



Brand Positioning as A Mediator in The Relationship Between Social Media Quality and Brand Loyalty: An Applied Study on The Private Universities in Egypt

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Abstract

The research investigates the role of brand positioning as a mediator in the relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty in private higher education institutions in Egypt from the student's perspective. The quantitative method was the research method. The primary data was collected by the online questionnaire from the students enrolled in private universities in Egypt. Convenience sampling was used. The sample size was 400. A total of 384 responses were collected and valid. The data were analyzed via (SPSS v22). The findings indicated that there is a significant relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty, and brand positioning mediates this relationship. Additionally, the model has a high ability to predict brand loyalty through social media quality and brand positioning. The study recommends private universities to depend on social media as a strategic marketing communication tool to build brand positioning and brand loyalty. The research is limited to private universities in Egypt, and findings may apply to other institutions.

Keywords: *Social Media, Brand positioning, Brand Loyalty, Private Higher Education Originations.*

Introduction

In the context of private universities that operate in a dynamic and challenging environment, students' decision-making is mainly influenced by the brand itself, which encourages private universities to pay greater attention to strategically building and managing their educational brands to differentiate themselves from other competitors and gain more student market share (Retamosa, 2018). Therefore, a marketing strategy is important for helping private universities in student recruiting and retention (Asaad et al., 2013), Indeed, brand loyalty that is reflected in recruiting and retaining students is the primary concern of private universities. Brand loyalty depends on the degree to which the customer associates the brand with quality and trust. Therefore, achieving brand loyalty and survival in such institutions can be affected by brand positioning and social media channels.

Brand positioning is "the heart of marketing strategy" (Keller et al., 2011), it is a critical point in affecting students' brand choices and their willingness to recommend their universities to others, Consequently, successful brands are those who succeed in creating brand positioning that is desired and relevant and then managing it in a way that can build brand loyalty. On the other hand, the digital platforms have changed the preferences for media consumption of the majority of people, which enforced companies to be in Google to have a presence in the digital era, and give greater concern to the quality of social media platforms in terms of ease of communication, credibility, content quality, and relevance (Helal, Ozuem, and Lancaster, 2018). Social media channels as digital channels can contribute more to institutions than traditional media by exposing their

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brands heavily to customers (Suryani, Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021), communicating brand positioning, and keeping those institutions more competitive (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). The institutions depend on such platforms for communicating with their customers and affecting their buying decisions through the trust generated in such platforms, which encourage private universities to move their brands to the social media environment (Baum, 2019), as an attempt to increase their visibility (Gunduz, 2015), and build a strong emotional relationship with their students and make their brands the first choice for the students when they decide to study (Tomiya, 2010).

Literature Review

The Relationship between Social Media and Brand positioning

The brand is the most important asset that institutions can have; it is intangible but vital for affecting consumers' buying decisions (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Brand plays three main functions that are navigating the customers to choose a specific brand from a broad range of possibilities, and then making them feel safe with their decision making, and engaging them through images and languages (Wheeler, 2012). A strong brand can affect student recruitment and retention. In addition, the brand can reduce the risks of acquiring the wrong product. Brand positioning is the marketing activity that is used by institutions to build their brands, communicate, and foster brand uniqueness in the customers' minds, as well as make the brand more relevant and desirable for the customers, which encourages the customer to remember the brand (Tomiya, 2010). Brand positioning should capture the institution's mission, aspiration, and strengths, as well as the interests of the marketplace (Chung et al., 2008).

Positioning depends on the marketing mix in terms of product, price, promotion, and place as four strategies to position their brands in consumers' minds, therefore, the decision made by the institutions related to how they decide to position their brands and offerings in consumers' minds is important for creating a marketing strategy, deciding advertising implementation and marketing communication practices (Wheeler, 2012), and implementing the marketing campaigns that can support their brand positioning (Hogan, 2004). Brand positioning is related to the messages that private universities deliver to the customers to make them understand what those universities intend to deliver for them. Therefore, an effective brand positioning message for a private university should reflect institutional safety and experience, course quality and flexibility, and graduates' quality and employment prospect. Therefore, Effective communication channels should be selected carefully by private universities to communicate their brand positioning (Chung et al., 2008).

