

THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL MARKETING: TRANSFORMING CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIGITAL NATIVES

A EVOLUÇÃO DAS MÍDIAS SOCIAIS E DO MARKETING DIGITAL: TRANSFORMANDO AS RELAÇÕES ENTRE CONSUMIDORES E MARCAS ENTRE OS NATIVOS DIGITAIS

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

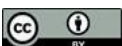
Abstract

Social media has revolutionized consumer behavior, particularly among digital natives, who are deeply integrated into digital ecosystems. This study explores the evolution of social media from its origins in Usenet to modern platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, emphasizing its role in shaping consumer interactions and purchase intentions. User-generated content (UGC) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) have emerged as critical tools for self-expression, community-building, and influencing consumer decisions. For digital natives, trust, authenticity, and seamless online experiences are pivotal in guiding purchasing behavior. The research highlights the growing influence of social media marketing, particularly in regions like Pakistan, where digital platforms drive dining and e-commerce decisions. It also examines the interplay between B2C and B2B social media strategies, emphasizing the importance of transparency and ethical marketing in fostering trust and loyalty. As businesses navigate the digital landscape, leveraging relationship marketing and adapting to the preferences of tech-savvy consumers are essential for brand visibility and long-term engagement.

Keywords: Social Media. Digital Natives. User-Generated Content (UGC). Electronic Word-of-

Resumo

As mídias sociais revolucionaram o comportamento do consumidor, especialmente entre os nativos digitais, que estão profundamente integrados aos ecossistemas digitais. Este estudo explora a evolução das mídias sociais desde suas origens na Usenet até plataformas modernas como Facebook, Instagram e TikTok, enfatizando seu papel na formação das interações dos consumidores e nas intenções de compra. O conteúdo gerado pelo usuário (UGC) e o boca a boca eletrônico (eWOM) surgiram como ferramentas essenciais para a autoexpressão, a construção de comunidades e a influência nas decisões dos consumidores. Para os nativos digitais, a confiança, a autenticidade e as experiências online perfeitas são fundamentais para orientar o comportamento de compra. A pesquisa destaca a crescente influência do marketing de mídia social, particularmente em regiões como o Paquistão, onde as plataformas digitais impulsionam as decisões relacionadas a restaurantes e comércio eletrônico. Ela também examina a interação entre as estratégias de mídia social B2C e B2B, enfatizando a importância da transparência e do marketing ético na promoção da confiança e da lealdade. À medida que as empresas navegam pelo cenário digital, aproveitar o marketing de relacionamento e se adaptar às preferências dos



Mouth (EWOM). Consumer Behavior. Purchase Intentions. Brand Loyalty. Relationship Marketing. Digital Marketing. E-Commerce.

consumidores experientes em tecnologia é essencial para a visibilidade da marca e o engajamento de longo prazo.

Palavras-chave: *Mídias Sociais. Nativos Digitais. Conteúdo Gerado pelo Usuário (UGC). Propaganda Boca a Boca Eletrônica (EWOM). Comportamento do Consumidor. Intenções de Compra. Lealdade à Marca. Marketing de Relacionamento. Marketing Digital. Comércio Eletrônico.*

1 CHAPTER NO 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Social media has become a vital element in digital communication, shaping individual and organizational behavior. Despite definitional challenges, platforms like Facebook and Instagram are central for digital natives—individuals born into the digital era—who interact uniquely with technology (Prensky, 2001).

Social media's evolution from Usenet in 1979 to today's Web 2.0 platforms has enabled widespread User-Generated Content (UGC), empowering digital natives to express themselves and build communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2021). A major influence on their behavior is **Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)**, which guides purchase decisions through peer reviews and online content, valued for authenticity and trust (Cheung *et al.*, 2020).

In regions like Pakistan, rising food service spending is driven by urbanization and fast-paced lifestyles. Digital natives rely heavily on mobile platforms and online reviews when choosing where to dine (Euromonitor, 2022). Businesses are adapting by leveraging digital strategies—such as dynamic pricing and personalized service—to meet their expectations (Yang *et al.*, 2022).

