

# 3 Social media marketing activities: Studying social identification, trust, value and loyalty

*Faizan Ali, Abraham Terrah, Seden Dogan and Cihan Cobanoglu*

## Introduction

Social media refers to different online platforms and tools that provide social interaction between users (Hays *et al.*, 2013) through text, pictures, and videos (Berthon *et al.*, 2012). During the last decade, the number of social media users has increased rapidly. The latest report published by We Are Social (2021) shows that in 2020 there were currently 4.2 billion social media users, equivalent to more than 53% of the world's total population. In 2019, this figure was 3.8 billion (We Are Social, 2020), showing an increase of more than 13% over the year. In other words, social media gained 1.3 million new users every day, or 15 people every second during 2020. A typical user spends almost 2.5 hours in a day on social media (We Are Social, 2021). They use social media for different purposes, including fear of missing out, need of fulfillment (Aksoy, 2018), search for information, search for social interaction (Chen & Lin, 2019), search for positive emotions, and escape from negative emotions (Brailovskaia *et al.*, 2020).

Social media is also becoming a popular marketing platform for brands (Chaffey, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2012). Social media brings significant opportunities for hospitality brands to engage and communicate with their consumers (Chu *et al.*, 2020). It has created a transformation in consumers' behavior where consumers can interact with brands during different stages of purchase decisions, such as discovering a brand or product, looking for information about a brand or product, and looking for suggestions

from peers about a brand or product. Moreover, it allows consumers to exchange information with one another, thus contribute to enhancing electronic word-of-mouth by (Kaosiri *et al.*, 2019), giving birth to social groups where the members have a good sense of community (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). These online communities facilitate customer-customer and customer-brand interactions, which can shape potential customers' perceptions and ideas. Also, hospitality brands have started to use social media influencers, who are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic and gained a big number of followers (Bakker, 2018). Through endorsement by social media influencers, brands promote their products/services on social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Youtube, and Weibo (Xu & Pratt, 2018). It provides brands the opportunity to establish individual connections, with a chance to reach out to the customers in a much more personalized way (Seo & Park, 2018).

Owing to these benefits, social media has incontestably become an essential component for hospitality brands' online marketing strategies (Pham & Nguyen, 2019). Social media marketing refers to marketing practices on social media platforms conducted by companies to influence users' behavior (Chen & Lin, 2019). According to Kim and Ko (2012), social media marketing activities (SMMA) include entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth (WOM). Similarly, Yadav and Rahman (2018) also confirmed interactivity, informativeness, word-of-mouth, trendiness, and personalization as dimensions of SMMA. In this study, the SMMA components proposed by Kim and Ko (2012) are studied in the context of social media advertising by hospitality brands. It is important to understand the role of SMMA in creating value perceived by the customer, which is an essential output of marketing activities (Sanchez *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, hospitality brands need to build strong relationships with their customers to maintain trust and loyalty. Trust is a crucial element to building a sustainable relationship with customers (Wang *et al.*, 2014). Loyalty, on the other hand, helps to develop long-term relationships, which leads to repeated purchase behavior and intention to pay more (Kandampully *et al.*, 2015). Although previous studies regarding social media focused on SMMA's impact on social identification and perceived value (Chen & Lin, 2019), studies focused on developing loyalty through social identification, perceived value, and trust are very limited. The purpose of this study is to fill this deficiency and address the following question: how SMMA performed by the hotels may develop social identification, trust, value, and loyalty towards the hotel.

## Literature review

The rise of social media networks in the 2010s has attracted marketers' attention, who view the platforms as powerful advertising tools due to the reach in terms of a number of consumers. For instance, Facebook counted over 2.7 billion active users and YouTube 2 billion users as of October 2020 (Statista, 2020). TikTok, another rising social network especially in the United States, has about 689 million users (Statista, 2020). The spectrum of means to market online using social media is broad, including opportunities to share information through blogs, forums, or virtual communities. As such, several organizations seek to extend the levels of communication and interactions with consumers in order to create brand communities on the virtual level (sphere) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2014). According to Wellman (2001), consumers' needs in terms of online communities do not differ from the ones in offline communities, especially in terms of shared experiences, social support, and self-identity. Previous studies have established that in a brand community, a set of beliefs develops among the members, and eventually links them by sharing their experiences with the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz & Schau, 2005; Sicilia & Palazon, 2008). This implies that consumers may also be interested in creating experiences through interactions with other consumers or experts (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

### Social media marketing activities

The social media marketing tools operate through online communities created around certain brands and organizations, bringing together individuals having experiences with those brands and organizations. An online brand community can be defined as a community in which interactions occur through computer-mediated devices and in which members share similar interests (Baldus *et al.*, 2015). Online brand communities have been enhanced by social media, which provides a way for two-way communication and allows the sharing of content between brands and consumers on the one hand, and between consumers themselves on the other hand (Verhagen *et al.*, 2015). Yadav and Rahman (2017) say that social media marketing tools allow for interaction, sharing of crucial information, and the spread of word-of-mouth about specific products and services. These are made possible through elements such as user ratings, reviews, referrals, testimonies, as well as recommendations (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). As a consequence, social media gained in importance, in particular with

regard to managing relationships with consumers (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). A definition of social media marketing is provided by Yadav and Rahman:

*A process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver online marketing offerings via social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships that enhance stakeholders' value by facilitating interaction, information sharing, offering personalized purchase recommendations, and word of mouth creation among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services (2017: 1296).*

Yadav and Rahman (2017) provided in their study a five-dimension scale of social media marketing activities, namely interactivity, informativeness, word-of-mouth, trendiness, and personalization. Prior to those findings, Kim and Ko (2012) also provided—in their investigation of luxury brands—five dimensions to social media marketing activities. These include entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth. Ebrahim (2020) found three dimensions to social media marketing activities: trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth, and established their link with loyalty. Working from the prior literature, the present study argues social media marketing entails performing activities that capture and engage consumers via five distinct factors—entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth (Chen & Lin, 2019; Godey *et al.*, 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Mohammadpour *et al.*, 2014; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). The entertainment dimension is hedonic and denotes the pleasure derived from the use of social media. Interaction allows users to contribute to the brand; trendiness is concerned with the novelty and up-to-dateness of the information; customization relates to the ability to serve different types of needs and consumer demands; and word-of-mouth denotes opinions and experiences' information sharing between members.

## **Social Identification**

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has previously been used as a theoretical foundation for understanding brand identification in marketing (Elbedweihy *et al.*, 2016; Lam *et al.*, 2013; Rather & Sharma, 2017). According to this theory, consumers spend a considerable amount of effort developing their own social identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Islam *et al.*, 2017). They tend to develop a group affiliation, which allows them to craft a unified opinion that acts as a determinant of a favorable attitude (Shareef *et al.*, 2019). When consumers can communicate with their peers and share their experiences with them, they are also provided with the capability to