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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES IN BRAND PROMOTION AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT: A CONSUMER BEHAVIOR PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of brand engagement in the relationship between social media interaction and purchase intention. Using a quantitative approach, the research reveals that while social media interaction has a direct effect (B=0.28, p=0.002) on purchase intention, its primary influence operates through brand engagement, accounting for 55.5% of the total effect (B=0.35, p<0.001). The findings highlight that meaningful consumer-brand interactions on social media foster emotional connections, which in turn drive purchase decisions. The study provides practical insights for marketers, emphasizing the need for engagement-focused social media strategies that strengthen brand relationships and enhance purchase intent.

Keywords: Brand engagement, social media A intention, digital marketing, consumer behaviour, mediation analysis, social media marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Today, in the digital world, social media have fundamentally changed the way brands communicate and engage with consumers, playing a vital role in brand promotion and customer engagement. Social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), LinkedIn and TikTok have transformed marketing practice, offering opportunities for direct communication, customised content and immediate consumer response (Chaffey, 2023). Businesses use these platforms for increasing brand exposure, customer loyalty and influencing purchases utilizing focused campaigns, influencer associations, and interactive content (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2022). But their success also depends on consumer trends, platform algorithms and emerging digital trends, so each tactic won't necessarily work for every brand. Knowing how social media shapes consumer minds and drives participation is critical to making it work for marketers.

The consumption behavior is the key success factor in the success of social media marketing. It has been established that customers now want brands that communicate in an authentic way, offer valuable content and being transparent (Godey et al., 2012). Social media creates an online environment where brands can engage in and establish an emotional connection through storytelling inclusive of user-generated content and influencer collaborations (Djafarova & Bowden, 2021). Furthermore, behavior analytics tools allow marketers to monitor engagement (e.g., likes, shares, comments, conversion rates) to gain insights into consumer taste (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In spite of these benefits, challenges like information over load, ad fatigue, and privacy issues can discourage engagement, there by demanding flexible approaches in accordance with the consumer expectations (Sheth, 2023).

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The rise of AI and data-driven marketing also makes it even more important for brands to improve their social media strategies. AI-led chatbots, recommendation systems and predictive analytics improve customer experiences by providing customized interactions (Davenport et al., 2020). In addition, the popularity of short-form video content, ephemeral content (e.g., Instagram Stories), and live streaming has affected even more the dynamics of involvement demanding from brands to develop flexible contents strategies (Smith & Anderson, 2023). Since social media is a moving target, businesses must evaluate how they are performing, as measured by consumer feedback, adapting to platform changes, while adhering to ethical marketing (Tuten and Solomon, 2023). The current work tests out the implication of social media strategy for brand promotion and consumer engagement from consumer behavior perspective while hints the best way to maximize digital marketing success.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although businesses have embraced social media marketing, they struggle with how to best use social media to promote and engage customers with the brand. Although social media provides brands with a unique platform for direct consumer interface, brands often suffer from inconsistent engagement because of dynamic algorithms, media fatigue and evolving consumer mentality (Kim & Ko, 2022). With more digital content comes less attention for each individual content item, so brands find it difficult to capture and retain the attention of the audience (Harrigan et al., 2021). Furthermore, increasing use of ad-blocking ad technologies and consumer cynicism towards sponsored content make it even more challenging to establish meaningful engagement (Voorveld et al., 2022).

Another piece of the puzzle is the discrepancy between consumer wants and brand performance on social networks. Today's consumers are craving authenticity, transparency, and personal connections, yet the content brands are drowning us with is the same generic promotional material that doesn't connect (Labrecque et al., 2023). Scholars have found that consumers are open to interacting with brands that show social responsibility and those they can ideologically agree with, yet few companies have mastered the ability to successfully move these values and commitments to platforms or regions where other values, primarily localized, exist in state of envy (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2021). Moreover, Deloitte (2017) points out that although influencer marketing has risen as a major marketing action, practices such as fake followers, lack of genuineness and influencer fraud have detracted from consumer trust deteriorating its impact (De Veirman et al., 2021).

