



# Effectiveness of Social Media Platform: A Perspective of Customer Purchase Intention through Social Networking in the Pakistani Context

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore the association among the social media practices which effect the purchase intention of the consumers in the Pakistani context. The study is helpful for all the practioniers and profit earning organizations as it gives a deep overview of the social media and their practices applied nowadays. The study also examines the mediating role of brand loyalty in these relationships. Paper, as well as electronic questionnaires, were used to collect data from 1000 consumers who use social channels to make a purchase. Structural equation modeling technique (SEM) was applied to test the hypothesized model. The results reflects that all the independent variables have a significant impact on purchase intention (dependent variable) keeping brand loyalty as the mediating variable. The results of the research are beneficial for all those firms and marketers who are targeting the social networking platforms to reach out to their target customers. This study explores the factors of brand loyalty in relation to social media in a unique way, but having few limitations to research such as the use of convenience sampling .Future directions can help the marketers to aim their consumers very precisely implying these social media studies.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Brand Loyalty, Social Networking, Community Engagements, Impression Management, Brand Use, Purchase Intention

**JEL Classifications:** M1, M3

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is considered as a substantial mean which not only support the consumers but the firms also to have a good mean of interaction and developing everlasting bond with the consumers. Social media is defined as the online platform facilitating the users to interact, collaborate and even share information among each other (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). The reputation of brand is directly proportional to its social media influence nowadays (Bae et al., 2010). Social networking means that individuals having similar interests and characteristics come together at one single platform or source or any channel sharing their ideas ,reviews and interacting with people of same nature. Socializing is done through various means such as sending messages, sharing photos,

blogging, web links, websites and discussion channels (Harris and Parker, 2009); and for this interaction there are various applications present like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter etc.

The debate over the brand-building activities of any company by utilizing digital platforms which can lead to consumer purchase intentions is an ongoing one. Some academics and researchers are of this viewpoint that only social media gives a unique platform to businesses and brands helping their consumers to develop long term bond with their brands while others doesn't agree with this theory (Harris and Parker, 2009). Taking this perspective forward, this research caters to variables namely social media, community engagement, impression management and brand usage to predict purchase intentions through customer loyalty status with the

mediating effect of brand loyalty. Past brand loyalty studies just explored the customer centered model explaining the bond between the focal customer and their desired brand, any company or any product using social channels (Schau et al., 2009). However, this research will study the effects of predicating antecedents like social media, community engagement, and impression management, brand use to enhance long term customer relationships through brand loyalty which fully mediates value creation practices on purchase intention of the consumers.

Social media growth enables customers to modify themselves from passive receivers to active co-creators of brand messages in response to marketers' persuasion tactics of using social media platforms (Ramiz et al., 2014). Firms and Business have started noticing the importance of social media marketing channels and results explored that 47% of companies use social media to connect to their customers (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013). As Marketing Insider Group (2017) reported, that brand community has shown significant business benefits when the system is shifted from conventional to online having benefits such as: (1) a decrease in customer support costs; (2) enhanced brand exposure and credibility; (3) help to get knowledge of new products or service; (4) showcasing products before their official presentation.

Communities developed online and interacting via social channels provide a platform to users to come together at one unified point and have a discussion about various brands, items or products. Nowadays various firms and businesses realizing the potential of social media have started supporting the developed communities and social platforms. Such channels can help in better development of their respective brands financially, ethically and emotionally (Most et al., 2001). Such communities develop a bond between the firm and their respective customers (Kim et al., 2007). Through impression management, the users come across the latest news, brand proficiency, standards of various brands matching their levels and likeness.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Social Networking and Purchase Intention

Social networking provide a chance for marketers to gather the information from the customer to have a record maintained (Hensel and Deis, 2010). A general rule explains that with the passage of time, social networking users become more inclined in sharing their private information. Data mining organizations are gathering data from individual posts and applications. An organization called "Colligent" gathers such free data, mines it and offers factual information to record mark organizations (Hall et al., 2009). Peng et al. (2008) suggest that social network marketing can be advantageous to the business in many ways. Schlaile et al. (2018) suggests that focusing the final outcome being advantageous using social media marketing, firms take into account the steps starting from their initial commercials broadcasting online, developing clear defined goals and in the last collecting the results to be beneficial or not.

Social networking is powerful source because of its two-way correspondence (Nisar and Whitehead, 2016). Ellis-Chadwick and

Chaffey (2012) propose numerous organizations take an initiative venture enabling online networking members to communicate and many have discovered achievement in utilizing the insight of the group to answer their business issues. Indian and Grieve (2014) suggested the two stages to gain customer confidence is first to give honor to the customer and second to make marketing programs that upgrade clients.

