The Mediating Role of Brand Awareness in the Relationship between Social Media Quality and Brand Image: An Applied Study on the Private Higher Education Institutions in Egypt

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Abstract

The research focuses on the role of brand awareness as a mediator in the relationship between social media quality and brand image in the 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 image, and brand awareness mediates this relationship. Additionally, the model has a high ability to predict the brand image through social media quality and brand awareness. The study recommends private universities to depend on social media as a strategic marketing communication tool to create brand awareness and a memorable brand image. The research is limited to the private universities in Egypt, and findings may apply to other institutions.

***Keywords**: Social Media, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, Private Higher Education Originations .*

Introduction

The students' brand choices or willingness to recommend their universities are affected by certain factors, such as brand awareness and brand image. The social media platform is one of the most important platforms, which significantly impacts millennial decisions, especially when they select their universities (Duffet, 2017). Therefore, most private universities have attempted to have a strong presence on social media and other digital channels to increase their visibility, as well as improve their brand awareness and image (Gunduz, 2015). Private universities are self-governing institutions that are funded privately and have their mission and rules (Moipone et al., 2021). In Egypt, such types of institutions are listed and operated under the supervision of the higher education ministry and the supreme council of universities.

Students consider certain factors when selecting a specific university to study at. Ho (2017) concluded that brand image is one of the major factors that can influence students' selection, while Pimpa (2017) mentioned that a nice environment, academic standards, course availability, financial aid, unique programs, location, and social activities are also critical criteria that play a critical role in choosing process. Therefore, private universities should adapt their strategies in a way that can guarantee their competitive advantage (Hollensen, 2019). Student decision-making is affected mainly by the brand. Therefore, universities should manage their brands in a way that can satisfy the student's needs and wants, where students are intrigued by the brands that reflect their values and attitude (Moipone et al., 2021).

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Research Problem

The current research is concerned with answering a specified question and fills in a specific gap "do social media consider a fundamental antecedent for a brand image through forming brand awareness? And how can brand awareness alert the relationship between social media quality and Brand image in the context of private universities?

Research Questions

a- Is there a relationship between social media quality and brand awareness?

b- Is there a relationship between brand awareness and brand image?

c- Is there a relationship between social media quality and brand image?

d- Are there differences between customers' perceptions about the brand image based on their demographics (Gender, Age, Internet Experience, and frequency of internet usage)?

Research Objectives

a- To investigate the relationship between social media quality and brand awareness.

b- To investigate the relationship between brand awareness and brand image.

c- To explore the relationship between social media quality and brand image.

d- To find out the differences between customers' perceptions about the brand image based on their demographics (Gender, Age, Internet Experience, and frequency of internet usage).

Literature review

Brand and social media

Brand can be defined as the distinct name and/or a symbol, which identifies the goods and services of a seller from the competitors" (Aaker, 1998). The brand is the most important asset for the companies (Kim et al., 2020), who should manage it in a way that creates brand awareness (Wheeler, 2012), and don't treat it just as a name (Kotler; 2011), but the objectives, branding strategy, and brand differentiation should be reflected in the logo, name, packing, communication, and design (Tomiya, 2010). Building a brand in the consumer's mind is a critical part of any organization's business strategy, which can be done through three stages. The first one is about differentiation, where the brand creates a unique concept that differentiates it from competitors. The second stage is about relevance, where the brand gives the customers a reason to prefer it. The third one is about esteem (Kay, 2006), where a brand builds emotional relationships with the customers (Corrêa, 2009). Therefore, brands do 3 main functions; navigation, security, and engagement. In navigation function, brands help customers to choose it. In the security function, brands pass safety to the customers when the quality of products and service is communicated. In the engagement function, the brand concentrates on image to help the customer identify the brand.

According to Ahmad & Laroche (2017), 97% of Customers are influenced by comments they read on social media platforms. thus, social media becomes a significant digital communication channel that Customers use to share information and experience with other peers (Siqueira et al., 2019), on the other hand, Social media platforms help companies to get in touch with many customers and influence their purchase intention and decision because of the trust generated in that environment (Baum, 2019), this can be done with little investment compared to traditional channels (Kim et al., 2015). as a result, private universities were forced to move their brands to the social media environment (Baum, 2019), which helped private universities to build solid and emotional relationships with customers, as well as, make their brands the first choice for the students when they decide to study.