In the digital era, Institutions depend on social media platforms to conduct their digital marketing activities (Malesev and Cherry, 2021), which can affect customers' perceptions (Zarantonello et al., 2020), persuade them, and affect their decision-making (Chu and Kim, 2011). Therefore, social media sites can play a significant role in helping private universities to maintain their brand positioning (Chung et al., 2008).

The Relationship between Brand Positioning and Brand Loyalty

In the context of private universities, when students decide to study at a certain university, they consider the brand that can reflect their values and attitudes; therefore, private universities should manage their brands in a way that can satisfy the student's needs (Moipone et al., 2021). Brand positioning is the main dimension of brand identity that has a significant role in developing a brand (Hanna and Rowley, 2013). Brand positioning communicates what a brand is all about and the value proposition the company will deliver to target audiences (Aaker et al., 2000). Brand positioning can augment the brand by focusing on the competitive characteristics that put it away from competitors, using the brand personality to give life to the brand, and building stronger customer relationships. Brand positioning creates a positive attitude toward the brand, by affecting customers' opinions regarding brand. Therefore, Companies that have a unique brand positioning are more likely to be successful than those who don't (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Having strong brand positioning is a condition for Institutions' success. Brand positioning helps companies to identify their target segment and communicate their differentiated value proposition to them. Brand positioning should be distinguished to help the brand to be the reference for the customers when they decide to buy (Tomiya, 2010). Brand positioning is the act of designing the institution's offer to be different to acquire a distinct place in the consumer's mind (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Brand positioning is the marketing activity that institutions implement to achieve a competitive position to survive in the competitive environment and protect their market share (Retamosa, 2018), which will be reflected in the profitability and long-term success of those institutions. Therefore, brand positioning has a significant role in improving brand loyalty. Thus positioning strategies are important in improving brand performance generally and brand loyalty specifically (Blankson et al., 2008).

The desired positioning is achieved when specific functional and emotional attributes are stressed in the positioning strategy, and when the brand and all marketing activities communicate relevant brand positioning (Baker, 2003), for instance, Superior performance is generally connected with more distinct high-quality positioning. Therefore, brand positioning has a significant impact on brand loyalty as an important dimension of brand performance, and this was supported by Chaves (2017) who studied the relationship between brand positioning and brand loyalty, and found that that brand positioning is the most influential construct that has a significant impact on brand loyalty (Zarantonello et al., 2020).

The Relationship between Social Media and Brand Loyalty

Millennials' decisions regarding university selection are affected by social media (Duffet, 2017). The study by Ahmad & Laroche (2017) declared that 97% of Customers are influenced by comments they read on social media, which is considered a primary digital communication channel for sharing their comments and experience (Siqueira et al., 2019), and to get answers to their questions related to the products and services, as well as purchasing the products they need (Lee & Choi, 2019). Social media is any website that users use to interact with others and share their opinions with them. Social media marketing is the marketing strategy that institutions use as a tool for communication with customers, direct sales activities, customer recruitment, and retention (McKinsey, 2007). Social media can improve brand value through engagement with a huge number of customers (Saha et al., 2021). Therefore, social media is a perfect interactive communication channel that can help institutions to enhance their relationship with customers (Kim and Ko, 2012), and strengthen brand loyalty (Keller, 2009).

According to Saha et al., (2021), brand loyalty is a very complicated phenomenon that can appear in the various stages of customers' mindsets; from habitual customers to satisfied customers, to those who are committed to the brand. Repeating purchases are the result of the total confirmation of the abilities of the brand to satisfy the customers' needs in the best way. Repeating purchases are affected by consumers' attitudes and experiences. Social media helps companies to engage with their customers in conversations through their blogs and forums, identifying their brands' influencers, personalizing their customer's experience on such platforms (Constantinides, Romero, and Gómez Boria, 2008), configuring customers' perceptions regarding the brand (Suryani, Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021), and encouraging customers to share their information with other peers, which create brand awareness that can influence customers' preferences, attitudes, purchase intention, and brand loyalty (Kim et al, 2018). For example, the information available on private universities' social media channels can persuade prospective students to enroll in (Kim & Eik, 2014).

