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The Dynamics of Social Media Marketing: Unraveling the Impact on Customer Purchase Intentions through Engagement and Trust

Liang QIAO¹, Pao Jui SUN²

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Abstract

Purpose: The primary aim of this study is to explore how social media marketing influences customer purchase intention, focusing on the roles of customer engagement and trust as mediators. **Research Design, Data, and Methodology:** The investigation utilized an online survey conducted in Chinese on the Questionnaire Star platform. It targeted male and female consumers aged 18 and above who purchase products online, yielding 1107 valid responses from across major Chinese cities. **Results:** Analysis reveals that social media marketing significantly affects customer purchase intention in a positive manner. It also enhances customer engagement and trust, which serve as crucial mediating variables linking social media marketing to purchase intention. The study found that engagement and trust facilitate brand identification and alignment, thereby directly boosting purchase intention. **Conclusion:** The findings offer essential insights for businesses aiming to improve their social media marketing impact on consumer behavior. It highlights the importance of fostering user engagement and trust, as well as creating a favorable brand image. These elements are key to influencing consumer purchase decisions within social media contexts. The study advises businesses to engage deeply with consumers and build trust, providing practical recommendations for navigating the evolving social media environment towards sustainable growth.

Keywords : Social Media Marketing, Customer Engagement, Customer Trust, Purchase Intention, Distribution Science

JEL Classification Code: M31, L81, C30

1. Introduction

With the rapid proliferation of the internet and continuous technological advancements, online shopping has become an integral part of modern consumer behavior (Zhang et al., 2021). An increasing number of consumers choose to shop online, a trend that not only changes the way consumers shop but also profoundly influences business models and market competition dynamics (Agustian et al., 2023). In this digital age, social media plays an indispensable role as one of the crucial channels for online

shoppers to gather information, make decisions, and communicate (Manzoor et al., 2020).

In the past, people typically opted for traditional physical stores when purchasing goods, relying on in-person experiences and observations to make decisions (Paz et al., 2020). However, with the rise of the internet, people are no longer limited by geographical constraints, and this convenience and flexibility have altered consumer purchasing behavior, making online shopping a more convenient and personalized choice (Lina & Ahluwalia, 2021). As consumers increasingly turn to online shopping,

1 First Author. PhD Candidate, International College, Krirk University, Bangkok. Email: 179543831@qq.com

2 Second Author. Professor, International College, Krirk University, Bangkok. Email: Paul093883@hotmail.com

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they rely more on social media platforms to obtain information, evaluate products, and share shopping experiences (Ryu et al., 2020). User reviews, product recommendations, and shopping insights on social media have become crucial references for consumers in making purchasing decisions (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). Information obtained through social media is more intuitive, real-time, and provides a multi-faceted understanding of product or service quality, features, and performance, profoundly influencing consumers' purchase intentions.

Social media platforms have become a primary channel for people to acquire information, exchange viewpoints, and share experiences, offering new communication and dissemination methods for individuals, businesses, and organizations (Ausat, 2023). Their strong interactivity and immediacy shape social behavior patterns, fundamentally changing how people approach information acquisition, brand acceptance, and consumption decision-making (Mirzaei & Esmaeilzadeh, 2021). For consumers, social media has permeated various aspects of daily life (Ahmad et al., 2019). In the information age, using social media for consumer information retrieval is considered more convenient and intuitive, allowing consumers to engage in instant communication and access a wealth of information, directly or indirectly influencing their purchasing decisions (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

In the business domain, companies have recognized the immense potential of social media and embraced it as a vital marketing tool (Martín-Rojas et al., 2020). Through social media platforms, businesses can interact directly with consumers, build brand image, convey product information, engage in targeted advertising, and obtain consumer feedback (Yang et al., 2022). Social media marketing not only provides a channel for direct communication with consumers but also empowers companies with more innovation and creative space to precisely target their audience and propagate brand image and product information on a broader scale (Makrides et al., 2020).

Especially for online shoppers, social media plays a crucial role (Manzoor et al., 2020). With the development and prevalence of e-commerce, an increasing number of consumers prefer to shop online (Yang et al., 2022). In the process of online shopping, social media serves as the primary platform for consumers to obtain product information, evaluate brands, understand product performance, and communicate with other consumers (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021).

