

DRIVING DIGITAL PURCHASES: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING SHAPES CONSUMER BUYING INTENTION THROUGH BRAND TRUST

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20322275>

Received	Accepted	Published
11 March 2026	21 April 2026	21 May 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention in the context of Pakistan's fashion and apparel e-commerce industry, with brand trust as a mediating variable. The research investigates key dimensions of social media marketing, including entertainment, interaction, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), customization, and trendiness, and their influence on consumer purchase intention. A quantitative research design was adopted, and data were collected from active social media users with online shopping experience. The findings reveal that social media marketing significantly and positively influences consumer purchase intention. Among all dimensions, e-WOM emerged as the most influential factor, highlighting the importance of online reviews and consumer-generated content in shaping purchasing decisions. Furthermore, brand trust was found to significantly mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, confirming its critical role in reducing uncertainty and enhancing consumer confidence. The study contributes to existing literature and provides practical implications for digital marketers and businesses.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Consumer Purchase Intention; Brand Trust; e-WOM; Digital Marketing; Pakistan; Fashion Industry

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has transformed from a communication tool into a powerful marketing platform that significantly influences consumer behavior and purchase decisions. Businesses increasingly rely on social media marketing to reach, engage, and persuade consumers through interactive and personalized content delivered via platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms enable firms to build brand awareness, enhance customer

engagement, and stimulate purchase intention in highly competitive digital environments. Prior research highlights that social media marketing activities positively influence consumer attitudes, trust, and buying behavior by providing entertaining, informative, and socially interactive content (Moslehpour et al., 2022; Qiao & Sun, 2024).

In emerging markets such as Pakistan, the rapid growth of internet penetration and e-commerce adoption has intensified the importance of social

media as a marketing channel. Consumers increasingly rely on online reviews, influencer recommendations, and personalized advertisements before making purchase decisions. However, the effectiveness of social media marketing depends on multiple dimensions, including entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which collectively shape consumer purchase intention (Prasad et al., 2023). Moreover, brand trust plays a crucial mediating role in reducing perceived risk and strengthening consumer confidence in online purchasing decisions (Pasha et al., 2024). Therefore, this study investigates how social media marketing influences consumer purchase intention through the mediating role of brand trust.

Problem Statement

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies and social networking platforms has significantly transformed contemporary marketing practices and consumer behavior. Social media marketing has emerged as an influential strategic tool that enables businesses to interact directly with consumers, promote products and services, and influence purchasing decisions. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become integral components of marketing communication strategies because they provide organizations with opportunities to create interactive, personalized, and engaging content (Alalwan, 2020). Businesses increasingly rely on social media marketing to enhance customer engagement, improve brand awareness, and stimulate purchase intention in highly competitive digital markets.

Recent studies indicate that social media marketing activities such as entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) significantly affect consumer attitudes and buying behavior (Seo & Park, 2021; Sanny et al., 2020). Consumers actively engage with social media platforms to obtain product information, evaluate customer reviews, and seek recommendations before making purchasing decisions. Consequently, social media marketing has become

a powerful mechanism for influencing consumer purchase intention and building long-term customer relationships (Moslehpour et al., 2022). Despite the growing significance of social media marketing, empirical findings regarding its influence on consumer purchase intention remain inconsistent across different contexts and industries. Several studies have reported that social media marketing positively influences purchase intention through customer engagement and trust development (Wibowo et al., 2021). However, other studies suggest that the effectiveness of social media marketing depends on factors such as brand credibility, cultural values, and consumer trust (Gaber et al., 2021). Furthermore, much of the existing literature has focused on developed economies, while limited research has explored these relationships in emerging economies such as Pakistan, where digital consumer behavior and social media usage are rapidly evolving.

