# Examining The Mediating Effect of Brand Trust on Social Media Marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth

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**Abstract**

Social media has been considered as one of the most popular medium of communication which connects a brand with customers. The availability of the internet and technology easily conveys the user's experience with a brand or a service through electronic word of mouth. The main purpose of the study is to understand the power of social media marketing activities on e-Word of mouth, with brand trust as a mediating factor. In order to study this, the following objectives were formulated by the researcher: To examine the effect of social media marketing activities on brand trust and also to investigate the association among social media marketing activities (entertainment, customization, interaction, trendiness), brand trust, and e-word of mouth. Finally, to find out the mediating role of brand trust between social media marketing activities and e-word of mouth, The target audience for this research is social media users, and based on convenience sampling using a structured questionnaire, data was collected from 390 respondents. IBM SPSS Statistics 20 was used for data analysis. Descriptive analysis, bivariate analysis, and Multivariate analysis were performed. There is a significant difference among age groups in the number of years of social media users with regard to the factors of brand trust. There is a positive correlation between all variables used in the study. Brand trust shows a good mediating role for Social Media Marketing activities and e-Word of Mouth. The researcher used four social media marketing activities to study the impact and mediating effect on brand trust and e-commerce. However, the research could be extended by using other social media marketing activities for brand enhancement.

**Keywords:** social media, brand trust, WOM, Brand knowledge, Trendiness, Customization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Technology advancement and uninterrupted internet connectivity have increased the usage of social media. Over 71% of internet users across the world are connected together using social media platforms. 60% of internet users could be connected through Facebook, and this is the reason why marketers use any of the social media platforms to promote their brands and businesses. A broad category of people would be able to see a firm's brand with the help of marketing on any of the social media platforms. Social media became an inevitable tool for launching a new product or service and also to enhance brand awareness, thus increasing brand authenticity (Callista, 2021). Social media marketing stimulates customers interest in a brand. Social media marketing influences more customers towards a brand than traditional modes of marketing (Panigyrakis et al., 2021). People usually follow a brand's page on social media platforms that seem interesting to them (Sarkar et al., 2022) and also gather information about a brand or a product through social media (. & ., 2021). Globally, 90% of businesses are using social media marketing for business enhancements (Sarkar et al., 2022). So, it is obvious that a marketer uses social media marketing platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. to promote their brands as well as those of other businesses. Marketers highly use social media platforms to know customers preferences and expectations, get feedback about brands, or have two-way communications, which helps with brand building.

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There are several studies that explain the different marketing activities provided by social media and how they affect brand equity and there is no study that explains the impact of marketing activities that are available on social media on brand trust, nor is there any study on how brand trust affects e-word of mouth, which is the research gap identified by the researcher. Objectives are formulated based on the reviews collected, which helps to overcome the research gap identified by the researcher. The objectives are to know the power of social media marketing activities on brand trust, to investigate the relationship between various social media marketing activities (entertainment, customization, interaction, trendiness), brand trust, and e-word of mouth and also to find out the mediating role of brand trust between social media marketing activities and e-word of mouth. The current study has been organized into the following sections: literature review, hypothesis, conceptual framework, research methodology, results, analysis, and discussions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Social Media for Marketing

An online application, platform, web tool, or technical system that enables collaboration and content sharing amongst community members is called as social media. Social media helps promote a brand at a low cost. ("HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS CAN PROMOTE ADVERTISING VALUE AND BRAND EQUITY," 2020).

Social media is also stated as a platform that is popular and helps users exchange information freely. Such information sharing on social media has changed the way a brand communicates with its consumers. Social media has highly affected consumer decisions and opinions about a brand, the way information is gathered, and even political discussions. Social media plays a vital role by helping a company establish an individual relationship with customers and thus creating a connection between a manufacturer and a purchaser. Social media marketing is helpful for businesses to share information about various brands and also establish relationships between customers and brands by providing entertainment, customization, trendiness, interaction, and e-WOM. (Santos et al., 2021).