Therefore, studying the impact mechanism of social media marketing on the purchase intentions of online shoppers is significant (Manzoor et al., 2020). As social media continues to evolve, research on its impact mechanism on consumer purchase intentions also holds practical significance (Ceyhan, 2019). Such research can

assist businesses in better utilizing social media platforms, optimizing marketing strategies, increasing brand exposure and awareness, enhancing consumer brand identification and trust, and consequently influencing their purchase intentions, promoting sales growth (Moslehpour et al., 2021). In summary, social media has profoundly changed consumer shopping habits and the purchase decision-making process. Studying the impact mechanism of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions in this context not only helps deepen our understanding of consumer behavior characteristics and psychological mechanisms but also provides theoretical guidance and practical basis for businesses to formulate more precise and effective marketing strategies.

Customer engagement refers to the degree of consumer identification with a brand or product, representing the emotional and cognitive connection between consumers and the brand (Mirzaei & Esmaeilzadeh, 2021). When consumers perceive a high alignment between the brand or product and their values, needs, or personality traits, they are more likely to develop a sense of identification with the brand, thereby enhancing purchase intentions (Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020). Social media platforms provide consumers with avenues to understand brand philosophy, culture, and core values, making it easier for consumers to find brands that resonate with them and, in turn, increase purchase intentions (Shawky et al., 2020).

Customer trust is the degree of consumer reliance on a brand or product, a crucial factor in building a solid relationship between consumers and the brand (Al-Adwan et al., 2020). In social media marketing, establishing and maintaining consumer trust is paramount (Irshad et al., 2020). Through social media platforms, brands can enhance consumer trust by providing authentic, reliable information, and user experiences (Ebrahim, 2020). Consumer trust directly affects their attitudes towards the brand and purchase intentions (Manzoor et al., 2020). High trust implies that consumers are more willing to purchase products or services from the brand, while low trust may inhibit their purchase intentions (Kim & Kim, 2021).

Brands convey brand stories, culture, and core values through social media, allowing consumers to gain deeper insights into the brand, thereby increasing customer engagement (Yoong & Lian, 2019). Additionally, by providing high-quality information, user reviews, and customer service on social media, brands can establish consumer trust, promoting an increase in customer trust (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). Brands can enhance customer engagement by providing content that aligns with consumer interests and needs, making consumers more identified with brand values and culture (Wibowo et al., 2020). Simultaneously, authentic and useful content on social media is a key factor in building customer trust (Shawky et

al., 2020). High-quality content and information contribute to an increase in consumer trust, thereby raising trust levels (Agrawal & Mittal, 2022). Only by establishing consumer identification and trust in the brand can companies more effectively influence their purchasing behavior, enhance brand loyalty, and improve sales performance (Confente & Kucharska, 2021).

In conclusion, social media marketing, as a novel marketing approach, possesses powerful information dissemination and interactive capabilities, profoundly influencing consumers' purchase intentions. In-depth research into its impact mechanism on purchase intentions helps businesses formulate better marketing strategies, increase brand awareness and influence, and stimulate consumer purchasing behavior. Moreover, such research aids the academic community in a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms and influencing factors behind consumer behavior.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

The ubiquity of social media has transformed the landscape of business marketing, playing an increasingly crucial role in influencing consumer purchase intentions. Social media, as a platform for information dissemination, possesses characteristics of being extensive, rapid, and real-time (Weltevrede et al., 2014). Brands can use social media to swiftly reach a large user base with product information, promotional activities, and other content, effectively impacting consumers' awareness and understanding of the brand (Aji et al., 2020). Consumers generate substantial content on social media, including product reviews and sharing usage experiences. This user-generated content serves as social proof, significantly influencing other consumers' purchasing decisions. People tend to trust the authentic experiences and opinions of fellow consumers, and this social proof positively affects purchase intentions (Ceyhan, 2019). Social media platforms offer personalized and customized content presentation, recommending content based on user interests and behavior. The presentation of personalized content better captures users' attention, stimulating their desire to make purchases (Sanny et al., 2020).

