Reexamining brand loyalty and brand awareness with social media marketing: A collectivist country perspective

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study seeks to advance the literature by examining the mediating role of brand loyalty and the moderating impact of brand awareness in the relationships between social media marketing and collectivist Chinese behavior in the hospitality service context. This exploration is grounded in brand commitment and expectancy disconfirmation theories.
Methods: Empirical testing was conducted on survey data gathered from 150 collectivist Chinese customers in Hong Kong, utilizing partial least squares structural equation modeling.
Results: Brand loyalty plays a partial mediating role in the relationships between social media marketing and purchase intention as well as word-of-mouth. Additionally, brand awareness exerts a negative moderating influence on social media marketing-brand loyalty link.
Implications: Recommendations are provided for front-line staff tasked with addressing communication challenges by effectively managing the hotel's social media account. They are strongly advised to steer clear of creating face-threatening situations and to demonstrate respect for the loyalty of Chinese collectivist customers. Furthermore, a negative brand awareness effect emerges when collectivist Chinese customers compare hotel brands with online travel agents.

Keywords: *social media marketing, brand loyalty, brand awareness, purchase intention, word-of-mouth*

JEL Classification: *O35, M3, M31*

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1   INTRODUCTION

In the present day, social media stands as an indispensable tool for hoteliers seeking to globally promote their brands and attract a diverse clientele. Through this dynamic medium, hotel marketers engage with their target audience, employing both mass messaging and intimate conversations on various social media platforms (Lamb et al., 2017). Social media marketing strategically merges the realms of social media and marketing, capitalizing on interactions and consumer behaviors to elevate brand development (Li et al., 2021). The prevalent trend among hoteliers involves leveraging social media platforms not only to showcase their brands but also to cultivate brand loyalty and stimulate customer purchase intention. Instagram, boasting an extensive user base of nearly 1.2 billion active monthly users worldwide (Dixon, 2022), emerges as the preferred choice for hoteliers in reaching their target audience. Customers actively explore hotel Instagram accounts, leveraging their existing brand awareness, and contribute to the discourse by sharing their insights and experiences. A statistical analysis from Digital Business Lab (2022) reveals that in Hong Kong, Instagram commands a substantial presence, with usage rates of 86%, followed closely by WhatsApp (85%) and YouTube (77%) among both male and female users. This data underscores the

potential of social media marketing on platforms like Instagram to elevate brand recognition, amplify customer purchase intention, and foster word-of-mouth marketing for hotels.

Previous research looks into the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness and customer behavior in the hospitality industry. Active hotel Instagram or Facebook pages, as investigated by Kang (2018) and Leung et al. (2017), enhance social engagement with customers, fostering improved brand loyalty and influencing customer behavior. The existing literature underscores the pivotal role of brand loyalty and brand awareness in shaping customers' decision-making processes (Suharto et al., 2021). However, limited studies have probed into the impact of brand loyalty and brand awareness in relation to social media marketing and consumer behavior, particularly among collectivist customers with stronger brand preferences (Lee et al., 2020; Xue, 2015).

Chan and Wan (2008) noted that collectivist customers prioritize harmony and avoid confrontation. They identify themselves as group members, shaping their self-definition in relation to others. This contrasts with individualists who concentrate on personal goals, welfare, freedom, and self-responsibility. Collectivists stress the importance of social relatedness, social roles, collective interests, and obligations to others. This inclination toward collectivism stems from a social pattern where individuals view themselves as part of collectives (Patterson et al., 2006), prioritizing collective goals over personal ones (Wan, 2013).

Chinese culture typifies collectivist values (Kwak and Lee, 2015; Lee et al., 2018). Zhang et al. (2014) argued for the heightened significance of brands in collectivist communities compared with individualistic ones. Chinese consumers exhibit a greater inclination to relate to branded products than their Western counterparts, driven by a heightened face consciousness (Siu et al., 2016). Strongly branded commodities not only fulfill material needs but also social needs within the collectivist community. Chinese consumers, seeking to minimize uncertainty amidst widespread counterfeiting, display loyalty to brands by preferring branded products (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998).

