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**Discovering the Mediating Role of Electronic-Word of Mouth between Consumers' Attitude and Purchase behaviors**

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**Keywords:**

Purchase behavior, Electronic Word of Mouth, Consumers' attitude towards social media advertisement, Corporate reputation, Incentive offering, perceived entertainment, Perceived intrusiveness

***ABSTRACT***

This study empirically investigates the antecedents of the consumers' attitude towards social media advertising and the subsequent mediating role of intention to engage in electronic-word of mouth (eWOM) between consumers' attitude towards social media advertising and purchase behavior. A total sample of 320 respondents were selected to investigate the relationship through a structured questionnaire. The antecedents of the consumers' attitude towards social media advertising involved in the study were corporate reputation, perceived entertainment, incentive offering and perceived intrusiveness. The former three reflected a significant and positive impact on the consumers' attitudes while perceived intrusiveness has established a negative effect. The mediator e-WOM behavior was also found to be significantly and positively mediating the relationship between consumers' attitude and purchase behavior. It can be deduced that organizations that rely on social media advertising may make use of the critical antecedents that shape the individual consumer's attitude and result in enhancing the purchase behavior of the consumers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's cut-throat market competition and changing business dynamics require companies to direct their efforts towards identifying and reaching potential customers. In order to generate ample awareness about their products while staying ahead of rivals in bagging profits and developing a competitive advantage (Rousta&Bahrami, 2021). In doing so, companies build on their advertising endeavors. Irrespective of the size of the organization, advertising and promotional strategies have become the ultimate determinant of market standing owing to the role they play in marketing products and services. As companies become dependent on advertising for selling their offerings, consumers too are seen to be highly reliant on advertising and various other types of promotion for insights through electronic media about brands and resulting in purchasing from them (Belch, Belch & Purani, 2013). Given the hype and popularity of social media, businesses are identifying them as potential sources to attract and influence customers. They are turning their direct marketing strategies to fit social media algorithms in an attempt to gauge the attitudes of potential customers and invoke purchase intentions in them (Micu, Micu, Geru&Lixandriou, 2017). Till now, both, industry and academia showed an increased inclination towards the exploration of various aspects of social media advertising and its role in influencing purchase decisions of customers.

Marketing strategies are evolving rapidly with the growing popularity of internet and dependency on social media worldwide (Quesenberry, 2020). Brand related conversations are now being conducted over social media platforms and networking sites rather than traditional communication channels and brand related advertisements are turning towards these platforms for widespread information dissemination (Reynolds-McIlroy&Taran, 2010). In light of these new marketing avenues being opened, opportunities for both companies as well as their target market are coming to life (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009). While the west was rendered as the early adopter of social media, and its potential to market products in a much effective way owing to availability and endorsement of internet, countries like Pakistan too are catching up. The intensified penetration of internet has created a global scenario in which even countries like Pakistan are forming business relationships over the web and particularly over social media platforms. Despite the high level of involvement of Asian consumers in online purchase behavior, there is scarcity of studies regarding consumers' perception towards social media advertising, while many have demonstrated the attitudes of consumers towards social media advertising (Gensler et al., 2013; Kumar, Bahaskaran, Mirchandani& Shah, 2013; Lukka& James, 2014; Tham, Croy&Mair, 2013).

However, the focus of these studies being on young adults and teenagers in countries having developed economies, fast internet speeds, high information technology, good infrastructure, different demographic variables and internet usage characteristics of consumers with different cultural backgrounds, render them ungeneralizable. This is because the findings of these investigations may vary with regards to preferences of consumers for social media advertising as compared to consumer of underdevelopment countries like Pakistan. This is because Pakistani adaptability to technology, demographic variables, internet and social media usage characteristics of Pakistanis are evidently different from the developed countries of the West (Sangi, Liu & Sarmad, 2017). Thus, explorations of factors that can lead to the formation of favorable or unfavorable attitudes of consumers towards social media advertising are critical in the Pakistani context. It is additionally important to investigate the impact of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on purchase behaviors in Pakistan to be able to acquire comprehensive insights into the phenomenon, holding favorable implications for

local and international businesses (Amjad, Javed&Jaskani, 2015). Such studies are required to highlight favorable attitudes towards advertisements on social media to gauge consumer behavior in order to instigate responses in favor of the brand and its products.

Companies can also utilize social media to gain feedback about marketed products and services with an aim to better them using the electronic word of mouth (eWOM) activities that occur over social media. Electronic word of mouth is the exchange of information, opinions and feedback related to a brand or service with friends and relatives, having the potential to affect the purchase behaviors of target market (Rosario et al., 2020). Bringing together all the variables involved in the influence on purchase behavior of consumers via social media, this study humbly endeavors to explore the aspects in a Pakistani environment, in an attempt to help stakeholders, channelize efforts and maximize sales. Literature suggests that attitudes of consumers towards the new ways of social media advertising are greatly impacted by a number of significant factors. The factors have been studied individually many times, studies integrating all findings to provide a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon are lacking (Hamouda, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for identification of the factors which are antecedents to the formation of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising keeping in view all factors, to provide companies interested in using social media as a marketing channel to properly utilize it.

