

Social Media Factors that Impact Buying Intentions of Consumers towards Brands

Author's Details:

⁽¹⁾**Saadat Ali Khan**

Scholar, Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: saadatikm@gmail.com

⁽²⁾**Dr. Masood Hassan**

PhD, IoBM, Karachi, Pakistan and Visiting Faculty Greenwich, Karachi, Pakistan.

Email: masoodhassan1@hotmail.com (Corresponding Author)

⁽³⁾**Daniyal Siddiqi**

Scholar, Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: Daniyalsiddiqi93@hotmail.com

⁽⁴⁾**Mian Muhammad Mustafa Rehman**

Scholar, Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: gu8231@greenwich.edu.pk

Abstract

In the current time we live in, brands have become a prominent presence on social media platforms, not only for marketing purposes, but also to interact with consumers, and to provide them with complete satisfaction, in order to prevent changes in their purchase intentions. This research, aims to investigate different social media factors that impact a consumers' buying intention towards brands, through literature review which would support the hypotheses' and through experimental primary research by circulating questionnaires. To investigate the data SPSS statistics method was used and to analyse the primary research data Inferential statistics technique is utilised in the research. The population selected for the study was people who were aware of the four independent variables of this research; (1) Online customer reviews/word of mouth, (2) Influence of social media influencers, (3) Digital Brand Marketing, and (4) Online product presentation. Results of the research prove that all four independent variables significantly impact consumers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: Purchase intention, e-WOM, OCR, influencers, digital marketing, Brands

Introduction

The concept of brands has existed since Roman times, where signs and drawings were used to showcase a brand's name in a shop in order to help customers distinguish between stores, in spite of this; the first theory of "brands" did not appear until 1955. Gardner, BB and Levy, SJ were the first ones to present the theory of brands. Over the recent years, companies shifted their focus from products to developing a strong and compelling brand, as the competition has increased immensely. Furthermore, brands in today's time are developed with proper research so that they can offer more than before, such as emotional connection, as nowadays, "consumers do not buy products, they buy brands" (Klawitter & Tania, 2016).

As branding has deeply marked its value in the 21st century, creatives created endless opportunities for brands to expose themselves to their target audience (Klawitter & Tania 2016). Introduction of technology was one of those opportunities that brands took advantage of to grow themselves to their full potential (Klawitter & Tania, 2016). Now, brands have become a prominent presence on social media platforms, not only for marketing purposes, but also to communicate with their consumers and to collect data on how people respond to their products (Klawitter & Tania, 2016). Staying connected with social media is important, as it helps in accumulating consumer's reviews, online interactions and their point of views through comments and discussions. All this collected data further helps in shaping a brand's image and buying intentions (Permatasari & Kuswadi, 2017). Due to the importance of social media in branding, this study aims to investigate social media factors that impact consumers' buying intention towards brands.

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), a consumer's buying intention can change due to five factors: 1) Awareness. A customer is introduced to a product. 2) Interest. The customer begins to research that product (positive buying intention). 3) Evaluation. He/she decides if the brand/product is trustworthy or not, and if it meets their expectations. 4) Trial. The customer tries that product. 5) Acceptance or Rejection. If the customer, by trying the product, feels that the product is not worth it, they will reject (negative/change buying intention). In the "Interest" factor, the customer's buying intention may change due to two reasons, 1) Customer reviews, 2) Non-anticipated factors.

This study focuses on how social media can make a brand or break it; consumer's online reviews, social media influencers evaluations, inadequate/adequate brand's online marketing, and brand's online product presentation can instantly change a buyer's intention regarding their preferred brands, in both negative and positive ways, which immediately affects a brand's growth, to a great extent. In this research, the following four hypotheses' will be tested: (1) Consumer's online reviews significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands. (2) Social media influencers significantly impact buying intentions towards brands. (3) Brand's online marketing significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands. (4) Brands online product presentation significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands.

Furthermore, Signaling theory is used in this research paper to discuss and evaluate the importance of communication and to support different claims regarding brand and consumer relationship. The primary research will be conducted through a questionnaire to gather sufficient responses that would either support or oppose the hypotheses' proposed in this research. The study aims to appraise new/developing brands regarding factors that can demotivate or encourage customers into purchasing products. The research will explore social media factors that impact buying intentions and will discern ways for how to combat them.

Literature review

Consumers' Online Reviews

In the last 10 years, social media has attracted much attention in different industries contexts such as digital advertising (Majali, 2018). Brands keep persuading consumers' to give positive electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) about their products or services on social network sites, as according to Nielsen Cross Platform Report 2017, more than 60% of consumers in the 21 - 49 years age group, after seeing an online advertising, did further searches through either electronic word of mouth (eWOM)/online customer reviews (OCR) or a direct visit to store (Nurhandayani, Syarief, & Najib, 2019). Customers' perceptions shaped by online customer reviews often leads to greater customer awareness, furthermore, OCRs contribute in giving endorsements and recommendations of products to customers, also, they lead to an increase in the number of sales (Elwalda & Lü, 2016).

