Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior

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This study investigates how social media marketing (SMM) shapes consumers' purchase intention (PI) in Pakistan by incorporating brand image (BI) and brand awareness (BA) as mediating variables within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. The research seeks to clarify whether SMM exerts a direct influence on PI or operates mainly through consumers' brand-related perceptions. A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based survey was administered using convenience sampling to active social media users in Pakistan. Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 312 valid responses were obtained. Established scales were adapted from prior studies to measure SMM, BI, BA, and PI. Data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, following a two-stage procedure to assess the measurement and structural models and to test mediation effects via bootstrapping. The results show that SMM has no significant direct effect on PI or BA. However, SMM has a strong positive effect on BI, and both BI and BA positively influence PI, with BI emerging as the stronger predictor. The pattern of relationships indicates that BI acts as a key pathway through which SMM affects PI, while the mediating role of BA is weaker and statistically unsupported. Thus, SMM in the Pakistani context functions primarily as a brand-building mechanism rather than a direct driver of purchase intention. This study is one of the few to apply the SOR model to SMM in an emerging market by simultaneously examining BI and BA as mediators. It offers nuanced evidence that in Pakistan, SMM affects purchase intention indirectly via brand image, thereby refining theoretical understanding and offering context-specific guidance for digital marketing strategy.

1. Introduction

The rapid rise of social media (SM) has tremendously changed the ways firms interplay and interact with their customer base. Instead of using the previously tried and true one-sided communications channels, corporations increasingly conduct more interactive,\ud real-time, tailored dialogues through social media. SM is an essential channel for communicating and reaching potential customers, broadcasting product-related information, and enhancing BA. A throng of millions using social media has invaded daily life, and nowadays, marketers are focusing on it very strategically (Manzoor et al., 2020). With around 4.2 billion active social media users globally among about 7.8 million people in the world (We Are Social, 2022), it has become nearly impossible for organisations to turn a blind eye to the impact of utilising social media marketing (SMM) on an individual's customer behaviour. SM enables users not only to search for information but also to express opinions on brands, engage with other consumers, create their own content, and influence their networks (Moghadam et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, with increasing globalization and digitalization, competition has become more intense, and consumers have more options open to them, which has led to consumer purchase intention (PI) being a major research focus in the field of marketing today. In contrast to offline marketplaces — where consumers are able to touch, feel, and experience the product before purchasing — in online contexts, consumers need to rely more on digital cues, brand signals, and eWOM while making purchase decisions (Ashraf & Iqbal, 2021). Social media also influences PI by constantly exposing consumers to brand messages, promotional activities, and peer-to-peer content creation. Reliable, beautiful, and innovative SMM strategies let brands stay in the audience's mind whenever they consider purchasing it. In developing countries, Zeqiri et al. (2024) note that the more a consumer uses social media, will make likely this person is to reach customers and consequently has an increasing probability of purchase. Likewise, the purchasing decision of Pakistani consumers has been significantly and partially influenced by social media, indicating its increasing relevance as a marketing and communication tool in local markets (Palalic et al., 2020).

In this changing digital realm, interactive personalized content has become one of the backbones of successful SMM strategies. This type of content provides a strong consumer engagement, drives participation, and delivers memorable brand experiences. Faisal and Ekawanto (2021) assert that such an interactive personalization technique may significantly elevate brand exposure, making products or services more poignant at the point of sale. SMM thus represents more than mere promotion; it opens up room for dialogue, co-creation, and relationship building across consumers, the collective perception of the brand. BA and brand image (BI) are core in this process. For example, brand awareness impacts visibility and supports the connection between brand image and evolutionary recognition, while it has been argued that the notion of brand image is related to emotional attachment, trust/overall valuations of a firm. A favorable brand image has been found to increase trust and the likelihood of purchase (Keller, 2016)while elevated brand awareness contributes to perceptions of reliability and familiarity, two imperative antecedents of PI (Hutter et al., 2013).

In this context, the current study aims at exploring the interrelationship between SMM, BI, BA, and PI, but with special focus on understanding how BA and BI significantly influence in path between SMM to PI. With successful SMM campaigns, businesses can better connect with their audiences, discover what they are looking for, and seek that information and content. This can also result in more profound insights into consumers, better connections, and enlightened results for marketing purposes as well. According to Faisal & Ekawanto (2021), interactive and personalized social media are also reshaping customers' purchase behavior by enhancing their trust and meaningfully affecting the decision-making process of the customer. As mediators, BI and BA provide an explanation of how SMM activities are transformed into responses by consumers: they can be used for the recognition, construction of collective perceptions regarding the brand , and creation of long-term purchase intentions. Brand image, specifically, serves a critical mediating function in shaping consumer perception of quality, value, and loyalty. A good and positive BI resulting in customer commitment and attachment would make buyer behavior more certain and less risky (Efendioğlu & Durmaz, 2022).

In short, extant findings lean towards the indirect influence of SMM on PI, through its effect on BA and via the moderation or mediation of BI in international markets as well as in the Pakistani context. Social media is now more than ever being used as a platform for brands to disseminate localized and culture-focused content that provides value to their PI and builds stronger connections with their audience (Ali et al., 2017). Kazmi and Mehmood (2020) stated that a positive brand image has the ability to inculcate value into products and services, which affects a more favorable consumer perception and action, which is why managing BI inside digital channels is important. Manzoor et al. (2020) also assert that effective SMM enables firms to expand market share and PI with customers. Building on this information, the current study seeks to address an important question of how SMM acts through both BA and BI to affect PI in the consumer market in the Pakistan context.

The purchase intention (PI) of a customer is an essential factor for success in the mission and vision of an organization since it stands as one step closer to customers choosing to purchase organizational products or services (Yang & He, 2011; Supna et al., 2021). The competitive environment becomes particularly challenging in the emerging markets, and therefore becomes a must for companies that aim at sustainable growth or differentiation to understand the determinants of PI. SMM has a significant role in shaping consumers' PI within the Pakistani context as consumers depend highly on digital media for information seeking, comparing options , and building brand preferences (Toor et al., 2017). Notwithstanding this increasing dependency on social platforms, the capability of firms to convert their footprint on social media from an awareness channel into actual selling results is still elusive and begs the question: what are the key drivers for PI in such settings?

