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Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention: Multi-Mediating Engagement, Brand Equity, eWOM, and Trust

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This research examines the role of social media marketing (SMM) in influencing consumer purchase intention (CPI) based on a multi-mediation framework which includes consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand loyalty (BL), brand equity (BE), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and customer trust (CT). The study uses 19 hypotheses to test the claims, and the hypotheses are based on a sample of 450 respondents who are Pakistan-based. Findings affirm that SMM completely mediates the associations between the six antecedents and CPI. The antecedents to CPI only have indirect paths (via SMM). The model has a high percentage of variance explained in CPI (58.6) and in SMM (62.9), which validates this strong explanatory power. Results provide practical information to marketers in the up-and-coming digital economies.

1. Introduction

The emergence of social media platforms has fundamentally restructured the architecture of brand-consumer interaction and has replaced traditional marketing paradigms with digital ecosystems as the main arenas of brand-consumer interaction. In Pakistan, which is a country where the penetration of smartphones is rapid, where the number of young people is growing, and where there are already more than 71 million users of social media as of 2024, the commercial importance of social media marketing (SMM) cannot be overestimated. However, even with this large digital footprint, no clear behavioral processes by which SMM can turn online impressions into buying obligations are sufficiently theorized, especially in the contexts of developing economies (Shafiq et al., 2024).

Consumer engagement (CE), brand awareness (BA), brand loyalty (BL), brand equity (BE), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and customer trust (CT) have been individually studied as determinants of consumer purchase intention (CPI). Nevertheless, these constructs have been studied mostly in isolation or within very parsimonious two-variable models and not considering the compound mediating role of SMM across multiple antecedent pathways at the same time. This conceptual and theoretical fragmentation restricts the practitioners to design integrated marketing strategies and limits the scholar to produce cumulative knowledge (Novilia et al., 2025).

The current research fills this gap by developing and empirically testing a multi-mediation model in which SMM is a key mediating variable between six different antecedents and CPI. This framework is based on the theory of Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) which states that the digital marketing stimuli triggers the psychological and attitudinal condition engagement, trust and loyalty which are then channeled through SMM to result in behavioral purchase responses (Sharma et al., 2022).

The research will be limited to Pakistani consumer market and will focus on the social media users, who have engaged with brand-related content on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok. The area includes B2C scenarios in product lines that are typical advertising on social media.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To investigate the immediate impacts of CE, BA, BL, BE, eWOM and CT to CPI.
- To measure the direct impacts of CE, BA, BL, BE, eWOM, and CT on SMM.
- To examine how SMM mediates the relationship between each of the antecedents and CPI.
- To test the explanatory power of the proposed multi-mediation framework in general.

1.2 Research Questions

- CE, BA, BL, BE, eWOM, and CT are independent and predictors of CPI?
- Question: Do CE, BA, BL, BE, eWOM and CT have significant predictive value of SMM?
- Does SMM intervene between the relationship between each antecedent and CPI?
- What is the percentage of variance in CPI that is accounted by the proposed framework?

2. Literature Review

The concept of social media marketing has become a multidimensional construct that consists of content creation, community management, influencer collaboration, and targeted advertising, all implemented using digital platforms to trigger consumer behavior (Li et al., 2021). In the Pakistani scenario, adoption of SMM by businesses has increased significantly, following availability of data tariffs and advertising mechanisms specific to each platform, which allows the targeting of audience precisely. According to previous research, the activities of SMMs, such as interactive content, sponsored posts, and user-generated campaigns, have a positive influence on consumer attitudes and intentions to behave (Asif & Sandhu, 2023). The theoretical foundations of the influence of SMM on behavior often also lie within S-O-R theory, where stimuli delivered by platforms can serve as environmental stimuli that trigger cognitive and affective organism-states that culminate in purchase reactions.

Engagement of the consumer, brand recognition, and brand loyalty are some of the core constructs in the digital marketing scholarship. CE reflects the richness of psychological and behavioral engagement between consumers and brands on social platforms, beyond passive consumption to include liking, sharing, commenting and co-creation (Zailskaitė-Jakštė et al., 2026). BA is the importance and awareness of a brand in consumer memory that is enhanced by social media due to repetitive and contextually relevant exposure (Sri & Drusika, 2025). As a consumer committed disposition to purchase a favorite brand over time, BL is becoming more and more influenced by the quality and authenticity of the social media interactions (Soloviov, 2025). These constructs are not independent, but they interdependently activate through sustained SMM efforts, and this forms a reinforcing cycle which gradually moves consumers towards commitment to purchase.

