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The Impact of Social Media Content Characteristics on Purchase Intention: Mediating Role of Brand Image

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ABSTRACT

Purchase intention of the customer has been the foremost requirement of every organization around the globe and requires the focus of recent studies. Hence, the present study examines the impact of social media content characteristics such as perceived entertainment value and perceived expertise on brand image and mediating role of brand image among the perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise and purchase intention of social media users of fast food companies in Pakistan. The study used the survey questionnaire to collect the primary data while also used the smart-PLS to test the relationships. The outcomes revealed that the perceived entertainment value and perceived expertise have a positive association with brand image and brand image significantly mediates among the perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise and purchase intention of social media users of fast food companies in Pakistan. The study guides the regulators that they should develop the regulations to achieve high purchase intention by focusing on perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise and brand image.

Introduction

The rise of the relevance of social media platforms has redefined the way people engage with brands and make decisions when it comes to purchases. The social media is no more the means of networking, but creating an overriding platform at which the marketing, brand engagement, and consumer behavior are influenced as well. As companies have moved toward a digital-first approach, the type of material distilled around social media has turned out to be vital in the capability to appeal to, connect with, and bind customers. Specifically, the aspects of such content, i.e., whether they are entertaining, informing, establishing credibility, or are pleasing to them, plays a key role in so far as to shaping the attitudes of consumers to brands and developing intentions to buy for products or services (Hanaysha, 2022). The digital era shapes the connection between consumers and brands through the circulating process of consumption and interpretation

of content. The proposed study aims to address the question of how perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise, perceived enjoyment, and credibility of social media sources determine source credibility as a factor in the purchase intention. These are the independent variables that are core in comprehending consumer responses with regard to online content. In addition, this research will present the mediating variable as brand image meaning that the idea of brand image does develop upon a given content features and shapes the later behavior (Junejo et al., 2022). Also, the study reveals the significance of brand-self congruence as being a moderator whereby by bridging a consumer deeper into her constructions of self-concept and the brand identity can enhance or dilute the power of brand image on the purchase intention (Abid et al., 2023).

The purchase intention can be said to be the chances of a consumer taking a buying step depending on the attitude, beliefs and perception of that particular consumer towards a brand. It is prospective type of measurement that reflects the desire of a consumer to buy a product or service within the short-run (Mohamed Sadom et al., 2024). Although Purchase intention does not constitute behavior per se, it is likened to a good indicator of the consumption behavior and is usually employed in marketing surveys as an aid in determining the success of branding and advertising programs. Cognitive and emotional aspects have a complicated interdependence in the case of purchase intention in the area of social media marketing. The online experience of consumers is content that develops their awareness, attitudes, and confidence in a brand. Once the attributes of the content and the experience and evaluation made from these attributes are positive because of entertainment, competence, fun and believability, the stronger the purchase intentions of the consumer will become. These traits assist to diminish information asymmetry, establish emotional passion, and produce a compulsion of recognized closeness, which enables the decision-making process (Jia et al., 2022).

Social media has emerged as one of the best brand communication tools in the modern digital world. It allows real-time interaction, communicating the brand story, and consumer response at a level that is out of the reach of conventional advertising. These notwithstanding, there has always been the disparity between social media content engagement and consumer behavioral outputs mainly the purchase intention. Brands tend to exhibit large numbers of likes, shares, and impressions, yet again, they do not always convert into consumer activity. That is a large gap that signals a major difficulty, as brands are producing more and publishing more content than ever before and many of them still could not reveal the concrete aspects of content, which influence their purchase behavior (Irfan et al., 2022). Some of the strong aspects that determine how consumer will rate the brand content include Perceived Entertainment Value, Perceived Expertise, Perceived Enjoyment, and Source Credibility. These attributes will outline how brand messages will be received and interpreted by the consumers in the social media. To cite an example, the entertainment perception may attract attention, but not cause belief and faith (Bibi et al., 2025). On the same note, an expertise communicating content can generate high reliability but a low appeal. Its complexity is not that one should not predict purchase intention to be based on one type of variable but that these content traits influence consumers on a multi-psychological level, not making it easy to dictate the intention of purchase based on that specific content trait. Such characteristics are discussed separately in the current literature providing piecemeal information about their impacts on consumer behavior (Khalid et al., 2024).