The emergence of SMM had a profound impact on consumer behavior, causing a significant change in consumer dealings with brands and decision-making (Kumar et al., 2020). The social Web is no longer just broadcast media; it's a medium for listening, promoting , and even note creation and building your community around your brand. Therefore, SMM is regarded as a fundamental instrument that helps entrepreneurs to achieve

effective brand recognition and perception, which leads to purchase intention (Hasan & Sohail, 2020). However, the relationship between SMM and PI is not merely direct. It is multidimensional and commonly functions through mediators that are important for the interpretation and reception of social media messages by consumers, notably brand image (BI) and brand awareness (BA) (Harrigan et al., 2020). While in the previous literature these variables are recognized, there is little agreement about how and to what extent BA and BI mediate the influence of SMM on PI, especially in emerging markets such as Pakistan.

Existing research suggests that BA and BI may contribute significantly to explaining why some SMM initiatives generate purchase intention while others do not. However, the mediating role of BA and BI in influencing purchase intention in the context of social media campaigns is still unclear at large. Faisal and Ekawanto (2021) discovered that purchase intention is significantly influenced by brand awareness and perceived value, which means that consumers' knowledge of a brand as well as its value can reinforce the influence of marketing activity on their willingness to purchase. Ali et al. (2017) argue that more studies are needed to explore mediating effects of BA and BI, particularly in culturally different and quickly digitalizing markets. This suggests an obvious lack of understanding about how SMM contributes, or does not contribute, to long-lasting purchase intentions.

Further, BA influences consumer brand recognition that leads to the preferences and consumers' willingness to adopt over alternatives of the same kind of association, as well as their global perceptions (Hameed et al., 2023). Inappropriate enhancement of BA and formation of beneficial BI due to SMM activities are not strong; the influence on PI may not be the same, despite firms spending a great amount on advertising online. More so in Pakistan, where social media is expanding, consumers are bombarded by dozens of local and foreign brands; the influence of BA and BI cannot be ignored in such an environment for the reduction of clutter and assistance towards selection. Thus, the fundamental issue addressed in this research is a lack of empirical evidence on how SMM creates an impact on PI through mediating the impacts of BI and BA in the context of Pakistan. By examining these mediating processes, this study seeks to address an important gap in the literature and offers actionable insights for companies looking to develop more successful SMM strategies that actually convert into increased purchase intentions.

Although previous studies have investigated SM as a mediator between PI and SME (Manzoor et al., 2020; Jamil et al., 2022; Dastane, 2020), we still do not fully understand the effect of SMM on consumers' actual decision-making process. Previous studies have primarily investigated the direct effects of SMM activities on consumers' purchasing decisions, indicating that social media advertising is able to drive interest and AIDA. On the other hand, researchers have investigated the effect of SMM on customers' purchasing decisions via BA mediation (Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020) as well as SMM's role in developing BI and reinforcing consumer perceptions towards a brand (Waworuntu et al., 2022). However, the majority of these studies examine BA and BI independently or as separate outcome variables, rather than as unique mediating mechanisms through which SMM is linked to PI. However, how BI and brand image jointly play a role in transmitting the effects of SMM into stronger or weaker PI is missing and still an open question;

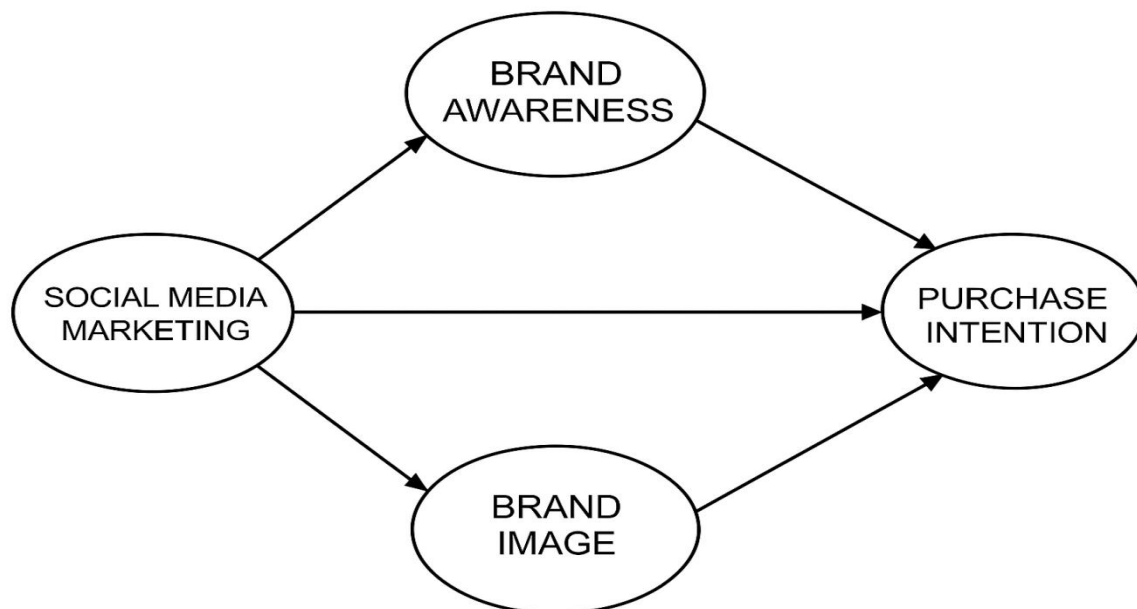therefore, there is a big gap about these brand-related constructs in the literature between SMM and PI.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives: to examine the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on consumers' purchase intention (PI); to analyse how brand image mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention; and to determine the extent to which brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

1.2 Research Questions

In line with these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions: What is the influence of social media marketing on purchase intention? What is the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention? And in what way does brand awareness act as a mediator between social media marketing and purchase intention?