Previous researches have highlighted that consequences of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising are that they affect and invoke intentions the purchase behaviors of consumers. They contend that consumers with favorable attitude towards social media advertising proactively exhibit favorable reaction and vice versa helping spread a positive word across communities (Wolin, Korgaonkar& Laud 2002). This can help brands build on eWOM and influence potential consumer purchase behaviors to bag sales and profits (Bruner & Kumar, 2000; MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986). Understanding the issues those results in the formation of consumers' attitude (Lee & Chow, 2020) towards social media advertising (Jacobson, Gruzd& Hernández-García, 2020) and further determining its effect on their purchase behaviors has been seen to be an area of concern that needs to be analyzed. The lack of in-depth studies on this subject, especially in the Pakistani context calls for comprehensive efforts to explain this phenomenon in detail. Keeping this into consideration, this research endeavors to examine the impact of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on their purchase behavior via the intention to engage in eWOM. In this study eWOM is incorporated in the model as mediator to test the intention construct of TBP in the context of electronic marketing strategies. Where, products are rated, reviewed, experienced and recommended by the customers openly. Customer intention to spread their word regarding a particular product becomes a norm in this context and eWOM serves as a connecting element to translate antecedents of behavior to actual behavior.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Media Advertising**

Advertisements refer to paid non-personal communication in favor of a business, its products or services. This can be done by an identified sponsor irrespective of the size of the business (Michael, 1982). Armstrong and Kotler (2007), define the process as any paid form of presentation of ideas, goods and services by a certain sponsor. The process itself holds a significant position in business endeavors owing to the fact that they are the primary source of influence on consumers' purchase behaviors. They are said to be a way to invoke positive feelings towards a brand and its offerings leading to development of consumers' sense of product characterization. This is known to have a persuasive impact on attitudes towards the products (Jacobson et al., 2020).

Communication assumes a pivotal role in human lives. Since times immemorial, even before the conception of a manmade language, people communicated to fulfill their needs. They used bird first and human messengers later to get their messages across despite the time it took, implying the critical need to communicate (Tayebi, Manesh, Khalili&Sadi-Nezhad, 2019). With the invention of telephones, pagers, and mobiles, revolutionary milestones were achieved. Today, even those prominent communication channels have been defeated by the globally efficient internet. Internet is the new medium that facilitates two-way communication. It provides the facility to participants to communicate directly with each other regardless of physical face-to-face or time bound interactions between them (Scannell, 2020). Among the various advertising strategies, nowadays advertisements on internet or online advertisements have gained popularity in the market because of various advantages they offer like; online advertisements have made it possible for a company to approach a number of people in less time. Without a doubt, internet is a much affordable channel of communication which smart businesses can utilize for attaining the competitive advantage (Shaltoni, 2017).

Given the popularity of internet and social media platforms formed over it, an equivalent, rather advantageous playing field can be gauged by businesses and through advertisements, these fields can be conquered (Gupta, Jung &Yoo, 2020). While internet can be used as a tool by businesses to disseminate favorable information and awareness regarding the brand and its products, consumers too can indulge in providing feedback, which by virtue of their nature can be a great way for companies to improve their offerings, segment the market and utilize target audience demands as basis for new offerings to maximize and direct sales (Berthona et al., 1996). Consequently, businesses are now devouring the potential of internet and social media to improve communications with customers regarding products and services. Businesses are endeavoring to better understand their customer needs and build on loyal clientele using the global online community.

Social media has emerged as a vital advertisement channel for companies recently. Reason being, the global impact of social media is highly favorable for business value chain and selling activities. Replacing traditional methods of advertisement, social media has now taken over as one of the most influential, and sought after marketing strategy focus amidst the primary discretionary element of the promotional mix (Hanna et al, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) developed a classification method for social media comprising of five categories namely: content communities, blogs, virtual worlds, collaborative projects and social networking sites. Chan and Guillet (2011) further elaborated on the idea and came up with six types of channels: virtual worlds, collaborative projects, micro-blogs and blogs, content community sites, social networking sites, and sites dedicated to feedback. The two terms; social networking sites and social media are often used interchangeably although, social media is a wider term as it comprises of the settings in which social networking occurs. Social media has changed the manner in which information is gathered by consumers, the way they communicate with each other and make purchase decisions. Hence, social media is not only limited to social network sites but also include various other platforms. Aichner and Jacob (2015), classified social media as business networks, blogs, social gaming, social bookmarking, microblogs, enterprise social networks, collaborative projects, forums, photo and video sharing, virtual worlds, products and services review and social networks.