The proposed study is intended to analyses the behavior of the consumers in the digital environment paying particular attention to the effects of the social media content characteristics on the purchase intention. It is restricted to the Pakistani setting because the application of social media has significantly increased in its various forms in the fashion, technology, food, e-commerce and beauty industries. The participants of the research are users who take positive actions on brand

content which is primarily located on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. Since Pakistan is a country with a very high level of digitalization and every day its citizens depend more and more on Internet shopping and interacting with brands, the results will have value to both local and regional marketers who aim to improve their social media campaigns. The most vital independent variables investigated in the study are, the perceived entertainment value and perceived expertise. The study examines the degree to which these content characteristics affect the purchase intentions of the consumers that constitutes the probability in which consumers would be making a purchase decision after being exposed on social media marketing. Another important variable in the research is the mediating effect of Brand Image, that is, the psyche of a consumer of a brand, created due to the repetition of the content. The research helps to find out how various content attributes are used in creating a positive brand image which in turn translates to high purchase intention.

Literature Review

Perceived entertainment value is the level at which consumers feel that social media content is entertaining, funny, fun and engaging instead of informative and promotional. This dimension can be traced back to the hedonic consumption theory where pleasure and affective responses are the main motivating factors to use and evaluate media. Viewing social media material as entertaining leads to attention, mood improvement, and promotes a length of engagement with the material and the brand that produced it. Empirical research where Ducoffe model is implemented in social media shows that the perceived amusement of advertisement by users has a substantial impact on the final assessment of the value of advertising and attitudes of consumers towards the advertising message (Islam et al., 2024). Entertainment value on social media acts as an affective discussion and impacts the way users decode and react to messages about the brand. Digital advertising and marketing studies indicate that social media posts and advertisements with an increasing content of entertainment content are more likely to engage users with positive emotions, which, in turn, increase their engagement behavior (like, comment, share, and more time viewing brand content) rates (according to the studies showing a correlation between social media entertainment and customer engagement indicators) (Wang et al., 2024). This increased involvement is directly related to brand attitude building. In cases when the users find the content to be enjoyable instead of just promotional, they become more inclined to form a more positive attitude towards the advertisements and brands behind them. Empirical literature has indicated in the past that entertaining advertisement literature serves as a source of positive advertising effectiveness in that it creates a psychological connection between the consumer and the brands hence it is more probable to achieve positive brand associations and brand-related behavior intentions. Hence:

H1: Perceived entertainment value has a positive association with brand image.

Perceived expertise is the extent to which a source of content like an influencer can be regarded as knowledgeable, skillful, and competent in a certain field. This construct in encourager marketing is what the followers believe regarding the capacity of the influencer to present precise, trustworthy, and pertinent information regarding products or services. The perceived expertise is one of the attributes that are cited by the Source Credibility Theory as a reason why the communicator persuades the consumer to buy a product as consumers will turn to the source they consider to have specialized knowledge in judging the claims and making decisions (Koh et al., 2022). Empirical studies have always found out that the perceived expertise enhances credibility and trust in the influence messages. Products are more likely to be taken and internalized when the audience thinks of an influencer as an expert making marketing communications more effective. The research indicates that the perception of expertise has a positive impact on the attitudes toward the influencer, which further improves the brand assessment and purchase intentions, especially when the content shared by the influencers is detailed and domain specific and indicates competence (Ko

& Phua, 2024). Expert authority is also a source of credibility to the source, which is strongly related to trust. It has been discovered that competence and expertise are signs of reliability; consumers believe knowledgeable sources are more likely to provide accurate and valid information as compared to non-expert sources, lessening uncertainty and strengthening trust in the influencer, as well as the related brand (Zheng & Xu, 2024). Hence,

H2: Perceived expertise has a positive association with brand image.

Mediating variable manifests the mechanism or a process by which independent variables affect a dependent variable. Brand image is frequently used as an intervening variable in the digital marketing research context that relates content characteristics (e.g., perception of entertainment, expertise, enjoyment, and credibility of sources) with purchase intentions in consumers. When such content characteristics are involved in forming brand image thereby impacting consumer behavior, mediation takes place, the psychological route that marketing stimuli take to outcomes (Ha et al., 2022). The characteristics that are part of social media content can form perceptions of consumers towards a brand by giving them information, emotional experiences, and clues towards the brand personality and quality. Brand association, perceived quality, and brand attitude as a whole can be reinforced through positive exposure to entertaining, enjoyable or credible content. These positive images are pivotal since consumers tend to use the image of a brand they hold internally to make their buying decisions, especially within an online context where a customer cannot have a personal experience with the product (Tan et al., 2022). The mediating role played by brand image in the digital marketing settings has been evidenced. As an illustration, one of the studies has demonstrated the fact that the content attributes of social media influencers do not directly cause purchase intention; rather, they first boost brand image, which, in turn, affects buying choices (Fosu et al., 2024). This implies that marketing stimuli effectiveness relies on the capacity to influence the formation of the mental picture of the brand in consumers and then to transmit it into behavioral results to some degree. Hence,

H3: Brand image significantly mediates among Perceived entertainment value and purchase intention.

