

# Investigating the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Intention to Follow Advice: The Mediating Role of Active Participation and Benevolence Trust

## ABSTRACT

The concept of social media marketing (SMM) extends beyond general marketing. SMM has significantly impacted the creation and development of marketing concepts. Drawing on the stimulus (S)–organism (O)–response (R) model, this research aimed to explore benevolence trust, active participation, and intention to follow advice (IFA) as three consequences of SMM activities (SMMA). It also aimed to investigate benevolence trust, and active participation as a mediator between SMMA and IFA with regard to a restaurant brand advertised on Facebook. This study used structural equation modelling and obtained data from 364 followers of a restaurant’s Facebook page. The study results showed that SMMA significantly influenced benevolence trust, active participation, and IFA. Furthermore, benevolence trust and active participation significantly influenced IFA. The findings also indicated that benevolence trust mediates the relationship between SMMA and customer IFA. In addition, active participation with restaurant brands on Facebook acts as a mediator between SMMA and IFA.

**Keywords:** Social media marketing, Intention to Follow Advice, Active Participation, Benevolence Trust, Facebook, Restaurant industry

## 1 Introduction

Social media includes content communities, blogs, and social network sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Furthermore, big and small businesses create brand pages through SNSs for their products and services and to spread information to their many current and potential customers; these efforts are considered part of a marketing strategy called social media marketing (SMM; Ibrahim, 2021a). SMM is a new-generation marketing tool that promotes products, services, and ideas and builds brands (Ahmed, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2022). SMM supports businesses’ marketing plans by focusing on interactive relationships with current and new brand consumers (Upadhyay et al., 2022) and creating confident exchanges with them (Kumar et al., 2022). These relationships are formed on SNSs by many followers who are interested in the brand or its admirers (Hazzam, 2021). The SNSs can be seen as spaces in which company–customer or customer–customer interactions occur (Cheung, Pires, et al., 2020). Many tourism and hospitality businesses are embedded in SNSs because of their many advantages; for example, they offer an effective communication channel for advertising; capture possible consumers; and offer customers with information about products, services, and opportunities to benefit from other customers’ reviews and recommendations (Aljarah et al., 2022; Popy & Bappy, 2022; Stojanovic et al., 2022). According to the *MDG Advertising Report*, nearly 74% of travellers worldwide use SNSs to look for help while travelling, and 42% of Facebook users said that friends’ shared photos encourage them to plan for their travelling (MDG Advertising, 2018). In 2019, more than one million U.S. travellers’ hashtags were searched to plan tours (Wex Inc., 2019). Specifically, SNSs play a crucial role in tourism and influence customer–brand relationships (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). SMM tools have become necessary and are part of multipurpose marketing activities for the tourism business, providing consistent service through various channels (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021). The SMM literature supports the assumption that SMM tools play a critical role in improving customer behaviour, increasing brand loyalty (Koay et al., 2020), enhancing commitment (Casaló et al., 2021), and strengthening brand equity (Upadhyay et al., 2022). Many tourism studies have claimed that a close link between SMM and customer responses exists. However, the role of intention to follow advice (IFA), members’

active participation, and benevolence trust as consequences of SMM has not been fully established in the restaurant industry.

The first gap in the literature concerns the underlying mechanism of how SMM promotes IFA in the restaurant industry. Few studies have examined SMM's influence on behavioural intention, including purchase and revisit intention, in the tourism and hospitality industry (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Moslehpour et al., 2020; Sano, 2015). However, potential customers turn to comments and recommendations from other brand community members to learn all they can about a brand (Casaló et al., 2020). For instance, more than 93% of customers intend to follow advice and reviews through SNSs, which influence their purchase decisions (Kaemingk, 2020). The consequences of SMM need further empirical investigation, and this gap in the literature paints an incomplete picture of the SMM–IFA relationship and limits our understanding of it. The second gap concerns the exploration of SMM as a driver of members' active participation and interaction with the Facebook pages of restaurants. Although previous studies have concentrated on exploring members' active participation in the SNS context, it is necessary to examine its antecedents and consequences (Casaló et al., 2010). Scholars emphasize the antecedents affecting members' active participation, such as satisfaction (Woisetschläger et al., 2008), trust (Casaló et al., 2010), and community identification (Woisetschläger et al., 2008). Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge and minimal research on the role of SMM as a crucial antecedent of members' active participation, especially in restaurants' Facebook pages (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Kang, 2018). Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature investigating the effect of SMM on members' active participation (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

The third gap in the literature concerns the underlying mechanism of how SMM promotes customer trust, especially benevolence trust, in the restaurant industry. Past research has proposed two forms of belief that define trust: credibility and benevolence (Liu et al., 2021). Credibility involves “one's belief that the exchange party is reliable,” and benevolence involves “beliefs that the exchange partner is motivated by seeking joint gain” (Aiken & Boush, 2006, p. 312). Specifically, benevolence trust is defined in this study as a passionate assessment of a person's contentment and is linked to considerate intentions (Dimoka, 2010). However, previous studies that examined the relationship between SMM and customer trust from the hospitality perspective have been limited to analysing customer trust as a product's ability to fulfil its intended function (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Yazdanian et al., 2019). Other scholars have declared trust to be the degree of customers' confidence in the products or services that companies offer (Ebrahim, 2019; Kim & Ko, 2010) or the degree to which the customer feels that the company will fulfil its promises and commitment related to the product or service (Moslehpour et al., 2020). Although previous studies have focused on cognitive assessment (reliability of the product or service and the ability of the company to fulfill its promises to the customer), the potential discovery of the relative effect of SMM in the formation of benevolence trust remains largely under-investigated in the existing hospitality literature on SMM (Ibrahim et al., 2021). To date, no effort has been devoted to investigating the effect of SMM on benevolence trust in the restaurant sector. The current study fills this research gap by examining the relationship between SMM and benevolence trust among restaurant brands through an analysis of Facebook pages.