E-WOM/ OCR has been described as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or brand, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Majali, 2018). Bringing forth a platform for consumers to give their opinions, suggestions and objections and monitoring them has become a business, and some firms, such as Daraz, pay (in cash, points, recognition) consumers for their participation as the reviews can be used to compete for consumer attention and visits (Chatterjee, 2001).

Impact of Online Reviews on Consumers' Buying Intentions

Online customer reviews (OCRs)/e-WOM have become a key source of product information and a major influence on customers' purchase decisions ((Elwalda & Lü, 2016). The reviews published online help other potential consumers in their purchase decision making, as the comments/reviews hold greater credibility, relevance, and ability to kindle empathy (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018). Moreover, research in marketing literature highlights the fact that word of mouth (reviews) plays an important role in "hybrid decision processes or recommendation-based analysis", in which the consumer has to decide whether the e-reviews provide enough information for them to change their buying decision or not (Chatterjee, 2001).

In accordance with a Nielsen online survey, 83% of total respondents covering 60 countries indicated that word of mouth suggestions from friends and family are the most persuasive and reliable form of advertising. These findings prove that consumers' buying decisions are dependable on others' online reviews (Majali, 2018). If a brand needs success, they have to make sure they have positive reviews online, as a study by Ventre and Kolbe (2020), proves that in order to gain trust and increase online purchases it is important to have positive online opinions and reviews. In short, a product with dissatisfied feelings expressed towards it or the brand, leads to negative brand reviews and lower purchase intentions (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018). Research conducted by Nurhandayani, Syarief and Najib (2019) proves that consumer attitudes positively influence intention and purchase decisions. The Nielsen's (2015) global consumer survey proves that 66% of buyers trust other buyer's opinions in the form of online consumer reviews, or electronic word of mouth

(eWOM). Scholarly findings also show that eWOM can influence consumers' viewpoint and actions online – as well as their faith in brands and buying intentions (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018).

A consumer's purchase intention also depends on how an individual absorbs messages. To understand how people receive and process convincing messages, the research will be using the heuristic–systematic model (HSM), “a widely recognized communication model”. HSM consists of two models of information processing: systematic processing and heuristic processing. By using the HSM model, this research explores how different systematic and heuristic informational cues of online reviews interconnect with and impact consumers' purchase decision making. In the course of systematic processing, the addressee goes through all the chunks of information thoroughly for their significance and usefulness to the task before making their final decision. In heuristic processing, the addressee uses a few useful suggestions by evaluating accessible information, to come to a conclusion (Ruiz-Mafe, Chatzipanagiotou, & Curras-Perez, 2018).

The HSM supports the dual processing theory of human information processing, and proposes that systematic processing and heuristic processing can exist simultaneously and can control each other in complicated ways. Their interactivity can be demonstrated by three subsequent effects: 1. *the additivity effect*, which creates independent effects on consumers' decision making; 2. *the attenuation effect*, which shows how the systematic approach of persuading can weaken the heuristic approach; and 3. *the bias effect*, which explains that heuristic processing can bias systematic processing by taking a hold of a person's expectations of or presumptions about the credibility of arguments. All in all, the dual processing theory suggests that the online reviews can be both informative (heuristic) and persuasive (systematic) in order to affect one's buying decision. The online reviews have to be convincing and informative at the same time (Ruiz-Mafe, Chatzipanagiotou, & Curras-Perez, 2018).

It is believed that *high-quality* online reviews are persuasive as the information provided is useful for evaluating the product and carries reliability and reasoning, and helps in making purchase decisions, however the credibility of the online review matters a lot as well as the consumers do not believe in all reviews, which results in impacting a consumer's purchase intention (Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018). Thus, the greater the credibility of Online Customers Reviews among potential consumers, the higher is the purchase intention (Lee, Park, & Han, 2011).

In the light of the heuristic–systematic model, some researchers debate that for the electronic word of mouth (eWOM), social media platforms are more preferable as there is less secrecy there and has the potential to make eWOM information more trustworthy and reliable. Other researchers believe the eWOM on social media to be more impactful on consumers' purchase intentions as it occurs between friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, other eWOM platforms, consumer review websites, discussion forums, and blogs have also been found impactful on consumers' buying intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Hence, H1: *Consumer's online reviews significantly impact buying intentions towards brands*.

To prevent any harm to business, brands and advertisers need to start taking part in the eWOM communication process by acknowledging negative product reviews by giving explanations and apologies, in order to please the unsatisfied customer who might leave a horrible review online if not provided with satisfaction. Some studies show that when brands had given response to negative online reviews, brand trust and buying intentions increased; this finding supports the statement that it is advantageous to provide brand response to negative eWOM comments/reviews. Furthermore, brand positive response to negative comments is significant as it helps uphold the company's promise and strengthens their relationship with the customers (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018).

Evaluations of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers are social media users who have built a strong network of followers by posting content online and who hold influence over a group of people (Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk, & Jones 2020). They are usually perceived as third-party advocates who are headstrong and can utilise their blogs, tweets and other social media platforms to influence their followers (Lin, Crowe, Pierre, & Lee, 2021). Social media influencers, who are successful and famous, can be considered as “opinion leaders” who can influence others' attitude and behaviours regarding a particular brand or product (Lin et al., 2021). The influencers are usually found on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Youtube and Tik tok. They use their vast networking to support and represent their “human brands”, including their ideas, images, competence and frequently sponsored products (Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk, & Jones 2020).