Establishing a positive brand image and reputation on social media has a profound impact on purchase intentions. Consumers are more inclined to purchase products or services from brands with a good reputation and a positive brand image (Ansari et al., 2019). Social media platforms provide a direct channel for brand-consumer interaction. Brands actively engaging in user interaction, responding to

comments, and providing personalized services can enhance consumers' sense of identification and trust in the brand, thereby promoting the formation of purchase intentions (Sun & Wang, 2020). On social media, interactions and influences among users are significant. When an individual expresses liking for a particular brand or product on social media, it may influence the opinions and decisions of others within their social circle, indirectly affecting purchase intentions (Masuda et al., 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media marketing positively influences customer purchase intention.

2.2. Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement

Social media platforms have the capability to deliver brand information to target audiences accurately through targeted advertising based on user data. Targeted advertising can better meet users' interests and needs by providing content aligned with user preferences, thereby enhancing users' awareness and engagement with the brand (Pelletier et al., 2020). Social media provides a platform for direct interaction with users, allowing brands to adjust content based on user feedback and engagement, providing a personalized experience. This personalization and interactivity strengthen consumers' sense of engagement with the brand (Leong et al., 2021). Users share evaluations and usage experiences of brands on social media, creating social proof that influences other consumers. User-generated content and influence on social media affect brand engagement. Consumers gather information and participate in discussions on social media, gaining a better understanding of the brand and enhancing brand engagement (Moslehpour et al., 2021). Social media platforms offer a channel for brands to share values and brand philosophy with users (Almohaimmed, 2019). Through social media, brands can showcase user experiences, product features, etc. Content that aligns with the brand image helps boost consumers' sense of identification with the brand (Benitez et al., 2020). Social media marketing, by providing personalized, targeted content and interactive experiences, enhances the cognitive and emotional connection between consumers and the brand (Wibowo et al., 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: social media marketing positively influences customer engagement.

2.3. Social Media Marketing and Customer Trust

Roma and Aloini (2019) argue that user-generated content on social media, such as product reviews and usage

experiences, forms social proof that influences the purchasing decisions of other consumers. Consumers are more inclined to trust the genuine experiences of other consumers, and this social proof affects consumer trust in the brand (Manzoor et al., 2020). Social media provides a platform for direct interaction between brands and consumers. Brands actively engaging in user interaction, responding to comments, and providing personalized services can enhance consumers' sense of trust in the brand (Li et al., 2020). Social media platforms can deliver brand information to target audiences accurately through targeted advertising based on user data, providing content aligned with user preferences (Ebrahim, 2020). The presentation of personalized content enhances users' trust in the brand.

Transparent brand information and reliable service quality are crucial factors in building trust (Hanaysha, 2022). On social media, brands can enhance transparency and reliability by sharing genuine information and responding to user questions (Sanny et al., 2020). Brand reputation and social proof from other consumers directly impact consumer trust in the brand. Consumers are more willing to trust brands with a good reputation and recognition from other consumers. Consumer interaction and participation with the brand on social media create a form of social cognition, deepening consumer trust in the brand (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Social media marketing, through personalized, targeted content, user interaction, and social proof, enhances consumer trust in the brand (Kim & Kim, 2021). Consumers gathering information and participating in discussions on social media form a sense of trust in the brand, subsequently influencing their attitudes and purchase intentions towards the brand (Zhang & Li, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Social media marketing positively influences customer trust.

2.4. Customer Engagement and Purchase Intention

When consumers engagement a fit with a brand or product, they generate a positive sense of identification. Fit has a direct impact on consumer behavior and purchase intention (Ilhamalimy & Ali, 2021). The degree of fit between consumers and a brand or product is closely related to their identification and loyalty to the brand (Büyükdağ & Kitapci, 2021). Consumer purchase motivation is closely related to fit. When consumers perceive that a brand or product aligns with their needs, they believe that such a choice will better satisfy their individual needs and enhance their motivation to make a purchase. Consumer awareness of the brand is closely associated with purchase intention (Akram et al., 2021). When the brand image aligns well with consumer expectations, consumers are more willing to

purchase brand products (Agrawal & Mittal, 2022). User-generated content on social media serves as social proof, influencing the purchasing decisions of other consumers. Consumers are more inclined to trust the genuine experiences of other consumers, thereby enhancing their sense of fit with the brand (Bismo & Putra, 2019). Social media platforms, through targeted advertising based on user data, provide content that aligns with user preferences. The presentation of personalized content better meets user needs, enhancing their sense of fit with the brand. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Customer engagement positively influences purchase intention.

