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Relationship of Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention with the help of Mediating Variable - Brand Trust

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ABSTRACT

Marketing has seen a paradigm shift in terms of direct communication with customers due to the growing use of social media by businesses. This study focuses on the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on purchase intention (PI) through mediation of brand trust (BT). This study is based on the application of quantitative methodology whereby the data on SMM, BT, and PI is collected from 380 undergraduate BS students studying in public and private universities in Pakistan through a questionnaire. Scales have been employed from past literature to measure the variables SMM, BT, and PI. Reliability test, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis have been conducted on the data. It has been concluded that social media marketing has a positive impact on both purchase intention and brand trust. Additionally, the brand trust partly mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust, Purchase Intention, Universities in Pakistan, Consumer Behaviour

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has caused changes in the ways that organizations interact with their customers, hence causing the marketing strategies to become interactive and customer-focused. In the past few years, there has been a shift from social media being used for communication purposes only to it being used as a marketing tool through which organizations are able to market their products/services, communicate with the customers and build relationships. Social media differs from traditional marketing tools in the sense that it allows two-way communication where the consumers are able to communicate with the content either by making comments, reviewing it, liking it, sharing it or directly messaging about it. This kind of platform makes it easier for the organizations to get to understand the behavior of the consumers and design their campaigns in a way to influence their purchasing decisions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The rising use of smartphones, the reduced cost of using the Internet, and technology developments have made the use of social media prevalent throughout the world especially among youth. University students are one of the best users of social media websites because they do not use these websites for communication and entertainment purposes only, but for educational and other purposes too, like shopping and product searches. Due to the rising use of the Internet and mobile phones in Pakistan, the use of digital technology is increasing among the youth population of the country making social media an important part of their life. It is now being understood by organizations that university students make an extremely profitable market segment due to their digital proficiency and sensitivity towards online marketing campaigns. As a result, a number of companies from various sectors like fashion, beauty, electronics, food delivery, education and retail are investing a lot in social media marketing to influence the buying behavior of the consumer (Bilgin, 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2021). The growing tendency of students to get information about the products via social media becomes an even clearer sign that digital marketing is significant in influencing consumer behavior. Social media marketing (SMM) can be understood as the use of social networking platforms in the creation, communication, and delivery of value to customers as well as the building of relationship between business organizations and consumers (Kim & Ko, 2012). Social media marketing consists of content marketing, influencer marketing, online advertising, electronic word-of-mouth, customer engagement, promotion, and brand community management. Despite the fact that it is distinct from traditional advertising, SMM provides new chances for customer engagement, immediate reaction, and personal communication that allows business organizations to develop emotional connections with consumers. Moreover, social media gives the chance for consumers to participate actively in the discussion process, share their experience with other consumers and recommend certain products. Many scientific researches show that entertaining and engaging content in social media positively influences the brand image of consumers, increases their satisfaction and purchase intentions (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). The concept of purchase intention can be described as an individual's deliberate probability of

