

Usage and Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing in Egypt: An Organization Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Social media is changing the way information is communicated to and from people around the world. The rapid use of social media is changing the way firms respond to consumer's needs and wants and increasing the opportunities for firms to market their products and services in a personalized way. However, there is still limited research to answer some of the key issues concerning the extent to which social media tools is being utilized in firms and their effectiveness in marketing from a business perspective. The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of social media marketing in manufacturing and service firms in Egypt and the perceived effects of these marketing practices on brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty. Data was collected by e-mail questionnaire with professionals of social media in firms in Egypt who use social media in their businesses and at least have a brand on social media platforms. The empirical results of structure equation model identified different ways of engaging social media as marketing tools specifically, in marketing communication, promotion, discounts, market research, and sales. Additionally, the results showed that social media marketing help the firms to create and enhance brand awareness and in turn this leads to increasing sales performance of firms. Additionally, the study found that social media usage has a positive relationship with firms' sales, market shares, high-profit margin products' sales and sales of new products However, the results revealed the weak and insignificant relationship between social media marketing usage and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Social media, Social media marketing, brand awareness, sales performance, brand loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

Today's marketing is changing faster than ever because with everyday new communication platforms appear. In addition to mass media like TV and newspapers, customers are now progressively adopting social media to communicate, search for, and exchange knowledge, ideas, and experiences of products, brands, and firms (Constantinides, 2014; Sinclair and Vogus, 2011). They use Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter to express their experiences whether affirmative

or negative (Mihalcea and Savulescu, 2013). Moreover, they search product and firm information on social media sites because they perceive that those sources are more reliable and appropriate than the traditional marketing communications developed by marketers (Bruhn et al., 2012; Sinclair and Vogus, 2011). According to Nielson's study (2009), most of the Internet users believe the judgments of customers and their recommendations for products on social media platforms than any other medium. Mangold and Faulds (2009) demonstrated that in conventional marketing, customers will tell seven to ten people about the product, but now social media gives the opportunity to customers to quickly spread the word to ten million in a short period.

From a marketing perspective, social media channel

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is now an important part of an organization's media mix that changes the way of how customers and marketers communicate and is providing new opportunities to reach out to potential customers (Borker, 2014; Ioană and Stoica, 2014; Lim et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2013; Zhuang et al., 2013). Specifically, the role of the social media in marketing has created two important opportunities for all kinds of firms. First, firms now have an access to a vast array of social media tools that can be utilized for different marketing purposes such as marketing communication, marketing intelligence, customer service, market research, product management, and word-of-mouth marketing (Akar and Topcu, 2011; Bajpai et al.; Deans, 2011; Jane et al., 2013; Johnson, 2011; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Milewicz and Saxby, 2013). Second, marketers started to use social media as an integral part of their marketing strategies because it has the power to achieve great results on efficiencies, competitive position (Shadkam and O'Hara, 2013; Yu et al., 2013) and customer value (Schultz et al., 2012) for very minimal cost and in less time.

Many statistics show the increasing number of users of social media. At a global level, social media and particularly, social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and LinkedIn, are prominent online activity in terms of average time spent or engagement index and number of active users. Heidemann et al. (2012) estimated that time spent on social media sites is rising at more than three times the rate of overall Internet growth and the Internet users visiting social networking sites at least once a month is anticipated to grow from 41% in 2008 to above 65% in 2014. In the Arab world, social media has been growing exponentially since 2011. Specifically, statistics showed that social media plays a major role in the everyday lives of Egyptian Internet users. Egypt is ranked as the 17th worldwide in terms of audience size and the first among

Arab region countries (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, 2014; SMAR, 2013). Additionally, it has the largest portion of Facebook users in the Arab world and constitutes more than one-quarter of all Facebook users in the region (eMarketing Egypt, 2013). Moreover, 44% of Egypt's Internet users are using YouTube on a daily basis and 97% of them have a positive opinion about it (Dubai School of Government, 2013).

While social media penetration statistics are impressive, it is more important to look at the implications. Some researchers support firms to develop their social media strategies and communicate their brands online. Further, some firms realized the importance of social media marketing and acted proactively at the early stage of its adoption. However, there are still a large number of firms lagging behind. On the contrary, others reveal that social media platforms are for communication among people, not brands and that many firms underestimate its potential and think it is just another marketing channel. Additionally, some firms are frequently concerned about the actual benefits of leveraging social media in marketing initiatives from a firm's perspective and in which marketing functions may this tool effectively be used. Thus, the argument about how social media is employed in marketing practices to engage and influence customers has remained unresolved. The aim of the study is to empirically explore the usage of social media in marketing and measures a range of variables, which are proposed to have an impact on the effectiveness of the use of these platforms for marketing in terms of brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty from the point of view of firms.

This study was organized into the following sections. Following this introduction, the research problem is presented and the existing literature on social media and

its related concepts was reviewed. Next, previous theoretically and empirically studies of the use of social media marketing in firms and its effectiveness, namely, on brand awareness, brand loyalty, and sales performance were discussed. Then, presented the methodology of the study describing the sample, the data, measurement, and provided a brief discussion on survey procedures. Finally, the results and conclusions, and implications for practitioners and suggestions for further research of this study were presented.

Research Problem

Although there has been a significant amount of research regarding the adoption of social media marketing from a business perspective, there is a lack of research on understanding the current role of social media in firms. This research is intended to fill the following gaps in the existing research and to create an understanding of how firms in Egypt exploit various social media platforms in marketing and examine which social media marketing can bring to marketing. (1) There is an ongoing theoretical and empirical debate over the practices of firms in social media in general or in different business functions. Some researchers believe that social media is an advanced environment for businesses to reach their customers and they consider social media as a new marketing tool that increases marketing effectiveness and very few focuses on how firms may benefit from them. So there is an important need in the literature to examine how different firms in different industries use social media marketing and the purposes of adopting them. (2) Although the increased pressure for marketing managers to measure and provide evidence of the effectiveness of their social media marketing practices, very few specific empirical studies have dealt with this issue. To the best of researcher knowledge, no academic study exists in the literature that measures social media marketing effectiveness in

terms of brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty effects within firms and brings these concepts together. In other words, several issues remain unanswered, such as the influence of social media marketing on brand awareness, the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty, and the extent of which social media practices in firms contribute to its sales performance and the interrelationships among these benefits. (3) No studies could be found addressing the practice and usefulness of social media firms in Egypt.

Social Media Marketing Concept and its features

The social media era was started around ten years ago. It began with LinkedIn, which was launched in 2003, followed by both MySpace and Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006 (Pradiptarini, 2011). Social media term is a construct from two areas of research, communication science and sociology. In the context of communication, social media is simply a means for interactive connections between customers and brands by sharing information and experiences via the web (Shojaee and Azman, 2013). In the realm of sociology, and in particular social (network) theory and analysis, social media platform is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (i.e., individuals, groups, or organizations) with a complex set of dyadic relationships among them (Peters et al., 2013).

When reviewing the literature, it is found that there are different terms describing social media such as social networks, consumer-generated media, user-generated content, and Web 2.0. The common social media definition was developed by Kaplan and Haenlein as a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Andzulis et al. (2012) defined social media from a marketing perspective as the technological component of the communication, transaction and relationship building

functions of a business, which leverages the network of customers and prospects to promote value co-creation.