2.5. Customer Trust and Purchase Intention

Trust is one of the essential factors in consumer purchase decisions (Mahliza, 2020). When consumers trust a brand or product, they are more inclined to choose to make a purchase. Trust reduces the perceived purchase risks and uncertainties, thereby strengthening purchase intention (Manzoor et al., 2020). Trust is a key factor in fostering brand loyalty. When consumers have trust in a brand, they are more likely to engage in repeat purchases, establishing brand loyalty (Rahman et al., 2020). Brand transparency and the provision of reliable products or services form the foundation for building consumer trust (Yu et al., 2021). Consumer trust in brand transparency and reliability influences purchase decisions (Zhang & Wang, 2021). User-generated content on social media, such as product reviews and usage experiences, serves as social proof, influencing the level of trust other consumers have in a brand. Consumers are more inclined to trust the genuine experiences of other consumers, thereby enhancing their trust in the brand (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Customer trust positively influences purchase intention.

2.6. Mediating Role of Customer Engagement

Consumers develop emotional identification with a brand or product, believing that the brand aligns with their values, lifestyle, or needs (Yoong & Lian, 2019). This emotional identification is a crucial factor in the formation of fit, leading consumers to prefer brands that align with themselves (Danyang et al., 2020). Social media provides a platform for direct interaction between brands and consumers, influencing consumers' perception and attitudes through personalized content, user-generated content, and brand interactions (Shawky et al., 2020). Social media marketing activities can directly or indirectly influence

consumer purchase intention (Yu & Zheng, 2022). The brand information and influence disseminated through social media may directly impact consumers' purchase decisions (Poturak & Softic, 2019). Fit directly influences consumer identification with the brand and purchase intention (Prentice et al., 2019). When consumers perceive a fit with a brand, they are more likely to choose to purchase products or services from that brand. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Customer engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

2.7. Mediating Role of Customer Trust

When consumers trust a brand or product, they are more inclined to choose to purchase, as trust can reduce purchase risks and uncertainties, enhancing purchase intention (Ilhamalimy & Ali, 2021). Trust is a key factor in cultivating brand loyalty (Al-Adwan et al., 2020). When consumers have trust in a brand, they are more likely to engage in repeat purchases, establishing brand loyalty (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022). Given the potential for opportunistic behavior by online sellers, trust becomes particularly crucial in online transaction relationships (Treiblmaier & Sillaber, 2021). Paparoidamis et al. (2019) argue that trust is a psychological condition wherein one party, expecting to cooperate with another, is willing to believe in their behavior, sharing knowledge and information to create maximum value. Trust can reduce the social complexity consumers face in e-commerce, enhancing purchase intention. As trust provides the expectation of successful transactions, it is considered a catalyst in the relationship between consumers and merchants (Rita et al., 2019). Gefen and Straub (2003) also posit that trust can reduce the social complexity consumers face in e-commerce, boosting purchase intention.

Based on the above perspectives, this study considers trust as a psychological factor where both parties have confidence in each other, leading to commitments, increased communication frequency, and resource sharing. Therefore, this study regards trust as a crucial factor influencing purchase intention. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Customer trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

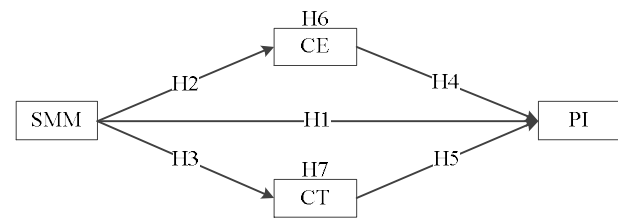
2.8. Research Model

Consumer behavior theories suggest that consumers, when deciding to make a purchase, are influenced by external factors (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Social media marketing, as an external stimulus, directly impacts

consumers' purchase intentions through forms such as advertisements and user reviews. This aligns with the behavior theory's perspective on the influence of external stimuli on behavior. Customer engagement and customer trust reflect cognitive and social factors in social cognitive theory. This theory posits that individuals learn through social interactions and observations, forming attitudes and behaviors based on interactions with others (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Thomas & Gupta, 2021; Govindaraju, 2021).