purchasing particular product or service and it is recognized as one of the most significant indicators of real consumer behavior (Ajzen, 1991). There are many factors that affect consumer purchase intention, including the perceived quality and value of the product or service, its brand image, promotional campaigns, and experience of the customer. Nowadays, many people rely on social networks to collect information about various products or services, compare them, learn the opinion of other consumers, study the brand, and finally make the decision. E-WOM, recommendations of the influencers, evaluation, and consumer-generated content have become crucial sources of information in the process of creating attitudes and purchase intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Unlike regular advertising, the recommendation of the product or service on the social network is considered to be more reliable, since it comes from regular customers or influencers, not from the company. Thus, social media marketing is considered to be the most effective way of affecting attitudes and increasing purchase intention. Whereas the role of social media marketing became more and more important recently, being exposed to marketing activities on the Internet does not guarantee consumers' intention to purchase a product. Consumers always seek for evaluation of credibility of the brands before making purchasing decision, because consumers are in the virtual environment and they are not able to see the products personally. In consequence, brand trust became an essential psychological construct for explaining consumers' responses to the activities of organizations through social media. Brand trust can be defined as consumers' trust towards the reliability and honesty of the brand and its capability to satisfy consumers' expectations consistently (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). It helps to decrease consumers' uncertainty and risk perception while buying the product on the Internet and increase the trust to the quality of the product and organization which produces it (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). As it was mentioned above, consumers with high levels of brand trust usually have positive attitudes and intentions to buy the product (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). In turn, more often nowadays, organizations are emphasizing on their transparency, authenticity, and responsiveness, thereby developing consumer trust and inducing their purchasing behavior via social media communication. There are a lot of ways offered to organizations by means of social media to develop trust in their brand through constant interaction, personal communication, immediate services provision to customers and transparency of communication. Consumers apply e-WoM, reviews on-line, endorsements of influencers and testimonials of other consumers, who already used certain brands through the help of social media. Interaction with brands in the context of social networking sites reduces purchase risks and builds up trust of consumers towards organizations. In this way, it becomes obvious that brand trust acts as an intermediary construct that allows one to explain how the activities of social media marketing affect consumer purchase intentions (Laroche et al., 2013).Despite the number of investigations that have been carried out on social media marketing, brand trust, and purchase intention, there is very limited empirical evidence from developing countries like Pakistan. Consumer behavior in Pakistan is different from consumer behavior in developed countries due to difference in culture, technology adoption, economic strength, and digital skills. In addition, university students are one of the best respondents who may be considered as a sample for carrying out the above investigation since they are frequent users of social media and use the digital platform for making purchases. Therefore, this research will examine the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention with brand trust as a mediator using 380 respondents pursuing Bachelor of Studies (BS) degree in public and private universities of Pakistan. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on digital marketing and consumer behavior.

Literature Review

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) is one of the most influential components of the digital marketing approach nowadays. It can be defined as an approach which implies the use of social networking sites for marketing purposes, communicating with clients, creating awareness about the company and establishing long-term relationships with them (Kim & Ko, 2012). Unlike traditional marketing methods, social media marketing provides an opportunity for businesses to have two-way communication with consumers. That means that consumers can take an active role in the process and voice their opinions regarding the products/services provided by companies. Thus, the interaction will make the communication process more effective and improve the relationship between the organization and the consumer (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The emergence of social media networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter) has greatly influenced consumer behavior. Various social media marketing strategies used by companies, such as content, influencers, online advertising, eWOM, promotions, contests and personalization, affect consumers' attitudes and purchase decisions (Tuten & Solomon, 2022). Several studies show that consumers use much of their time interacting with brands through social media, which means that it is a very effective means for developing brand-customer relationship (Dwivedi et al., 2021). From some empirical research done in the past, it has become clear that the use of social media marketing has a positive effect on consumers' engagement, brand awareness, customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and purchase behavior. According to Bilgin (2018), social media marketing has a very large effect on how consumers view brands and their purchase intentions. Also in a similar research, Yadav and Rahman (2018) found out that entertainment, interaction, personalization, trendiness, and eWOM significantly increased customer reactions towards brands. Recent research has emphasized the importance of interactive digital content in helping organizations develop emotional connection with consumers and hence loyalty and purchase intentions (Li et al., 2023; Jabeen et al., 2024).

Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

The conscious tendency of customers to acquire a particular product or service in the future is called purchase intention (Ajzen, 1991). Purchase intention is one of the strongest predictors of purchase behavior because consumers assess the products before making their decision (Dodds et al., 1991). There are a variety of factors that determine the purchase intention in the digital sphere such as quality, price, consumer reviews, reputation, promotion, and social influence. In the

modern world, social media plays an extremely important role in offering information about products in order to facilitate comparison, recommendations, and evaluation. Nowadays, customers rely on influencer information, customer reviews, demonstrations, and user-generated content available on social networking sites. Such information decreases uncertainty related to online shopping and increases confidence in the buying process (Erkan & Evans, 2016). There were a number of empirical studies that concluded that social media marketing positively influences purchase intention. Therefore, Kim and Ko (2012) concluded that there was a positive effect of social media marketing actions of luxury brands on customer equity and purchase intention. Bilgin (2018) In other words, successful social media marketing leads to higher purchase intentions because consumers perceive such brands more favorably. Moreover, entertainment, interaction, customization, and trendiness contribute to increasing consumers' purchase intentions concerning luxury products, as suggested by Godey et al. (2016). These conclusions still remain relevant in modern research. In particular, Sanny et al. (2020) suggest that entertaining social media posts positively influence purchase intentions of young consumers. In turn, according to Alalwan et al. (2022), personalized social media advertising positively influences consumers' purchase intentions due to improving their perceived value and consumer experience. In other words, effective social media marketing becomes a powerful tool for encouraging consumers to make a purchase because of their positive attitude to the brand.

