

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION – A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON WOMEN FASHION APPAREL IN KARACHI

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to add to the existing knowledge of the key components of social media marketing and their influence on client buying intent. Following a detailed examination of the relevant literature, six primary criteria (Social influence, Informativeness, Perceived risk, Product Evaluation, Informativeness, and Behavioral Responses) emerged as major predictors of purchase intention. The procedure for the research was inductive, as it required interviewing and observing. This study is exploratory qualitative research based on a phenomenology study. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, the individual experiences were evaluated to understand how social media marketing affected their purchase intent, leading to a purchase decision. With the participation of interview subjects, novel themes, and connections were built and validated in qualitative research. The target population for this research was females from all walks of life who use social media and indulge in purchasing fashion apparel while following the fashion trends on social networking websites. According to the qualitative-focused interviews, Social Influence, Informativeness, Perceived Risk, Product Evaluation, Informativeness, and Behavioral Responses affected women's fashion apparel purchasing intentions. In conclusion, there is a considerable link between social media advertising and customer purchase intent. The generalizability of the research findings is constrained since this article is qualitative. Furthermore, the social media advertisement's impact on consumer purchase intention only looked at women's fashion apparel in Karachi. This field can be further explored by examining the concept in various cities. This paper presented many aspects that can be verified using a quantitative method. As a result, this study adds to the body of information on factors influencing purchasing intent, which leads to actual purchase decisions.

Keywords: *Social Media Marketing; Perceived Risk; Purchase Intention.*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, technology has advanced; in 1979, UseNet allowed people to connect via a simulated circular. By 1980, Computers for home use were becoming more common, and social media was getting innovative. Internet chat rooms, or Internet Relay Chat (IRCs), were first used in the 1980s, and they continued to be more popular well into the '90s. In 1997, the leading social media website, Six Degrees, was launched. It allowed users to create and upload profiles, develop their social circle, and be friends with other users. In 1999, the first blogging websites developed became more famous, creating a social-media awareness that is still prevalent. From this point onwards, social media started its journey to further acceptance and recognition. Websites including MySpace, Photobucket, Flickr, and LinkedIn became very popular in the beginning years of 2000 and then the advent of YouTube in 2005, a free video-sharing website that made it highly convenient and easy to watch as well as upload free online videos.

To add to the popularity of social media websites, Facebook and Twitter were accessible to internet users globally, followed by Tumblr, Spotify, and Pinterest, further making it easy for consumers to get linked together and form a global village. To date, we are all surrounded by a network of an increasing number of social networking websites while creating a well-connected environment and settings allowing various users to connect without even disturbing each other's privacy (Hendricks, 2021).

Consumers are now switching away from conventional and old-fashioned media for up-to-date information searches on social media websites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Unlike traditional media, social media encourages people to post, partake in, and generate private, semi-private, and officially released multi-modal content through a network of friends, fans, and users (Yeo et al., 2020). A new beginning of revolutionary, two-way, multidimensional, and peer-to-peer communication has taken over the world of socializing with the help of social media (Berthon, Pitt & Campbell, 2008). Corporations are no longer playing the role of providing exclusive brand communication; instead, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so forth have provided consumers with a break to better and more reliable correspondence (Kautish et al., 2022; Li & Bernoff, 2010). No doubt that the old-fashioned and conventional marketing communication methods that the brand/marketing executives earlier controlled are now run by the customers themselves in new ways. Any web material intended to convince social networking platforms that enable Internet users to browse, share, link, and co-create

content is considered social media advertising. Tax, possession, and purchase are the three types of participation in social media ads (Yeo, Tan, Lim, Leong, & Leong, 2020).

Social media has played a substantial role in helping marketers reach their consumers while penetrating the lives of millions of people globally (Thein, 2022; Irshad & Ahmad, 2019). YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram, etc., come under the social media platforms and have earned high-level recognition from 3.196 billion users globally (Irshad & Ahmad, 2019). Today's consumers devote a significant amount of their time to using social media. In 2019, the average time spent on social media was projected as 144 minutes per day compared to 60 minutes a day in 2012.

In 2019, \$90 billion was spent on social media advertising, showing how marketers pay attention to it. Social media has infiltrated our lives greatly, whether it is the consumer or the marketer. Two or more social media channels have been used by approximately 91% of retailers and 81% of SMEs have used social media to promote their brands (Brandwatch, 2019). In 2020, 3.88 million people worldwide were using social media, which is almost more than half of the world's population, and it has been increasing every second (Broadbandsearch, 2021).