Social media networking in a way is one of the most effective utilization of marketing expenses (Krasnova et al., 2010; Nisar and Whitehead, 2016), which is essential for even small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as they have to make do with smaller spending plans than the bigger organizations. Firms utilize social media networking to discover new consumer as well as to keep up and hold their current consumer (Kim et al., 2018).

H<sub>1</sub>: There exists a positive relationship between social networking practices and purchase intention.

### 2.2. Community Engagement and Purchase Intention

Community engagement proposes that individuals are keen on helping different individuals, taking part in joint exercises and acting in cooperative ways until the group underwrites the proposal and when that upgrade eventually culminates into practice, the group's esteem is aggrandized, not only for themselves, but also for other groups and subsequently, the brand itself. Social interaction/user-participation is alluded to as "Partaking," one takes part when one has added something, either straightforwardly or in a roundabout way, to the group (Shang et al., 2006). Thompson and Sinha (2008) inspected the impacts of brand conscious people upon those who are not brand conscious.

Muniz and O'guinn (2001) find that long-haul individuals have a tendency to appreciate higher status inside the Brand Community and that their participation is viewed as more honest. Hence, longer-term participation in a Brand Community ought to lead to a more grounded social recognizable proof with that Brand Community. Furthermore, long-haul participation lead to learning purchasers' assessments of new offerings, aggressive marketing and promotion activities, et cetera; and to augment chances to draw in and work together with very faithful clients (Ohern and Rindfleisch, 2010). Within consumer relationship toward brand and brand networking, the brand loyalty acts a very crucial and vibrant role (Ismail, 2017).

Buyer's impression of the brand community's outward requests on a man to connect and coordinate inside the group. These requests are gone to by some of the time plain however regularly verifiable pressure to adjust to the Community's standards, ceremonies, and goals (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Brand Communities, however, have not possessed the capacity to manage the entire hover, from starting associations with clients to the change of promoting efficiency. Rather, the exploration center has been on assorted ranges, for example, the impact of demeanors toward brand communities on brand (Solem and Stalenhoef, 2016; Sasmita and Suki, 2015). Brand community duty and breaks down the impact of trust and influence toward a brand community. The significant connections amongst Trust and duty and amongst influence and

responsibility have been identified in past brand administration contemplates (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Goh, 2013).

Hence the proposed hypothesis is:

H<sub>2</sub>: There exists a positive relationship between community engagement practices and purchase intention.

### 2.3. Impression Management and Purchase Intention

Customers involve themselves in such selfless activities or to gain higher status within their communities/society which results in providing an esteemed impression. People don't bother about the motivation behind, but just observe the impression to develop their status within the society (Laroche et al., 2012). From a behavioral viewpoint, the practice of engaging consumers can be viewed as a consumer's behavioral manifestation toward a company's brand (Gignac and Szodorai, 2016). Secondly, consumer engagement can be hypothesized as a psychological state that occurs in combination with a customer's interactive experience with a focal (Core) brand, accompanied with consumer attitude formation as a multidimensional construct comprised of emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions (Zebrowitz and Montepare, 2015).

Impression management plays a vital role in organizational research that is inclusive of political accomplishment (Riegelsberger et al., 2007). Impression management helps to achieve beneficial results while making hiring decisions, performance evaluations and career development (Yen and Tseng, 2013). Staff workers hope to be treated well by their upper management; for this purpose, impression management performs a vital part in managing the controller's impressions to increase staff workers' productivity. When supervisors use impression management the staff workers feel the supervisors are in their favor (Proudfoot et al., 2018).

Different theories proved that use of impression management helps to achieve great success in career (Fuller et al., 2007) and builds good relations between staff workers and supervisors (Harris et al., 2007). Impression management is a theory to be paid attention to. It has the authority and impact to create a promising public recommendation of a noteworthy person; it can harm an individual's social status, and, it can reestablish a harmed guise. Also, impression management has the aptitude to regulate a person's status in the social order. A relative position of a person can also effect impression management (Merkl-Davies et al., 2011).

Hence the proposed hypothesis is:

H<sub>3</sub>: There exists a positive relationship between impression management practices and purchase intention.

### 2.4. Brand Usage and Purchase Intention

Brand use practices are the consumer's ability to help each other with novel and better means to utilize any main brand. These comprise essentially about the valid knowledge/know how by one user to another focusing the usability of brands as per the basic needs. These practices can also be related to the feelings of one person in an attempt to help or assist another who is new into the

community. Brands use practices include developing, nurturing and custom tailoring the brand as per their user demand. Such practices results in best use and liking towards the brand (Schau et al., 2009).