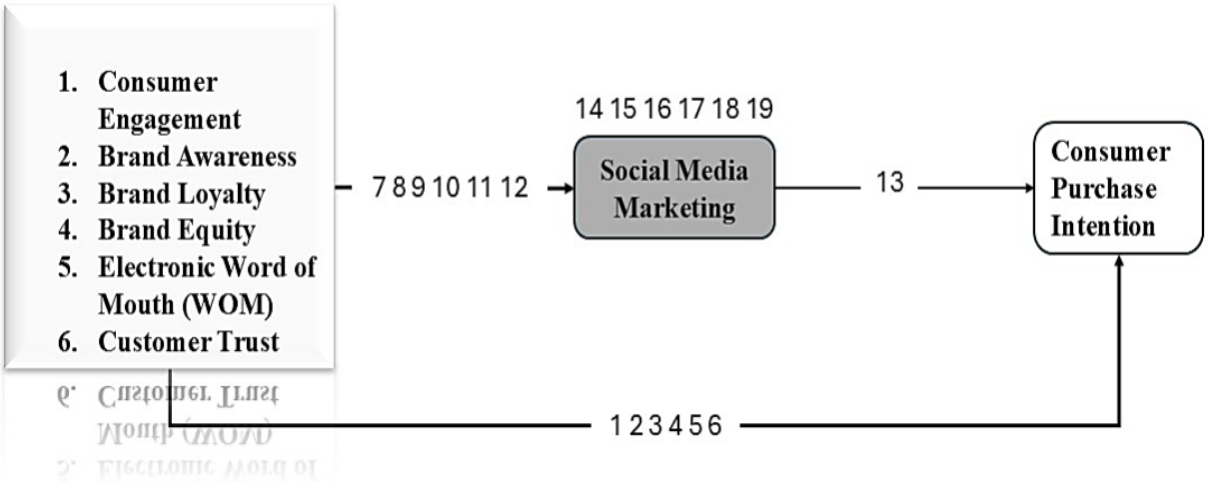
A second level of construct that extends the framework into the realms of perceived value, peer influence and relational confidence includes brand equity, eWOM and customer trust. As the operationalization of BE, which is the incremental value that a brand name adds to a product over the function attributes, it is highly improved by the consistent and high-quality communication of SMM (Lin et al., 2023). eWOM, which includes consumer-created reviews, recommendations, and testimonials that are shared through social media, serves the function of a credibility enhancer that influences the perception of peers regarding the quality of brands and mitigates some of the pre-purchase uncertainty (Lin et al., 2023). Based on the perceptions of competence, benevolence and integrity, CT mediates the willingness of consumers to act upon the brand information provided on social media (Prasetyo et al., 2025). These constructs combined define the psychological process of how the individual impacts of each construct are combined and channeled.

2.1 Hypotheses Development

- H1: The positive influence of consumer engagement on consumer purchase intention is significant.
- H2: There is an important positive effect of brand awareness on consumer purchase intention.
- H3: H3: Brand loyalty positively, but significantly, influences consumer purchase intention.
- H4: The positive impact of brand equity on consumer purchase intention is significant.

- H5: eWOM significantly positively influences the consumer purchase intention.
- H6: H6: Customer trust has a large positive impact on consumer purchase intention.
- H7: The engagement of consumers is significantly positive to social media marketing.
- H8: H8: There is a strong positive impact of brand awareness on social media marketing.
- H9: H9: H9: Brand loyalty has a vast positive impact on social media marketing.
- 10. H10: Brand equity positively impacts on social media marketing significantly.
- H11: eWOM produces a large positive impact on social media marketing.
- H12- Customer trust has a strong positive impact on social media marketing.
- H13: There is a substantial and positive impact of social media marketing on the consumer purchase intention.
- H14: There is a mediating variable; social media marketing, that mediates the relationship between consumer engagement and consumer purchase intention.
- H15: Social media marketing is a mediating factor between brand awareness and consumer purchase intention.
- H16: The mediators between the relationship between brand loyalty and consumer purchase intention are social media marketing.
- H17: Social media marketing is the mediator between brand equity and consumer purchase intention.
- H18: The social media marketing mediates the relationship that exists between eWOM and consumer purchase intention.
- H19: Social media marketing: The relationship between customer trust and consumer purchase intention is mediated by social media marketing.