In Pakistan, the increasing use of smartphones, internet accessibility, and e-commerce platforms has accelerated the adoption of social media marketing among businesses, particularly in the fashion, retail, and online shopping sectors. Organizations are investing substantial resources in digital marketing campaigns to influence consumers' buying intentions. However, many businesses still lack a comprehensive understanding of which dimensions of social media marketing most effectively drive purchase intention among Pakistani consumers. In addition, the mediating role of brand trust in strengthening the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention has received limited scholarly attention in the local context.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of social media marketing dimensions, including entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and electronic word-of-mouth, on consumer purchase intention. The study further examines the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to contemporary marketing

literature and provide practical insights for digital marketers, entrepreneurs, and organizations operating in emerging digital economies.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the effect of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention.
2. To analyze the influence of entertainment on consumer purchase intention.
3. To investigate the effect of interaction on consumer purchase intention.
4. To examine the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on consumer purchase intention.
5. To determine the influence of customization and trendiness on consumer purchase intention.
6. To evaluate the mediating role of brand trust between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention?
2. How does entertainment influence consumer purchase intention?
3. What is the relationship between interaction and consumer purchase intention?
4. How does electronic word-of-mouth affect consumer purchase intention?
5. To what extent do customization and trendiness influence consumer purchase intention?
6. Does brand trust mediate the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention?

Literature Review

Social media marketing has emerged as a powerful digital strategy that enables firms to communicate directly with consumers through interactive, engaging, and personalized content. In the current digital era, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play a central role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing

buying decisions (Zafar & Anees (2026). Recent empirical studies confirm that social media marketing activities significantly enhance consumer attitudes, brand awareness, and purchase intention by providing timely, relevant, and engaging content (Moslehpour et al., 2022; Yasin et al., 2023). Consumers exposed to persuasive and visually appealing social media content are more likely to develop positive brand evaluations, which ultimately increase their willingness to purchase products and services (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, social media marketing acts as a stimulus that shapes consumer cognitive and emotional responses. When consumers perceive social media content as credible and valuable, they are more likely to engage with brands and develop favorable purchase intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

Entertainment refers to the degree to which consumers perceive social media content as enjoyable, fun, and emotionally engaging. In digital marketing, entertainment is considered a core driver of attention and engagement because it transforms advertising content into enjoyable experiences rather than intrusive messages. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have amplified the role of entertainment through short-form videos, reels, live streams, and influencer-based content, making marketing messages more immersive and interactive.

Recent studies indicate that entertaining advertisements significantly enhance consumer engagement, emotional attachment, and brand recall, which ultimately influence purchase intention (Sanny et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2024). Emotional stimulation generated through humorous, creative, and visually appealing content increases dopamine-driven engagement, which strengthens consumers' positive attitudes toward brands. In addition, entertaining content reduces perceived advertising resistance, making consumers more receptive to marketing messages in saturated digital environments.

Furthermore, recent research highlights that entertainment-based social media marketing enhances customer experience by increasing enjoyment and reducing cognitive effort during content consumption (Huang & Su, 2022). This positive emotional experience improves brand perception and encourages consumers to interact more frequently with brand content. Studies from 2020–2026 also emphasize that entertainment plays a critical role in viral marketing strategies, where engaging content spreads rapidly through shares, likes, and user participation, further increasing brand visibility and influence. Overall, entertainment remains a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention in social media marketing contexts due to its ability to capture attention, evoke emotions, and enhance engagement.

H2: Entertainment positively influences consumer purchase intention.

Interaction refers to the degree of two-way communication and engagement between consumers and brands through social media platforms. It encompasses activities such as commenting, liking, sharing, direct messaging, replying to posts, and participating in brand-related discussions. In contemporary digital marketing environments, interaction is considered a core dimension of social media marketing because it transforms passive audiences into active participants. This engagement fosters stronger emotional connections between consumers and brands, ultimately influencing purchasing behavior.

Recent studies indicate that higher levels of interaction significantly enhance consumer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, which in turn increase purchase intention (Chen & Lin, 2022; Wibowo et al., 2021). Interactive communication allows consumers to express opinions, ask questions, and receive timely responses from brands, thereby reducing uncertainty and perceived risk in online purchasing environments. This real-time engagement strengthens consumer confidence and improves decision-making quality. Furthermore, recent literature highlights that interactive content formats such as live streaming,

polls, Q&A sessions, and influencer collaborations on platforms like Instagram and TikTok have significantly increased consumer participation and engagement rates. These interactive features create immersive brand experiences that enhance emotional attachment and strengthen consumer-brand relationships (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

In addition, interaction also facilitates community building, where consumers share experiences and recommendations, further reinforcing trust and social influence. As a result, interaction plays a crucial role in shaping positive consumer attitudes and increasing purchase intention in digital marketplaces. Therefore, interaction remains a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention in social media marketing contexts.