Social media also enables two-way engagement between brands and consumers, making eWOM a powerful tool in shaping consumer decisions (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This peer-influenced behavior is particularly relevant for high-involvement purchases, where emotional investment plays a role (Morwitz *et al.*, 2023).

Digital marketing now emphasizes relationship-building over traditional advertising. Brands that prioritize ethical marketing, transparency, and UGC see stronger

loyalty from digital natives (Sweeney *et al.*, 2023). Though B2C use of social media is well-researched, B2B applications remain underexplored, despite their potential in trust-building and innovation (Ngai *et al.*, 2023).

Ultimately, social media's transformation from early digital forums to today's dynamic platforms reflects its integral role in shaping brand perceptions and purchase intentions. Businesses must continue adapting to meet the expectations of digital-native consumers who value authenticity, engagement, and technological fluency (Sajid *et al.*, 2025)

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are centered on understanding the influence of digital marketing dynamics in the Pakistani context. Firstly, the research aims to examine the effectiveness of social media brand-building strategies employed by businesses in Pakistan. Secondly, it seeks to analyze the effect of social electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intentions within the country. Additionally, the study explores the impact of value co-creation—where consumers actively participate in shaping brand experiences—on their purchase intentions. Lastly, it investigates how brand attitude influences consumer decisions, providing insights into the psychological factors that drive purchasing behavior in the digital age.

2 CHAPTER NO 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social media

Social media has transformed marketing, reducing reliance on traditional media like TV (Palmer & Lewis, 2017). Companies now focus on digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to engage informed, connected consumers (Ernst *et al.*, 2011; Chaffey *et al.*, 2022). These platforms offer speed, cost-efficiency, global reach, and valuable consumer insights (Gay *et al.*, 2007). Despite challenges like cultural differences and authenticity issues (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), social media fosters trust and long-term customer relationships, especially in B2B settings (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Bendixen *et al.*, 2004; Glynn, 2012). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) further

strengthens brand perception and loyalty (Henning-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Xiaobo, 2014).

2.2 The Role of EWOM and its advantages

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is seen as more credible than traditional advertising due to its authenticity and consumer-driven nature (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Keller, 2007). As consumers face information overload, they increasingly trust peer recommendations over firm-generated content (Podnar & Javernik, 2012; Smith, 2004). Electronic WOM (eWOM), while lacking face-to-face social cues, allows for broader, faster information sharing. Its anonymity encourages more honest feedback (Meuter *et al.*, 2013; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). As a result, eWOM plays a crucial role in shaping consumer trust, engagement, and purchase behavior (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

2.3 Relationship Between WOM and purchase intention

Word-of-mouth (WOM) significantly influences consumer behavior and purchase intentions, especially in digital marketing and online retail (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Positive WOM enhances brand image and encourages purchases, particularly when consumers have access to detailed product information (Lee *et al.*, 2014). Customer reviews also shape perceptions of quality and desirability, affecting purchasing decisions across product categories (Lee & Lee, 2009).

Most research has focused on high-involvement, durable goods like luxury items or services such as wedding photography—products that involve emotional investment and long-term value (Kotler & Keller, 2016). For these, WOM reduces uncertainty and strengthens the link between intent and actual purchase (Morwitz *et al.*, 2007). Given the personal nature of wedding photography, WOM serves as a key trust-building tool, making it essential for marketers in this space to understand and leverage it effectively.