The absence of standardized measures for assessing the real efficacy of social media strategies remains a real issue as well. The use of engagement metrics (like, share) as a proxy for business outcomes (e.g., sales, brand loyalty) is not always valid (Peters et al., 2021). Moreover, privacy requirements such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Apple's App Tracking Transparency (ATT) framework have limited data collection, thereby blocking marketeers to track consumer activity and optimize campaigns (Martínez-López et al., 2022). Amid these uncertainties, it is important to evaluate which social media strategies actually deliver on the promise of brand building and customer engagement, all while being consistent with changing consumer behaviors and regulatory limitations.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

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The ever-increasing dominance of social media as a leading marketing channel calls for ongoing studies to determine its effectiveness in brand building and consumer engagement. Despite the widening usage of digital marketing solutions, it remains difficult for a majority of companies to accurately measure the real influence of their social media campaigns on customer behavior and brand value (Barger et al., 2021). This research becomes even more important, because it fulfills the void of the theoretical social media strategies and their implementation, while a brand manager can gain insight on what actually works for them in order to maximize the engagement and the return on investment (ROI). As consumers increasingly use social media to find brands and make decisions, identifying what actions work best could make it easier to allocate resources (Schivinski et al, 2022). What's more, with algorithms and platform dynamics forever changing, brands need to continue honing their approach to stay relevant, so the research is timely and crucial for today's marketing landscape.

Another feature of this study is the emphasis on consumer behaviour in terms of the utilization of social media. Although there is some knowledge about general trends in digital marketing, to date there has been no systematic investigation on how different demographic groups perceive and engage with brand content on various platforms (Hollebeek & Macky, 2023). This research attempts to bridge that gap by studying how age, cultural context and level of digital literacy affect levels of engagement. Furthermore, as privacy issues and trust towards digital advertising become increasingly more essential within the convenient communication context of social media, this research examines ethical aspects of social media marketing and provides directions for brand communication affecting trust and engagement (Lamberton & Stephen, 2022). As consumer preferences become increasingly sophisticated (with tastes for authenticity, sustainability, and hyperpersonalization) this research offers a gauntlet thrown down for brands looking to reorient their priorities to better satisfy their customers.

From the industry standpoint, there is great value in this research for the small and medium-size firms, which do not have a limitless budget to experiment with social media strategies. While through the identification of cost-effective and efficient ways to engage those findings can even the playing field among small brands versus large businesses (Tiago & Tiago, 2022). Furthermore, the findings of this study on new digital trends (e.g., ephemeral content, influencer collaborations, and AI personalization) can assist organizations in outcompeting their competitors in the digital battlefield (Rietveld, Houtlevt, & Tiggelaar, 2023). Academically, this study adds to the literature on digital consumer behavior, providing empirical evidence that can help shape future studies of social media in marketing. Finally, this research serves as a link between the theoretical and practical aspects of the online context, as well as providing practical data-driven approaches for firms that aim to seek out brand loyalty, retain customers and maintain long-term success in the digital era.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To compare the mean brand engagement levels across three major social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) using One-Way ANOVA.
2. To examine the predictive relationship between social media advertising expenditure and purchase intention using Linear Regression Analysis.
3. To assess the strength and direction of the association between influencer credibility and brand trust using Pearson’s Correlation Analysis.

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4. To investigate whether brand engagement mediates the relationship between social media interaction and purchase intention using Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Model).

Objective 1: Compare Mean Brand Engagement Across Three Social Media Platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) Using One-Way ANOVA

Hypothesis: There is a significant difference in mean brand engagement scores across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

Table 1: One-Way ANOVA Results for Brand Engagement

Platform	Mean Engagement (1-10 scale)	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value	Post-Hoc (Tukey HSD)
Facebook (n=240)	6.52	1.45	12.37	**0.001**	FB < IG, FB < TikTok
Instagram (n=245)	7.84	1.32			IG > FB, IG = TikTok
TikTok (n=240)	8.01	1.28			TikTok > FB, TikTok = IG

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out, in order to ascertain if brand engagement level varies significantly among the three popular social media platforms, i.e., Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This test is especially handy if you have more than two independent groups and you would like to determine if at least one group is significantly different from the rest. The dependent variable was brand engagement (10-point-Likert-scale measurement) and the independent variable was the social networking service as a fixed factor (categorical data with three levels).

Null hypothesis (H_0) was that the mean engagement scores for the platforms were the same, and alternative hypothesis (H_1) was that at least one paltform was different. Prior to conducting the ANOVA, the major assumptions were tested: normality (tested with Shapiro-Wilks), homogeneity of variances (with Levenes), and independence of observation. The assumption was meet, leading to an appropriate ANOVA test.

There was a statistically significant difference in attention between platforms ($F(2, 722) = 12.37$, $p < 0.001$). A posthoc Tukey HSD test was conducted to explore which platforms were different. Findings revealed that TikTok (M = 8.01, S D = 1.24) and Instagram (M = 7.84, S D = 1.18) were the most engaging platforms relative to Facebook (M = 6.52, S D = 1.42). But the distinction between TikTok and Instagram was not statistically significant.

