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The Impact of Social Media Content Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decisions: The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

Dr. Abdur Rehman
PhD Management Sciences, Qurtuba University, Peshawar,
Email: rehman091@yahoo.com

Abdul Mateen (Corresponding Author)
Lecturer, Centre for Management & Commerce, University of Swat, KPK
Email: abdulmateen@uswat.edu.pk

Akhter Hussain
PhD Scholar, Center for Management & Commerce, University of Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, 19120 Email: 241163@uswat.edu.pk, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5414-9704

Abstract
The research is aimed at examining how Social Media Content Marketing (SMCM) affects the consumer purchasing decision with the mediating role of brand trust. This study hypothesizes that useful, relevant and continuous content on social media networks is a decisive factor of consumer behavior in an age where consumers are becoming more cynical with conventional advertisements. Data was gathered through a survey of a sample of social media users with the use of a quantitative methodology and assessed using a structural equation modelling (SEM). The data was analyzed using SPSS-23 and SmartPLS. The results show that the positive direct influence on brand trust and purchase decisions exerted by SMCM is significant. The study outcomes also indicate the existence of a positive and significant impact of brand trust on consumer purchase decisions. However, the results also show that brand trust is a strong and effective mediator in the relationship between SMCM and consumer purchase decision. This implies that the purchase decisions are largely determined by effective social media contents that initially create a base of trust in the brand. The paper concludes that brand trust is not an outcome, but a very important psychological mechanism in which content marketing is converted into commercial action. These insights can give managers a strategic need to focus on trust-building content, more than simply promotional tactics, in order to effectively influence consumer buying.

Keywords: Social Media Content Marketing (SMCM), Brand Trust, Consumer Purchase Decision, SEM

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Introduction

The internet has revolutionized the way marketing is being done and targeting customers in a way that has not been done before. The other new paradigm that has emerged as a result of the social media is a powerful commercial ecosystem, where brands and consumers engage each other in real time. Consequently, Social Media Content Marketing (SMCM) is currently one of the most important strategic requirements of the companies that want to address the expectations of the modern consumers. Unlike conventional advertising, SMCM is founded on the creation and dissemination of high value, pertinent and consistent content to attract and sustain a clearly defined customer audience and as a result attaining profitable customer behavior (Pulizzi, 2014).

Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, and Twitter give brands a chance to create customized content, such as videos, infographics, user-created stories and collaborations with influencers which may lead to interaction and a change in behavior among consumers. This paper looks at the role of social media content marketing in consumer purchase decisions which is the process by which consumers evaluate and make decisions regarding purchasing a product or service (Howard & Sheth, 1989). The mediator is the brand trust that customers believe in the reliability and integrity of a brand (Delgado-Ballester, 2003). As consumers are overloaded with information, social media content marketing offers a point of distinction because it builds relationships and not imposes sales. It uses stories, credibility and engagement of community to shape perceptions and shape decisions. The statistics published in an international level prove its popularity: over 4.9 billion people use social media across the globe and the average number of hours spent on it is 2.5hrs per day (Statista, 2025). This renders it one of the most successful platforms of influencing purchase decisions. However, it is a two-way street and along with the possibility of content to be informative and persuasive, brand trust may turn out to be the success factor as well.

Untrusted branded content is viewed as deceitful by the consumers, whereas the trusted brands can transform the engagement into the purchases (Ibrahim et al., 2022). The ubiquitous aspect of social media contents in consumers cannot be ignored. This kind of content can be educational blog posts, entertaining videos, user-created content and influencer collaborations. These all are the ones that create brand stories and improve consumer experiences. Previous researches have already created a direct association between exposure to marketing activities on social media and intention to purchase (Kim & Ko, 2012). However, it still needs to be studied how exactly the engagement in the content is transformed into a real-life purchase choice. Even though content can help create awareness and interest, this might not suffice to break the fear and perceived risk of online transactions. This is the place where the idea of brand trust comes in. Brand trust means that a consumer is willing to believe in the ability of a brand to perform what it promises (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Trust is a crucial risk reducer in the non-transparent world of social media, where fake news can spread rapidly. The hypothesis is that successful SMCM does not directly cause a purchase, but rather it does so through a systematic accumulation of this critical reservoir of trust. Through their timeless value, showcasing of expertise and

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development of genuine communication, brands can utilise content to convey a sense of their reliability, which subsequently becomes the driving force behind the ultimate purchase decision. Although the role of SMCM and the significance of brand trust are acknowledged individually, and the essentiality of brand trust is recognised, empirical research studies that test an integrated model in which brand trust serves as a mediating variable are lacking. These are the relationships that most researchers study separately and there is still a gap in the knowledge of the exact mechanism by which content marketing influences behaviour. The paper thus aims to address this knowledge gap by introducing and experimenting with a conceptual framework that presents brand trust as a central mediator between social media content marketing and consumer purchase behaviors.