Figure No 1: Conceptual Framework

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework

As described by SOR theory, the organism is a complex set of psychosocial processes that take place within the individual when they are confronted with a stimulus. This model was originally formulated by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), who described the three main components: stimulus, organism, and response. Taken together, these components describe the way in which environmental stimuli lead to internal emotional and cognitive

responses that in turn influence overt behavior. Under this model, subjective feelings and internal appraisals of the environment shape the way people respond to it. A stimulus is anything in the environment to which an organism responds (Sheng-Wei Lin & Louis Yi-Shih Lo, 2016). In this study, the cue is especially identified as extrinsic marketing activities implemented in social media. These initiatives cover a variety of SMM activities, including online advertising, interactive content and engaging challenging material, value-based posts, collaborating with influencers, brand storytelling, or other efforts to better suit your ultimate target audience. Those prompts trigger the beginning of psychological responses that influence how people perceive brands, and ultimately whether they'll choose to buy from or work with them. According to the literature, SMMAs also represent environmental stimuli that have the potential to impact consumer attitudes and behavior (Kian Yeik Koay et al., 2020).

Under this model, brand image and brand awareness act as central organismic variables that mediate the stimulus to behavioral outcomes. That is, if the consumers are exposed to SMM stimuli, their internal processing will be expressed as changes in BI and BA, which subsequently impact pre-purchase decision-making. The BI and BA, therefore, work as important mediators to deliver SMM stimulus effect through PI (Desi Patmawati & Miswanto Miswanto, 2022). Brand image and brand awareness act as the crucial psychological bridge between what companies convey on social media and how consumers perceive them. In the SOR model, response is that observable behavior or probably occurring behavior which results from the internal state of the organism. The response in this study was categorized as purchase intention, which stands for the tendency or probability that consumers decide to purchase a product or service after exposure and perception of stimuli via BI and BA.

2.2. Social Media Marketing

SMM is the systematic use of various online platforms and tools for the purpose of generating, distributing, and supporting content in order to attract, interact with, and influence large web audiences. In the social media milieu, firms could engage their customers and potential consumers by operationalising their brand presence in order to achieve some goals, such as creating awareness of the brand (BA), developing a stronger image of the brand (BI), generating leads, and ultimately leading to sales. SMM is more than just unilateral pushing; it focuses on dialogue, co-creation of content, and community building. Ebrahim (2020) described SMM engagement as an effective advertising instrument, which is a combination of the five critical dimensions: engagement, two-way communication, popularity, personalization, and word-of-mouth. Together, these dimensions impact how customers experience the brand, how engaged they are with its content, and how much more likely they are to share information. Scenarios of use Scenarios make interactions memorable; Two-way communication makes consumers feel you listen to them; Popularity indicators (social proof); Personalization Tailors content according to an individual's needs; Word of Mouth Helps spread the word through a consumer's peer networks. All the above SMM elements together affect and strengthen consumer perception, attitude, and engagement.

2.3. Brand Image

BI may be regarded as the full range of associations, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs that consumers connect with a product or brand. It is the image that resides in the minds of customers, and it is responsible for giving life to a brand and directing their relationship with the same. This image is developed and shaped over time through multiple touchpoints such as advertisements, social media content, word-of-mouth referrals, product experience, and customer service conversations. Visual identity is an important tool in building BI: elements such as brand logo, color palette, typeface, design and visual style, and overall look and feel make it easier for customers to identify a brand from those offered by competitors. A well-thought-out and coherent visual identity contributes to the creation of a unified and attractive image in consumers' minds. Research shows that, in practice, when a positive and strong brand image exists, it may promote consumers' trust and decrease perceived risk of buyers while increasing their purchase intentions to ultimately lead to the occurrence of actual behavioral purchase (Keller, 2016). Therefore, BI is not a conceptual matter but has implications for how consumers judge and decide about patronizing brands.

2.4. Brand Awareness

BA is the degree to which consumers are capable of identifying, recalling, and recognizing a brand when they come in contact with a product category or make a purchase decision. It is a measure of how well the brand is lodged within consumers' minds. Customers high on BA means customers can easily retrieve the brand to memory, and it increases the likelihood that they include the brand in their consideration set. Social media Involvement of BA in social media has excellent potential for both content and branding efforts. The brand's name, logo , and messages become more familiar to consumers from the constant exposure of posts, stories, and campaigns. This familiarity decreases doubt and increases confidence when it is time to make a decision between options. BA's driving force is to ensure customers can easily recognize the brand and link it with the benefits they saw online, as soon as possible, when customers decide to buy. BA has been found to evoke a sense of trust and closeness—two important psychological antecedents of high levels of PI (Hutter et al. BI and BA are both necessary for forming a strong and positive relationship between SMM and PI, as they work together to build trust, emotional attachment, and long-term relationships with customers.

2.5. Purchase Intention

PI reflects the consumer's awareness of his conscious intention, preference, or willingness to buy some particular product or service in the future. It is generally accepted as a strong predictor of future purchasing behaviour, since people tend to act the way they intended when circumstances permit. PI is determined by several factors, such as perceived value, experience, brand-rendered perceptions (BI and BA), social influence, and the quality of marketing communication. Strong purchase intention attests to the favorable evaluation of the brand that a consumer has made, paving the way for purchase, while weak or low intention may result in resistance, shift, and no decision. In digital and social media contexts, PI is particularly critical as consumers face numerous alternatives that are able to change their preferences at a rapid pace. The intention to shop is encompassed by the positive effects

of perceived value and subjective buying tendency, also known as subjective display intention (Chenggang Wang et al., 2023). As long as consumers perceive good value and the brand meets their expectations, they will be motivated to buy, increasing the likelihood that potential buyers become actual customers.

2.6. Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

The effect of Social media marketing (SMM) on purchase intention (PI) has become a hot topic in the recent marketing literature, as increasing number of studies indicate that social media (SM) influence how consumers think, feel and behave within the.. 1. With social media now providing brands with the chance to connect with consumers in real time, putting out attractive and useful content, responding rapidly to comments or even complaints, they facilitate an atmosphere of increased engagement and credibility. This reinforced relationship between consumers and brands (thanks, in part, to dialogue, ratings/reviews, recommendations, and repeated exposure) is a definitive influencer of purchase decisions.

