

Title: From perceived creativity and visual appeal to positive emotions: Instagram's Impact on Fast-Food Brand Evangelism

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Abstract

Social media marketing activities (SMMAs) on Instagram play a pivotal role in eliciting internal responses from fast-food customers. Based on the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model, mere exposure effect, aesthetics-usability effect, affective events theory, and social identity theory, the study is the first to investigate how SMMAs of fast-food brands impact perceived creativity (PCR), positive emotions (PEM), and perceived visual appeal (PVA). The study aims to explore how these content attributes shape PEM and contribute to brand evangelism. To achieve this, data was collected from 403 participants who actively follow fast-food Instagram accounts in the USA. The ensuing data analysis reveals positive relationships between SMMAs and PCR, PVA, and PEM. These factors, in turn, exert a significant influence on brand evangelism. Furthermore, the findings indicate that PEM mediates the effects of PCR and PVA on brand evangelism. By identifying the underlying mechanisms connecting SMMAs to brand evangelism, this study sheds light on how businesses in this sector can leverage Instagram effectively for marketing purposes.

Keywords: Social media marketing activities, creativity, positive emotions, visual appeal, brand evangelism, Instagram, fast food Industry.

1 Introduction

Fast food brands significantly impact the global market, emphasizing quick and convenient food services. These brands strategically influence customer behavior and preferences by employing marketing techniques, such as value meals and limited-time offers (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). A compelling illustration of this influence is evident in the thriving fast-food industry in the USA, boasting 201,865 restaurants in 2023, with a market size of \$331.41 billion (Kolmar, 2023). This substantial figure represents approximately 40% of the \$907 billion global fast-food industry in 2023 (Kolmar, 2023). Social networking sites (SNSs) play a crucial role in the fast-food industry, providing a platform for customers to actively engage with these brands' social media pages (Y. V. Chen, Wong, et al., 2024). On these platforms, customers share their experiences, offer reviews, and express opinions that hold sway over the purchasing decisions of others (Polat et al., 2024; Xiong et al., 2023). By recognizing the importance of online presence, fast food businesses strategically leverage platforms to showcase their offerings, tell their brand story, engage with their audience, and drive overall business growth (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2022). SNSs such as Instagram and Twitter (Now x) serve as effective mediums for fast-food brands to display their products and promotions aesthetically, eliciting favorable emotional reactions from customers (Xiong et al., 2023).

SNSs allow fast-food brands to enhance customer engagement and creativity by encouraging them to share their recipe ideas while using their products (Li et al., 2019). As a prime example, McDonald's has been at the forefront of deploying social media marketing (SMM) campaigns across various SNSs to enhance brand reputation. These campaigns facilitate customers in sharing

their food experiences and offering positive and critical feedback, thereby contributing to the brand's products or service improvement (Zimmer, 2021). Similarly, Burger King has strategically utilized SNSs to generate 'buzz' around its products and promotions. The brand employs viral marketing strategies and collaborates with influencers to extend its reach to a broader audience (Ramanarayanan, 2020).

Due to growing business interest, the concept of SMM has seen significant development in recent years (Attia et al., 2018, 2021), particularly within the hospitality and tourism (H&T) domain, as indicated by previous studies (Aljarah et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). Social media marketing activities (SMMA), initially applied in luxury fashion to enhance customer equity (Kim & Ko, 2012), have become a notable subset of SMM. The SMMA model has undergone initial scrutiny across various industries and contexts, including luxury brands, communications, and service domains (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021, 2023; Zollo et al., 2020). SMMA encompasses various components such as interaction, word-of-mouth (WOM), entertainment, customization, and trendiness (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Previous studies in the tourism industry have established a connection between SMM stimuli and customers' internal responses, such as emotions, which subsequently influence travel behaviors and loyalty (Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). Consequently, brands need to craft effective SMMA to stimulate PEM and foster loyalty and evangelism among their followers. However, there is a literature gap concerning SMMA content attributes, including perceived creativity (PCR) and visual appeal (PVA), that contribute to the development of customers' positive emotions (PEM) (Ibrahim et al., 2024; F. Li et al., 2023; Polat et al., 2024). Notably, limited studies have explored the role of PCR and PVA of SMMA in eliciting PEM on Instagram within the context of fast-food brands (Casaló et al., 2021; Ibrahim, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023). While fast-food brands benefit from SMM's extensive reach and interactivity, their ability to influence customer emotions through creative and visually appealing content is critical (Polat et al., 2023). These PEM play a crucial role in the effectiveness of brand communication on SNSs, encouraging a profound connection and strong inclination towards passionately persuading others to engage with the brand. Recent findings by Casaló et al. (2021) indicate that PCR of SMMA is a weak predictor of the PEM of followers of fashion brands on Instagram and suggest the inclusion of PVA to enhance the development of PEM. This current study aims to address these gaps in the SMM literature and respond to recent research calls (e.g., Ibrahim et al. 2023; and Li et al. 2023) by investigating the influence of SMMA on PCR and PVA, which, in turn, may contribute to the development of PEM on fast-food Instagram pages.

Brand evangelism refers to the customer disseminating brand-related experiences to others, attempting to recruit others to use the brand, and dissuading them from choosing other brands (Harrigan et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022). Previous research in the H&T context has focused on branding concepts as motivators of brand evangelism, such as destination distinctiveness, information-seeking engagement, and brand attachment (Kang et al., 2020; Sharma, 2021). The development of brand evangelism is crucial for organizations, as customers not only recommend the brand on SNSs but also share their feelings and attempt to persuade others to choose this brand (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Nyadzayo et al., 2020). However, the internal organismic components contributing to the development of brand evangelism as a response to SMMA stimuli require further investigation in the H&T literature (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Kang et al., 2020;

Sharma, 2021). Specifically, there is a knowledge gap regarding the role of PEM as a critical precursor to brand evangelism, especially in the context of fast-food Instagram pages (Osmanova et al., 2023). PEM on SNSs may influence individuals' experiences and promote pro-brand behaviors, such as brand evangelism (Bagozzi et al., 2016). The current study addresses this research gap by assessing the influential role of PEM on brand evangelism.

This study aims to investigate the mechanism by which SMMA on Instagram impact brand evangelism through customer internal responses, namely PCR, PVA, and PEM, and how these PEM mediate the relationships between PCR, PVA, and brand evangelism. The present study contributes to the SMM literature in the H&T context by identifying the content attributes that evoke PEM, which, in turn, contributes to the development of brand evangelism of fast-food Instagram page followers. Initially, the research will discuss the importance of SMMA in H&T and the fast-food industry, leading to the conceptual foundations of the research. The study will include a literature review section, a proposed model of this study, and hypotheses development. The methodology will be discussed, covering data collection and measures. Following this, the findings will be discussed and concluded with managerial and theoretical implications, study limitations, and future research directions.

2 Conceptual Foundation

In the SMM and H&T literature, several theories and models have been applied to understand the consequences of SMMA. This study has used five theoretical perspectives to comprehend the impacts of SMMA on customer internal responses (PVA, PEM, PCR), which, in turn, enhance brand evangelism.

2.1 The SOR (Stimulus–Organism–Response) Model

The Stimulus (S)-Organism (O)-Response (R) - (SOR) model is a framework that explains the relationship between external environmental stimuli, inner organism characteristics, and consumer response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the SOR model provides insights into the interplay between external environmental stimuli and internal organism characteristics, ultimately shaping consumer behavior and responses. This study leverages the SOR framework to examine how Instagram SMMA from fast-food brands influence customer perceptions (PCR, PEM, PVA) and ultimately initiate brand evangelism. While the SOR framework is appropriate for examining the initial research questions, past research exploring SMM's influence on consumer behavior through multiple theories has been limited (Fetis et al., 2022; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). Our study responds to recent calls for more empirical studies combining multiple theories and models to analyze factors influencing consumer behavior in the restaurant context (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Polat et al., 2023, 2024). Within the SOR framework, we utilize the mere exposure effect (Zajonc, 1968), aesthetics-usability effect, affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) to discuss the links among the constructs of the study. Each theory plays a distinct and complementary role, comprehensively recognizing the dynamic interaction between SMMA, customer perceptions, and responses.

2.1.1 Stimulus

A stimulus is a specific environmental feature that triggers individuals' actions and perceptions (Zafar et al., 2020). Several digital marketing studies have employed SMM tools, such as SMMA, firm-generated content, and digital content marketing, considered external environmental stimuli in the SOR model (Aljarah et al., 2022; Aljuhmani et al., 2022). For example, a study by Aljarah et al. (2022) demonstrated that digital content marketing acts as a stimulus influencing specific internal states, such as customer engagement, which can ultimately impact online brand advocacy of coffee shops. Additionally, Aljuhmani et al. (2022) explored SMMA as a stimulus for customer behavior in the airline context. In the current study, SMMA refers to a brand's activities as environmental stimuli to attract customers toward brand content and strengthen customer relationships.

2.1.2 Organism

The SOR model suggests that individuals respond to stimuli based on their internal processes, encompassing their feelings, thoughts, and past experiences (Xiang et al., 2016). These internal processes dictate how a stimulus is perceived and translated into a response (Zafar et al., 2020). In the context of SMM, existing literature considers PEM, PVA, and PCR as cognitive reaction variables. A study by Hashemi et al. (2023) examined PEM as a traveler organism variable, representing individual emotional responses and its influence on place attachment in the context of sports tourism. Additionally, a study by Casaló et al. (2021) within the framework of SOR explored how stimuli, such as brand publications on Instagram, trigger specific internal states, such as organismic response processes (PEM and PCR), ultimately leading to responses like affective commitment and interaction intention. Moreover, the social media literature underscores that visual appeal indicates attentiveness to external environmental stimuli and forms the foundational basis for information processing in individual decision-making processes (Janiszewski et al., 2013). The study of Fu et al. (2024) empirically examined the effectiveness of selfies and emotionally evocative titles (stimuli) in capturing visual attention (organism), as well as their impact on the attitudinal evaluations of viewers (response) within the context of museum social media communication.

