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Muhammad Gulraiz Tariq \*

Muhammad Ziaullah †

Muhammad Aqtab Ahmad ‡

## Navigating Customer Relationships: Unraveling Social Media Marketing's Impact on Buying Intention in Pakistan's Tourism Sector with Brand Equity as a Moderator

**Abstract:** *This study aims to investigate the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on Pakistan's tourism industry. For this purpose, a quantitative research methodology was employed, involving the collection of data from 350 residents of Pakistan. The collected data underwent comprehensive statistical analysis, including demographic profiling, reliability testing, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis, using the SPSS software. Additionally, the Smart PLS 4 software was utilized to apply the Structural Equation Model (SEM) approach to the proposed conceptual framework. The outcomes of this research hold significant importance and applicability within the context of Pakistan's tourism sector. By shedding light on the factors influencing buying intentions, these findings offer valuable insights. The implications of these insights are thoroughly examined, with potential consequences for business strategies, marketing approaches, customer engagement, and overall profitability within the tourism industry.*

**Key Words:** Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust, Customer Relationship, Brand Awareness, Buying Intention, Brand Equity

**Corresponding Author:** Muhammad Gulraiz Tariq (Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan.  
Email: [gullkhetran007@gmail.com](mailto:gullkhetran007@gmail.com))

## Introduction

In the context of Pakistan's tourism industry, buying intention plays a pivotal role as it signifies the willingness of consumers to make future purchases of products or services. This

crucial variable directly impacts the industry's sales and revenue growth. If the potential customer has a strong intention, then they are more likely to purchase services/products

\* Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan.

offered by the industry which increases its morals and generates revenue.

Brand loyalty provides customers with the assurance of consistent quality offered by the brand, influencing their decision to repeatedly choose the same brand. To effectively manage a brand, strategies such as enhancing brand awareness and fostering a positive brand perception can be achieved by leveraging brand attitude. Providing comprehensive information about the brand and creating distinct brand attributes are crucial in aiding customers' purchase decisions (Zhang, Wu, Buhalis, & Management, 2018). Both online and offline brand equity plays a role in influencing consumer buying intentions, as both forms of faith have an optimistic influence on purchase intentions Nosi, Pucci, Melanthiou, and Zanni (2021). The study further emphasizes the significant positive influence of brand equity on purchase intentions, underscoring its importance in shaping customers' buying behaviour (Rizwan, Al-Malkawi, Gadar, Sentosa, & Abdullah, 2021).

In the modern business landscape, social media has become a critical tool, offering a rapidly growing marketplace for businesses, particularly in the tourism industry, to promote their products and services to a vast audience. Leveraging SMM allows companies to swiftly reach numerous potential customers. Furthermore, social media plays a significant role in fostering economic growth by providing various benefits such as cost-effective marketing solutions and facilitating two-way communication through social media platforms, businesses can gather valuable information, establish connections with their target audience, and cultivate robust customer relationships Irfan et al., (2019).

The main goalmouth of SMM is to support corporations in growth and encourage customers' purchasing goals Irfan, Rasli, Sami, and Liaquat (2017). With the proliferation of social media platforms, organizations have access to a powerful marketing tool that opens up numerous opportunities. Social media marketing, by definition, involves utilizing

social media networks as channels for marketing purposes Kujur and Singh (2017). Customers often turn to online groups and social media to learn about a company's reputation and gain better insights into the products or services being offered Dedeoğlu, Taheri, Okumus, and Gannon (2020).

In the realm of marketing, brand equity signifies the additional value that a brand provides beyond the fundamental functional advantages inherent in its product or service. This additional value arises from intangible factors such as brand perception, customer loyalty, and emotional associations that consumers have with the brand. Social media plays a crucial role in building and enhancing brand equity by providing businesses with features like two-way communication and cost-effective marketing. Through social media platforms, businesses can gather valuable insights into customer preferences, engage with their audience directly, and cultivate strong and lasting relationships with their customers. These interactions and positive associations foster a stronger brand identity, leading to increased customer trust, higher customer retention, and ultimately, a competitive advantage in the market. In the context of Pakistan's tourism industry, brand equity holds significant importance in shaping the buying intentions of potential customers. When a brand possesses high equity, it enhances customer satisfaction with their overall experience, leading to a higher likelihood of choosing that brand for a purchase Tran, Nguyen, and Management (2022).