H3: Interaction positively influences consumer purchase intention.

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) refers to online consumer-generated information such as reviews, ratings, comments, and recommendations shared across digital and social media platforms. In the era of social commerce, e-WOM has emerged as one of the most influential determinants of consumer purchase intention because it allows potential buyers to access authentic experiences from other users before making decisions. Unlike traditional advertising, which is firm-controlled, e-WOM is perceived as more credible, unbiased, and trustworthy, thereby playing a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions.

Recent literature suggests that consumers increasingly rely on peer-generated content when evaluating products and services, especially in online shopping environments where uncertainty and perceived risk are high (Prasad et al., 2023; Ismagilova et al., 2020). Positive e-WOM enhances brand credibility, reduces perceived risk, and strengthens consumer confidence in purchase decisions, while negative reviews can significantly damage brand reputation and discourage potential buyers. Furthermore, the volume, valence, and credibility of online reviews are key determinants of their persuasive power in influencing consumer behavior (Gaber et al., 2021).

Recent studies also highlight that social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok amplify the speed and reach of e-WOM diffusion through likes, shares, and viral engagement mechanisms. This rapid spread of consumer opinions makes e-WOM a powerful marketing force that directly shapes brand perception and purchase intention in digital markets. Therefore, e-WOM remains a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention in social media marketing contexts.

H4: Electronic word-of-mouth positively influences consumer purchase intention.

Customization refers to the capability of social media platforms and marketers to deliver highly personalized content based on consumers' preferences, browsing behavior, demographic characteristics, and purchase history. In today's data-driven digital environment, customization has become a core element of social media marketing strategies as it enhances relevance, improves user experience, and increases consumer engagement with brand content. Personalized marketing messages allow firms to target individuals with content that matches their specific needs, thereby strengthening emotional connection and influencing purchase decisions.

Recent studies indicate that consumers are significantly more responsive to customized advertisements because such messages reduce cognitive effort and increase perceived relevance (Ali et al., 2024; Seo & Park, 2021). When consumers feel that content is tailored specifically for them, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the brand and demonstrate higher purchase intention. Furthermore, personalization reduces information overload by filtering irrelevant content and presenting consumers with more meaningful product suggestions, which improves decision-making efficiency in digital environments.

Recent literature also highlights the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning in enhancing customization capabilities on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. These technologies enable real-time data analysis and predictive targeting, further strengthening the

effectiveness of personalized marketing strategies (Dwivedi et al., 2021). However, studies also caution that excessive personalization may raise privacy concerns, which can negatively affect consumer trust if not managed transparently.

H5: Customization positively influences consumer purchase intention.

Trendiness refers to the extent to which social media platforms provide up-to-date, fashionable, and rapidly evolving information about products, services, and market developments. In dynamic industries such as fashion and cosmetics, trend-driven content plays a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences and accelerating purchase decisions. Consumers are increasingly exposed to viral content, influencer-led fashion updates, and real-time product trends, which significantly affect their buying behavior in digital environments. Recent studies emphasize that trendiness enhances perceived brand relevance and stimulates continuous consumer engagement with social media content, ultimately strengthening purchase intention (Talukdar et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2024).

The impact of trendiness is particularly strong among younger consumers, especially Generation Z, who are highly responsive to viral challenges, short-form videos, and rapidly changing online trends. Research indicates that trend-driven marketing creates a sense of urgency and fear of missing out (FOMO), which further encourages impulse buying behavior and increases online conversion rates (Prasad et al., 2023; Efendioglu, 2022). Additionally, social media platforms amplify trend diffusion through algorithmic content distribution, making trending products more visible and desirable.

However, recent literature also suggests that excessive trend exposure may lead to overconsumption fatigue and skeptical consumer behavior in certain segments (Business Insider, 2024). Despite this, overall evidence strongly supports that trendiness remains a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention in social media marketing contexts. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Trendiness positively influences consumer purchase intention.

Brand trust is a fundamental psychological construct in online consumer behavior, particularly in digital environments characterized by uncertainty, information overload, and perceived risk. It reflects consumers' belief in a brand's reliability, integrity, and ability to deliver promised value. In social media marketing contexts, trust is developed through consistent communication, transparency, user engagement, and authentic content shared across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Gill, A., 2026; Qaisar, Anees, & Raza, (2026). These platforms enable brands to build long-term relationships with consumers by enhancing credibility and reducing perceived uncertainty in online transactions.