In the model presented in this paper, customer engagement and customer trust serve as mediating variables, illustrating how consumers' attitudes towards brands and social media are influenced by their cognitive and social interactions. The possibility model focuses on people's cognition and choices in the decision-making process (Chen et al., 2022; Bao & Wang, 2021; Shahab et al., 2021), potentially influencing consumers' preferences and decisions when perceiving social media marketing information, forming fit, and establishing trust.

In summary, this paper proposes a research framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Note: SMM (Social Media Marketing), CE (Customer Engagement), CT (Customer Trust), PI (Purchase Intention)

Figure 1: Research model

3. Methodology

3.1. Measures

3.1.1. Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing involves utilizing various social media platforms as marketing tools and channels to interact with the target audience, share content, build brand image, and promote products or services. To measure the impact of social media, we employed Gunelius (2011) 4-dimensional, 16-item scale, which uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a higher perceived level of social media marketing by consumers. The reliability of this scale is excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.863$).

3.1.2. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to consumers' tendency or intent to buy a particular product or service in the future. To

measure purchase intention, we used Kotler and Armstrong's (2010) 5-item scale, employing a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Higher scores indicate stronger purchase intention by consumers. The reliability of this scale is excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.815$).

3.1.3. Customer Engagement

When consumers engagement a fit with a brand or product, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes and a sense of identification, increasing the likelihood of loyalty and repeat purchases. To measure customer engagement, we utilized Shawky et al.'s (2020) 5-item scale, employing a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Higher scores indicate stronger customer engagement. The reliability of this scale is excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.884$).

3.1.4. Customer Trust

Customer trust is the connection consumers have with a brand in terms of trust or emotional relationships. It represents the relationship formed by consumers gathering various aspects to link with the brand. Consumers establish a specific connection with the brand through various dimensions. To measure customer trust, we employed Hidayat et al.'s (2021) 5-item scale, using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The reliability of this scale is excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.839$).

3.2. Study Population and Sampling Methodology

The data for this study were collected through an online survey questionnaire created using QuestionStar, with the questionnaire presented in the Chinese language.

To reach participants, both male and female consumers aged 18 and above, capable of purchasing and consuming products online, were selected for convenience. After a two-week data collection period, a total of 1107 valid questionnaires were received. Beijing's internet users account for 1.84% of the national total, Shanghai's share is 2.08%, Guangzhou's is 1.44%, and Shenzhen's is 1.47%. Calculating the proportions for these four first-tier cities, Beijing constitutes 26.94% of the total of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen; Shanghai comprises 30.45%; Guangzhou is 21.08%, and Shenzhen is 21.52%. In the sampled population, consumers from Beijing account for 26.38%, Shanghai 30.80%, Guangzhou 21.14%, and Shenzhen 21.68%, aligning with the actual distribution. The gender ratio is 40.65% male and 59.35% female. The top three age groups are 31-40 years (29.72%), 26-30 years (22.76%), and 18-25 years (17.43%), the 31-40 age group is

the largest, indicating that individuals in this age bracket are the most active among online shoppers, likely due to their relatively higher purchasing power and stable financial situation. In terms of education, participants with a bachelor's degree constitute 38.93%, while those with a college degree make up 24.93%. Regarding monthly income, the top three categories are 5001-7000 RMB (31.17%), 3001-5000 RMB (28.73%), and 7001-10000 RMB (15.72%). The most common reason for online shopping is time-saving, accounting for 29.00% of the total. The latest online purchases were made on platforms like Douyin/Kuaishou, representing 48.51%, followed by Xiaohongshu at 30.98%.

4. Results

4.1. Common-Method Bias

For social science surveys, particularly self-assessment scales, it is crucial to address the issue of common-method bias (CMB). To assess whether there is a significant CMB in the questionnaire, we employed Harman's single-factor test method to examine the presence of common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results indicate that, after conducting an unrotated principal component factor analysis, the sum of squared loadings for the first factor is 33.157%, which does not meet the 50% criterion. This suggests that the questionnaire does not suffer from a severe common-method bias issue. Additionally, we employed the common latent factor method following Belschak et al.'s (2006) approach. We introduced a common factor in the measurement model, connecting it to all observed indicators to capture common variance. We compared the standard regression weights between models with and without a common latent factor. The results show that the difference in regression weights between models with and without a common latent factor is less than 0.02. These findings indicate that CMB is not a significant concern in this study.