The Relationship between Social Media and Brand Awareness

According to Wu (2016), social media platforms help organizations in developing solid relationships with customers. as a result, marketers' top priority is creating a strong brand in consumer's mind (Gensler et al., 2013), which play a significant role in enhancing brand recall and brand recognition, where both are the key dimensions of brand awareness (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Indeed, brand awareness is the primary source of information related to the brand (Barreda et al., 2016). Brand awareness is the key element of brand equity, which is regarded as the top priority of all organizations operating in a competitive environment, and the higher brand awareness, the more frequently the customers recall and recognize the band (Ratriyana, 2016). Therefore, brand awareness is one of the most significant objectives of marketing communication (Kotler, Armstrong and Opresnik, 2017).

Social media is a contemporary digital media that can help organizations in introducing their brands as well as improving their level of brand awareness (Hootsuite, 2021). Social media channels provide customers with the information they search for, as well as increase their engagement with the brands. Thus social media can increase brand awareness, which is the first stage in developing a purchase decision, and the quality of social media platforms could affect brand awareness. Indeed, social media is a marketing tool that has a direct and significant effect on brand equity, by facilitating communication with the customers, which increases brand value via engagement. Brand awareness is important for building a strong brand, as well as building a brand image with the help of social media, therefore, organizations should invest well in social media marketing to reach more customers, as well as increase their brand awareness (Saha et al., 2021).

The Relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Image

Private Higher Education Institutions are a very dynamic and developing sector, where customer decision-making is affected mainly by the brand itself, and customer retention is affected by the degree to which the customer associates the brand with quality, trust, and features. therefore, the main concern in this sector is to build a strong brand image, which consists of four main dimensions namely; brand associations, favorability, strength, and uniqueness, in addition, it should be consistent and stable over time even if the programs introduced by these institutions are changed (Keller, 1993). Brand image is a reflection of the memory of the brand, which is influenced by the customer's perception regarding advantages, attributes, and characteristics of the brand, which is based on the association. Building a positive, solid, and unique brand image can create competitive advantages, and work as a defense against competitors' threats (Persson, 2010). Brand image is the main element of brand equity, which is configured in two main ways; the first one is related to the customer's exposure to external environmental stimuli, while the second is related to what the customers share with their environment. The establishment of the two ways depends on the establishment of brand awareness, which is related to the information the customers gain and share with their peers through E-WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Therefore, brand image is a crucial element for improving the efficiency of marketing communication and creating brand information (Keller, 1993)

Brand awareness is another main element of brand equity, which can be seen as the expected result of customers' exposure to external environmental stimuli. Social media platforms can play a role in creating such stimuli, which can affect the configuration of customers' perceptions regarding the brand, this perception can encourage customers to share the information they gain with others via E-WOM (Suryani, Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021). Therefore, brand awareness is a vital component for establishing communication with the customers (Barreda et al., 2015), and it can be shaped by promotion activities and advertising (Sürücü et al., 2019). therefore, Brand awareness can affect customers' preferences, attitudes, purchase intention, brand commitment, and loyalty (Kim et al., 2018), which in turn affects brand image (Barreda et al., 2016)., and both brand awareness and brand image are essential for affecting customers' perception of the brand, as well as their purchase intention (Lee, 2014).

The Relationship between Social Media and Brand Image

According to Zhang (2015), brand image can distinguish the brand from other competitive brands by reflecting the characteristics and the benefits of the brand, which affects consumer purchase intention and behavior (Luong, VO, and Le, 2017). Social media plays a significant role in building and communicating the competitive brand image, which is essential for survival in the competitive environment. indeed, media has a significant role in shaping and improving brand image, but traditional media became less effective and efficient in exposing brands to customers, who depend on digital media more heavily (Suryani, Fauzi, and Nurhadi, 2021), while digital channels contribute more to companies through keeping them competitive (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

The internet was the reason behind the changes that happened in the digital platforms, which are used by more than half of the global population, and changed their preferences for media consumption. therefore, companies should be in Google as a condition to have a presence in the digital era, as well as having their social media platforms, and give greater concern for the quality of social media platforms, which can be affected by certain factors such as ease of communication, credibility, content quality, and relevance (Helal, Ozuem, and Lancaster, 2018), and affect consumers' perception regarding the brand image (Suryani, Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021). Companies use digital channels for conducting their digital marketing activities and shaping their brand image (Malesev and Cherry, 2021), for instance, the information that is gained by students from universities' websites and social media platforms can persuade those prospects to enroll in those institutions. Therefore, social media can enhance the brand image and affect the decision-making process, by improving the learning process, where customers can gain the intended information, then spread this information and their experience to others via E-WOM (Chu and Kim, 2011).