Social media is considered an essential marketing strategy that is perceived to be cost-effective, and with minimal effort, marketing activities could be performed. (Koay et al., 2021). SMM is well-thought-out as a powerful driver of the responses of customers, which positively influences a customer's intention, behaviour, and purchase decision. (Shofiya & Fachira, 2021). Companies use several communication tools to stimulate customers as well as establish an association with the help of traditional marketing. Social media is used by companies for increasing brand awareness, finding new customers, and enhancing brand image, which results in increasing brand value.(Rimadias et al., 2021).

Entertainment is a key aspect that tends to encourage people to stay with a brand for a longer time and also creates a positive perception of the brand. Various activities like games, video sharing, and participation contests that are available on social media make customers spend time on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. and thus motivate them to join brand communities. According to the social media viewpoint, entertainment states the extent to which a social media platform provides contents and information to its customers that are very interesting, exciting, and funny. Entertainment on social media is an important component that enhances interaction and also induces customers to use it continuously.

Customization is stated as the degree to which customised services are rendered based on customer expectation and preference. Customization also means that the services rendered by the brands on social media platforms will be easy to use for customers. It allows a marketer to share personalised information about a brand for value creation. An instant reply to a customer's personal query is an example of customization, which gives a feeling of contentment. Customization also communicates the uniqueness of their brand, which encourages customers to be loyal (Nikolinakou et al., 2021).

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Interaction is the space provided to customers for effectively communicating views, opinions, and ideas about a brand on social media (Nisa et al., 2018). Most businesses stimulate customers to reveal their personal opinion about a brand, which is called user online interaction. Social media provides a platform for interaction between brands and customers, which increases a feeling of closeness (Tibber et al., 2022). Social media brand pages motivate customers by discussing brand stories, features, and benefits and also sharing the needs of a brand, thus tightening the consumer-brand relationship (Samarah et al. 2021).

Trendiness is defined as providing the latest update to a brand or a service. It is also defined as the degree to which a product or service transfers modern and updated information that is connected to the latest trend. Social media provides the hot trending topics about a brand to its customers and thus eases the information search necessity of customers. Trendy information includes the latest brand-related information, a review of a brand, and new thoughts about a brand. (Dewi et al., 2022). Trendiness is important as it helps a customer stay on a particular brand's page for a longer time rather than providing the usual contents. (Rather et al., 2021).

## 2.2. Brand Trust

Trust is an essential concept used in social and economic interactions where there is uncertainty and dependency, which is studied in different social sciences. With regard to the marketing point of view, trust is stated as the readiness of a customer to revisit a brand. Feelings of satisfaction and trustworthiness towards a brand are called brand trust, and this trust is shared via social media nowadays (Martin et al., 2021). Brand trust improves customer satisfaction and enhances loyalty. Online social communications build good rapport between a consumer and a brand, which makes them trustworthy and in love with the brand. Brand trust enhances confidence, which leads to brand equity (Dag et al., 2022). Consumers tend to trust information shared on social media more than other forms of marketing (Irshad et al., 2020). The reason for this could be due to interactive platforms, instant feedback, and more user-generated content. Brand trust is the expectation that promises will be followed by a brand (Putra et al., 2020). Trust is the positive expectation of a customer towards a brand. Social media marketing is considered an active method to establish good connections with clients. Such interactions develop brand trust as well as remove unnecessary fears that block customers from spending time with a brand (Singh et al., 2021).

## 2.3.e-WOM

e-WOM is considered the most powerful marketing tool, and social media is regarded as one of the top platforms for this. Traditional word of mouth is called an interactive communication process to share and exchange information or feedback, while e-WOM uses the internet for it (Edwards et al., 2020). Enormous researchers concluded that EWOM plays a predominant role in enhancing brand equity. A consumer's decision-making is affected by e-WOM, and thus it has a huge impact on brands. e-WOM are those statements, comments, or experiences shared by any user (who could be a potential user, an actual user, or a former user) towards a product, service, or brand that are shared with others via social media platforms (Azer & Ranaweera, 2022). If customers are acting as brand ambassadors of a brand by spreading positivity, then that automatically creates a positive impression towards the brand (Berger-Grabner, 2021). Consumers search for reviews if they intend to buy a product or service, and those users' reviews minimise fear or anxiety about failures by verifying relevant information. The information received through e-wom is real and won't be exaggerated (Kang, 2018). Social media marketing helps businesses communicate with clients and customers easily. These interactions help marketers have a good rapport with their potential and existing customers, thus building positive brand trust. Social media marketing can trigger customers to perform true word-of-mouth marketing, and social media tends to be a strong communication tool. Brand trust increases positive WOM through brand behaviour. Social media marketing activities help customers trust a brand, which in turn makes them write positive posts about the brand (Maria et al., 2020). Social media helps consumers share their

favourite and most trusted brands on their social media pages or personally. They can write a blog or write reviews about the trusted brand. All these are forms of e-WOM (Mena et al., 2020).