H4: Brand image significantly mediates among Perceived expertise and purchase intention.

Based on the above literature on the nexus among perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise, brand image and purchase intention, the present study has developed the theoretical framework given below in Figure 1:

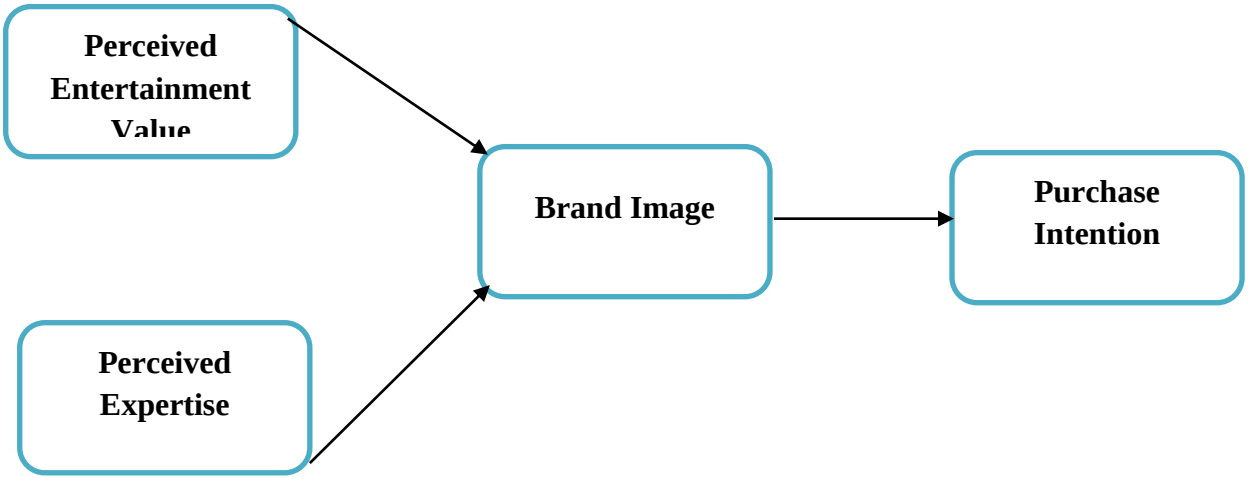


Figure 1: Theoretical model

Research Methodology

The present study examines the impact of social media content characteristics such as perceived entertainment value and perceived expertise on brand image and mediating role of brand image among the perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise and purchase intention of social media users of fast food companies in Pakistan. Thus, the research design that is used by the study gives a general methodology of data gathering, quantification and analysis towards answering research questions and validating hypotheses. The proposed research design is a quantitative research design because it aims at measuring relationships among constructs like perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise, brand image, and purchase intention using structured questionnaires and Likert-scale values. An explanatory design is used to test the causal relationships and the mediating effects in the conceptual model, whereas Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) permits to test numerous direct and indirect paths simultaneously.

The research is also based on the cross-sectional design where data is collected at one instance in time to effectively capture the consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions without the longitudinal tracking. The target audience of social media users is explained by the purpose of the research that seeks to comprehend consumers' reaction to digital marketing messages on the social media platforms using Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The data of the respondents are taken from the fast food companies and send the survey questionnaires through mail and WhatsApp. messages. The variables are measured with questions taken from the past studies such as perceived entertainment value (PEV) is measured with four items (Dzogbenuku et al., 2022), perceived expertise (PE) is also measured with four items (Meinert & Krämer, 2022), brand image (BI) is also measured with four items (Philip & Pradiani, 2024) and purchase intention (PI) is also measured with four items (Duarte et al., 2024). These items are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Items and variables