The Mediating Role of Brand Awareness in the Relationship between Social Media quality and Brand Image

The conducted marketing activities through the different platforms of social media can affect a company's brand image and improve brand awareness by influencing customers' perceptions (Zarantonello et al., 2020). the brand image is about customers' beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes towards a certain brand, which means that brand image plays a significant role in shaping consumers' preferences and purchase decisions (Song et al., 2019), on the other hand, brand awareness can reflect consumers' perception of the brand, and their purchase intention (Lee, 2014). Brand image can be derived from exposure to social media, such exposure can enhance brand awareness, which encourages customers to exchange information about the brand, and spread E-WOM via social media. Consequently, social media and websites can play a significant role in shaping the brand image directly and indirectly through brand awareness and E-WOM (Suryani, Fauzi, and Nurhadi, 2021). The study conducted by Büyükdağ (2021) studied the impact of brand awareness on brand image, and the impact of both variables on brand loyalty and purchase intention. The study revealed that brand awareness has a significant and direct effect on brand image, and brand image mediates the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty and purchase intention.

In other words, brand image can be affected as the main component of brand equity can be affected by brand awareness and social media quality, and the characteristics of decision-makers such as marketing managers who are responsible for implementing marketing activities that are related to brand image, which means that brand awareness and social media quality, and capabilities of decision-makers can justify the differences in brand image.

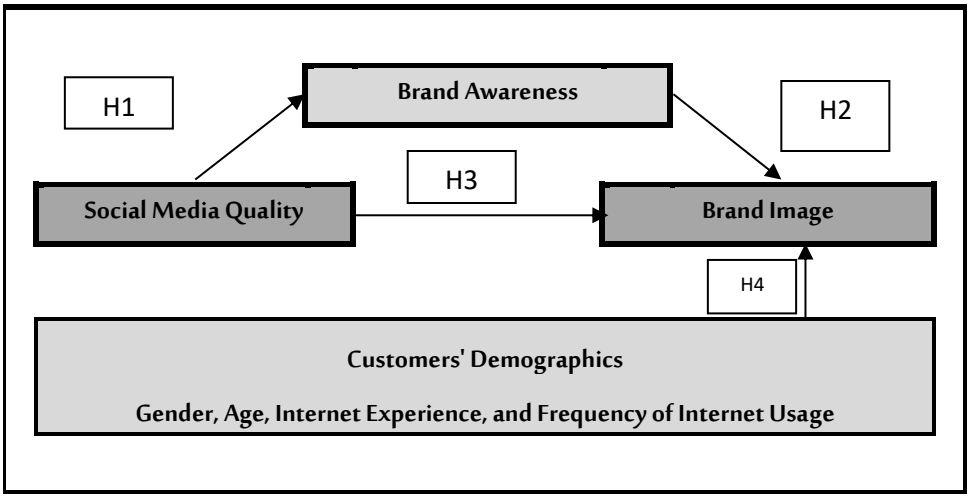
Research gap

According to the previous studies that investigated the relationship between brand awareness, social media quality, and brand image, it was noted that many researchers studied social media from

different perspectives, some of them studied its influence on brand perceptions of millennials such as (Helal, Ozuem, and Lancaster, 2018), and their attitudes such as (Duffett, 2017), while others tried to investigate its role in the firm value for U.S. restaurant companies such as (Kim et al., 2015), growing market share for construction SMEs such as (Malesev and Cherry, 2021), and enhancing the performance of the chain store industry such as (Wu, 2016). In addition, many pieces of research aimed to discover the influence of brand image on the selection and preference of technology universities such as (Moipone et al., 2021), while others studied how the brand image is affected by electronic word of mouth such as (Luong, VO and Le, 2017), and its relationship to price premiums such as (Persson, 2010). Moreover, many researchers aimed to discover the effect of celebrity on brand awareness such as (Kim, 2018), while others studied the Effects of sports mega-events on city brand awareness such as (Lee, 2014), while others such (Barreda, 2015) showed how brand awareness can be generated in online social network.