### **Consumers' Attitude towards Social Media Advertising and Purchase behaviors**

Various studies have demonstrated an association between attitude of consumers, their intentions and purchase behavior. Behavioral intentions have been referred to as the readiness of an individual to carry out a specific behavior (Fishbein&Ajzen, 1975). Nevarez and Torres (2015) emphasized that consumers' attitude towards social media advertising are affected by certain factors which additionally influence behavior. Not only is participation enforced by these factors, but also the inclination towards

accessing brand websites to explore products/services and buy them. This decision to purchase or purchase behavior implies the readiness and action of the customers to buy products or services online (Bamini, Balakrishnan, Danhil& Yi, 2014). According to Grewal et al. (1998) it can be the probability in the hands of the customers who intend to purchase a specific product. This behavior is driven by a number of factors influencing consumers' attitudes towards advertising (Mitchell & Olson, 1981).

### **Corporate Reputation**

Corporate reputation is referred to as the repute firms attain by perception and the assessment of others as suggested by Fombrun (1996). A critical role is played by brand credibility in development of a brand's image which leads to attracting potential consumers and influencing their purchase intent. Smith and Quelch (1996) asserted further that this credibility helps companies in getting their message across for the sales of their products given that the advertisement they make and the conveyor channel they choose is credible too. Smith and Quelch (1996), asserted that credibility and success of an advertisement is highly dependent the company's reputation and representative channel chosen for the advertisement. This is because consumers' trust on the web-store depends upon their outlook towards reputation and size of the company as suggested by Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky& Vitale, 2000). Various studies supported that reputation of a company which is displaying the advertisements on social media plays important role in building the favorable attitude of consumers towards them (Berens & Yan Riel, 2004; Boateng&Okoe, 2015; Sallam, 2011; Sandu&Ianole, 2016; Singh & Singh, 2015; Winters, 1986; Yoon, Guffey&Kijewski,1993).

### **Incentive Offering**

Previous investigations have also explicated the positive relationship between incentive offering and user's attitude towards the acceptance of online technology (Amjad et al., 2015; Mir, 2012; Nevarez &Torres, 2015; Vanauken, 2014; Wang & Sun, 2010; Yilmaz &Enginkaya, 2015). The studies contend that incentives can help in creating favorable attitudes towards the acceptance and use of online innovation (Suk, 2007). Smart businesses are changing their course of action and switching from traditional methods to indulging in referral incentives program over social media (Lobel, Sadler&Varshney,2015). This is a direct effort to utilize the social media popularity as a tool for quick and widespread advertisement of deals and offerings in a way to significantly influence the attitude of consumers in minimum time with maximum impact.

### **Perceived Entertainment**

Exploring the various aspects of audience's need for emotional enjoyment, diversion and escapism, McQuail (1983) suggests that entertainment can be a useful tool in fulfilling them. According to Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992), an effective source of entertainment in this regard, can be positive hedonic messages or pleasurable advertisement which is readily accepted by consumers. Schlosser et al. (1999), offers similar findings, contending that feelings of entertainment related with advertisements play a significant role in bookkeeping for individuals' overall behavior towards them. Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999), further elaborated with findings that customers' feeling of enjoyment associated with advertisements performs a prominent role in assessing their attitudes towards the ads.

Janusz (2009), additionally highlighted that highly successful results are reaped by advertisements that include an element of entertainment. This is because internet is itself a platform used for several reasons, entertainment being one of them (Amjad et al., 2015; Bauer & Greyser, 1968). These advertisements therefore provide a way to build on clientele as they attract internet users focusing on entertainment in their free time. These findings concurrent with other studies imply that one of the most influential factor in turning customer intentions and attitudes towards positivity with regards to products and services is entertainment (Ducoffe, 1996; Gao & Koufaris, 2006; Singh & Singh, 2015; Waheed, Anjum, Rehman, & Khwaja, 2017; Wang & Sun, 2010; Wolin et al., 2002; Yilmaz & Enginkaya, 2015). Thus advertisement that is entertaining as well as credible can significantly improve consumer base due to the fact that such advertisement appeals to consumers primarily due to an emotional connect. Feelings of consumers when strategically touched, help entertaining advertising grab consumers' attention effectively. Thus, Social media advertisements with engaging content, entertaining, pleasurable and enjoyable elements deliver a positive effect on consumers' attitude, great for businesses to devour on.