The fourth research gap concerns the conditions under which SMM might enhance IFA in the restaurant context. Studies have concentrated on how SMM influences behavioural intentions, such as purchase intentions, revisit intentions, and brand loyalty (Khan, 2022; Kumar et al., 2022). Although these studies are significant, they overlook possible mediators of the relationship between SMM and behavioural intention. The SMM literature has instead tended to emphasize different organism factors, such as trust, satisfaction commitment, brand image, and customer engagement (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021; Kumar et al., 2022). Based on this perspective, this study examines the mediating effects of active participation and

benevolence trust on the relationship between SMM and IFA. According to Ibrahim et al. (2020), alternative mediating mechanisms should be examined in greater depth to enable an understanding of the relationship between SMM and behavioural intentions. This study, therefore, deepens the understanding of the process of building IFA by considering members' active participation and benevolence trust as mediating factors.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this research is to explore IFA, members' active participation and benevolence trust as three consequences of SMM activities (SMMA) in the restaurant industry and on Facebook pages. This paper investigates the direct and indirect effects of the five dimensions of SMMA—namely, entertainment, customization, interaction, word of mouth (WOM), and trendiness—on IFA. The origin model of SMMA was explored in the context of the Korean fashion industry (Kim & Ko, 2012). SMMA are a generally recognized concept that is a subgroup of SMM through SNSs (Ahmed, 2021). A secondary purpose of this study is to examine the mediating influence of members' active participation in the path from SMMA to IFA, and a third is to examine the mediating effect of benevolence trust on the SMMA–IFA relationship. The paper progresses as follows: We provide a literature review of the research framework and SMM and present the hypotheses and variables of the proposed model. The following section describes the methodology and study design and discusses the results of the structural equation model. The final section discusses the theoretical implications, managerial implications, the study limitations, and future research directions.

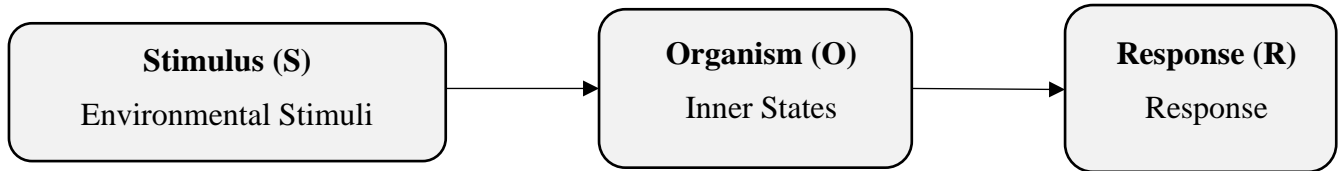
## **2 Research framework**

### **2.1 The stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model**

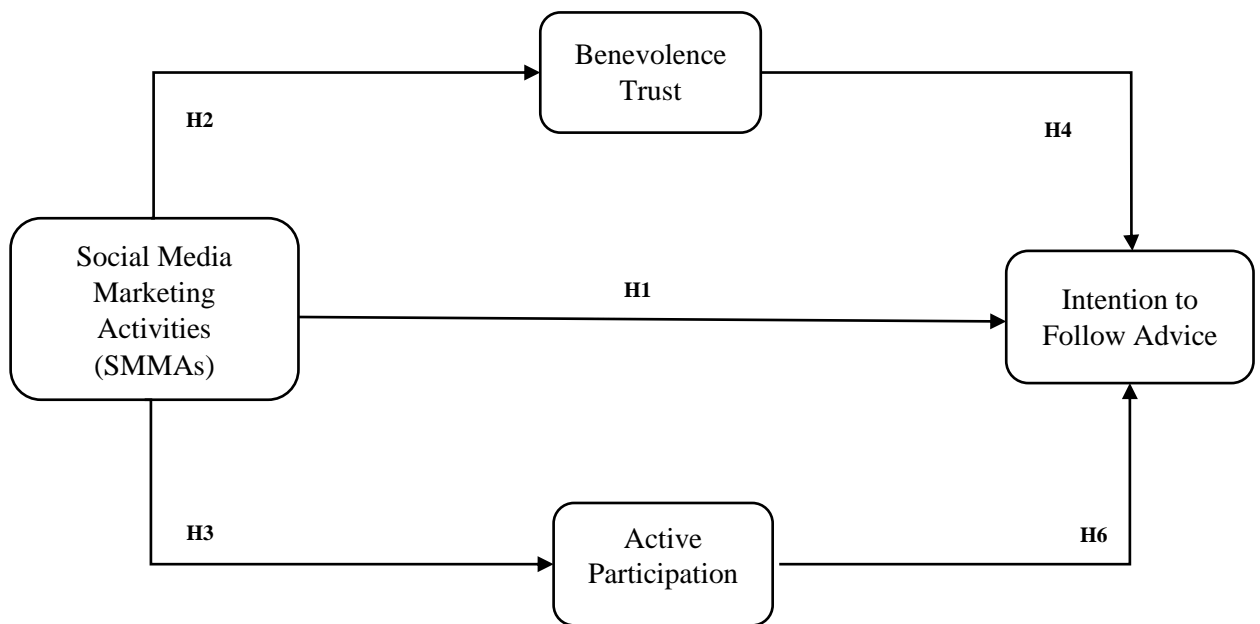
The framework used in this study—the “stimulus (S)–organism (O)–response (R)” (SOR) model—was first examined in the context of environmental psychologists (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Marketing scholars extended this framework to different contexts, such as consumer behaviour, SMM, e-commerce, and tourism marketing (Kim et al., 2020; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). For instance, Jain et al. (2018) employed the SOR model in the SNS context to examine the influence of motivation on customer participation and, subsequently, on behavioural intention: loyalty. Several scholars have argued that SMMA are external environmental stimuli and motivators (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Koay et al., 2020). Furthermore, Koay et al. (2020) used the SOR model to examine SMMA, as specific features of the environment (stimuli) trigger the inner states of perception of customers (brand experience and customer equity) and lead to particular consumer behaviours (response). In the context of the social media tourism domain, the SOR model indicates that SMMA can be regarded as a stimulus affecting a particular inner state of the consumer or organism, such as brand trust and brand loyalty, which can ultimately influence revisit intention (Ibrahim et al., 2021). The current paper contemplates five dimensions of SMMA as stimuli for consumers through SNSs. The second component of the SOR model is organism, which refers to the customer's affective and cognitive state and is considered a mediator between the stimulus and response (Kihlstrom, 1987). In this study, active customer participation and benevolence trust are regarded as the organism examined in previous studies (Ibrahim, 2021a; Jain et al., 2018). Hence, as Figure 1 shows, the key assumptions of this model are that SMMA (stimulus) can impact active customer participation and benevolence trust (organism). As Ibrahim and Aljarah (2021) discussed, behavioural intention can be regarded as the response. In keeping with the assumptions of this model, SMMA are hypothesized as stimuli that influence customer participation (H2) and benevolence trust (H3) (i.e., organism), which in turn influence IFA (i.e., response). This study examines the relationship between SMMA and IFA (H1) while considering benevolence trust (H5) and active participation (H7) as mediating factors within

SOR model. These findings offer new insight into the SMM concept and the SOR model in the SNS context.