2.1.3 Response

In the SOR model, the response component encompasses the observable behaviors or outcomes stemming from an individual's affective, cognitive, or emotional reactions to external stimuli (Xiang et al., 2016). The response represents the final decisions or actions taken by the individual in response to the stimulus and their internal processing (Zafar et al., 2020). Previous studies have incorporated brand evangelism as the final response within the SOR framework. Specifically, Al Nawas et al. (2021) examined brand evangelism and WOM as customers' responses in the online shopping context. The study of Hussain et al. (2023) in the restaurant industry identified brand evangelism as the main response, with customer-perceived innovativeness and brand love acting as antecedents to brand evangelism. Our study assumes that brand evangelism represents observable behaviors (responses) triggered by SMMA on Instagram pages (stimulus), mediated by customers' internal responses (organism) within the fast-food Instagram page environment.

2.2 Underpinning theories

2.2.1 The Mere Exposure Effect

Zajonc (1968) revealed the mere exposure effect, a psychological phenomenon demonstrating how repeated exposure to stimuli, such as music or visual patterns, can shape attitudes and preferences. This effect operates through the dynamic interplay between cognitive and emotional processes, leading to enhanced enjoyment of the stimulus over time (Palumbo et al., 2021). Within the realm of SMM, consistent exposure to engaging, interactive, and trendy content, coupled with personalized features, cultivates a familiar and positively reinforced brand environment (Li et al., 2023). Despite the ubiquity of SMM, few studies have employed the mere exposure effect to investigate its influence on consumer behavior in this context. The study of Ananda et al. (2019) demonstrated how heightened exposure to such SMM efforts can significantly increase the likelihood of eWOM intention, leading to positive brand perception. This suggests that the familiarity and positive effect fostered by the mere exposure effect may be crucial in enhancing consumers' perception of marketing content creativity on fast-food Instagram pages (Hervet & Guitart, 2022). The mere exposure effect suggests that repeated exposure increases customers' likeability of a stimulus (Palumbo et al., 2021), providing a framework to illuminate the transformative impact of repeated exposure to online original content, such as branded videos or user-generated content, on shaping individuals' perceptions of SMMAs' perceived creativity (Hervet & Guitart, 2022). Therefore, this framework holds explanatory potential for the relationship between SMMAs and PCR.

2.2.2 The Aesthetics-Usability Effect

The basic tenet of the aesthetics-usability effect posits that the aesthetic appeal of a product or service, such as a travel app or tourism website, can significantly influence users' perception of its usability and improve their attitudes and intentions towards products or brands (Lidwell et al., 2010). Therefore, leveraging the aesthetics-usability effect within the SMM tourism context can yield significant benefits in describing how SMMAs enhance the PVA content. Activities like entertainment (e.g., humorous travel videos, interactive quizzes), customization (e.g., personalized vacation packages, user-generated itineraries), interaction (e.g., live Q&A sessions with travel experts), WOM (e.g., food influencer testimonials, restaurant customer reviews), and trendiness (e.g., utilizing location-specific hashtags, incorporating popular travel photography styles) can all contribute to a visually appealing and engaging Instagram presence (Ibrahim, 2023; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023; H. M. Lee et al., 2021; J. Liu et al., 2022). Consequently, this can lead to more PEM, enhancing brand loyalty and benefiting tourism businesses in a competitive online landscape (Abbasi et al., 2023; Hashemi et al., 2023). Therefore, incorporating visually appealing designs into SMMAs can improve the PVA of fast-food brands on Instagram and enhance consumers' brand perception. The aesthetics-usability effect provides a foundational understanding of how a brand's marketing activities on Instagram fast-food pages influence the formation of PVA.

2.2.3 The Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive their sense of self from their memberships in various social groups, such as brand communities, and attempt to maintain and enhance a social identity through these affiliations (Tajfel, 1978). Building upon the study of Tajfel (1978), we utilize social identity theory as a framework to examine the development and expression of PEM

among brand followers across diverse SMMAAs. When brands actively curate engaging online content, such as user-generated posts, humorous videos, and exclusive behind-the-scenes glimpses, it raises a shared sense of positivity and belonging within the online brand communities (Ibrahim, 2023). This shared positivity further strengthens the group's collective identity, resulting in PEM-like joy, pride, and a sense of belonging, which research has consistently demonstrated are linked to strong associations with brands and consumer self-identities (Torres et al., 2018). Consumers often prefer brands that align with their values and interests, furthering a sense of connection and belonging that translates into PEM-like loyalty and pride (Y. V. Chen, Jin et al., 2024; Polat et al., 2024). This trend is especially noteworthy in online brand communities, particularly in subcultures on SNSs that revolve around fast-food chains. When customers identify with these communities and the specific marketing activities they value, such as influencer collaborations or user-generated content campaigns, they are likely to experience positive emotional reactions such as excitement, satisfaction, and a heightened sense of belonging when interacting with the brand on Instagram (Aljarah et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2023). Social identity theory is appropriate for exploring customer-brand relationships. It can be utilized to explain the relationship between positive emotional reactions toward fast-food Instagram pages and their response to the brand's SMMAAs.

3 Literature Review

3.1 The model of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAAs)

SMMAAs, as described by Ibrahim et al. (2023), are considered "promotional and relational communication tools that complement organizational marketing strategies by enhancing interactivity through online relationships between organizations and consumers" (p. 5). According to Zollo et al. (2020), SMMAAs function as a tool for marketers to enhance the comprehension of their target audience. This understanding is derived from the valuable information obtained through both customer-to-customer and customer-to-brand interactions. In the Korean fashion industry context, Kim and Ko (2012) have developed a model of SMMAAs, identifying five dimensions: trendiness, entertainment, interaction, customization, and WOM.

Interaction on SNS serves as a potent tool for brands, enabling them to cultivate enduring relationships with their target audience, increase brand awareness, and ultimately enhance sales (F. Li et al., 2023; X. Liu et al., 2024; Zollo et al., 2020). The interaction encompasses various forms of communication, such as commenting on posts, sharing content, and direct messages, fostering a dynamic exchange between brands and users (Godey et al., 2016). Ibrahim et al. (2023) highlight the effectiveness of interactive content on restaurant social media pages and specify that marketers should share a video recipe on Instagram, encouraging users to visit their restaurant, try the recipe, and share their creations using a branded hashtag. Such initiatives engage the audience and drive desired user behavior, strengthening brand loyalty and contributing to business objectives (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Entertainment refers to the ability to create engaging and enjoyable content for users. This content can be videos, images, animations, games, or other formats (Fetais et al., 2022). Recognizing that users often turn to various SNS to escape and relax, Godey et al. (2016) identified these motivations as fundamental to seeking entertainment. Brands can harness entertainment content to stimulate consumers' emotions, attract new customers, retain existing ones, and build lasting relationships with their audience (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). For instance,

activities like sharing entertaining and captivating content, hosting contests, promotions, and exclusive deals are manifestations of SMMAAs (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021). Through targeted messaging and promotional efforts, brands can leverage SNS to craft tailored experiences that deeply resonate with their audience (Khan, 2022). By analyzing user data, such as demographics, online behavior, and purchase history, brands can create customized content and offers that align with the specific interests and needs of micro-targeted segments within their customer base (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021, 2023). This targeted approach allows brands to effectively reach potential customers and maximize the relevance of their promotions. For example, a fast-food restaurant might utilize Instagram to tailor personalized content, showcasing menu items recommended based on past orders or highlighting birthday meal deals targeted to specific age groups (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

Trendy content on SNS plays a vital role in capturing the user's attention and engaging them with the brand (Fetais et al., 2022). Staying attuned to the latest trends and popular content enables the brand to enhance its appeal and interact effectively with the audience (Li et al., 2023). Brands rely on creating trendy content, regularly updating it with appealing images and dynamic videos while fostering innovative and interactive engagement with the audience (Ibrahim et al., 2024). This type of content motivates followers to participate actively and influences their purchase decisions. According to Hazzam (2021), engaging in trendy activities in social media management inspires the audience with new and innovative ideas. As customers seek unique experiences and a sense of individuality, they are encouraged to build strong emotional connections, increase interaction, and solidify the brand's presence in the audience's minds (Fu et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2022). The increase in online communication platforms has elevated eWOM to the forefront of effective marketing tactics (Ibrahim et al., 2024). As customers increasingly rely on the Internet for communication and information, companies have significant opportunities to leverage the power of WOM marketing. This involves sharing subjective evaluations of brands, products, and services across SNSs' and other online channels (Aljarah et al., 2022). Social media serves as a quintessential platform for eWOM, enabling consumers to express their experiences and opinions regarding offerings unabashedly. The ubiquitous presence of these online networks encourages users to share experiences and views regarding brands and offerings, ultimately fostering deeper customer engagement (Hazzam, 2021). Importantly, when strategically implemented with incentives and rewards, eWOM marketing cultivates trust and loyalty within consumer communities, strengthening brand relationships and achieving marketing objectives (Polat et al., 2024).