### **Perceived Intrusiveness**

Li et al. (2002), defined intrusiveness as, a psychological reaction to ads that interfere with consumers' ongoing cognitive process. Bond, Ferraro, Luxton & Sands (2010) advertisements exhibited on social media generate an unfavorable impact on consumers when they intervene with their online work. Similarly, various studies highlighted that online and social media ads intrusiveness has negatively influenced the consumers' attitude towards these ads (Amjad et al., 2015; Ducoffe, 1996; Edwards et al., 2013; Gao & Koufaris, 2006; Jung, Shim, Jin & Khang, 2016; Kim, Kang, Choi & Sung, 2016; Li et al., 2002; Mahmoud, 2013; Nevarez & Torres, 2015). The intrusiveness of social media advertisements may lead to irritation and avoidance of advertisements by the consumers if they perceive that the advertisements are interfering with their ongoing online activities and infringing their social media personnel space.

### **Intention to engage in WOM Behaviors**

The term electronic word of mouth (eWOM) depicts online exchange of the knowledge by the consumers (Thurau et al., 2004). It depicts and conveys all the positive and negative views of customers who have already used a product or service via the social media platforms. Intention to involve in eWOM behavior is defined as consumers' intentions to share information about products, brands, and companies with other members of their social networks (Nevarez & Torres, 2015). The eWOM behavior of consumers reflect their positive attitudes towards social media advertisements, as they perceive these advertisements beneficial for receiving updates of news and offerings from their favorite companies. On the contrary, consumers may also develop negative attitudes and get discouraged from entering into eWOM behaviors due to certain reasons (Bond et al., 2010). Past researches also highlight that eWOM Behaviors further lead to the enhancement of purchase behaviors of the consumers Bamini et al. (2014).

### **Purchase Behavior**

The purchase behavior as advocated by George (2004), is considered as the amount of times the consumers make purchases. Many researchers also consider intentions as an indicator of the purchase behavior (Azjen, 1991). These studies have assumed the internet purchasing as purchase behavior. Lack of knowledge and intentions to buy may result as an obstacle to the purchasing behavior (Liu, He, Gao & Xie, 2008). While many researchers such as Lim et al. (2016) and Pena-Garcia, Gil-saura,

Rodríguez-Orejuela and Siqueira-Junior (2020) consider the need to further exploring and researching upon the construct of purchase behavior. Along with many other antecedents, the word of mouth is known to have an impact on the purchase behavior of the consumers. The word of mouth when spread electronically are referred to as the electronic word of mouth and consumers tend to depend on these messages to form the purchase decisions (Lee &Youn, 2009; Sen &Lerman, 2007). The availability of internet has globally transformed the traditional word of mouth to electronic word of mouth which has been considered a tool for determining the consumers' online purchase behavior (Ha & Perks, 2005; Morgan-Thomas &Veloutsou, 2013; Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). Since advertising is a major source of information and due to the internet social media is becoming popular means to advertise, it significantly influences the consumers' purchase behavior (Kumar, Varma, Sangvikar&Pawar, 2020). Many researchers have also postulated that individuals can be sensitized through social media and eWOM behavior so as to lead them to a certain purchase behavior (Prasad, Gupta &Totala, 2017). This study hence focuses on assessing the impact of the antecedents.

### ***Hypotheses***

***Hypothesis 1:*** Corporate reputation has a significant and positive impact on consumers' attitude towards social media advertising.

***Hypothesis2:*** Incentive offering has a significant and positive impact on consumers' attitude towards social media advertising.

***Hypothesis3:*** Perceived entertainment has a significant and positive impact on consumers' attitude towards social media advertising.

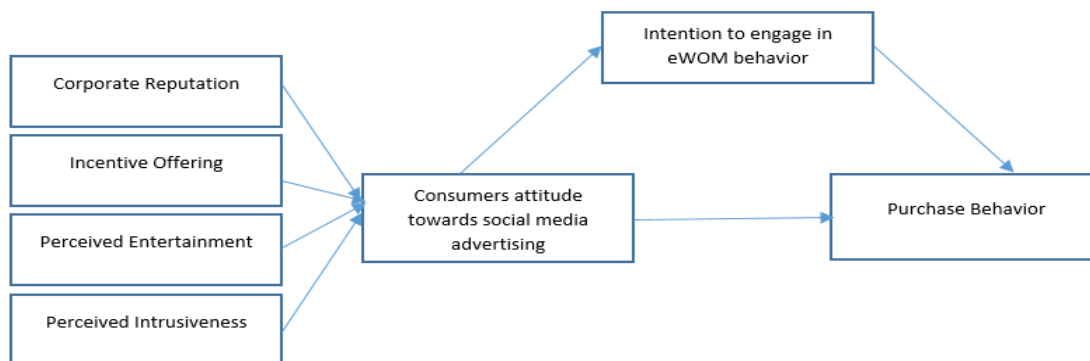
***Hypothesis4:*** Perceived intrusiveness has a significant and negative impact on consumers' attitude towards social media advertising.

***Hypothesis 5:*** Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising has a significant impact on intention to engage in eWOM behavior.