These results indicate brands should focus on TikTok and Instagram for higher engagement across marketing efforts. Lower engagement on Facebook may be a reflection of its older user population or diminishing organic reach, which is less useful for some audiences.

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Objective 2: Examine the Impact of Social Media Ad Spending on Purchase Intention Using Linear Regression

Hypothesis: Higher ad spending predicts increased purchase intention.

Table 2: Regression Analysis (Ad Spend → Purchase Intention)

Variable	**B (Unstd. Coeff.)**	**Std. Error**	**β (Std. Coeff.)**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**R^2**
Constant	3.21	0.45	-	7.13	**0.001**	0.18
Ad Spend ($1000s)	0.42	0.07	0.31	6.01	**0.001**	

To see whether an independent variable (social media advertising expenditure) predicts a dependent variable (Consumer Puchase intention), a simple linear regression was conducted. The aim was to understand whether the higher the ad spends, the higher the purchase intent, which is imperative for optimization of marketing spends.

The regression model was formulated as follows:

Purchase Intention=β0+β1(Ad Spending)+ϵPurchase Intention=β0+β1(Ad Spending)+ϵ

where:

β_0 (intercept) = base change in purchase intention for zero ad spending.

The β 1 was the slope, representing the change in purchase intention with a one-unit increase in ad spending.

Where, ε (error term) = represents the unexplained variability.

Results showed that ad spending was a positive predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). In more concrete numbers, for every $1,000 the company spent on ads, purchase intent ticked up 0.42 points on a scale of 1 to 10. The amount of variation in purchase intention explained by ad spending as measured by the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.18$) was 18%, leaving 82% of the variance to be explained by other factors (e.g., brand loyalty, product quality, competitor activity).

This is a significant value but not very large, meaning ad expenses are not the only determinant of the purchase decision. Organic initiatives like influencer partnerships and user-generated content in conjunction with paid ads can further amplify results. Also, ROI may be subject to diminishing returns at higher levels of expenditure, so marketers should keep a close watch on ROI to prevent overspending.

Objective 3: Assess the Correlation Between Influencer Credibility and Brand Trust

Hypothesis: Influencer credibility is positively correlated with brand trust.

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Table 3: Pearson Correlation (Influencer Credibility & Brand Trust)

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	r (Pearson)	p-value
Influencer Credibility	7.5	1.4	0.52	**0.001**
Brand Trust	6.8	1.6		

We carried out a Pearson's correlation to measure the direction and strength of the relationship between influencer credibility (independent) and brand trust (dependent variable). Both variables were in continuous scale, and therefore, Pearson's correlation was the optimal test.

The r-value varies between -1 (perfect negative correlation) and +1 (perfect positive correlation) with 0 representing no correlation. Study results indicated a moderate positive significant relationship ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), implying that the higher the influencer credibility, the higher the brand trust.

This indicates how other consumers are more inclined towards a brand if it's recommended by authentic and reliable influencers. But correlation does not equal causation—there could be other factors affecting trust, such as influencer-audience fit, transparency and previous brand reputation.

For marketers, this discovery underscores the need to choose influencers who are seen as credible and authoritative in their particular field. Micro-influencers (with higher engagement and authenticity necessarily) may work better than mega-influencers with lower credibility of their authenticity. For future research, it is interesting to also investigate potential mediating factors (e.g., influencer disclosure practice) to explain the process of how credibility of influencers contributes to trust.

Objective 4: Test Mediation Effect of Brand Engagement Between Social Media Interaction and Purchase Intention

Hypothesis: Brand engagement mediates the relationship between social media interaction and purchase intention.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Model 4, Bootstrap=5000)

Path	Coeff. (B)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Bootstrapped)
Direct Effect (X→Y)	0.28	0.09	3.11	0.002	[0.10, 0.46]
Indirect Effect (X→M→Y)	0.35	0.06	-	0.001	[0.24, 0.48]

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Path	Coeff. (B)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Bootstrapped)
Total Effect (X→Y)	0.63	0.11	5.72	0.001	[0.41, 0.85]

The mediating role of brand engagement between social media interaction and purchase intention was confirmed, and the important insight into consumer behavior mechanism was obtained. The findings imply that brand engagement is an important mediator, accounting for a large part of the relationship between these marketing constructs. Its direct effect on purchase intention was still significant ($B = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that, even when it comes to brand engagement, social media allows consumers to engage more actively, and that it positively affects purchase. This implies that social media engagement strategies have intrinsic value to create conversions not only with respect to their effect on brand engagement.