These definitions imply the following characteristics of social media. (1) It is a software tool that creates user-generated content and facilitates the Internet users to join, connect, and share ideas, content, views, experiences, concepts, and information (Chan and Guillet, 2011; Neiger et al., 2012; Sinclair and Vogus, 2011). User-Generated-Content (UGC) permits Internet users to create comments in distinct forms, such as photos, videos, ratings, reviews, articles, and blogs (Judson and Rajdevasagayam, 2012; Jussila et al., 2014). It is also noted as user-created-content (UCC) or consumer-generated media (CGM) (Judson & Rajdevasagayam, 2012). (2) Social media does not seek to replace telephones, e-mail communication, or even transactions. Instead, it seeks to complement them or augment the value of each interaction with the customer. Greenberg (2010) argued that all customers are nowadays “social customers” and every interaction is part of a new cooperation between firm and customer: a vital part of CRM (customer relationship management). Akar and Topcu (2011) indicated that social media to some extent changes customers into marketers and advertisers, and customers can create positive or negative experience for the firm and its products, depending both on how the firm or brand is communicated online and on the products quality presented to the customer.

Social media tools include social network (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn), Wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), Podcast (e.g., Apple iTunes), content communities (e.g., YouTube), blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter) (Mohammadian and Mohammadreza, 2012). Castronovo and Huang (2012) stated that a firm chooses from these platforms when formulating a social media strategy. This social media strategy is developed based on the

objectives of the strategy and the usage of social media among firm’s target market.

In relation to social media, social media marketing concept (SMM) is defined as any form of direct or indirect marketing that is used to build awareness, recognition, recall, and action for a brand, business, product, person, or other entity and is carried out using the tools of the social Web, such as blogging, micro-blogging, social networking, and content sharing (Gunelius, 2011, p. 10). Akar and Topcu (2011) described this kind of marketing as an integral part of online marketing activities that integrates with the traditional Web marketing strategies, such as email marketing, webinars, and online advertising, but not equal to online marketing because online channels are static in nature and are just one way communication of which firms used to give out information without interacting with customers. Furthermore, Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) explained the difference between social media marketing and traditional methods of marketing as the social media marketing is related to relationship marketing, where the firms need to shift from “trying to sell” to “making connections” with the customers. Akar and Topcu (2011) added another difference that traditional marketing applications and their contents are directed or “pushed” from the firm to the customer without a request. On the contrary, social media marketing is participatory; meaning that it consists of multi-directional communication, brands communicate with customers; customers communicate with those brands, and most importantly, customers share with each other.

In summary, today, it is no longer enough to solely rely on traditional media for marketing, more is it acceptable for the firms to simply step in and explore how to utilize their interactive media as a part of the marketing strategy and culture of operations within

firms. This highly interactive social media holds enormous potential for firms to become more connected to customers and, by doing so, increase revenue, reduce costs and improve efficiencies.

Literature Review

The first concern of researchers was pointing in the direction of gratification and users attitudes towards social media (e.g., Cha, 2009; Ho and Dempsey, 2010; Say et al., 2011), the impact of social media on word of mouth marketing (WOM) (e.g., Gupta and Harris, 2010; Trusov et al., 2009), social media and brand evaluations and users purchase decision (e.g., Dnias et al., 2010; Lennon and Curran, 2012; Vinerean et al., 2013), and people's usage of social media (e.g., Alam et al., 2011; Smith, et al., 2012). Recent topics have started to assume a more business-oriented route (e.g., Borker, 2014; Dateling and Bick, 2013; Mihalcea and Savulescu, 2013; Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014) and have started to explore the use of social media in marketing environment and relevance of this communication tool to marketing principles and business philosophies. The literature review of this study is divided into two streams; namely, studies focusing on the different usage of social media marketing on firms and studies regarding the marketing outcomes of social media marketing specifically, in terms of brand awareness, brand loyalty and sales performance.

Social Media Marketing Usage

Prior researchers have assessed the adoption of social media by firms and its usage for a variety of goals. These studies provided empirical evidence of successful usages of this interactive channel by different types of organizations in the consumer products and service industry. For example, Borker (2014) provided empirical evidence that the majority of the listed firms on the Mongolia Stock Exchange have a website and a Facebook brand page to attract Facebook users to

additional information about the firm and its brands on the firm websites. Furthermore, the significance of social media is shown by Stelzner (2014) in the annual social media marketing industry report, which pointed out that the majority of marketers are now using some form of social media specifically, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs to market their businesses. Barnes (2010b) demonstrated in a study that third of Fortune 500 (F500) firms at 2010 have corporate public-facing blogs in terms of corporate Twitter accounts along with fan page Facebook.

In a similar framework for adopting social media in small and medium business firms, Pentina et al. (2012) showed that adoption of social media marketing in small businesses is strongly influenced by social influences from experts, competitors, and customers. Indrupati and Henari (2012) found that entrepreneurs in the Arabian Gulf use social media as a part of the "Integrated Marketing Communications" because it is a cheap and easy method of advertising and gives all entrepreneurs a better chance of reaching their target market and, thereby, in succeeding in their ventures. In the same direction in nonprofit organizations, Carim and Warwick (2013) presented an example of how research-funding organizations in the UK use social media to enhance communications through increasing transparency and facilitating dialogue with stakeholders. Barnes (2010a) compared the adoption of social media by largest charities in the United States in a longitudinal study, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. The most recent study revealed that social media is an integral part of the communication strategy for US charities and most of those charities studied have an online presence in terms of Facebook profile, a Twitter presence, and a blog, compared with the first report that showed that every charity surveyed employing at least one platform of social media.

However, another stream of studies found low adoption of social media marketing in business. For example in a recent study of Jussila et al. (2014), they presented empirical evidence of the low adoption of social media in the business-to-business firms in the Finnish technology industry sector. Most of these firms used social media for internal communication purposes and only a few firms employ social media in various functions such as communications, marketing, employer branding, sales support and customer participation in R&D. Javinen et al. (2012) asserted firms continue to focus on one-directional communications such as newsletters and e-mail marketing rather than social media tools.

With regard to social media marketing goals, several theoretical and empirical evidences revealed that social media marketing provides firms with the most important business objectives such as product development, marketing communication, support services, relationship marketing and direct sales. Constantinides (2014) proposed passive and active approaches of social media applications in the marketing strategies. The passive approach (Listening-In) focus on utilizing the social media as a source of customer's voice and market intelligence to provide marketers with information about market needs, customer experiences, competitive movements, and trends. The active approach engages the social media as tools of communication, direct sales, direct marketing and customer influence tools in terms of personalizing the customer experience and product they buy. A similar framework of Sinclair and Vogus (2011) suggested another classification model for employing social media marketing by global firms. Their results indicated that the usage of social media by firms could be passive and active use, proactive and reactive use, and tactical and strategic use. In this regards, for example, some firms are mainly building external

communities of fans to disseminate the benefits of a specific brand or product among customers and their social networks as a proactive and tactical approach. Another theoretical study of Mohammadian and Mohammadreza (2012) suggested five of the most common goals of social media marketing in firms: (1) build relationships with actively engaged customers, online influencers, peers, and more (2) build brand awareness, support brand recognition, and increase brand loyalty, (3) provide a communication channel where businesses can share important information and modify negative perceptions, (4) provide exclusive discounts and opportunities to audience in order to make these people feel valued and special, and (5) learn about customers, create demographic and behavioral profiles of customers, find niche audiences, and learn about competitors.

Several studies presented empirical evidence about how firms use brand pages to accomplish brand objectives and marketing communication strategies such as announcing new products/ services, interacting with fans, providing advice and useful information, giving information about latest offers and discounts and handling customer service issues, creating awareness about brands and firm and creating word-of-mouth for products/services (e.g. Michaelidou et al., 2011; Milewicz and Saxby, 2013; Nassar, 2012; Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014; Vij and Sharma, 2013). However in a recent study of Lagrosen and Grunden (2014), they found that the Swedish spa-hotels employ both the traditional media and social media for their marketing communication. Some of the hotels use Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and YouTube effectively, especially in tracking their competitors. Others are beginners in adopting the social media marketing and utilize limited benefits from this advanced communication channel.