Purchase intention in this study can be interpreted as the probability or percentage a customer describes when making up his mind to purchase a certain product or service. The higher the likelihood that this is from happening, the greater will be the extent to which a consumer is ready and willing to purchase something, and thus there will also be a stronger motivational tendency for making real purchases (Xia Liu et al., 2021). Thus, PI is a significant gauge that enables marketers to forecast future sales and analyze how efficiently their marketing communications persuade consumers. Several earlier works have emphasized how PI is an important factor in recognizing and predicting consumer buying behavior, hence its significance in explaining general market trends at the moment and later (Khalid Jamil et al., 2021). This process is also supported by social networking platforms (SNPs) through which individuals can access high-quality content of interest to them that has been shared by experts in a field (such as authority figures or "key opinion leaders"; Levy et al., 2012), influencers, and knowledgeable peers. From the consumers' perspective, if they see reliable information, comprehensive product descriptions, truthful reviews, and word-of-mouth recommendations on platforms, their PI is expected to positively affect (George Onofrei et al., 2022). This content reduces the risk of uncertainty, increases perceived value, and builds confidence in a brand, which helps move consumers further through purchasing consideration.

H1: Social media marketing has a positive impact on purchase intention

2.7 Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness

A considerable number of empirical studies have consistently supported the important degree to which social media marketing (SMM) is theoretically relevant in enhancing brand awareness (BA) over a variety of contexts and sectors. For example, research done in 2021 among vocational high school students in Tangerang found that SMM activities had a significant effect on BA and PI. This research implies that when educational institutions or brands utilize structured SMM practices like posting text-based information, interactive communication, and two-way communications, students come to know them better, the organization's brand is easily identifiable to students, and they are more likely to be

considered by students during their decision-making process. In other words, SMM not only enhances visibility, but it also plays a significant role in shaping how consumers recall and evaluate the brand and affects their purchase intention.

This evidence supports that the efficacy of SMM is based on promoting and preserving BA over time. When customers see images, stories, and messages about a brand over and over on social channels, they start to make strong mental connections. Accordingly, BA is an important psychological hurdle that SMM must overcome to influence consumer buying decisions. Therefore, since brand awareness and when the customers consider the brand as an option of choice to buy a certain product are significantly affected by social media marketing, this factor becomes crucial in shaping individuals' purchasing behavior because there are more chances for the organizations that created these offers to be one of those who come into consideration whenever they decide to buy something.

The strategic role of SMM in creating long-term brand awareness has continuously been highlighted in the literature on various SM platforms (Cuong Nguyen et al., 2024). Through stories, live sessions, reels, and targeted ads, brands are able to stay connected with their audience at all times via social media. They allow us to produce stimulus, furthering repetitive but interesting exposure, making the brand mentally available and relevant for all of us. Continuously producing unique messages and visuals, SMM contributes to strengthening BA as much as it makes the brand stand out in packed digital markets.

This relationship is further supported by evidence from Pakistan's fashion industry. Research in this domain has found that BA has been affected positively by brand communication on digital media, whether internet users communicated (eg, reviews, posts, and shared customer) or the company communicated (eg, official campaign, new product launch, and promotional posting) (Shaheera Amin, 2019). This finding also means that the effects of paid activities of social media, in addition to the organic, are important to create BA, because consumers listen to both for what brands speak about themselves and through the opinions they hear from other users about them. The positive influence of this communication on BA suggests that SMM is important for creating awareness locally (Pakistan-specific) and internationally. In aggregate, our results suggest that SMM is a key factor for BA, and not only within a country or industry but worldwide. Through tools such as social media, brands can have meaningful dialogue with present and future consumers, react to feedback, and offer content that evokes audience needs and lifestyles. This continuous interaction builds deeper recall, attachment, and finally long-lasting fidelity. In doing so, SMM constitutes an antecedent of developing and nurturing BA to influence positive consumer attitude and purchase behavior in the long run.

H2: Social media marketing has a positive impact on brand awareness

2.8 Social Media Marketing and Brand Image

The findings draw attention to the role of social media marketing in forming brand image through enhanced engagement, trust, and emotional connection between consumer and brand. Brands can, with meticulous planning and curation, manipulate social platforms by portraying consistent values, stories, and visuals that appeal to their target audience. The

process goes beyond mere visibility; it implies all the relationships (response to feedback) and actions (interactable poll questions) brands can establish with consumers in order to associate them more directly with their business. Content on social sites tailored to users has the impact of providing an improved brand experience for consumers more than any other form of passive or non-interactive content, by personalizing the nature of a consumer's interaction with a brand (Imran Ali & Mohammad Naushad, 2023). When consumers perceive that the brand shares their needs and communicates effectively in a way that contributes to share market information, they evaluate the overall image of the brand more favorably, and this fact is reconfirmed for good image brands.

Moreover, the impact of social media marketing on purchase decisions is further enhanced when brand image is accounted for as a mediator. The research shows that through better online communication (storytelling as a way to deliver the brand value, direct marketing to certain segments, and using unique feature offers by social media platforms (live video, short video reelings, interactive story)), the brand can make its image more favorable in consumers' minds (Rizki Zulfi Akbari et al., 2024). These efforts contribute to a connected, compelling brand story that enhances brand image and ultimately impacts purchase behaviour. Positive and reliable brand image enables the brand to differentiate from other brands, create customer loyalty over time, and form strong rapport-based relationships (Wijayanti & Nainggolan, 2023). If consumers continue to be exposed to a brand over and over again that looks dependable, sincere, and emotionally attractive, it is probable that they will remain loyal to this brand, recommend it, and choose it. Psychological process of brand image in the success of social media banking marketing.

H3: Social media marketing has a positive impact on brand image

2.9 Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention

A current meta-analysis of extant research revealed a consistently positive link between brand awareness and purchase intentions, proving that consumers are more inclined to make a purchase when they have a greater degree of dazzle. In the decision-making of consumers, high brand awareness works as an essential premise for them (Kerse 2023), because those brands that are easy to remember and recall can be part of the possible choice set of a consumer, then may even lead to purchase. That means the brand is known and its name, logo, and broad associations are made, consumers become more confident in it as a stable choice – with less uncertainty associated with a purchase decision -- leading them to be more likely to buy the product or service. Consistent with these factors, another study also found a meaningful and positive correlation between brand awareness and purchase intention, which suggests that the rise in the extent of brand attention leads to a higher chance of consumers purchasing particular products or services.