The study fills an essential gap: despite the existing literature that supports the direct correlations between social media marketing and the purchase decision (Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022; Dehghani & Tumer, 2016), few studies investigate the role of brand trust as a mediator in this specific situations. There is growing evidence that trust acts as a mediating factor, creating credibility and perceived risk reduction, although it has not been empirically validated across a wide variety of contexts (AlSad & Al Kurdi, 2023; Hussein, 2020). This work provides context specific information by focusing on KPK, Pakistan consumers, a group with high social media penetration and evolving purchasing habits. This mediating mechanism will enable managers to have a more detailed roadmap for their social media strategies, as they will understand that visibility is only one of the aims of the content itself, but rather a systematic and intentional building of trust that will ultimately lead to commercial success. Despite this, there are still gaps in content marketing specific mediation, especially in emerging markets. Multiple research studies have been devoted to general social media marketing (Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022), neglecting the specific role of content marketing.

The Primary Objectives of this Research are:

The study aims to investigate the direct effect of Social Media Content Marketing on consumer buying decisions.

To examine the direct effect of Social Media Content Marketing on brand trust.

To explore the mediating aspect of brand trust in the correlation between SMCM and purchase decisions.

To examine the direct effect of brand trust on consumer buying decision

The Research Questions of this Research are:

How does social media content marketing directly affect the purchase decisions of consumers?

How does social media content marketing have a direct effect on brand trust?

How does brand trust directly affect the purchase decision of the consumers?

Is brand trust the mediator of social media content marketing and consumer purchase decision?

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Literature Review

The Evolution of Marketing: From Interruption to Content

The marketing paradigm has radically transformed traditional models of marketing, which were traditional interruption oriented into new models that are engagement oriented. The traditional methods of advertising such as television ads, print advertisements and radio advertisements, employed a one-way communication paradigm, which often disrupted the consumer experience (Kotler et al., 2019). This model has become ineffective with the advent of the digital era, where there is an abundance of information and consumers are in control. As a result, content marketing has become a cornerstone of modern digital strategy. Pulizzi (2014, p. 6) describes content marketing as a marketing and business process of creating and sharing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a distinct audience, to lead to profitable customer relationship.

The core idea of the philosophy is to attract consumers by providing value prior to making a sale and thus building a relationship of utility and trust. This trend is best realized on social media sites, which have been the main avenues of sharing and consuming content. The social media networks, including Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok and LinkedIn provide a two-way communication channel where the brand can engage with its followers. These platforms together with the principles of content marketing have formed the specific discipline known as Social Media Content Marketing (SMCM). In the study case, SMCM is taken as a strategic process of creation, distribution and posting of valuable and free content on social media to attract, engage and convert a target audience to increase brand awareness, trust and eventually purchase behavior.

Social Media Content Marketing and Dimensions

The effectiveness of SMCM is not unilateral; it is dependent on the nature and quality of the content. Scholars have attempted to break down SMCM into its fundamental dimensions to gain a clearer understanding of its effects. According to Kim and Ko (2012), five major social media marketing activities that are highly content relevant are entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth. Based on these, this literature review seeks to consolidate various frameworks to present four major dimensions of SMCM that prove essential in the setting of establishing trust and influencing purchases:

Informational Value:

This dimension is content that informs the consumer, problem-solving or useful industry information. This category includes how-to guide, tutorials, whitepapers and expert blogs. Highly informative content makes the brand a well-informed expert, thereby minimizing consumer uncertainty (Ismail, 2017).

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Entertainment Value: This refers to the content that is meant to entertain, delight or engage the consumers on an emotional basis. Which consist of funny videos, interesting memes, interactive polls and convincing storytelling. Entertainment value is crucial for gaining attention in a crowded feed and fostering positive brand associations (Hudson et al., 2016).