Social media has granted users several platforms to raise and lead a network of followers, empowering some users to monetize the exposure they can provide companies and brands (Taillon et al., 2020). The companies consider social media influencers fitting for delivering their messages to new or old consumers. Influencers give various kinds of persuasive messages to their audience, such as product reviews, usage of different products, tips and tricks, and comparison of different products that are similar to each other. In other words, they persuade their consumers into following and using the products they use themselves (Nurhandayani, Syarief, & Najib 2019). The companies also believe that the social media influencers have compelling powers on their audience and thereby brands have begun to invest on social media influencers to promote their products through influencer marketing (Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk, & Jones 2020). Today, the companies are aware of the fact that if they want people to follow them, talking about their new product is not enough, they need to find a “personality” or an influencer to achieve the desired growth (Nurhandayani, Syarief, & Najib 2019). Past studies have found out that consumers mostly follow and get persuaded by influencers who are well-known, attractive, relatable, liked by others, who are experts in their job and have built a strong trust with the audience (Nurhandayani et al., 2019).

Impact of Evaluations of Social Media Influencers on Consumers' Buying Intentions

In consumer studies, attitude and purchase intention correspond in nature; a consumers' positive attitude towards a brand or its product, predicts consumers' positive purchase intention, likewise, a positive attitude towards products introduced or reviewed by social media influencers will have a higher possibility of a positive purchase intention. The point being made is, social media influencers can change a consumer's buying intention and can easily convince consumers into buying what they advocate as they hold strong credibility, and credibility is one of the factors that leads to an increase in product purchase intentions (Lin, Crowe, Pierre, & Lee, 2021).

Likeable, famous, trustworthy and attractive influencers are other factors that alter consumers' buying intentions, attitudes and behaviours towards a brand (Lin et al., 2021). Previous studies done on this topic identified “informative value”, “entertainment value”, “trustworthiness”, “expertise”, “attractiveness”, and “similarity” as factors related to brand awareness and purchase intentions (Masuda, Han & Lee, 2022). The theory of persuasion also supports the argument that social media influencers affect behavioural and buying intentions, as the followers buy more when the influencer is trustworthy, attractive and famous (Masuda et al., 2022). Opinion leaders/influencers with a lot of followers hold a great deal of power in advertising, and can influence consumer behaviour in several different ways, such as, they could indirectly impact a consumer's way of seeking, purchasing and using a product (Lin, Crowe, Pierre, & Lee, 2021). Due to this reason, marketing advisors look for social media influencers who are active in this field (Lin et al., 2021).

The advisors believe that the active influencers could help their brand flourish (Lin et al., 2021). Using influencers as representatives of brands can help form the characteristics of a brand and attract consumers into buying their products or service, and as a result the consumers will continue to remember the brand and their buying intention will remain unchanged (Nurhandayani, Syarief, & Najib 2019). Past research has shown that when consumers see a review posted on instagram by their admired and trusted influencer, they instantly trust that brand or product and change their purchase intention (Lin, Crowe, Pierre, & Lee, 2021). Because influencers can be relatable to consumers, it is easy to trust them and their reviews about certain brands, even if the influencer belongs to another ethnicity or origin (Lin et al., 2021).

Influencers have the power to improve a brands' image, and an improved brand image attracts customers and increases sales. Brand image gives a beneficial and notable impact to purchase intention (Nurhandayani, Syarief, & Najib 2019). Making use of famous influencers as opinion leaders/brand ambassadors would continue to be a really cost-efficient and practical plan of action to raise brand awareness, fondness and devotion among the consumers (Lin, Crowe, Pierre, & Lee, 2021). In the end it is up to the brand to hire a credible, up-to-date, trustworthy and reliable influencer in order to keep positive purchase intentions towards their products (Nurhandayani, Syarief, & Najib 2019).

Hence, H2: *Social media influencers significantly impact buying intentions towards brands.*

Brands' Online Marketing

Online marketing plays a major part in any company's multi-channel marketing strategy. It uses the Internet to carry through promotional marketing messages to consumers. Online marketing involves email marketing, search engine marketing, social media marketing, mobile advertising, and other sorts of display advertising. Online advertising, similar to other advertising media, often includes a publisher, whose job is to integrate advertisements into its online content, and an advertiser whose job is to come up with the advertisements that would be later on displayed on the publisher's content. Advertising agencies, an ad server and advertising affiliates are other probable members who participate in online advertising. Advertising agencies give the service of generating and placing the ad copy, an ad server technologically delivers the ad and tracks statistics, and the advertising affiliates job is to independently work, for the advertiser, on promotions (Pawar, 2014).

Online marketing has served as a platform that intermixes companies with their customers, and creates more ways of connecting. The technological evolution, by changing the field of marketing, has enhanced the significance of branding for companies, by creating indefinite prospects of how and where businesses wish to exhibit their brand. Marketing online also increases the accessibility of the company and makes it easier for the consumers to get in touch with the company no matter what time or day it is, and without actually visiting a physical store. Furthermore, through digital marketing, brands can extend their reach to a broader audience and can build a strong relationship and communication with customers (Klawitter & Tania, 2016).