## 2.4 Research Framework & Hypothesis

Social media marketing activities include entertainment, customization, interaction, e-WOM, and trendiness (Wijayaa et al., 2021). Some researchers defined social media marketing activities as interaction, customization, perceived risk, and trendiness (Colella et al., 2022; Wijayaa et al., 2021). However, in this study, entertainment, customization, interaction, and trendiness are considered social media marketing activities (independent variables), while e-word of mouth is taken as a dependent variable. Brand trust is a mediating variable.
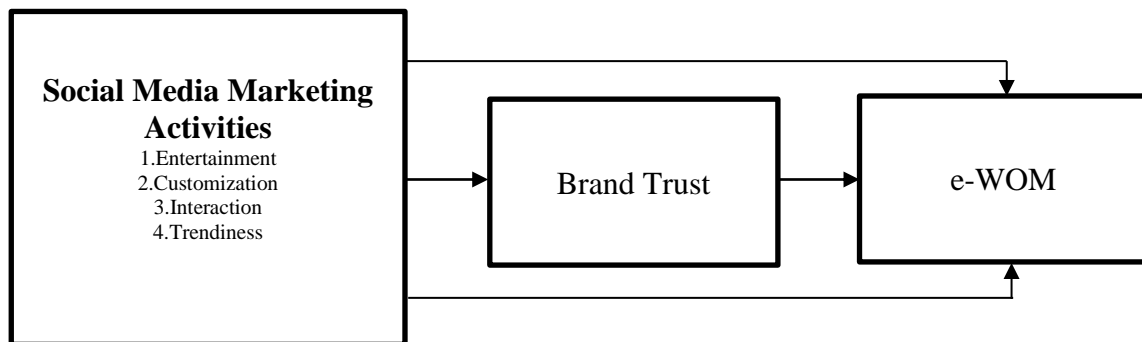


**Fig 1**. This model was created by researchers based on Masa'deh et al. (2021), Seo & Park (2018), and B et al. (2018)

The following hypotheses are framed by the researcher based on the reviews studied:
*H1: There is a major difference among age groups with respect to Entertainment, Customization, Interaction, Trendiness, Brand Trust and e-WOM.*
*H2: Social Media Marketing activities are positively related with e-WOM*
*H3: Social Media Marketing activities are positively related with Brand Trust*
*H4: Brand Trust is positively related with e-WOM.*
*H5: Brand Trust mediates the association between social media marketing activities as well as e-WOM.*
   *H5.a. Entertainment and e-WOM are mediated by Brand Trust.*
   *H5.b. Relationship between customization and e-WOM are mediated by brand trust.*
   *H5.c. Relationship between interaction and e-WOM are mediated by brand trust.*
   *H5.d. Trendiness and e-WOM are mediated by brand trust*

## 3.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Population, Sampling and Data Collection

The target audience here is social media users and based on convenience sampling (Masa'deh et al., 2021), using structured questionnaire data, data was collected from 390 respondents. Online distribution of questionnaires was chosen because of its ease of use, wider reachability, and low cost. Researchers circulated a Google Form (questionnaire) through Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp, which are popular social media sites based on convenience (Masa'deh et al., 2021; Menon, 2022).

## 3.2. Measurement Scales

The researcher referred to various research papers to prepare a structured questionnaire, and 21 constructs and variables were taken from Dag et al. (2022) and Masa'deh et al. (2021) to study the following activities: entertainment, customization, interaction, trendiness, brand trust, and e-word of mouth. For every item in the questionnaire, participants have to choose any one of the scales from a combination of the five scales mentioned.

## 3.3. Software and Tools used

IBM SPSS Statistics 20 was used for analysing the data (George & Mallery, 2021). following (George & Mallery, 2021) Analyses will be performed using descriptive analysis (reliability, frequency), bivariate analysis (correlation, chi-square, anova), and Multivariate analysis (multiple linear regression).