Authenticity and Transparency: The consumers of the modern world are becoming more and more suspicious of slick, corporate communications. They appreciate authenticity, which can be achieved by providing behind the scenes material, user-generated content (UGC) posts, honest answers to comments and acknowledging errors. Authentic content humanizes the brand and fosters genuine connections (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Interactive Content: This dimension shifts away the one-way broadcasting to include two-way communication. It entails materials that attract comments, queries, live question/answers and competitions. Interaction creates a feeling of community and makes the consumer feel listened to, which enhances the relational relationship between the brand and the consumer (Hudson et al., 2016). These content dimensions are strategically deployed and the basis on which the consumer perceptions such as trust, will be established.

The Direct Effect of SMCM on Consumer Purchase Decision

Consumer purchase decision process is a complicated process that involves need recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior stages (Kotler et al., 2019). There is a considerable amount of literature that proves SMCM has a direct effect on different phases of this journey. To start with, SMCM is very efficient at the top of the funnel, creating brand awareness and stimulating the need recognition. Entertaining and interesting contents can put a brand on the radar of a consumer, even in case there is no active need yet. Secondly, rich information value is a resource that becomes critical in the information search and evaluation processes. To alleviate perceived risk, consumers actively engage in seeking reviews comparison videos and tutorial content.

Hudson et al. (2016) discovered that the consumers who are actively engaged in viewing the social media content of the brand feel more informed and confident in their judgments. Most importantly the association between SMCM activities and purchase intention, one of the predictors of the actual purchase decision has been confirmed by several studies to be positive and significant. In a study examining luxury fashion brands, Kim and Ko (2012) found that purchase intention was directly proportional to the level of entertainment and interaction. In the same vein, a study by Seric, Mikac & Gil-Saura (2020) found that stable and valuable social media content enhances cognitive and affective commitment among consumers to a brand, thereby increasing their desire to purchase.

The theory behind it is that quality content generates favorable brand perceptions and elevates the degree of perceived value of the product or service, which leads to an

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increased likelihood of purchase decision. Nevertheless, although this direct relationship is established adequately as it gives a one-sided view. It does not provide a comprehensive explanation for why a consumer shifts their liking of a piece of content to the point where they give that brand their money, which in many cases is a risk in both financial and social terms. The existence of this gap implies that a significant mediating variable exists, which facilitates this move: brand trust.

Brand Trust as a Central Pillar in Consumer Relationships

Brand trust is a complex construct that has received considerable research attention in the marketing literature. It is generally characterised as the average consumer's desire to trust the brand in terms of its capability to carry out its declared task (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23) made a notable contribution to the concept of trust as an essential ingredient of their "Commitment-Trust Theory" of relationship marketing, in which they wrote that when trust is present, partners are more inclined to engage in long-term relationships and avoid short-term alternatives. The importance of trust is particularly amplified in the context of online businesses and social media. Perceived risk is heightened by the intangibility of the digital environment and the geographical distance between the buyer and the seller. Trust is a vital risk-taker. Having consumer trust in a brand makes it more likely that they will provide personal information, trust its claim and rely on its promises, thereby decreasing psychological resistance to purchase (Hajli, 2014). Trust does not occur overnight; instead it is developed over time, based on consistent, positive experiences and performance.

The brand trust dimensions usually contain:

Credibility: This refers to the confidence that the brand possesses the capacity and expertise to fulfil its promises.

Integrity: The idea that the brand is truthful, ethical and will not break its word.

Benevolence: The emotion of the brand that it is interested in the well-being of its customers and not solely in selling the product. Brand trust is the most important outcome of any marketing process and it is especially relevant to SMCM, as this brand is well-positioned to showcase these three dimensions through content.

The Linking Pin: SMCM as an Antecedent to Brand Trust

The hypothetical relationship between SMCM and brand trust is strong. These different aspects of quality social media content are the direct contributors to the pillars of trust.

Informational Value Builds Credibility: With a brand, constant delivery of helpful, truthful and professional information conveys competence and expertise. This makes it an authoritative figure in its area of operation, which directly leads to the development of trust on the basis of competence (Ismail, 2017).