In addition, online marketing opens a cost-effective window for marketers who intend to gather insights of their consumers, as the social media websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, can help collect a ton of information (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015). The gathered insights are then used to make improvements in products and to create marketing campaigns (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015). Nevertheless, switching to online marketing can cause negative outcomes for brands, bringing forth a lot of challenges for them (Klawitter & Tania, 2016). It is important to choose marketing strategies cleverly that will in every way benefit the brand (Klawitter & Tania, 2016). Companies' strategies will keep becoming better as they become familiar with online marketing and with time, brands will begin to focus more on how to give the customers a pleasant experience, and treat them as one of their own rather than just providing them with basic information (Klawitter & Tania, 2016).

In contrast to traditional marketing, digital marketing connects the brand and the consumers in a distinct way, making them exacting and cavilling, and more demanding towards marketing messages (Klawitter & Tania, 2016). Despite the negative effects of online marketing, the world has become a better place as everything can now "go viral" resulting in eliminating frauds.

Impact Of Brands' Online Marketing On Consumers' Buying Intentions

Digital marketing is one of the most popular marketing techniques used by brands (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020). In recent research, it is found that advertisements can be the most important factors that contribute to a consumer's purchase intention (Husnain & Toor, 2017). Digital marketing attracts a large number of consumers, allows firms to communicate to consumers efficiently and strengthens the brand image by getting rid of brand misapprehensions (Dastane, 2020). Digital marketing branches out to two most leading tools, social media marketing and email marketing (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020). Social media and email marketing are the most popular digital marketing instruments worldwide, and have been believed to be most efficient in raising customer engagement, a factor that finds out about how widespread the customer's purchase intentions are (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020). According to a study done previously, email marketing is considered to be the most distinguished digital marketing tool that aims for consumers who are tempted by promotional offers (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020).

Email marketing is a communication tool that delivers messages to customers electronically, while social media marketing communicates with consumers through different social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. Customers who assent to getting email marketing are more plausibly to have higher purchase intention. In addition, email marketing has been proven to have a major impact on buying intentions. This type of marketing involves the communication of advertisements, company appeals or donations, and other messages to build trust, loyalty and brand awareness. It is the most efficient tool for executing promotions and building customer interactions at a low price (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020).

Email marketing can be studied using three aspects: Offer: A way to calculate consumer response. Website: If the site is aesthetically pleasing, displays genuine and thorough details, and is user friendly, and Communication Time/Sequence: The matching order of time with what is being advertised. On the other hand, social media marketing can be studied using four aspects: Relationships: Development of relationships with customers. Communication: The interconnection between retailers and customers. Post-Purchase Interactions: Communication among the retailer and the customer regarding transactions and Information format (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020).

Then there is Social network marketing, a part of social media marketing under which customers and brands are connected without constraint of time, location and communication as in this marketing there is a two-way communication instead of the conventional one-way communication (Husnain & Toor, 2017). Digital marketing has been proven to have a major and positive effect on customer engagement and purchase intention (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020). Most people, globally, are ready to experience new marketing techniques such as social media and email marketing that are confirmed to make a positive impact on buying intention (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020).

Hence, H3: *Brand's online marketing significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands.*

Brands' Online Product Presentation

Product presentation is defined as "the consciously designed display of chosen merchandise in a specified area" (Song & Kim, 2012). It is an important feature of the store environment which helps consumers collect information regarding the products they wish to purchase in online shopping (Song & Kim, 2012). Online shopping, over the last 10 years, has grown dramatically (Song & Kim, 2012). According to InsiderIntelligence, worldwide online sales in 2021 were 19.5%, compared to 13.9% in 2019 (Dawn, 2021). In 2 years, the world experienced a major increase in online sales (Dawn, 2021). In Pakistan, based on the data issued by the State Bank, registration of Pakistani e-commerce merchants increased from 1,707 in 2009-20 to 3,003 in 2020-21 (Dawn, 2021). Online shopping is a part of our everyday's life, hence an excellent and inviting product presentation is needed, as customers need to judge the quality of products in order to purchase it online (Wang & Dai, 2013).

In a research done by Jovic, Milutinovic, Kos and Tomazic (2012), the participants communicated that for an acceptable online presentation, usage of images, text, video, speech and music in the background is needed; it is preferable to incorporate more elements in a product presentation than to leave out even one of the elements stated above. The approach a brand takes to present their products impacts the consumer shopping experience both online and offline (Yoo & Kim, 2014). Thus, in online product presentation, where physical product experience is missing, it is crucial to display authentic and plenty of information about products in order to help customers create mental imagery, which works in behalf of the missing sensory experience (Wu, Wang, Liu, & Shin 2020).