## 4. RESULTS

## 4.1. Reliability

The Cronbach's Alpha method was used for performing reliability tests, and the results are stated below. The result shows that the values of all the scales are above 0.7, and 0.886 is the value for the total items used in the research. If the results are greater than 0.70, then the questionnaire used is reliable. (Thorndike, 1995). (Refer to Table 1)

**Table 1:** Test for Reliability

| Items | Value (using Cronbach Alpha) |
|---|---|
| Entertainment | .884 |
| Customization | .854 |
| Interaction | .867 |
| Trendiness | .854 |
| Brand Trust | .864 |
| e-WOM | .876 |

## 4.2. One-Way ANOVA (H1)

**Table 2:** Age group of respondents Vs. Entertainment, Customization, Interaction, Trendiness, Brand Trust and e-WOM

| Factors | Age of respondents (years) | | | F value | P value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Below 25 | 25-35 | Above 35 | | |
| **Entertainment** | 16.26 (3.21) | 16.95 (2.98) | 16.51 (2.98) | 1.207 | 0.300 |
| **Customization** | 16.23 (2.82) | 16.83 (2.53) | 16.37 (2.61) | 1.457 | 0.234 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Interaction** | 11.56 (2.11) | 12.14 (2.34) | 11.88 (2.14) | 1.374 | 0.254 |
| **Trendiness** | 12.00 (2.08) | 12.38 (1.98) | 12.09 (1.84) | 1.086 | 0.339 |
| **Brand Trust** | 16.24[a] (2.75) | 17.17[b] (2.49) | 16.54[ab] (2.53) | 3.278 | 0.039* |
| **e-WOM** | 11.74 (2.69) | 12.44 (2.39) | 12.08 (2.31) | 1.764 | 0.173 |

1. ()->SD
2. *-> significant at 5% level
3. [a], [b], [ab]-> significant at 5% level using Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT)

Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) was used to perform ANOVA, and the results are interpreted as follows (refer to Table 2).

The P-value with regard to age and brand trust is.039, which is less than.05, which means that H1 is accepted with regard to the age group of social media users with regard to brand trust. In table 2, it is represented using * with DMRT. The alphabets represent that the age group below 25 significantly differs from 25–35 years, while the age group above 35 doesn't vary with any other age group with regard to brand trust. The reason behind this could be that the requirements and expectations from a brand differ with age, as the wants and needs of all age groups are different in all ways. Thus, age is a very important factor that varies with age. All other p-values are >0.05, which shows there is no major difference among age groups and the variables used, i.e., entertainment, customization, interaction, trendiness, and e-WOM.

### 4.3. Correlation

**Table 3:** Pearson Correlation between Entertainment, Customization, Interaction, Trendiness, Brand Trust and e-WOM

| **Factors** | **Entertainment** | **Customization** | **Interaction** | **Trendiness** | **Brand Trust** | **e-WOM** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Entertainment** | 1.000 | 0.849** | 0.468** | 0.572** | 0.441** | 0.287** |
| **Customization** | | 1.000 | 0.606** | 0.646** | 0.531** | 0.426** |
| **Interaction** | | | 1.000 | 0.687** | 0.517** | 0.647** |
| **Trendiness** | | | | 1 | 0.791** | 0.668** |
| **Brand Trust** | | | | | 1.000 | 0.707** |
| **e-WOM** | | | | | | 1 |

** ->1% level

Table 3 denotes the correlation among the various factors used in the study. The interpretation is as follows: Correlation The coefficient between entertainment and customization is 0.849, which indicates $(0.849^2 = 0.6060)$. 60.6 percentage points of positive relationships between entertainment and customization, whereas the correlation between customization and interaction is 0.606, which indicates $(0.606^2 = 0.687)$. 68.7 percent positive relationships between customization and interaction Correlation The coefficient of interaction and trendiness is 0.687, which indicates $(0.687^2 = 0.791)$. 79.1 percent positive relationships among them, wherein the correlation between trendiness and brand trust is 0.791, which indicates $(0.791^2 = 0.707)$. 70.7 percent positive relationships between trendiness and brand trust Correlation The coefficient between brand trust and e-WOM is 0.707, which indicates $(0.707^2 = 0.849)$.