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Authenticity and Transparency Build Integrity: The brand can convey content behind the scenes, confess failures and answer the criticism openly to show honesty and integrity. This openness indicates that the brand has no secrets to keep, thus the consumers are more inclined to believe its statements (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Interaction and Entertainment Lead to Benevolence: Engaging in comments and messages actively and producing content that focuses on consumer pleasure (not only sales) will be a big indication that the brand cares about its relationship with customers. This creates the impression of goodwill, and consumers believe that the brand is concerned about them as a person (Hudson et al., 2016). This is a correlation that has been demonstrated empirically. Laroche et al. (2013) discovered that brand trust is one important variable, which is affected positively by the presence of a brand on social media. In the same manner, Hajli (2014) has also shown that engagement via the social media builds trust, one of the requirements to get e-commerce transactions to work. Thus, it is hypothesized that SMCM is not a promotional tool only but a basic trust-building mechanism.

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust in the Purchase Decision

This brings us to the core of the proposed conceptual framework: the mediating role of brand trust. Although it is possible that SMCM has a direct influence on purchase intention, the most likely influence is this, but it is indirect and goes through the formation of brand trust. It is the mere exposure to an amusing advertisement that can provide a pleasant emotion but the trust behind the brand credibility and integrity is what can eventually persuade a consumer to press the purchase button, particularly when the product is high-involvement. This mediation can be explained in the following way: SMCM activities are the cause of Brand Trust, which in turn leads to Purchase Intention and Decision. Trust will turn a passive content consumer into a loyal customer. The perceived risk of making a purchase is also reduced, as the belief that the brand can deliver value is enhanced.

Thus, the final stage of the decision-making process is directly facilitated by the level of trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Similar mediation models have been tested in studies, which support this premise. To illustrate, it has been found that the connection between general social media marketing activities and brand loyalty is mediated by trust (Ismail, 2017). A different study concluded that trust plays a pivotal role in the relationship between consumer interaction with a brand's social media page and their intention to make a purchase (Hajli, 2014). Nonetheless, a particular emphasis on the multi-dimensionality of content marketing (rather than generic activeness) with brand trust as the decisive factor of study is a niche but important research question.

Literature Review Conclusion and Research Gap Identification

In a summary, the extant literature confirms the personal significance of Social Media Content Marketing, brand trust and consumer purchasing choices. It is already known that SMCM can affect purchases, as well as contribute to the development of trust.

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Furthermore, the importance of trust in risk reduction and fostering loyalty cannot be overstated. It is the gap in the definition of the process that relates these relationships, rather than the existence of these relationships. Several studies have been conducted on the direct effects and fewer have empirically tested an integrated model in which the different dimensions of SMCM are placed as antecedents and brand trust is positioned as the primary mechanism (mediator) through which the content affects the final purchase decision. The proposed study aims to address this gap by developing a detailed model that explains this mediating pathway. In this way, it will also provide a more sophisticated insight for marketers, showing that it is not only immediate metrics of engagement that might yield the ultimate ROI on social media content, but also the systematic building of trust that can consistently lead to sales.

Theoretical Foundation

Classical consumer choice models (Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behaviour) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991) are used to describe the state of purchase intention as a result of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes and norms can be shaped through social media materials, resulting from constant exposure to brand messages, peer comments and normative cues. Technology acceptance and e-commerce adoption models (e.g., Pavlou, 2003) build on this finding by identifying trust and perceived risk as the key determinants in online purchasing activities; thus, trust becomes a natural mediator of the effects of online content.

Hypothesis Development

The proposed conceptual framework is founded on a thorough analysis of the existing literature in the field, which reveals how Social Media Content Marketing (SMCM) directly and indirectly affects consumer purchasing behavior, mediated by the role of brand trust. The hypotheses presented below will be used to empirically test this framework.

Direct Implication of Social Media Content Marketing on Purchase Decisions

The basic assumption of the current study is that the content, which a brand shares on social media is of paramount importance in directing the consumer to the path of making a purchase. As it has been determined, SMCM offers the value that goes beyond the conventional advertising by informing, entertaining and involving the consumer. This level has a direct effect on the analysis of the alternatives by the consumer and perceived risk, therefore leading to a purchase decision. Research has consistently shown a strong relationship between consumer behavior and social media marketing activities. Kim & Ko (2012) established that entertainment and social media interaction are of significant importance in improving purchase intention towards the luxury brands. On the same note, studies show that applicable and consistent content reinforces both cognitive and affective commitment, which directly precedes purchase intention (Šeric et al., 2020). As such, the hypothesis is:

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H1: Social Media Content Marketing has a significant positive influence on consumer purchase decisions