Indeed, social media can affect customer purchase intention (Siqueira et al., 2019), because of the trust created in those platforms. Thus, institutions were forced to make their brands on their social media platforms to reach, interact and build a stronger relationship with customers and affect their purchase decision-making (Baum et al., 2019). Therefore, Private universities depend on Social media for improving their brand exposure and increase lead generation, collect information about their target customers and competitors, as well as improving brand loyalty (Büyükdag, 2021).

The Mediating Role of Brand Positioning in the Relationship between Social Media Quality & Brand Loyalty

Pozin (2014) revealed that social media can play a significant role in creating and maintaining brand loyalty, through establishing and managing the relationship with the customers, which in turn helps brands to maintain direct conversation and interaction with their customers via social networking sites. Such conversation and interactions are critical for strengthening customer brand loyalty (Montero, 2015). Social media platforms can help institutions in introducing their brands, and enhance their brand awareness (Hootsuite 2021), by providing them with the information they search for and enhancing their engagement with those brands, and the quality of social media can influence brand awareness (Saha et al., 2021). Brand awareness is reflected in the increase in brand recall and brand recognition (Kotler and Keller, 2012), and it is the base for building a strong brand, brand positioning, and brand loyalty. Therefore, companies have to invest in the quality of their social media to reach more customers and increase brand awareness, if they plan to build strong brand positioning and brand loyalty (Saha et al., 2021).

In addition, Successful institutions are those who established relevant and desired brand positioning that can associate their brands in the customers' minds (Gensler et al., 2013), through articulating brands strength points that differentiate them from other competitive brands (Keller et al., 2011), through social media platforms. Brand positioning is responsible for creating a positive association between the brand and the customers (Wong & Merrilees, 2008), to differentiate the brand from other competitors, which in turn helps the brand to be the first choice when the customer decides to buy a specific product category (Tomiya, 2010). Brand positioning is an essential ingredient for increasing companies' profitability and long-term success, and brand loyalty (Baker, 2003).

In other words, Social media has a significant effect on brand positioning and brand loyalty through creating brand awareness, which is needed for creating brand positioning that is critical for building customer brand loyalty. Therefore, social media can affect brand loyalty through brand positioning (Saha et al., 2021). Indeed, Brand loyalty can be affected by social media quality, which can play a significant role in maintaining brand positioning.

Research Gap

According to the previous studies that investigated the relationship between social media quality, brand positioning, and brand loyalty, it was noted that many researchers studied social media from different perspectives, some of them studied its influence on introducing successful new product such as (Baum et al., 2019), while others saw it as an important frontier for retailers such as (Constantinides et al., 2008), which can be used for building a brand such as (Hogan, 2004), enhancing brand equity such as (Kim and Ko, 2012), building strong brand positioning such as (Saha et al., 2021), and improving the market share of construction SMEs such as (Malesev and Cherry, 2021), In addition, many pieces of research aimed to illustrate the critical role that brand positioning can play in private universities (Chung et al., 2008), while others investigated the influence of brand positioning on market share such as (Retamosa, 2018), and its influence on company performance such as (Blankson et al., 2008), while others studied the role of positioning in building brand loyalty such as (Saha et al., 2021), Moreover, many researchers aimed to discover the effect of celebrity on brand loyalty such as (Kim, 2018), while others studied how brand loyalty is affected by brand awareness and brand image such as (Büyükdag, 2021)

Indeed, there is a lack of research that has addressed the relationship between social media quality, brand positioning, and brand loyalty. This situation represents one of the empirical gaps in the present literature. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this gap by shedding light on brand positioning as a mediator in the relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty in private universities, which make the study different from other studies in terms of objective and the field of study.