Items	Questions	Sources
	Perceived Entertainment Value	
PEV1	The content I view on social media is entertaining.	(Dzogbenuku et al., 2022)
PEV2	I find the brand-related content enjoyable to watch.	
PEV3	The content I view on social media is entertaining.	
PEV4	The content makes my experience on social media fun.	
	Perceived Expertise	
PE1	The content creator has extensive knowledge about the brand.	(Meinert & Krämer, 2022)
PE2	The information provided by the influencer is trustworthy and professional.	
PE3	The posts give reliable guidance for my decisions.	
PE4	The social media source demonstrates expertise.	
	Brand Image	
BI1	I perceive this brand positively.	(Philip & Pradiani, 2024)
BI2	The brand is appealing and attractive.	
BI3	I feel the brand has a good reputation.	
BI4	The brand reflects quality in my mind.	
	Purchase Intention	
PI1	I intend to buy products from this brand.	(Duarte et al., 2024)

PI2	I am likely to purchase from this brand in the future.
PI3	I will recommend this brand to others.
PI4	I will consider buying this brand over others.

The study used the smart-PLS to check association among the variables. The measurement assessment and structural assessment model was created to check the reliability of items and variables and association among variables. The measurement model exposed the convergent validity that is checked using, Alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and factor loadings. In addition, the measurement model also exposed the discriminant validity that is checked using Fornell Larcker, cross-loadings and Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Finally, the structural model is used to test the positive and negative association using beta values and also test the significance of the associations using t-values and p-values.

Research Findings

The study checks the convergent validity that exposed the correlation among the items. The convergent validity that is checked using, Alpha and the values are more than 0.70, composite reliability (CR) and the values are more than 0.70, average variance extracted (AVE) and the values are higher than 0.50 and factor loadings and the values are 0.50. These values indicated a high correlation between items and proved convergent validity as valid. Table 2 and Figure 2 shows these values.

Table 2: Convergent validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Brand Image	BI1	0.891	0.931	0.951	0.829
	BI2	0.936			
	BI3	0.924			
	BI4	0.889			
Perceived Expertise	PE1	0.851	0.872	0.912	0.722
	PE2	0.841			
	PE3	0.860			
	PE4	0.845			
Perceived Entertainment Value	PEV1	0.840	0.827	0.885	0.658
	PEV2	0.832			
	PEV3	0.812			
	PEV4	0.758			
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.728	0.794	0.866	0.618
	PI2	0.740			
	PI3	0.838			
	PI4	0.833			

The study checks the discriminant validity that exposed the correlation among the variables. The discriminant validity that is checked using Fornell Larcker and the outcomes indicated that the first value is larger than the other values in same column. These values indicated a low correlation between variables and proved discriminant validity as valid. Table 3 shows these values.

Table 3: Fornell Larcker

	BI	PE	PEV	PI
BI	0.910			
PE	0.410	0.849		
PEV	0.608	0.472	0.811	
PI	0.589	0.598	0.631	0.786

The study checks the discriminant validity that exposed the correlation among the variables. The discriminant validity is checked using cross-loadings and the outcomes indicated that the values that shows the correlation with variable itself are larger than the values that show the correlation with other variables. These values indicated a low correlation between variables and proved discriminant validity as valid. Table 4 shows these values.

Table 4: Cross-loadings

	BI	PE	PEV	PI
BI1	**0.891**	0.396	0.592	0.527
BI2	**0.936**	0.355	0.530	0.514
BI3	**0.924**	0.403	0.549	0.578
BI4	**0.889**	0.334	0.540	0.523
PE1	0.393	**0.851**	0.403	0.547
PE2	0.322	**0.841**	0.399	0.531
PE3	0.354	**0.860**	0.425	0.450
PE4	0.314	**0.845**	0.373	0.503
PEV1	0.540	0.437	**0.840**	0.596
PEV2	0.442	0.431	**0.832**	0.535
PEV3	0.412	0.321	**0.812**	0.440
PEV4	0.547	0.333	**0.758**	0.459
PI1	0.452	0.446	0.502	**0.728**
PI2	0.386	0.445	0.404	**0.740**
PI3	0.484	0.525	0.535	**0.838**
PI4	0.517	0.465	0.529	**0.833**

The study checks the discriminant validity that exposed the correlation among the variables. The discriminant validity is checked using HTMT ratio and the outcomes indicated that the values are less than 0.90. These values indicated a low correlation between variables and proved discriminant validity as valid. Table 5 shows these values.