**H5 Mediation effect**



**H5 Mediation effect**



**H7 Mediation effect**

**Mediation effects**

**H5:** SMMAs–Benevolence Trust–Intention to Follow Advice

**H7:** SMMAs–Active Participation–Intention to Follow Advice

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

**Source:** Self developed based on the literature review.

**3 Literature review**

4.3 SMMAs

Social media channels are an effective and alternative marketing plan for companies to activate communication with consumers (Femenia-Serra et al., 2022). Therefore, SMMAs are regarded as a component of SMM tools. Referring to the previous literature in the SMM context (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021; Khan, 2022), SMMAs are defined in this study as “promotional and relational communication tools that complement organizational marketing strategies applied by offering enhanced interactivity through online relationships between organizations and consumers” (Ibrahim et al., 2020, p. 5). Kim and Ko (2010, 2012) examined customers of luxury fashion

brands and determined that SMMAAs contain five dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and WOM. Previous scholars have found that entertainment is one of the most powerful factors motivating people to use SNSs and obtain fun and interesting content (Cheung, Pires et al., 2020; Muntinga et al., 2011). Entertainment help them relieve stress and enjoy themselves through SNSs (Ibrahim, 2021b). Conversely, Godey et al. (2016) defined interaction on SNSs as “the sharing of information and the exchange of opinions with others.” Muntinga et al. (2011) described this trend as SNSs’ ability to provide up-to-the-minute information through four sub-drivers: monitoring, knowledge, the transmission of purchasing information, and encouragement. Further, Zhu and Chen (2015) defined two types of post-customization: customized posts (e.g., Facebook services) aimed at specific spectators and transmissions (e.g., Twitter posts) intended to engage users. Additionally, Godey et al. (2016) demonstrated that WOM includes the extent to which brand customers accept supplementary information from SNSs and share content. SMMAAs serve as a stimulus factor in shaping relationships between customers and companies and reinforcing links between followers and brands in the hospitality context (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Scholars widely adopt SMMAAs as a vital driver of companies’ traditional marketing strategy, which aims to enhance positive customer–brand relationships (Godey et al., 2016; Salunka & Jain, 2022; Zollo et al., 2020). Furthermore, previous studies have investigated SMMAAs vis-à-vis customer responses in diverse industries, such as luxury brands (Zollo et al., 2020), smartphones (Cheung, Pires et al., 2020), and e-commerce sites (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). In addition, Moslehpour et al. (2020) claimed that customer responses (trust, commitment, and loyalty) are significant outcomes of SMMAAs for airline products and services.

## **4 Research hypotheses**

### **4.1 SMMAAs and IFA**

IFA is considered behavioural intention and an essential feature of customer behaviour because it identifies and expresses the consumer’s future direction (Casaló et al., 2010). In the SNS context, IFA is defined in this study as the intention to act implicitly in a specific manner, following the comments, recommendations, and suggestions of other SNS members (Casaló et al., 2011). The customers or users join SNSs to engage with brands and share content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In the world of SNSs, customers rely on users’ advice and opinions about brands to build brand awareness and trust in the advice other users or companies provide. The path between SMMAAs and IFA has not been studied in the SMM literature. However, in previous studies on SMM, a strong relationship between SMMAAs and behavioural intention has been observed. For example, Khan (2022) found that users are more likely to purchase when they perceive SMMAAs on SNSs. In line with this, a meta-analysis involving 15 studies by Ibrahim et al. (2020) showed that SMMAAs are significantly and positively linked to purchase through SNSs. This finding of pervious study was based on research conducted among 415 Facebook users in North Cyprus; (Ibrahim et al., 2021) noted that SMMAAs play a key role in building intention to revisit coffee shops.

Similarly, based on a sample of online travel community members in Spain, Casaló et al. (2011) showed that perceived usefulness, trust, and consumer attitude positively affected customer IFA. However, previous research has demonstrated that both perceived enjoyment

and usefulness positively affect IFA on the Instagram pages of fashion brands (Casaló et al., 2017). The different efforts of SMM entice customers to participate in SNSs by motivating them to be brand advocators and to promote to other users or friends.

Thus, the following is hypothesized:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between SMMA and IFA*

#### 4.2 SMMA and benevolence trust

Trust is a crucial element and cornerstone of establishing a strong connection between a customer and a brand (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021). To shape customer trust, goods or services must meet customer expectations, thereby generating positive results (Wei et al., 2022). Ganesan (1994) defined trust as the readiness to rely on another party based on beliefs or expectations emerging from this partner's experience, reliability, and benevolence. Benevolence refers to the belief that the company has the intent and stimulus to act in the future, by considering customers benefits without seeking rewards (Ashraf et al., 2022). In hospitality, benevolence trust is "the customer's reliance upon the honesty, concern, benevolence and care revealed by the hotel" (Rather, 2018, p. 394). In the online context, benevolence is based on the extent to which online brand members are inspired by a desire to help the brand's admirers or other followers who are interested in the brand, regardless of individual earnings, by sharing information and experiences to support others (Gharib et al., 2019). Many empirical studies have suggested that SMMA are vital for building strong customer trust (Bilgin & Kethüda, 2022). Trust is examined in different contexts, such as smartphone products (Upadhyay et al., 2022), telecommunications (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021), and e-commerce (Wibowo et al., 2021). Sharma et al. (2021) also demonstrated that customer relationship quality (trust, commitment, and loyalty) substantially affects the SMMA of apparel brands on SNSs. On the other hand, in the hospitality literature, Mosehpour et al. (2020) shed light on the relationship between SMMA and trust through investigative data obtained from 301 consumers at Indonesian airline companies. They found that SMMA significantly enhance consumers' trust through different efforts, such as sharing entertaining content on SNSs and supporting customer interaction (e.g., exchanging information). From the perspective of 407 hotel users on Facebook, Ibrahim (2021a) illustrated that an increase in the SMMA of Facebook pages increased their trust, loyalty, and purchase intention. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