Social media can enhance brand usage practices by keeping brand dedication and increasing followers by connecting and sharing brand information and knowledge. Along with all these value addition practices, it is assumed that brand community pointers can openly impact these practices (Laroche et al., 2012). Ahmad et al. (2011) worked on determining the influence of brand positioning on consumer purchase intention among different products using eight variables; brand credibility (signaling variable), brand image (signaling variable), brand prestige (signaling variable), consumer purchase intention, perceived value, perceived quality, perceived risk and product involvement on consumer purchase intention. Results revealed that all brand signaling variables impact positively on consumer purchase intention through perceived value for money, perceived quality, and information costs saved, and perceived risk. Brand positioning variables have great impact on high involvement product rather low. Marketers and advertisers use this study to outline operational strategies and increase effectiveness.

Thus, the study postulates the following hypothesis:

H<sub>4</sub>: There exists a positive relationship between brand use practices and purchase intention.

### 2.5. Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention

Hidayanti and Nuryakin (2018) explained the impacts of brand practice and brand trust to enhance brand loyalty and brand commitment. Brand experience support to brand commitment and brand loyalty. Loyalty is a way through which customers show their contentment towards the enactment of product or facilities given to them (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995). Brand loyalty is also distinguished as "keeping a particular product or service desirable" (Khraim, 2011). Loyalty is based on different variables but the most important fact is the practice of use (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Consumer's check the brand for their satisfaction that inaugurates a good and long relationship with that brand (Woodcock et al., 2011).

Brand loyalty is elemental for every firm to gain competitive advantage in order to attract more customers and gain more profit (Iglesias et al., 2011). Every firm wants to get high customers loyalty towards the brand. However, all brands cannot achieve high customer loyalty. Every company's marketing plan is designed to focus on growth and preservation of consumer's brand loyalty, specifically in the marketplaces having tough opposition and high impulsiveness and less item variation (Ismail, 2017).

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) had indicated brand loyalty as a constructive and steady frame of mind and characterized it by the client through attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty to the brand. Brand loyalty alludes to the propensity of being reliable to a brand and can be an inclination of customers to purchase a brand as the main decision indicated loyalty to a specific brand.

**Table 1: Correlational matrix**

|                            | Mean   | St. Deviation | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4       | 5       | 6 | Cronbach's Alpha |
|----------------------------|--------|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---|------------------|
| Social networking (SN)     | 3.6610 | 0.39117       | 1       |         |         |         |         |   | 0.616            |
| Community engagement (CE)  | 3.4907 | 0.41846       | 0.536** | 1       |         |         |         |   | 0.812            |
| Impression management (IM) | 3.5684 | 0.45882       | 0.516*  | 0.616** | 1       |         |         |   | 0.744            |
| Brand use (BU)             | 3.8982 | 0.54123       | 0.474** | 0.429** | 0.436** | 1       |         |   | 0.720            |
| Brand loyalty (BL)         | 3.7839 | 0.53520       | 0.496** | 0.475** | 0.501*  | 0.579** | 1       |   | 0.685            |
| Purchase intention (PI)    | 3.6379 | 0.50490       | 0.432** | 0.499** | 0.540** | 0.488*  | 0.638** | 1 | 0.742            |

Hence it is proposed that

H<sub>5</sub>: Brand loyalty has mediating effect among independent variables (social networking, community engagement, impression management, brand use) and purchase intention.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The current study assumed the positivist philosophy as the nature of the research to undergo the factors of purchase intention using social media and branding. This study utilized quantitative (survey-based) methodology being cross sectional in nature. In the present study, target population refers to all those consumers using internet facilities and social media platforms and online networking in Pakistan. Currently, the total population of Pakistan is 200 Million as per *World Meter*. Out of this population 18% or precisely 35 million are regular internet users while 31 million or 16 % are the active social media users. 1200 questionnaires were distributed and out of which 1000 came out fully filled and duly acceptable to run the tests with response rate of 83%. In measuring variable social networking is leading the concept of socializing and interaction and was developed by Hsieh et al. (2005). A thirteen item scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) was used which was developed by Hsieh et al. (2005). Community Engagement means social interaction and it was measured by 30 items scale from from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) developed by Algesheimer et al., 2005. Impression management is the practice used by people to give directions to alter their developed image towards any brand by Schau et al. (2009). A fifty item scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) developed by Schau et al. (2009) was used. Brand loyalty is the affirmative approach towards a brand and it was measured by 6 items scale from one one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) developed by Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003). Brand usage is the level to calculate the purchase of any brand in priority to alike brands and it was measured by 5 items scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) developed by Schau et al. (2009). Purchase intention is the preference of consumer to buy the product or service and it was measured by it was measured by 9 items scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) developed by Singh et al. (2012).