Furthermore, a moderate mediating function of brand equity is evident in the connection between brand awareness and the intention to make a purchase. This implies that when consumers possess a favourable impression of a brand's equity, it has the capacity to notably shape their choices regarding purchases, as underscored in the investigation conducted by Azzari and Pelissari (2021). The constructive correlation between brand equity and intentions to purchase underscores the notable influence of

a strong brand standing on consumer purchasing patterns, as illustrated in the study on Business and Development by Kyguoliene and Zikiene (2021).

In customer relationships trust is a critical component of any successful customer relationship and trust developed through social media can transfer to social commerce. Consequently, businesses that have successfully cultivated trust among their customer base via social media platforms can capitalize on this trust to enhance and strengthen their customer relationships, as outlined in the research by Chen, Wang, and Management (2016). The use of Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) further enhances this process by helping businesses understand and manage customer engagement through social media. The study conducted by Arora, Singh, Bhatt, and Sharma (2021) highlights the significance of SCRM in building and nurturing stronger relationships with customers in a dynamic business environment. When organizations place a high value on customer relationships, they can establish a strong sense of trust and loyalty with potential customers. This is achieved through exceptional service and creating meaningful connections, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of customers being willing to purchase the organization's products or services.

## Literature Review

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### Social media Marketing and buying Intentions

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Social Media Marketing (SMM) has become a potent force in shaping consumer behaviour and purchase decisions, as demonstrated by Hajli (2015). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter offer tourism businesses valuable opportunities to interact with customers, enhance brand visibility, and promote their offerings, as highlighted by Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft in 2010. Research on social commerce, as conducted by N. Hajli, Sims, Zadeh, and Richard (2017), has underscored the significant impact of social

media marketing on various outcomes, including purchase intentions and consumer engagement Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft (2010).

Understanding factors that influence buying intentions is crucial for businesses operating in the tourism industry (Chen & Shen, 2017). Consumers' willingness to make a purchase is influenced by various factors, including green innovation performance and corporate advantage (Chen & Shen, 2017). Recent studies have also explored the role of online reviews, social media marketing, and brand engagement in shaping consumers' purchase intentions (Hajli et al., 2017).

### Social Media Marketing and Customer Relationship

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Effective customer relationship management is essential for achievement in the industry of tourism (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2018). Social media podiums have reformed the way industries relate with clients, allowing for personalized communication and relationship-building (Paraskevas & Altinay, 2018). Advances in information technology have enabled the creation of smart hospitality ecosystems, enhancing customer experiences and fostering long-term relationships (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). Recent research has emphasized the transformative potential of social media information technology in the tourism sector, highlighting its impact on customer relationships (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2018).

### Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity

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Brand equity holds significant importance within the tourism industry as it actively influences consumer preferences and behaviours, as observed in the study conducted by Kim, Kim, and An in 2016. The way consumers perceive the value and effectiveness of a brand directly influences both their intentions to make purchases and their loyalty towards the brand. This correlation is further highlighted in the identical study conducted by Kim et al. in 2016.

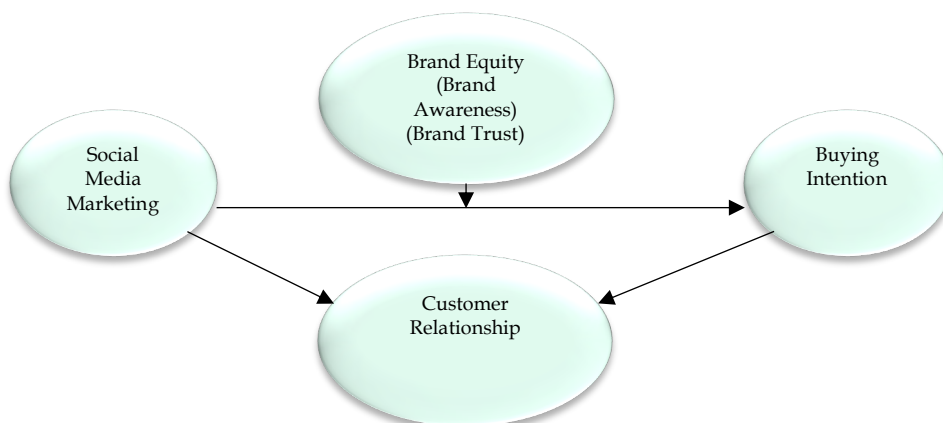
As evidenced by the study conducted by Rauschnabel et al. in (2019), recent investigations have delved into the interplay

between brand personality, innovation, consumer innovativeness, and brand equity, with a particular focus on smartphones.

## Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



## Hypothesis Development

**H1:** The tourism industry of Pakistan experiences a significant impact on buying intention due to the presence of social media marketing

Akar and Cetin (2019) discovered that social media marketing significantly influences buying intention. By promoting tourism destinations on social media platforms, businesses can increase awareness, familiarity, and ultimately, purchase intention. Similarly, Al-Azzawi and Qasem (2020) found that utilizing social media to share travel experiences, photos, and videos influences tourists' decisions on where to visit, thereby impacting purchase intention. Chen and Chen (2017) found that social media marketing not only directly influences purchase intention but also does so indirectly through its effect on brand image. Positive social media content about a destination enhances tourists' brand image perception, leading to increased purchase intention.

**H2:** The tourism industry of Pakistan witnesses a notable influence on

customer relationships as a result of social media marketing efforts

In their research, Al-Dmour and Almsafir (2018) found compelling evidence showcasing the substantial influence of social media marketing on customer relationships. Their study highlighted that utilizing social media platforms for engaging with customers, addressing their queries, and offering personalized recommendations contributes to the development of robust customer connections, ultimately resulting in increased repeat business. Similarly, Dwivedi and Singh (2018) found that social media marketing contributes to customer relationship development by offering personalized experiences like discounts and exclusive content. This approach enhances customer loyalty and encourages repeat business. Additionally, Priya and Raja (2019) found that leveraging social media to listen to customer feedback and promptly respond to their concerns helps build robust customer relationships, promoting repeat business in the tourism industry

**H3:** The buying intention within Pakistan's tourism industry is significantly affected by the presence of brand equity

Bai and Yang (2020) discovered that brand equity significantly influences buying intention. A positive brand image of a tourism destination fosters a positive attitude among tourists, leading to increased purchase intention. Similarly, Jiang and Zhang (2020) found that a high level of belief in a tourism brand positively affects tourists' attitudes, subsequently increasing their purchase intention. Additionally, Li and Zhang (2019) observed that perceiving a tourism brand as highly valuable contributes to a positive attitude and, consequently, higher purchase intention.

**H4:** The connection between social media marketing and buying intention within Pakistan's tourism industry is moderated by the intermediary role of customer relationships

Ahmed and Butt (2018) discovered that customer relationship mediates the link between social media marketing and buying intention. Building strong relationships through social media marketing enhances customer satisfaction, which subsequently increases purchase intention. Similarly, Jiang and Zhang (2019) found that providing customers with a personalized experience through social media marketing leads to increased customer satisfaction and, in turn, higher purchase intention. Wang and Zhang (2019) noted that proactively engaging with customer feedback and effectively resolving their issues through social media marketing enhances customer satisfaction, consequently exerting a positive impact on purchase intention.

**H5:** The association between social media marketing and buying intention within Pakistan's tourism industry is influenced by the moderating factor of brand equity

Chaudhry et al. (2021), Jiang and Zhang (2020), and Wang and Zhang (2020) collectively discovered empirical support for the

moderating function of brand equity in the correlation between social media marketing (SMM) and buying intention. More specifically, when brand equity is robust, the favourable impact of social media marketing on buying intention is accentuated. To put it simply, strong brand equity intensifies the effectiveness of SMM endeavours in shaping customers' intent to initiate a purchase.

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## Methodology

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### Measurement Scales

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A quantitative method was used in the particular structured questionnaire to investigate the relationship proposed in this research. A 05-point Likert survey is designed into two sections capturing demographic information of respondents in the first section like age, gender, education and qualifications etc and the second part of the questionnaire comprises the items for measuring the constructs under said conceptual framework for Independent Variable consists of Social media marketing which has 3 items(questions), the second variable that is Customer Relationship which acts as a mediator it consists of 3 items(questions), the third variable is the Brand Equity that acts as a mediating role and consists of 9 items, Finally the last variable in this study is Buying Intention which is measured using 4 items(questions).

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### Sampling and Data Collection

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The sampling area through which the data was collected was the main tourism hub of Pakistan and the main focus was on the tourists area from many people travel to such places. A sample of 350 respondents was recorded who benefited from this research. Subsequently, the study collected data and information from Pakistani residents, through which we reported and evaluated the effect of SMM on buying intention in the tourism industry of Pakistan. It should be noted that the response rate of the questionnaire all responses were included as the response rate was 100%, with no outliers detected.



Subsequently, the following section presents the findings of the study.