*H2: There is a positive relationship between SMMA and benevolence trust.*

#### 4.3 SMMA and active participation

SNSs afford social communication channels for members/customers who share the same interest in providing helpful information and interacting to benefit from other members (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Some individual members of SNSs are keen to offer recommendations and criticisms regarding company products or services; these members are called "active participants" (Lee et al., 2012). However, not all SNS members are considered active (Bigne, 2020). In addition, passive members (lurker members) may be unwilling to contribute to community activities—for example, engaging in discussions, providing reviews and feedback, and seeking information—and may seldom or never participate (Bigne et al., 2020; Kang et al.,

2014, 2015). Moreover, SNSs convert from passive to active those members who share online information and content related to firms, products, and services (Bigne et al., 2020). The concept of active participation draws on the social exchange theory, which indicates that the extent to which an individual motivates people to participate in interpersonal interactions, as well as their concern regarding the intangible cost and benefit, may require the behaviour, influence, production, and communication that each party obtains, such as respect, care, and friendship (Cook et al., 2013). Social exchange assumes that active members of SNSs participate in the conversation (interaction) only when they believe that their reward from the exchange warrants the cost of taking part in it (Blau, 1986; Gouldner, 1960). The success of the knowledge-sharing process in virtual groups depends on each member's intentions and willingness to share their knowledge. The SNSs stimulating the members to interact with brands leads to the company's commitment to boosting consumers' overall experiences and achieving the success of brand (Ibrahim et al., 2020). The active members are dynamically involved in SNSs, such as by sharing easily deliverable information about brands, contributing content to newsfeeds, generating product-related content (posts, photos, and videos), and starting discussions about service or product criticisms and recommendations with other members (Bigne et al., 2020; Wang, 2021) .

In keeping with its conceptualization of active participation, this study argues that SMMAAs are more likely to drive online members to be active participants. Based on the SOR model, it is argued here that SMMAAs are the stimulus that represents the external determinants of consumer choice, provoking consumers' cognitive and emotional states (active participation). When a company engages in SMM initiatives, shares exciting information about brands, enhances interactivity through online relationships between the company and consumers, and offers trendy information by personalizing the content (Ibrahim et al., 2020; Koay et al., 2020), the active members of the SNSs are affected. Füller (2010) theoretically proposed that the members of SNSs participate actively and share when the following motivations drive members: entertaining content, desire to know or learn about the product or service, a sense of achievement owing to their contributions, skill development, information search, recognition, community support, friendship, personal needs, and compensation (economic incentive). These motivations are recognized as influential drivers for confirming the active participation of members in SNSs (Woisetschläger et al., 2008). The SMMA model with five constructs—entertainment, customization, interaction, WOM, and trendiness—can cause a member of the SNSs to participate actively in and share effectively through these platforms. SMMAAs are a communication tool that enhances overall consumer experiences and interactions between consumers and brands (Bilgin & Kethüda, 2022). If a member of SNSs is integrated with the SMMAAs of the restaurant brand, the customer may be motivated to actively and effectively participate in the brand's efforts through the SNSs. Therefore, SMMAAs can be considered an antecedent and a factor motivating members to be active on and participate in SNSs. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

*H3: There is a positive relationship between SMMAAs and active participation.*

#### 4.4 Benevolence trust as a mediator

The proposed framework suggests that the impact of SMMAs on IFA is mediated by benevolence trust. Based on the SOR model, customers' benevolence trust encourages consumers' positive IFA. McKnight et al. (2002) claimed that the IFA is a significant outcome of trust in e-commerce. Furthermore, in the tourism context, Casaló et al. (2010) insisted that benevolence trust plays an essential role in enhancing the intention to follow online travel community members' advice. Additionally, some hospitality scholars have demonstrated that brand trust is vital to creating and strengthening behavioural intention (purchase and revisit intention) (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Moslehpour et al., 2020). Trust is considered a success factor that enhances partnerships between members and an online brand community, while benevolence trust is achieved when each party "cares about the trusting party" (Wu et al., 2014, p. 196). Hence, SMMAs positively influence consumer behaviour, such as brand trust, and build long-term customer relationships (Ebrahim, 2019; Moslehpour et al., 2020). In addition, Palmatier et al. (2006) revealed that the influences of relationship marketing behaviour on customer behaviour outcomes are generally mediated via the relational constructs of satisfaction, commitment, and trust. This study proposes and examines the mediation role of benevolence trust in recognizing how SMMAs affect IFA. Based on the conclusions above, we hypothesize the following:

*H4: There is a positive relationship between benevolence trust and IFA.*

*H5: Benevolence trust mediates the relationship between SMMAs and IFA.*

#### 4.5 Active participation as a mediator

Some scholars have argued that brand relationships, including satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, and intention to recommend customers, are consequences of members' active participation (Casaló et al., 2007, 2010; Kang et al., 2014, 2015; Woisetschläger et al., 2008). These consequences are crucial to the success of SNSs (Woisetschläger et al., 2008). Woisetschläger et al. (2008) stated that community participation positively improves community members' loyalty intentions and WOM behaviour. In the tourism context, Kamboj and Rahman (2016) emphasized the significant role of active participation in improving brand loyalty directly and indirectly through brand commitment on hotel Facebook pages in India. Casaló et al. (2010) also showed that more substantial community participation leads to stronger consumer intention in the online travel community.

