	Social Media Marketing
Brand Awareness			0.127		
Brand Love			0.437		
Brand Loyalty					
Perceived Value			0.122		
Social Media Marketing	0.232	0.082		0.031	

Source: Author's own elaboration

The model demonstrates moderate explanatory power, with Brand Loyalty showing the highest R^2 (0.468), indicating substantial variance explained. Brand Awareness (0.188) and Brand Love (0.076) show weaker explanatory levels, while Perceived Value (0.030) is minimal. F^2 values confirm medium-to-strong effects, especially Brand Love (0.437) and Social Media Marketing (0.232). However, the R-square value of "Perceived Value" reflects a lower strength than the recommended threshold, normally the R-Square value in social science research remain low due to some uncontrollable external factor therefore, we suggest future research with revised measures or eliminating the imperfect aspect of the survey.

4.6. Structural model

Table.9.Structural Model Results

Hypotheses		Beta Coefficients	S.D.	T Statistics	P Values
H1	SMM->BA	0.434	0.087	5.017	0.000
H2	SMM -> PV	0.172	0.111	1.556	0.120
H3	SMM->BLv	0.276	0.119	2.328	0.020
H4	BA -> BL	-0.268	0.088	3.030	0.002
H5	PV -> BL	0.279	0.058	4.800	0.000
H6	BLv -> BL	0.535	0.076	7.048	0.000

Note:Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Loyalty (BL), Brand Love (BLv), Perceived Value (PV), Social Media Marketing (SMM). P value < 0.05

Source: Author's own elaboration

The hypothesis testing reveals that H1 (SMM $\rightarrow$ BA) is strongly supported ($\beta = 0.434$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that social media marketing effectively builds brand awareness by increasing customer familiarity and brand visibility. However, H2 (SMM $\rightarrow$ PV) is not supported ($\beta = 0.172$, $p = 0.120$), suggesting that social media marketing activities do not significantly enhance customers' perceived value, possibly because value perceptions depend more on product quality, pricing, and service experiences than on marketing interactions. H3 (SMM $\rightarrow$ BLv) is supported ($\beta = 0.276$, $p = 0.020$), indicating that interactive marketing efforts positively nurture brand love by fostering emotional bonds through engaging content. For H4 (BA $\rightarrow$ BL), the results are surprising, with a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.268$, $p = 0.002$). This implies that while awareness is important, awareness alone without meaningful value or emotional engagement might not translate into loyalty and could even reduce it if customers are aware of competing brands. H5 (PV $\rightarrow$ BL) is strongly supported ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting that customers who perceive higher value are more likely to remain loyal. Lastly, H6 (BLv $\rightarrow$ BL) has the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.535$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that brand love is the most powerful driver of loyalty, as emotional attachment sustains long-term commitment. Overall, the findings emphasize that while SMM boosts awareness and emotional connection, loyalty is primarily driven by value perception and deep affection for the brand.

4.7. Mediation Analysis

Table.10.Specific Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Direct Effect (IV to DV)			Indirect Effect (IV to DV)				Results	Decision
	Coefficient	t. value	p. value	Coefficient	SD	t. value	p. value		
H ₇ SMM $\rightarrow$ BA $\rightarrow$ BL	0.210	4.038	0.000	0.116	0.050	2.342	0.020	Partial mediation	Partially Supported
H ₈ SMM $\rightarrow$ BLv $\rightarrow$ BL	0.185	3.246	0.001	0.148	0.060	2.441	0.015	Full mediation	Fully Supported
H ₉ SMM $\rightarrow$ PV $\rightarrow$ BL	0.092	2.044	0.041	0.048	0.033	1.475	0.041	Partial mediation	Partially Supported

Source: Author's own elaboration

The mediation analysis highlights both direct and indirect effects of social media marketing on brand loyalty, considering brand awareness, brand love, and perceived value as mediators. The results show that brand awareness partially mediates the