Direct Impact of Social Media Content Marketing on Brand Trust

SMCM, being focused on offering value rather than direct selling is in a unique position to develop trust. The aspects of SMCM such as informational value, entertainment, authenticity and interaction, directly respond to the key elements of brand trust, credibility, integrity and benevolence. A brand gains credibility through the delivery of credible information. It is also honest and transparent, thus showing integrity. When it interacts meaningfully with the consumer and focuses on consumer enjoyment, it is a good sign of benevolence. This is confirmed by empirical data; as an example, Hudson et al. (2016) discovered that interactions via social media have a positive effect on consumer-brand relationships and these relationships are supported by trust. The same findings were also supported by Laroche et al. (2013) who established that brand trust is enhanced by the social media presence of a brand. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Social Media Content Marketing has a significant positive influence on brand trust

Brand Trust Direct Effect on Purchase Decisions

Trust and its critical importance in reducing the perceived risk of a transaction, particularly in an online environment is a foundational block of modern marketing theory. The Commitment-Trust Theory of relationship marketing posits that relationship commitment can be determined by the presence of trust, which results in cooperative behaviors beneficial to the firm, including brand loyalty and repeat purchases (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). By having a brand that consumers trust, they are assured that the product will do as promised and that the brand will work in their best interest, thereby minimizing the psychological barriers to purchasing. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) empirically confirmed that brand trust has a direct effect on both purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Within the framework of e-commerce and social media, Hajli (2014) found that trust is one of the key aspects in the absence of which any purchase intentions are reduced to a minimum. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H3: Brand trust has a significant positive influence on consumer purchase decisions.

The Mediating Effect of Brand Trust

Whereas H1 assumes a direct relationship between SMCM and the purchase decision, the essence of this paper is that this relationship is not only direct but also heavily mediated by the intermediary effect of brand trust. The use of valuable content can result in the development of a positive attitude. However, it is the building of trust that will change this attitude to a tangible purchase intention. The content serves as input that develops trust, which in turn becomes the immediate motivator of the

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purchase decision. This suggests that brand trust serves as a transmission mechanism for the SMCM's impact on purchase decisions. That is, brand trust is the process through which and why SMCM results in purchases. The mediating role of trust has been supported in similar models in previous studies. Indicatively, Ismail (2017) discovered that social media marketing activities and brand loyalty are mediated by trust. Thus, the mediating hypothesis is presented below:

H4: Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between Social Media

Content Marketing and consumer purchase decisions.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the hypothesized relationships is as shown below:

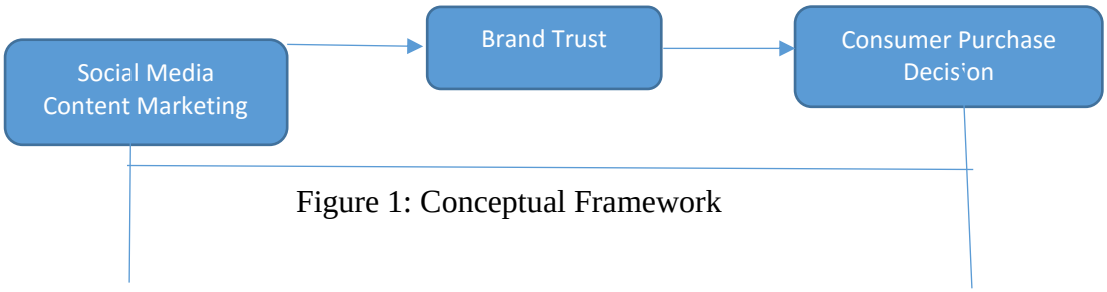


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This section contains the methodological plan that will be used in researching on the effects of social media content marketing on consumer purchase decision with brand trust as an intermediate variable. The research follows a quantitative research design to test out the hypothesized relationships and the study employs structural equation modeling (SEM) to test both direct and indirect relationships. This method is appropriate when using the mediation analysis in consumer behavior studies and it is possible to evaluate the relationship between complex latent variables (Hair et al., 2017).

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design is used in the study, where the data was collected at one time among the consumers who use social media sites. This design is effective in examining the correlations and mediation effects of a large sample (Sedgwick, 2014). The Conceptual framework is premised on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) in which social media content marketing is the independent variable, brand trust is the mediator and consumer purchase decision is the dependent variable.