Table 5: Heterotrait Monotrait ratio

	BI	PE	PEV	PI
BI				
PE	0.450			
PEV	0.680	0.551		
PI	0.679	0.718	0.766	

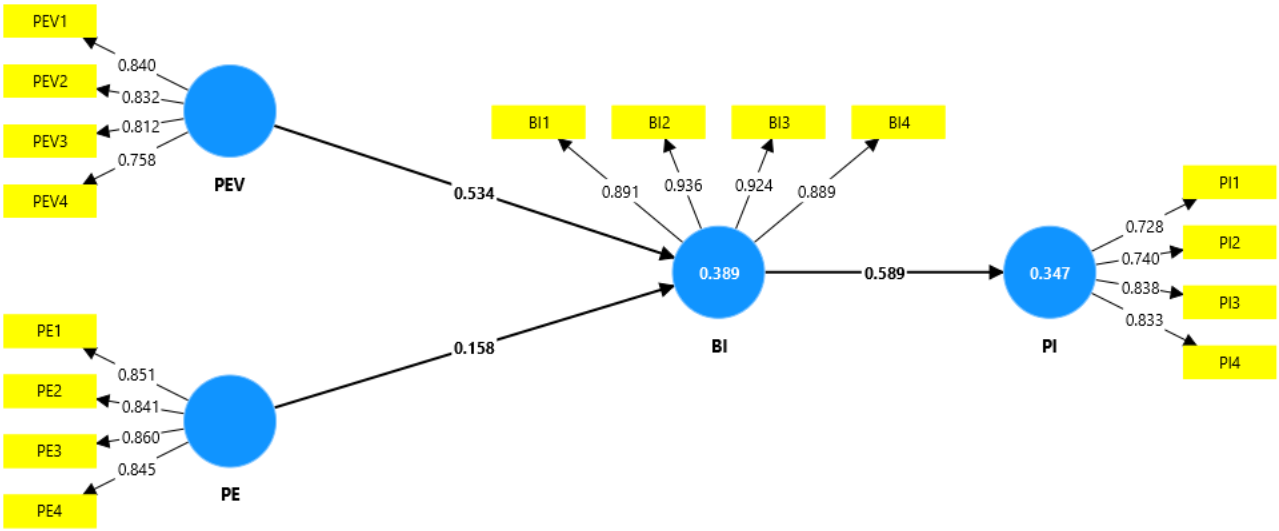


Figure 2: Measurement model

The results of path analysis revealed that the perceived entertainment value and perceived expertise have a positive association with brand image and accept H1 and H2. The results also exposed that the brand image significantly mediates among the perceived entertainment value, perceived expertise and purchase intention of social media users of fast food companies in Pakistan and accept H3 and H4. These associations are given in Table 6 and Figure 3.

Table 6: Path analysis

Relationships	Beta	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BI -> PI	0.589	0.042	14.082	0.000
PE -> BI	0.158	0.050	3.177	0.002
PEV -> BI	0.534	0.047	11.316	0.000
PE -> BI -> PI	0.093	0.031	2.963	0.003
PEV -> BI -> PI	0.314	0.041	7.618	0.000