Indeed, there is a lack of research that has addressed the relationship between brand awareness, social media quality, and brand image. 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 awareness as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media quality and brand image in private higher education institutions, which make the study different from other studies in terms of objective and the field of study. **Therefore,** the following hypotheses are proposed based on the above discussion:

- **H1:** there is a relationship between social media quality and brand awareness.
- **H2:** there is a relationship between brand awareness and brand image.
- **H3:** there are relationships between social media quality and brand image.
- **H4:** there are significant differences between customers' perceptions of the brand image based on their demographics (Gender, Age, Internet Experience, and frequency of internet usage).



Source: Developed by the Researcher

Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

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 awareness in the relationship between Social media quality and brand image. The

questionnaire was developed from several literature reviews; the list consists of 12 items representing social media quality, 8 items representing brand awareness, and 9 items representing the brand image. 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 (± 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 April 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.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of the Sample

Demographically, the study found a relatively balanced distribution in terms of gender (58 % females and 42% males). The majority of respondents are aged 17 to 24 years old (67%), which indicates they have a higher propensity to engage in online activities. Mostly have been using the internet for more than six years (75.5%), which indicates that they are using the Internet before joining the university. Further, about 96.4% of respondents use the Internet daily, which indicates that most of the respondents have embraced the Internet and are using it consistently.

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 social media quality, brand image, and brand awareness have a high-reliability coefficient (0.950), (0.935), and (0.920) 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	0.950	12
2	Brand awareness	0.920	8
3	Brand image	0.935	9

Correlation Analysis

In Table 2, all variables are positively correlated with each other, and there was a significant relationship between all constructs at the 0.01 level in the model.

Table 2: the Pearson Correlations between Constructs

	Social media quality	Brand awareness	Brand image
Social media quality			
Sig. (2-tailed)			
Brand awareness	0.953**		
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
Brand image	0.915**	0.904**	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	

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

Regression Analysis

Testing the First Hypothesis H1

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

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

In Table 3, the model shows that there is a significant relationship between Social media quality and brand awareness. The significant level is .000. The positive values show that there is a positive relation-

ship. In addition, it is also confirmed through (F calculated = 3742.27) which is greater than (F tabulated = 3.021).

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. In addition, it is also confirmed through (T calculated =61.17) which is greater than (T tabulated = 1.967). The coefficient of determination R-Sq is equal to 0.907 which means the effect of the Social media quality is 90.7 % in the variation of brand awareness.

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

Dependent Variable	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Brand Awareness	Regression	279.82	1	279.82	3742.27	.000[a]
	Residual	28.56	382	.075		
	Total	308.38	383			

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

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.004	.063		.07	.94
Social Media Quality	1.001	.016	.953	61.17	.000

Testing the Second Hypothesis H2

H2: there is a relationship between brand awareness and brand image.

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

In Table 5, the model shows a significant relationship between brand awareness and brand image. The significant level is .000. The positive values show that there is a positive relationship. It is also confirmed through (F calculated = 1709) which is greater than (F tabulated = 3.021).

Table 5: Analysis of Variance between Brand Awareness and Brand Image

Dependent Variable	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Brand Image	Regression	237.8	1	237.79	1709	.000[a]
	Residual	53.14	382	.139		
	Total	289.9	383			

Table 6: Analysis of Simple Regression between Brand Awareness and Brand Image

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.415	.082		5.05	.000
Brand Awareness	.878	.021	.904	41.34	.000

In Table 6, the coefficient of the simple regression model of brand awareness proves the significance of the coefficient of the resource. The significant level is .000. It is also confirmed through (T calculated =41.34), which is greater than (T tabulated = 1.967). The coefficient of determination R-Sq equals 0.817, which means the effect of brand awareness is 81.7 % in the variation of brand image.

Testing the Third Hypothesis H3

H3: there are relationships between social media quality and brand image.

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

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

Dependent Variable	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Brand Image	Regression	243.6	1	243.6	1966	.000[a]
	Residual	47.3	382	.124		
	Total	290.9	383			

In Table 7, the model shows that there is a significant relationship between social media quality and brand image. The significant level is .000. The positive values show that there is a positive relationship. It is also confirmed through (F calculated = 1966), which is greater than (F tabulated = 3.021).

In Table 8, 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

=44.34) which is greater than (T tabulated = 1.967). The coefficient of determination R-Sq is equal to 0.837 which means the effect of the Social media quality is 83.7 % in the variation of brand image.

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

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	P-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.213	.081		2.626	.009
Social Media Quality	.934	.021	.915	44.34	.000

Testing the Fourth Hypothesis H4

H4: there are significant differences between customers' perceptions of the brand image 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 indepens dent 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 perception of the brand image 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. The Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to assess the differences between the answers of the respondents regarding their perception of the brand image based on their age, and Internet experience.