3.2 Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAAs) in the Hospitality and Fast-Food Industry

The concept of SMMAAs has recently gained significant attention among scholars within the H&T context. The importance of SMMAAs is evident in their impact on the behavioral intentions of customers in restaurants (Ibrahim, 2023), the enhancement of airline customer engagement (Aljuhmani et al., 2022), and the cultivation of high brand loyalty among hotel customers (Ibrahim, 2021). Recent scholarly research has utilized SMMAAs to explore how these tools influence consumer behavior across various H&T disciplines, including airlines, coffee shops, restaurants, and destinations (Aljarah et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022). While the concept of SMMAAs has piqued the interest of mainstream marketing researchers in the H&T industry, there remains a significant gap in empirical research specifically focused on fast food (Ibrahim &

Aljarah, 2023; Xiong et al., 2023). Only a few studies have investigated the association between SMMA and customer-brand relationships in the restaurant context (See Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Literature on the Consequences of SMMA in the Tourism and Hospitality Context

No	Articles	Industry	Consequences	Mediators/Moderators	Social Media Platform	Theoretical Frameworks & Theories
1	(Liu et al., 2022)	Destination and travel behaviors	-Destination preference -Willingness to pay a premium	Moderators: -Gen Z and other generations -Gen Z (male and female)	WeChat	- Elaboration likelihood model - Generation theory
2	(Aljuhmani et al., 2022)	Airlines	-Cognitive engagement -Emotional engagement -Brand loyalty	Mediators: -Cognitive engagement -Emotional engagement	Facebook	-SOR model
3	(Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023)	Restaurants	-User Engagement -Self-Brand Connection	Mediators: -User engagement Moderators: -Gender -Trust	Instagram	None
4	(Ibrahim, 2023)	Restaurants	-Online brand identification -Purchase intention	Mediators: - Online brand identification -Purchase intention Moderators: -Gender	Facebook	-SOR model -Uses gratifications theory
5	(Ibrahim et al., 2023)	Restaurants	-Benevolence trust -Active participation -Intention to follow the advice	Mediators: -Benevolence trust -Active participation	Facebook	-SOR model
	Contributions of this article	Fast food restaurants	-PCR -PEM -PVA	Mediators: -PCR-PEM-brand evangelism -PVA-PEM-brand evangelism	Instagram	-SOR model -The mere exposure effect -The aesthetics-usability effect -The social identity theory

For instance, Ibrahim and Aljarah (2023) demonstrated that SMMA of restaurant brands serve as essential enablers for user engagement and establishing a self-connection. In addition, Ibrahim et al. (2023) have claimed that SMM initiatives of restaurants influence benevolence trust, user participation, and the intention to follow advice. These studies have significantly advanced our understanding of the relationships between SMMA and customer-brand connections in the restaurant context. However, these prior studies did not explore the relationship between SMMA and consumer behavior in specific types of restaurants, such as fast-food brands (See Table 1). The current study aims to fill this gap by empirically examining the role of SMMA in promoting consumer behavior on fast-food restaurants' Instagram pages. Consequently, SMMA encompass the initiatives undertaken by brand social media pages to allure consumers, amplify engagement,

and reinforce the relationship between the brand and consumers within the H&T context (Y. V. Chen, Wong, et al., 2024). Despite numerous studies on SMM, there is no clear definition in the H&T context (Ibrahim, 2023; Liu et al., 2022). Thus, we define SMMA in this study as "the use of several content attributes to stimulate user perceptions and PEM, leading to an evangelic response toward the fast-food brand".

3.3 Customers' Internal Responses

3.3.1 Perceived Creativity (PCR)

Creativity involves generating novel solutions to challenges or problems characterized by originality and nonconformity (Amabile, 1983). Previous research (e.g., Amabile 1983; Casaló et al., 2021; Smith and Yang 2004) has established that creativity consists of two primary components: novelty (the ability to generate ideas that are novel, unusual, and unique) and appropriateness (the perception that an advertisement is relevant, useful, or aligned with the brand). Novelty can be applied directly or indirectly to the marketing situation, while appropriateness is measured by its relevance to the marketing context (Casaló et al., 2021). In marketing, creativity involves incorporating imaginative ideas into the marketing plan to promote a product or service. SNS, such as Instagram, provide marketers with various content types (e.g., filters, live videos, and boomerangs) that allow them to showcase PCR and engage their followers (Casaló et al., 2021; Xiong et al., 2023). Instagram empowers marketers to personalize and creatively edit their posts, promoting products or services in an engaging and visually appealing way (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). On the consumer side, people's actions, eating habits, and food choices are often influenced by what they see online. Fast food brands on Instagram have focused on introducing new foods to encourage young people to share photos and engage with content, such as liking, sharing, or commenting (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Polat et al., 2023). Additionally, food presented on social media, especially on Instagram, significantly influences how people buy and consume food (Y. V. Chen, Jin et al., 2024; Polat et al., 2024). Consequently, Instagram has been identified as a key platform that enhances creativity in the fast-food industry.

3.3.2 Perceived Visual Appeal (PVA)

Visual appeal encompasses dynamic content, such as photos, designs, and videos that enhance the presentation of products and services, enticing consumers to make purchases and actively engage with brand social media pages (Kujur & Singh, 2020). Several studies have demonstrated that customers are more likely to engage with visually attractive content, specifically high-quality images and videos, than less appealing content. For instance, Xiong et al. (2023) suggest that incorporating high-quality photos and engaging designs can enhance perceived customer value and improve the restaurant's image.

Similarly, Argyris et al. (2020) found that the visual appeal of Instagram posts positively predicts users' engagement behavior, such as liking and commenting. In particular, fast-food brands utilize Instagram's visual-based platform, filters, and editing tools to showcase their products' appeal and enticement (Y. V. Chen, Wong et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2022). This aligns with a recent book about Instagram, asserting that its visual and interactive features encourage creative thinking and original content sharing (Leaver et al., 2020). The authors emphasize that deviating from traditional scenarios and incorporating visual appeal into Instagram brand content creation produces images capable of conveying emotions and feelings (Leaver et al., 2020).

3.3.3 Positive Emotions (PEM)

Emotions are complex psychological and physiological responses to stimuli, typically associated with specific feelings and behaviors (Lazarus, 1991). These emotional responses can arise from internal or external events, varying in intensity and duration (Lazarus, 1991). PEM encompasses a broad range of feelings associated with happiness, contentment, and well-being (Lane Keller, 2001), including joy, love, gratitude, and hope.

Within SNS settings, earlier studies have emphasized the significant role of emotions in improving customer interactions and increasing engagement with the brand's online content (Bagozzi et al., 2016; Casaló et al., 2021). PEM in social media campaigns has been noticed to contribute to brand awareness and customer loyalty (Zollo et al., 2020). By utilizing platforms like Instagram, fast-food brands can effectively stimulate PEM and drive sales (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2022). Additionally, through the strategic use of hashtags, sponsored posts, and actively engaging content such as likes, comments, and direct messages, fast-food companies can generate a sense of community and belonging for their followers (Aljarah et al., 2022; Polat et al., 2024).

3.4 Brand Evangelism

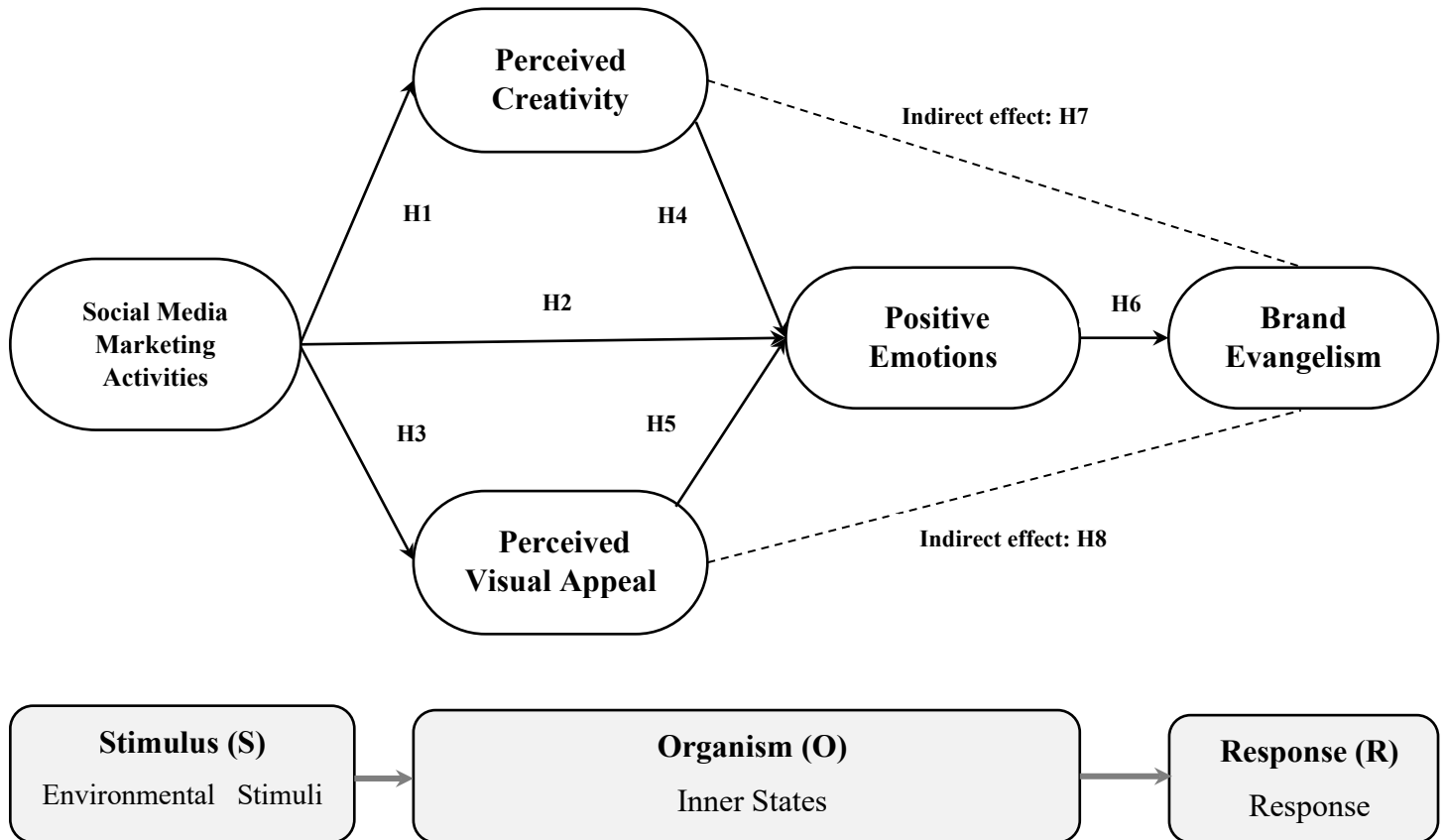
Marketing consultant Ben McConnell is credited with coining "brand evangelism" in 2003 (McConnell & Huba, 2003). Brand evangelism is a form of brand referral behavior that actively and passionately shares opinions about a brand, advocates for its products or services, and uses persuasive tactics to encourage others to consume the same brand (Matzler et al., 2007). In the fiercely competitive hospitality industry, establishing loyal followers of brand evangelists can be a valuable asset for businesses, ultimately contributing to long-term business success (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Kang et al., 2020). In the tourism context, brand evangelism expands the scope of WOM communication by introducing passionate advocacy and a deep emotional connection to the brand (Harrigan et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Shang & Li, 2024). Moreover, Nkoulou Mvondo et al. (2022) demonstrated that brand evangelism leads to substantial customer engagement compared to positive WOM, particularly in the context of travel and hospitality. In the cruise industry, Kang et al. (2020) study emphasized how cultivating strong brand attachment among customers is a powerful strategy for managing brand advocates. They also highlight the importance of brand distinctiveness, such as unique experiences or memorable service, in forming a cohort of consumers inclined to defend and protect the brand.