The dynamic business environment of the hospitality industry, significantly influenced by external factors such as technological advancements in the extensive use of social media marketing, necessitates strategic consideration from hoteliers. With over 50% of social media users, including Chinese collectivist customers, following Instagram pages of various brands (De Vries et al., 2012), hoteliers must strategically manage social media marketing. Online marketing serves as a crucial source of word-of-mouth, influencing travel perceptions (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). In this realm, understanding the interconnected relationships among social media marketing, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and consumer behavior poses a major challenge. The present study strives to contribute to the academic community by addressing these gaps. It verifies that no recent study has tested the mediating effect of brand loyalty in the relationship between social media marketing and customer behavior in the hospitality industry, grounded in the theory of brand commitment. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the insufficient attention given to the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty. The research aims to explore the

mediating role of brand loyalty in the social media marketing–customer behavior relationship, alongside brand attachment (Alves, 2022), particularly among Chinese collectivist customers in the hospitality service context. Additionally, the study examines the moderating role of brand awareness between social media marketing and brand loyalty. Rooted in expectancy disconfirmation theory (EDT), this investigation represents one of the few attempts to scrutinize brand awareness for hotel brands in collectivist communities. The study seeks to differentiate the roles of brand loyalty and brand awareness from the perspective of Chinese collectivist customers under the impact of social media marketing in the hospitality industry. Empirical testing, utilizing partial least squares structural equation modeling, was conducted on survey data collected from Chinese collectivist customers in Hong Kong. Through this empirical study, the research aims to enrich existing literature and practically offer recommendations for maintaining a high degree of purchase intention and word-of-mouth among hoteliers serving Chinese collectivist customers.

Following, this paper is organized in four sections. The next section examines the literature on social media marketing, brand loyalty, brand awareness, purchase intention. In addition, the hypotheses are developed in this section. The third section details the methodology employed in the research. The fourth section presents the results. The final section encompasses a comprehensive discussion, covering theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and future studies.

2　LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Social media marketing

Social media offers a stage for advertising and brand promotion—a defensive strategy for cultivating brand loyalty and keeping loyal consumers (Singh, 2022). Social media marketing serves as an effective means to communicate with customers, particularly in the hospitality industry, via various platforms (Hsien-Cheng et al., 2020). Successful social media marketing efforts can foster a relationship between users and the hotel brand, potentially leading to brand loyalty (Ismail, 2017). Given the significant impact of social media on users' daily lives, where ideas are exchanged on platforms like Instagram or Facebook (Duffett, 2017), Li et al. (2021) argue that online advertising in social media helps hoteliers promote their brands and build customer relationships. Active use of social media tools may contribute to enhanced brand loyalty for hotels (Tatar and Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Social media marketing is positively associated with brand loyalty.

2.2　Relationship among brand loyalty, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth

Brand loyalty, defined as the customer's preference for a particular brand, is intricately linked to brand awareness. It manifests as positive attitudes toward a brand and a willingness to make repeat purchases based on past positive experiences (Bowen and Shiang-Lih, 2015; Kandampully

and Suhartanto, 2000). Customers harboring positive attitudes toward a brand are more likely to exhibit loyalty, a connection often influenced by their satisfaction with the hotel experience (Shafiee and Bazargan, 2018). Purchase intention, on the contrary, gauges customers' interest and willingness to buy products from a specific brand (Hutter et al., 2013). Notably, customer purchase intention serves as an indicator of their loyalty level to the brand. Despite the relatively low explained variance rate of brand loyalty, Büyükdağ (2021) asserted its robust impact on purchase intention. Consequently, the following hypothesis is posited:

H2: Brand loyalty is positively associated with purchase intention.