### Instruments Development

In this study, 3 items/Questions were taken from (Shareef et al., [2019](#); Abed et al., [2015](#)) to identify the Impacts of Social media marketing, whereas Anderson and Gerbing ([1988](#)) and Ou et al. ([2013](#)) provided 3 items/Questions for Customer Relationship. And Verhoef et al. ([2007](#)), Seo and Park ([2018](#)), Laroche et al. ([2013](#)) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook ([2001](#)) helped in clarifying the idea and connections of Brand equity with its sub-constructs Brand awareness and Brand trust towards their relationship to Buying intention and provided 9 items/Questions overall, finally there were 4 items/Questions that were provided by (Lockie et al., [2004](#)) to measure the Dependent Variable (Buying Intention)

### Analysis

The study utilizes steps wise method to validate the measurement scales through Measurement Assessment Model (MAM) and to validate the network of the association through Structural Assessment Model (SAM) (Hair et al., [2006](#)). EFA uncovers hidden patterns and dimensions, while SEM examines the latest interaction paradigm for virtual environments. The analysis is conducted using SmartPLS 4 and SPSS (version 26), contributing to a better understanding of the framework's underlying patterns and relationships among variables.

### Demographic Data

#### Gender

The percentage of females was 40%, while the percentage of males was 60%, indicating a considerable gender imbalance.

#### Age

8.2% of respondents were between the ages of under 21, 70% were between the ages of 22 to 30, and 21.8% were between the ages of 31 to 45.

### Education Level

Respondents that hold a Bachelor's degree made up 27.3% of the population, while master's degree holders constituted 38.2%. People with M.phil made up 31.8% of the population. Doctoral degree holders made up 2.7%.

### Construct Reliability & Validity

To ensure the accuracy of the measurements, a range of metrics including Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were employed. The obtained results revealed alpha values spanning from 0.800 to 0.904, composite reliability values surpassing 0.800, and AVE values ranging from 0.565 to 0.732. These outcomes signify that a notable portion of the variables' variations was elucidated by their respective indicators. Collectively, these findings affirm the high reliability and validity of the variables under study, thereby reinforcing the credibility and robustness of the research outcomes (Fornell & Larcker, [1981](#); George & Mallery, [2003](#); Raykov, [2004](#)).

**Table 1**

*Reliability & Internal Consistency Statistics*

Variables	Alpha	rho_a	rho_c	AVE
BE	0.904	0.906	0.921	0.565
BI	0.871	0.874	0.912	0.721
CR	0.800	0.803	0.882	0.714
SMM	0.816	0.816	0.891	0.732

### Factor Loading

The outer loading values provided in the table reflect the strength of the relationship between observed indicators and their corresponding latent variables in the structural equation model (SEM). Indicators with higher outer loading values, such as BA1, BA2, BA3, BE1, BE2, BI1, BI2, BI3, BI4, BT1, BT2, BT3, BT4, CR1, CR2, CR3, SMM1, SMM2, and SMM3, demonstrate a substantial contribution to measuring their respective constructs. These indicators are considered reliable and valid measures for their associated latent variables. Additionally, the outer loading value of 1.000 between the BE x SMM indicator and the

combined construct of brand equity and social media marketing indicates a strong relationship. These findings are consistent with previous research (Kline, [2015](#); Hair et al., [2019](#)), highlighting the importance of selecting indicators with robust outer loading values to ensure accurate measurement of latent variables. Overall, the outer loading values validate the suitability of the selected indicators and support the reliability and validity of the measurement model (Bagozzi & Yi, [1988](#); Fornell & Larcker, [1981](#)).

**Table 2**

*Factor Loadings*

Variables	BE	BI	CR	SMM
BA1	0.798			
BA2	0.716			
BA3	0.730			
BE1	0.747			
BE2	0.792			
BT1	0.798			
BT2	0.699			
BT3	0.758			
BT4	0.718			
BI1		0.859		
BI2		0.871		
BI3		0.867		
BI4		0.798		
CR1			0.825	
CR2			0.841	
CR3			0.868	
SMM1				0.864
SMM2				0.879
SMM3				0.823

### Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is crucial in structural equation modelling (SEM) to ensure that constructs are distinct from one another. In our study, we examined the correlation matrix of indicators for the constructs of brand equity (Dedeoğlu et al.), buying intention (BI), customer relationship (CR), and social media marketing (SMM). The correlations within each construct were higher than the correlations with indicators from other constructs, indicating discriminant validity. Specifically, the strongest correlation was found between BI and CR (0.900), followed by BI and BE (0.735). The correlations between BE and SMM (0.656) and between CR and SMM

(0.615) were moderate, while the correlation between BE and BE x SMM (0.202) was weak. These results support the distinctiveness of the constructs and validate the measurement model.