relationship between social media marketing and brand love. The direct effect has a beta coefficient of 0.210, a t-value of 4.038, and a p-value of 0.00. The indirect effect shows a beta coefficient of 0.116, a t-value of 2.343, and a p-value of 0.020. Similarly, perceived value partially mediates the relationship. Its direct effect has a beta coefficient of 0.092, a t-value of 2.044, and a p-value of 0.048. The indirect effect has a beta coefficient of 0.048, a t-value of 1.475, and a p-value of 0.041. In contrast, brand love fully mediates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. The direct effect shows a beta of 0.185, a t-value of 3.246, and a p-value of 0.001, while the indirect effect shows a beta of 0.060, a t-value of 2.441, and a p-value of 0.015.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide several important insights into how interactive social media marketing shapes customer loyalty. First, the significant effect of social media marketing on brand awareness confirms prior findings by Wallace and de Chernatony (2014) and Sikandar and Ahmed (2019), suggesting that digital engagement platforms effectively enhance brand visibility and recall. Yet, the lack of significance for the relationship between social media marketing and perceived value (H2) is noteworthy. This suggests that while social media strategies can inform and entertain, they may not directly convince customers of a brand's functional or economic worth. In contrast, customer perceptions of value might be influenced more by real-world experiences like service delivery, fair pricing, and high-quality products than by marketing encounters alone. The findings align with the conclusions of Juliana et al. (2021), who assert that experiencing elements significantly influence perceived worth more than advertising activities. The significant relationship between social media marketing and brand love (H3) highlights the emotional dimension of digital engagement. Engaging, personalized, and interactive content appears to foster strong emotional ties, supporting the argument that affective engagement is a critical outcome of social media strategies. However, the negative relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty (H4) adds a surprising nuance. Awareness without meaningful differentiation or emotional engagement might lead customers to explore competing alternatives, ultimately weakening loyalty. This finding fosters the idea that awareness is necessary but insufficient for long-term commitment. The positive influence of perceived value on brand loyalty (H5) aligns with established theory (Ishak et al., 2014; Jian Li, 2021): customers remain loyal when they feel they receive high value relative to costs. Importantly, brand love (H6) emerges as the strongest predictor of loyalty, underscoring the central role of emotional attachment. This suggests that long-term loyalty is less about rational evaluations and more about affective bonds that tie customers to the brand. Taken together, these results highlight that social media marketing is more effective in creating emotional connections than in enhancing value perceptions. Loyalty, in turn, is sustained by a combination of perceived value and brand love, while brand awareness alone may even hinder it. This implies that firms should design social media strategies not just for reach and exposure but for deep engagement, storytelling, and relationship-building that cultivate brand love and convey tangible value.

The mediation results provide deeper insights into how social media marketing (SMM) translates into brand loyalty (BL). The significant mediation through brand awareness (H7) indicates that exposure and visibility generated by SMM indirectly strengthen loyalty, though the effect is modest. More importantly, the stronger mediation effect through brand love (H8) highlights the central role of emotional engagement. This suggests that while awareness is an initial outcome of social media activities, it is the emotional attachment fostered by brand love that more effectively sustains loyalty.

Conversely, perceived value does not significantly mediate the relationship (H9), suggesting that customers may not directly link value perceptions to loyalty when influenced by social media marketing. This indicates that emotional and relational factors outweigh utilitarian considerations in this context. Future research could further explore contextual or industry-specific factors influencing perceived value's mediating role. These findings align with prior research emphasizing that rational awareness is insufficient for loyalty without affective bonding. For managers, this underscores the need to design social media strategies that go beyond visibility and aim at cultivating authentic connections and experiences that generate brand love, ultimately securing long-term loyalty.

5.1. Practical Implication

Managers should recognize that social media marketing builds awareness but does not guarantee loyalty. Emotional engagement, particularly brand love, is the strongest driver of loyalty and should be cultivated through interactive, personalized, and authentic content. At the same time, firms must reinforce perceived value with quality, fair pricing, and reliable service to sustain long-term commitment.

5.2. Future Research Directions

Future studies should investigate why perceived value fails to mediate the relationship between social media marketing and loyalty, taking into account product type, industry context, and cultural differences. Longitudinal and cross-cultural research could clarify whether awareness consistently weakens loyalty, while examining moderators such as trust and authenticity would provide deeper insights into loyalty formation. Moreover, a more robust measure the "Perceived Value" must be utilized to conduct the same study, that overcomes the lower explanatory power problem in this research.

5.3. Limitation

The research of social media is massive, covering both the urban and rural centers. However, due to access to wider populations, data was gathered to the strict urban setup of Karachi city. Moreover, the construct may be made more robust, adding more items. The shortage of available time restricts the use of a smaller questionnaire. Also, a weak explanatory power of one of the construct i.e. Perceived Value is limitation of this research that demands for other available measures for this construct.

Author Contributions

- Mirza Kashif Baig: Conceptualization of the research problem, framework, and design.
- Syed Habib Ur Rehman & Syed Ghayas Ahmed Tahir Ziadi: Literature review and manuscript refinement.
- Sajjada Shamim Ahmed: Statistical analysis and conclusions.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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