Moreover, Kang (2018) indicated that active participation in SNSs encourages community activities, including participating in comments about products or services, giving recommendations, and sharing stories, which lead to positive attitudes towards the active members and positive behavioural changes. Furthermore, the members who actively participate exhibit positive engagement behaviours in regard to gaining knowledge (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), strengthening intentions to follow that member's advice on SNSs (Casaló et al., 2017). To examine active participation as a mediating factor, it is essential to understand the direct influence of SMMAs on active participation and the role of active participation in enhancing customer IFA. Drawing on the SOR framework, this study examined the relationship between SMMAs, active participation, and IFA in a single framework. This study proposes that SMMAs stimulate active participation, thereby encouraging members to follow advice. Therefore, the



authors postulate that active participation represents the organism or the consumer’s cognitive and emotional internal state. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

*H6: There is a positive relationship between active participation and IFA.*

*H7: Active participation mediates the relationship between SMMA and IFA.*

## 5 Research Methodology

### 5.1 Sampling and procedures

The data were collected from restaurant customers using a questionnaire. A convenience sample was drawn from 364 respondents who followed and engaged with the activities of the restaurant Facebook pages. Facebook is among the most popular SNSs, with two billion users worldwide (Statista, 2018) and the dominant social network in the tourism industry (Romão et al., 2019). In addition, respondents within the 18–24 age group are the most frequent users of SNSs and, youth and college-aged students are the main visitors to fast food restaurants (Ibrahim, 2021b). The online questionnaire was distributed during online classes for university students. The target population was selected based on criteria such as screening questions to ensure that all respondents were active participants on restaurant Facebook pages. These screening questions (i.e., age group [18–24], active followers of restaurant Facebook brands in North Cyprus, and visitors to the restaurants) were applied to classify respondents who were not among the required sample. Those who answered the initial screening questions appropriately were eligible to complete the rest of the questionnaire. The opinion survey was carried out by conducting a pilot study of 50 respondents to determine the names of their favourite restaurant brands on Facebook in North Cyprus. Based on the opinion survey results, which identified popular restaurants, the study measured brand recognition by asking the respondent to “choose the restaurant you are most familiar with from a list of five restaurants in North Cyprus and one choice for [an]other brand.” During class time, 406 online-prepared questionnaires were distributed, and 364 responses were used for further analysis.

### 5.2 Respondents’ demographic profiles

Only 364 completed the questionnaires were returned. Regarding gender, 55.7% of the respondents were male, and 42.9 % were female. Regarding customer experience with the restaurant’s Facebook page, 48.6% of the respondents had been followers of the restaurant’s Facebook page for less than one year, while about 41.8% had been followers for 12–24 months. Approximately 45.6% of the respondents had spent 1–3 hours per week on Facebook pages, whereas 29.7% had spent less than an hour per week. Most respondents visited the restaurant monthly (43.7%), followed by those who visited weekly (37.6%). For followers of the restaurant brand on Facebook, 29.7% followed Uncle Sam’s American Eatery & Patisserie, and 21.7% were followers of Eziç Restaurant. Please see Table 1.

**Table 1:** Demographic data

	Frequency	Percent %
<b>Gender</b>		

Male	208	57.1
Female	156	42.9
<b>Duration of membership on restaurant Facebook page</b>		
Less than one year	177	48.6
12-24 months	152	41.8
over 25 months	35	9.6
<b>Average hours spent per week on Facebook pages</b>		
Less than an hour	108	29.7
1-3 h	166	45.6
3-10 h	23	6.3
More than 10 hour	67	18.4
<b>Frequency visit Restaurant</b>		
More than one visit in the week	68	18.7
Weekly	137	37.6
Monthly	159	43.7
<b>The most followed Restaurant brand on social media</b>		
Uncle Sam's American Eatery & Patisserie	108	29.7
Eziç Restaurant	79	21.7
Fornello Pizza Grill	72	19.8
Jashan Indian Restaurant	62	17.0
Mozzarella	33	9.1
Other Brands	10	2.7

Source: Self-developed based on SPSS 25 software output.

### 5.3 Measurements

The data were collected through questionnaires that were developed in keeping with previous studies. The questions in each dimension were framed based on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). SMMA were operationalized as a construct with five dimensions: entertainment, customization, interaction, WOM, and trendiness. SMMA were measured by adopting 11 items from Kim and Ko (2012). At the same time, the benevolence trust dimensions were measured using three items and were taken from Casaló et al. (2010). Conversely, active participation was operationalized using four items adopted from Kang et al. (2014). Finally, the IFA dimension was operationalized using four items adopted from Casaló et al. (2010).

### 5.4 Power analysis

An a priori analysis using G\*Power 3.1 was conducted to determine whether the sample size used in this study was adequate according to Faul et al. (2007). Based on the G\*Power results, 314 samples are required to achieve 0.85 statistical power with a medium effect size of 0.15 at a significance level of 0.05. This is also consistent with Sekaran and Bougie (2016), who recommended a sample size of 30 to 500 for optimal results. This study used 364 participants, which is more than the minimum acceptable sample size.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Reliability, validity, and normality

Data normality was applied statistically. All data analyzed in this study had a normal distribution, so skewness and kurtosis calculations were performed for variable-specific data. The study analysis showed that the skewness ( $0.186 < X < 0.689$ ) and kurtosis ( $1.046 < \lambda < 1.735$ ). All values are ranged in Acceptable values of skewness fall between  $-3$  and  $+3$ , and kurtosis is appropriate from a range of  $-2$  to  $+2$  (Hair et al., 2010).

The measurement and structural model were evaluated using structural equation modelling (SEM) and IBM SPSS software platform to assess the hypothesized relationships between the constructs of this study. Cronbach's alpha is an indicative instrument used to measure reliability between multiple variable dimensions (Nunnally, 1978). A cut-off value limit of .70 or more was used to identify a satisfactory level of reliability analysis (Nunnally, 1978). The Cronbach's alpha scores ranged from .86 to .94. Therefore, all measures were considered acceptable (see Table 2). The authors evaluated the construct validity based on confirmatory factor analysis. The construct validity of the measurement model was tested using the index of the goodness of model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). All model fit indices of the study were acceptable where  $\chi^2 = 2.20 < 3$ , CFI = .96 > .90, NFI = .94 > .90, CFI = .91 > .90, AGFI = .88 > .80, RMSEA = .05 < .08, and PCLOSE = .06 > .05. Furthermore, all the model fit values demonstrate a good fit to the data above the recommended cut-off point of the study (Hu & Bentler, 1999), signifying sufficient validity of all the constructs. The composite reliability values for each item ranged from .85 to .94, which is above the .70 recommendation in the literature (Hair et al., 2010).