Table 9: Results of Analysis of Mann-Whitney Test for Customers' Perception of Brand Image According to Gender

Variable	Gender		Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig*
	Male	Female				
	Mean Rank					
Brand image	182.7	214	13260	48240	-2.57	0.010

Table 10: Results of Analysis of Kruskal-Wallis Test for Customers' Brand Perception of Brand Image According to Frequency of Internet Usage

Variable	Frequency of internet usage		Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig*
	daily	weekly				
	Mean Rank					
Brand image	225.6	187.3	6909	62187	-2.32	0.020

In Tables 9 and 10, the value of Sig (=0.010, 0.020) < 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' perception about the brand image based on their Gender and frequency of internet usage" is supported.

Table 11: Results of Analysis of Kruskal-Wallis Test for Customers' Perception of Brand Image According to Age

Variable	Age			(Chi-Square)	Df	Sig*
	From 17 to 24	from 25 to 29	30 or above			
	Mean Rank					
Brand image	141.27	305.06	189.54	147.37	2	0.000

In Tables 11 and 12, the value of Sig (=0.000) < 0.05, which means reject the null hypothesis (HO: the groups are equal), and 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' perception about the brand image based on their age and internet experience "." is supported.

Table 12: Results of Analysis of Kruskal-Wallis Test for Customers' Perception of Brand Image According to the Internet Experience

Variable	Internet experience				(Chi-Square)	df	Sig*
	0-1 year	2-3 year	4-5 year	6+ ears			
	Mean Rank						
Brand image	159.3	284.03	327.2	125.5	211.63	3	0.000

Structural Equation Model Analysis for the Conceptual Model

To test the research hypotheses and the structural model prescribes the role of brand awareness in the relationship between social media quality and consumer brand image, and the interrelation-

ships 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 awareness and brand image).

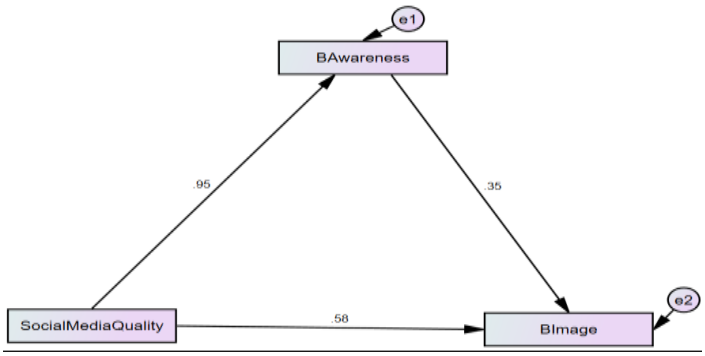


Figure 2: the Path Diagram for the Conceptual Model

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

Table 13: Results of Structural Model Assessment

H	Paths			Estimate	S.E.	C.R	P	**results**
H1	Brand awareness	<--	Social media quality	0.953	.016	61.25	***	supported
H2	Brand image	<--	Brand awareness	0.582	0.67	8.9	***	supported
H3	Brand image	<--	Social media quality	0.350	0.63	5.36	***	supported

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.

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 image: Social media quality ⟶ Brand awareness ⟶ Brand image, where the relationship between Social media quality and brand image is possibly fully mediated by brand awareness.

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**
AR ⟶ Brand image	0.582	0.001	0.34	0.000	0.91	.001

In Table 14, The results of the standardized indirect effects (two-tailed significance) indicate that the path Social media quality ⟶ Brand image, the indirect effect of Social media quality on brand image is 0.341, 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 awareness mediates the relationship between Social media quality and brand image. So, the null hypothesis will be rejected which is "H0: there is no indirect path between social media quality and brand image. The mediation effect through a single mediator, also brand awareness has a net mediated effect between social media quality and brand image. In summary, brand awareness is an effective mediator.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study helps higher education institutions to get know that brand awareness and brand image play a significant role in affecting the choices of first-year students, and the characteristics that students depend on to select a specific university. In addition, The study contributes to the body of knowledge related to the

impact of social media quality on brand awareness, and brand image in the private universities context by developing a new model of how brand awareness mediates the relationship between brand awareness and brand image. Indeed, the brand is the most important asset that private universities can have, and the success of such institutions depends on their brand image. When private universities have a strong brand image, the students' brand choices and willingness to recommend their universities will be the results. Brand image can be derived from the exposure to social media that impacts millennial decisions when they select their universities. further, social media is a significant digital communication channel that helped private universities to build solid and emotional relationships with customers, as well as, make their brands the first choice for the students when they decide to study.