Word-of-mouth communication encompasses discussions among individuals about products, services, or brands and has been scrutinized for its intangible nature in various service industries (Lee et al., 2022). Potential customers often gain valuable insights about an organization through word-of-mouth (Chen and Kim, 2019). Brand loyalty, as a driving force, influences customer behavior shifts, such as engaging in word-of-mouth communication facilitated by the hotel's Instagram account. Kang (2018) contends that brand loyalty stimulates customer behavioral changes, fostering active participation on social media platforms and generating word-of-mouth interactions with fellow customers. Loyal customers, as argued, willingly share positive sentiments about the brand's products, influencing the information-seeking process of others. Word-of-mouth, therefore, emerges as a significant indicator for customers to trust a brand (Jalilvand et al., 2017). As a result, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H3: Brand loyalty is positively associated with word-of-mouth.

2.3 Brand loyalty as a mediator
Tatar and Eren-Erdoğmuş (2016) delved into the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty, highlighting its significance as an outcome of hotel-sponsored websites. Similarly, Kim and Ko (2012) explored the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention, emphasizing the role of relationship equity and brand equity. Notably, customers who exhibit loyalty to a brand often engage in positive word-of-mouth, effectively becoming brand ambassadors. This condition aligns with the theory of brand commitment, reflecting customer loyalty within a specific product class, and the concept of brand attachment, fostering a profound emotional connection between the consumer and the brand (Martin and Goodell, 1991; Alves, 2022). Word-of-mouth emerges as a potential consequence of brand loyalty (Hutter et al., 2013). Drawing on these insights, we posit that brand loyalty serves as a mediator between social media marketing and customer behavior, encompassing both purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Thus, we hypothesized that:

H4a: Brand loyalty mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.
H4b: Brand loyalty mediates the relationship between social media marketing and word-of mouth.

2.4 Brand awareness as moderator
Prior research underscores the role of a brand as a representation of a company's image, particularly within the hospitality sector. Brand awareness, integral to customer interaction, serves as a means for customers to acquaint themselves with the hotel's brand name (Boonsiritomachai and Sud-on, 2020). It plays a pivotal role in customer decision making, influencing their preferences and future loyalty (Rrustemi and Baca, 2021; Büyükdağ, 2021). Notably, scholars assert that social media marketing is instrumental in creating brand awareness and fostering word-of-mouth (Li et al., 2021). Hutter et al. (2013) find that advertising and sales promotion through social media activities contribute to establishing brand awareness, aligning with the hierarchy of effects theory. Moreover, brand awareness is identified as a crucial factor in cultivating brand loyalty (Yaseen and Mazahir, 2019). Customers' familiarity with a brand, shaped by brand awareness, influences their choices and desires (Yaseen and Mazahir, 2019; Boonsiritomachai and Sud-on, 2020).

Furthermore, brand awareness is posited to function as a moderator in the relationship between attitude toward digital marketing and customer purchase intention (Hien and Nhu, 2022). However, according to EDT, the customer expectations of service performance are created before making a purchase (Lee et al. 2020). High expectation usually lead to larger satisfaction. If high expectation couples with low perceived performance, customer dissatisfaction would be resulted. Brand awareness may elevate customer expectations, influencing their satisfaction. This interplay is evident in studies advocating that brand awareness may negatively moderate the relationship between technology-related factors, such as information quality, and customer attitude-related factors, such as customer satisfaction (Du et al., 2022). In line with this discussion, the current study proposes that brand awareness plays a negative moderating role in the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. This implies that brand awareness acts as a suppressor, diminishing the positive impact of technology-related factors (social media marketing) on customer attitude-related factors (brand loyalty). Hence, the following hypothesis is posited:

H5: Brand awareness negatively moderates the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Figure 1. Conceptual model
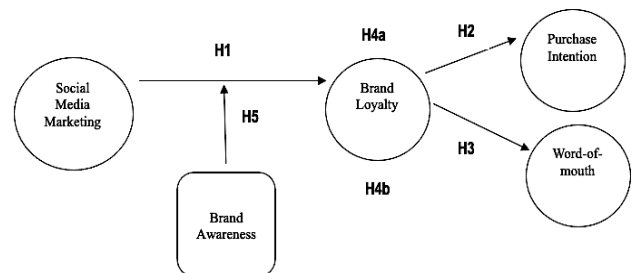
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample profile