Similarly, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each construct should be greater than .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and all standardized loadings are above .60 and accepted (Hair et al., 2010) (see Table 3), signifying the recommended value of the instrument and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was tested by adhering to recommendations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results of examining discriminant validity are shown in Table 3. The square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than the correlations between this construct and any other. In addition, the AVE value should be greater than .50, indicating an appropriate level of discriminant validity- Fornell-Larcker Criteria.

Furthermore, Table 4 illustrates the discriminant validity among the study constructs based on the criteria associated with each construct. In recent years, a new method of detecting discriminant validity has been developed (Henseler et al., 2015), called the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations. Therefore, this study also evaluated discriminant validity through HTMT; the results shown in Table 4 are represented in the lower triangle. HTMT values are all below 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), which confirms discriminant validity. That is, the constructs in this research have a good discriminant validity

**Table 2:** Summary of the measurement model

Latent constructs	$\lambda$
<b>Social media marketing activities (SMMAs) (<math>\alpha = 94</math>)</b>	
Using a restaurant's Facebook page is fun.	.82
The content of the restaurant's Facebook page seems interesting.	.87
The restaurant's Facebook page enables information sharing with others.	.72

Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through the restaurant's Facebook page.	.79
It is easier to deliver my opinion through the restaurant's Facebook page	.77
The content shown on the restaurant's Facebook page is the newest information.	.82
Using a restaurant brand on Facebook is very trendy.	.64
The restaurant's Facebook page offers a customized information search.	.84
The restaurant's Facebook page provides customized service.	.83
I would like to pass along information about the brand, product, or services on the restaurant's Facebook page to my friends.	.72
I would like to upload content from the restaurant's Facebook page to my blog or microblog.	.66
<b>Benevolence trust (BENT) (<math>\alpha = .94</math>)</b>	
In general, I think that most of the members of the restaurant's Facebook page take into account the repercussions that their actions could have on the other members	.86
In general, I think that most of the members of the restaurant's Facebook page will not intentionally carry out actions that could harm other members.	.82
In general, I think that most of the restaurant's Facebook page members are concerned about the needs and interests of the other members.	.77
<b>Active participation (ACTIVE) (<math>\alpha = .89</math>)</b>	
I take an active part in the restaurant's Facebook page.	.82
I frequently provide useful information to other members of the restaurant's Facebook page.	.91
I post messages and responses on the restaurant's Facebook page with great enthusiasm and frequency.	.72
In general, I do my best to participate in activities offered on the restaurant's Facebook page.	.70
<b>Intention to follow the advice ( IFA) (<math>\alpha = .86</math>)</b>	
I would feel comfortable behaving according to the advice I obtain on the restaurant's Facebook page.	.79
I would not hesitate to take into account the comments and suggestions made by other members of the restaurant's Facebook page.	.75
I would feel secure in following the suggestions made by other members of the restaurant's Facebook page.	.71
I would rely on the recommendations made by other members of the restaurant's Facebook page.	.72

Source: Self developed based on SPSS 25 and AMOS 24 software output.

**Table 3.** Assessing discriminant validity: Fornell–Larcker Criteria

Constructs	CR	AVE	SMMA	BENT	ACTIVE	IFA
SMMA	0.931	0.577	<b>0.759</b>			
BENT	0.942	0.843	0.231***	<b>0.918</b>		
ACTIVE	0.900	0.693	0.180**	0.532***	<b>0.833</b>	
IFA	0.859	0.606	0.300***	0.557***	0.418***	<b>0.779</b>

**Note:** \*\*  $p < 0.010$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ;

**Note:** Intention to follow the advice: (IFA); Benevolence Trust: (BENT); Active participation (ACTIVE).

Source: Self-developed based on AMOS 24 software output.

Table 4. Assessing discriminant validity: Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	SMMA	BENT	ACTIVE	IFA
SMMA	0			
BENT	0.235	0		
ACTIVE	0.184	0.558	0	
IFA	0.290	0.556	0.422	0

Source: Self-developed based on AMOS 24 software output.

## 6.2 Structural model testing

The SEM approach was used to test the research hypothesis presented in Table 5. Some model fit indices are commonly used and reported to provide evidence supporting the fitness of the hypothesized structural model (Adaileh et al., 2020; Alrwashdeh et al., 2020). In sum, all index values are in the acceptable range, depending on the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999), which confirms good goodness of fit between the theoretical model and the actual data. For instance, ( $CMIN^2/df = 2.39 < 3.00$ ;  $GFI = .91 > .90$ ;  $CFI = .96 > .90$ ;  $NFI = .93 > .90$ ;  $RMSEA = .06 < .08$ ).

The SEM approach was used to examine the direct effects of the study constructs. As shown in Table 5, SMMAs are significantly related to IFA ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. SMMAs are a significant predictor of benevolence trust ( $\beta = .31, p < .001$ ), which supports Hypothesis 2. The results also indicate that SMMAs significantly affect active participation ( $\beta = .20, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3. Table 4 shows a significant positive relationship between benevolence trust and IFA ( $\beta = .36, p < 0.001$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported. The results showed a significant positive influence of benevolence trust on active participation ( $\beta = .16, p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is fully supported.

We followed the three stages proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) to determine the mediation effect. First, the direct effect of SMMAs on IFA was examined. As shown in Table 5, SMMAs had a significant positive effect on IFA ( $\beta = .18, p < 0.001$ ). Second, the direct impact of benevolence trust and active participation on IFA was tested. The result showed a significant positive relationship between mediating variables (benevolence trust and active participation) and IFA ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ) and ( $\beta = .16, p < .01$ ), respectively. Third, the indirect relationship between SMMAs and IFA was examined. The bootstrapping results revealed that the indirect effect of SMMAs on IFA was statistically significant ( $\beta = .11, CI [0.06, 0.18], p < .001$ ), indicating the partial mediating effect of benevolence trust on the SMMAs–IFA relationship (see Table 6). Thus, Hypothesis 6 is supported. Furthermore, the results confirmed that SMMAs have a significant indirect impact on IFA through active participation ( $\beta = .03, CI [0.01, 0.07], p < 0.01$ ), thereby indicating the partial mediating effect of active participation on the SMMAs–IFA relationship. Thus, Hypothesis 7 is supported.