Research Problem

The current research is concerned with answering a specified question and fills in a specific gap “does social media quality affect brand loyalty through creating brand positioning? And how can brand positioning alert the relationship between social media quality and Brand loyalty in the context of private universities?”

Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between social media quality and brand positioning?
- Is there a relationship between brand positioning and brand loyalty?
- Is there a relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty?
- Are there differences between customers’ brand loyalty based on their demographics (gender, age, internet experience, and frequency of internet usage)?

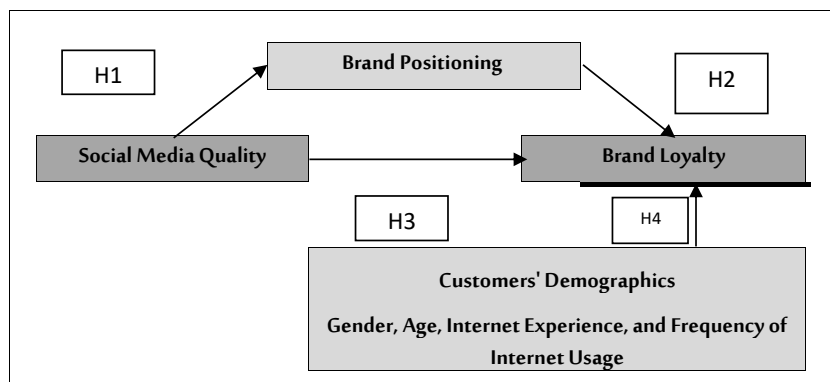
Research Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between social media quality and brand positioning.
- To investigate the relationship between brand positioning and brand loyalty.
- To explore the relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty.
- To find out the differences between customers’ brand loyalty based on their demographics (gender, age, internet experience, and frequency of internet usage).

Research Hypotheses

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed based on the above discussion:

- H1: There are relationships between social media and brand positioning
- H2: There are relationships between brand positioning and brand loyalty
- H3: There are relationships between social media and brand loyalty
- H4: there are significant differences between customers’ brand loyalty based on their demographics (gender, age, internet experience, and frequency of internet usage).



Section 2: Method

To achieve the aforementioned research objectives, descriptive research was chosen as a research format. The research depended on the quantitative research method. The secondary data and primary data were used for data collection. The secondary data sources included books, journals, newspapers, and websites. Primary data was collected through the online questionnaire, which was developed to capture the mediating role of brand positioning in the relationship between Social media quality and brand loyalty. The questionnaire was developed from several literature reviews; the list consists of 12 items representing Social media quality, 10 items representing brand positioning, and 10 items representing Brand loyalty. These items were presented on a 5-point Likert-type scale, anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Non-probability sampling was manipulated as a sampling method. Convenience sampling

was used as a sampling technique. The sample size is determined through the equation which takes a sampling error of ($\pm 5\%$), a 95% confidence level, and a maximum variation in the population (i.e. 50%). The results will yield a sample size of 384 and the results of the present research sample can be safely generalized to the entire population. The content validity and construct validity were conducted. The questionnaire also includes demographic characteristics and was distributed online in June 2022. A total of 384 responses were collected and valid. Descriptive analysis, Cronbach's alpha, Correlation analysis, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), The Mann-Whitney U Test, Kruskal Wallis One-Way Analysis of variance Test, and Structural equation modeling were implemented to analyze the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (IBM SPSS v22) for Windows computer software.

Section 3: Results

Demographic Profile

From the demographic profile of the questionnaire participants, the percentage of female participants (41%) is lower than male participants (59%). And the majority of the participants (75%) were aged from 17 to 24 years old as it is true that social media is very popular among them. It also can be seen that about 82% of the total participants are using the internet for more than six years; in addition, about 99% of respondents use the internet daily, suggesting that students are very much involved in social media.

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of each construct with its different number of statements can be measured by Cronbach's alpha. In this model, 3 constructs are focused on.