In this era, (eWoM) has become a very famous and powerful tool for promoting products/services. Consumers are starting to use the gradually growing eWoM (for example, blogs, and vlogs) to share their opinions on products and services. Organizations use eWoM to target customers and spend a significant amount selling their products. eWoM is also an essential tool for building relationships between consumers and organizations.

Social media, including online video networks, social games, community networking, message boards, polls, websites, and microblogs, dominate today's internet society. About 70% of Facebook users regularly participate, and more than 80% of Americans use social networking sites at least once a month. Social media has evolved into a vital medium that closely resembles advertisement and marketing communications in terms of publicity. Internet ad revenue hit \$121 billion in 2014, and it is projected to rise at the highest rate of all media platforms in 2015. Organizations have been advertising on social media sites (such as Facebook) since 2009, and their social media marketing budgets are continuing to expand. Building brand recognition on a platform of 1.39 billion users is essential. However, many advertisers are unsure whether people can see and click on their advertising and if that notice will lead to a buy (Zhang & Mao, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, the essence of conversations on social media sites has evolved dramatically, thanks to a wide variety of users, including families, employers, associates, group organizations, and governments. In commerce, entertainment, politics, and education, social media platforms provide new space and platforms for people to communicate, discover, and perceive new topics. Anybody from anywhere can exchange information, thoughts, products, and services (Yeo et al., 2020).

Social media ads have gotten much attention on social networks. This type of social media-based word of mouth can assist customers in making buying decisions. Customers' sales of goods and services on the Internet are exponentially increasing, according to research. As a result, businesses, organizations, developers, and retailers are beginning to study and consider using social media channels to draw consumers and purchase goods and services while still building strong brand partnerships with customers worldwide (Alalwan et al., 2017).

Advertisers can pay for social media platforms by displaying ads, endorsing advertising, and sharing behavioral expectations with consumers through different apps and plug-ins on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. On the other hand, advertisers are most likely to employ an offline involvement or participation approach, in which businesses deliver content to their web followers directly (Yeo et al., 2022). Marketers also use earned social media, which are cases where users engage in content linked to the brand/service through word-of-mouth (WOM) or user-generated content (UGC) (Yeo et al., 2020). UGC is User Generated Content, which can range from images to videos, texts, or even audio, and is uploaded by users on social media websites. It is content or information from the consumers about various products or services or the firms or providers and not created by the marketers themselves. The marketers use them to speak on their behalf, invest in them, portray them as their brand ambassadors, and play the role of social media influencers while socializing on their social networks.

With the advent of social media and Web 2.0, there has been a shift away from product-oriented networks, popular in e-commerce, and into highly customer-oriented platforms. Web 2.0 is the movement that marks the transition from a web where the users were accessing the data (web 1.0) to a web that was more interactive and dynamic. S-commerce is an evolution of e-commerce utilizing Web 2.0 technologies and social media platforms while incorporating the SNS, facilitating the factions to work together (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Therefore s-commerce could be described as "a special kind of e-commerce that incorporates interactions in a social environment such as Facebook or Instagram" (Sturiale & Scuderi, 2013).

Today's consumer is surrounded by different types of social media platforms known as e-commerce, and it is rapidly increasing its presence in every area of life and daily routines. Therefore, it is essential to explore what they feel about social media advertising and how it impacts their purchase intention leading to the actual purchase, especially when it comes to the fashion apparel industry of Karachi, Pakistan.

Research Gap

Much research has been performed in social media marketing, but there are still research gaps. Marketers are still unclear about how social media impacts consumers' attitudes and purchase decisions, leading to the consumer purchase decision. Another gap is that the impact of eWOM has not been explored on the consumers' purchase intent, along with the effect of other factors that may have played a role in the popularity of social media, like consumer trust in social networking websites, performance expectancy of products presented, hedonic motivation of the consumers, level of interactivity.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the rise in prevalence of social networking and social media platforms, consumers are bombarded with positive eWOM every time they log into a social media website, without even knowing they make purchase decisions which usually end up in actual purchase decisions. It is essential to explore the factors that play a positive role in convincing consumers to take the journey from intention to actual action.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research Objective that has been developed based on the above discussion is:

- Exploring the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention regarding women's fashion apparel in Karachi, Pakistan.