Table 5. Results of SEM model

Paths From →To	Beta( $\beta$ )	p-value	Result
Direct effect			

SMMAs→ IFA	.18	.0015**	Hypothesis 1 supported
SMMAs→ Benevolence trust	.31	***	Hypothesis 2 supported
SMMAs→ Active participation	.20	***	Hypothesis 3 supported
Benevolence trust→ IFA	.36	***	Hypothesis 4 supported
Active participation→ IFA	.16	.0023**	Hypothesis 5 supported
<b>R2</b>			
IFA	.31		
Benevolence trust	.057		
Active participation	.037		

Source: Self-developed based on AMOS 24 software output.

**Note:** Confidence Interval=CL; \* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

**Table 5.** The mediation results

Mediation analysis	Beta( $\beta$ )	CI low	CI high	p-value	Mediation type
<b>Indirect effect</b>					
SMMAs→ Benevolence trust → IFA	.11	.06	.18	.0005***	Partial Mediation
SMMAs→ Active participation → IFA	.03	.01	.07	.005**	Partial Mediation

Source: Self developed based on AMOS 24 software output.

## 7 Discussion of findings

Building on the SOR framework, the authors of this study developed an integrative model to examine the influence of SMMAs on IFA in the tourism context, the mediating role of benevolence trust, and the active participation of restaurant customers in these relationships. The results of this study reveal the role of SMMAs in driving customers' positive behaviour intention (IFA), thereby extending the results of previous research (Khan, 2022; Sharma, 2021). Previous studies found that SMMAs are positively and significantly associated with brand loyalty and customer responses (Koay et al., 2020; Zollo et al., 2020). The study results were consistent with those of previous research, which revealed the role of SMMAs in driving positive behavioural intention in tourism and service contexts, such as Facebook coffee shops (Ibrahim et al., 2021), telecommunications Instagram pages (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021), hotel Facebook pages (Ibrahim, 2021a), and social media travel agencies (Sano, 2015). Moreover, the results proved the significant role of SMMAs in enhancing benevolence trust and active participation through restaurant Facebook pages. In addition, SMMAs have a more substantial effect on benevolence trust than active participation. Prior studies indicated that SMMAs influence customers' perceived value and satisfaction with regard to tourism (Moslehpour et al., 2020; Sano, 2015). The present study encompasses these findings by confirming the impact

of SMMAAs on benevolence trust, and active participation. This identifies the importance of SMMAAs in enhancing customer confidence, thus increasing the likelihood for the customer to be involved through SNSs. Aligned with existing research findings, this study found a positive impact of benevolence trust and active participation on the strengthening of IFA on restaurant Facebook pages (Casaló et al., 2010, 2017; Woisetschläger et al., 2008). Therefore, improving trust and customer community participation is essential for creating and strengthening customers' behavioural intention.

Moreover, these results revealed that benevolence trust and active participation are bridges between SMMAAs and IFA. This mediating effect suggests a significant relationship between benevolence trust and IFA and a direct-influence relationship between SMMAAs and IFA (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2021). These results suggest that SMMAAs on restaurant Facebook pages enrich active customers' engagement and generate trust with brands, leading to the intention to follow customers' advice on Facebook pages. These positive relationships were consistent with the results of previous studies (Hafez, 2021; Yazdanian et al., 2019) that primarily examined brand trust as a mediation between SMMAAs and behavioural intention.

## **8 Theoretical implications**

This study makes various contributions to the tourism and SMM literature. First, it incorporates IFA, benevolence trust, and active participation as consequences of SMMAAs, which have received less attention in previous studies. For instance, the study construct was examined from different perspectives. The first links SMMAAs with trust from the cognitive perspective (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Yazdanian et al., 2019). The second perspective links the relationship of SMMAAs with behavioural intention, such as the intention to purchase or recommend (Khan, 2022). This study confirms that benevolence trust, active participation, and IFA are consequence factors in SMM implementation. Our findings reflect the call of previous studies to conduct more empirical research on SMMAAs in different types of SNSs and in various sectors (Ibrahim, 2021a; Khan, 2022; Zollo et al., 2020), especially in the restaurant industry (Ibrahim et al., 2021). This contribution is novel; the role of benevolence trust, and active participation in increasing IFA as the outcomes of SMMAAs has not been fully explained in the existing hospitality literature. This study contributes to the marketing body of knowledge by exploring the relationship between SMMAAs, benevolence trust, active participation, and IFA in the restaurant context.

Second, this study contributes to the hospitality literature on SMM. Previous studies examined SMM in the hospitality industry, such as coffee shops, hotel Facebook pages, travel agencies, and airlines (Ibrahim, 2021a; Ibrahim et al., 2021; Sano, 2015; Seo & Park, 2018). However, within the restaurant context on Facebook, no scholar has yet demonstrated the interactive effects of SMMAAs on benevolence trust, active participation, and IFA, and few researchers have investigated of SMMAAs in the hospitality industry (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Seo & Park, 2018). Furthermore, following the latest meta-analysis research on SMM and behavioural intention, such as that carried out by Ibrahim et al. (2020), our study does not examine customer-brand relationships and SNSs in regard to the hospitality industry in general; rather,

it evaluates the specific customer-brand relationship in detail by considering benevolence trust, active participation, and IFA on restaurant Facebook pages. Our study helps deepen the understanding of how SMMAs impact customer–brand relationships in general and in the context of restaurant Facebook pages

Third, the current study found that benevolence trust and active participation partially mediated how SMMAs were linked to IFA. Consequently, benevolence trust and active participation can be viewed as links and bridges between SMMAs and IFA on restaurant Facebook pages. This study indicated that the restaurant could encourage users to follow the brand pages' or SNS users' advice if customers interact with the brands' SMMAs. In addition, SMMAs increase customers' belief in the company's sincerity and their interactions with the restaurant's Facebook page. However, most studies have considered only the mediation effects of different brand outcomes, such as trust, loyalty, satisfaction commitment, brand image, and customer engagement between SMMAs and behaviour in different contexts (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Seo & Park, 2018). Moreover, previous studies have been limited in terms of their analysis of the mediating mechanism between SMMAs and behavioural intention in the tourism context; this study aimed to fill this gap (Ibrahim, 2021a; Ibrahim et al., 2021). The present research adds to the extant literature by proposing and empirically validating a novel model for examining the influence of SMMAs on IFA while considering the mediating role of benevolence trust and active participation in the tourism literature and the SMM context.