The results in Table 1 indicated that brand loyalty, Social media quality, and brand positioning have a high-reliability coefficient (0.934), (0.929), and (0.927) respectively. Therefore, the surveys are reliable because Cronbach's alpha and the internal consistency based on the corrected correlations are more than 0.5 (Hair et al, 2014).

Table 1: Reliability Test for Constructs

| | constructs | Cronbach's alpha | N of Items |
|---|----------------------|------------------|------------|
| 1 | Social media quality | 0.929 | 12 |
| 2 | Brand positioning | 0.927 | 10 |
| 3 | Brand loyalty | 0.934 | 10 |

Correlation Analysis

In Table 2, all variables are positively correlated with each other, and there was a significant relationship between all constructs at the 0.00 level in the model.

Table 2: Pearson Correlations between Constructs

| | Social media quality | Brand positioning | Brand loyalty |
|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Social media quality | | | |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | | |
| Brand positioning | 0.925** | | |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | | |
| Brand loyalty | 0.900** | 0.876** | |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 | |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression Analysis

1- Testing the First Hypothesis H1

H1: there is a relationship between social media quality and brand positioning.

To test the validity of the first hypothesis (H1), a simple regression model was developed between brand positioning as a dependent variable and Social media quality as an independent variable.

In Table 3, the model shows that there is a significant relationship between Social media quality and brand positioning. The significant level is .000. The positive values show that there is a positive relationship. In addition, it is also confirmed through (F calculated = 2249.8) which is greater than (F tabulated = 3.021).

Table 3: Analysis of Variance between Social Media Quality and Brand Positioning

| Dependent Variable | Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P-value |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Brand positioning | Regression | 255.29 | 1 | 255.29 | 2249.8 | .000 ^a |
| | Residual | 43.34 | 382 | .113 | | |
| | Total | 298.63 | 383 | | | |

In Table 4, the coefficient of the simple regression model of social media quality proves the significance of the coefficient of the resource. The significant level is .000. It is also confirmed through (T calculated = 47.43) which is greater than (T tabulated = 1.967). The coefficient of determination R-Sq is 0.855 which means the effect of the social media quality is 85.5 % in the variation of brand positioning.

Table 4: Analysis of Simple Regression between Social Media Quality and Brand Positioning

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | t | Sig. |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--|-------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| (Constant) | .074 | .079 | | | .941 | .347 |
| Social media quality | .986 | .021 | .925 | | 47.43 | .000 |

2- Testing the Second Hypothesis H2

H2: there is a relationship between brand positioning and brand loyalty.

To test the validity of the second hypothesis (H2), a simple regression model was developed between brand loyalty as a dependent variable and brand positioning as an independent variable.

In Table 5, the model shows a significant relationship between brand positioning and brand loyalty. The significant level is .000. The positive values show that there is a positive relationship. It is also confirmed through (F calculated = 1259.2) which is greater than (F tabulated = 3.021).

Table 5: Analysis of Variance between Brand Positioning and Brand Loyalty

| Dependent Variable | Model | Sum of Squares | | Mean Square | | F | Sig. |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|------|
| | | Squares | df | Square | | | |
| Brand loyalty | Regression | 218.3 | 1 | 218.3 | 1259.2 | .000 ^a | |
| | Residual | 66.23 | 382 | .173 | | | |
| | Total | 284.5 | 383 | | | | |

In Table 6, the coefficient of the simple regression model of brand positioning proves the significance of the coefficient of the resource. The significant level is .000. It is also confirmed through (T calculated = 35.48), which is greater than (T tabulated = 1.967). The coefficient of determination R-Sq equals 0.767, which means the effect of brand positioning is 76.7 % in the variation of brand loyalty.

Table 6: Analysis of Simple Regression between Brand Positioning and Brand Loyalty

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | t | Sig. |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--|-------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| (Constant) | .515 | .092 | | | 5.60 | .000 |
| Brand positioning | .855 | .024 | .876 | | 35.48 | .000 |

3- Testing the Third Hypothesis H3

H3: There are relationships between social media and brand loyalty.