In April 2022, we gathered a total of 150 online survey responses. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of survey participants, with 50 male and 100 female samples. The majority of participants fell within the 19 to 25 age range, holding a bachelor's degree level of education. Regarding the weekly hours using Instagram, over 66% of respondents dedicated 1–6 hours.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	n = 150	% = 100
	n	%
Age		
18 or less	4	2.7
19–25	126	84.0
26–31	15	10.0
32–40	2	1.3
41 or above	3	2.0
Gender		
Male	50	33.3
Female	100	66.7
Education level		
Secondary or below	5	3.3
Sub-degree	24	16.0
Bachelor's degree	116	77.4
Master's degree or above	5	3.3
Weekly hours using Instagram		
Less than 1	14	9.3
1–6	100	66.7
7–11	30	20
12 or above	6	4

3.2 Sampling and data collection

This study adopted a quantitative methodology, utilizing surveys as the primary data collection method. The survey instrument was crafted according to existing literature and prior studies investigating the impact of social media marketing. Online structured surveys were disseminated through various social media channels, with a specific focus on social media users in Hong Kong who had either traced or sought for the hotel brand at least once. The convenient sampling method was employed due to its cost-effectiveness, affordability, and convenience, enabling respondents to initiate and complete the questionnaires at their preferred times. The survey was distributed over social media platforms, predominantly through Instagram, targeting 200 social media users over a one-month period. Ultimately, 150 fully completed questionnaires were received, yielding a response rate of 75%.

For the survey data analysis, we utilized SmartPLS version 3.0 software with 5,000 bootstrap samples. As shown in Table 2, all Cronbach's alpha coefficients fell within the range of 0.822 to 0.910, and composite reliabilities exceeded 0.851 (surpassing the 0.7 threshold), stating commendable internal consistency and reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The average variance extracted values ranged from 0.658 to 0.791 (surpassing the 0.5 threshold) signifying unidimensionality and strong convergent validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

Table 2. Measurement instrument

Construct	Item	Wording	Loading	α	rho_A	CR	AVE
Social Media Marketing (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016)				0.910	0.913	0.930	0.689
	SMM1	The hotel's Instagram accounts exhibit activity.	0.856				
	SMM2	I can access up-to-date information through the hotel's Instagram accounts.	0.819				
	SMM3	The hotel's Instagram accounts are visually appealing.	0.857				
	SMM4	I can comprehend the hotel's promotions via its Instagram accounts.	0.823				
	SMM5	Active and updated social media accounts are crucial for my brand selection.	0.840				
	SMM6	The activity and currency of the hotel's Instagram accounts can influence the hotel's image.	0.781				
Brand Loyalty (Oliver, 1997)				0.902	0.902	0.931	0.772
	BL1	I opt for brands I follow on social media accounts.	0.882				
	BL2	I develop loyalty to brands I follow on social media accounts.	0.876				
	BL3	I share brands I follow on social media with others.	0.896				
	BL4	I recommend brands I follow on social media to those seeking my suggestions.	0.861				
Purchase Intention (Das, 2014)				0.867	0.867	0.919	0.791
	PS1	I intend to purchase products from the hotel I follow on Instagram.	0.861				
	PS2	I am inclined to try the brand due to its positive image.	0.908				
	PS3	I plan to repurchase the brand because of its good reputation.	0.898				
Word-of-mouth (Sun et al., 2006)				0.909	0.912	0.932	0.734
	WOM1	I find information about the hotel brand through social media platforms.	0.871				
	WOM2	I research others' opinions about the hotel brand prior to making a purchase.	0.883				
	WOM3	I suggest the hotel brand I follow on social media to my friends or family.	0.876				
	WOM4	I speak positively about the hotel brand I follow on social media.	0.786				
	WOM5	I believe comments from other individuals on social media.	0.864				
Brand Awareness (Yoo et al., 2000)				0.822	0.851	0.883	0.658
	BA1	I remember the hotel brand logo that I follow on Instagram.	0.625				
	BA2	I follow the hotel brand because it is gaining popularity.	0.856				
	BA3	I recognize the hotel brand I follow on Instagram.	0.856				
	BA4	My loyalty to the hotel brand is influenced by its high awareness.	0.880				