H1: There is a significant positive impact of social media marketing on purchase intention.

Social Media Marketing and Brand Trust

"Brand trust" concept means the confidence of consumers in the reliability, credibility, honesty, and ability of a brand to keep its promises (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). It plays an important role in lowering risks because in the online environment, there is no way for consumers to physically examine the purchased goods. Overall, people tend to buy products of trusted brands since trust reduces uncertainty and enhances their confidence in products (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). There are many advantages of social media marketing for the creation of brand trust including transparent communication, instant customer service, authenticity, and personalized interaction. Social networking sites allow organizations to communicate and interact with customers in real-time and provide them with credible information about the brand's products and services (Laroche et al., 2013).

Research shows that social media marketing has an impact on increasing brand trust. For example, Kim and Ko (2012) argue that interactive communication via social media enables consumers to build trust in luxury brands. Laroche et al. (2013) also observed that active involvement of consumers in brand communities on social media makes a significant contribution in the development of trust and loyalty towards brand by consumers. In the same vein, Bilgin (2018) stated that organizations that actively operate on social media will be able to create trusted relationships with their customers.

Recently, there have been some other similar studies carried out. Cheung et al. (2021) found that communication transparency and consumer participation on social networking sites make a significant contribution in brand credibility. Likewise, Ebrahim (2023) found that interaction of customers on social media sites makes a significant contribution in consumer trust towards brand. From the above discussion, it is clear that organizations can develop brand trust through authentic social media marketing efforts.

H2: Social media marketing makes a significant contribution in brand trust.

Brand Trust and Purchase Intentions

The trust in the brand was always regarded as one of the most important factors influencing consumer purchases. According to Delgado-Ballester (2004), a consumer is expected to have purchase intentions towards a brand that is trustworthy since trust reduces consumer risk perception. This aspect gains increased importance in the electronic commerce environment since the consumer does not have an opportunity to feel or examine a product before purchasing it. The decision is made based on brand reputation, customer feedbacks, personal experience and social media connections (Gefen et al., 2003). There are some empirical studies which showed that brand trust has a positive impact on purchase intention. As stated by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005), purchase intention will be higher for those brands which consumers believe as having a low purchase risk. Moreover, as mentioned by Erciş et al. (2012), brand trust is an indicator of purchase intention and product recommendation. In addition, Konuk (2021) highlighted that trust is one of the factors that have the strongest impact on the purchase intentions of consumers on the internet. As stated by Wang et al. (2023), brand trust of consumers is a major factor that increases the purchase intention of products advertised on social media. Thus, in order to increase consumers' purchase intention, organizations should focus on building brand trust and credibility.

H3: Brand trust has a positive influence on purchase intention.

Mediator Role of Brand Trust

Although it is true that researchers have focused on developing the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, now researchers argue that the relationship between the two is not direct at all times. It means that consumers need to develop some kind of trust about a particular brand in order to transform the perception into purchase intention. In this regard, the role of brand trust as a mediator becomes highly significant.

Brand trust is developed because of social media marketing through information transparency, customer engagement, e-WOM and organizational responsiveness. The consumer who is engaged in a consistent, honest and informative engagement with the brand sees that the brand is trustworthy. As brand trust develops, consumers feel motivated enough to purchase products because of the reduction in risks and increased confidence (Laroche et al., 2013). Empirical research proves the mediating role of brand trust. For example, Godey et al. (2016) concluded that the efforts made by firms in social media marketing help to increase the purchase intention as it develops consumer trust and brand equity. Ebrahim (2020) Also, trust has been identified as a mediator of the association between the techniques used in digital marketing and consumer loyalty. According to Algharabat et al. (2022), the use of social media helps build brand trust of the consumers and thereby increases their purchase intention. Furthermore, Jabeen et al. (2024) asserted

that trust acts as a psychological intermediary of the connection between social media marketing and consumers' purchase decisions.

In the context of Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), trust is a key element that contributes to creating a successful and effective relationship between firms and consumers. Moreover, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) indicates that consumers show reciprocal behavior such as purchasing goods and services based on the trust that they have on the firm. Considering all the points described above, it can be concluded that brand trust acts as a mediator of the association between social media marketing and purchase intention among the students from Pakistan universities.