Brand evangelism is characterized by a deep connection to a tourism brand and a strong inclination to actively share it with others, often with passionate enthusiasm (Kang et al., 2020). To examine why customers become brand evangelists, many studies in the T&H context have identified factors influencing the development of brand evangelism. For instance, the study of Ibrahim et al. (2024) on Starbucks' Instagram page reveals that firm-created and user-generated content are positively and significantly related to affective commitment, brand evangelism, and brand fidelity. For example, Osmanova et al. (2023) found that brand symbolism is positively associated with the dimensions of brand evangelism in the coffee shop industry. The earlier study's findings indicated that brand symbolism most strongly predicted positive brand referrals, with purchase intention and oppositional brand referrals following in importance. By conducting three scenario-based experiments with Chinese restaurant customers, Shang and Li (2024) discovered that the presence of service rituals, memory, and the quality of employee-to-customer interaction significantly

influences brand evangelism. Drawing upon prior literature within the hospitality context, this study defines brand evangelism as "the customer disseminating brand-related experience to others, attempting to recruit others to use the brand, and dissuading others from consuming other brands."

4. Hypotheses development

In this section, we will explore a proposed model that examines the antecedents and consequences of customers' internal responses on Instagram in the fast-food industry (See Figure 1).



Mediation effect:

H7: Perceived Creativity- Positive Emotions- Brand Evangelism

H8: Perceived Visual Appeal - Positive Emotions- Brand Evangelism

Figure 1: Proposed Model: Antecedents & Consequences of Customers' Internal Responses on Instagram

4.1 Consequences of SMMA

While offering valuable engagement opportunities, SMM strategies are marred by ethical concerns (Jacobson et al., 2020). Inauthentic practices, such as fake followers and misleading influencer schemes, can erode brand trust and damage consumer relationships (Andonopoulos et al., 2023).

Manipulative tactics, including targeted advertising and algorithmic personalization, raise worries about privacy intrusion and potential exploitation of user data (Susser et al., 2019). Furthermore, the pervasive promotion of unrealistic beauty standards on SNSs can negatively impact vulnerable groups, such as adolescents, damaging self-esteem and body image (Perloff, 2014). Tackling these controversies necessitates greater transparency and ethical considerations within SMM practices to ensure responsible marketing that prioritizes both consumer well-being and brand objectives (Andonopoulos et al., 2023; Jacobson et al., 2020).

On platforms like Instagram or X, SMM strategies leverage various interactive features and content formats specifically designed to foster high levels of customer engagement (Kim et al., 2023). Engagement tools like liking, sharing, and commenting can stimulate brand innovation and storytelling by encouraging greater user-generated content, feedback, and discussions (Aljarah et al., 2022; Khan, 2022). This customer engagement holds significant value, allowing brands to tap into valuable customer resources, such as creativity. As a result, brands can leverage these resources to gain a sustainable advantage (Polat et al., 2023).

Prior studies have indicated that SMM tools enable effective interaction with the brand and enhance emotional and creative perceptions toward social media brand content (Casaló et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2022). For instance, Casaló et al. (2021) clarified that SMM publications of luxury fashion brands can potentially create PCR and PEM among their followers. This, in turn, can positively impact commitment and behavioral intentions. On the contrary, limited studies have researched this relationship, particularly in the context of the multidimensional model of SMMA. For example, Zollo et al. (2020) explored how SMMA of fashion brands stimulate brand association and consumers' benefits (i.e., cognitive, personal integrative, and social integrative benefits). From the perspective of 433 WeChat users in China, Cheung et al. (2020) illustrated that two SMMA aspects, entertainment and interaction, positively affect online engagement (e.g., consuming and contributing), and trendiness drives creating behavior. In this study, the influence of SMMA on PCR is examined through the lens of mere exposure effect. Based on this effect, repeated exposure to a stimulus can lead to increased liking and affinity (Zajonc, 1968). This aligns well with the idea that SMMA, such as sharing interactive, trendy, and entertaining content, can influence how people perceive a brand's creativity (Ananda et al., 2019). As a result, brands can increase their chances of frequent appearances among their audiences by actively participating in such activities (Palumbo et al., 2021). The mere exposure effect explains how repeated exposure to social media content can influence users' attitudes and behavior (Hervet & Guitart, 2022). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: SMMA of Instagram brand account positively influence the perceived creativity experienced by followers of the account.

Effective SMM plans can extend beyond mere engagement, creating a strong emotional bond between fast-food brands and their customers on SNS, thereby increasing PEM towards the brand (Ibrahim, 2023). This emotional connection between SNS can lead to greater success and differentiation from competitors in the future (Aljarah et al., 2022). Several studies in the H&T context support the argument that SMMA enhances several cognitive, emotional, and behavioral

activities, including, but not limited to, emotional engagement, behavior attitude, and self-brand connection (e.g., Aljarah et al., 2022; Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023). Although SMMA has received limited attention in tourism marketing research, it has resulted in heightened PEM. For example, a study conducted in Jordan by Aljuhmani et al. (2022) among 514 airline social media users confirmed that SMMA is a fundamental variable in strengthening engagement measurements (cognitive and emotional) and brand loyalty. Additionally, the study of Xiong et al. (2023) clarified that when visitors to a restaurant share food selfies, those who also engaged in ‘foodstagramming’ experience higher dining enjoyment. These results show that social norms play a crucial role in shaping the influence of food selfies on customer emotions.

On the other hand, several studies examined the negative aspects of tourism brand SMM strategies. Bigné et al. (2023) validated that restaurant brand posts containing negative user-generated content triggered negative emotional responses like sadness and contempt. In addition, fast-food restaurants have faced stigmatization and acquired controversial reputations. If consumers harbor contempt for the fast-food industry, providing brand feedback may temporarily alleviate anger but is unlikely to diminish long-term sentiments of contempt (Bigné et al., 2023).

The social identity theory is employed to understand how SMMA affects PEM through Instagram fast-food pages. The social identity theory suggests that individuals establish a sense of identity and self-esteem by being part of social groups, which include online brand communities. This can explain the positive relationship between SMMA and PEM toward brand content (Ibrahim, 2023; Tajfel, 1978). Drawing on this theoretical logic, customers who follow and engage with a brand's Instagram page develop a sense of belonging to a community with similar interests and values. As a result, this affects their PEM toward the SNS (Hazzam, 2021). In the context of SMM for restaurants, we predict that SMMA will improve happiness, joy, and satisfaction with the content of Instagram pages. Based on the above discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: SMMA of Instagram brand account positively influence the positive emotions experienced by followers of the account.

Instagram serves as an effective marketing and brand-building tool by displaying the brand's products or services in innovative and attractive ways (Argyris et al., 2020; Leaver et al., 2020). As a prominent platform dedicated to sharing photos and visual content, Instagram provides brands with a powerful tool to capture attention, retain viewer interest (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021), and foster loyalty (Attia et al., 2021). Brands on Instagram employ various marketing strategies, such as visually appealing images and design elements, to enhance their online content's visual appeal and attractiveness (Lee et al., 2021). These efforts strengthen customer-brand relationships and cultivate positive attitudes toward the brand (Khan, 2022).

The study by Simonetti and Bigne (2022) confirmed that restaurant customers exert greater cognitive effort to form opinions when confronted with negative valence reviews in social media content, particularly on platforms like TripAdvisor, compared to positive ones. Additionally, negative valence reviews were found to heighten uncertainty regarding the quality of the product or service. Several tourism scholars have researched the connection between SMM strategies and

the visual and exposure factors of tourism businesses. For instance, Jamshidi et al. (2023) demonstrated that enhanced destination information on social media significantly influences tourists' perceptions of coolness, encompassing qualities such as desirability, novelty, uniqueness, innovativeness, authenticity, and trendiness. In addition, Abbasi et al. (2023) noted that the aesthetically attractive, modern, and entertaining content generated by social media destinations enhances tourists' perception of visual appeal, contributing to a strong influence on decision-making processes. The current study applies the aesthetics-usability effect to provide a fresh perspective on the relationship between SMMA and PVA. The aesthetics-usability effect suggests that incorporating a successful design and carefully selected visual elements for SMMA of Instagram brand pages can enhance the excitement and a sense of pride and create a positive PVA (Lidwell et al., 2010). By leveraging entertaining, interactive, and personalized content on Instagram, such as humorous posts, promotions, special deals, and staying up-to-date with trends, a restaurant can demonstrate its relevance and aesthetic appeal to its followers (Kim et al., 2023). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: SMMA of Instagram brand account positively influence the perceived visual appeal experienced by followers of the account.