Recent empirical studies highlight that brand trust plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to engage in repeat purchases, exhibit loyalty, and develop stronger emotional attachment toward the brand (Pasha et

al., 2024; Qiao & Sun, 2024). Moreover, trust significantly reduces perceived risk associated with online shopping, especially in emerging markets where digital literacy and regulatory assurance may still be developing (Ali et al., 2024).

Furthermore, previous studies emphasize that brand trust acts as a psychological mechanism that translates marketing stimuli into behavioral outcomes, such as purchase intention and brand loyalty. In line with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, social media marketing functions as an external stimulus that builds internal trust, which ultimately drives consumer responses (Zhang et al., 2025). Therefore, brand trust is not only a direct predictor of purchase intention but also a key mediating factor in digital consumer decision-making. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Brand trust positively influences consumer purchase intention.

H8: Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention.

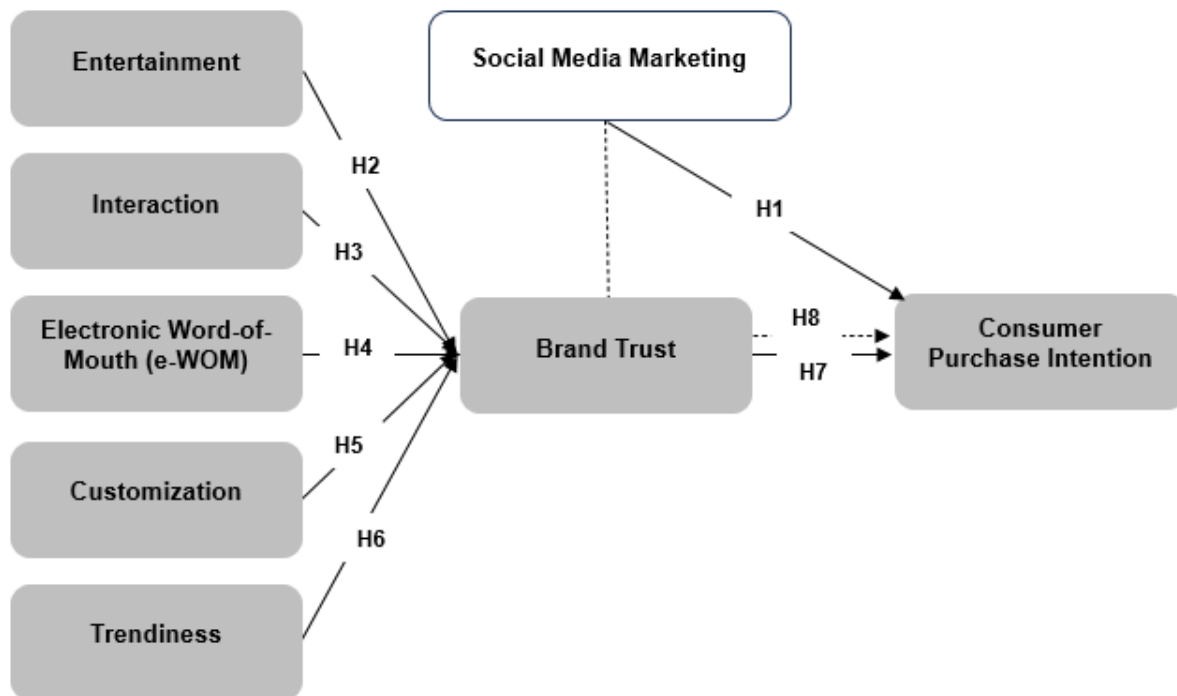


Figure 1.0: Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response Model, which explains how external environmental stimuli influence consumers' internal emotional states and behavioral responses. In this study, social media marketing dimensions serve as stimuli, brand trust represents the organism, and consumer purchase intention reflects the behavioral response.

The study also incorporates the Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests that consumer intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research methodology based on the positivist research philosophy and deductive research approach to examine the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. A quantitative approach is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to statistically test the hypothesized relationships among the study variables and generate objective findings (Hair et al., 2021). The study employs a cross-sectional research design in which data are collected from respondents at a single point in time. Cross-sectional designs are widely used in marketing and consumer behavior studies because they allow researchers to examine perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions efficiently within a specific context (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020; Atef, et. al., 2021).