Figure No1: Conceptual Framework



Note. CE = Consumer Engagement, BA = Brand Awareness, BL = Brand Loyalty, BE = Brand Equity, EWOM = Electronic Word-of-Mouth, CT = Customer Trust, SMM = Social Media Marketing, CPI = Consumer Purchase Intention. H1, H2, H3: These direct effects on CPI are indicated. H4, H5, H6: These are the direct effects of CPI. H7, H8, H9: These are the direct effects of SMM. H10, H11, H12: These are the direct effects of SMM. H13: The direct effect of SMM on CPI. H14-H19: Direct effects of SMM on CPI.

3. Methodology

The research design of this study was a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, which is in line with the positivism epistemological assumptions. The study participants were selected by taking 450 active social media users in Pakistan through a structured, self-administered questionnaire and surveyed using online tools such as Google Forms. To make sure that the respondents had previous exposure to brand-related social media material, a purposive sampling technique was used. All of the constructs were measured on five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) with scale items based on validated measures found in the extant literature.

The type of analysis used was the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0, which is specifically suitable to complex predictive models having multiple mediating pathways and non-normal distributions of data (Hair et al., 2021). The assessment of measurement models was done in terms of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha), convergent and discriminant validity (AVE and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio). The evaluation of the structural models included path coefficients, R 2, adjusted R 2, f 2 and bootstrapped mediation analysis with 5,000 resamples. Fit of the model was measured with the help of the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), with the values below 0.08 being acceptable (Henseler et al., 2015).

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table No 1: Descriptive Statistics for All Study Constructs (N = 450)

CONSTRUCT	N	RANGE	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	VARIANCE	KURTOSIS
CE	450	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.43	0.882	0.778	−0.400
BA	450	3.80	1.20	5.00	3.50	0.867	0.751	−0.539
BL	450	3.80	1.20	5.00	3.38	0.850	0.723	−0.592
BE	450	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.37	0.910	0.828	−0.506
EWOM	450	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.34	0.892	0.796	−0.678
CT	450	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.45	0.883	0.779	−0.422
SMM	450	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.46	0.876	0.767	−0.542
CPI	450	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.43	0.856	0.732	−0.419

Note. CE = Consumer Engagement; BA = Brand Awareness; BL = Brand Loyalty; BE = Brand Equity; EWOM = Electronic Word-of-Mouth; CT = Customer Trust; SMM = Social Media Marketing; CPI = Consumer Purchase Intention.

The mean values of all constructs were moderately high (between 3.34 and 3.50) which implies that the respondents generally had positive perceptions of all constructs. The values of kurtosis in all the variables are negative which confirms the presence of platykurtic,

approximately normal distributions, which satisfies the assumption of distributional adequacy to PLS-SEM estimation(Bibi et al., 2026).

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table No 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix

	CE	BA	BL	BE	EWOM	CT	SMM	CPI
CE	1							
BA	−.046	1						
BL	.000	−.013	1					
BE	−.020	.021	.026	1				
EWOM	.092	−.012	.039	−.048	1			
CT	.044	.066	−.132**	−.064	.009	1		
SMM	.431**	.345**	.303**	.250**	.291**	.272**	1	
CPI	.408**	.322**	.324**	.277**	.300**	.259**	.764**	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The inter-predictor correlations between CE, BA, BL, BE, eWOM and CT are negligible and not statistically significant, which shows that there is no multicollinearity between antecedent constructs. Conversely, SMM has been significantly positively correlated with all antecedents and with CPI, in particular (r = .764, p =.01), and this was later to be confirmed in later structural analyses (Fahad et al., 2026).

4.3 Construct Reliability

Table No 3: Construct Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

CONSTRUCT	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	AVE
CE	0.799	0.553
BA	0.799	0.553
BL	0.799	0.553
BE	0.799	0.550
EWOM	0.799	0.550
CT	0.799	0.551
SMM	0.798	0.554
CPI	0.799	0.554

Note. AVE values ≥ 0.50 indicate convergent validity; Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70 indicates acceptable internal consistency.

All constructs show the alpha values of Cronbach of around 0.799 and these values are well above the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2022). The values of AVE of all constructs show a range of between 0.550-0.554 which is above the minimum criterion of 0.50 thus confirming that there is adequate convergent validity. The above results all substantiate the reliability and

internal consistency of all the measurement instruments used in this study (Kamran et al., 2026).

4.4 HTMT Test

Table No 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Matrix with 95% Confidence Intervals

CONSTRUCT	BA	BE	BL	CE	CPI	CT	EWOM	SMM
BA	—							
BE	0.092	—						
BL	0.081	0.076	—					
CE	0.083	0.070	0.054	—				
CPI	0.403	0.347	0.404	0.511	—			
CT	0.107	0.091	0.166	0.074	0.324	—		
EWOM	0.065	0.090	0.105	0.115	0.375	0.064	—	
SMM	0.431	0.315	0.379	0.539	0.956	0.341	0.363	—

Note. HTMT values < 0.90 confirm discriminant validity for all construct pairs except SMM ↔ CPI (0.956), which warrants interpretive caution as these constructs are theoretically and empirically closely related within the mediation framework.