This research will help determine the factors that strongly affect a customer's purchase intent by advertising on social media in the women's fashion apparel industry in Karachi, Pakistan.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the Research Objective, the following objectives were formulated for this research.

R1. How does social media advertising impact consumer purchase decisions?

R2. What is the impact of eWOM on Consumer Purchase Intention?

R3. What is the impact of product evaluation on Consumer Purchase Intention?

R4. Which factors play a role in the consumers' purchase intention?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media

Nowadays, social media is such an integral aspect of daily life, and everything is done online. In the world of social media, the younger generation sets the pace. They are more adept at learning emerging technologies and conventions. For example, the social media network Snapchat has over 100 million members, yet just 14% of them are over 35 years old (Snapchat, 2015). Consumers are subjected to various promotional formats on social media, including banner advertisements, brand accounts, and promoted posts (Irshad & Ahmad, 2019). Social networking is also used as a forum for electronic commerce events and these modes of marketing (Han, Xu, & Chen, 2018). It is widely accepted that social media marketing is rising in popularity and is in developed Western countries and developing Asian countries like Pakistan (SBP, 2018).

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing uses Social Networking Marketing Sites (SNM) to promote a product or service. Scholars define SNM as "a network of relationships within a group of people, often serving as a conduit for disseminating knowledge, ideas, and power among the participants" (Kempe, Kleinberg, & Tardos, 2003). Many internet SNM platforms allow for online networking, enabling individual channels to share thoughts, activities, events, and interests. Since participants repeat the information on SNM, these resources serve as word-of-mouth (Zhaveri, 2013). Electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM) promotes and enables consumers' sharing of positive opinions about products/services, businesses, or brands (Jummani & Shaikh, 2019), while also enabling the consumers to send advertising materials to relatives and friends via SNM pages. Because of its cost-effective management, enterprises are embracing viral marketing tactics (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015).

Perceived Informativeness

The significance of social media advertising in foreseeing consumer's perceptions, insights, and reactions cannot be ignored. The increased interest by marketing researchers is thus leading to studies on social media marketing-related topics. Research conducted by Logan et al. (2012) showed that social media and television advertising are influenced by perceived entertainment and informativeness. At the same time, it was also noticed that there is also an association between perceived values and consumer's attitudes towards social media advertising (Logan,

et al., 2012). Alalwan et al. (2017) asserted that social-media advertising, with a range amount of informativeness, will become realized as more valuable & well-organized from the shopper's perspective. Things measured, the level of informativeness that occurs in social media website advertisements can allow online shoppers to have improved buying performance & can accordingly raise intention to buy.

Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that behavioral motive or intention is the primary reason for any specific behavior referring to a person's desire to do something (Ajzen, 2005; 1980). In essence, behavioral intention is dictated by attitude and subjective norms, each of which can be the most significant determinant of any given action. While attitude is how a person evaluates favorable or unfavorable actions, the norm is how a person considers what others believe a person should do or the social pressures for performing or not performing an action (Trafimow, 2009). As a knowledge provider, peer contact between buyers has a significant impact on buyers' decision-making (Smith, Menon, & Sivakumar, 2005). Consumers learn expectations and purchase intentions in SNM environments through written messages sent by peers. Similarly, in terms of technological adoption, subjective norm applies to social conventions in terms of external impact (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006).

Viral Marketing

More frequently than not, customers' buying intentions are highly impacted by word-of-mouth (Kenyon & Sen, 2012). However, this word of mouth is negative or positive. Consumers' electronic word-of-mouth on SNM pages is referred to as viral marketing. It spreads like a virus, taking advantage of multiplication to reach thousands if not millions, of people (Vilpponen, Winter & Sundqvist, 2006). Research suggests that buzzwords, photographs, videos, and blog articles/reviews are all used by viral marketers (Larsson & Odén, 2011). Viral marketing is cheaper and has a higher response rate while providing an unparalleled chance to link locally and globally (Yang, Liu, & Zhou, 2011).