The research is conducted within the fashion and apparel e-commerce industry of Pakistan (Khaadi, Sapphire, Gul Ahmed, Limelight, Beechtree, Ethnic) because this sector heavily relies on social media marketing activities to engage consumers and promote products online. Fashion brands actively use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to influence consumer buying behavior through advertisements, influencer endorsements, customer engagement, and electronic word-of-mouth. The target

population of the study consists of consumers in Pakistan who actively use social media platforms and have experience purchasing products online. More specifically, the study focuses on individuals who follow fashion and apparel brands on social media platforms and are exposed to digital marketing content regularly.

A convenience sampling technique with purposive elements is employed for data collection because social media users are easily accessible through online platforms and the study requires respondents who have prior online shopping experience. Respondents are selected based on the criteria that they must be active social media users, aged 18 years or above, and have purchased products online within the last six months. Data are collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. According to Hair et al. (2021), an adequate sample size is essential for ensuring statistical reliability and validity in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Therefore, the study aims to collect approximately 350 valid responses, which is considered appropriate for PLS-SEM analysis and consistent with the recommended sample size for behavioral research.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections: demographic information, social media marketing dimensions, brand trust, and consumer purchase intention. The measurement items are adapted from previously validated scales to ensure content validity and reliability. The constructs of entertainment, interaction, customization, and trendiness are adapted from Kim and Ko (2012) and Yadav and Rahman (2017), while electronic word-of-mouth items are adapted from Seo and Park (2021). Brand trust items are adopted from Sanny et al. (2020), and consumer purchase intention items are adapted from Moslehpour et al. (2022). All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Table 1.0: List of measurement items.

Variable	No. of Items	Source
Entertainment	ENT1: Social media content of brands is entertaining.	Kim & Ko (2012); Yadav & Rahman (2017)
	ENT2: I find social media advertisements enjoyable.	
	ENT3: Brand social media pages are interesting to browse.	
	ENT4: Social media marketing content is fun to interact with.	
Interaction	INT1: Brands interact effectively with customers on social media.	Kim & Ko (2012)
	INT2: Social media allows two-way communication with brands.	
	INT3: I can easily communicate with brands through social media.	
	INT4: Brands respond quickly to customer queries on social media.	
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)	EWOM1: Online reviews influence my purchase decisions.	Seo & Park (2021)
	EWOM2: I trust recommendations shared on social media.	
	EWOM3: Positive comments on social media increase my interest in products.	
	EWOM4: I often read online reviews before purchasing products.	
Customization	CUS1: Social media advertisements match my interests.	Yadav & Rahman (2017)
	CUS2: Brands provide personalized content on social media.	
	CUS3: Social media platforms show products according to my preferences.	
	CUS4: Customized advertisements attract my attention.	
Trendiness	TRE1: Social media provides the latest information about products.	Kim & Ko (2012)
	TRE2: Brand social media pages are updated regularly.	
	TRE3: Social media helps me stay updated about market trends.	
	TRE4: Trendy social media content influences my interest in products.	
Brand Trust	BT1: I trust brands that actively market on social media.	Sanny et al. (2020)
	BT2: Social media communication improves my confidence in brands.	
	BT3: Brands on social media appear reliable.	

	BT4: I believe social media brands keep their promises. BT5: I feel secure purchasing products promoted on social media.	
Consumer Purchase Intention	PI1: I intend to purchase products promoted on social media. PI2: Social media advertisements increase my willingness to buy products. PI3: I am likely to purchase products recommended on social media. PI4: I would consider buying products after viewing social media promotions. PI5: Social media marketing positively influences my buying decisions.	Moslehpour et al. (2022)

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and SmartPLS. Initially, SPSS is used for data screening, descriptive statistics, and reliability analysis, including Cronbach's alpha. Subsequently, SmartPLS is employed to assess the measurement and structural models through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis includes convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, path coefficients, and hypothesis testing. Furthermore, bootstrapping procedures are applied to examine the mediating effect of brand trust between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. The use of PLS-SEM is appropriate because it effectively handles complex models involving multiple constructs and mediation relationships while providing robust predictive analysis (Hair et al., 2021).