Population and Sampling

The target group is urban consumers of KPK, Pakistan aged 18-45 and using social media (e.g., Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook etc) at least 2 hours per day and have made online purchases in the last six months. This group is selected because of their large involvement in social media and also because it is relevant to content marketing (We

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Are Social, 2023). The non-probability convenience sampling method was used and snowballing was also used to achieve a diverse population. Calculation of sample size was done through G-Power Software and a sample size of 280 respondents were selected for the study.

Data Collection & Measuring Instruments

The online questionnaires were used to gather data. The questionnaires were administered on Google Forms, which guaranteed anonymity to minimize bias on social desirability. The measures of all constructs were assessed using a validated multi-item scale on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The social media content marketing has been measured using a 7-item scale based on the scale used by Hollebeek et al. (2019) and it includes such aspects as informativeness, entertainment and interactivity (e.g.,"). The brand's social media content is engaging and entertaining. Brand trust utilized a 6-item scale developed by Laroche et al. (2012) (e.g.," I believe this brand and its promises (I trust this brand). Amira Omar & Nermine Atteya (2020) had a 5-item scale used to measure consumer purchase decision (e.g.,) I will tend to buy the products of this brand").

Reliability and Validity

The measurement model was first tested on reliability and validity before the hypotheses were tested. The findings supported the validity of the scales applied:

Reliability: The high internal consistency of all constructs was demonstrated by Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7: SMCM (0.891), Brand Trust (0.911) and Consumer Purchase Decision (0.882). The Cronbach's alpha was >0.80, and all constructs were found to be reliable.

Validity: The validity was achieved through Average Variance Extraction (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR), AVEs higher than 0.50 and Composite Reliability (CR) was higher than 0.70. The results are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Statistics

S#	Variables	Source	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	(CR)	(AVE)
01	SMCM	Hollebeek et al. (2019)	07	0.891	0.818	0.578
02	Brand Trust	Laroche et al. (2012)	06	0.911	0.871	0.554
03	Consumer Purchase Decision	Amira Omar & Nermine Atteya (2020)	05	0.882	0.856	0.591

Note: Reliability & Validity

Findings and Analysis

This section presents the findings of the data analysis process conducted to test the hypotheses formulated in this study. The data obtained on 280 valid responses were

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analyzed on the basis of descriptive statistics, reliability tests as well as regression analysis using SmartPLS to test the path analysis and mediation.

Descriptive Statistics and Characteristic of Respondents

The sample size comprised of 280 social media users including 161 (57.50%) males and 119 (42.50%) females who are an active follower of brands. The demographic profile showed a rather young sample, where 66.78% of the respondents were aged between 18-34. Instagram (25.72%), Tik Tok (40%) and Facebook (34.28%) were the most common social media platforms used to interact with the brand.

Table 2: Demographics

Factors	Character	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	161	57.50
	Female	119	42.50
Factors	**Sum**	280	100
Ages	18-34 years	187	66.78
	34 & Above	93	33.22
Factors	**Sum**	280	100
Social Media Users	Facebook	96	34.28
	Instagram	72	25.72
	Tik Tok	112	40
Sum		280	100

Correlation Analysis of the Study

Table 3: Correlation Matrix (N = 280)*

Variable	Mean	SD	SMCM	BT	CPD
Social Media Content Marketing	4.07	0.79	—		
Brand Trust	3.89	0.88	.58**	—	
Consumer Purchase Decision	3.79	0.94	.53**	.64**	—

Note: **p < .001 (2-tailed).

The correlation table indicates that the three variables have statistically significant positive correlations with each other at a significant level (p <.001).

SMCM and Brand Trust (r = .58, p < .001): There is a high positive relationship between Social Media Content Marketing and Brand Trust. This implies that those consumers who find the social media contents of a brand as valuable and engaging stand a high chance of trusting the brand. **SMCM and Purchase Decision** (r =.53, p <.001): There is positive and strong correlation between Social Media Content Marketing and Purchase Decision. This implies that when the social media content is effective there is a direct relationship between the chances of the consumer purchasing the brand.

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Brand Trust and Purchase Decision (r =.64, p <.001): The closest association in the model is between Brand Trust and Purchase Decision which is strongly and positively correlated. This highlights the fact that trust is an influential direct correlate of consumer purchasing intentions. The findings of the Pearson correlation analysis are good indicators to support the research hypotheses. The strong inter-relationships of all pairs of variables provide support to the basic inter-relatedness of the constructs. More importantly, the correlation pattern justifies the logical basis of mediation testing: The independent variable (SMCM) has a significant correlation with the proposed mediator (Brand Trust, r =.58) and the dependent variable (Purchase Decision, r =.53). Mediator (Brand Trust) has a high correlation with the dependent variable (Purchase Decision, r = .64). The quality of these relationships, especially the strong correlation between Brand Trust and Purchase Decision is a strong reason to continue further statistical studies including multiple regression or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the mediating effect of Brand Trust.