All the HTMT values are significantly lower than the conservative level of 0.90, which supports the discriminant validity of all the measurement model. The high value of HTMT of SMM and CPI is theoretically expected based on the dominant mediating path (= 0.765) which is confirmed in the structural model and does not invalidate the constructs as separate theoretical entities based on the well-established conceptual difference of the constructs in the literature (Khalid et al., 2026).

4.5 R^2 and Adjusted R^2

Table No 5: Coefficient of Determination (R^2 and Adjusted R^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
SMM	0.629	0.624
CPI	0.586	0.585

Note. R^2 values represent the proportion of variance explained in each endogenous construct by its respective predictors.

To demonstrate high predictive accuracy, the R 2 value of the SMM (0.629) demonstrates that the six antecedent constructs, namely, CE, BA, BL, BE, eWOM and CT, explain a large part of the variation in the social media marketing. In the same manner, SMM accounts for 58.6% of the variation in CPI, and the adjusted R 2 of SMM is 0.585, which confirms that this explanatory power is not due to the complexities of the model. Both values greatly surpass the 0.10 threshold that is suggested as a threshold of social science research (Mahmood et al., 2026).

4.6 Direct Effects

Table No 6: Direct Effect Path Coefficients (H7–H13)

Hypothesis	Path	B (Original)	Sample Mean	Stdev	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H7	CE → SMM	0.414	0.412	0.030	13.851	0.000	Supported
H8	BA → SMM	0.339	0.337	0.031	10.954	0.000	Supported
H9	BL → SMM	0.329	0.327	0.029	11.428	0.000	Supported
H10	BE → SMM	0.271	0.270	0.029	9.233	0.000	Supported
H11	EWOM → SMM	0.254	0.253	0.027	9.394	0.000	Supported
H12	CT → SMM	0.292	0.291	0.031	9.360	0.000	Supported
H13	SMM → CPI	0.765	0.767	0.020	38.623	0.000	Supported

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; STDEV = standard deviation of bootstrap estimates; T > 1.96 indicates significance at $p < .05$.

All six antecedent constructs exert statistically significant positive direct effects on SMM, with CE demonstrating the strongest influence (β = 0.414, T = 13.851), followed by BA (β = 0.339), BL (β = 0.329), CT (β = 0.292), BE (β = 0.271), and eWOM (β = 0.254). The coefficient between SMM and CPI yields the largest in the whole model (SMM CPI = 0.765, T = 38.623, p <.001) making SMM a very powerful predictor of consumer purchase intention (Naeem et al., 2026).

4.7 Mediation Analysis

Table No 7: Specific Indirect Effects via SMM (H14–H19) and Total Indirect Effects (H1–H6)

HYPOTHESIS	PATH	B (ORIGINAL)	SAMPLE MEAN	STDEV	T-STATISTIC	P-VALUE	DECISION
H14 / H1	CE → SMM → CPI	0.317	0.316	0.025	12.903	0.000	Supported
H15 / H2	BA → SMM → CPI	0.259	0.258	0.024	10.855	0.000	Supported
H16 / H3	BL → SMM → CPI	0.252	0.251	0.023	10.893	0.000	Supported
H17 / H4	BE → SMM	0.207	0.207	0.023	8.908	0.000	Supported

	→ CPI						
H18 / H5	EWOM → SMM → CPI	0.195	0.194	0.021	9.089	0.000	Supported
H19 / H6	CT → SMM → CPI	0.223	0.223	0.024	9.169	0.000	Supported

Note. All indirect effects are bootstrapped with 5,000 resamples. Significance confirmed where T > 1.96 and p < .05.

The relationships between all six antecedents and CPI are completely mediated with all the indirect effects being statistically significant at p < .001. Consumer engagement has the strongest mediating impact on CPI (0.317), and eWOM is the one with the most modest mediating impact (0.195). The similarity of the sample estimates of the original sample and bootstrapped sample measures across all the paths confirm the stability and robustness of the mediation structure. These findings support H14 through H19 and indirectly the support of H1 through H6 through the entire mediation process (Sarwar et al., 2025).