Results and Data Analysis

A total of 387 questionnaires were distributed among consumers using social media platforms in Pakistan, out of which 342 valid responses were received and used for final analysis, resulting in a response rate of 88.37%. The respondents consisted of active social media users who had prior experience purchasing products online, particularly from fashion and apparel brands. The demographic analysis revealed that 54.7% of the respondents were male, while 45.3% were female. The majority of respondents (61.4%) belonged to the age group of 21–30 years,

indicating that young consumers are more actively engaged with social media marketing activities. Regarding educational background, 67.5% of respondents possessed undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications. Furthermore, most respondents reported using social media platforms for more than three hours daily, with Instagram and Facebook identified as the most frequently used platforms for online shopping and product exploration.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. According to Hair et al. (2021), Cronbach's alpha and CR values above 0.70 indicate satisfactory reliability.

The findings demonstrated that all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold values. Entertainment recorded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.842, interaction showed 0.861, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) recorded 0.873, customization achieved 0.821, trendiness showed 0.846, brand trust recorded 0.889, and consumer purchase intention demonstrated 0.901. Similarly, all Composite Reliability values ranged between 0.85 and 0.92, confirming strong internal consistency among the measurement items.

These findings indicate that the adopted scales were reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed through factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability values. Hair et al. (2021) suggested that factor loadings should exceed 0.70, AVE values should be above 0.50, and CR values should exceed 0.70.

The results indicated that all factor loadings ranged between 0.718 and 0.912, exceeding the recommended threshold. Additionally, AVE values ranged from 0.58 to 0.74, confirming adequate convergent validity for all constructs. These findings suggest that the measurement items sufficiently represented their respective constructs.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The square root of AVE values for each construct was greater than the inter-construct correlations, satisfying the Fornell-

Larcker criterion. Furthermore, all HTMT values were below the threshold value of 0.90, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the study variables (Hair et al., 2021).

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS. Bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 subsamples were applied to test the significance of the hypothesized relationships.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) value for consumer purchase intention was 0.71, indicating that 71% of the variance in consumer purchase intention was explained by entertainment, interaction, e-WOM, customization, trendiness, and brand trust. Additionally, the R^2 value for brand trust was 0.64, suggesting that social media marketing dimensions substantially explained consumers' trust in brands.

Hypothesis Testing

The results of hypothesis testing are presented below;

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Social Media Marketing → Purchase Intention	0.417	7.852	0.000	Supported
H2	Entertainment → Purchase Intention	0.186	3.761	0.000	Supported
H3	Interaction → Purchase Intention	0.214	4.194	0.000	Supported
H4	e-WOM → Purchase Intention	0.271	5.382	0.000	Supported
H5	Customization → Purchase Intention	0.169	3.206	0.001	Supported
H6	Trendiness → Purchase Intention	0.192	3.984	0.000	Supported
H7	Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.356	6.711	0.000	Supported
H8	Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.148	4.663	0.000	Supported

The findings revealed that social media marketing significantly and positively influenced consumer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.417$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Entertainment, interaction,

electronic word-of-mouth, customization, and trendiness also demonstrated significant positive effects on purchase intention, thereby supporting H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6 respectively.

Among all predictors, electronic word-of-mouth exhibited the strongest influence on purchase intention, indicating that online reviews, recommendations, and customer feedback play a crucial role in shaping consumers' buying decisions. Furthermore, brand trust significantly influenced purchase intention ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H7.

The mediation analysis confirmed that brand trust significantly mediated the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. This finding indicates that effective social media marketing activities strengthen consumer trust in brands, which subsequently enhances their intention to purchase products online.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention in Pakistan's fashion and apparel e-commerce industry. The findings revealed that social media marketing significantly and positively affects consumer purchase intention, indicating that consumers are more likely to purchase products when they are exposed to engaging, interactive, and informative social media content. These findings are consistent with recent studies that identified social media marketing as a critical determinant of consumer buying behavior in digital environments (Moslehpour et al., 2022; Qiao & Sun, 2024).

The results demonstrated that entertainment significantly influences consumer purchase intention. This finding suggests that entertaining social media content, including short videos, interactive posts, reels, and visually appealing advertisements, enhances consumer engagement and creates positive emotional experiences that encourage purchasing behavior. In the context of Pakistan's fashion industry, consumers are highly attracted to creative and visually engaging content shared on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The finding supports previous studies indicating that entertaining content increases customer attention, emotional attachment, and buying intention (Islam & Sheikh, 2024; Sanny et al., 2020).