H4: Brand trust significantly mediates the association between social media marketing and purchase intention.

Methodology

For this study, a combination of quantitative approach and cross-sectional design has been adopted in order to identify the impact of SMM on PI through mediation of brand trust (BT). Quantitative approach may be adopted in research as it is possible to test the hypothesis and objective measurement of relationships between different variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With the help of cross-sectional design, data could be collected from the respondents at one point in time, and it is helpful in analyzing consumer attitude and intentions**.**

Population and Sample

In this case, population for the study consists of BS students studying in public and private universities of Pakistan. BS students were considered as population for the study as they are regular users of social media websites and seek for products on these websites. Also, they belong to an educated category of consumers who have exposure to social media marketing. The selected sample of 380 participants was established by means of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is the most common method in consumer research since the implementation of this method is convenient (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). The surveys were conducted both online and offline via Google Forms to acquire the information about students of various universities in Pakistan.

Measurement Instruments

Data collection was performed through a structured survey with validated indicators of the constructs under research. All questions of the survey were answered based on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 denoted "Strongly Disagree" option, while 5 referred to the "Strongly Agree" statement.

Social Media Marketing (Independent Variable): The construct of social media marketing was measured via the 11-item scale proposed by Kim & Ko (2012). The measure covers the perceptions of social media marketing initiatives and includes the following dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and electronic word-of-mouth. The measurement tool is reliable and valid enough for digital marketing studies. Mediator - Brand Trust: Measurement of the mediator variable brand trust was done using the 8-item scale called Brand Trust Scale, developed by Delgado-Ballester (2004). The brand trust scale aims at measuring the consumer's level of trust in the reliability and integrity of the specific brand. Validity and reliability tests have already been performed for this scale. Dependent Variable - Purchase Intentions: Measurement of purchase intention was done using a 4-item scale developed by Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal (1991). This scale measures the consumer's willingness and intent to purchase products which are promoted using different brands. This is the most commonly used scale in marketing research studies.

Data Analysis

The collected survey data was analyzed with the use of IBM SPSS Statistics 26 and SmartPLS 4. In the first place, the descriptive statistics of the sample were calculated, helping to analyze the demographic features of the respondents. Each construct's reliability was checked with the help of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with values higher than 0.70 being reliable (Hair et al., 2022). Pearson correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationships among the research variables. To find the direct impact of SMM on purchase intention and brand trust, the multiple regression analysis was conducted. Furthermore, the impact of brand trust on purchase intention was evaluated. Lastly, the indirect impact of SMM on purchase intention was assessed via mediation analysis using SmartPLS with the bootstrapping approach. 5,000 samples were used during the bootstrapping process to prove the significance of the mediation (Hair et al., 2022).

Results

The results based on the data of 380 BS students studying in both public and private universities of Pakistan were collected through the software IBM SPSS Statistics 26 and SmartPLS 4. The type of analysis done included descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and mediation analysis.

Table 1Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	208	54.7
	Female	172	45.3
Age	18–20 years	126	33.2
	21–23 years	184	48.4
	Above 23 years	70	18.4
University Type	Public	218	57.4
	Private	162	42.6
Daily Social Media Usage	Less than 2 hours	62	16.3
	2–4 hours	158	41.6
	More than 4 hours	160	42.1

According to the demographic findings, the most of the survey respondents are men (54.7%), with an age group of 21-23 years (48.4%). Majority of the respondents received their education from government universities (57.4%). Also, more than 80% of the respondents spend more than two hours on social media daily.

Table 22 Reliability Analysis

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Marketing	11	0.913
Brand Trust	8	0.895
Purchase Intention	4	0.882

Alpha coefficients were in the range of 0.882 and 0.913, and they were above the threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). This evidence supports the conclusion that all scales have excellent internal consistency for assessing social media marketing, brand trust, and purchase intentions of Pakistani students at universities.

Table 33 Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3
1. Social Media Marketing	1		
2. Brand Trust	.691**	1	
3. Purchase Intention	.726**	.744**	1

Note: $p < .01$

The Pearson correlation test showed significant positive correlation among all the variables under study. Social media marketing was found to have strong correlation with purchase intention (r = .726) and brand trust (r = .691). Similarly, purchase intention was strongly positively correlated with brand trust (r = .744).