Online product presentation affects the amount of product information perceived by the consumers (Song & Kim, 2012). For instance, a large product image would provide more information as compared to a small product image, as it would give a clearer visibility of the details (Song & Kim, 2012). Moreover, a good product presentation contributes to a positive online environment which further gives rise to pleasant moods that leads to a satisfied shopping experience (Yoo & Kim, 2014). In an online environment, product presentation plays a major role in evoking affective and cognitive responses, and it plays an even more important role in the apparel category as apparels involve sensory experience that retailers must achieve online, somehow (Yoo & Kim, 2014); either by giving information of the fabric, or by putting up a high quality image of the fabric where even the tiniest speck of the thread is prominent.

To achieve high quality product presentation experience, advanced online product presentation technologies have been created, such as virtual mirrors. These advanced technologies allow customers to experience products like they are present with them in the real world. Empirical research verifies that product presentation formats that are interactive and crystal clear grows a consumers' perception of products and makes them appreciate and trust the website. Different product presentation features, such as high and low quality images, product rotation feature, and online product trials have been considered influential on consumers' product perception, moods and purchase intentions (Verhagen, Vonkeman, Feldberg, & Verhagen, 2013).

Impact of Brands' Online Product Presentation On Consumers' Buying Intentions

Different forms of product presentation, such as text, static and dynamic pictures, 3D, video, etc., have been noticed to create contrasting measures of presentation vividness, which, in result, affects consumers' behaviour and purchase intention (Wu, Wang, Liu, & Shin, 2020). The word "presentation" in the light of social media, spreads out to many variables, for instance, web interface features and design (Hausman & Siekpe, 2009), quality of product images (Song & Kim, 2012), online store environment (Chang & Chen, 2008), etc. Effective product presentation is needed in online businesses to attract consumers to a website and to fill in the absence of in store experiences which shapes consumer purchase decisions (Yoo & Kim, 2014). In order to achieve an up to the mark product presentation to fulfil the customers' need for sensory product experience, many online sellers have begun to take advantage of recent advances in technology by utilising different visualisation tools (Yoo & Kim, 2014).

Considering the fact that customers cannot touch, feel or try the products online (Verhagen, Vonnkeman, Feldberg, & Verhagen, 2013), and the only way they can understand the product and feel the product quality is through details on website (Wang & Dai, 2013), it is important for brands to provide them with the best product presentation in order to keep their buying interest in brand's favour (Wang & Dai, 2013). Moreover, the signalling theory, where "sellers may send signals to help consumers determine the product quality", also states that a retailers' reputation, advertisement investment, trust, e-image and website quality could impact an online customers' purchase intention (Wang & Dai, 2013).

Conveying all the attributes of in-store products to online stores is a difficult process, however to deal with this problem, online sellers keep on applying more advanced product presentation formats, such as video formats and virtual mirrors, which drastically improves the quality of product information (Verhagen, Vonnkeman, Feldberg, & Verhagen, 2013). For example, Ray-bans website allows its customers to virtually wear their glasses to see if it suits or not (Verhagen et al., 2013), this idea would attract the customers who purchase online. A remarkable product presentation has two qualities, interactivity and vividness (Verhagen et al., 2013), and Ray-ban owns both. Previous studies show that if the product display is interactive and vivid, the purchase intentions would increase (Song & Kim, 2012). Empirical results also approve of both of these qualities, as customers were found to have positive attitudes towards the website when the vividness was increased in product presentation, while interactivity raised consumption value and customer satisfaction (Verhagen, Vonnkeman, Feldberg, & Verhagen, 2013). Both of the qualities in the end led to increased buying intentions (Verhagen et al., 2013).

Another reason why a consumer's buying intention changes is the non-physical nature of online shopping, due to which consumers find it risky and change their decision of buying a certain product, however, this risk can be reduced by using more efficient online product presentation methods. For example, Instead of displaying flat clothing images, the smart choice would be to display the clothing on a mannequin or a human model, this way consumers' positive emotional and cognitive responses will be evoked. It is found that, "sensory enabling technologies" such as 2D perspective, 3D rotation and virtual try-ons can induce positive behaviour in customers towards the brand, hence increasing purchase intentions (Song & Kim, 2012).

Hence, H4: *Brand's online product presentation significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands.*

The conceptual framework, shown below, includes 4 direct relationships.