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In this section, we examined the validity and reliability of the measurement model through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The evaluation covered all constructs used in the study, demonstrating good fit indices: CMIN = 572.245, $df = 193$, $\chi^2/df = 2.965$; SRMR = 0.033, GFI = 0.955; AGFI = 0.931; PGFI = 0.615; NFI = 0.962; IFI = 0.969; CFI = 0.969; TLI = 0.956; RMSEA = 0.049. These results indicate a good fit between the assumed model and the dataset. All item loadings exceed 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019), demonstrating high reliability.

4.3. Correlation Analysis and Discriminant Validity

Two methods were employed to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs. First, the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) was used. Table 1 shows that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs is higher than the inter-construct correlation coefficients, indicating good discriminant validity. Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio criterion was utilized for further examination (Henseler et al., 2015). The results reveal that the highest correlation level is 0.61 (<0.85), suggesting satisfactory discriminant validity in this study (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 1: Correlations between Constructs

Variables	SMM	CE	CT	PI
SMM	0.774			
CE	0.592**	0.735		
CT	0.534**	0.574**	0.803	
PI	0.606**	0.452**	0.628**	0.761

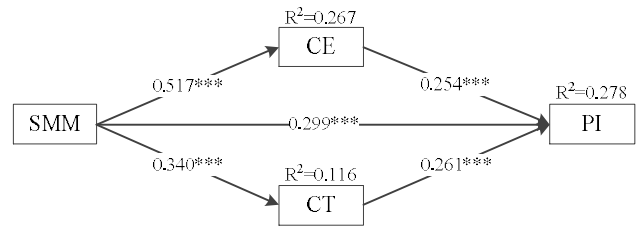
Note: ** $p < 0.01$; SMM (Social Media Marketing), CE (Customer Engagement), CT (Customer Trust), PI (Purchase Intention)

4.4. Assessment of Structural Model

Following the approach outlined by Hair et al. (2019), we evaluated the structural model using standard assessment criteria, including “coefficient of determination (R^2), as well as statistical significance and correlation of path coefficients.” As depicted in Figure 2, the R^2 values are as follows: Customer Engagement (26.7%), Customer Trust (11.6%), and Purchase Intention (27.8%).

The structural model primarily serves to test hypothesized relationships. This study employed a bootstrapping procedure to test the research model, obtaining path estimates to validate hypotheses. Social Media Marketing positively influences Purchase Intention, confirming H1 ($\beta = 0.299, p < 0.001$). Social Media Marketing positively influences Customer Engagement, validating H2 ($\beta = 0.517, p < 0.001$). Simultaneously, Social Media Marketing positively influences Customer Trust, confirming H3 ($\beta = 0.340, p < 0.001$). On the other hand, Customer Engagement positively influences Purchase Intention, confirming H4 ($\beta = 0.254, p < 0.001$). Customer Trust positively influences Purchase Intention, validating H5 ($\beta = 0.261, p < 0.001$).

Furthermore, employing bootstrap tests for mediation effects with 5000 samples, the results indicate that Social Media Marketing \rightarrow Customer Engagement \rightarrow Purchase Intention has a mediating effect, confirming H6 ($\beta = 0.133, p < 0.01$). Social Media Marketing \rightarrow Customer Trust \rightarrow Purchase Intention also exhibits a mediating effect, supporting H7 ($\beta = 0.089, p < 0.05$).



Note: SMM (Social Media Marketing), CE (Customer Engagement), CT (Customer Trust), PI (Purchase Intention)

Figure 2: Results of Structural Model

5. Discussion

In this study, we delved into the impact of social media marketing on customer purchase intention and examined the mediating roles of customer engagement and trust. Through the analysis of questionnaire data, we derived a series of key research findings that contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media marketing and consumer behavior.