2.4 Social EWOM

Social electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), shared via platforms like Facebook and Instagram, has become a major force in digital marketing. Unlike traditional review

sites, social media enables real-time, personalized sharing of product opinions within trusted networks, influencing consumer decisions (Chu & Kim, 2018; Thomas *et al.*, 2021). Branded social pages increase loyalty and encourage positive eWOM, though challenges like negative trolling require active management (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Zhao *et al.*, 2022).

eWOM differs from traditional WOM by being scalable, permanent, and more impactful due to its wide reach and the perceived credibility of detailed, balanced reviews (Hu & Wu, 2019). Internally, it shapes consumer interactions and trust; externally, it involves the platforms and roles through which messages spread (Chen & Huang, 2019).

eWOM also enhances brand advocacy, with consumers trusting recommendations from those with similar values—reducing uncertainty and boosting purchase confidence (Keller, 2020; Matos & Rossi, 2018). To fully benefit, marketers must understand eWOM's complexities and manage it strategically as a vital part of digital engagement.

2.5 Online word of mouth

Online word-of-mouth (eWOM), like traditional WOM, relies on interpersonal communication but is enhanced by digital platforms, allowing wider and faster message dissemination (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Goldenberg *et al.*, 2001). Using tools like smartphones and social media, consumers can share product opinions globally, making eWOM a powerful marketing tool (Pitta & Fowler, 2005; Mason, 2008).

Unlike offline WOM, eWOM benefits from broader reach, permanence, and asynchronous exchange (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Though personal networks remain most trusted (Eccleston & Griseri, 2008), consumer reviews online are seen as credible due to their perceived lack of bias (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

However, the anonymous nature of eWOM raises concerns about trust. Brands must actively build credibility through authenticity and transparent engagement to maintain effective eWOM strategies (Kiecker & Cowles, 2001).

2.6 Impact of eWOM on purchase intentions

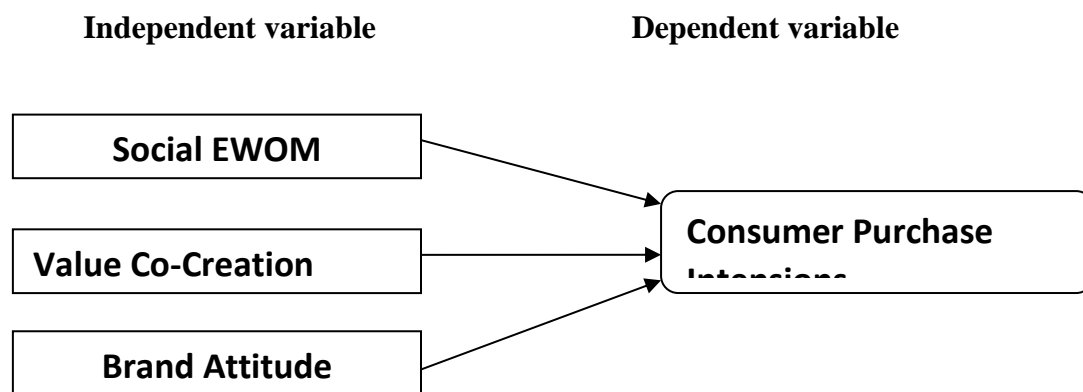
The effectiveness of eWOM largely depends on the volume and valence of online reviews and comments. Positive eWOM often correlates with increased purchase

intentions, as customers tend to trust peer recommendations over traditional advertising (Filieri *et al.*, 2018). Conversely, negative eWOM, often expressed through dissatisfaction or anger, can deter potential buyers (Park & Nicolau, 2015). Loyal customers, however, are less likely to be swayed by negative eWOM due to their established trust and repurchase intentions, which buffer the impact of unfavorable comments (Han & Hyun, 2015).

2.7 Theoretical frame work

Figure 1

Theoretical Frame Work



Hypothesis

H1: Social EWOM has a significant positive impact on consumer purchase Intentions.

H2: Value Co-Creation has a significant positive impact on consumer purchase Intentions.

H3: Brand attitude has a significant positive impact on consumer purchase Intentions.

3 CHAPTER NO 03 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research approach, utilizing a structured questionnaire to gather data. The population targeted comprised digital native customers of high-end restaurants in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. A sample size of 190 respondents was selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique chosen

to specifically include restaurant customers. Questionnaires were distributed in person to both male and female participants. The primary research instrument was a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The validity and reliability of the scale were confirmed through Cronbach’s alpha, which exceeded the acceptable threshold. Data collection was cross-sectional, conducted over a four-week period. For data analysis, regression analysis was employed to examine the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable, while correlation analysis was used to assess the relationships among these variables.