In the case of product development, several empirical

studies addressed that businesses are beginning to explore how social media can help them grow and improve profits, not just with common practices such as outbound marketing, but to enhance business interactions as part of the innovation and product development process. They indicated that these new social media applications are designed to allow users both inside and outside an organization to easily communicate and collaboratively design, manage, and launch new products and services. These studies investigated the impact of social media tools on the development phase of the new product development process (e.g., Kenly and Poston, 2010; Marion et al., 2014; Mohammadian and Mohammadreza, 2012; Peltola and Mäkinen, 2014; Reid et al, 2013). Kenly and Poston (2010) found in a survey of 90 product and service organizations that over one-half of surveyed companies are using social media tools in product innovation to some extent. However, most of these companies have only piloted the use of social media on a small number of their product innovation initiatives. Peltola and Mäkinen (2014) indicated that the adoption and use of social media tools influences the amount of accessible knowledge and increases the number of ideas as an organization's ability to find and access various sources of intra-organizational expertise increases. Kenly and Poston (2010) and Reid et al (2013) found that firms who seek to incorporate new social media tools into their new product development (NPD) process have improved performance outcomes including the number of concepts generated and tested, more efficient NPD team collaboration, faster management approval, faster time to market, faster product adoption, lower product costs, and lower product development costs. More importantly, these improvements have resulted in higher market share and improved product revenue. However, recent research of Marion et al. (2014) on the relationship

between social media and NPD performance has shown mixed results. They found that the use of these new tools is significantly lower than the adoption of traditional IT tools such as e-mail and computer-aided-design. Surprisingly, social networking tools like weblogs and Twitter negatively impact management evaluation while having no impact on NPD team collaboration and concepts/prototypes generated.

Other stream of studies added another application of social media marketing in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) (e.g., Clark and Melancon, 2013; Heidemann et al., 2012; Johnson, 2011; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Shadkam and O'Hara, 2013; Trainor et al., 2013; Yadav et al., 2013). These studies confirmed that social media marketing helps in developing customer value and differentiate firms than their competitors by cultivating customer relationships and creating a unique brand identity. For example, Johnson (2011) showed that social media marketing enhance customer support services and reduce its process cost through connecting with firms' customers, and receive beneficial real customer feedback, and administer the support at the appropriate time. Clark and Melancon (2013) found based on empirical research that the followers of social media marketing of a firm have higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, perceive higher levels of relationship quality and finally, share positive word of mouth with their social networks than unfollowers. Alkhoms and Alnsour (2013) suggested that social media have influence on customer's relationship quality by enhancing three factors: (1) trust, which relates to the customers' willingness to rely on the firm fan pages; (2) satisfaction, which results from utilizing services that are provided by the firm fan page; (3) commitment which indicates continuity of the relationship with the firm on its fan page.

Finally, recent researches addressed that several

firms are more using social media marketing as a new sales channel that influence transactions, supporting sales or even serving as a selling platform – some experts call it “F-commerce” or social commerce (e.g., Shadkam and O’Hara, 2013; Yadav et al., 2013). Additionally, sales literature advanced in the understanding of social media marketing as a strategic sales tool that influences sales performance. Javinen et al. (2012) suggested that increasing sales is the possible goal of the social media marketing efforts made by B2B firms. They explained that sales to existing customers can be increased, for example, by facilitating the transaction process, whereas sales to new customers can be boosted by driving traffic to a website and thereby generating sales leads. Schultz et al. (2012) revealed that the majority of salespeople in their study use social media in different stages of the sales process. The activities were ranked based on the highest percentage used to maintain good business relationships, obtain leads, build awareness, connect with customers and keep them feeling important, prospect, communicate thoroughly, and obtain referrals to other potential prospects.

On the other hand, many kinds of researches advocated that social media strategies and approaches vary among firms or industry group (e.g., Javinen et al., 2012; Jussila et al., 2014; Sinclair and Vogus, 2011). For example, Sinclair and Vogus (2011) demonstrated that several firms and industries adopt a strategic approach to the use of social media in marketing practices with a strong objective toward developing strong brand communities from current or potential customers and communicate a consistent message across all social media platforms. While other firms and industries employ the tactical approach by posting advertisements or promotion campaigns on different social media platforms without any interaction with their

communities. Javinen et al. (2012) argued that social media tools are more important for large-sized B2B firms. In contrast, other studies such as Burton and Soboleva (2011) and Michaelidou et al. (2011) concluded that there is no difference between manufacturing and services regarding their usage of social media marketing. They explained this result for the low cost of social media and the relatively limited financial resources required for their adoption. Additionally, Burton and Soboleva (2011) revealed that no differences between the two geographic markets; sample of firms in the USA as the heaviest country for Twitter usage, and by comparable firms in the less well-developed Australian market, even between Twitter usages within firms that market the same product in these different markets.

In summary, social media marketing literature suggested that most marketers in different kinds of firms and industries are beginning to understand the use of social media as a component in their marketing strategies and campaigns to reach out to customers. Marketing communications, product and customer management, promotions, sales and support services and marketing intelligence are sub-disciplines of marketing that may use social media. However, it is not clear and how important widely the tools have been adopted and how important their role in firms is perceived to be.

The Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing

The second related literature stream concerns the effectiveness of social media marketing on firms. Several studies provided theoretical and empirical confirmation of the role of social media marketing in developing and improving brand awareness and brand information. For example, Bruhn et al. (2012) empirically suggested that both traditional communications and social media communications significantly influence brand equity in tourism,

telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals industries. Also, traditional media positively affects brand awareness and social media communications strongly affect brand image. Nigam (2012) found that consumers who visit social networking websites are more likely to develop differential perception about brands and may often post their comments through these social networking sites and influence other prospects to buy the product. Neti (2011) presented the benefits of social media to firms including brand reach and awareness, consumer interactions through transactions, referrals, and reputation management. Javinen et al. (2012) and Shojaee and Azman (2013) suggested that social media marketing enables firms to provide brand and product-related information and builds brands in terms of creating awareness, improving brand attitude, and increasing purchase intentions. Bond (2010) presented a conceptual framework of the proposed relationship between social media participation and engagement, and behavioral outcomes in terms, brand awareness, and willingness to provide word of mouth, purchase intention, and satisfaction. In a recent study of Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014), they bring empirical insights on benefits users get from using such pages. According to the opinions of marketing managers, interact with customers, create/enhance relationships with customers, brand awareness, customer engagement, promote products/increase of sales, and the more targeted acquisition of new customers, were referred to as the main expected outcomes for firms. Based on the above, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H₁ Social media marketing usage in marketing is positively and significantly related to brand awareness.

Other researchers investigated the influence of social media marketing on firm performance. Schniederjans et al. (2013) suggested that social media usage to spread marketing communication between firms and their

stakeholders contributes to achieving positive firm's earnings per share (EPS). Yu et al. (2013) confirmed the influence of social media than traditional media on firm's stock market performances for publicly traded firms across pharmaceutical, retail, software, savings institutions, health care, and hotel industries. More interestingly, they found that both social media applications and traditional media influence stock movement in different directions. Mora and Barnes (2011) showed that firm revenue and usage patterns of social media marketing complexity positively influence each other. Stelzner (2014) in the annual social media marketing report revealed that reduced marketing expenses and improved sales were the top benefits of social media marketing. Another published report from the Altimeter Group (2009) found among the top 100 global brands a correlation between the brand's social engagement and its financial performance. The brands most heavily engaged in the social media marketing show increasing in revenue growth, gross margins, and net margin against for not involved brands. Rodriguez et al. (2012) supported that social media marketing usage has a positive relationship with sales processes (creating opportunities and relationship management) and relationship sales performance but not with outcome-based sales performance in terms of quota achievement, growth in average billing size, increases in sales productivity, and overall revenue gain.