More recent empirical work continues to corroborate this logic in varying digital and sectoral settings: For instance, evidence indicates that brand awareness is a significant driver of purchase intention (both on the online and mobile platforms) as well as force mediating the influence of social media campaigns and digital communication on many consumers' decisions to purchase; implying that these studies supply strong evidence for how brand awareness should not be reduced to a superficial marketing outcome but rather framed as an

essential strategic input which informs how consumers compare options, build preferences, and convert those valuations into actual purchase intentions.

H4: Brand Awareness has a positive impact on Purchase intention

2.10 Brand Image and Purchase Intention

Brand image is a focal construct in understanding consumer behaviour and marketing responses, as evidenced by past research. Online, brands share the communicative touch-points of stories, values, and imagery that reverberate favorable perceptions, positive sentiment, and trust in a brand identity over time. Brand image is a key driver of intentions to purchase, especially in beauty products and personal care, since it creates a strategic platform for creating an identifiable and distinct brand, which can positively impact consumers' purchasing intention (M. Salem, 2024). Parallel results from diverse industries provide evidence that brand image is directly or indirectly associated with other constructs (e.g., e-WOM, perceived value) are closely associated with purchase intention (Chairani et al., 2025; Khoirunnisa & Albari, 2023; Mohit, 2025).

Increasingly competitive markets have led consumers to be more selective, not only considering the product's functional attributes but also the brand's reputation and image in purchase decisions (Irawan & Suprapti, 2020). Empirical and review studies indicate that good brand image results in lower customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, which is significantly linked to increasing purchase intention (Tahir et al., 2024; García-Salirrosas et al., 2024). A strong brand image is also used as a risk-reducing mechanism: by giving the signal of reliability and consistent quality, it reduces the perceived uncertainty and increases consumer confidence regarding their decisions, which is especially relevant in high-involvement or high-risk purchase situations (Brown et al., 2011; Chairani et al., 2025). Indeed, as a whole, these results highlight that brand image – and with it brand awareness – is an important determinant of purchase intention, supporting prior research suggesting that the brand-related constructs are potent drivers of whether consumers move from evaluation to actual purchasing behaviour (Kerse, 2023; Chen, 2024).

H5: Brand image has a positive impact on purchase intention

2.11 Brand Awareness Mediates the Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

Though it is a technology of now and the future, SMM forms the foundation of current marketing tools to increase brand penetration, enabling success in competitive markets. With the help of interesting visuals focusing content spread across different platforms, SMM lets brands connect with a vast number of people and become familiar with their products or services, thus making it easier for them to be remembered when consumers make a buying decision. According to several researchers, brand awareness not only has a direct effect on purchase intention, but it also serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between digital word-of-mouth and purchase intention; hence, consumers are more likely to follow up online recommendations when they are already aware of the discussed brand (Arifin & Syah, 2023). This underscores the extent to which successful SMM activities will do more than simply increase brand awareness; they amplify the impact

of other digital influencers (e.g., reviews, comments, peer endorsements) on decision-making related to purchase decisions.

Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase decision, as increased brand awareness makes customers more inclined to be concerned about the promotional message frame and assured in their choices (Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021). Consistent with this perspective, research in the relationship between SMM, brand awareness, and purchase intention found that brand image (BI) is also identified as an essential mediating variable that links social media marketing to purchase intention, which implies that how consumers perceive and praise the brand due to its exposure from SMM activities (Saputra & Wardana, 2023). In addition, it was also found by Priatni et al. (2020) that brand awareness is a significant mediator in the relationship between SMM exposure and purchase intention, lending support to the premise that awareness serves as an important mechanism through which social media returns can be converted into buying behaviour. All in all, these studies suggest that brand awareness is an important principle of the use of social media to stimulate a consumer's purchase interest, enhancing the influence of digital communication and fostering more positive assessments about the brand.

H6: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention

2.12 Brand Image Mediates the Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

Social media, as an essential of contemporary marketing, has become a dominant strategic tool to create and build brand identity in consumers' minds. By means of interactive functionalities, visual storytelling, personalized reflections, and two-way communications, SMM allows brands to express their identity, values, and personality more viscerally than conventional media formats, thereby affecting consumer perceptions and assessments over time. Among the contributions in recent studies, social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchasing intention, through a complete mediation of brand image perception (Ali & Naushad, 2023). That is, SMM does not have a direct relationship with purchase intention; its influence arises largely due to how it forms, creates, and maintains the favorability towards the brand. When consumers are exposed to consistent and attractive brand content on social sites, they can form stronger brand associations and love feelings towards the brand, which in turn have positive influences on their purchase intention. Several other research studies also suggest that social media marketing, product quality, and brand image are significantly related to consumer behavior, namely the evaluation of brands, preference formation of brands, and final purchase decisions. The influence they have on consumers' purchasing decision behavior implies that brand image holds significance as a mediating variable through which marketers and product attributes are associated with purchase intentions (Akbari et al., 2024). In doing so, brand image serves as a perceptual filter that consumers employ to evaluate marketing communications and make inferences about the extent to which a brand is consistent with their own attitudes and self-image. Consistent with these findings, a recent study on Kooka Coffee demonstrates that brand image as a mediator significantly and positively influences purchase decisions influenced by

social media marketing (Tauran et al., 2022). This adds up to the fact that, also in successful SMM contexts—besides raising consumers' attention and attractiveness for products—it is the enhanced image of the brand which will lead to concrete purchase behaviour.

H7: Brand image mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Choosing an appropriate design for research is key to conducting a systematic and professional study, since this choice sets the JJ 52 plan of action in terms of information collection and analysis. The structure that binds the research problem and the methods by which action may be implemented to the National Agricultural Library Page 41 of 113 study and answer questions is called a design. Explanatory studies conducted using descriptive surveys may be particularly relevant when one seeks to investigate hidden interconnections between variables and the nature of one variable as the influencing factor on another. Research designs are generally viewed in three perspectives, namely explanatory (causal), exploratory, and descriptive approaches (Aramide, 2023).

In this research, the method used is a descriptive survey, as it allows for the gathering of accurate and verifiable data from a specified population using standardised questionnaires. This design is particularly appropriate for assessing perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions towards social media marketing (SMM), brand image (BI), brand awareness (BA), and purchase intention (PI). The study will provide empirical evidence on the mediating effects of BI and BA in the relationship between SMM and PI, which will lead to an overall greater understanding of how brand variables carry forward the impact of SMM on consumers' purchase intention. Through SMM, the current study will examine building a relationship and exposure to content on how it impacts consumers' purchase intention and perceived brand visibility. In quantitatively testing these relationships, the research design offers strong evidence to support the influence of SMM tactics on the brand and consumer decision-making.