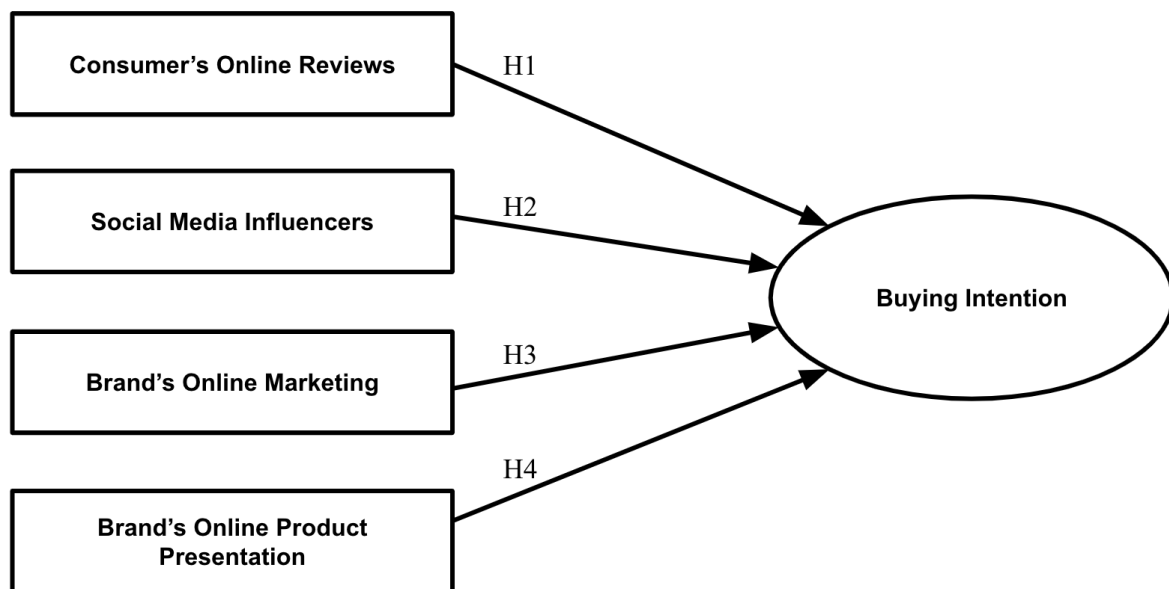


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Data Collection, Population and Sample size

As online shopping has become dramatically popular lately, this research aims to study factors of social media that impact buying intentions of consumers towards brands, through experimental research design. The population selected for this research is people who are aware of digital media, most specifically social media platforms, and who are able to answer questions related to the four independent variables of this research; (1) Online customer reviews/word of mouth, (2) Influence of social media influencers, (3) Digital Brand Marketing, (4) Online product presentation.

To collect data, probability sampling was done. Questionnaires were circulated among friends, relatives, acquaintances and on social media platforms and ages 10 - 60 were targeted. The questionnaire was distributed online, and 149 respondents completed the survey, which was a concern as 100-150 participants were not enough for an adequate sample size. The questionnaire was circulated on social media pages where people are always willing to participate in research. This particular sampling method was used so that the results of this study could be generalisable to the entire population. Quantitative surveys were thought to be the best method for this research as statistics and unbiased data were needed to either strengthen or weaken the accuracy of the hypotheses'.

For this research, other than the primary research method, a secondary research method was also used, as it is the first step towards gathering data through academic sources; that include information on websites and books. Different journal articles, published dissertations and thesis projects were studied and analysed in order to find out if the hypothesis made about the selected topic stands correct, which it did. This research method was used to obtain an in-depth study regarding the chosen topic. *Does More Mean Better? An Examination of Visual Product Presentation in e-Retailing* by Sarah Sungsook Song and Minjeong Kim, *The Impact of Social Media Influencer and Brand Images to Purchase Intention* by Arum Nurhandayani, Rizal Syarif and Mukhamad Najib, *A New Development in Online Marketing: Introducing Digital Inbound Marketing* by Alin Opreana and Simona Vinerean and *The Effects of Online Product Presentation on Consumer Responses: A Mental Imagery Perspective* by Jungmin Yoo and Minjeong Kim were a few published projects used as secondary sources.

Measurement of Constructs

The questionnaire was divided into four sections, section 1 collected data regarding how online customer reviews impact a buyer's purchase intention. Section 2 included questions regarding influence of social media influencers, section 3 revolved around digital marketing and section 4 consisted of questions related to online product presentation. The following are some of the questions that were asked in the questionnaire:

"I prefer "convincing" online reviews rather than "informative", when researching on a product."

"For me to trust an influencer, the influencer has to be all 5: entertaining, relatable, attractive, informative and an expert."

"I do not find Brand email marketing useful. (In emailing marketing, brands email their customers with promotions, discount codes, etc.)"

"I would definitely want brand websites to introduce virtual try-on options. (where people can try the product virtually to see how it looks on them)."

In the survey, OCR is evaluated by heuristic–systematic model (HSM) from (Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018), Influence of influencers is evaluated by 5 factors that impact purchase intention from (Masuda et al., 2022) and positive/negative purchase intentions from (Lin et al., 2021), Impact of digital marketing is evaluated by tools of digital marketing from (Nawaz & Kaldeen, 2020), lastly, online product presentation is evaluated by online product presentation methods from (Song & Kim, 2012). The constructs were evaluated at a 5-point linear scale, with a strongly agree in 1 point and strongly disagree at 5 point.

Statistical Technique

For preliminary analysis and inferential statistical testing of the hypotheses' the SPSS statistics software was utilised. SPSS was found best for a quantitative research's statistical analysis.

Data Analysis & Results of the Study

Respondents Profile

This research was conducted in Pakistan, through a digital questionnaire that was circulated on social media platforms. 44% of respondents were male, and 56% were female; 27% belonged to the 10-19 age group, 62% were 20-29 years old, 9% were 30-39, 2% belonged to the 40-49 age group. Out of 149 respondents, 22% do online shopping only on social media websites, 11% do on only browser websites, and 67% do on both social media and browser websites.

Quantitative Analysis

The statistical characteristics of the research variables were summarised using descriptive statistics, which included the Mean, 2k-independent test and Kruskal-Wallis test. The reliability analysis was done through Cronbach's Alpha test by using an Alpha of 0.05.