To test the validity of the third hypothesis (H3), a simple regression model was developed between brand loyalty as a dependent variable and social media quality as an independent variable.

In Table 7, the model shows that there is a significant relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty. The significant level is .000. The positive values show that there is a positive relationship. It is also confirmed through (F calculated = 1627.8), which is greater than (F tabulated = 3.021).

Table 7: Analysis of Variance between Social Media Quality and Brand Loyalty

| Dependent Variable | Model | Sum of Squares | | Mean Square | | P-value |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| | | Squares | df | Square | F | |
| Brand loyalty | Regression | 230.46 | 1 | 230.46 | 1627.8 | .000 ^a |
| | Residual | 54.08 | 382 | .142 | | |
| | Total | 284.55 | 383 | | | |

Table 8: Analysis of Simple Regression between Social Media Quality and Brand Loyalty

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | T | P-value |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--|-------|---------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| (Constant) | 0.232 | .088 | | | 2.600 | .009 |
| Social media quality | .937 | .023 | .900 | | 40.34 | .000 |

In Table 8, the coefficient of the simple regression model of social media quality proves the significance of the coefficient of the re-

source. The significant level is .000. It is also confirmed through (T calculated =40.34) which is greater than (T tabulated = 1.967). The coefficient of determination R-Sq is equal to 0.81 which means the effect of the Social media quality is 81 % in the variation of brand loyalty.

4- Testing the Fourth Hypothesis H4

H4: There are significant differences between customers’ brand loyalty based on their demographics (gender, age, internet experience, and frequency of internet usage).

To test the validity of the fourth hypothesis (H4), the Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal Wallis One-Way Analysis of Variance Tests were used as non-parametric tests to compare differences between two independent groups. In this research, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the differences between two independent groups. It was developed between the answers of the respondents regarding their brand loyalty based on their gender and frequency of internet usage, in addition, The Kruskal-Wallis H test (one-way ANOVA by ranks), an extension of the Mann-Whitney U test, is used to compare multiple independent samples and assess the differences between the answers of the respondents regarding their brand loyalty based on their age, and internet experience.

In Tables 9 and 10, the value of Sig (=0.00, 0.009) < 0.05, which means reject the null hypothesis (HO: the two groups are equal), and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1: the two groups are not equal), and the two groups are significantly different. Therefore, the hypothesis “ there are significant differences between customers’ brand loyalty based on their gender and frequency of internet usage “ is supported.

In Tables 11 and 12, the value of Sig (=0.000) < 0.05, which means reject the null hypothesis (HO: the groups are equal), accept the alternative hypothesis (H1: the groups are not equal), and the groups are significantly different. Therefore, the hypothesis “ there are significant differences between customers’ brand loyalty based on their age and internet experience “. is supported.

Table 9: Results of Analysis of Mann-Whitney Test for Customers’ Brand Loyalty According to Gender

| Variable | Gender | | Mann-Whitney U | Wilcoxon W | Z | Sig* |
|---------------|-----------|--------|----------------|------------|-------|------|
| | Male | Female | | | | |
| | Mean Rank | | | | | |
| Brand loyalty | 152.3 | 251.15 | 8634.5 | 34740 | -8.58 | 0.00 |

Table 10: Results of Analysis of Kruskal-Wallis Test for Customers’ Brand Loyalty According to Frequency of Internet Usage

| Variable | Frequency of internet usage | | Mann-Whitney U | Wilcoxon W | Z | Sig* |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------|------------|-------|-------|
| | daily | weekly | | | | |
| | Mean Rank | | | | | |
| Brand loyalty | 194.01 | 48.75 | 185 | 195 | -2.61 | 0.009 |

Table 11: Results of Analysis of Kruskal-Wallis Test for Customers’ Brand Loyalty According to Age

| Variable | Age | | | (Chi-Square) | Df | Sig* |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|----|-------|
| | From 17 to 24 | from 25 to 29 | 30 or above | | | |
| | Mean Rank | | | | | |
| Brand loyalty | 184.7 | 246.81 | 90.26 | 36.152 | 2 | 0.000 |