84.9 percent positive relationships between trendiness and brand trust All relationships are established at the 1% significance level.

| Independent Variables | Model-I IV-DV | | Model-II IV-MV | | Model-III MV-DV | | Model-IV IV+MV-DV | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **B** | **t- value** | **B** | **t-value** | **B** | **t-value** | **B** | **t-value** |
| **Entertainment** | -.154* | -2.903 | -.023 | -.456 | | | -.143* | -3.023 |
| **Customization** | .048 | .687 | .075 | 1.131 | | | .012 | .192 |
| **Interaction** | .410** | 7.408 | -.081 | -1.540 | | | .449** | 9.076 |
| **Trendiness** | .601** | 9.181 | 1.075** | 17.251 | | | .086 | 1.103 |
| **Brand Trust** | | | | | .661** | 19.717 | .479** | 10.050 |
| **F** | 108.821** | | 163.151** | | 388.771** | | 129.869** | |
| **R2** | .531 | | .629 | | .500 | | .628 | |
| **Adjusted R2** | .526 | | .625 | | .499 | | .624 | |

**4.4. Regression Analysis(H2-H5)**

**Table 4:** Mediating effect of brand trust amongst social media marketing activities and e-WOM

Note: 1. Dependent Variable (DV)->e-WOM, Mediating Variable (MV)->Brand trust, Independent Variable (IV)->SMM marketing activities

2. *p<0.05, **p<0.01

**4.4.1. Effect of social media marketing activities on brand trust as well as e-WOM**

In table 4, Model-1 explains the individual effects of SMM activities like entertainment (=.154, p.05), customization (=.048, p>.05), interaction (=.410, p.01), and trendiness (=.601, p.01). All variables except customization show a significant positive effect on e-WOM. Overall hypothesis 2 is accepted (F = 108.821, p.01), which means SMM activities are positively related to e-WOM. Model 2 shows the individual effect on SMM activities like entertainment (=.023, p>.05), customization (=.075, p>.05), interaction (=.081, p>.05), and trendiness (=.1.075, p.01). H3 is accepted (F = 163.151, p.01), which means SMM activities are positively related to brand trust. Model 3 shows the association between brand trust and e-WOM, depicting a significant positive effect of brand trust on e-WOM. Hence, H4 is accepted (F = 388.771, p.01).

**4.4.2. Mediating effect of brand trust between SMM activities and e-WOM**

Model-IV explains the mediating effect of brand trust between SMM activities and e-WOM. Results suggest that brand trust fully mediates the relationship between customization (=.012, p>.05) and e-WOM, trendiness and e-WOM (=.086, p>.05), while entertainment and e-WOM (=.143, p.05), interaction and e-WOM (=.449, p.01) show brand trust partially mediates between these relationships. The result supports all hypotheses that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between SMM activities and e-WOM ( =.479, p.01). Thus, the above result provides strong support for the acceptance of hypotheses H5 and sub hypotheses H5a–H5d.

## 5.CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was conducted to understand the mediating effect of brand trust among social media activities and e-WOM. The research model has been developed using the factors of social media marketing activities, brand trust, and e-WOM, thus establishing a relationship between the factors for analysis. Five major hypotheses and four sub hypotheses were formulated, and conclusions were derived after analysis. The study exposed a significant difference among the ages of social media users with regard to brand trust, and the age group of below 25 significantly differs with the age group of 25–

35 at a 5% significant level, but the age group of above 35 does not differ with any other age group with respect to brand trust. The study concludes that SMM activities are positively related to e-WOM and brand trust. It was also revealed that brand trust is positively related to e-WOM. SMM activities and e-WOM are mediated by brand trust. The current study explored the effectiveness of four social media activities, which are entertainment, customization, interaction, and trendiness towards brand trust, and how they influence electronic word of mouth. Only four SMM activities were used for the study. Advertisement, purchase intention (Ramesh, 2020), the impact of storytelling, and viral marketing on brand knowledge in social media could also be included as marketing activities and studied to determine how they impact brand trust. Also, further studies can be conducted by using the various social media marketing activities and their effects on creating value for a brand.

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