α is Cronbach's alpha. rho_A is Dijkstra–Henseler's ρA. CR is Composite reliability. AVE is average variance extracted.

The inter-correlation of the scales is presented in Table 3. Importantly, the variance inflation factors of each constructs was below the suggested cut-off value of 5, alleviating concerns about collinearity in this study (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3. Inter-correlation of the scales

Construct	Mean	SD	VIF	1A	2G	3SMM	4BL	5PI	6WOM	7BA
1.Age (A)	0.867	0.341	1.035	1						
2.Gender (G)	0.333	0.473	1.807	-0.139	1					
3.Social Media Marketing (SMM)	3.971	0.751	4.809	0.072	-0.615**	0.830				
4.Brand Loyalty (BL)	3.758	0.850	4.285	0.021	-0.566**	0.812**	0.879			
5.Purchase Intention (PI)	3.976	0.841	3.828	-0.058	-0.581**	0.814**	0.789**	0.889		
6.Word-Of-Mouth (WOM)	4.029	0.830	4.972	0.033	-0.640**	0.842**	0.830**	0.847**	0.857	
7. Brand Awareness (BA)	3.758	0.747	4.481	0.004	-0.525**	0.834**	0.828**	0.785**	0.818**	0.811

** indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.01$ level of confidence
Figures in the shaded areas represent the square roots of the AVEs for the corresponding constructs.
SD denotes standard deviation. VIF stands for the variance inflation factor.

3.3 Measures

Table 2 outlines the measurement properties. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was utilized. The measurement scales for social media marketing were derived from Tatar and Eren-Erdoğmuş (2016). Brand loyalty metrics were adapted from Oliver (1997). Purchase intention was gauged using scales from Das (2014). The assessment of word-of-mouth employed scales developed by Sun et al. (2006). Brand awareness was quantified using scales crafted by Yoo et al. (2000).

4 FINDINGS

As the results indicate, social media marketing positively influences brand loyalty (β = 0.817, p ≤ 0.01), and brand loyalty significantly positively relates to purchase intention (β = 0.793, p ≤ 0.01) and word-of-mouth (β = 0.833, p ≤ 0.01), supporting H1, H2, and H3 (table 4).

Table 4. Mediation test of brand

Dependent variable								
	Step 1 IV → DV		Step 2 IV → Med	Step 3 Med → DV		Step 4 IV + Med → DV		
	Purchase Intention (PI)	Word-of-mouth (WOM)	Brand Loyalty (BL)	Purchase Intention (PI)	Word-of-mouth (WOM)	Purchase Intention (PI)	Word-of-mouth (WOM)	
Independent variable Social Media Marketing (SMM)	0.815**	0.845**	0.817**			0.502**	0.496**	
Mediator Brand Loyalty (BL)				0.793**	0.833**	0.382**	0.428**	
						Partial Mediation	Partial Mediation	

** indicates significance at the p ≤ 0.01 level of confidence

Concerning the mediating effect, brand loyalty mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention (Table 4). The direct effect results indicate the path coefficient (β = 0.815, $p \leq 0.01$) between social media marketing and purchase intention (Table 4). The strength of the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention reduces (β = 0.502, $p \leq 0.01$) after entering the suggested mediator. The direct effect decreases in strength from 0.815 to 0.502 but remains significant, showing partial mediation. Thus, H4a is accepted.