Interaction was also found to have a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention. This result indicates that two-way communication between brands and consumers strengthens customer relationships and improves trust toward online brands. Consumers who receive prompt responses, personalized interactions, and active engagement from brands on social media platforms are more likely to develop favorable perceptions and purchasing intentions. The findings align with recent research emphasizing that responsiveness, audience interaction, and consumer engagement are among the most influential factors shaping online purchasing behavior (Wibowo et al., 2021). Moreover, contemporary consumer trends indicate that social media is no longer perceived merely as a promotional channel but rather as a platform where trust and long-term customer relationships are established.

The study further revealed that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has one of the strongest effects on consumer purchase intention. This finding highlights the importance of online reviews, recommendations, comments, and customer feedback in shaping consumer decision-making processes. Consumers tend to rely heavily on peer-generated content before making online purchases because such information reduces uncertainty and perceived risk. The result is supported by recent studies indicating that customer reviews and social recommendations are often perceived as more credible than traditional advertisements or influencer promotions (Praatmana et al., 2024). The increasing preference for authentic customer experiences suggests that businesses should encourage positive customer reviews and user-generated content to improve consumer trust and purchase intention.

Customization was also identified as a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention. Personalized advertisements and customized product recommendations enable consumers to perceive social media content as more relevant and useful. This finding indicates that consumers respond positively to marketing messages tailored according to their preferences, browsing behavior, and shopping interests. Recent research similarly

suggests that personalized social media advertisements significantly improve customer satisfaction and purchase intention because consumers perceive such content as more valuable and engaging (Gaber et al., 2021). However, recent consumer behavior studies also indicate that personalization strategies must balance relevance and privacy concerns because excessive personalization may reduce consumer trust if users perceive misuse of personal data.

The findings additionally confirmed that trendiness positively influences consumer purchase intention. Consumers prefer brands that regularly share updated, fashionable, and trendy content through social media platforms. This result is particularly relevant in the fashion and apparel industry, where consumers actively seek the latest styles, fashion trends, and influencer-inspired content. Current industry trends demonstrate that consumers, particularly Generation Z and millennials, are strongly influenced by culturally relevant and trend-driven content on social media platforms (Vogue Business Trends, 2024). Therefore, organizations that continuously update their social media content according to emerging market trends are more likely to maintain consumer attention and increase purchase intention.

One of the most significant findings of this study is the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intention. The results demonstrated that social media marketing activities positively enhance brand trust, which subsequently increases consumers' willingness to purchase products online. This finding confirms that trust remains a critical psychological mechanism influencing online purchasing behavior, especially in digital environments characterized by uncertainty and information overload. Recent studies similarly found that brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and consumer buying behavior because consumers are more likely to purchase products from brands they perceive as reliable, transparent, and credible (Prasetyo et al., 2025; Pasha et al., 2024).

The mediating effect of brand trust also supports the Stimulus-Organism-Response Model employed in this study. According to the S-O-R framework, social media marketing activities act as external stimuli that influence consumers' internal psychological states, represented by trust, which subsequently shapes behavioral responses such as purchase intention. The findings indicate that consumers exposed to entertaining, interactive, and trustworthy social media content develop stronger emotional and cognitive trust toward brands, thereby increasing their purchasing intentions. This theoretical explanation is consistent with contemporary research emphasizing the importance of trust and engagement as mediating mechanisms in digital consumer behavior models (Qiao & Sun, 2024).

The study also contributes to the growing literature on social media marketing in emerging economies, particularly Pakistan. Much of the prior literature has focused on developed countries, whereas consumer behavior in developing markets differs due to cultural values, technological adoption, and varying levels of digital trust. The present findings suggest that Pakistani consumers are highly influenced by social media marketing activities, particularly e-WOM, interactivity, and trust-building mechanisms. This indicates that businesses operating in Pakistan's digital marketplace should focus not only on promotional content but also on relationship-building strategies that enhance transparency, authenticity, and customer engagement.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that marketers should design social media strategies that prioritize consumer engagement, authenticity, and trust development. Brands should invest in interactive communication, influencer collaborations with credible personalities, personalized marketing campaigns, and user-generated content strategies to enhance customer trust and stimulate purchase intention. Businesses should also encourage satisfied consumers to share online reviews and testimonials because peer-generated content significantly influences purchasing behavior. Furthermore, organizations should continuously

monitor social media trends and adapt their content strategies according to evolving consumer preferences and digital behaviors.