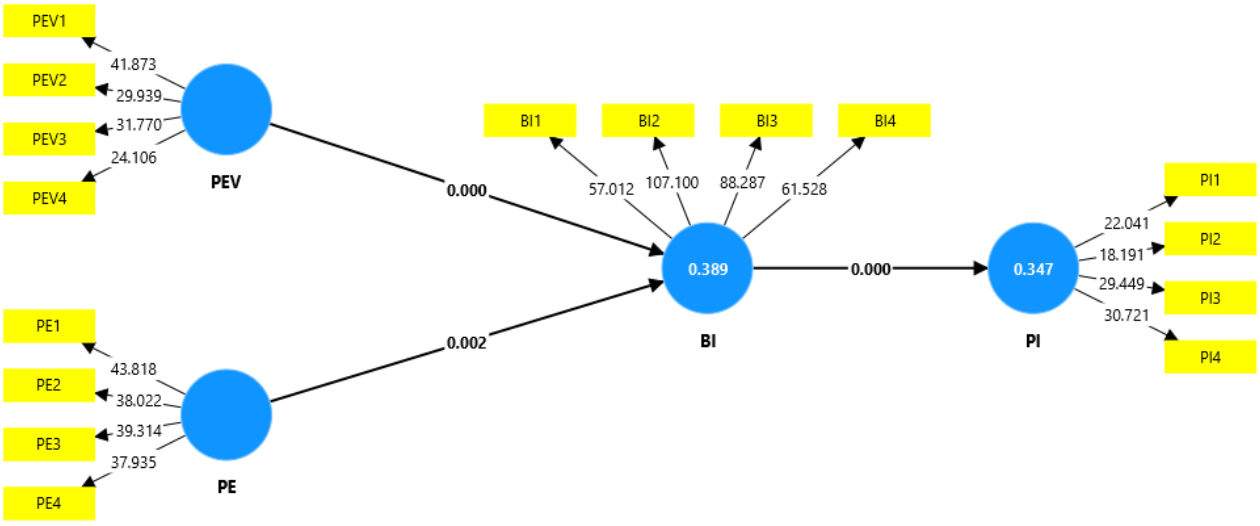


Figure 3: Structural model

Discussions

In particular, the fact that positive and significant direct effects of entertainment, expertise, brand image is indicative that consumers are not only influenced by information and credible content, but are also influenced by engaging and enjoyable content. It is in line with the earlier studies, which found that affective experiences can lead to positive brand perceptions and allow consumers to react positively (Majeed et al., 2024; Zeqiri et al., 2025). Perceived entertainment among them had a comparatively greater impact, which suggests the significance of involving content in the formation of brand perception in the digital setting. The high positive influence of brand image on purchase intention and partial mediation that was experienced during the analysis indicate that brand image is an essential element that converts the content of social media into consumer behavioral intentions.

The findings confirm the theoretical framework, which states that brand perceptions are an intermediary between marketing stimuli and consumer behavior (Ahmed et al., 2025; Ibrahim, 2023; Jha et al., 2022). Although the direct effects of content characteristics on the purchase intention were substantial, the fact that its decline once brand image was taken shows that the purchase decision of the consumer is highly determined by their perceptions of the brand, but not the content itself.

Implications

The current research makes various significant contributions to the body of information on the social media marketing and the consumer behavior. To begin with, it offers empirical data to the mediating hypotheses of the relationship between social media content characteristics and purchase intention. Although past studies have revealed the relevance of content features in shaping consumer attitudes and behavior, this study has shown that brand image is a key process by which the cognitive (perceived expertise, source credibility), as well as affective (perceived entertainment, enjoyment) content dimensions, are converted into behavioral intentions. This observation supports the generalizability of the brand image theory within the context of digital marketing and goes further to empirically indicate how the various content characteristics play a role in the formation of brand perception in an online setting. Second, the research contributes to the knowledge on consumer-brand identity processes by validating the moderating effect of brand-self congruence. The findings show that consistency between self-concept of consumers with brand identity increases the brand image impact on purchase intention, indicating that identity based determinants play an important role in the process of digital marketing.

The results of this research give a number of practical implications to marketers working in the social media. First, the findings emphasize the significance of creating the content that would appeal to both cognitive and affective aspects of consumer interaction. Marketers must develop content that not only must be informative and credible, which raises the perception of expertise and trustworthiness in the consumers, but also to be entertaining and enjoyable to the viewers to gain attention and positive emotional reaction. Second, the study also highlights the strategic importance of brand image in influencing consumer behavior. Brand image campaigns that resonate with the values, identity, and lifestyle of the target group have a better chance of reinforcing the effect of brand image on the intentions to buy because the consumers will want to associate themselves with a brand that expresses their self-concept.

Conclusion

The current research can be taken as a strong argument that the content features of social media, both cognitive (expertise) and affective (entertainment), are important in influencing the purchase intentions of the consumers, with the major effect being the brand image. The mediating effect of brand image emphasizes the key position of brand image as an intermediating variable between marketing stimuli and consumer behavior. All these findings make it clear that successful digital marketing must be more integrated: the informative, credible, and engaging content should be used and the alignment to the self-concept of the consumer should be high. The research has not only contributed to the theory, in developing the insights into brand image, but also practical advice, as it will inform the marketers on how to create the social media strategies that will help in enhancing the brand image, increasing the interactions and ultimately the purchasing behaviors in the ever competitive online marketplaces.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study has some limitation such as it used only two predictors and suggested that more predictors can be used by upcoming researchers. In addition, the study used mediating variable while other studies can be add moderating variable in the model. Finally, the study used the fast food industry consumers and suggested that the upcoming studies could add more industries consumer in their studies.

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