***Hypothesis 6:*** Intention to engage in eWOM behaviors has a significant impact on purchase behavior.

***Hypothesis 7:*** Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising has a significant impact on purchase behaviors.

***Hypothesis 8:*** Intention to engage in eWOM behavior significantly mediates the relationship between consumers' attitude towards social media advertising and purchase behavior.



**Figure 1: Research Model**

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on positivist research design as it examines the interrelationship between the factors influencing the consumers' attitude towards social media advertising and then the mediating role of impact of intention to engage in eWOM between consumers' attitude towards social media advertising and purchase behavior.

### Sampling

The study targeted the adult population from Pakistan, who are at least graduates, self-dependent and frequently use the social media applications and websites. To select the sample, purposive sampling is used to select the sample (respondents) based on the personal judgment of researchers about the sample members on the basis of above-mentioned characteristics. Users of social media platforms such as Face book, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn and Instagram etc. have been targeted to assess eWOM. The sample size was calculated based on the conventional formula of Green (1991), stating the minimum sample size for quantitative studies to be  $n = 8p+50$ , which means a minimum of 106 respondents with 7 variables. However, the sample size was selected to be 320 respondents based on the data generated, to increase the generalizability of the results.

### Instruments

Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising measures was adapted from Wang and Sun (2010). Measures of Corporate Reputation were adapted from Walsh et al. (2009), the Perceived Advertisement Entertainment was measured by the scale given by Kim et al. (2016) Perceived Advertisement Intrusiveness measures were adapted from Li, Edwards and Lee (2002). Incentive Offering was examined using the scale developed by Nevarez and Torres (2015). Intention to Engage in eWOM Behaviors measures were adapted from scale given by Sun et al. (2006). To measure all the



constructs 9-point interval scale (1 strongly disagree to 9 strongly agree) has been used in order to give due consideration to the sensitivity of the measurement instrument (Zikmund et al., 2016). In order to examine Purchase behaviors measures were adapted from George (2004). The actual purchase behavior as suggested by George (2004), based upon the theory of planned behavior by Azjen (1991), has been measured with a single item; “How much would you say you spend on Internet purchases each month?”, as recommended by De Vellis (2003). It has been measured by the frequency of the purchase ranging from never to daily.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The statistical methods used in the study are; descriptive statistics and reliability testing, correlation analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). IBM AMOS 20 and SPSS 21 are used for the purpose of analysis of data in the research.

### Demographic Analysis

Data is collected from respondents of different demographic profiles (gender, age and educational qualification) in the study. Sample selected in the study consists of 118 females (36.8%) and 202 (63.2%) male respondents. The data is gathered from respondents belonging to different age groups. Majority of respondents, 130 (40%) are found in the age group of 20 to 35 years. Results also indicate that 115 (35.93 %) of the respondents are from 35 to 50 years of age and 75 (23.43 %) of the respondents are from age group 50 years or above. Out of 320 respondents 150 (46.8 %) respondents are graduates, 160 (50%) are post graduates and 10 (3.2 %) have a doctorate degree.

### Descriptive analysis

In the study, the descriptive statistics analysis is done on the responses collected from selected users of social media. For all constructs, the descriptive analysis includes the estimations of mean, mode, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis. In addition to this the internal consistency reliability of the statements to measure the constructs is measured with the help of Cronbach’s alpha.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Mode	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach’s Alpha
Corporate Reputation	6.5066	7.00	1.76095	-.313	-.893	.721
Incentive Offering	6.2311	7.00	1.85713	-.346	-.774	.870
Perceived Ent	6.3541	7.00	1.89265	-.411	-.783	.824
Perceived Intr	6.4049	8.00	1.91399	-.466	-.769	.724
Consumers’ Attitude	6.4541	7.00	1.69090	-.316	-.769	.823
eWOMBehavior	6.4000	7.00	1.72321	-.293	-.817	.831
Purchase behavior	6.3180	7.00	1.74306	-.286	-.862	.842

*Ent= Entertainment, Intr=Intrusiveness*

**Table 2:** Validity Testing using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

<b>Code</b>	<b>Construct Name</b>	<b>Standardized Regression</b>	<b>Critical Ratio</b>	<b>p value</b>
CR 1	Corporate Reputation	0.845	26.788	0.000
CR 2		0.841	26.585	0.000
CR 3		0.904	30.122	0.000
CR 4		0.867	27.661	0.000
IO1	Incentive Offering	0.867	24.732	0.000
IO2		0.877	25.821	0.000
PE1	Perceived Entertainment	0.801	24.587	0.000
PE2		0.853	26.732	0.000
PE3		0.845	26.367	0.000
PE4		0.848	27.632	0.000
PE5		0.863	26.447	0.000
PI1	Perceived Intrusiveness	0.860	28.340	0.000
PI2		0.882	29.678	0.000
PI3		0.874	29.195	0.000
PI4		0.859	28.285	0.000
PI5		0.852	27.840	0.000
PI6		0.829	26.479	0.000
PI7		0.769	23.389	0.000
EB1	eWOMBehavior	0.826	26.084	0.000
EB2		0.847	27.283	0.000
EB3		0.837	26.682	0.000
EB4		0.858	24.655	0.000
EB5		0.843	27.050	0.000
EB6		0.755	22.530	0.000
PB1	Purchase behavior	0.854	24.451	0.000
PB2		0.803	21.207	0.000
PB 3		0.771	24.471	0.000
PB 4		0.776	23.465	0.000