3.2 Research Approach

Research methods are broadly classified into two main categories: deductive and inductive. The first approach used in this study is a deductive one, which relies on existing theories to generate and test specific hypotheses. The proposed model is built on the basis of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory, and it is used as a framework for investigating the relationships among variables in our study. By adopting such a theory-testing approach, we aim to make evidence-based conclusions and deliver a theoretical contribution towards the understanding of social media marketing and its effects.

3.3 Philosophies and Time Horizon

There are many philosophical approaches to research, which most predominantly include deductive and inductive, and abductive approaches (however, we also address the other approaches, such as analytic induction as well). A realist philosophy is used in an

analysis of quantitative data in this research. This position is justified relative to the SMM industry as it focuses on objectivity, measurement, and the application of statistical methods to investigate relationships between well-defined variables (SMM, BI, BA, PI). Using quantifiable indicators, the positivist method allows for more reliable and generalizable conclusions to be drawn from data , as well as an organized examination of how this set of variables is related. The findings can therefore help to inform further evidence-based approaches to improve marketing in this sector.

In terms of time frame, the observations of most research are categorized as a cross-sectional or longitudinal design. Qualitative or quantitative data may be gathered, but the major difference is the timing of when the data are collected. In a cross-sectional design, data are gathered at one time point, whereas in longitudinal designs, the behaviour of interest is recorded several times. For this study, a cross-sectional approach is taken because it is not reasonable to try to collect the data from the same participants at different times. This design enables the researcher to take a 'snapshot' of SMM, BI, BA , and PI perceptions and behavior at an instant in time -- before any coaching intervention has taken place -- thereby offering an immediate and expedient foci for analysis.

3.4 Sampling Technique

In the present research, the convenience sampling method is utilised to gather information from social media users. Target users were those who could independently read the questionnaire and complete it. Participants were sampled based on availability, as well as relevance to study criteria, including being actively involved in social media, especially with a focus on or reference to the research setting. A combined sample of 408 was first contacted, with the selection being largely based on availability and willingness to respond. Before completing the survey, participants were informed about the aim and purpose of the research so that they could be effectively informed. Of the 408 questionnaires sent out, 310 returned fully completed, and these were found to be valid responses for analysis; thus, these data constitute the final dataset used in this study.

3.5. Scale and Measure

Our study adopts a questionnaire based on previous research. Table 1 presents an overview of key constructs, sources, and the specific items used in the study.

Table No 1: Scale and Measures

Construct	No. of items to use	Main source to adopt items from
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	15 items	Yadav & Rahman (2017), based on Kim & Ko (2012)
Brand Image (BI)	4 items	Keller & Aaker (1992); Batra et al. (1991), as operationalised by Elseidi & El-Baz (2016)
Brand Awareness (BA)	5 items	Buil, de Chernatony & Martínez (2013); Boo (2009), as adopted in Ngan (2018/2019)
Purchase Intention (PI)	5 items	Spears & Singh (2004)

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

In this study, the procedure of analysing data consisted of classifying and summarizing data in a systematic way for sound statistical testing. SmartPLS was chosen as the main instrument of statistical treatment due to its adequacy for correlation analysis, measurement model testing, structural model examination, and mediation tests for the Sobel test. The investigation used structural equation modeling (SEM) with the partial least squares (PLS) technique via SmartPLS 4, which offers significant benefits in relation to data issues such as noise, missing values, and skewness (Cassel et al., 2000). A two-step approach to data analysis was used: an initial measurement model was tested in order to check the reliability and validity of the constructs, followed by a structural model, which tested the theoretical relationships among variables. This was done so that we could get a detailed picture of how the observed indicators were related to the latent constructs, as well as between those constructs in the overall model.

4. Results

4.1 Factor Loading's

Table 2 shows the factor loadings, which represent how strongly each item (indicator) is related to its construct. All factor loadings are above the recommended cutoff of 0.70, indicating that the indicators have a strong association with their respective constructs.

Table No 2: Factor Loadings – LOC

Construct	Indicator	Factor Loading
Social Media Marketing	SMM1	0.812
Social Media Marketing	SMM2	0.845
Social Media Marketing	SMM3	0.879
Social Media Marketing	SMM4	0.868
Social Media Marketing	SMM5	0.831
Brand Image	BI1	0.891
Brand Image	BI2	0.904
Brand Image	BI3	0.876
Brand Image	BI4	0.842
Brand Awareness	BA1	0.827
Brand Awareness	BA2	0.843
Brand Awareness	BA3	0.869
Brand Awareness	BA4	0.812
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.894
Purchase Intention	PI2	0.908
Purchase Intention	PI3	0.873
Purchase Intention	PI4	0.858

Table 3 presents the findings for reliability and convergent validity. The results show that all AVE values are above 0.500, which meets the standard requirement for convergent validity (Wong, 2013).

Table No 3: Reliability and Validity of Measurement Model

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BA	0.783	0.769	0.896	0.537
BI	0.865	0.868	0.872	0.650
PI	0.847	0.800	0.863	0.603
SMM	0.824	0.887	0.929	0.559

4.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated by the Farndell and Larcker (1981) criteria and cross-loading analysis. The findings, presented in Tables 5 and 6, reveal that the latent variables are clearly separable. In particular, every pair of AVE's square root value is greater than the correlation between these two factors, and cross-loadings also emphasize that each measured variable has a relatively high contribution to the explanation (aligned to its factor).