The direct effect results indicate the path coefficient (β = 0.845, $p \leq 0.01$) linking social media marketing with word-of-mouth (Table 4). The relationship between social media marketing and word-of-mouth weakens (β = 0.496, $p \leq 0.01$) after entering the suggested mediator. The direct effect weakens from 0.845 to 0.496 but is still significant, showing partial mediation. Thus, H4b is accepted.

Table 5. Results of moderating test of brand awareness in the social media marketing and brand loyalty relationship

Variables	Dependent Variable = Brand Loyalty			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control Variables				
Age	-0.076	-0.056	-0.067	-0.072
Gender	-0.553**	-0.092	-0.085	-0.083
Independent Variables				
Social Media Marketing		0.752**	0.320**	0.264**
Brand Awareness			0.519**	0.493**
Moderating Terms				
Social Media Marketing X Brand Awareness				-0.065*
R²	0.328	0.676	0.758	0.764

* indicates significance at the p ≤ 0.05 level of confidence.
** indicates significance at the p ≤ 0.01 level of confidence.

In Table 5, the coefficient of the term demonstrating an interaction between social media marketing and brand loyalty (β = −0.065, $p \leq 0.05$) indicates that brand awareness is a significant negative moderator. This result weakens the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty, thereby supporting H5.

Figure 2. Structural model
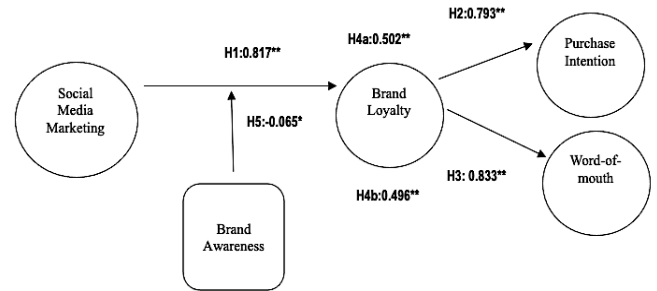
The values were calculated through bootstrapping iterations with 150 cases and 5,000 samples.
** indicates significance at the p ≤ 0.01 level of confidence

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical implications

Drawing upon the theory of brand commitment, this study establishes that social media marketing exerts a positive impact on brand loyalty for collectivist Chinese customers in the hospitality service context, supporting H1. Additionally, brand loyalty positively influences both purchase intention (supporting H2) and word-of-mouth (supporting H3). The results further validate that brand loyalty acts as a mediator between social media marketing and purchase intention, as well as word-of-mouth, aligning with Hypotheses 4a and 4b (supporting H4a & 4b). When collectivist Chinese customers exhibit loyalty to the hotel brand, their intention to purchase is positively influenced. Moreover, greater loyalty among collectivist Chinese customers correlates with increased word-of-mouth behavior, particularly in the hospitality industry. Consequently, brand loyalty emerges as a partial mediator in this context.

Nevertheless, this study found that an intriguing finding emerges as brand awareness is revealed to weaken the social media marketing-brand loyalty link, supporting H5. According to EDT, when high customer expectations of the hotel brand, fueled by brand awareness through social media, collide with lower actual hotel performance, the impact of social media marketing diminishes, resulting in reduced brand loyalty. In other words, brand awareness may not necessarily contribute to higher brand loyalty. This nuanced result may be attributed to the characteristics of the younger generation involved in online purchases of travel and tourism products. As younger consumers increasingly engage with online booking platforms, the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty becomes more intricate in the digital marketing environment. Therefore, brand awareness may not be a straightforward determinant of brand loyalty in the case of hotel Instagram. Social influences on the younger generation could play a pivotal role in shaping brand awareness (Singh and Sibi, 2023). For theoretical advancement, it is crucial to recognize that customers deem what hoteliers offer as acceptable, and this perception becomes a vital benchmark for evaluating brand loyalty, surpassing the significance of brand awareness. The findings

underscore the importance for hoteliers to reassess their partnerships with online travel agencies, which play a pivotal role in product distribution in the tourism industry.