Overall, the findings confirm that social media marketing has become a powerful strategic tool for influencing consumer purchase intention in the digital era. The increasing role of social media platforms in shaping consumer trust, engagement, and purchasing decisions highlights the need for businesses to adopt customer-centric and relationship-oriented digital marketing strategies to remain competitive in rapidly evolving online markets.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention in Pakistan's fashion and apparel e-commerce industry, with brand trust as a mediating variable. The findings confirm that social media marketing is a strong predictor of consumer purchase intention, highlighting the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping consumer behavior in emerging markets.

The results revealed that all dimensions of social media marketing (entertainment, interaction, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), customization, and trendiness) significantly and positively influence consumer purchase intention. Among these, e-WOM emerged as one of the most influential factors, indicating that consumers place high importance on online reviews, peer recommendations, and user-generated content when making purchasing decisions. This finding aligns with recent research emphasizing the credibility and persuasive power of consumer-generated content in digital environments (Prasad et al., 2023; Raza et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the study confirmed that brand trust plays a significant mediating role between social media marketing and purchase intention. This suggests that social media marketing does not only directly influence purchasing behavior but also indirectly affects it by strengthening consumer trust in brands. This result supports the Stimulus-Organism-Response Model, which explains that external marketing stimuli shape internal psychological states (trust), leading to behavioral

responses such as purchase intention. Recent studies also confirm that trust is a central mechanism in digital consumer decision-making processes (Qiao & Sun, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Overall, the study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from an emerging economy, demonstrating that social media marketing is a powerful tool for influencing consumer behavior when combined with trust-building mechanisms.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study used a cross-sectional research design, meaning data were collected at one point in time. Therefore, the findings capture only a snapshot of consumer perceptions and do not reflect changes in behavior over time. Longitudinal studies could provide stronger causal insights into how social media marketing influences purchase intention over extended periods.

Second, the study focused only on the fashion and apparel industry in Pakistan. While this sector is highly relevant to social media marketing, the findings may not be generalizable to other industries such as banking, healthcare, tourism, or food delivery, where consumer involvement and decision-making processes differ significantly.

Third, the study employed a convenience sampling technique, which may limit the representativeness of the sample. Although this method is commonly used in digital marketing research, it may introduce selection bias and restrict the generalizability of results to the broader population.

Fourth, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be affected by common method bias and social desirability bias. Respondents may overestimate or underestimate their actual behaviors or intentions, which could affect the accuracy of results.

Finally, the study primarily focused on brand trust as a mediating variable. However, other important psychological and behavioral factors such as brand loyalty, perceived value, customer engagement, influencer credibility, and perceived risk were not included. Recent studies suggest that these

variables also play a significant role in shaping consumer purchase intention in digital environments (Ali et al., 2024; Hussain & Shah, 2023).

Future Research Directions

Future research can extend this study in several meaningful ways.

First, future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs to examine how consumer perceptions and purchase intentions evolve over time in response to social media marketing activities. This would help establish stronger causal relationships and capture dynamic behavioral changes in digital environments.

Second, future researchers should explore multiple industries such as tourism, banking, healthcare, education, and FMCG to improve the generalizability of findings. Comparative industry studies can provide deeper insights into how social media marketing effectiveness varies across different service and product categories.

Third, future studies should consider using probability sampling techniques and larger sample sizes to improve representativeness and external validity. Cross-cultural or cross-country studies could also help identify differences in consumer behavior between developed and developing economies.

Fourth, future research should include additional mediating and moderating variables such as brand loyalty, customer engagement, influencer credibility, perceived risk, and customer satisfaction. These variables may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social media marketing influences consumer decision-making processes.

Fifth, emerging digital trends such as artificial intelligence-driven marketing, short-form video content, influencer marketing evolution, and live commerce should be explored in future studies. Platforms such as TikTok are rapidly changing how consumers interact with brands, making them important areas for future investigation.

Finally, future research may also adopt qualitative or mixed-method approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain deeper insights into consumer motivations, emotions, and

psychological drivers behind online purchase behavior.

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