Table 4Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	SMM → Purchase Intention	0.487	10.84	.000	Supported
H2	SMM → Brand Trust	0.691	15.26	.000	Supported
H3	Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.423	8.97	.000	Supported

All the three hypotheses were supported by regression analysis. The purchase intention was significantly influenced by the social media marketing (β = .487), while the brand trust was significantly influenced by the social media marketing (β = .691). On the other hand, the purchase intention was significantly positively influenced by the brand trust (β = .423).

Table 55 Mediation Analysis

Relationship	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	Mediation
SMM → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.292	6.58	.000	Partial Mediation

It is revealed that the brand trust plays a significant mediating role between social media marketing and purchase intention (β = .292, $p < .001$). Therefore, as both the direct and indirect effects have been revealed to be significant, the brand trust becomes a partial mediator. Therefore, the research hypotheses have been empirically proven. It has been established that social media marketing has considerably increased brand trust and purchase intentions of BS students studying in Pakistan universities. Moreover, brand trust has been revealed to be a psychologically significant variable which impacts consumer purchase intentions owing to the effect of social media marketing. The results of the reliability statistics demonstrate that the measures are reliable, while correlation and regression analyses reveal the existence of significant positive relationships among all variables. Finally, mediation analysis reveals partial mediating role of brand trust in social media marketing effect on purchase intentions.

Discussion

The primary objective of conducting this study is to examine the influence of SMM on PI and the role of brand trust as mediator among 380 BS students studying in public and private universities in Pakistan. The findings of empirical analysis support all the four hypothesized influences. According to the findings of this study, SMM had an influence on PI not only directly but also indirectly through the role of brand trust. The first hypothesis suggested that SMM has a positive effect on PI. Regression analysis confirmed that there is a positive relationship between these two variables. In other words, those students who perceived SMM campaigns as informative, interactive, entertaining, and engaging were more likely to purchase products promoted on social networks. These findings are in line with Kim & Ko (2012), Godey et al. (2016), Bilgin (2018), and Yadav & Rahman (2018) who have found that social media marketing that is performed successfully increases engagement of the customers and positively impacts consumer decision-making. The finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) that claims that exposure to marketing information has a positive impact on the behavior of consumers. In Pakistan, where university students are active social media platform users, SMM has become an important source of product information for the consumers. The second hypothesis was concerned about the relationship between social media marketing and brand trust. It is found out that social media marketing has an influential effect on the development of brand trust of consumers. The results obtained are consistent with the findings of other previous researchers such as Laroche et al. (2013), Bilgin (2018) and Cheung et al. (2021). The transparency of communications, interaction with customers and fast response of the organizations through the social media platforms have been considered to be significant for enhancing

the credibility of organizations. Through the interactive marketing practices, consumers could develop their brand trust because they obtain credible information regarding products and all the questions are being answered by the organization. Thirdly, the assumption about brand trust having positive effects on purchase intention was made. The results supported the validity of this hypothesis as people who trusted the brands more bought their products more often. The same was confirmed by the research of Delgado-Ballester (2004), Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Erciş et al. (2012), and Konuk (2021). According to those studies, trust reduces the risk and increases consumers' confidence. In the case of online shopping, people do not have an opportunity to estimate the product physically before the purchase. Therefore, the role of trust is even more important in such situation. Brand trust is used by Pakistani university students more often during their online shopping due to lower uncertainty regarding the quality of products, payment safety, and after-sales service. The main strength of this research lies in the evidence of the mediation role of brand trust. It was found that brand trust mediated the influence of social media marketing on purchase intention, which means that social media marketing enhances purchase intention by enhancing consumers' brand trust besides having a direct influence on it. This result supports the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994). This research corroborates the assumption that trust is vital in forming successful long-term relationships between organizations and their consumers. This research is consistent with recent findings provided by Algharabat et al. (2022) and Jabeen et al. (2024) regarding the role of brand trust in linking digital marketing efforts to consumer behavior. In view of these results, it is evident that, rather than just focusing on the existence of social media marketing, the organizations should focus on having more reliable and more consumer-friendly social media marketing strategies. To achieve this, organizations have to provide authentic information related to their products, reply to the questions asked by consumers on time, facilitate positive electronic word-of-mouth, collaborate with influencers, and promote their brands effectively on social networking sites. Through these activities, they would be able to improve their brand trust, reduce consumer risks, and create purchase intentions.