Table 12: Results of Analysis of Kruskal-Wallis Test for Customers’ Brand Loyalty According to Internet Experience

| Variable | Internet experience | | | (Chi-Square) | df | Sig* |
|---------------|---------------------|----------|---------|--------------|----|-------|
| | 0-3 year | 4-5 year | 6+ ears | | | |
| | Mean Rank | | | | | |
| Brand loyalty | 118.56 | 128.72 | 206.73 | 29.017 | 2 | 0.000 |

Structural Equation Model Analysis for the Conceptual Model

To test the research hypotheses and the structural model prescribes the role of brand positioning in the relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty, and the interrelationships between constructs, the structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to determine whether the data fit the hypothesized model using the AMOS v22 program in this research. Confirming the structural relationship in a structural model can be done by using structural equation modeling (SEM). The properties of the research model are

as follows: one construct, of which one was exogenous social media quality, and two endogenous (brand positioning and brand loyalty).

In Figure 2, a hypothesis is supported if the parameter estimate is significant and has the predicted sign (e.g., positive affect).

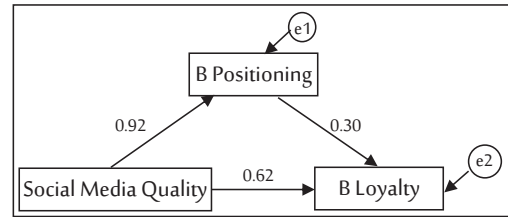


Figure 2: the Path Diagram for the Conceptual Model.

From Table 13, moving on to the parameter estimates representing the research hypotheses, the result suggests that all signs of associations between the constructs are in congruence with the hypothesized relationship. This provides support for the validity of all constructs forming the model, which means all hypotheses were supported.

Table 13: Results of Structural Model Assessment

| H | Estimate | S.E. | C.R | P | results |
|---|----------|------|-------|-----|-----------|
| H1 Brand positioning <-- Social media quality | 0.986 | .021 | 47.49 | *** | supported |
| H2 Brand loyalty <-- Brand positioning | 0.646 | .059 | 11 | *** | supported |
| H3 Brand loyalty <-- Social media quality | 0.295 | 0.55 | 5.35 | *** | supported |

Mediation

The researcher relied on the SEM tool to produce an unbiased estimation of the mediating effect of latent variables (Koufteros, 2009). The potential indirect (mediating) effects in the model were judged based on their direction of effects, magnitude, and also their significance level. Regarding the research model, there is a possible full indirect effect (full mediation) between social media quality and brand loyalty: Social media quality → Brand positioning → Brand loyalty, where the relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty is possibly fully mediated by brand positioning.

Table 14: The Results of Direct, Indirect (Mediating), and Total Effects.

| Relationship | Direct effect | | Indirect effect (mediating) | | Total effect | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| | Value | P-value | Value | P-value | Value | P-value |
| Social media quality → Brand loyalty | 0.663 | 0.002 | 0.37 | 0.000 | 0.88 | .001 |

In Table 14, The results of the standardized indirect effects (two-tailed significance) indicate that the path Social media quality → Brand loyalty, the indirect effect of Social media quality on brand loyalty is 0.37, and the two-tailed significance (P-value= 0.000) is significant at the 95 % level of confidence, which means that there is a full mediation effect, where brand positioning mediates the relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty. So, the null hypothesis will be rejected which is “H0: there is no indirect path between social media quality and brand loyalty. The mediation effect through a single mediator, also brand positioning has a net mediated effect between social media quality and brand loyalty. In summary, brand positioning is an effective mediator.

Section 4: Discussion and Conclusion

The study helps private universities to get know that brand plays a significant role in affecting the choices of first-year students. In addition, The study contributes to the body of knowledge related to the impact of social media quality on brand positioning and brand loyalty in the context of private universities by developing a new model of how brand positioning mediates the relationship between social media quality and brand loyalty. Indeed, the brand is the most important asset that private universities can have, and the success of such institutions depends on their abilities to associate their brands with quality and trust in their students’ minds.