Hypothesis Testing

Regression analysis and SmartPLS, with a bootstrap sample of 5,000, were used to test the proposed hypotheses (Hayes, 2022). The table 4 below summarizes the results and explains below.

Direct Effects (H1, H2, H3):

As a result of the regression analysis, consumer purchase decisions were found to be significantly influenced by social media content marketing in a positive manner (0.231, $p < 0.01$), supporting H1. This means that the more valuable and engaging social media content one has, the greater the chances of making a purchase. Moreover, a significant positive direct relationship was observed between SMCM and Brand Trust ($r = 0.651$, $p < 0.001$), which substantially supports H2. This confirms that successful content marketing is a powerful tool in building consumer trust. Expectedly, Brand Trust also had a strong direct influence on Consumer Purchase Decision (0.641, $p < 0.001$), which supports H3, and also highlights the importance of trust in the ultimate purchase decision.

Mediation Analysis (H4):

The indirect effect was tested to establish the mediating effect of brand trust (H4). The overall impact of SMCM on Purchase Decisions (in the absence of the mediator) was considerable (= 0.419, $p < 0.001$). The direct impact of SMCM on Consumer Purchase Decision was significant but low as compare to the construct Brand Trust was added to the model. Most importantly, the analysis of the indirect effect yielded a significant result. The indirect effect bootstrapped confidence interval (SMCM → Brand Trust → Consumer Purchase Decision) was 0.328, 0.517. The statistically significant mediating effect of Brand Trust is because this 97.5% confidence interval does not include zero (Hayes, 2022). Thus, H4 is entirely justified. This means that brand trust serves as a partial intermediary, justifying a significant portion of the

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association between SMCM and consumer purchase decision. The estimated model and path analysis table 4 is given below:

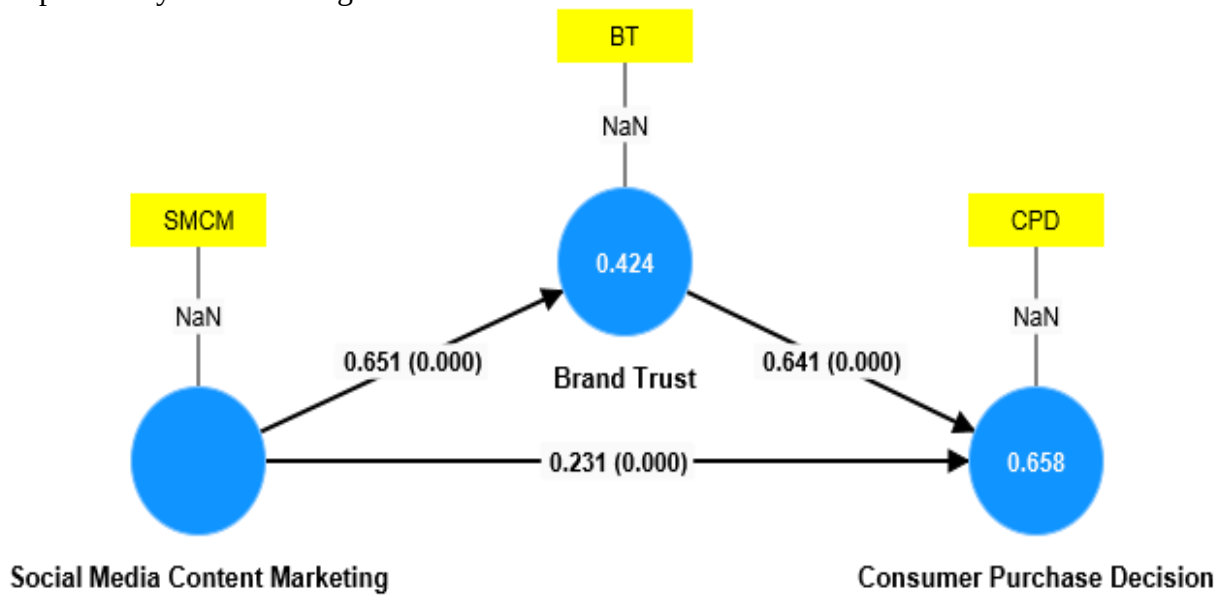


Figure 2: Estimated Model

Table 4: Path Analysis

Direct-Effect	**Beta**	**SE**	**t**	**Sig**	**97.5% CI**		**Decision**
					Lower	**Upper**	
Social Media Content Marketing->Consumer Purchase Decision	0.231	0.059	3.88	.000	0.116	0.349	Accept
Social Media Content Marketing -> Brand Trust	0.651	0.042	15.34	.000	0.565	0.731	Accept
Brand Trust -> Consumer Purchase Decision	0.641	0.061	10.59	.000	0.519	0.758	Accept
Indirect-Effect	**Beta**	**SE**	**t**	**Sig**	**97.5% CI**		**Decision**
					Lower	**Upper**	
Social Media Content Marketing -> Brand Trust -> Consumer Purchase Decision	0.419	0.048	8.691	.000	0.328	0.517	Accept

Conclusion and Discussion of Findings

In this study, the researcher aimed to explore the complex association between Social Media Content Marketing (SMCM), brand trust and consumer purchase behavior. The results provide strong empirical evidence in support of the suggested model. The evidence in support of H1 is consistent with past research by Kim & Ko (2012), who confirm that content marketing on social media is a direct cause of consumer behavior. Nevertheless, the subtler finding is the mechanism of this drive. The high level of support on H2 and H3 substantiates the theoretical basis of the relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) in a social media environment. It shows that SMCM is not a promotional channel, but a relational channel and is effective at establishing the

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credibility, integrity and benevolence that form the basis of brand trust. This trust, on its part is a significant risk reducer, which directly influences the purchase decision (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The essence of this study is that H4 is confirmed. The highly mediating effect of brand trust indicates that the impact of SMCM is bi-directional: it directly affects purchases, but a larger portion of its impact is channeled into the development of trust. This is to say that although entertaining or informative content may attract attention, it is the trust that is established by a constant and valuable content that best transform a follower into a customer.

Theoretical Implications:
The study is an addition to the marketing theory because it unites the notions of SMCM and brand trust into one testable framework. It does not just stop at making direct correlations, but it unravels the black box of the psychological process in the consumer. The results confirm that trust is not an effect of marketing but a key mediating variable that needs to be in the center of digital consumer behavior models.
Practical Implications:
To marketing managers and brand strategists, the results can provide clear actionable information:

Movement to Selling to Trust-Building: The main idea of social media content ought to be building trust and not necessarily to make sales immediately. Authenticity, transparency and value provision should be the key points of the strategies.

Invest in Quality Content: Brands should invest in multi-dimensional content strategies, which focus on informational value (to gain credibility) and authentic interaction (to gain integrity and benevolence).

Measure What Matters: In addition to measuring likes and reach, managers are encouraged to frequently measure brand trust metrics in order to determine how successful the content marketing strategy is in the long term.

Managerial implications
Make content about trust: Marketers are to create social media messages that can be interpreted as trustworthy and authentic (behind-the-scenes, genuine testimonials, open communications). The content that builds trust yields higher conversion dividends compared to content that is solely promotional.

Balance informative and emotional content: Many categories of content should have informational credibility and emotional appeal (storytelling), and mixed formats (e.g., product demos + user stories) are worthwhile to use.

Measure brand trust as a KPI: Companies are expected to add trust measurements to the social media performance dashboard and A/B test content on the trust as a result of the test.

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Product involvement: Invest more in trust-building content on high-involvement and high-risk products (e.g., electronics, financial services).

Limitations and Future research directions

Although this study has made its contributions but it has several limitations. To begin with, the sampling technique employed is not probability; hence, the findings cannot be generalized to the whole population. Future research may employ random sampling methods to achieve greater representativeness. Second, the cross-sectional design provides a snapshot in time; longitudinal research may be used to track the changes in the relationships between SMCM, brand trust and consumer purchases. Third, the research was conducted on a general basis; future research may investigate these relationships in particular industries (e.g., luxury goods vs. fast-moving consumer goods) or in culture-specific contexts. Finally, this paper concludes that trust is the currency of conversion in the crowded social media landscape. This currency is achieved through effective Social Media Content Marketing and consequently, it is a sure way to influence consumer buying behavior.

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