On the other hand, other researches showed that there is no hard formula to calculate social media marketing Return on Investment (ROI), because this advanced channel mostly involves human interactions among customers, online communities and firms (i.e. positive/negative reviews, Word of Mouth), which cannot be calculated using traditional mathematical calculation. The effectiveness of social media marketing practices in firms should involve both financial (i.e.,

increase in online sales) and non-financial (i.e., consumers' involvements on the social media sites, increase in positive mentions) outcomes of the campaign. For example, Pradiptarini (2011) analyzed the correlations between Twitter activities and sales performances of five companies from the Fortune 500 companies (Microsoft, Wal-Mart, P&G's Charmin, Merck's Claritin, and AT&T) and then compared this to its main competitors (Oracle, Target, Kimberly-Clark's Cottonelle, Johnson & Johnson's Benadryl, and Verizon Wireless). The results showed some mixed indications of these correlations because companies use more than one social media in their marketing communication strategies, and it is difficult to conclude that the companies' Twitter activities were the main contributor to their business success. Based on the above, it is expected to have a positive relationship between social media marketing usage and sales performance of a firm. The following research hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: Social media marketing usage in marketing has a positive and significant relationship with sales performance of a firm.

Furthermore, other researchers discussed the extent to which social media marketing builds brand loyalty in firms. Laroche et al. (2013) showed that brand communities in social media have a positive influence on brand trust, and in turn, trust has a positive impact on brand loyalty. Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) suggested that effective social media marketing campaigns are the most significant influence on brand loyalty pursued by relevancy of the content, acceptance of the content among brand communities, and posting consistent content on various social media sites. Ab Hamid et al. (2013) revealed the relationships between the use of social media, trust, and customer retention. Furthermore, their findings also showed that social media is a strategic marketing communication tool to the hotel industry.

Based on the above, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Social media marketing usage in marketing has a positive and significant relationship with the brand loyalty of customers.

The effectiveness of social media marketing must be measured in terms of its ability to generate positive buzz about a firm, as well as its products and services. This, in turn, should translate into measurable business results for the firm - whether in the form of increased awareness, increased sales, or increased loyalty. Despite exponential growth of social media marketing studies on these issues, there is limited research on its potential effect on the interrelationships among brand awareness, sales performance and brand loyalty. Though many of these elements have received individual attention. This study aims to examine the fundamental linkages among social media marketing practice in firms and the three concepts together. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₄: There are significant interrelationships among the benefits of social media marketing in terms of brand awareness, sales performance of a firm and brand loyalty of customers.

More specifically, this hypothesis was divided into the following sub-hypotheses:

H_{4a}: Brand awareness of the customers from social media marketing is positively and significantly affected sales performance of a firm.

H_{4b}: Sales performance from social media marketing usage is positively and significantly affected brand loyalty of customers.

H_{4c}: Brand awareness from social media marketing is positively and significantly affected brand loyalty of customers.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent

to which social media marketing is being utilized and its effectiveness in firms in Egypt. Specific objectives are as follows.

- Explore the use of social media in marketing and develop associated categories and properties of usage specifically in marketing, sales and customer services and marketing communication.
- Test the impact of social media marketing practices on brand awareness.
- Measure the perceived effect of social media marketing practices on sales performance, based on the perceptions of the research participants not on numerical values.
- Investigate the influence of social media marketing practices on brand loyalty of the customers.
- Examine the extent of social media marketing practices influence the interrelationships among brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty.

Research Design and Methodology

Conceptual Model

This study attempts to analyze the relationships between social media marketing usage and its effectiveness in terms of brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty. The relationships among the constructs are presented in Figure 1. This study considers the common social network sites according to their global usage and user numbers: Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter (Wearesocial.SG, 2014).

The conceptual model of the study contains two parts: the social media marketing practices of firms and the effectiveness of these practices in marketing. Regarding the first part of the model, this study proposed a list of practices of social media in marketing. Six items

were presented to reflect the extent of firms to use social media marketing in a promotion, product improvement and development, and on market research. Six items measure the use of social media in generating sales, connecting and maintain relationships with customers, providing customer service, and responding to customer inquiries. The use of social media in marketing communication was measured by six items indicating purpose of communication with customers such as communicate the brand online, add social networking features to the firm's website, and post the upcoming firm events to the market.

The second part of the conceptual model was to conceptualize and test the effectiveness of using social media marketing. Three constructs were proposed to measure the effectiveness of social media marketing: brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty. Brand awareness was measured by items measure the number of times the brand content on a firm fan page is viewed, the number of people and their characteristics who interact with the firm fan page and its brand content, and the degree to which people prefer the brand content and are involved in generating, disseminating, sharing, and editing this brand content with their social communities.

Regarding the sales performance construct, it measures the impact of social media usage on increasing sales measurements and improving sales effectiveness process. Brand loyalty was measured by items measure the level of customer interaction with a brand, the willingness of the average customers to rely on and form credibility of the brand content, the valuable customers who have favorite brand, spend an above-average amount on that brand, and are actively involved with the brand, through engagement and advocacy.



Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Population and Sampling Process

The population of this study was firms covering manufacturing and service industries in Egypt that use social media in their businesses. A variety of firms were considered for analysis in these industries for reflecting reality more precisely and understanding the role social media marketing plays in the context of brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty. To be eligible for study, a firm should have a corporate website to serve as the corporate platform meeting the expectations of the online customer and a minimum level of use of the social media in marketing with at least one brand on social media platforms. However, there is no available data about the number of firms in Egypt that adopt social media in their businesses and their estimated expenses on social media marketing.

Data was collected from a random sample of firms in

Egypt drawn from a Ministry of Trade & Industry, Egyptian International Trade Point, and Egypt Business Directory databases. The method employed to determine the sampling frame involved multiple steps. First, firms were contacted via their official social media sites through their Twitter or Facebook accounts. Contacting the administrators of firms' accounts to create a direct link to a communication or social media professional at that particular firm. The goal of this approach was to gain direct access to social media professional and to know whether this firm is an eligible sample for the study. In addition, to establish a rapport with social media professional with the selected firm, two steps that were intended to lead to a high response rate. If the professional replied with an email address, then he or she received an email containing the consent letter and a link to the survey. If the account did not respond to the

initial email within one week, then the same message will be posted on the firm's website. The email was sent to a general email account of the firm with the instructions that the consent letter containing the survey link is forwarded to the professional at the firm. Whenever the introductory email and link to the survey were sent, a reminder email was sent one week afterward if a response was not received. A total of 541 emails were sent out. There were 55 firms that did not have an email address attached to their social media accounts or websites.

Data Collection

This study used an electronic mail questionnaire method to obtain data from a sample of 541 firms across a broad spectrum of manufacturing and services industries in Egypt, which use social media, and at least has one brand on social media platforms. All constructs' measurements in the model were adjusted from literature. The questionnaire was developed to measure the constructs of the study, namely, the practices of social media marketing on firms and the effectiveness of social media marketing efforts in terms of brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty.