Consequently, successful brands are those who succeed in creating brand positioning that is desired and relevant to customers and then managing it in a way that can build brand loyalty, which is reflected in recruiting and retaining students. On the other hand, social media channels as digital channels can contribute more to institutions by exposing their brands to more customers and creating brand awareness, which is needed for maintaining brand positioning that is critical for building brand loyalty. Therefore, private universities should give greater concern to the quality of social media platforms in terms of ease of communication, credibility, content quality, and relevance. Indeed, social media can affect brand loyalty through brand positioning. Therefore, the study concludes that brand loyalty can be affected by social media quality with the mediation role of brand positioning, in the context of private universities.

Main Findings

The structured model is valid for use and has the following advantages:

- 1- The reliability of all constructs of the model measured by Cronbach's alphas has higher degree rates from (0.876 to 0.925). These results are in agreement with previous studies (Tomiya, 2010; Pozin, 2014).
- 2- All variables are positively correlated with each other, and there was a significant relationship between all constructs at the 0.01 level. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Saha et al., 2021; Siqueira et al., 2019).
- 3- The model has a high ability to predict and explain brand positioning through Social media quality, and this was proved by the validity of the first hypothesis (H1) through the value of (R-Sq = 855). In addition, there is a positive relationship between Social media quality and brand positioning, and the effect of social media quality is (85.5 %) in the variation of brand positioning in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015; Chung et al., 2008).
- 4- The model has a high ability to predict and explain brand loyalty through brand positioning, and this was proved by the validity of the second hypothesis (H2) through the value of (R-Sq = 0.767). In addition, there is a positive relationship between brand positioning and brand loyalty, and the effect of brand positioning is (76.7%) in the variation of brand loyalty in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Chaves, 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2020).
- 5- The model has a high ability to predict and explain consumer brand loyalty through social media quality, and this was proved by the validity of the third hypothesis (H3) through the value of (R-Sq = 0.81). In addition, there is a positive relationship between Social media quality and brand loyalty, and the effect of Social media quality is (81%) in the variation of brand loyalty in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Kim et al., 2018; Büyükdağ, 2021).
- 6- Structural equation model analysis for the conceptual model proved that the parameter estimate was significant and had the predicted sign (e.g., positive affect), which means the three hypotheses were supported (H1, H2 and H3) These results are in agreement with previous studies (Baum et al., 2019; Saha et al., 2021)
- 7- Customers' brand loyalty is affected by the demographics (gender, age, Internet experience and frequency of internet usage) in the model, and this was proved through testing the fourth hypothesis H4. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Zarantonello et al., 2020)

Recommendation

- 1- In the model, the effect of social medial quality is (85.5 %) in the variation of brand positioning, and the effect of brand positioning is (76.7%) in the variation of brand loyalty, in addition, the effect of social medial quality is (81 %) in the variation of brand loyalty. The meaning of these percentages (85.5 %, 76.7%, and 81 %) is a reflection of one of the following factors:

- Other dimensions or dimensions have not been covered in this study and searching for them is an essential element to increase this percentage.
 - The current dimensions value may need to be increased by searching for the reasons that make the values higher.
- 2- Private universities should use the structured model in the current study as a strategy, to ensure that their social media platforms are quality enough to build brand awareness, which is the base for maintaining their brand positioning and building brand loyalty.
 - 3- Private universities should give great concern to the demographics of the customers (gender, age, internet experience, and frequency of internet usage), which can affect their brand loyalty.

Study Limitations

This descriptive study investigates the role of brand positioning as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media quality as an independent variable and brand loyalty as a dependent variable. The study focuses on private universities in Egypt; other universities such as public universities weren't included. The study was done only from the student's point of view; the companies' perspective on this subject was not focused. As for the study's obstacles, this potentially prevents the generalization of this research results to a broader context.

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