4.2 Perceived Creativity and Positive Emotions

Previous studies have affirmed that the creative features of websites and SNSs impact users' enjoyment and contribute to creating PEM (Hashemi et al., 2023). Poorly designed, unoriginal, and heavily imitative content reduces user interaction and diminishes the positive impression users have, ultimately lowering their overall experience and emotions (Xiang et al., 2016). For instance, a user might be searching for details about meals offered by a restaurant on SNSs. However, if users find no information about the restaurant's menu on its specific page and the content appears outdated, they may feel that the page does not meet their information needs, leading to a less positive impression (Hussain et al., 2023). Creative and original content enhances user interaction and fosters a positive perception, while unappealing and unoriginal content may hinder interaction and positive user emotion (Hussain et al., 2023; Rauwers et al., 2018). Casaló et al. (2021) emphasized that Instagram is a visual platform that focuses on engaging photos and videos and provides tools that allow companies to create visually rich, engaging, and creative content. Therefore, the Instagram brand's strategies to generate new and original ideas, whether unconventional or innovative, can create more appealing content (Leaver et al., 2020). This content grabs the audience's attention, making the brand more memorable and fostering positive feelings among them. In line with this rationale, this study suggests that an increase in the creativity of Instagram fast-food pages—manifested through the delivery of creative and novel content that captures the attention and interest of customers—will effectively enhance the PEM derived from Instagram fast-food content. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H4: The perceived creativity of the content on an Instagram brand account positively influences positive emotions experienced by followers of the account.

4.3 Perceived Visual Appeal and Positive Emotions

Instagram provides an engaging and positive experience through its modern and diverse visual design. The content strategically focuses on showcasing the brand's stories and daily updates, motivating followers to quickly interact with products or services, ultimately leading to increased profits and sales (Hazzam, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). Color harmony and content diversity make the brand's page easy to read and visually appealing. In addition, visual-based SNSs, such as Instagram, offer users tools like filters that can enhance the appearance of the content they upload to their profiles, making their posts more visually appealing (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021). The diversity in content, whether through images or videos, contributes to creating an integrated and exciting user experience, improving positive feelings toward the brand. Brands are dedicated to conveying positive and motivational messages, utilizing bright colors and inspiring storytelling images that enhance the attitudes and emotions of customers. Furthermore, Casaló et al. (2021) concluded that the PCR plays a vital role in improving customers' PEM. Similarly, the visual appeal of e-commerce platforms positively relates to perceived usefulness and perceived enjoyment. Therefore, incorporating visually appealing content into SMM efforts can create strong emotions and drive customer engagement and loyalty (Aljarah et al., 2022; Fetais et al., 2022). In essence, visual content on Instagram effectively expresses the brand, reaching a wider audience and fostering PEM towards it. Thus, this study posits the following hypotheses:

H5: The perceived visual appeal of the content on an Instagram brand account positively influences positive emotions experienced by followers of the account.

4.4 Positive Emotions and Brand Evangelism

Previous scholars identified that PEM could enhance brand evangelism of customers by fostering a sense of emotional attachment and loyalty (Kang et al., 2020). When customers experience PEM concerning a brand, they are more likely to engage in WOM communications and advocate for the brand to others (Aljarah et al., 2022). This can be especially effective when customers connect their PEM to personal values or identity. In the H&T industry, Sharma (2021) asserts that the more appealing the destination brand is, the more likely customers will talk about it, and the more likely brand evangelists persuade others in their SNS that the brand is unique and valuable. Therefore, brands can enhance customers' belief in their products or services and strive to transform customers into brand evangelists by creating PEM through marketing efforts such as interactive campaigns and personalized experiences (Kang et al., 2020). Based on these ideas, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: Positive emotions experienced by followers of an Instagram brand account positively influence brand evangelism.

4.5 The Mediation of Positive Emotions

The affective events theory has been applied to the field of marketing to understand how emotions play a crucial role in affecting consumer attitudes, preferences, and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). This theoretical framework provides insights into how emotional events, specifically PCR and PVA, lead to emotional reactions (PEM), influencing cognitive appraisals

and subsequent behaviors, such as brand evangelism. PCR represents how individuals perceive a brand's content as innovative and as an emotional event (Smith & Yang, 2004). Several studies demonstrate that the quality of brand content, particularly in the form of high-quality images and videos on Instagram, significantly influences its visibility to a broader audience (Kim et al., 2023; Leaver et al., 2020). The more creative and visually appealing the content, the greater the likelihood it will garner emotional reactions from the audience, enhancing the overall brand experience (Argyris et al., 2020). As a result, brands generating creative and visually aesthetic content can evoke PEM, such as joy and admiration (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). Additionally, PVA captures followers' attention and increases engagement (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). The study of Casaló et al. (2021) found that PCR significantly influences the PEM of Instagram fashion brand account followers. Moreover, the customer's PEM, such as happiness or excitement, is associated with satisfaction and pleasure, leading to increased customer loyalty and engagement (Hazzam, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2023). For instance, when customers have a positive experience with a company's product or service, they are more likely to return and recommend the company to others (Aljarah et al., 2022; Y. V. Chen, Wong, et al., 2024). This PEM also influences brand evangelism, which occurs when customers strongly associate with and actively promote a brand (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Osmanova et al., 2023). In line with the affective events theory, PEM drives a stronger consumer-brand relationship and decision-making (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). PEM, as emotional reactions, is triggered by events or experiences that are relevant and meaningful to the individual, and these emotions can lead to positive responses and behaviors toward the brand (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Drawing on the affective events theory to explain the relationship between PCR, PVA, PEM, and brand evangelism is logical, as we expect that customers' positive perceptions of PCR and PVA will evoke satisfaction and feelings. These positive emotional reactions (PEM) are anticipated to be pivotal in instigating brand evangelism. Therefore, incorporating PVA and PCR into marketing efforts can enhance customer PEM and drive brand evangelism. Thus, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H7: The relationship between perceived creativity and brand evangelism is mediated by positive emotions.

H8: The relationship between perceived visual appeal and brand evangelism is mediated by positive emotions.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Sample and Data Collection

This study aims to investigate the research hypotheses by analyzing the Instagram accounts of fast-food restaurants. The strategic focus on fast-food Instagram pages is grounded in several considerations. The emphasis of Instagram on visual content makes it an attractive platform for promoting and enhancing the aesthetic appeal of food. Numerous tourism sector studies confirm that Instagram is a powerful promotional platform for chefs, restaurant marketers, and influencers. It enables them to showcase creativity, share culinary experiences, and engage with a broad audience, ultimately improving consumer perceptions (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023; Lee et al., 2021; Lee & Tao, 2021). Additionally, brands can leverage high-quality photos and videos on Instagram

to attract customers, highlight new menu items, and build a positive brand image (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023).

As of January 2023, Instagram boasts over 143 million users in the US, positioning itself as the second-largest social network globally (Jo Dixon, 2023). Additionally, the food and beverage industry exhibits a notable average engagement rate of 1.45% on Instagram, surpassing Facebook's 0.74% and X's 1.17% (Mikolajczyk, 2023). The hashtag #food holds the 25th position among Instagram hashtags, with a staggering 380 million posts (Castillo, 2023). Given its visual orientation, high engagement rates, and predominantly youthful user base, Instagram emerges as a pertinent and effective platform for scrutinizing fast-food brands.

The research methodology aligns with established practices outlined in reputable journals (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021; Khan, 2022; Zollo et al., 2020). Using a non-probability convenience sampling technique, the study employed a questionnaire that included a seven-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was chosen for its effectiveness in garnering quantifiable data from large populations (Dauzón-Ledesma & Izquierdo, 2023). Targeting active followers of fast-food Instagram accounts aged 18 and above in the USA, participants were invited to provide feedback on various aspects, including brand engagement, ratings, reviews, and recommendations concerning the products and services of fast-food restaurants.

For data collection, SurveyMonkey was employed, and a self-administered online questionnaire was distributed via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in April 2023. In hospitality research, MTurk is frequently used for data gathering and hypothesis testing. Despite monetary compensation being a primary motivator for MTurk participation, individuals tend to provide socially desirable responses, particularly in student samples and notably in the USA (Aguinis et al., 2021). To ensure the study's success, it was imperative to identify Instagram users who actively engage with fast-food restaurant content in the United States. This specifically targeted those who use Instagram to follow and interact with SMMA. Drawing from prior research in SMMA (Yadav & Rahman, 2018; Zollo et al., 2020), participants were chosen based on their affirmative responses to questions assessing their involvement with fast-food restaurant content on Instagram. The screening criteria were adjusted in line with this empirical study to ensure that respondents met the following requirements:

1. Being at least 18 years old and actively using Instagram.
2. Following and actively engaging with multiple fast-food restaurant Instagram pages, including participating on brand pages, rating and recommending, and writing reviews.
3. Having visited a fast-food restaurant within one month before data collection.

Only participants responding appropriately to the initial screening questions were eligible to proceed with the remaining questionnaire sections. Upon eligibility, participants were presented with a drop-down list featuring five popular fast-food chains (Starbucks, McDonald's, Dunkin', Burger King, and Chick-fil-A) and were instructed to select one. Alternatively, they could enter another brand's name in a designated textbox. These five fast-food chains were selected for the drop-down list based on their popularity, as indicated in the "Best fast-food Chains Instagram Fan

Pages" publication by How to Cook Recipes (Megan, 2022). Only participants who identified as fans of fast-food Instagram pages were invited to complete the questionnaire.

Data were gathered from MTurk, focusing on participants with a minimum of 95% Human Intelligence to guarantee the quality of the collected data (Ali et al., 2021). Additionally, providing more detailed instructions when explaining the survey is crucial in enhancing respondents' judgment of the requester's responsibility and reliability on MTurk (Aguinis et al., 2021). Depending on the situation, a minimum of two such checks should be employed to address the threat posed by MTurker inattention (Aguinis et al., 2021). Hence, the survey incorporated two attention-check questions, following the methodology outlined by Aljarah et al. (2022). Any responses that did not pass the attention checks were subsequently removed from the dataset. Consequently, 403 valid responses remained in the final dataset out of the total 544 collected responses. The exclusion of 141 responses was attributed to failing attention checks and not matching the screening questions. Therefore, these 403 valid responses were considered usable for this research study.