As a result, businesses use this tactic to disrupt customers online, generating digital "hype" to advertise their products/services. In Social Network Marketing (SNM), people's attitudes toward viral messaging influence their willingness to participate in the process that contributes to buying intent (Camarero & San José, 2011). Viral marketing often necessitates social networking, usually concerning brands, to draw consumers to virtual communities that affect their purchasing decisions (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Since viral

marketing provides online product/service ratings, consumers' risk judgments in buying a product are influenced mainly by the facts and interactions on those pages (Beldad, Jong, & Steehouder, 2010).

Product Evaluation

For the customer to make a purchase decision, he checks the product search process (Horn, 2006) In a search on social networking sites, the customer explores the price of manufactured products, attention to the beauty of manufactured products, specifications based on product performance, product sustainability, country of origin, and country of origin.

The price of a manufactured product often affects customers' buying intentions because the audience is price sensitive (Moskell & Allred, 2013). Price sensitivity affects buyers' willingness to pay for a product by combining their qualities from giving and withdrawing money (Smith & Woodside, 2009). When making purchase decisions, customers also appreciate product performance by measuring additional features as well.

Trust

The previous study directs that buying from an electronic seller relies on purchaser trust in the electronic vendor (Gefen et al., 2003), suggesting that trust in Social Networking Sites (SNS) can raise buyers' purchase intentions. Social networking sites (SNSs) as social market platforms carry purchasers into contact with electronic vendors & offer services for the worth exchange among the parties. On social networking sites (SNS), the purchaser meets advertisements, videos/news pictures, references & likes connected to the e-sellers. In line with the classification of beliefs suggested by McKnight & Chervany, though, trust in social networking sites, like the platform, can cause the purchaser's confidence in the trustworthiness of the contents & electronic vendors' events (McKnight & Chervany, 2001)

Similarly, another researcher suggested that since exchange relationships are impersonal and dependent on the Internet's infrastructure, confidence has become more relevant in e-commerce. Consumers, in particular, face the challenge of purchasing goods or services from unknown merchants via social media. Furthermore, they are unable to see or touch the items. Their level of trust influences consumers' perceptions (Limbu, Wolf, & Lunsford, 2011). Customers would not send personal information, including credit card information, to providers without trust, so privacy and security considerations are a significant obstacle to Internet access (Kim, Xu, & Gupta, 2012)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The procedure for the research was inductive, as it required interviewing and observing. This study is an exploratory qualitative research based on a phenomenology study because this research method helps to understand the individual's personal experiences and perspectives in a particular situation (Lester, 1999).

Research Design

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, the individual experiences were evaluated to understand how social media marketing affected their purchase intent, leading to a purchase decision (Creswell, 2003). With the participation of interview subjects, novel themes, and connections were built and validated in qualitative research (Birkinshaw, Brannen, & Tung, 2011).

Sample Design

The target population for this research was females from all walks of life who use social media and indulge in purchasing fashion apparel while following the fashion trends on social networking websites. The sampling technique used was Purposive sampling, as this is one of the most common sampling techniques.

Data Collection

An in-depth investigation was conducted to get the required data through in-depth interviews. This is the best tool when the researcher needs to ask open-ended questions from the respondents and requires relatively fewer people for the research than quantitative research (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The preferred way of collecting data was a personal meeting. However, the interviewee could not be approached personally in one case, so a telephonic interview was conducted. The interview process continued till the topic was exhausted no new ideas were being collected and a saturation point was reached.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were converted into written text, known as transcription, while carefully detaching from the participants' views to minimize the researcher bias through the bracketing technique. Verbatim transcription was executed, which included word-by-word documenting the respondent's answers without any omissions. The transcript was then used for further analysis through coding, sorting, and sifting. Coding was performed by extracting important ideas or terms from the transcript prepared in response to the interview questions. After highlighting these concepts, they were sorted into groups or patterns.

Once sorted into categories or sub-themes, sifting was performed by removing irrelevant and unnecessary information, and finally, themes emerged from the qualitative interviews. The process from coding to categorizing the data into meaningful themes is known as Thematic Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005a). A validity check was also performed by returning to the respondents to verify that the data had been accurately represented and if the essence of the interview was correctly captured.

The final stage of essence extraction or meaning making involved writing up the data analysis in a storyline that others would read conveniently. At this stage, the actual lived experience of the respondents is identified.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in Qualitative research makes it valid and reliable in the same way as precision and accuracy make Quantitative research reliable and valid. The researcher needs to ensure that their research meets a specific criterion proposed by a researcher; it should have credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981).