Table 1

Case Processing Summary

	N	%
Cases Valid	131	87.9
Cases Excluded ^a	18	12.1
Total Cases	149	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables on the procedure

The summary shows that the data collected was valid. This gives the data a hundred per cent (100%) reliability. With the results being reliable, the results are now ready for further analysis.

Table 2

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.266	20

The reliability statistics show that there is no significant difference. We were able to analyse this by knowing that anything greater than 0.05 is reliable.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Online Customer Reviews	149	1.40	4.00	2.37	0.52
Influence of Influencers	149	1.25	3.25	2.20	0.40
Digital Marketing	149	1.33	4.33	2.76	0.61
Online Product Presentation	149	1.00	2.50	1.56	0.32
Valid N (Listwise)	149				

The greatest mean value is of Digital Marketing (Mean=2.76, SD=0.61), whereas the lowest mean value is of Online Product Presentation (Mean=1.56, SD=0.32). The variables of the study were found to be reliable as the alpha value was greater than 0.05.

Table 4

Constructs Ranks (Grouping Variable: Age)

	Age	N	Mean Rank
Online Customer Reviews	10-19	39	74.06
	20-29	94	75.47
	30-39	13	74.12
	40-49	3	76.17
	Total	149	
Influence of Influencers	10-19	39	78.00
	20-29	94	72.37
	30-39	13	80.19
	40-49	3	96.00
	Total	149	
Digital Marketing	10-19	39	65.14
	20-29	94	74.48
	30-39	13	74.73
	40-49	3	64.00
	Total	149	
Online Product Presentation	10-19	39	87.23
	20-29	94	70.93
	30-39	13	66.00
	40-49	3	82.67
	Total	149	

Age does not have a significant difference in terms of social media reviews on buying intentions of brands although we see a slight dip in the age group between 10-19 in digital marketing and a rise in online product presentation, that shows that they are affected by how the product is marketed and presented.

Table 5

Tests Statistics

	Online Customer Reviews	Influence of Influencers	Digital Marketing	Online Product Presentation
Kruskal Wallis H	0.38	1.450	3.351	4.918
df	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.998	0.694	0.341	0.178

Table 6

Ranks (Grouping Variable: Gender)

	Gender	N	Mean Rank
Online Customer Reviews	Male	65	73.72
	Female	84	75.99
	Total	149	
Influence of Influencers	Male	65	70.45
	Female	84	78.52
	Total	149	
Digital Marketing	Male	65	74.68
	Female	84	75.24
	Total	149	

Online Product Presentation	Male	65	74.46
	Female	84	75.42
	Total	149	

As the table shows, there is no significant difference found between gender in the mean comparison of social media reviews on buying intentions of brands.

Table 7

Tests Statistics

	Online Customer Reviews	Influence of Influencers	Digital Marketing	Online Product Presentation
Kruskal Wallis H	0.102	1.292	0.006	0.019
df	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.749	0.256	0.936	0.890

Table 8

Ranks (Grouping Variable: Gender)

	Gender	N	Mean Rank
Do you do online shopping?	Male	65	73.35
	Female	84	76.28
	Total	149	

Both genders shop online equally.

Table 9

Tests Statistics

Do you do online shopping?	
Kruskal Wallis H	0.246
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.620

Table 10

Ranks (Grouping Variable: Age)

	Age	N	Mean Rank
Do you do online shopping?	10-19	39	62.59
	20-29	94	81.15
	30-39	13	62.08
	40-49	3	99.50
	Total	149	

Ages between 30 to 39 don't shop online as much, followed by the age group below the age of 19.

Table 11

Tests Statistics

Do you do online shopping?	
Kruskal Wallis H	10.581
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.014

Table 12

Ranks (Grouping Variable: Age)

	Age	N	Mean Rank
Online shopping consumer behaviour	10-19	39	73.99
	20-29	94	76.06
	30-39	13	69.58
	40-49	3	78.33
	Total	149	

Ages between 30 to 39 have slightly different consumer behaviour as compared to other age groups.

Table 13

Tests Statistics

Online Shopping Consumer behaviour	
Kruskal Wallis H	0.302
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.960

Table 14

Ranks (Grouping Variable: Gender)

	Gender	N	Mean Rank
Online shopping consumer behaviour	Male	65	72.18
	Female	84	77.18
	Total	149	

Both genders have almost the same consumer behaviour.