5.2 Measures

In this study, all the items are measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The SMMA scale, initially developed by Kim and Ko (2012), comprises 11 items distributed across five components: entertainment, customization, interaction, WOM, and trendiness. However, previous studies have approached the measurement scale of SMMA either as a first-order factor (Chen & Lin, 2018; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023; Kim & Ko, 2012; Zollo et al., 2020) or as a second-order factor (Yadav & Rahman, 2017, 2018). In this study, we performed a CFA on the second-order factor by specifying SMMA as a second-order construct, with five dimensions considered as the first-order factor. However, this model did not converge. On the other hand, modeling SMMA as a first-order factor converged, including adequate goodness of fit indices. Also, an EFA was conducted on the SMMA items, revealing a one-factor structure with an eigenvalue higher than one. Overall, our analysis provides empirical support for the chosen measurement model, which is consistent with recent SMM studies (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021; Zollo et al., 2020).

We conducted an evaluation using analysis of variance (ANOVA), as well as intraclass correlations ICC (1) and ICC (2), to verify substantial differences between groups and consistent agreement within groups. This assessment aimed to establish the appropriateness of aggregating the data (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Specifically, data consolidation is considered suitable if the ANOVA yields a significant F-statistic, ICC(1) is higher than .30 (Bliese, 2000), and ICC(2) is higher than .70 (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). For the SMMA scale, the intraclass correlation values were adequate, indicating significant between-group differences, as follows: ($\alpha = .95$; ICC (1) = .69, ICC (2) = .95, and ANOVA $F = 24.32$, $p < .001$). The PCR Scale comprises three items adapted from Casaló et al. (2021) and Andrews and Smith (1996) ($\alpha = .89$; ICC (1) = .73, ICC (2) = .89, and ANOVA $F = 9.25$, $p < .001$). A6-item scale, adopted from Bagozzi et al. (2016), was utilized to measure PEM ($\alpha = .90$; ICC (1) = .61, ICC (2) = .90, and ANOVA $F = 10.81$, $p < .001$). PVA is assessed using a 3-item scale adopted by Liu et al. (2013) and Loiacono et al. (2007) ($\alpha = .79$; ICC (1) = .54, ICC (2) = .78, and ANOVA $F = 4.79$, $p < .001$). Brand evangelism is measured with a 5-

item scale adopted from Matzler et al. (2007) ($\alpha = .90$; ICC (1) = .68, ICC (2) = .89, and ANOVA $F = 10.26$, $p < .001$).

6 Results

6.1 Demographics

Most respondents were male (55.3%), and more than half (68.4%) were in the 18 to 30 age range. A significant portion of respondents were highly educated, holding an undergraduate degree (72.3%), and 13.2% had a master's degree. In terms of marital status, 22.0% were single, and 46.8% were married. Regarding Instagram usage, most respondents spent 1 to 5 hours weekly on the platform (56.9%), while some used Instagram for more than 5 hours per week. Moreover, 72.1% of the respondents were fans of two to five fast-food restaurant brands on Instagram. In terms of specific brand profiles, 27.7% of the respondents followed Starbucks, 24.2% were followers of McDonald's, 17.2% followed Burger King, and 15.7% followed other brands. Table 2 highlights the characteristics of the participants in this study.

Table 2. Demographics of participants

Variables	Variation	Count	Percentage
Gender	Female	222	55.3%
	Male	175	43.5%
	Prefer not to say	6	1.2%
Age	18-30 years old	276	68.4%
	31-40 years old	105	26.1%
	More than 41 years old	22	5.5%
Educational level	Undergraduate degree	291	72.3%
	Master's Degree	53	13.2%
	High School Graduate	40	10.0%
	Less than High School	19	4.7%
Marital Status	Single	89	22.0%
	married	189	46.8%
	Divorced	56	13.9 %
	prefer not to say	69	17.1%
Instagram Usage Hours per week	Less than 1 hour	9	40.8%
	Between 1 and 5 hours	229	56.9%
	More than 5 hours	165	40.8%
Fast-Food Brand Profile	Starbucks	111	27.7%
	McDonald's	98	24.2%
	Burger King	69	17.2%
	Chick-fil-A	62	15.3%
	Other Brands	63	15.7%

6.2 Validity, Reliability, and Common Method Bias

The result of the confirmatory factor analysis indicates that the measurement model exhibits good fit indices ($\chi^2=2.27 < 3.00$; CFI = .95>.90; NFI = .93 >.90; RMSEA = .05 < .08), suggesting its appropriateness for the data. Construct reliability was confirmed using the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2010) with a value higher than .50. Factor loadings for all items are mostly above .60, indicating their alignment with the intended construct. The item loadings ranged from .61 to .96. As a rule of thumb, factor loading values should be at least .50 and ideally .70 or higher, with all factors loading statistically significant (Hair et al., 2010). Two items were excluded during CFA due to factor loadings falling below the acceptable threshold of .5 (See Table 3). As demonstrated in Table 3, Cronbach's alpha values varied from .79 to .95, indicating high reliability. The results for discriminant validity (see Table 4) also exhibited good results, with composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values above .50 and most off-diagonal elements in the matrix being statistically significant. This supports the conclusion that the variables measure distinct constructs and are not highly correlated.

Table 3: Reliability Measures

Variable	Item	Loading	Cronbach's
SMMA's			.95
	SMMA1	.91	
	SMMA2	.76	
	*SMMA3	-	
	SMMA4	.91	
	SMMA5	.89	
	SMMA6	.73	
	SMMA7	.86	
	SMMA8	.73	
	SMMA9	.96	
	SMMA10	.87	
	SMMA11	.74	
Perceived creativity			.89
	PCR1	.83	
	PCR2	.78	
	PCR3	.97	
Perceived visual appeal			.79
	PVA1	.64	
	PVA2	.78	
	PVA3	.85	
Positive emotions			.90
	PEM1	.60	
	PEM2	.82	
	PEM3	.74	
	PEM4	.83	
	PEM5	.77	
	PEM6	.87	

Brand evangelism			.90
	BEVN1	.96	
	BEVN2	.70	
	BEVN3	.85	
	BEVN4	.79	
	*BEVN5	-	

Note: * item removed.

Each construct's AVE, factor loadings, and CR values indicate the adequateness of the instrument and convergent validity. The cutoff value Hair et al. (2010) recommended was utilized for assessment in this study. Various methods were employed to address the potential common method bias (CMB) arising from data collected from a single source (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Harman's one-factor test was initially executed by consolidating all the study constructs into a single factor. The analysis disclosed that an unrotated single factor explained only 42.1% of the variance, below the 50% threshold. Thus, the results showed that CMB was not a significant concern. Second, the common latent factor (CLF) approach was employed. This involves introducing an unobserved latent factor that manifests in all observed indicators within the initial measurement model. The standardized loadings obtained under this CLF model were then compared to those from a model without the CLF. The observed differences between the two sets of standardized loadings fell below the established cutoff criterion of .20, suggesting that CMB is unlikely to significantly impact our findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Consequently, this indicates that CMB was not a significant issue in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

	CR	AVE	PVA	PEM	BEVN	SMMA	PCR
PVA	.804	.581	.762				
PEM	.900	.603	.291***	.776			
BEVN	.898	.691	.209***	.302***	.831		
SMMA	.959	.704	.164**	.220***	.218***	.839	
PCR	.896	.744	.124*	.207***	.346***	.153**	.862

Note: *P ≤ 0.05, **P ≤ 0.01, ***P ≤ 0.001.

Note: Numbers in bold on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted

6.3 Hypothesis testing

The study employed an AMOS SEM software program to examine the hypotheses. The model fit was considered acceptable, as indicated by the goodness of fit indicators ($\chi^2=2.28 < 3.00$; CFI = .95 > .90; NFI = .92 > .90; RMSEA = .05 < .08), suggesting a good fit for the hypothesized structural model (Hu & Bentler, 1999). SEM was utilized to examine the hypotheses, as displayed in Table 5 and Table 6. Table 5 exhibits the results of testing six hypotheses about the relationships among the variables SMMA, PCR, PEM, PVA, and brand evangelism. The findings support hypotheses 1 and 2 (H1 and H2), indicating a significant relationship between SMMA and PCR ($\beta=.11$; p

<.01) and between SMMA and PEM ($\beta=.18$; $p <.01$). Similarly, hypothesis 3 (H3) was also supported, signifying a significant relationship between SMMA and PVA ($\beta=.16$; $p <.01$).

Table 5. Hypotheses Results

	Relationship		β	S.E	p	Result
H ₁	SMMA	PCR	.11	.0369	.0031**	Accepted
H ₂	SMMA	PEM	.18	.0612	.0022**	Accepted
H ₃	SMMA	PVA	.16	.0533	.0022**	Accepted
H ₄	PCR	PEM	.25	.0856	.0026**	Accepted
H ₅	PVA	PEM	.29	.0691	***	Accepted
H ₆	PEM	BEVN	.14	.0368	***	Accepted
(x ² =2.28 < 3.00; CFI = .95 > .90; NFI = .92 > .90; RMSEA = .05 < .08; PClose = .05 > .05)						

Note: * $P \leq 0.05$, ** $P \leq 0.01$, *** $P \leq 0.001$, Confidence interval: CI

Table 6. mediation analysis

Relationship	Direct relationship		Indirect relationship		Result
	β		β	CI Low CI High	
H8: PVA- PEM-BEVN	.10		.05	.027 .080	Accepted
H7: PCR- PEM -BEVN	.32		.05	.023 .088	Accepted

Note: Confidence interval: CI

Hypotheses 4 and 5 receive support (H4: $\beta=.25$; $p <.01$; H5: $\beta=.29$; $p <.001$), implying that PCR and PVA significantly and positively affect PEM. Hypothesis 6 also gains support, revealing a significant relationship between PEM and brand evangelism ($\beta=.14$; $p <.001$). The mediation hypotheses were examined using "PROCESS" (Version 3.3) developed by Hayes (2013). The results from Model 1 indicate a significant positive impact of PVA and PCR on brand evangelism ($\beta =.10$, $p < .05$; $\beta =.32$, $p <.001$), respectively. In Model 2, PEM significantly influences brand evangelism ($\beta =.29$, $p <.001$). Additionally, the results illustrate the examined indirect relationship between PVA and brand evangelism through PEM ($\beta =.05$, $p <.001$). A bootstrapped analysis confirms that the indirect effect estimate is statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval [.027,.080]. This implies that PEM partially mediates the influence of PVA on brand evangelism, thereby supporting Hypothesis 8. Furthermore, the findings in Table 6 indicate a significant and partial indirect relationship between PCR and brand evangelism through PEM ($\beta =.05$, $p <.001$, CI [.023, .088]), providing support for Hypothesis 7. The 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals were assessed using a sample of 5,000 (Preacher et al., 2007).