Criteria for credibility are the same as internal validity, ensuring that the study measures what it intends to measure. The informants were asked to read the transcripts of their data collection dialogues to check for inaccuracy or mismatch between what they intended to say and recorded. Member checks were done to verify the research's evolving concepts and interpretations developed throughout the conversations.

The criterion for dependability focuses on reliability so that if the same contextual work is reiterated, following a similar methodology will result in similar outcomes. Dependability was accomplished by providing in-depth information about the methods employed, enabling a future researcher to imitate the work. The complete report of the study includes the research design and its implementation, operational details of data gathering, and respective appraisal of the entire research to make the reader understand the methods and their effectiveness thoroughly.

The confirmability criterion is based on the study's objectivity, but researchers' biases are highly predictable as humans design the questionnaires and tests. Triangulation techniques that could help reduce investigator bias, which plays an essential role in the study's objectivity, could not be applied. There was a shortage of time for research; the number of informants was

limited to six females only. The researcher posed the same question to the participants in multiple ways to achieve increased confirmability in this study (Guba, 1981)

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 6 interviews were conducted, comprised of females from Karachi, to identify the impact of Social Media Advertising on their purchase intent leading to the actual purchase of fashion apparel. The main criteria for choosing the participants were that they were users of social media, and their age group ranged from 30 – 45 years of age, working as well as homemakers. Out of the 6 participants, only 4 of the interviews were attached to the appendix. The other two did not spend enough time on social media to be suitable participants for the study. Out of the four, two were working females while the other two were homemakers.

Behavioral Profile of Respondents

Participants were users of Social Media Websites as well as Social Media Networks. Almost all of them relied on social media websites for information regarding fashion trends and updates on fashion apparel in Karachi. They all were users of Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and WhatsApp for social networking.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Content Analysis

Thematic content analysis analyzes the quality of data sets by classifying them systematically and then coding and identifying patterns and relationships (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005b). The themes that originated from the qualitative interviews were extracted by using the thematic content analysis technique. The steps of analysis included first-order concepts, and second-order themes leading to final themes.

Table 1 shows instances of data structure from the qualitative phase of the research, which is an important stage in data collection and analysis.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Participants

Respondents	Age (Years)	Occupation
1	35	Job in a private firm
2	42	Housewife
3	36	Housewife
4	36	H.R. Manager in Private Firm
5	29	Housewife
6	40	University Professor

Source: Study Analysis

The data structuring allows the researcher to visually organize and display the data collected from the qualitative interviews and demonstrate how the raw data was extracted, which then emerged into various themes, thus helping in analysis. Table 2 shows examples of the data structured in the research to extract categories and themes from the responses/statements of the interviewees.

The statements in the first column demonstrate the first-order concepts. The second column shows the second-order theme or categories, while the third column shows the enhanced themes that emerged from the concepts.

Table 2. Data Structure and Reporting Process

First-Order Concept	Second Order Theme	Refined Themes
<i>If I find something interesting and worth sharing, I definitely would like to share it on my Facebook wall. (Respondent # 1)</i>	Sharing information with friends and family	Social Interaction
<i>I mainly use social media to stay in touch with friends and family. (Respondent # 4)</i>		
<i>If that product is of my interest, I would certainly like to explore more about it by visiting its website. (Respondent # 1)</i>	Increased awareness, Attraction towards special offers Brand remembrance/greater reach than TV	
<i>It's very easy to remember the brands shown on social media as I spend more time on social media compared to watching TV or listening to the Radio. And in my opinion, the reach of SMA is greater than the other traditional mediums as the usage of the Internet and smartphones have increased, (Respondent # 2)</i>	SM is better than traditional media.	Behavioral Responses
<i>I hardly watch TV now, so the only way I watch ads is on social media, especially YouTube. (Respondent # 1)</i>	Brand Recall	
<i>Yes, do visit the website of the products to cross-check the products and their prices. (Respondent # 3)</i>	Risk averseness of customers	Perceived Risk
<i>It gives me an idea of what is trending, and which brand is coming up with something good and unique but instead of buying it online, I would rather visit the outlets, once I shortlist the products. However, I did purchase online last year when we were in total lockdown. (Respondent # 1)</i>	Awareness of fashion trends, Keep consumers updated.	
<i>I think social media these days plays a major role in guiding the customer about different brands, and any new launches. I think it is the best platform to know what you want and how to get it. There is always someone out there who will tell you what you want to know. (Respondent # 2)</i>	Updated knowledge of current and upcoming brands	
<i>Social media has set new trends in the field of marketing. It is now easy for marketers to promote their products at minimum cost. People can now promote their products without even leaving their houses. (Respondent #6)</i>	Best platform for all sorts of information, Provides awareness about the product,	Informativeness