4 CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability analysis

Table 1

Reliability Analysis

Reliability Statistics of Electronic Social WOM	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.726	5

A fundamental estimation of the survey is shown by the endurance table. The figure exhibits that the data is trustworthy and the results can be relied on.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics of Value Co-Creation

Reliability Statistics of Value Co-Creation	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.674	5

A fundamental estimation of the survey is shown by the endurance table. The figure exhibits that the data is trustworthy and the results can be relied on.

Table 3*Reliability Statistics of Brand Attitude*

Reliability Statistics of Brand Attitude	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.687	4

A fundamental estimation of the survey is shown by the endurance table. The figure 0.687 exhibits that the data is trustworthy and the results can be relied on.

Table 4*Reliability Statistics of Purchase Intentions*

Reliability Statistics of Purchase Intentions	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.749	3

The reliability of the survey is confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.749, indicating that the data is trustworthy and the instrument used is both reliable and valid, as it exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.6.

Table 5*Frequency Distribution*

age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-30	29	17.1	17.1	17.1
	31-40	76	44.7	44.7	61.8
	41-70	65	38.2	38.2	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

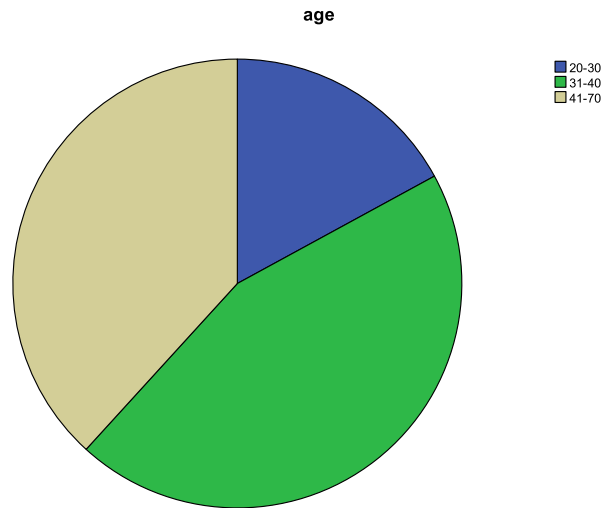
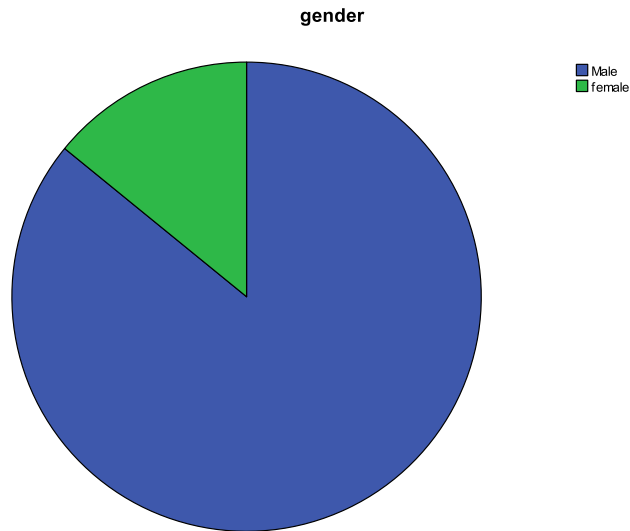
Figure 2*Age***Interpretation:**

Table 4.2.1 and the accompanying pie chart show the age distribution of 170 respondents: 65 are aged 41–70, 76 fall within 31–40, and 29 are aged 20–30. The majority belong to the 31–40 age group.