One filter question was employed to confirm that the respondents in the selected sample were eligible to be included in the study. This question asked whether the firm uses social media in their business. If the answer to this question was positive, then the respondent completes the questionnaire. The questionnaire had four main sections. The first part included questions about the kind of social media a firm uses most often, the experience of a firm to use social media, the functional area responsible for social media activities in a firm, the number of staff members assigned to social media activities, and the other types of marketing communication than social media used in a firm. The objective of these questions was to provide detailed

information about social media practices in the selected sample.

The second part consisted of questions related to the utilization and objectives of social media marketing in the respondent's firm. The questions to measure usage of social media marketing for different purposes were drawn from the literature review (Javinen et al., 2012; Jussila et al., 2014; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Sinclair and Vogus, 2011) and developed an index for the social media use. Respondents were presented with a list of 18 social media marketing use classified under promotion, product devolvement, and market research, sales and customer services, and marketing communication. Their views were measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all used) to 5 (extensively used).

The third part focused on measuring the effectiveness of social media marketing practices in the respondent's firm. Social media marketing effectiveness construct comprised 32 items grouped on three main constructs. The first measure of effectiveness was brand awareness scale based on the Bond (2010), Javinen et al. (2012), Neiger et al. (2012), Schultz et.al (2012), Shojaee & Azman (2013) to capture the extent to which social media marketing practices of a firm increase consumers view of the firm's brand, visit the firm site, create comments, raise reviews on rating sites, improve search ranking, the extent of social media marketing practices enable people to participate in brand discussion, increase traffic, provide demographics of subscribers and the degree to which people take an action in the firm's post such as like, retweet and encourage the conversation about the brand.

Brand loyalty was adopted from Michaelidou et al. (2011) and Sinclair and Vogus (2011) study to include customer interaction with the firm brand in the form of increase the number of people who register for services/ make an appointment, enhance consumer knowledge

about brand/firm, trust the information about firm/brand, form high credibility to interact with the firm and the extent of social media marketing generates brand advocates who believe firm /brand. The six items that were used to measure sales performance were adapted from and Javinen et al. (2012), Schultz et al. (2012) including the extent of social media marketing generate leads, reduce overall marketing communication expenses, improve firm sales, contribute to firm's market share, sell high profit margin products and generate sales of new products. All items corresponding to the brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty constructs were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not effective at all) to 5 (extremely effective).

In addition, demographic items were included in this study to specify the personal information of respondents. They were asked about their gender, the function they belong to and their professional titles, the size of their firms in terms of a number of employees and its industry type.

The unit of analysis was the executive of each firm in the selected sample. These executives included marketing and sales or communication directors who have experience in integrating social media into their marketing strategies. The questionnaire and its validity have been measured and pretested using a small sample (20 executives from several industries in Egypt) to confirm the respondents' ability to understand the survey instruments and to support the validity and reliability of

all constructs in the model. Based on pretests results, the wording of a few items was changed to correctly measure the constructs under study.

The online survey was sent via e-mail. The survey was sent out over a two-week period beginning February 20, 2014. In total, 241 responses, all representing different firms were accumulated from 541 surveys sent, but the actual used 211 with a response rate of only 39% were used in the analysis.

To measure the reliability and validity of the study measurements, Cronbach's Alpha and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed. The values of the Cronbach's Alpha for the dependent variables, including brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty, were obtained as 0.863, 0.923, and 0.92 respectively, and for the independent variable, social media marketing usage, as 0.893 (Table 3). These values strongly confirm the internal consistency of the constructs and thus the reliability of the questionnaire, according to the accepted value 0.70 or higher that is suggested by most social science studies (e.g., Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the measurement model. The results of this analysis are shown in the next section.

Sample Description

Table (1) summarizes the characteristics of the sample based on the demographic information of participants. The respondents in the study represented various employment statuses and genders.

Table 1. Summary of respondents' demographic profile (sample size= 211)

Characteristics	Number	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	132	62.6
Female	79	37.4
<i>Total Number of Employees (Firm Size)</i>		
Less than 100 employees	78	37.0
101-500 employees	79	37.4
501-1000 employees	38	18.0
More than 1000 employees	16	7.6
<i>Job Description</i>		
CEO/Director/Vice president	12	5.7
Marketing Director/Manager	75	35.5
Sales Manager	66	31.3
Marketing/ Customer Service Executive	33	15.6
Communication Manager/Executive	16	7.6
Others (Social media executive, IT Manager/ CRM executive)	9	2.8
<i>Industry sector</i>		
Manufacturing (construction, Car Manufacturer, Cosmetics, Furniture)	25	11.8
Media & Entertainment	24	11.4
Retailing	27	12.9
Travel/Hospitality/Airline/Restaurants	32	15.2
Consumer Packaged Goods (Beverages, Daily Processed food	43	20.4
IT Telecommunication	14	6.6
Services (education, training, health care services)	34	16.0
Financial Services & Banks	12	5.7

In terms of gender, the percentage of male and female was 62.6% and 37.4%, respectively. Nearly 74.4% of all respondents worked for firms employing 500 or fewer employees and 25.6% for those employing more than 500 employees. The sample was additionally varied with respect to respondents' job descriptions. Marketing directors and sales and marketing managers (66.8 percent) represented the biggest percentage of respondents in the sample, pursued by marketing/customer service executives (15.6 percent). Other categories of respondents

were communication managers (7.6 percent), CEO/vice president (5.7 percent) and other managers (2.8 percent). The sample showed diversity with respondents from different industries (e.g., construction, car manufacturer, cosmetics, furniture & decoration, media & entertainment, retailing, travel, hospitality, airline, restaurants, consumer packaged goods, beverages, daily processed food, IT telecommunication, education, training, health care services, Financial Services & Banks) (Table 1).

Table 2. Social media marketing characteristics in the study sample (n= 211)

Characteristics	Frequency	%
<i>Commonly used social media platforms *</i>		
LinkedIn	87	16.7
Facebook	203	38.9
YouTube or other video	58	11.1
Twitter	162	31
Other (Geolocation, Foursquare, MySpace)	12	2.3
<i>Years using social media marketing</i>		
More than 6 years	9	4.3
5–6 years	25	11.8
3–4 years	49	23.2
1–2 years	72	34.1
Less than 1 year	56	26.5
<i>Functional area responsible for social media marketing</i>		
Marketing	61	28.9
Sales	45	21.3
Customer Service	52	24.6
Computer and Information Technology	42	19.9
Other (Corporate Communication, Public Relations)	11	5.2
<i>Number of staff members assigned to social media marketing</i>		
10 or more staff members	4	1.9
5–9 staff members	15	7.2
2–4 staff members	70	33.8
1 staff member	54	26.1
We do not have staff assigned only to social media activities	42	20.3
We assign consultants for this purpose	22	10.6
<i>Use of other types of marketing communication*</i>		
Email marketing	120	19.0
Press releases	44	7.0
Online ads (i.e., Google Awards)	105	16.7
Direct mail	12	1.9
Print display ads	74	11.8
Sponsorships	53	8.4
Mobile marketing	65	10.4
Webinars	115	18.3
Radio ads	28	4.5
TV ads	12	1.9

*Respondents may select more than one choice.