### 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Demographic results revealed that 519 are female buyers with majority as compared to 481 male buyers being the minority. Age level of the respondents in between 18 and 23 years are in majority with 658 respondents while rest age groups ranges such as 24-29

**Table 2: Fitness summary**

| Varibales                  | CMIN/DF | CFI   | GFI   | RMSEA |
|----------------------------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| Social networking (SN)     | 0.122   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 0.000 |
| Community engagement (CE)  | 2.565   | 0.981 | 0.989 | 0.040 |
| Impression management (IM) | 2.780   | 0.983 | 0.993 | 0.042 |
| Brand use (BU)             | 1.00    | 1.00  | 1.00  | 0.310 |
| Brand loyalty (BL)         | 1.805   | 0.998 | 0.992 | 0.046 |
| Purchase intention (PI)    | 2.649   | 0.993 | 0.992 | 0.066 |

**Table 3: Regression weights (group number 1-default model)**

|     |          | Estimates | P-value |
|-----|----------|-----------|---------|
| PI. | <--- SN. | 0.214     | 0.027   |
| PI. | <--- IM. | 0.344     | ***     |
| PI. | <--- CE. | 0.089     | ***     |
| PI. | <--- BU. | 0.297     | ***     |

years are 250 respondents, 30-34 years are 49 while above 35 age limit are 43 respondents. Similarly for the education bachelor level is in majority with 666 responses, master level is 208 and MPhil level is 84 while PhDs are 42 respondents.

Table 1 explains the relationship among the variables. It explains the variables have significant relationship with each other at the level of 0.01 and 0.05. The lowest correlational was 0.429 in Brand Use with Community Engagement while the highest correlation was 0.638 in between Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty. Means and Standard Deviation are also mentioned in the table ranging from 3.49 to 3.89 and 0.391 to 0.541 respectively. Reliability of each variable are also shown in the Table 1 while the overall reliability is 0.885.

Table 2 demonstrated the fitness summary of the model and variables. All the values showing that the constructs are fit for the analysis. The variables have the values above the threshold level donating fitness and validity of the constructs. Standard regression weights also have 0.3 estimate values showing the acceptable range to retain the variables.

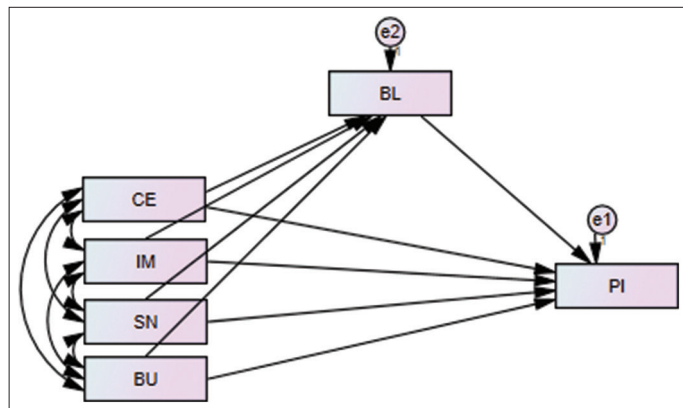
Table 3 shows the P values through which hypotheses are accepted or rejected. According to the results of P values, first relationship of social networking (SN) with purchase intention (PI) has not been accepted. All others hypothetical relationships have been accepted shown in Table 3.

To test the mediation, bootstrapping technique is used. It is also useful to verify both the direct as well as the indirect effects of the model. As mentioned in Table 4 and according to it there are

**Table 4: Bootstrapping strategy**

| Paths    | Standardized total effect | Standardized direct effect | Standardized indirect effect | Results           |
|----------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| CE-BL-PI | 0.157***                  | 0.115***                   | 0.047***                     | Partial mediation |
| IM-BL-PI | 0.228***                  | 0.184***                   | 0.076***                     | Partial mediation |
| SN-BL-PI | 0.003(ns)                 | 0.163***                   | 0.067***                     | No mediation      |
| BU-BL-PI | 0.095***                  | 0.372***                   | 0.153***                     | Partial mediation |

**Figure 1: Conceptual model and hypotheses testing**



partial mediation present in first, second and fourth path. First path is Community Engagement with Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention. Second path is Impression Management with Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention. While the fourth path is Brand Use with Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention. Third path is showing no mediation among the variables (Social networking with Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention).