PB5		0.752	23.664	0.000
PB 6		0.801	25.657	0.000
PB 7		0.816	24.465	0.000
PB 8		0.742	24.334	0.000
PB 9		0.857	25.767	0.000
CA 1	Consumers' attitude towards	0.879	28.476	0.000
CA 2	social media advertisement	0.889	29.073	0.000
CA 3		0.881	28.605	0.000
CA4		0.850	28.487	0.000

The results of the CFA analysis applied on the measurement model indicate that all the p values are found to be less than 5%. Also, standardized regression weights (standardized construct loadings) between the items and related constructs is found to be greater than 0.7. As the standardized construct loading represent the correlation between the construct and item, the standardized construct loadings greater than 0.7 in case of all the items indicates the presence of construct validity of the scale. Further the convergent validity as well as discriminant validity is measured with the help of Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Maximum Shared Variance (MSV).

**Table 3:** CFA Results for Convergent and Discriminant Validity

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (CR)</b>	<b>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</b>	<b>Maximum Shared Variance (MSV)</b>	<b>Max R(H)</b>
<b>CA</b>	0.929	0.765	0.500	0.930
<b>IO</b>	0.870	0.769	0.456	0.972
<b>PE</b>	0.924	0.709	0.500	0.984
<b>PI</b>	0.947	0.718	0.037	0.988
<b>PB</b>	0.925	0.672	0.268	0.989
<b>CR</b>	0.921	0.745	0.379	0.992
<b>EB</b>	0.921	0.745	0.379	0.992

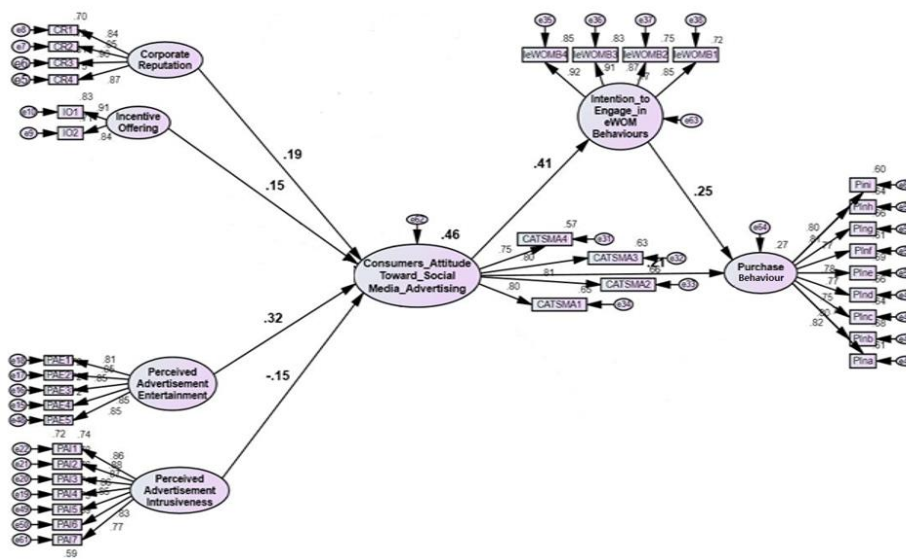
The results indicate that Composite Reliability is found to be greater than 0.7 for each of the constructs. The AVE statistic of each construct is found to be greater than 0.5. Hence the necessary condition required to fulfill the convergent validity in the scale is fulfilled. In addition to this, the AVE of each construct is found to be greater than the MSV which indicates that the required condition of a scale to have discriminant validity is fulfilled.

**Table 4:** Correlation Analysis

	CA	IO	PE	PI	PB	CR	EB
CA	<b>0.875</b>						
IO	0.675	<b>0.877</b>					
PE	0.707	0.665	<b>0.842</b>				
PI	-0.193	-0.076	-0.126	<b>0.847</b>			
PB	0.515	0.482	0.484	0.059	<b>0.820</b>		
CR	0.614	0.616	0.551	0.014	0.474	<b>0.863</b>	
EB	0.640	0.591	0.570	-0.006	0.518	0.592	<b>0.824</b>

The results indicate that square root of the AVE is found to be greater than its correlation with all other remaining constructs representing the presence of discriminating validity of the scale. Since the condition of convergent as well as discriminant validity is fulfilled, further advance statistics can be applied to the collected responses. The statistical fitness of the measurement model is shown in Table 5.