The questionnaire was begun by simply asking participants the commonly used social media platforms, among the social networking sites investigated, Facebook (38.9%), followed by Twitter (31%), and LinkedIn (16.7%) were the most widely used social media sites in the selected firms (Table 2). 57.3% of participants surveyed have at least from one to four years of social media marketing experience. The responses concerning the functional area responsible for social media marketing within the firm were marketing (28.9%), customer service (24.6%) and sales (21.3%). The remaining were spread between computer and information technology (19.9%) and others in terms of public relations and corporate communication (5.2%). Regarding the number of staff dedicated to social media marketing activities, 60 percent indicated that there are from 1 to four staff for social media activities and 20.3% do not have staff dedicated only to social media activities. Finally, the top three other types of marketing communication used by participants in the survey were email marketing (19%), webinars (18.3%) and online ads. (16.7%)

Data Analysis

The results were analyzed using SPSS 20 statistical software and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Lisrel 85. SPSS was used to provide all the demographic analysis of the sample of respondents and the descriptive statistics of social media marketing characteristics of the corresponding firms. Structural equation modeling (SEM) using Lisrel 85 was used to test the proposed model of the study.

Research Findings and Testing Hypotheses

The structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was employed to test the measurement model and the structural path model. SEM is an effective multivariate technique that assesses multiple of interdependent regression equations simultaneously by establishing the

structural model (Hair et al., 2012). Additionally, the technique examines the unobserved constructs in proposed relationships and computes the measurement error (Schumacker and Lomax, 2010). The next sections illustrate the measurement model and structural model developed from SEM.

The Measurement Model

For the data analysis, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was specified with the four constructs (latent variables)-social media marketing practices, brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty, and their underlying observed variables. This analysis is a reliable scientific method for examining the internal structure of a set of index and measuring construal validity which estimating factor loadings and relations between a set of index and factors (Albright and Hun, 2009). Moreover, the analysis was utilized to select and assess the final items for structuring the model and testing the research hypotheses.

First, an initial CFA model was developed; including all independent and dependent latent variables and each item was prescribed to be loaded on one specific latent variable. Poor factor loadings were found for three observed variables of social media marketing practice measures: MKT5 with loading 0.51, SCS5 with loading 0.32, and COM4 with loading 0.621. In addition, one item of brand awareness constructs, CENG3 with loading 0.532 and two items of brand loyalty; BRT4 with loading 0.556 and BRADV5 with loading 0.589 and all five items were less than 0.7. So these items were dropped out and run the model again. The items were tested in a two-factor confirmatory model to obtain an acceptable fit. The final measurement model includes 50 items to measure the four constructs: 18 for social media marketing practices measure, 6 for sales performance, 12 for brand awareness, and 14 for brand loyalty. These items were highly loaded on their

compatible constructs and confirmed the independence of those constructs and their validity. The factor loadings in the final measurement model varied from a minimum of 0.701 to 0.880, with factors loadings above 0.70 and all loading estimates were significant ($p < 0.001$). Table (3) presents the construct items, final item-to-construct loading, Cronbach's α , construct reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE).

The values of α for the four constructs ranged from 0.78 to 0.923. The composite reliability (CR) measures the convergent validity computed from LISREL solutions. The construct reliability (CR) for social media marketing purposes (SMMP), brand awareness (BRAWR), sales

performance (SPER), and brand loyalty (BRLY) were 0.87, 0.90, 0.946, and 0.920 respectively, exceeded the 0.70 benchmark as the cutoff value in the literature (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The average variance extracted (AVE) estimates the amount of variance occupied by a construct's scale in relation to the variance correlated with random measurement error (Hair et al., 2012). Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that constructs with AVE estimates of 0.50 or higher are suitable for use in the analysis because estimates in this range indicate minimal concern for the effects of measurement error. Based on this criterion, all measures have acceptable AVE estimates, ranged from 0.65 to 0.752.

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis and construct validity (n= 211)

Factor	Item	Factor Loadings
SMMP Social media marketing purposes (AVE = 0.65, CR =0.87, α = 0.78)		
MKT1.	Establish a group or fan page for firm's product	0.801
MKT2.	Promote firm's product/brand	0.830
MKT3.	Post discounts or package deals	0.843
MKT4.	Get input to produce improvement/ development	0.749
MKT6.	Research the market	0.719
SCS1.	Obtain leads to firm's brand	0.828
SCS2.	Grow sales/new customers	0.775
SCS3.	Grow sales/existing customers	0.835
SCS4.	Maintain good relationships with customers	0.876
SCS6.	Provide customer service and respond to customer enquires	0.756
COM1.	Communicate the brand online	0.861
COM2.	Educate customers on specific topics/ technologies	0.742
COM3.	Join industry groups related to firm's product	0.712
COM5.	Add social networking features to the firm's website	0.841
COM6.	Post upcoming firm events to the market	0.768
The actual benefits of social media marketing		
SPER Sales Performance (AVE = 0.752, CR = 0.946, α = .0.923)		
SPER1.	Generate qualified leads	0.835
SPER2.	Reduce overall marketing communication expenses	0.839

SPER3.	Improve firm sales	0.809
SPER4.	Contribute to firm's market share	0.821
SPER5.	Sell high profit margin products	0.722
SPER6.	Quickly generates sales of new firm products	0.726
BRAWR	Brand Awareness (AVE = 0.664, CR =0.90, α =0.863)	
BREXP1.	Increase brand page views	0.824
BREXP2.	Increase brand site visits	0.766
BREXP3.	Create comments	0.722
BREXP4.	Raise reviews on rating site	0.828
BREXP5.	Improve search rankings	0.714
BRCH1.	Enable people to participate in brand discussions	0.832
BRCH2.	Increase traffic/number of followers or subscribers	0.734
BRCH3.	Provide demographics of subscribers/fans/followers	0.844
CENG1.	Increase people who like brand posts or retweets it	0.780
CENG2.	Encourage the conversation about the brand (buzz)	0.870
CENG4.	Increase the number of times a post, video, or link was shared	0.753
BRLY	Brand Loyalty (AVE = 0.698, CR =0.957, α =0.920)	
CVOL1.	Increase people who register for product	0.880
CVOL2.	Enhance customer knowledge about firm/product	0.844
CVOL3.	Entrance into conversations firm previously was not a part of	0.815
CVOL4.	Move from monologue to dialogue with customers	0.791
CVOL5.	Growth of relationships with key customers	0.827
BRT1.	Sentiment of conversations about firm/brand	0.797
BRT2.	Decrease the uncertainty of information about firm/brand	0.862
BRT3.	Expand information sharing	0.701
BRADV1.	Generate brand advocates who believe enough in firm's brand	0.801
BRADV2.	Encourage people to say real customer stories and experiences	0.743
BRADV3.	Expand the recommendation and sharing with others	0.871
BRADV4.	Facilitate providing suggestion to brand	0.712

*Factor loadings are final loadings used in model estimation.

*Poor factor loadings of five items were dropped from the analysis, which were less than 0.7. These items were MKT5 (to collect competitive intelligence about customer, competitors, and suppliers), SCS5 (to obtain referrals to other potential prospects), COM4 (to share useful articles, pictures, surveys, or research data), CENG3 (develops new discussions, new topics about firm/brand), BRT4 (forms higher credibility to interact with the firm information), and BRADV5 (enables brand advocates to pay a premium or purchasing more when on sale).

Table (4) summarizes the results of goodness-of-fit indices and the desired levels that were suggested by social science scholars (e.g., Hair et al., 2012; Schumacker and Lomax, 2010). Various goodness-of-fit tests were computed from LISREL solutions to examine to what extent the empirical proposed model could clarify the observed data. Overall fit statistics of the measurement model were as follows: Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) and Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) were 0.96 and 0.89, respectively; Normed Fit Index (NFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were 0.96 and 0.93 respectively; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.077. These results reflected an acceptable level of fit of the model and were above the desired minimum acceptable level as indicated in Table (4).