Conclusion

For the purpose of identifying the mediating role of brand trust (BT), in this paper, the relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and purchase intention (PI) has been considered among 380 BS program students from public as well as private universities in Pakistan. As there is rapid development in technology in the world and young consumers have started using social media networks, it becomes essential for marketers and academicians to know about the variables that influence the decision-making process of consumers while buying products online. The results of the present study reveal the importance of social media marketing in shaping consumers' purchase intentions directly and indirectly through BT. The effect of social media marketing on brand trust and purchase intention was positive statistically. Students who perceived SMM to be interactive, informative, entertaining, and responsive activities had high BT and demonstrated high PI toward the brands being promoted. Brand trust also proved to have a significant effect on purchase intention, which indicates that the consumers are willing to purchase products of the brands in which they have trust. The result of mediation analysis indicated that brand trust partially mediated the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, which means that efficient SMM practices enhance purchasing behavior due to increasing brand trust. These findings are consistent with the findings of the prior research in the area of digital marketing, branding, and consumer behavior, which emphasizes the importance of trust as a key psychological process. This research will contribute in extending the knowledge that is currently available in the literature because it will give empirical data about the effect of social media marketing on consumers' behavior in higher education sector of Pakistan, which is one of the most active users of social media in the country. This research will add to the existing knowledge about the effect of social media marketing on consumer behavior in emerging economy and its applicability in the digital environment. From practical point of view, this research will stress the importance of developing not just the visibility of brands in the digital environment but also trustworthy relationship between organizations and consumers by being sincere, offering timely customer service, product information and engagement with consumers. Thus, by increasing brand trust, it will be possible to increase the consumers' confidence, decrease purchase risks and increase purchase intentions and customer loyalty towards organizations.

Recommendations

The results of this study imply several recommendations which should be made to the business organizations, marketers, and researchers in the future. Firstly, it is suggested that the organizations design a comprehensive social media marketing strategy with emphasis on the customer engagement rather than on the promotion of their products. In other words, the organizations have to publish interesting content which would motivate customers to discuss the products and the organizations through leaving comments, writing reviews, etc. Secondly, it is suggested that the organizations should gain the consumers' trust through communicating with them transparently, informing them about the products, and responding to their queries. It is also possible to earn trust through delivering high-quality products, ethical marketing, secure online transactions, and good after-sales services. Further, there is a need for organizations to collaborate with influencers who share similar values with the organization since their influence can have a positive effect on the consumer confidence and purchasing intentions. It is advisable for organizations to come up with electronic word-of-mouth campaigns that encourage the consumers to communicate their experience on social media platforms. Further, it is advisable for the organizations to monitor and analyze the sentiments of the consumers in order to learn about the problems they are facing and make necessary changes to their strategy. Additionally, awareness campaigns on digital marketing can be undertaken by organizations to convince the students to critically evaluate the advertisements online and make wise purchases. Finally, it is proposed that the future research work done should have a longitudinal study design and use more samples through CB-SEM and multi-group analysis to validate the findings of this study.

Weaknesses in the Study

Despite the fact that the present study is quite useful in the sense that it helps understand the relationship between social media marketing, brand trust, and purchase intention, there are certain limitations in the study which need to be pointed out. First, the current study is based on the use of cross-sectional research methodology in which data has been collected at one point of time only. It means that the relationship between the variables cannot be determined with certainty.

Moreover, secondly, the use of convenient sampling technique for selecting the sample for the study implies that the generalizability of the study to the population of Pakistani consumers cannot be taken for granted. The reason is that the selected sample of 380 BS students represents only a segment of the consumer population while it may not represent other consumers who do not belong to this segment. Thirdly, data collection has been done using self-reporting questionnaires implying that the current study is prone to methodological bias and social desirability bias. In addition to this, it is pertinent to mention here that the current study has just considered brand trust as the mediating variable. There are many other psychological and behavioral variables like brand loyalty, customer engagement, value perception, electronic word of mouth, brand image, perceived risk, and customer satisfaction that can influence the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. Finally, in the current study, the researchers have considered only Pakistani university students as their respondents and, therefore, care must be taken while applying the results of the study to any other setting.

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