5.2 Managerial implications

This study underscores the significant impact of social media marketing on Chinese collectivist customers in the hospitality industry. The near-universal participation of Chinese respondents in following hotel Instagram accounts indicates the willingness of Instagram users to engage with hotel social media pages, presenting a valuable opportunity for hotels to distinguish themselves in a fiercely competitive sector (Tatar and Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016).

For Chinese collectivist customers, a proactive social media presence is crucial in reducing the potential for face loss in public interactions, influencing their perception of the brand (Lee et al., 2020). To enhance brand loyalty, hoteliers may consider increased activity on social media platforms, offering promotional discounts, giveaways, and crafting visually appealing advertisements with engaging comments to capture customers' attention. Such initiatives can contribute to heightened purchase intention and word-of-mouth among Chinese collectivist customers.

Efficient management of hotel Instagram accounts is paramount for effective communication, especially if Chinese collectivist customers find it challenging to convey messages online. Front-line staff should promptly address customer questions or comments, avoiding face-threatening situations and demonstrating respect for cultural sensitivities (Lee et al., 2020). By fostering positive relationships and understanding the needs of Chinese collectivist customers, hoteliers can positively influence brand recognition and customer perception, translating into favorable behaviors such as increased purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Implementing an "Instagram posts loyalty program" could further incentivize Chinese collectivist customers to share positive feedback. Through this program, customers generating more posts related to the hotel could receive discounts, creating a mutually beneficial approach to social media marketing. This strategy not only rewards loyal customers but also attracts them to participate in new activities through the social media platform, ultimately fostering brand loyalty and positive behaviors.

Contrary to traditional wisdom, this study reveals that brand awareness weakens the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty for Chinese collectivist customers. This unexpected outcome may be influenced by the potent social media marketing effect of online travel agents, impacting customers' brand selection. For instance, despite high brand awareness, a hotel may be perceived as expensive and unworthy in specific situations, such as sky-high hotel fees during Labour Day Holidays, leading to a negative brand awareness effect. Hoteliers should recognize that solely increasing brand awareness may not universally influence consumer attitudes toward purchase intention (Hien and Nhu, 2022). Therefore, efforts to promote brand awareness in hotel settings should focus on unique product features and exceptional service levels that distinguish the brand in ways not easily comparable by other hotels. Hoteliers must exercise caution in managing brand awareness to address the brand loyalty concerns of target customers effectively.

5.3 Limitations and future studies

Although this study contributes valuable insights for hoteliers aiming to comprehend participants' perceptions of the influence of social media marketing on the hospitality industry, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size, limited to 150 survey responses due to time constraints, constitutes the first limitation. Second, the data primarily stem from a single social media platform, Instagram, probably restricting the generalizability to users of other platforms. Additionally, this research's cross-sectional design, although employing a structural equation modeling approach, restricts the establishment of causal relationships among the constructs. The use of predefined scales for participant responses may hinder the provision of specific feedback.

Significant control variables, age and gender, surfaced in this research and may be explored as potential moderators in future study within the hospitality service context. Investigating other relevant moderating variables could enhance the understanding of customer behavior. The convenience sampling employed in this study is another limitation that warrants attention. Future research might benefit from a more robust stratified sampling strategy to enhance the study's generalizability, especially considering the data were collected from participants of similar ages in Hong Kong. Given the sample size constraint, qualitative research methods, like in-depth interviews and focus groups, could offer additional insights.

A longitudinal approach would be beneficial to explore the enduring effects of social media marketing on customer behavior. Conducting repeated observations over an extended period could enhance the reliability and validity of the study. In summary, although the research model may be applied to other service sectors and similar contexts, like aviation services, offering a broader understanding of these businesses, careful validation is essential in diverse cultural and economic settings. As ethical and moral perceptions vary across nations and cultures, the implications of this study extend beyond the hospitality industry in Hong Kong, urging cautious consideration in different contexts (Lee et al., 2018).

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