### Measurement Model Testing Through SEM



**Figure 2:** Measurement Model

Results of hypothesis testing of proposed hypotheses with the help of SEM analysis and the model fitness are discussed as under;

**Table 5:** Model fitness of Measurement Model

Fitness Index	CMIN/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA
Estimate	3.425	0.963	0.841	0.910	0.975	0.912	0.045

Results indicate that CMIN/df (3.425) is found less than 5, GFI (0.963) greater than 0.9, AGFI (0.841) is greater than 0.8. Also, CFI (0.910), NFI (0.975), TLI (0.912) is found greater than 0.9 and RMSEA (0.045) indicates that the badness of fit is found to be less than 0.08, supports the statistically fitness of the model.

### Regression Analysis

**Table 6:** Regression results through SEM

Independent Constructs	Dependent Constructs	Standardized Regression Weights	Critical Ratio	P Value	Remarks
Corporate Reputation	Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising	.187	5.281	.000*	Hypothesis Accepted
Incentive Offering	Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising	.152	3.745	.000*	Hypothesis Accepted
Perceived Entertainment	Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising	.421	5.828	.000*	Hypothesis Accepted
Perceived Intrusiveness	Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising	-.367	-4.342	.000*	Hypothesis Accepted
Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising	Intention to engage in eWOMbehavior	.408	8.707	.000*	Hypothesis Accepted
Intention to engage in eWOMbehavior	Purchase behavior	.241	5.401	.000*	Hypothesis Accepted
Consumers' attitude towards social media advertising	Purchase behavior	.233	4.276	.000*	Hypothesis Accepted

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 6 above reflects the values of the standardized regression weights and the p value for the linear regression hypotheses. The results reflect that all the P values are below 0.05, therefore directing that all the hypotheses have been accepted at 95% confidence level.

### Mediation Effect of Intention to Engage in eWOM Behaviors

The bootstrap method is used to analyze the significance of mediation role of intention to engage in eWOM behaviors between the unidirectional effects of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on purchase behaviors.

Business organizations are using different channels of information in order to provide information about their products to consumers. Due to massive popularity of social media, organizations have started using social media as a platform to communicate with the potential customers about their products and services offered by them. The different activities performed by these companies' influences the consumers' attitude and their purchase behaviors. However, purchase behaviors are directed by consumers' attitude towards social media advertising as well as they may also be

originated from intention to engage in eWOM behaviors of the customers. In other words, the different activities influencing the customers' attitude do not have impact on it only but also further have significant impact on intention to engage in eWOM behaviors and finally on purchase behaviors. Statistically consumers' attitude towards social media advertising have two types of effects on purchase behaviors, firstly, the direct effect on purchase behaviors and secondly, the indirect effect on purchase behaviors via intention to engage in eWOM behaviors.

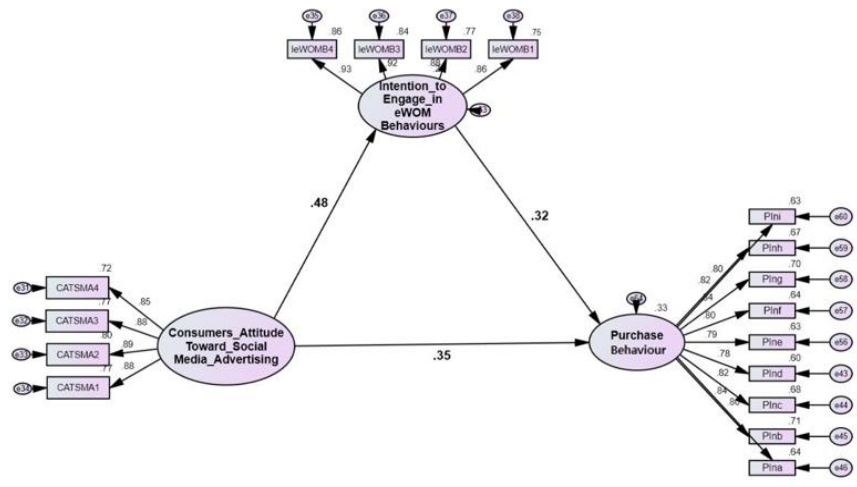


Figure 3: Mediation Analysis

The bootstrap method is used to analyze the significance of mediation role of Intention to Engage in eWOM Behaviours between the unidirectional impacts of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on purchase behaviors. In this case there is a possibility of partial mediation effect and full mediation effect. The difference between partial mediation effect and full mediation effect lies in the fact that direct effect becomes insignificant in the case of full mediation effect and remains significant in case of partial mediation effect. The minimum required condition in both the cases is that the total effect as well as indirect effect is to be found statistically significant. The bootstrap method is used in the study due to its popularity and robustness of the results. The results obtained by applying bootstrap mediation effect of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on purchase behaviors via intention to engage in eWOM behaviors.