Factors that affect my buying intention would be the quality of the product, pricing, social influence, and whether the product is readily available or not. I evaluate brands based on positive comments about the product quality, customer service, and most importantly whether it attracts me or not. (Respondent # 1)

Product availability,
Price, Quality, Customer rating,
Sales promotion,
Physical appearance/product
outlook

Product Evaluation

Price, quality, its rating by other people on social media. (Respondent # 2)

I try to see the number of comments on a specific message or communication by the brand company or several people who have commented on it and what they have commented. And also, the level of engagement by Consumers on social media. More people engaging means the brand is either good or very bad, as comments would be positive or negative. Level of engagement is important and their views of course. (Respondent # 1)

I usually buy what I like but sometimes it's also a good thing to see what other people think about a specific product. If they think there is some issue with a brand or a specific collection, then I do follow that comment. It is always good to stay informed. And social media is the best place, all you have to do is to know who to follow and whom to ignore. (Respondent # 1)

Word of Mouth
Consumer engagement

Social Influence

Yes, I do read what other consumers say about a specific brand. You know how important Word of Mouth is!! It is even more important than what the firm says about itself. (Respondent # 6)

Source: Study Analysis

Social Interaction

The interview participants suggested that they used social media to interact with their friends and family. Most of the participants mentioned Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, and Twitter as their favorite Social Networking Sites.

"If I find something interesting and worth sharing, I definitely would like to share it on my Facebook wall." (Respondent # 1)

"I mainly use Social Media to stay in touch with friends and family." (Respondent # 4)

WhatsApp helped them stay in touch with their friends and family any time they wanted and share any information directly with each other. They used Facebook to interact with friends and family and share information with them on a bigger platform as other people could also see what they were sharing. Facebook was also liked for providing information about the recent fashion trends as and when they required.

"For clothing brands, my favorite is Facebook. There I can see what people say about different products. Every time I need to buy clothes, I try checking out Facebook for people's feedback on a new collection of fashion clothing." (Respondent # 2)

Participants also mentioned that they usually visit their friend's or family's social network pages or virtual communities they participate in, see what they have been doing, and which pages they liked. This means that people use social media sites to interact, but they also watch advertisements posted there while they are interacting. So, it can be said that Social Media Networks provide platforms for people to socialize and marketers to market their products.

Behavioral Responses

Respondents suggested that Social Media Advertising helped them remember the brands more than any other media platforms. Social media advertising has a greater reach and brand recall, as mentioned by one of the participants. And when there is brand recall, there are greater chances of purchase intention. Most of the participants answered that they are too busy to watch any T.V. or listen to the radio and social media is the most efficient and up-to-date platform in terms of informativeness and entertainment.

"It is very easy to remember the brands shown on social media as I spend more time on social media as compared to watching TV or listening to the Radio. And in my opinion, the reach of S.M. is greater than the other traditional mediums as the usage of Internet and smartphones have increased." (Respondent # 2)

"I hardly watch T.V. now, so the only way I watch ads is on social media especially YouTube." (Respondent # 1)

The findings of the interviews revealed that their purchasing intent had been stimulated after seeing advertisements on social media for a long period. Users who have a positive attitude toward social media advertising are more inclined to interact with brand messaging and seek knowledge about brands, which leads to their desire to acquire branded fashion *apparel*.

If that product is of my interest, I would certainly like to explore more about it by visiting its website. (Respondent # 1)

Perceived Risk

Respondents said they visited that product's website to cross-check the price or availability after viewing an advertisement. The advertisements on social media attracted them to the level

that they tried visiting the website to confirm the information provided in the advertisement. This response also shows that the consumer is cross-checking, meaning an amount of risk is involved when a customer plans to buy something after seeing it on social media.

*"Yes, I do visit the website of the products to cross-check the products and their prices."
(Respondent # 3)*

*"I rarely buy clothes online as I always have doubts about the quality of the products."
(Respondent # 3)*

Almost all respondents said that they visit company websites once they are willing to find out more about their choice or if any product appeals to them. However, two out of six respondents believed that they did visit the company website to cross-check the price, check its availability, and shortlist but would still prefer to purchase it from the outlet after evaluating it physically and not ordering it online.