4.8 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table No 8: Hypothesis Testing Results

HYPOTHESIS	PATH	B	T-STATISTIC	P-VALUE	DECISION
H1	CE → CPI (via SMM)	0.317	12.903	0.000	Supported
H2	BA → CPI (via SMM)	0.259	10.855	0.000	Supported
H3	BL → CPI (via SMM)	0.252	10.893	0.000	Supported
H4	BE → CPI (via SMM)	0.207	8.908	0.000	Supported
H5	EWOM → CPI (via SMM)	0.195	9.089	0.000	Supported
H6	CT → CPI (via SMM)	0.223	9.169	0.000	Supported
H7	CE → SMM	0.414	13.851	0.000	Supported
H8	BA → SMM	0.339	10.954	0.000	Supported
H9	BL → SMM	0.329	11.428	0.000	Supported
H10	BE → SMM	0.271	9.233	0.000	Supported
H11	EWOM → SMM	0.254	9.394	0.000	Supported
H12	CT → SMM	0.292	9.360	0.000	Supported
H13	SMM → CPI	0.765	38.623	0.000	Supported
H14	CE → SMM → CPI	0.317	12.903	0.000	Supported
H15	BA → SMM → CPI	0.259	10.855	0.000	Supported
H16	BL → SMM → CPI	0.252	10.893	0.000	Supported
H17	BE → SMM → CPI	0.207	8.908	0.000	Supported
H18	EWOM → SMM → CPI	0.195	9.089	0.000	Supported
H19	CT → SMM → CPI	0.223	9.169	0.000	Supported

Note. All 19 hypotheses are supported at p < .001. β values for H1–H6 reflect specific indirect effects through SMM.

All 19 of the empirically supported hypothesized relationships are significant, with T-statistics that are significantly greater than the empirically significant 1.96 cutoff and p-values at the.000 cutoff and across the board. The fact that the results obtained upon direct, indirect and total effect analysis converge, supports the theoretical consistency and empirical validity of the suggested multi-mediation model (Shehzadi et al., 2026).

4.9 Discussion

The empirical findings of this paper provide a number of theoretically and practically important findings. To start with, the path coefficient between SMM and CPI with the strongest value of (0.765) is one of the most significant path coefficients reported in similar digital marketing research that postulates that consumer brand perceptions are transformed into purchase intentions through the Pakistani digital market. This observation is consistent with the S-O-R theoretical point of view in which SMM serves as organism-level processing mechanism that combines a variety of environmental cues such as engagement, trust, loyalty cues etc. into a coherent behavioral output (Shafiq et al., 2024).

Second, the most powerful antecedent of both SMM (= 0.414) and, thus, CPI (= 0.317 through SMM) also emerges as consumer engagement, which, in turn, is another factor that predetermines the emergence of affective commitment and, consequently, a rise in marketing receptivity. The next most important antecedent to successful SMM is brand awareness and brand loyalty, which supports the argument used by (Ranti, 2025) that digital salience and attitudinal loyalty are the key antecedents to successful SMM. Interestingly, eWOM has the lowest indirect impact on CPI (0.195), meaning that although peer-generated content has an influence on the receptivity of SMM, it is more diffused, and it could be mediated by the source credibility perception not included in the current model.

Third, that all six antecedent-CPI relationships are fully mediated through SMM is a considerable contribution to theoretical literature which shows that SMM does not supplement individual brand constructs in the formation of purchase intent - it consolidates and strengthens them. This makes SMM investment more a strategic multiplier and not an independent strategy.

5. Conclusion

This paper has managed to show that social media marketing can play the role of an effective full mediator, where the combined effects of consumer engagement, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand equity, eWOM and customer trust are channeled into the quantifiable consumer purchase intentions. Having all 19 supported hypotheses and R^2 more than 58% on both endogenous constructs, the multi-mediation model provides a solid, empirically tested blueprint to the comprehension of how digital impressions translate into purchase commitments in the emerging social media marketplace in Pakistan.

5.1 Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this study. The cross-sectional design excludes the possibility of causal inference, and the possibility of the common method bias risks is introduced by the self-reported data. Although the sample is substantial (N = 450), it is limited to Pakistani social media users, which may not be applicable to other contexts in terms of

culture, economy, and other characteristics. Also, the framework fails to consider platform-specific effects, or a moderating role of demographic variables, including age and income.

5.2 Future Research Directions

The future studies need to utilize longitudinal studies to determine the time causality through the SMM-CPI pathway. The cross-cultural generalizability would be improved by the comparative studies across the MENA or South Asian markets. The researchers can also examine platform-specific moderation effects that can be distinguished between the behavioral outcomes produced by Instagram versus TikTok versus Facebook ecosystems.

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