Figure 1 explains the model showing the impact of independent variables; Social Networking (SN), Community Engagement (CE), Impression Management (IM), Brand use (BU) on the dependent variable Purchase Intention (PI) and with the mediation effect of Brand Loyalty (BL).

### 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to examine the mediating role of Brand Trust between the relationship of social networking, community engagement, impression management, brand use and purchase intention in the developing world of social media and internet within the Pakistani context. Social networking, community engagement, impression management, brand use were the independent variables and purchase intention was the dependent variable. Brand trust was the mediating variable in the study. Five hypotheses were crafted to examine the relationship between the variables. Data was collected from 1200 social media users who use social chains and internet medium to make the purchase out of which 1000 were usable respondents. Majority of the population was female to make online purchase (n=519) which was 52% of the total respondents. Most users were of the age group 18-23 years and belonged to the bachelor level of education having 666 responses. Mean value of Brand use was highest (M=3.898, SD=0.541). CFA indicated that the data were collected fit for the hypothesized measurement model along with sufficient factor loadings. In correlational matrix all the variables were positively correlated with one another and fitness summary showed that all

the variables were fit for the analysis with standardized regression weights above the threshold level (>0.3).

For the hypothesis testing, the first hypothesis was the relationship of Social Networking and Purchase intention. It showed estimate 0.003 which was insignificant P=0.027 and it showed that there is no positive relationship among Social media and Purchase intention reflecting that with the development of social media the purchase patterns of the consumers doesn't change. Second hypothesis was the positive association between Community Engagement and Purchase Intention which denoted the estimate 0.089 and significant relationship between them. Communities living together and people effect each other a lot while making any purchase. Third hypothesis was the positive association between Impression Management and Purchase Intention which denoted the estimate 0.344 and significant relationship between them. People prefer to purchase while making an impression on other individual about any brand. Furthermore, fourth hypothesis was the positive association between Brand Use and Purchase Intention which denoted the estimate 0.297 and significant relationship between them. In the mediation analysis only Social networking showed no mediation effect among the relationship between Social Networking and Purchase Intention with Brand Trust. Brand Trust has the partial mediating effect in three relationships of Community Engagement, Impression Management and Brand Use.

### 6. IMPLICATION AND LIMITATION

This study provides deep understanding for the marketers and practitioners. The world is moving from conventional buying to online modes and socializing. Thus, in today's world of social media and interaction it is vital to pay attention to the social channels and platform while making purchases. Social media practices are crucial in today's world of businesses and it leads the companies to have better knowledge about their customers. The likings and interests of consumers for any brand can be accessed using social media and their channels. In such way, the decision makers in corporate world will get a better picture about the brands to develop the sense of brand trust and long term loyalty relationship among its consumers. People can get better knowledge about the brands and the information available online and have deep understanding about respective desired products instead of the old traditional mall shopping scenario. It not only saves times while doing online purchase for both the customers but also this step is beneficial for the firms to cut down the cost of outlets maintenance and people hiring as selling agents. Shifting your business online can improve the chances of social networking. This can not only help business to business marketing but business to customers will have more improves results. The interaction with potential buyers of the brands will be more easy and to share the products using social platforms will improve the

user flow. People are highly active on these forums, they develop their impression about the product or brand by knowing the views of other fellows who are using these networks. So, by walking on same impressions, they start using the particular product and attempt to purchase online such thing. So, by handling these things efficiently and effectively, their online sale could be increased positively and not only they can raise their sales but also they can sustain it too.

The study also has theoretical contribution as well as the model is novel and significantly contributes in the literature. Theory is also tested in the study which strengthen the generalizability of existing studies. There are very less study in this area specifically in the context of Pakistan so this study create a trend of testing online purchase intentions of customers and try to fill a gap in the literature related to Pakistani context.

The limitations of the study are as follows, which can be might fulfilled using the future suggestions by the study. As the data is analyzed in a specific period of time and being cross sectional in nature it can be done to different time scale and patterns. The following study only worked upon analyzing the mediating effect in relation to dependent and independent variables however, in future, moderating effect can also be implied in this model. Another thing that limits the scope of the study is the population targeting only the people using social channels and medium to make the purchase. It can link with other sectors of economy and different cultural perspectives and different time zones. Moderated mediation can also be checked in some future studies by incorporating different individual traits as moderator in the model.

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