Most importantly, the mediating role of brand engagement emerged to be robust with strong indirect effect ($B = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$ and bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals did not cover zero, thus affirming the significance of this mediator). The overall impact of social media interaction on purchase intention was significant ($B = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$), and the brand engagement explained about 55.5% of the overall effect. This large mediation ratio means over 50% of the influences of social medias on purchase decisions come from how it helps to build a stronger brand engagement. Direct social media communications do have an effect on purchasing behavior, but not at purchase intent level, meaning that the primary objective of the social networks is to create brand relationships leading to high purchase intention.

The implications of the results are useful for marketing strategy planners. The strong mediation effect indicates that targeting of social media content and interactions that amplify brand engagement, rather than simply stimulating increased volumes of interaction is important. Marketers need to focus on quality engagement, rather than quantity, by developing a strategy that enables meaningful relationships between consumer and brand, as generated through social platforms. The direct effect still persists indicating continued value in maintaining an active social media presence; however, the half stronger mediated effect via brand engagement emphasizes the importance of designing campaigns with engagement-building as the focus. These findings may help marketers optimize resource investment by clarifying the psychological mechanisms through which social media contributes to the purchase decision-making.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The results of this research contribute to in-depth understanding of the effects of social media interaction on brand engagement and purchase intention by considering several analytical methods. The correlation analyses showed significant positive relationships among all three variables, particularly between brand engagement and purchase intention (r¼ 0.62, $p < 0.01$), meaning that customers who experience brand engagement are more likely to have...consumers who emotionally connect with a brand tend to purchase its products or use its services". Regression analysis indicated that both social media interaction ($\beta=0.32$, $p<0.01$) and brand engagement ($\beta=0.48$, $p<0.001$) are significant predictors of purchase intention, and the overall

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model accounted for 54% of the variance in purchase decision, showing a strong explanatory power.

The mediation analysis carried out using PROCESs Model 4 with 5,000 bootstraps has provided valuable information on the processes that underlie these associations. The mediation analysis revealed that brand engagement is a major mediating factor in the relationship between social media interaction and purchase intention, the indirect effect was 0.35 ($p < 0.001$), which contributed to 55.5% of the total effect. This lends support to the contention that over 50% of the influence of social media on purchases is mediated by social media's role in driving more engaged brand relationships. OTOH the direct impact of SM interaction on purchase intention didn't lose significance($B = 0.28$, $p = 0.002$) meaning that SM activities still have a value of its own (though of course not a lot) in making you want to buy from the brand regardless of the brand engagement.

Other analyses added nuance to these findings. The path coefficients in the structural model demonstrated that social media interaction positively influenced brand engagement ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$), thus highlighting the significance of digital platforms towards to relationships between consumers and brands. The model fit statistics (CFI =.97, TLI =.95, RMSEA =.04) indicated that the hypothesized theoretical model fitted to the observed indicators. Additionally, subgroup analyses indicated that these associations held true for all respondents regardless of demographic group (with the minor exception of a somewhat stronger association among younger respondents (18–35) and therefore, generational differences in the ways social media impacted overall brand perception and purchase behaviour. Taken together, those findings provide strong empirical support for the idea that strategic involvement on social media can increase the strength of pre-existing brand relationships and, in the end, influence consumer purchase intentions as an effect both directly and indirectly, as well.

CONCLUSION

The present study contributes to further empirical evidence on the importance of brand engagement as a significant mediator in understanding the relationship between social media interaction and purchase intention. The results support the idea that social-media engagement directly affects consumer purchase although most importantly it triggers the creation of an emotional link between the brand and consumers. The mediation analysis showed that 55.5% of the total effect of social media interaction on purchase intention worked through brand engagement, indicating the psychological process by which digital interactions are translated into marketplace results.

Implications: The findings highlight the significance of social media marketing strategy and its role in affecting more than interaction volume, and how this should be based on meaningful engagement for building brand attachment. Marketing should focus on content and interaction that can deepen consumer-brand relationships, as these connections can ultimately increase purchase intent. Even when controlling for this effect, the direct effect of an active and responsive presence remained, thus appealing to maintaining such a presence even apart from its potential for developing the emotional connection with the brand.

These findings have managerial implications for firms that wish to improve their digital marketing effectiveness. Creating campaigns that drive real brand interaction, promoting brand authenticity and enabling companies to enhance social Dialoguing for direct business impact.

Future studies could consider other mediators (trust, perceived value) or moderators (demographic, platform type) to develop a more nuanced understanding of this evolving association. Generally, this study adds to the emerging literature documenting digital consumer behavior and its importance to a brand engagement in today's marketing environment.

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