Moreover, the discriminant validity was tested by

comparing the square root of AVE estimates for the corresponding constructs with the correlation estimate between each two constructs. When all the square root of the AVE of each construct was larger than the correlation of the specific construct with any of the other constructs, this is evidence that all latent variables studied in the conceptual model satisfy the discriminate validity criteria (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The correlations among the four latent factors ranged from 0.289 to 0.540. The mean values of the four constructs for data ranged from 3.15 to 3.68. The intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of the constructs presented in Table (5). Based on the CFA results, the measurement model is adequate to employ in testing the proposed model. The next section describes the structural model analysis.

Table 4. Fitness of the measurement model (n= 211)

Fit Index	Recommended Value*	Model Value
X ² /df	< 3	1.803
GFI	> 0.8	0.96
AGFI	> 0.8	0.89
NFI	> 0.9	0.96
CFI	> 0.9	0.93
REMSEA	< 0.08	0.077

* Sources: Hair et al., 2012; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010.

Table 5. Interconstruct correlations in the confirmatory factor analysis

	No. of items	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Social media marketing practices	18	3.63	0.629	(0.81)			
2.Brand awareness	12	3.68	0.722	.540**	(0.87)		
3.Sales performance	6	3.25	0.618	0.518**	0.519**	(0.81)	
4.Brand loyalty	14	3.15	0.653	0.289**	0.366**	0.102	(0.84)

□ Significant at < .05. □□ Significant at < .01.

-Diagonals represent the squared root of average variance extracted (AVE), while the other matrix entries represent the shared variance among the constructs.

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

After measuring the measurement model, the structural model was developed to measure parameters of the model and to test the hypothesized link from H₁ to H₄. The overall acceptability of the structural model was acceptable as follows: RMSEA = .0062, GFI = .862, AGFI = .803, NFI = .87, and CFI = .89 (Figure 2).

The SEM structural path results indicated that most path coefficients were significant ($p < .05$, $p < .01$). Notably, the signs and significance of the parameters were compatible with the results of the measurement model and the intercorrelations among the constructs. The standardized structural coefficients are displayed in Table (6) and Figure (2). Empirical evidence was found in the relationships of social media marketing practices and brand awareness ($\beta=0.43$, $p < .01$) and sales performance ($\beta=0.35$, $p < .01$), as hypothesized by hypotheses 1 and 2. The most important items of brand awareness were increasing firm brand page views and the brand site visits, raising reviews on a rating site, providing demographics of subscribers/fans/followers, increasing traffic/number of followers or subscribers on firm brand pages, increasing people who like on Facebook brand posts or retweet that drive word of mouth and encourages the conversation about the brand (buzz).

Similarly, as Figure (2) shows, social media marketing practices also have a positive influence on all measures of sales performance. This result suggests that the ultimate goal of social media marketing practices in firms is to increase sales, be it through new customer acquisition, increased consumption, or up- or cross-selling, especially, in terms of improving firm sales and contributing to firm's market share, reducing overall marketing communication expenses and selling high

profit margin products, which leads to the acceptance of H₂. However, it is noticed that the relationships of usage of social media marketing and brand awareness ($\beta=0.43$, $t= 1.266$, $p < .01$) were relatively much higher than the relationship of usage to sales performance ($\beta=0.35$, $t= 7.51$, $p < .01$), suggesting that brand awareness is the most perceived benefit achieved from social media marketing for different purposes.

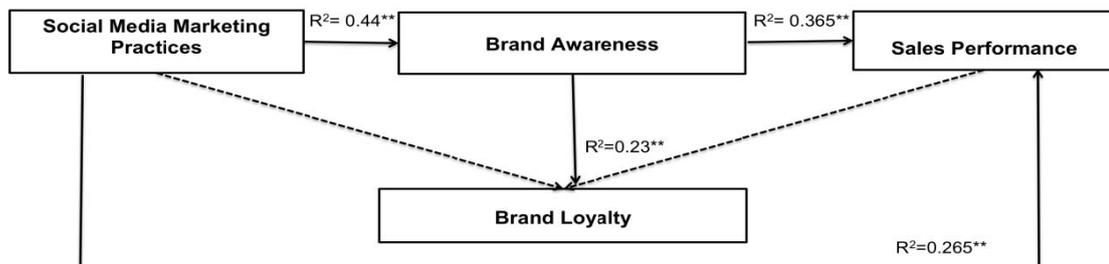
On the other hand, the relationship of social media marketing to brand loyalty (hypothesis 3) was weak and insignificant ($\beta=0.02$, $t= 0.36$). However, when measuring the correlation among the dimensions of brand loyalty in the structural model, the intercorrelations of these items were strong and significant: The items that reflect brand trust and customer involvement were the strongest items correlate with brand loyalty and the least of the supported paths was items that reflect brand advocacy to brand loyalty. However, no significant effect of social media marketing is detected to brand loyalty, rejecting H₃.

H_{4a}, H_{4b}, and H_{4c} hypothesize that brand awareness and sales performance directly influence brand loyalty. As the results in Table (6) and Figure (2) indicated, brand awareness does significantly impact sales performance ($\beta=0.519$, $t=8.768$ $p < .01$) and brand loyalty ($\beta=0.366$, $t= 5.692$ $p < .01$). However, sales performance did not show any impact on brand loyalty ($\beta=0.102$, $t= 1.479$). According to the relational paths among the constructs, loyalty construct was closer to brand awareness than sales performance. This finding revealed that brand awareness mediates the effect of sales performances on brand loyalty. Thus, based on these results, partial support for hypothesis 4 was found, H_{4a} and H_{4c} were supported while H_{4b} was not.

Table 6. Structural model estimates and hypotheses testing results (n= 211)

Hypotheses	Paths of proposed relationships	Standardized path coefficient	t-value	R ²	Hypothesis supported
H ₁	Social media marketing practices/usage in marketing is positively and significantly related to brand awareness. SMMP → BRAWR	0.43	1.266**	0.44**	Supported
H ₂	Social media usage in marketing has a positive and significant relationship with sales performance of a firm. SMMP → SPER	0.35	7.51**	0.265**	Supported
H ₃	Social media usage in marketing has a positive and significant relationship with brand loyalty of consumers. SMMP → BRLY	0.02	0.36	0.079	Not Supported
H ₄	There are significant interrelationships among the benefits of social media marketing in terms of brand awareness, sales performance of a firm, and brand loyalty of consumer				
H _{4a}	Brand awareness of the consumers from social media marketing is positively and significantly affected by sales performance of a firm. BRAWR → SPER	0.519	8.768**	0.365**	Supported
H _{4b}	Sales performance from social media marketing usage is positively and significantly affected by brand loyalty of consumers. SPER → BRLY	0.102	1.479	0.006	Not Supported
H _{4c}	Brand awareness from social media marketing is positively and significantly affected by brand loyalty of consumers. BRAWR → BRLY	0.366	5.692**	0.23**	Supported

□ Significant at < .01.



Fit Statistics & Measures for the Structural Model

	Model Value
Goodness of Fit Index (GF)	0.862
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit	0.803
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.87
Comparative Fit Index (CF)	0.89
Root Mean Square Residu	0.062

*p < .05, ** p < .01.

→ Significant - - - - - Non significant

Figure 2. Structure model results

Research Conclusion

The objective of this study was to describe and classify the practices of social media marketing of firms in Egypt and the perceived effects of these marketing practices on brand awareness, sales performance, and brand loyalty, based on the perceptions of the study participants. The results showed that most respondents in the selected firms realize that social media is employed for their marketing efforts in different purposes. As it was analyzed above, among the sub-disciplines of marketing that may utilize social media include marketing communication, promotion, market research, and sales. Promotion, discounts, package deals, and enhancing product development and improvement are the most common practices of social media marketing in firms. Other practices include growth of sales for current and potential customers and building strong relationships with those customers.