**Table 3**

*Discriminant Validity*

Variables	BE	BI	CR	SMM
BE				
BI	0.735			
CR	0.710	0.900		
SMM	0.656	0.615	0.557	

### R-square

The R-square values offer valuable insights into the degree to which the independent variables incorporated within the model elucidate the variances within the dependent variables. In this particular study, the calculated R-square values for BI and CR were determined to be 0.649 and 0.204, correspondingly. These outcomes imply that approximately 64.9% of the variance in BI and 20.4% of the variance in CR are explicable through the encompassed independent variables. When considering the R-square adjusted values, which factor in the predictors' count, the results were 0.645 for BI and 0.202 for CR. These findings underscore the robustness of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, with higher values signifying a more substantial portion of the variance accounted for. It is crucial to interpret these results within the specific context of the research domain and acknowledge other pertinent factors that might impact the outcomes (Hair et al., [2006](#); Tabachnick & Fidell, [2013](#)).

**Table 4**

*R-Square & Adjusted R-Square*

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
BI	0.649	0.645
CR	0.204	0.202

### Discussion

The study examined the complex interrelationships among social media

marketing, customer relationships, Buying Intention, and brand equity in the dynamic environment of Pakistan's travel and tourism sector. The study highlighted the crucial part that social media marketing plays in influencing tourists' buying intentions. Tourism companies may successfully communicate with their target audience, and build brand recognition, and consumer interest by utilizing a variety of social media channels. This is consistent with other studies demonstrating the significant influence of SMM on customer behaviour.

The study also emphasized how customer relationships play a moderating role in the link between social media marketing and buying intention. It emphasized the need of developing excellent client connections in order to turn marketing efforts into noticeable results. Tourism firms may build long relationships with their clients and eventually influence their buying intentions by cultivating trust, encouraging loyalty, and assuring personalized experiences.

Moreover, the study also showed that brand equity had a moderating influence on the link between social media marketing and buying intention. According to the research, strong brand equity magnifies the beneficial effects of social media marketing on consumers' propensity to buy. This emphasizes the importance of cultivating a favourable brand image, fostering brand loyalty, and creating unique brand associations within the minds of consumers.

Overall, this study gives a thorough insight into how brand equity, customer relationships, buying intentions, and social media marketing interact in the Pakistani tourist business. The research sheds light on important aspects that affect customers' decision-making processes by identifying the mediating function of customer relationships and the moderating effect of brand equity. These insights offer practical implications for tourism businesses, enabling them to design and implement effective marketing strategies that foster customer engagement, cultivate brand equity, and ultimately drive buying intention.

## Conclusion

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In conclusion, this study explored the intricate relationships between SMM, customer relationships, buying intentions, and brand equity in the Pakistani tourist sector. The research underlined the importance of social media marketing in affecting buying intention, which is mediated by customer connection and controlled by brand equity. These observations provide Pakistani tourist enterprises with useful advice on how to effectively utilize social media channels, foster solid client connections, and build strong brand equity. Businesses may increase their chances of success, draw more visitors, and promote sustainable growth in the dynamic Pakistani tourism sector by putting the results from these studies into practice. The study has significant relevance and scope in the Pakistani context, as it can provide valuable insights into the factors that influence buying intention in the tourism industry, which can ultimately help businesses to improve their marketing strategies, customer relationships, and profitability.

## Future Recommendations and Limitations

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Although this study contributes valuable insights into the relationship between social media marketing, customer relationships, and buying intention, it has certain limitations. The geographic scope of the data collection might restrict its ability to fully represent the diversity of Pakistan's entire tourism sector. To enhance our understanding further, future studies should consider examining additional variables that could influence the link between social media marketing, customer relationships, and purchasing intentions. Moreover, developing a comprehensive conceptual framework that encompasses a broader context will provide a solid foundation for future research in this domain.

The increasing popularity of social media in Pakistan's tourism industry is indeed intriguing. However, the current understanding of how social media marketing (SMM) impacts people's buying decisions in



this sector remains limited. Previous research has not adequately explored the role of customer relationships and brand equity in the relationship between SMM and buying intention. Therefore, conducting more

extensive research is essential to gain deeper insights into the impact of SMM on buying intentions in the context of Pakistan's tourism industry.

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