Table No 4: Discriminant Validity

	Brand Awareness	Brand Image	Purchase Intention	Social Media Marketing
Brand Awareness				
Brand Image	0.080			
Purchase Intention	0.335	0.662		
Social Media Marketing	0.005	0.709	0.466	

4.5 Structural Model Assessment

Following the measurement model assessment, the present paper proceeded to investigate structural relationships among constructs through path coefficients and their significance (Hair et al., 2017). The inner model was analyzed, and the hypotheses were tested by means of bootstrapping using SmartPLS. The results of these hypothesis tests are presented in the following subsections.
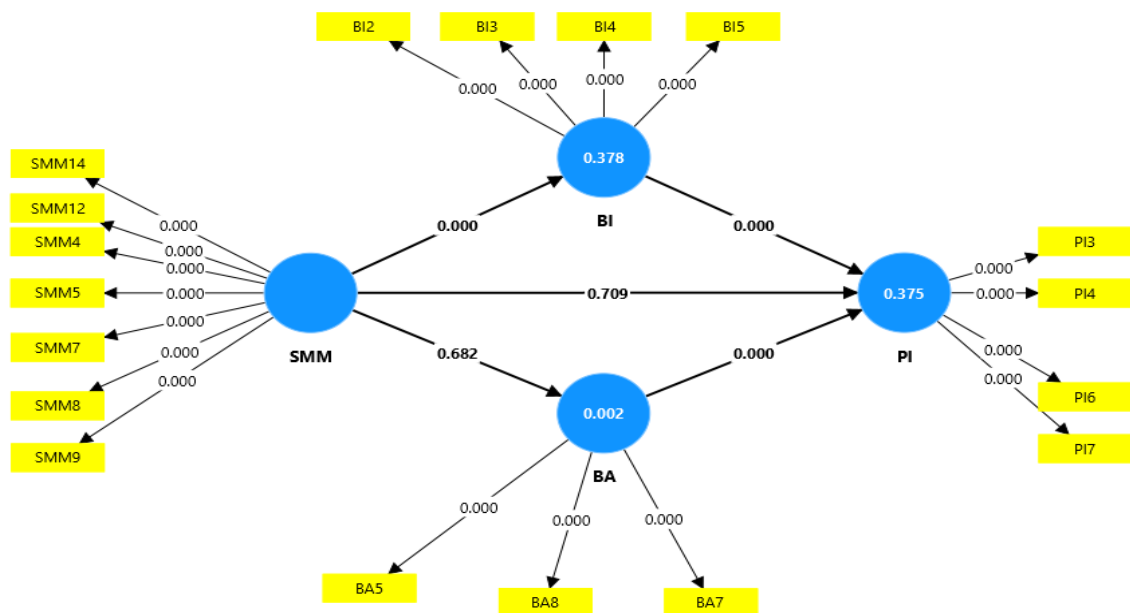
4.6 Hypothesis Testing

Table No 5: Hypotheses Results

Path	Beta	T Statistics	P values	Results
H1 : SMM -> PI	0.027	0.344	0.719	Rejected
H2 : SMM -> BA	0.050	0.430	0.632	Rejected
H3 : SMM -> BI	0.615	12.635	0.000	Accepted
H4 : BA -> PI	0.260	4.148	0.000	Accepted
H5 : BI -> PI	0.530	6.784	0.000	Accepted

Structural path coefficients from the overall results in Table 8 show that all hypotheses were supported by our tested model. The findings reveal that the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on purchase intention (PI) is not significant (H1: β =0.027, t = 0.344, p = 0.719). The SMM -> brand awareness (BA) link is also insignificant (H2: β =

0.050, t = 0.430, p =.632). Because the p-values of both H1 and H2 are higher than 0.05, we reject H1 and H2 to conclude that in this sample, the direct effect of SMM is marginally nonsignificant for PI or BA (Table 3). On the other hand, all further paths are positive and highly significant at the 0.001 level. SMM has a positive influence on BI (H3: β = 0.615, t = 12.635, p = 0.000), and the result is conducive to H3, which illustrates that SMM activities are a great help for BI. Besides, BA also has a positive impact on PI (H4: β = 0.260, t = 4.148, p = 0.000), while BI has an even stronger effect on PI (H5: β = 0.530, t = 6.784, p = 0.000). Therefore, H4 and H5 are supported, which indicates that BA and BI both play significant roles in influencing consumers' purchase intentions, with BI being the stronger predictor.

Figure No 2. Structural Model

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research extends knowledge about the interrelationship between SMM, BA, BI, and PI, especially in a Pakistani context. Results indicate that SMM has no direct influence on PI or BA, but it is significantly and strongly related to BI, which propels PI. This trend shows that SMM serves mainly as a brand-building tool instead of a sales promotion tool for Pakistani consumers. In other words, it's not who's on social platforms that matters, but the impression they are giving consumers about a company. Therefore, this study supports previous studies that suggest the significance of brand image on buying decisions (Ali & Naushad, 2023). In a market like Pakistan—where consumers are possibly more risk-averse, price-conscious, and their behaviour is largely shaped by social and cultural factors—image-related cues such as perceived credibility, modernity, and ethical behavior play an even more significant role while translating online interest into purchase intentions.

The non-acceptance of H1, which indicated that a direct path between SMM and PI did not exist, as digital campaigns are not influential enough to generate strong purchase

intentions in Pakistan. They can like, follow, or enjoy brand content, but for even the most engaged users, without convincing trust signals and a sense of reliability and longevity, it is difficult to encourage them to purchase. This correlates with findings from other emerging economies, where trust and perceived credibility have emerged as a critical filter in making decisions (Patmawati & Miswanto, 2022). Likewise, rejecting H2 (SMM → BA) reflects that publicizing on social media alone does not necessarily lead to increased awareness. Pakistan's social media users encounter a high percentage of generic brand promotions, and an undifferentiated campaign can easily get lost in the clutter. This, in turn, emphasizes the importance of specific and stratified SMM strategies that are also localised and culturally adapted (for instance, by language and issue use, selected local influencer), which joins the idea of a cultural/regional shaping the construction of awareness toward brand when it comes to SMM use (Saputra & Wardana, 2023).

With the acceptance of H3, it has been established that SMM does have a positive and significant impact on BI, thereby demonstrating the significance of brand image in digital strategies. Highly engaging storytelling and behind-the-scenes content raising user-generated questions on, for instance, Twitter and Instagram (with a prompt hashtag) that brands respond to can give personality, or even a face, to companies interacting with emotionally appealing factors, which enhances our direct connections with BI. This is in agreement with studies that demonstrate that efficient SMM enhances consumer trust and involvement, which are essential constructs of a positive brand image (Imran Ali & Naushad, 2023). The observed positive and significant direct effect of BA on PI (H4) is consistent with existing work emphasizing brand familiarity and recognition as driving purchase decisions (Kerse, 2023). In the generally crowded Pakistani market, where most brands usually trade off very similar products at the same price, standing out and being remembered becomes a competitive benefit that propels an individual towards a specific brand when he or she is making a choice.