*"It gives me an idea of what is trending, which brand is coming up with something good and unique, but instead of buying it online, I would rather visit the outlets once I shortlist the products. However, I did purchase online last year when we were in total lockdown."
(Respondent # 1)*

Informativeness

All the respondents believed that Social Media Advertising was an essential source of information for them. They use it whenever they want to know about the current fashion trends in the fashion apparel industry.

*"It gives me an idea of what is trending, which brand is coming up with something good and unique but instead of buying it online, I would rather visit the outlets, once I shortlist the products. However, I did purchase online last year when we were in total lockdown."
(Respondent # 1)*

They also said that because of Social Media Advertising, they know about the latest launches of their favorite brands every time they use social media.

"I think Social media these days play a major role in guiding the customer about different brands, any new launches. I think it's the best platform to know what you want and how to get it. There is always someone out there who will tell you what you want to know." (Respondent # 2)

Respondents also think that the advertisements placed on social media are usually more linked and relevant to their requirements, interests, and preferences.

"I would say social media does play a significant role, as whenever we search something on the internet instantly we start to get advertisements regarding those particular products and that gives us a fair opportunity to compare the products of different brands, and certainly all that working might lead to the decision of buying." (Respondent # 1)

Overall, the level of informativeness present in social media advertising may enable customers to engage in better purchasing behavior and, as a result, enhance their intention to purchase. Indeed, social media networks give advertisers additional options and tools for tailoring their advertising and content. As a result, social media advertising has become more helpful and valuable from the customer's standpoint.

Product Evaluation

Most of the respondents evaluated products based on their perceived usefulness, price, quality, availability, etc. All these factors play a positive role in leading the consumer from Awareness through Interest to Desire and Intention of buying that product.

"It would be the quality of the product, pricing, somewhat social influence, and if the product is readily available or not." (Respondent # 1)

I evaluate fashion apparel based on its price, quality, its rating by other people on social media. (Respondent # 2)

Sometimes they buy products online that are not available in the outlets in their city, i.e., Karachi, or when the product being advertised on social media is more affordable than the one being sold by the branded outlets. One of the respondents talked about her buying experience from a seller who did not have an outlet but sold her clothes online through Facebook.

The respondent had no other option than to buy from her as the seller offered cheaper but good quality clothes while the respondent was out of time and had to take the risk of buying from that lady as it was a risk worth taking. Sometimes people tend to take the chance when the products being offered are cheaper, unique, or not available in their area/city of residence and the only option they have is to order online.

Social Influence

According to the responses collected from the respondents, it is evident that individuals are concerned about the impressions his or her conduct makes to other individuals. The social

influence of other members of a community influences his or her decisions. Other people's comments sometimes shape the behavior of individuals. If a fashion clothing brand has good comments and reviews, other consumers are more likely to read them and act accordingly.

Positive comments lead to a greater chance of their purchase intention. At the same time, if there are more negative comments, then fewer people are likely to get attracted, thus leading to purchase intentions and then actually purchase.

"I try to see the number of comments on a specific message or communication by the brand company or several people who have commented on it and what they have commented. And the level of engagement by the Consumers on social media. More people engaging means the brand is either good or very bad, as comments would be positive or negative. Level of engagement is important and their views of course." (Respondent # 1)

Consumers do buy according to their needs and choices, but they are primarily concerned about what other people are buying and where. Social influence can be from their friends, family, spouse, colleagues, etc. Some consumers tend to follow their favorite celebrities on their Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram pages, to see what fashion apparel they prefer and what brand pages they have followed or have commented on (Sultan et al., 2015).

"I usually buy what I like but sometimes it's also a good thing to see what other people think about a specific product. If they think there is some issue with a brand or a specific collection, then I do follow that comment. It is always good to stay informed. And social media is the best place, all you have to do is to know who to follow and whom to ignore."