Social media has a significant role in enhancing brand awareness, which is the first stage in developing a purchase decision, and the quality of social media platforms could affect brand awareness that is the expected result of customers' exposure to external environmental stimuli. Social media platforms can play a role in creating such stimuli, which can affect the configuration of customers' perceptions regarding the brand, this perception can encourage customers to share the information they gain with others. Then the Brand image is established when the customer's exposed to external environmental stimuli, and or when they share with their environment. Therefore, the study concludes that brand image can be affected by social media quality with the mediation role of brand awareness, in the context of private universities.

Main Findings

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

a- The reliability of all constructs of the model measured by Cronbach's alphas has higher degree rates from (0.950 to 0.920). These results are in agreement with previous studies (Persson, 2010; Zhang, 2015; Helal, Ozuem and Lancaster, 2018)

b- 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 (Suryani, Fauzi, and Nurhadi, 2021; Büyükdağ, 2021; Olsson et al., 2012; Poushneh & Vasquez-Parraga, 2017)

c- The model has a high ability to predict and explain brand awareness through social media quality, and this was proved by the validity of the first hypothesis (H1) through the value of (R-Sq = 0.907) in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Zarantonello et al., 2020; Suryani, Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021).

d- The model has a high ability to predict and explain the brand image through brand awareness, and this was proved by the validity of the second hypothesis (H2) through the value of (R-Sq = 0.817) in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Barreda et al., 2016 Büyükdağ, 2021).

e- The model has a high ability to predict and explain the consumer brand image through Social media quality, and this was proved by the validity of the third hypothesis (H3) through the value of (R-Sq = 0.837) in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Saha et al., 2021; Suryani, Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021 Malesev and Cherry, 2021).

f- There is a positive relationship between Social media quality and brand awareness, and the effect of social media quality is (90.7 %) in the variation of brand awareness in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Zarantonello et al., 2020; Suryani, Fauzi, and Nurhadi, 2021).

g- There is a positive relationship between brand awareness and brand image, and the effect of brand awareness is (81.7%) in the variation of brand image in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Barreda et al., 2016; Büyükdağ, 2021).

h- There is a positive relationship between social media quality and brand image, and the effect of Social media quality is (83.7 %) in the variation of brand image in the model. These results are in agreement with previous studies (Saha et al., 2021; Suryani; Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021; Malesev and Cherry, 2021).

i- 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 (Suryani, Fauzi, and Nurhadi, 2021; Büyükdağ, 2021)

j- Customers' brand image 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- The effect of social medial quality is (90.7 %) in the variation of brand awareness, in addition, the effect of brand awareness is (81.7 %) in the variation of brand image, and The effect of social medial quality is (83.7 %) in the variation of brand image. The meaning of these(90.7 %, 81.7 %, and 83.7 %) are reflection of one of the following factors:

a- Another dimension or dimensions have not been covered in this study and searching for them is an essential element to increase this percentage.

b- The current dimensions value may need to be increased by searching for the reasons that make the values higher.

2- The study recommends marketers work for private universities to prioritize their branding efforts to guarantee their institutions' profitability and validity.

3- Private universities should use the structured model in the current study as a strategy, to ensure that their brands' images will help them in reflecting the characteristics and the benefits introduced by their brands, which are needed for distinguishing their brands from other competitive brands.

4- This study recommends private universities give great concern to the demographics of the customers (gender, age, internet experience, and frequency of internet usage), which can affect their perceptions regarding the brand image.

Future Research

- First, the most significant limitation of this study is the use of an insufficient sample. The results may therefore not be representative of the perceptions of the whole population of customers. Future studies could address this problem by using larger samples worldwide.
- Second, another significant limitation of this study is the data collected from a limited sample within one country within a limited time frame. Only students that enrolled in private universities in Egypt were surveyed, they provided answers at a particular time and it is difficult to know whether they would hold the same view over time. Accordingly, future research should apply the research model developed in this study to other research contexts such as different sectors or different countries.
- Finally, future research should investigate the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (EWOM) in the relationship between brand image and brand performance. As well as the moderating role of the types of consumers that can affect their behaviors in the future.

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