## **9 Managerial implications**

The study findings have several implications for managers and marketers, particularly in the restaurant context. Based on the findings of this study, marketers and decision-makers should recognize the importance of SMMAs in building an effective marketing strategy to create an excellent customer experience. Marketers can evoke a positive customer–brand relationship; stimulate engagement with posts; and encourage customers to participate, interact with, and share brands' Facebook fan pages. Consequently, various restaurant brands, such as McDonald's and KFC, manage their Facebook page to encourage recommendations and criticisms from members about company products or services. These leading restaurant brands in the hospitality industry rely on posting high-resolution photos of food and drinks to attract “foodies,” who are the primary target audience, and ensures that the food images look appealing, motivating people to visit the restaurant. Accordingly, to effectively manage the five dimensions of SMMAs (entertainment, customization, interaction, WOM, and trendiness), marketers may offer entertaining strategies to customers by holding contests with different conditions to get various incentives, such as long-term meal discounts, free meals, and clothes emblazoned with the restaurant logo. For instance, contest posts can be designed to encourage customers and users to share posts with photos of their experiences at the restaurant, tag their friends to participate, and share content on the restaurant's page.

Furthermore, restaurateurs should consider offering customized/tailored information about services and products (season offers, kids' campaigns, and holiday discounts) to enhance benevolence trust. In addition, restaurant marketers should recognize that WOM is an essential factor for success and that it can be used and spread by customers who have experience with specific products or before making a purchase. In addition, marketers should note that



proposing opportunities to customers or users who want to discuss their views and involvement with other consumers is a success factor in formulating benevolence trust and improving customer-company relationships.

The findings indicate that SMMAAs play a significant role in enforcing customer-brand relationships, such as benevolence, active participation, and IFA. Through SNSs, restaurants can implement strong marketing strategies to inspire consumers to interact with each other and the brand. The followers of restaurant brands are motivated to share information and experiences with other followers and admirers of the brand, regardless of individual incomes (Gharib et al., 2019). Investigating the different drivers of members' active participation in restaurant Facebook pages will help tourism and hospitality businesses develop new marketing plans, increase customer participation, and achieve maximum effectiveness (Casaló et al., 2010). The study results was concluded that restaurant managers should maintain their marketing plans and improve their benevolence trust through SNSs. The marketers can adopt a strategy that reinforces trust and creates reciprocal awareness among customers on restaurant social media fan pages. Marketers can reinforce benevolence trust by creating posts that include positive honesty, encouraging each other and providing updated information about the company's products and services. To implement effective plans, marketers should keep up with the latest trends in marketing strategies and methods employed by leading companies using social media and should try to emulate these. To help build the restaurant's brand, marketers should encourage customers to share information and ideas. As a result, customers will be more willing to share reviews and trust other customers on the restaurant's social media fan pages. In addition to benevolence trust, and active participation, IFA is a critical consequence of SMMAAs. Marketers must recognize that the main motive for stimulating customers to follow advice on SNSs is to provide exciting content that attracts users to participate and engage with these brand posts. Failure to present information clearly and honestly may lead to a negative customer-brand relationship that reduces customer participation and increases dissatisfaction. Concurrently, marketers should encourage their customers to write reviews on Facebook pages about the restaurant's products and services. They should pay courtesy to customers' online feedback and respond to reviews. Marketers should assign hashtags to various restaurant meals for easy review by Facebook users. This way, users can advise members to give their thoughts on and evaluations of the food quality, service, and various other aspects. Positive and negative feedback on a private dining experience is helpful for the restaurant's development to correct negative situations and improve positive aspects.

## **10 Limitations and future studies**

This study has several limitations. First, it examines three consequences of SMMAAs: benevolence trust, active participation, and IFA. Future studies could investigate other consequences of SMMAAs, such as brand reputation, customer involvement, user engagement behaviour, perceived creativity, positive emotions, visual appeal, and positive attitude, to assist marketers in attaining a better understanding of the SMM phenomenon from the behaviour side. In addition, future studies can examine pro-brand behaviours, such as brand fidelity and evangelism, intention to recommend and visit, and continuance intention. Second, the study investigates only one SNS (Facebook) and the restaurant context. Future marketing scholars could examine the nature of SMMAAs in other SNSs (e.g., Twitter and Instagram) or in other

industries (e.g., online shopping, organic products, smartphone, and tourism). The third is the emerging country (North Cyprus) and local restaurant brands selected for this study. Future studies could extend the research model to different cultures and countries with international brands (e.g., McDonald's, KFC, and Starbucks). Fourth, using student samples in one age group may have reduced the generalizability of the research results. Future research could explore the study model using a non-student sample or different age groups, which could generate different outcomes regarding the effect of SMM on customer behaviour. Finally, this study was implemented using the SOR framework; future studies could encompass the research model by applying different theories or frameworks to examine the importance of SMM.

## 11 Conclusions

SMM is the amalgamation of SNSs and marketing that supports traditional marketing tools for brand marketing management. Brands seek and work to attract consumers to them and strengthen the relationship between the brand and consumers through all traditional marketing tools and SMM. The adoption of SMM to sustain growth has become a part of companies' marketing plans, enhance communication with customers, and build good relationships with them. To investigate this subject. We employed the SOR model to examine the influence of SMMA on young restaurant consumer response. Particularly this study investigated IFA, members' active participation, and benevolence trust as three consequences of the SMMA on restaurant Facebook pages and the mediating roles of active participation and benevolence trust. In response to the first purpose of the study, the findings confirmed the importance of SMMA in boosting IFA. Additionally, we observed that SMMA were important determinants of a member's active participation and benevolence trust. Previous studies have not linked SMMA with benevolence trust, active participation, and IFA within the same framework. These findings contribute to understanding how to develop SMMA in the restaurant industry to improve consumer-brand relationships, including IFA, members' active participation, and benevolence trust. This study confirmed that the indirect relationships between SMMA and IFA via benevolence trust and active participation are significant, demonstrating that benevolence trust and active participation partially mediate the effect of SMMA on IFA. The findings of this study showed that benevolence trust, and active participation could be an intermediary between SMM efforts and IFA of customers through Facebook pages.

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