Social media marketing has been demonstrated to play a crucial role in positively influencing customer purchase intention. The research results indicate that social media, as an information dissemination platform characterized by its wide reach, speed, and real-time features (Weltevrede et al., 2014), can rapidly convey product information, promotional activities, and other content, thereby influencing consumers' awareness and understanding of the brand (Aji et al., 2020). User-generated content on social media serves as social evidence, positively influencing other consumers' purchasing decisions (Ceyhan, 2019; Sanny et al., 2020). This finding emphasizes the importance for businesses to fully leverage social media platforms in formulating marketing strategies to enhance brand influence on the target audience and, consequently, increase purchase intention.

Social media marketing has a positive impact on customer engagement and trust. Social media platforms provide opportunities for direct interaction with users (Roma & Aloini, 2019), allowing brands to enhance consumers' sense of identification (Pelletier et al., 2020) and trust (Hanaysha, 2022) through activities such as responding to comments and providing personalized services. Personalized and targeted content presentation also attracts users' attention, stimulating their desire to make purchases (Zhang & Li, 2019). These results offer substantive guidance for businesses, emphasizing the importance of user interaction, personalized services, and the establishment of a transparent and trustworthy brand image in social media marketing.

The research findings indicate that social media marketing enhances customer engagement by providing a platform for interaction and participation with the brand. This increased engagement, in turn, promotes a stronger purchase intention among consumers. The positive relationship between social media marketing and customer engagement suggests that engagement serves as a critical pathway through which the efforts of social media marketing can be translated into higher purchase intentions (Agrawal & Mittal, 2022). Similarly, the mediating role of customer trust is evident in the study's findings. Social media marketing activities establish consumer trust by providing reliable information, engaging content, and interactive experiences. This trust cultivates a sense of security and reliability in the brand, leading to higher purchase intentions (Zhang & Wang, 2021). The study supports the hypothesis that customer trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, indicating that trust is a pivotal factor in converting marketing efforts into actual purchasing behavior. The mediating effects of customer engagement and customer trust emphasize the importance of not only focusing on direct marketing efforts but also building and nurturing relationships with consumers through social media platforms. By engaging customers and earning their trust, brands can enhance the effectiveness of their social media marketing strategies, leading to higher purchase intentions. This underscores the need for businesses to adopt a holistic approach to social media marketing, encompassing direct promotional activities as well as strategies aimed at engaging customers and building trust.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides substantial insights into the impact of social media marketing on customer purchase intention and the underlying mediating mechanisms, offering valuable guidance for businesses to formulate effective social media marketing strategies. The widespread use of social media has transformed it into a platform for direct interaction between brands and consumers, fostering brand awareness and consumer engagement through personalized and targeted content presentation. User-generated content serves as social evidence, influencing purchase decisions. Establishing a positive brand image and reputation in social media marketing has a significant impact on purchase intention. Additionally, customer engagement and trust have been proven to play mediating roles in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, emphasizing the importance of deep interaction and trust in purchase decisions.

For businesses, a focus on direct interaction with users in social media marketing, responding to comments, and providing personalized services is crucial to enhancing user engagement and building trust. Simultaneously, conveying authentic and transparent brand information to establish a positive brand image influences consumer perception and trust, contributing to increased purchase intention. This encourages users to prefer brands or products with a good reputation and high alignment with their needs.

However, it's essential to note the continuous changes in the social media environment and the diversity of consumer behavior, requiring businesses to maintain sensitivity and adaptability. Future research can further explore differences in social media marketing across industries and consumer segments to develop more precise marketing strategies. Additionally, with the emergence of new social media platforms and technologies, research can focus on understanding the similarities and differences between various platforms to better grasp the mechanisms through which social media influences purchase intention.

Social media marketing has become an integral part of contemporary marketing, and for businesses, a deep understanding of the interactive mechanisms between social media and customers, uncovering its latent value, will contribute to enhancing brand influence and market competitiveness. By continuously optimizing social media marketing strategies, businesses can better meet consumer needs and achieve sustainable development.

This study, focusing on Chinese consumers, may not fully apply to other cultural and economic contexts, highlighting the need for research across diverse populations. Its cross-sectional design captures consumer behavior at a single point, suggesting longitudinal studies for dynamic insights into social media marketing's effects. The research doesn't differentiate between social media platforms, which vary in user behavior and marketing effectiveness, calling for future studies on platform-specific impacts.

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