Table 6*Gender*

		gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	146	85.9	85.9	85.9
	female	24	14.1	14.1	100.0
Total		170	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3
Gender



Interpretation:

Out of 170 respondents, 24 were female and 146 were male, making up 85.9% of the sample, indicating higher male participation.

4.3 Correlations

Table 7

Correlations

Correlations

		PSOCIALEWOMMEAN	VALUECOCREATIONMEAN	BRANDATTITUDEMEAN	PURCHASEINTENSIONSMEAN
SOCIALEWOMMEAN	Pearson Correlation	1	.495**	.717**	.774**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	170	170	170	170
VALUECOCREATIONMEAN	Pearson Correlation	.495**	1	.647**	.737**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	170	170	170	170
BRANDATTITUDEMEAN	Pearson Correlation	.717**	.647**	1	.755**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	170	170	170	170
PURCHASEINTENSIONSMEAN	Pearson Correlation	.774**	.737**	.755**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	170	170	170	170

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis shows significant positive relationships ($p < 0.01$) between the independent and dependent variables, with correlations of 0.774**, 0.737**, and 0.755**. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypotheses (H1, H2, & H3).

4.4 Regression Analysis

Table 8

Model Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.881 ^a	.776	.772		.47525

a. Predictors: (Constant), BRANDATTITUDEMEAN, VALUECOCREATIONMEAN, SOCIALEWOMMEAN

The R-squared value indicates that 77% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables. It reflects the relationship between the dependent and independent factors after accounting for errors.

Table 9

ANOVA

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	129.827	3	43.276	191.605	.000 ^a
	Rresidual	37.493	166	.226		
	Total	167.320	169			

a. Predictors: (Constant), BRANDATTITUDEMEAN, VAUECOCREATIONMEAN, SOCIALEWOMMEAN

b. Dependent Variable: PURCHASEINTENSIONSMEAN

The ANOVA table underneath indications towards good fit for the model. The places of the independent and dependent factors are appropriate as shown by the p figure .000.

Table 9

Coefficients

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.148	.137		-1.076	.283
	SOCIALEWOMMEAN	.382	.044	.453	8.592	.000
	VALUECOCREATIONMEAN	.423	.051	.404	8.365	.000
	BRANDATTITUDEMEAN	.201	.071	.169	2.806	.006

a. Dependent Variable: PURCHASEINTENSIONSMEAN

The Beta coefficients show that all three independent variables—Social eWOM (B = 0.453, p = .000), Value Co-Creation (B = 0.404, p = .004), and Brand Attitude (B = 0.169, p = .006)—positively influence Purchase Intentions. These results support the acceptance of alternative hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.

5 CHAPTER NO 05 - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for engaging consumers and shaping their purchasing behavior, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter provide brands with interactive spaces to share content, connect with audiences, and encourage consumer participation. Key factors like peer influence, social media posts, and user-generated content significantly impact how consumers perceive brands and make purchase decisions. Managing these digital relationships, however, requires considerable resources and dedicated marketing teams.

This study examines the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions in Pakistan—a country experiencing rapid growth in social media usage. It highlights how platforms like Facebook are increasingly used to engage consumers in the region. The findings show that social electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), value co-creation, and positive brand attitudes all have a strong, positive influence on consumer purchase intentions in the restaurant sector. These insights emphasize the strategic importance of leveraging social media marketing to enhance consumer engagement and drive purchasing behavior.

5.2 Recommendations

Given the evolving behavior of today's informed and critical consumers, restaurants must adapt by adopting dynamic, customer-centric marketing strategies. Social media should be leveraged to engage directly with customers, foster relationships, and build a strong brand image. Encouraging electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through positive reviews and customer testimonials can significantly influence potential diners. Collaborating with trusted influencers can further enhance credibility and drive customer conversions. Additionally, monitoring and responding to online feedback in a timely, professional manner helps build trust and loyalty. Restaurants should also identify and maintain a database of key customer influencers who can amplify brand messaging across their networks. These strategies collectively support customer retention, brand growth, and competitive advantage in the digital age.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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