6.4 General Discussion

SMM strategies have become integral to a brand's marketing strategy, driven by the rapid shifts in consumer behaviors and intense competition within the fast-food industry (Ibrahim et al., 2024). The SMMA model has gained increased interest from marketing scholars and experts recently (Khan, 2022). Despite this, limited studies have delved into the realm of SMMA for fast-food restaurants. Drawing upon the SOR model and theories such as mere exposure, aesthetics-usability, affective events, and social identity, this research focuses on fast-food restaurants in the USA. This study aims to construct an integrated theoretical framework that examines how external

stimuli in the form of SMMA impact customers' internal responses (PCR, PVA, and PEM). These internal responses, in turn, influence subsequent customer behaviors, specifically brand evangelism, within fast-food restaurant settings. This study seeks to bridge gaps in previous H&T marketing literature by analyzing data collected from Instagram users who follow fast-food brands on Instagram.

Firstly, our study unveils a positive and significant impact of SMMA on PCR. This result is consistent with the principle of the mere exposure effect (Zajonc, 1968) and is in line with the earlier study by Casaló et al. (2021), which indicates that brand publications on fashion Instagram pages play a critical role in shaping PCR. This connection can be implicitly linked to the mere exposure effect, suggesting that frequent exposure to innovative content through SMMA generates a cognitive fluency effect, facilitating easier processing and enhancing creativity (Ananda et al., 2019; Palumbo et al., 2021). In addition, various interactive features, including sharing stories, mentions, tags, communications tools, and hashtags, enhance customers' self-perceived creativity. These features allow users to tap into the creativity of others and foster a sense of community around the fast-food business's products or services (Hervet & Guitart, 2022; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). The positive relationship between SMMA and PCR suggests that companies engaging in SMM efforts can enhance customers' perception of creativity in marketing campaigns (Casaló et al., 2021).

Second, the results indicate a positive relationship between SMMA and PEM, displaying a moderate effect size. This result aligns with prior studies in the H&T context, emphasizing the critical role of SMM tools in enhancing customer engagement and fostering positive attitudes and emotions toward SMM (Aljarah et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Popy & Bappy, 2022). Our study's results contribute to the social identity theory, shedding new light on the impact of SMMA on customers' PEM (Torres et al., 2018). Specifically, Hanaysha (2022) postulated that marketing strategies employed by fast-food social media pages, such as incorporating the latest food trends or collaborating with popular influencers, play a vital role in attracting customers who identify as "in-the-know" and "trend-setters". This approach suggests that increased exposure to SMMA correlates with a higher likelihood of developing PEM toward the Instagram page.

Third, the positive effect of SMMA on PVA is supported, corroborating earlier findings (Abbasi et al., 2023; Hashemi et al., 2023). For instance, a study by Berger and Milkman (2012) obtained that visually appealing social media posts, including creative and engaging visuals (images and videos), were more likely to be shared than non-visually appealing ones. As a result, SMM emerges as a potent tool for improving consumers' PVA of a product or service. This implies that SMM campaigns that evoke customers' emotions can increase their positive feelings toward the company's products or services (Leung et al., 2022; Xiong et al., 2023). Additionally, Munar and Jacobsen (2014) found that visual content, encompassing pictures, stories, and short videos, posted on SNSs significantly influences users' attitudes toward the content and willingness to share it. The results of this current study align with the aesthetics-usability effect, suggesting that visually appealing and entertaining content can swiftly capture customers' attention on a cognitive level, thereby increasing the likelihood of them processing the information conveyed within the post (Akpınar & Berger, 2017).

Fourth, regarding the antecedents of PEM, the results underscore that PCR significantly contributes to PEM (Casaló et al., 2021; Rauwers et al., 2018). This aligns with an empirical study by Chu et al. (2024), indicating that PCR is pivotal in fostering viral behavioral intentions and positive authenticity on TikTok. In this context, consumers tend to gravitate towards novel and innovative content in TikTok videos, shaping their perception of its authenticity. This, in turn, creates a positive emotional feeling, thereby fostering an intention to share on TikTok. Moreover, the findings of this study align with previous research, highlighting that creative (as opposed to traditional) media advertisement can trigger customers' affective and cognitive-behavioral responses (Rauwers et al., 2018). When the Instagram pages of fast-food brands generate new ideas and enhance the capacity to produce aesthetically pleasing content, these efforts can evoke PEM, encompassing emotions such as joy, excitement, and surprise (Leung et al., 2022; Morrison et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023).

Fifth, the study demonstrates that PVA toward Instagram fast-food pages contributes to heightened emotions and positive feelings. This is consistent with earlier tourism studies, confirming that PVA in online environments is pivotal for promoting PEM and influencing tourist behavior (Perez-Vega et al., 2018). The findings indicate that SMMA on Instagram fast food pages can elicit vibrant sensory experiences, fostering positive associations (Hanaysha, 2022; Leaver et al., 2020). The heightened positive attitude among customers, generated by visually appealing fast-food images, can trigger these favorable connections, ultimately inducing happiness and comfort (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023).

Sixth, the results confirm that PEM positively impacts brand evangelism. In a broader context, these novel findings align with studies conducted by Harrigan et al. (2020) and Sharma (2021), demonstrating that customers who are cognitively and emotionally linked with social media tourism brands tend to convince others to engage with the same brand and generate positive recommendations. Furthermore, the study of Nkoulou Mvondo et al. (2022) supports the idea that PEM, representing a psychological inclination toward establishing a long-term relationship, is crucial in fostering brand evangelism. Nonetheless, the results of the current study specifically unveil the direct influence of PEM on brand evangelism, emphasizing the significance of cultivating positive feelings and enhancing engagement with restaurant pages to stimulate pro-brand behaviors, including evangelism and advocacy (Aljarah et al., 2022; Osmanova et al., 2023).

Finally, the findings confirm a significant indirect relation between PCR, PVA, and brand evangelism via a mediating role of PEM. This suggests that the ability to evoke PEM through PCR and visually appealing content is crucial in driving brand evangelism among users on fast-food Instagram pages. This logic is consistent with existing studies in H&T literature that identify PEM as a driver of brand evangelism and an antecedent of positive attitudes toward SNSs (Nkoulou Mvondo et al., 2022; Sharma, 2021). In this regard, it appears that when users feel positive about creative and visually attractive content on SNSs, it results, to a large extent, from the combination of several pro-brand behaviors, such as brand evangelism via creating positive feelings toward the brand (Argyris et al., 2020; Leaver et al., 2020). Specifically, it can also be argued that PEM, resulting from PVA and PCR toward Instagram, can motivate users to promote fast-food content through their Instagram profiles, actively recommend it to others, and become brand advocates (Osmanova et al., 2023). The nature of Instagram's visual and interactive features fosters creative thinking and encourages the sharing of original content (Kim et al., 2023; Leaver et al., 2020). As

a result, incorporating visual appeal and creativity into Instagram brand content creates images capable of conveying emotions and feelings, ultimately leading to brand evangelism.

7 Theoretical and Managerial Implications and Limitations of the Study

7.1 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to H&T literature by empirically examining the connection between SMMA and customers' internal responses (PCR, PEM, and PVA) within the fast-food industry, specifically utilizing Instagram as the focus platform. Firstly, it elucidates that SMMA on Instagram stimulate followers to perceive the brand content as creative and aesthetic, enhancing their PEM and ultimately leading to a brand evangelism response. Previous H&T research has mainly focused on studying the impact of SMMA on various customer-brand relationships and actual brand behavior, such as self-connection, cognitive engagement, brand loyalty, behavior intention, and online brand community identification (Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2023; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023; Liu et al., 2022). However, these studies have often overlooked the crucial linkage between SMMA and customer internal responses in the H&T and fast-food industry. In the context of SMMA, a limited number of studies have employed the SMMA model in restaurant social media studies, and no research on fast-food customer behaviors has been conducted with the inclusion of customer internal responses (PCR, PVA, PEM) as consequences of SMMA. This study addresses recent calls to examine various consequences of SMMA, such as PCR, PVA, and PEM (Ibrahim, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2023). Additionally, the current study is one of the first to examine the role of SMMA as drivers of customer internal responses (PCR, PVA, PEM) in the Instagram fast-food context. This research significantly contributes to enriching our understanding of the driving forces behind consumers' internal states from the perspectives of SMMA on Instagram fast-food pages.

Second, the study sheds light on the explanatory power of the SOR framework in the fast-food context. Theoretically, the present research develops a model within the context of SMM tourism to understand the relationship between SMMA stimuli and customer internal response, such as PVA, PCR, and PEM, by explaining the stimulus-organism connection. Several studies have examined the SOR model as a theoretical foundation to investigate how SMMA influences consumer-brand relationships in the H&T context. For instance, Yadav and Rahman (2018) integrated schema theory, equity theory, and social exchange theory with the SOR framework to examine the SMMA as drivers of loyalty and customer equity components in an e-commerce context. Additionally, Mishra (2021) demonstrated that the SOR model can be integrated into the banking context with the use and gratifications theory, establishing a significant correlation between SMMA and customer's social interaction propensity and online engagement. Moreover, the SOR model has been integrated with attribution theory to understand how SMMA can improve the value co-creation intentions of fashion brand consumers (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Consequently, our study responds to recent demands in SMM tourism by developing a model for SMMA with different theories, concepts, drivers, techniques, and contexts (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021). Furthermore, theories such as mere exposure, aesthetics-usability, and affective events have been limitedly utilized within the marketing hospitality field. To the best of our knowledge, the current study is the first to integrate the SOR model with mere exposure, aesthetics-usability, affective events, and social identity theories in the context of SMM in H&T research.