Table 7: Mediation Results

Type of effects	Path	Standardized Regression Weights	P Value
Total Effects	CA→EB→PB	.500	.021*
Indirect Effects	CA→EB→PB	.153	.010*
Direct Effects	CA→EB→PB	.347	.014*

\* $p < 0.05$

The results indicate that total effect of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on purchase behaviors is found to be 0.500 with p value of 0.021 indicating the existence of significant

total effect in the direction from consumers' attitude towards social media advertising to purchase behaviors. The results also indicate that the indirect effect of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on purchase behaviors via intention to engage in eWOMBehaviors is also found having the standardized beta of 0.153, p value of 0.10. Results indicate that there exists a significant indirect effect along with direct effect of consumers' attitude towards social media advertising on purchase behaviors. Thus, results show that intention to engage in eWOMbehaviors is a significant partial mediating construct between consumers' attitude towards social media advertising and purchase behaviors.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study are concurrent with literature suggesting that with the emergence of technology, the web has emerged and invented opportunities of communication and sharing of information among individuals over social media (Gupta et al., 2020; Tayebi et al., 2019). The study emphasizes on consumers' attitude having a significant effect on the purchase behaviors, which is consistent with the literature suggested by Nevarez and Torres (2015). The word of mouth has been become an important source for influencing consumers' purchase decisions as individuals share their knowledge and reviews related to the service over networking sites. Electronic word of mouth has enabled individuals to share opinions with others and give a second judgment to others, hence creating a virtual community. In an attempt to increase visibility and spread of their advertisements, companies have endeavored to explore various marketing platforms to broaden the consumer base and thus increase sales, now considering social media and the eWOM as the focal point. This has also been augmented in the prior literature such as that of Bamini et al. (2014).

Since social media has made the efforts more streamlined, easy and purposive, it has provided marketers with a huge territory to bag sales and offered a chance to build brand credibility and win loyal customers by building its reputation. This study signifies this relationship and is concurrent with the findings of Singh and Singh (2015) and Sandu and Ianole (2016). Social Media users tend to believe Word-of-mouth more as compared to other communication channels, given that they form interactive groups or join them considering the groups to be reliable and means of credible insights. Groups by friends or peer group on social media are greatly trusted which form the basis of strategic marketing with an aim to gain competitive advantage. The corporate reputation, incentive offerings, perceived entertainment, have also been found to be significant towards consumer attitudes, which hence form the purchase behaviors, while perceived intrusiveness has a negative association. This also converges with the studies of Edwards et al. (2013), Mahmoud (2013); Amjad et al. (2015), Nevarez & Torres (2015), Kim et al. (2016) and Jung et al. (2016).

The advantage is attained as the consumers' positive attitude enhances the purchase behaviors. A result of high believability, reliability and reputation which companies use to their needs to convince an individual who is part of a larger social media group or has the ability to influence several other people in his purview to buy products being marketed. Moreover, myriad of people can be influenced by the companies in lesser time through social media which is a sure advantage for the companies. Cost effectiveness is another major advantage as promoting the product on social media is immensely economic as compared to other means of mass communication and hence, the organizations can use social media to attain competitive advantage.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Customer purchase behavior has been a longstanding area of research for numerous researchers around the world. Different factors have been identified to be related to purchase behavior of the study in different parts of the world. With the wave of information technology and social media marketing, eWOM has been a very influential factor to determine the purchase behavior of the customers. There

have been some studies related to the eWOM that affects the purchase behavior. This is based upon the fact the social media and electronic platforms of public spread their views about products. Customers also share their experiences and also recommend brands to their friends and family. Thus, being viral becomes the trend for various unknown brands and eWOM changes mind-set. However, the variables are not deeply studied. This study hence catering to the need to close this gap offers insights critical for marketers of the Pakistani industry. It holds widespread implications for businesses aiming at making social media a pivotal advertisement platform to spread awareness about their products and attract sales. The present study paves way for organizations and marketers to adopt a marketing strategy that grasps the attention of the social media users, potentially the greatest audience in the global scenario. This study also opens doors for marketers to improve their advertisement strategies, focusing more on positive influence on intent and purchase behavior. As Smith and Quelch (1996) asserted that credibility and success of an advertisement is highly dependent the company's reputation and representative channel chosen for the advertisement. In the light of this notion, companies can channelize their strategies to persuade audience towards purchasing the products or services as suggested by Hanna et al., (2011). The present study provides updated and authentic research in Pakistani context, providing new opportunities for the organizations, small businesses and products. Liable to mention, present study provides gateway for future research to validate and improve variables that can have an impact on purchasing behaviors of consumers.

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