Lastly, the support for H5–which evidences BI as a strong determinant of PI – signifies that what consumers feel and think about a brand is more important than just exposure. A positive BI is related to quality, trustworthiness, modernity, and peers' acceptance, which can mitigate the perceived risk and thereby strengthen the purchase intentions of consumers (Khalid et al., 2024). Such a finding corresponds well with FFS's view that brand image has a determinant impact in constructing a positive attitude toward buying (Siddiqui et al., 2026). Overall, these results imply that SMM should be viewed as a strategic platform by Pakistani firms to create and manage brand image and awareness rather than using it as an independent sales tool. It can be concluded that creating a strong, trust-based brand through localized digital content might be the optimal avenue to convert social media presence into stronger purchase intentions in Pakistan.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The contribution of this research to the marketing theory is to strengthen and widen the use of the SOR model in social media marketing in Pakistan. According to SOR, social media marketing (SMM) is the stimulus, and brand awareness (BA) and brand image (BI) are the organism that refers to internal states of consumers, whereas purchase intention (PI) is used as a response. The results demonstrate that SMM does not have a large direct effect on

PI, but its indirect effect is reflected mainly through BI (and slightly smaller through BA). And by that I mean, users do not go after social media content straight to purchase intention; they consume the content and then process it. Perceptions about the brand are formed, and from there decide what's next. This evidence (consumers' perceptions) supports the mediating effect of consumer perceptions and shows how BA/BI are not only outcomes of SMM but psychological paramount processes translating digital stimuli into behavioral intentions.

This research also resolves problems in previous research that occasionally reported either mixed or weak direct effects of SMM on PI by separating the non-significant direct paths (SMM → PI; SMM → BA) and powerful indirect paths (SMM → BI → PI). The findings indicate that such discrepancies can be due to models neglecting the mediating effects of brand-related variables. In the context of Pakistan, where consumers are very conscious about cues about credibility, image, and trustworthiness in deciding on the information for acquiring job intern perception among potential candidates, what effects of BA are insignificant as compared to BI. Thus, by bringing forward that in emergent and trust-sensitive markets the "organism" component of the SOR model—namely BI and BA—is particularly important for understanding how digital marketing activities end up influencing purchase intentions, this research advances theory.

5.2. Practical Implications

Managerial Implications: The managerial implications of these findings are manifold for the firms operating in Pakistan and other developing nations. First, the non-significant direct impact of SMM on PI suggests that merely being active on social media, organizing a large number of campaigns, or gathering more followers is not sufficient to generate purchase intention. What's important is how those actions influence brand image. Companies should view SMM as a tool to build a brand, not a relationship. Marketers must create content strategies that convey a strong, coherent, and attractive brand personality; one that can stand for trustworthiness, quality, and local culture. Compelling visuals, emotion-heavy storytelling, and coherent brand narratives across platforms can help build BI up.

Socially engaging. Secondly, the findings underscore the need to build social media initiatives that create more than nominal 'buzz.'" Interactive ads, polls, Q&As, live events, and partnerships with reputable influencers can put a face to the name and help people feel closer on an emotional level. Stories of real customers, according to the testimonial, experience, and user-generated content, are more popular in the Pakistani audience, where peers receive the most valuable opinion leaders' suggestions. BI, authenticity, and credibility (due to enhanced perceptions of authenticity and credibility as introduced in the previous discussion). Perceptions regarding the ideas/ideals: This content promotes BI; this does not just boost PI but also adds back the PI necessary precursors.

Third, SMM was not observed to significantly influence BA directly in this study; however, it exerted a positive and significant impact on PI. That doesn't mean companies should ignore awareness, but they should take a more focused and methodical approach to growing it. Visual Identity (logo, colors, typography) is coherent. Saying the name of your brand clearly is important. Key messages: brands that have their USP spread over the

channels are easily recognisable. Nothing prevents the brand from consistently being showcased to its priority segments, whether it be through social media paid ads, search optimization, and sponsored content, or by establishing partnerships with local pages/communities. All these measures work to make the brand sticky and top of mind by encouraging better content quality, showing a regular posting schedule that is regular, and responsiveness to comments/messages, which I believe can also be very influential.

Fourth, the research highlights the importance of contextualizing SMM interventions. Pakistani consumers are guided by culture, religion, language, and local trends. Campaigns using Urdu or regional language, mentioning local events/festivals and cultural sensitivities, may be more appealing and indicative of BI and BA. Transitioning your tone, imagery, and storytelling towards Pakistani lifestyles and dreams. Your content should never be cut and pasted from elsewhere across the globe.

Lastly, organizations need to ensure that SMM becomes part of a wider focus on customer relationship management. Providing customer service replies via social, addressing complaints timely and being open about policies serve to further bolster brand image and awareness for the long term. Measuring performance through the management of metrics like sentiment, share of voice, repeat engagement, and conversion driven from social media can help managers determine if their SMM is actually improving their BI and PI instead of simply creating likes and views.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Notwithstanding its merits, the study also has several limitations that must be addressed. First, the study is mostly restricted to Pakistani social media users, and thus, generalization of its findings in a cross-cultural or economic environment becomes problematic. Cross-country comparisons may be useful in future studies to explore the extent of the influence of BI and BA as mediators among developed and developing countries. Second, this research is based on a cross-sectional design and convenience sampling; the inference of causality should be treated with caution. Longitudinal or intervention studies could offer more unequivocal evidence about the effects of changes in SMM activities over time in regard to BI, BA, and PI.

Third, the model focuses on BI and BA as mediators; yet other influential psychological constructs (e.g., trust, perceived value, electronic word-of-mouth, customer engagement) could serve in mediating or moderating roles. Further work is also needed to investigate moderation or media buffering in more complex mediated moderated mediation models and to test the moderators of such effects by other variables. Similarly, pieces of future work segment-based analyses (e.g., segmented by age, gender, income, or type of social media platform) to see if the strength of relationships across subgroups is different, and give more specific advice for market segmentation and targeting.

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