(Respondent # 1)

"Yes, I do read what other consumers say about a specific brand. You know how important Word of Mouth is!! It is even more important than what the firm says about itself." (Respondent # 6)

DISCUSSION

Researchers in fashion marketing are becoming increasingly interested in social media advertising (Kim & Ko, 2010). The findings revealed that respondents' perceptions of social media advertising (in terms of informativeness, product information, product evaluation, etc.) were critical markers of their overall attitude toward the medium. Users are frequently updated with information about businesses from marketers or friends via social media, a rich information platform. This study found that the level of informativeness present in social media

advertising may enable customers to engage in better purchasing behavior and, as a result, enhance their intention to purchase. The value of social media advertisements in forecasting client views and reactions is constantly a source of debate. According to a study, both fun and informativeness have a major influence on the value of social media and television advertisements (Logan, Bright, & Gangadharbatla, 2012)

All participants said that they used social media to communicate and interact with their friends and family. Social networking sites provided a platform where they could also stay updated on the recent fashion trends. It also allowed the consumers to share their perspectives and views on various products being advertised through social media advertising. These findings are consistent with what research suggests that offering knowledge and involvement in a product/service is the most suitable and efficient marketing tactic (Qiu & Benbasat, 2005).

It is evident from this research that individuals are concerned about the impressions their conduct makes on other individuals. The social influence of other members of a community influences his or her decisions. Other people's comments sometimes shape the behavior of individuals. Because social media provides a platform to many friends or peers, they operate as socialization agents and instantly supply substantial product knowledge and assessments, facilitating education and information. Considering the consumer networking framework, researchers discovered that internet users' opinions toward social media advertising are heavily influenced by socialized characteristics (i.e., peers). According to research, online peer contacts can significantly impact customers and turn others into Internet buyers. (Gershoff, Andrew & Johar, 2006)

Respondents suggested that Social Media Advertising helped them remember the brands more than any other media platforms. And when there is brand recall, there are greater chances of purchase intention. Research supports that brand recollection and purchase intent are positively correlated with mindset regarding advertising. Respondents who had a negative attitude toward online advertising had lower purchase intention than those who had a favorable response toward online advertising (Mehta, 2000). According to the authors, consumers go through the cognitive phase as an initial response to persuasion attempts, in which they build awareness and understanding. The emotional stage follows, during which customers may acquire a fondness for, preference for, and conviction for the marketed goods or service. Consumers act on their purchases once they've built their cognitive and emotive responses (Ducoffe, 1996).

A couple of respondents said they visited the product's website to cross-check the price or availability after viewing an advertisement showing that they perceive a level of risk in any particular purchase they want to minimize by visiting the website or the outlet. Supported by research, the researcher suggests that perceived risk is powerful in explaining consumers' behavior considering influences often motivate consumers to avoid mistakes rather than maximize utility in purchasing and expecting a loss (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). So, the greater the amount of perceived risk, the lesser the chance for the consumer to purchase virally advertised fashion apparel.

Most of the respondents evaluated products advertised on social media based on their perceived usefulness, price, quality, availability, number of positive views or comments, level of engagement by other users, etc. This is supported by a study recommending that comprehensive and up-to-date information covering all aspects of the product like product characteristics, price, discounts, shipping, and availability should be considered in any social media marketing message (Alalwan, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Researchers and practitioners in the marketing field have been increasingly focused on the associated concerns of social media advertising. As a result, the purpose of this study was to add to our existing knowledge of the key components of social media marketing and their influence on client buy intent. Following a detailed examination of the relevant literature, six primary criteria including social influence, informativeness, perceived risk, product evaluation, informativeness, and behavioral responses, emerged as major predictors of purchase intention. The outcome of the entire research is that there is a considerable link between social media advertising and customer purchase intent when we talk about women's fashion apparel. The purchase intent of the consumers can be altered using different marketing techniques. As we live in an interactive and trust-based advertising era, businesses should focus on increasing their social media advertising budgets to take advantage of changing client patterns in the twenty-first century. With social media phone apps/social media advertising, businesses can stay in touch with their valuable clients.

LIMITATIONS AND AREA OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In-depth interviews were the only data collection technique used as a survey instrument to explore the impact of social media advertising on women's purchasing intent for fashion apparel. Since this tool is being used to analyze and evaluate market insights, other methods,

including the focus groups or a mixture of both, could also have been used to investigate consumer insights about the impact of social media advertising on consumer purchasing intention to actual buying. Due to limited time, only one method for locating the primary participants was used namely purposive sampling; snowballing could also have been used to find additional participants and further improve the study. This study is also limited by the issue of generalization that comes with qualitative research.

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