Third, the result of this study empirically supports the mere exposure effect by asserting a significant connection between SMMA and PCR in the tourism social media context. While numerous studies explored this effect in tourism and marketing studies, a limited number of scholars examined the impact of SMM tools on engagement behaviors through the lens of mere exposure effect (Palumbo et al., 2021; Stylidis, 2022). These studies suggest that the mere exposure effect provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding how consumers perceive exposure to marketing stimuli, such as SMMA of the brand, and how it can amplify the likelihood of developing positive attitudes and creative content (Ananda et al., 2019; Hervet & Guitart, 2022; Stylidis, 2022). This study tests the relationship between SMMA and PCR, applying the mere exposure effect to introduce a new perspective in the context of fast-food Instagram.

Fourth, the study extends the aesthetics-usability effect to SNS and underscores the significance of the aesthetic design of SNS content in the fast-food context in influencing user perceptions and attitudes. According to this effect, users perceive aesthetically pleasing designs as more usable and functional, resulting in positive attitudes towards the promoted fast-food product or service (Lidwell et al., 2010). Therefore, SMMA can be more impactful in enhancing PVA when presented in a visually appealing manner. While previous H&T research has typically employed theories such as generation theory and use gratifications theory (Ibrahim, 2023; Liu et al., 2022) to understand consumer behavior towards SMMA, our study makes a distinct contribution to SMM in the fast-food setting by drawing on the aesthetics-usability effect perspectives. Moreover, we add to the burgeoning research on PVA in the context of SMM in the H&T industry. This study is one of the first to investigate PVA as a consequence of SMMA by extending the aesthetics-usability effect to the SMM tourism context. The study addresses the call for more investigation into how SMMA, particularly those carried out by fast-food pages, significantly enhances PVA (Aljarah et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023).

Fifth, this study underscores the significance of the social identity theory by establishing that SMMA are significantly correlated with customers' PEM in the fast-food industry. Previous research has employed various theories to comprehend how SMMA enhances emotional attributes, fosters positive customer attitudes, and increases intention toward the brand. For instance, Hanaysha (2022) posited that SMMA of fast-food restaurants are significantly linked to purchase intention through the lens of the theory of reasoned action. Aligned with the social exchange theory, the study by Cheung et al. (2021) postulated that eWOM, customization, and entertainment are influential factors in improving customers' intention to participate in the ongoing value co-creation process with technology products. The current study provides a unique perspective and novel contribution to understanding the nature of SMM actions that create positive feelings towards the content of the fast-food Instagram pages.

Finally, the study results show that PCR and PVA positively affect PEM. While most studies have primarily focused on identifying various antecedents of PEM, such as online shopping values and PCR (Al Nawas et al., 2021; Casaló et al., 2021), several scholars have suggested that other variables can be explored as drivers of PEM (Casaló et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021). The study tests the interrelationships between customers' internal responses. Note that internal response variables, like PVA, PCR, and PEM, are established and tested independently in previous H&T studies. This study explores their interrelationships in an incorporated model. To overcome

these limitations, the present study investigates the role of PVA and PCR as determinants of PEM and contributes to the existing body of SMM literature in the fast-food industry. Finally, this paper brings the affective events theory into the study of the relationship between PVA, PCR, and brand evangelism, exploring the mediating role of PEM. This expansion contributes to the theoretical framework in the field of social media tourism (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). By incorporating PEM as a mediator and integrating the affective events theory into tourism behavior studies, our study explores the mediating role of PEM, a factor not previously considered in the existing H&T research (Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022).

7.2 Managerial Implications:

The study provides several implications for marketing practitioners using Instagram effectively to stimulate PEM and brand evangelism in the fast-food industry. The findings suggest that managers creating SMMAAs need to ensure that the fast-food brand content is perceived as creative and visually appealing to trigger followers' PEM. This can be achieved using various functions and tools provided by Instagram.

Firstly, marketing managers can leverage the editing function of Instagram, including new and trendy filters, to enhance the PCR and PVA of their food images. This might involve incorporating text to reveal ingredients/nutritional information, highlighting promotions and discounts with attractive font and colors, and using branded and general fast-food hashtags. Managers can track their followers' responses by measuring the number of likes, shares, hashtags, and comments on these creative and visually appealing photos.

Secondly, marketing managers can leverage the powerful video editing tools available on Instagram to create compelling stories and Reels (video uploads on Instagram) that are creative and visually appealing to their followers. They may utilize the story feature of Instagram to showcase real-time food preparation, enjoyable employee activities, and behind-the-scenes glimpses, and introduce new offerings or highlight discounts or promotions. These videos could incorporate entertaining quizzes and polls that resonate positively with fast-food Instagram users, fostering interactivity and PEM toward the brand. Additionally, the visual appeal can be enhanced by incorporating trendy music or songs provided by Instagram and other features. This can evoke positive reactions, improve shareability, and broaden the content's reach to a wider audience. The effectiveness of these SMMAAs can be assessed by examining the number of views and interactions with the content, including the number of likes, shares, and participants in quizzes and polls.

Thirdly, marketing managers can leverage the augmented reality features available on Instagram stories to enhance their posts' PVA and PCR. This will provide an interactive experience for their followers, generate positive reactions, and support loyal users in sharing engaging content with their friends and family. Finally, fast-food chains may take advantage of Instagram image-based social networks and short videos on stories and reels by encouraging their followers to share their photos or videos showcasing their experiences with the fast-food brand, including the best offers or new meal trials. This approach can enhance the PCR on the platform and introduce new ideas that followers generate. Furthermore, these activities support the users' identification with the fast-food brand, building PEM, which can ultimately lead to brand evangelism. The effectiveness of

these activities can be measured by tracking the brand mentions and the volume of user-generated content of the fast-food brands.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

Firstly, this research is confined to the fast-food industry in the USA, limiting the generalizability to other H&T sectors, such as food influencers, hotels, beaches, and travel agencies, which may have different applications of SMMA, including varying content attributes. Therefore, future studies could test the model in other H&T settings, including customers from various countries and cultures. Secondly, the study solely focused on Instagram, presenting features and characteristics for content attributes that differ substantially from other SNSs. Additionally, Instagram users may have specific lifestyle and psychographic criteria that may not align with users on other SNSs. Hence, future studies should investigate how SMMA and content attributes influence PEM and brand evangelism on other SNSs, such as Snapchat, X, and TikTok. Thirdly, using convenience sampling may introduce selection bias and restrict the generalizability of the study findings. Therefore, future studies might contemplate employing a random sampling technique to augment the representativeness of the results. Additionally, as a fourth consideration, despite implementing participant quality control measures and adhering to best practice recommendations to address validity threats, it is worth noting that our study collected data through the crowdsourcing platform MTurk. This may raise concerns about the quality of responses, given that financial incentives could influence participants. Thus, future research may use multiple data collection platforms to diversify the sample and improve the generalizability of the findings. Fifthly, the study primarily examined the effect of SMMA on PCR, PVA, PEM, and brand evangelism. In the future, it is crucial to explore the impacts of SMMA on additional aspects of customer–brand relationships, such as brand inspiration, online engagement behavior, brand passion, brand defense, brand advocacy, brand fidelity, continuance intention, and positive attitude. In addition, future studies can examine PCR, PVA, and PEM in different contexts, such as food vloggers or travel influencers, or in different SNSs, such as YouTube and TikTok. Also, future studies can explore several antecedents of brand evangelism in travel and tourism settings, such as brand image, curiosity, online engagement, inspiration, and content quality.

Sixthly, the study relied on a cross-sectional survey method to collect the data and explore the relationships between the constructs of the proposed model at one point, limiting our understanding of the changes in PEM and brand evangelism that may occur by exposing followers to SMMA. Future research may use longitudinal research design to provide new insights into the customer's internal response changes by SMM stimuli over a period of time. Finally, examining SMMA through the lens of a single, convergent first-order factor, as outlined in the Kim and Ko (2012) model, yields valuable insights. Nevertheless, relying solely on this aggregated measure poses a risk of neglecting the distinctive traits of individual SMM components. Such an approach might oversimplify the intricate dynamics within SMMA, potentially impeding a comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions. To overcome this limitation, future research could draw inspiration from Yadav and Rahman (2017, 2018) alternative methodology, which involves analyzing SMMA as a double-reflective higher-order construct. Furthermore, conducting comparative analyses between Kim and Ko (2012) and Yadav and Rahman (2017) studies in future

research could suggest beneficial insights into the merits and drawbacks of different modeling approaches, contributing significantly to the advancement of SMMA research.

7.4 Conclusion

Our study illuminates the underlying mechanisms transforming SMMAAs into brand evangelism on Instagram fast-food pages. While earlier studies have investigated the influence of SMMAAs on customers' internal responses, further investigation into the content attributes that evoke PEM and brand evangelism on fast-food Instagram pages is needed. This study aims to enhance our understanding of how SMMAAs influence customers' PEM, PCR, and PVA of fast-food brand activities on Instagram. Additionally, this study examines how PEM develops brand evangelism and mediates the relationships between PCR, PVA, and brand evangelism. Grounded in the SOR model, the mere exposure, aesthetic-usability, affective events theory, and social identity theories, the results reveal that the customers' exposure to creative and visually appealing SMMAAs stimulate internal responses, including PCR and PVA, which, in turn, evoke PEM. Furthermore, these organismic components and PEM contribute to developing brand evangelism as a response. The findings contribute to the SMM literature in the fast-food industry, emphasizing the critical role of content attributes in leveraging SMMAAs on Instagram, triggering PEM, and transforming followers into evangelistic customers.

8 Reference

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