The significance of hypotheses underscores the application of social media to build brand awareness and sales performance that are critical for most firms. The majority of selected firms in this study indicated that social media is used for building or enhancing brand awareness and in turn this leads to increasing sales revenue and sales process effectiveness. The results showed that firms know that social media marketing is one channel for spreading the brand name to gain exposure through the increase brand page views and brand site visits, which builds an online presence and adds to their circle of influence. Other influence of social media marketing on brand awareness involve obtaining high brand reach through enabling people participating in brand discussions and increase traffic or number of followers or subscribers and the feedback that they provide. The results also revealed that engaging with customers by increasing people who like brand posts or retweets that drive word of mouth, and consequently an

increase in the number of users added to a firm circle of influence.

Furthermore, this study provides an understanding of how social media usage impacts sales processes and sales measurements. The empirical results strongly support that social media marketing usage has a positive relationship with the firms' ability to both increase sales measurements and improve sales process effectiveness. In terms of sales measurements, the study found that social media usage has a positive relationship with firms' sales and market shares. For improving sales process effectiveness, the results revealed that social media marketing contributes in selling high-profit margin products and generate sales of new products.

According to the results of the structural path model, this study showed that the social media marketing practices in different marketing purposes have distinct impacts on brand awareness and sales performance, respectively. Notably, it was found that the brand awareness resulted from social media marketing activities positively influenced sales performance. Moreover, the brand awareness influenced brand loyalty not only directly but also indirectly.

Finally, the results demonstrated that brand awareness has the weakest impact on brand loyalty. On the other hand, the relationship between sales performance and loyalty was not statistically significant. It takes the time to develop relationships that lead sales performance to affect brand loyalty.

Managerial Implications

The findings of the study have several implications for marketers to develop efficient social media marketing strategies, and for understanding the role of social media marketing in developing brand awareness and increasing sales performance. First, firms must begin to integrate social media marketing into their marketing strategies.

The findings of this study suggested that social media marketing practices in firms for the purposes of communication, promotion, and sales have the most effect on succeeding with social media. Therefore, marketing managers with using the results of this study should develop a social media marketing strategy to have a better communication and interaction with their customers and increase brand awareness. Second, the results of this study imply that usage of social media marketing is strongly related to brand awareness and sales performance, but not with brand loyalty. Firms can utilize the advantage of the daily and direct communication offered by social media by keeping current and potential customers close to the brand name and have greater opportunity to increase brand awareness. Besides bringing customers closer to the brand, activities such as promotion, special discounts, offers, market input about new or improved products, marketing messages, or even using the page as a direct selling channel can provide several benefits to firms such as enhancing brand awareness and increasing sales.

Third, according to the research results, through social media channels firms expect to reach a wider range of people and they can access the demographics of their fans, so they can implement their social media strategy according to their fans' profile. Finally, based on the finding of the influence of social media marketing on sales performance, it can be suggested that firms may need to explore how to include social media as part of their training programs and management development programs to increase sales process effectiveness and sales revenue. Firms need to include social media in order to increase identification of qualified customers, continue to build deeper relationships, and, as a result, strengthen their social capital.

Research Limitation

There are several limitations to the current study. First, the study sample was very broad and diverse

across industries and the sample size may not be a representative of all firms in Egypt. Therefore, it was unable to split the sample according to industry type and it could not test the difference between the industries. In addition, the relationships may be less applicable to specific industries that may not be seen as much social media use and the outcome of usage in these industries. Second, there is no actual examination of the customers' side in this study about their behaviors towards social media usage in marketing practices by firms, their awareness and loyalty for participating in a brand's social media fan page. Finally, sales performance was measured based on the perception of the participants, not on the objective measurements achieved by selecting firms. There is a lack of financial returns results from social media practices in firms in Egypt that could justify the resources firms spent on these activities.

Future Research

A number of future researches emerge from the findings of the current study. First, future research might examine specific social media marketing strategies and their effects on firm outcomes, in addition to discovering which social media sites are most appropriate for various objectives, and target segments. Second, new topical issues related to the use of social media by a firm can extend this study such as concerns regarding the risks of such use and its potential negative consequences. These risks include the uncontrolled and unpredictable behavior of brand fans on social media, the handling of negative comments, rumors, and word of mouth and so on. Third, future research should test the relationship between social media marketing practices and firm financial performance indicators, such as shareholder value, to discover the extent to which the benefits of social media marketing may be reflected on corporate financial success. Fourth, future researches may wish to take a deeper look into potential moderating or

mediating effects such as the size of the firm, level of the respondent within the firm, or other context variables or other contingent factors such as the competitive environment or the position of the firm in its industry.

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استخدام وفاعلية وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي التسويقية في مصر

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ملخص

ساعدت أدوات التواصل الاجتماعي أو الإعلام الاجتماعي على تغيير طرق الاتصال والتفاعل من وإلى الأفراد في جميع أنحاء العالم، وكذلك ساعد الاستخدام السريع لهذه الوسائل في تغيير طرق استجابة المنظمات لاحتياجات عملائها وإتاحة الفرص لهذه المنظمات لتسويق منتجاتها وخدماتها بطرق مصممة خصيصا لعملائها كل على حدة. ومع ذلك لا يزال هناك بحوث محدودة للإجابة على بعض التساؤلات الرئيسية المتعلقة بمدى تطبيق أدوات التواصل الاجتماعي في هذه المنظمات وكذلك مدى فاعليتها التسويقية من وجهة نظر المنظمات. وعلى هذا فإن الغرض الرئيس من هذه الدراسة هو دراسة استخدام أدوات التواصل الاجتماعي في المنظمات الصناعية والخدمية في مصر وتأثير هذا التطبيق على كل من وعى العملاء بالماركات التجارية للمنظمات، والمبيعات والأداء البيعي للمنظمات، وكذلك ولاء العملاء لهذه الماركات التجارية للمنظمات. ركزت الدراسة الميدانية على قياس آراء المسؤولين عن تطبيق أدوات التواصل الاجتماعي بالمنظمات في مصر من خلال قائمة استقصاء تم إرسالها بالبريد الإلكتروني لهؤلاء المسؤولين الذين لديهم على الأقل ماركة تجارية واحدة بالمنظمة متاحة ومتدولة على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وبتطبيق نموذج المعادلات الهيكلية توصلت الدراسة الميدانية إلى استخدام أدوات التواصل الاجتماعي في أنشطة تسويقية متعددة داخل منظمات الدراسة، وعلى وجه التحديد الاتصالات التسويقية، الترويج، الخصومات والعروض التسويقية، بحوث التسويق والبيع. بالإضافة إلى ذلك أظهرت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن استخدام أدوات التواصل الاجتماعي في هذه الأنشطة التسويقية يساعد على خلق وتقوية وعى العملاء بالماركات التجارية للمنظمات، وهذا بدوره يؤدي إلى زيادة المبيعات والأداء البيعي للمنظمات. ومع ذلك فلقد توصلت نتائج الدراسة إلى وجود علاقة ضعيفة وغير جوهرية بين استخدام أدوات التواصل الاجتماعي في الأنشطة التسويقية وولاء العملاء للماركات التجارية للمنظمات.

الكلمات الدالة: التواصل الاجتماعي، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي التسويقية، الأداء البيعي.

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