Table 15

Tests Statistics

Online Shopping Consumer behaviour	
Kruskal Wallis H	0.491
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.484

Discussion

The first hypothesis: Consumer's online reviews significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands, is proven correct according to the primary data analysis. 80.1% of the respondents use their social media accounts to read or write reviews, which mean online reviews have an impact on them which is why they invest their time in reading and writing reviews. Moreover, the majority of the participants (74%) find detailed and convincing online reviews to have more credibility rather than just informative ones, as convincing and detailed reviews help them in buying decisions. Study by Ruiz-Mafe, Chatzipanagiotou, & Curras-Perez (2018) also supports the findings, as the study states that *high-quality* online reviews are persuasive as the information provided is useful for evaluating the product and carries reliability and reasoning, and helps in making purchase decisions. The second hypothesis: Social media influencers significantly impact buying intentions towards brands, was evaluated by 5 factors that impact purchase intention from (Masuda et al., 2022) and positive/negative purchase intentions from (Lin et al., 2021). The primary research supports both Masuda et al. (2020) and Lin et al. (2021), but opposes the claim "A positive attitude towards products introduced or reviewed by social media influencers will have a higher possibility of a positive purchase intention" by Lin, Crowe, Pierre, & Lee (2021). According to the primary data results, 49% of the sample size disagreed with the statement: "Positive reviews of a social media Influencer regarding a brand will motivate me to buy from that brand", while only 33% agreed. The hypothesis is proven correct as 73.16% of the respondents agreed with the claim: "Negative reviews of a social media Influencer, regarding a brand, will stop me from buying that brand's products", only 13.42% of the

respondents disagreed. Which proves that social media influencers have a significant impact on consumer's buying intentions. Also, according to the results, 66% of the participants would want the influencer to have all 5 characteristics in order to trust him/her: entertaining, relatable, attractive, and informative and an expert, thus this result further strengthens the hypothesis, as trust makes the influencers more credible, and credibility is what makes the consumers believe in their negative reviews. The third hypothesis: Brand's online marketing significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands, is proven correct according to the primary data analysis. 48% of the respondents would not trust a brand if it doesn't advertise its products on social media, which means the respondents would not have positive buying intentions towards that brand, while 24% of the respondents were neutral about it. Therefore, online marketing is necessary in order to make customers have positive buying intentions towards brands. A study done by Husnain and Toor (2017) also supports the hypothesis by stating "advertisements can be the most important factors that contribute to a consumer's purchase intention". Research done by Nawaz and Kaldeen (2020) also supports the hypothesis, however, their claim "email marketing is considered to be the most distinguished digital marketing tool" has been found weak in the results of the primary research, as only 33% of the respondents find email marketing useful, while 51% disagree. Moreover, social media marketing is found useful to many.

The fourth hypothesis: Brand's online presentation significantly impacts buying intentions towards brands, is proven correct according to the primary data analysis. 93% of the participants agree with the statement: "If a brand website doesn't contain clear and detailed product images, I would quit it and go to other brands' websites". This result shows that clear and vivid product presentation impacts a consumers buying intention towards brands. Furthermore, 96% of the respondents voted for brands to post product videos online, which would make them understand the product better, hence creating more chances of positive buying intentions. A 3D rotation and virtual try on option was also encouraged to be made available online by 84% of the respondents, which indicates that online product presentation plays a significant role to achieve positive purchase intentions. The hypothesis is also supported by a study done by Song and Kim (2012). Sensory enabling technologies" such as 2D perspective, 3D rotation and virtual try-ons can induce positive behaviour in customers towards the brand, hence increasing purchase intentions (Song & Kim, 2012).

Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to study the impact of social media factors (i.e. Online customer reviews, Evaluations of social media influencers, Online marketing, Online product presentation) on a consumer's buying intention, towards brands. Online customer reviews/eWOM, that are persuasive and detailed, leaves a high impact on consumers' purchase intentions; immediately turning them positive or negative, as according to the results, majority of online shoppers research regarding a certain brand or product through Online customer reviews. Companies and entrepreneurs, that are new to business, should pay extra attention to online customer reviews, and should always reply to negative reviews as it helps in controlling a situation gone wrong. Moreover, evaluations of social media influencers extensively impacts a consumer's buying interest, as according to the primary and secondary researches done in this study, consumers would not buy a certain product if it has a negative review from their favourite influencer. Companies, especially the ones that are new in the business field, should definitely target social media influencers, as their reviews can help in their brand's growth to a very high extent, however, not all influencers are credible, hence they should target the influencers who withhold all 5 characteristics: entertaining, relatable, attractive, informative and an expert. Online marketing impacts a consumer's buying intention as well, as results from the survey proves that the majority of the respondents would not trust a brand if it doesn't advertise its products on social media, which means the respondents would not have positive buying intentions towards the brand. Online marketing should be new/developing brands' high priority in order to build trust and positive purchase intentions.

Online product presentation, another factor that impacts purchase intentions significantly, should be taken into consideration by companies and entrepreneurs that are new to the business world, as the findings of this research proves that consumers exit a brand's website/page if the online product presentation is not clear and vivid or informative enough. To make the product presentation more informative, companies can introduce different presentation methods, such as 3D rotation, product video, and virtual try on (Song & Kim, 2012). Although the research proves all four hypotheses' to be correct, there were limitations that didn't allow the study to be conducted in the best manner. Two huge limitations were encountered during the

research, insufficient sample size for statistical measurements, and missing elements in the questionnaire; the questions in the survey could have been addressed from another perspective and a few more important questions could have been included in order to achieve better results. All in all, results through primary and secondary research shows that all four social media factors have significant impact on a consumer's buying intention, therefore, emerging and developing companies should continue to keep all four factors in consideration in order to achieve successful brand growth, in today's competitive world.

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