

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AS A DETERMINANT OF PURCHASE INTENTION: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE FAST FASHION APPAREL INDUSTRY

Zongyi Zhou

An Independent Study submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Management
Program in Creative Industries Management
Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship
Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin
Academic Year 2026
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Title of Independent Study: Social Media Marketing as a Determinant of Purchase Intention: Empirical Evidence from the Fast Fashion Apparel Industry

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Degree: Master of Management (Creative Industries Management)
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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were (1) to clarify the internal pathways through which three distinct stimulus dimensions of social media marketing--content quality, interactivity, and promotional intensity--influence consumers' purchase intentions, (2) to test the mediating role of brand trust as an organismic state within the marketing-to-purchase-intention linkage, and (3) to provide an equivalent empirical examination of consumer engagement as a parallel mediator.

A quantitative methodology was adopted for this study. The target population consisted of consumers engaged with fast-fashion apparel products. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire, which received 200 valid responses after quality screening. A dual non-probability sampling strategy that combines convenience sampling and snowball sampling was used to recruit respondents. Subsequent data processing relied on statistical software and included descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, bivariate correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

The empirical results reveal three principal findings: (1) Three dimensions of social media marketing exert a statistically significant and positive effect on consumers' purchase intention; (2) Brand trust partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention; and (3) Consumer engagement played a mediating role along the same pathway.

Keywords: Digital platform promotion, Fast fashion, brand credibility, User interaction.

Advisor’s Signature…….

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Table of Contents

Page

Abstract ..... (1)

Acknowledgements ..... (2)

Table of Contents ..... (3)

List of tables ..... (6)

Chapter 1 Introduction 1

1.1 Research Background — The Rise of Social Media Marketing in the Fast Fashion Industry 1

1.2 Research Objectives and Research Questions — Focusing on Purchase Intention, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement 2

1.3 Significance of the Study 4

1.3.1 Theoretical Significance — Extending the S-O-R Model to Fast Fashion Consumption 5

1.3.2 Practical Significance — Implications for Fast Fashion Brands' Social Media Strategies 5

1.4 Thesis Structure — A Pathway from Literature to Mediation Analysis 7

Chapter 2 Literature Review 9

2.1 Current State of Research — Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement in Fast Fashion 9

2.2 Research Focus and Existing Problems — Gaps in Understanding the Mediating Mechanisms for Purchase Intention 10

2.3 Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses — Grounding the Study in the S-O-R Model 11

Chapter 3 Research Methodology 14

3.1 Research Design — Correlational Design for Testing Mediating Effects 14

3.2 Data Collection 15

3.2.1 Survey Population and Sampling — Fast Fashion Apparel Shoppers 15

3.2.2 Questionnaire Distribution and Collection 16

3.2.3 Sample Characteristics Description 16

3.3 Instrumentation and Variable Measurement 17

Table of Contents (Continued)

Page

3.3.1 Independent Variables — The Three Dimensions of Digital Platform Promotion (Content Quality, Interactivity, Promotional Activities) 17

3.3.2 Mediating Variables: Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement 17

3.3.3 Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention 18

3.4 Data Analysis 18

3.4.1 Measurement Model Testing — Reliability and Validity Checks 18

3.4.2 Correlation Analysis — Bivariate Relationships Among Key Constructs 20

3.4.3 Regression Analysis and Mediation Effect Testing — Examining Indirect Pathways to Purchase Intention 20

Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Results 23

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample — Fast Fashion Buyers' Characteristics 23

4.2 Measurement Model Testing 24

4.2.1 Reliability Testing — Internal Consistency of Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement Scales 24

4.2.2 Validity Testing — Convergent and Discriminant Validity for S-O-R Constructs 24

4.3 Correlation Analysis — Associations Among digital platform promotion, brand credibility, user interaction, and Purchase Intention 25

4.4 Empirical Examination of the Proposed Hypotheses 26

4.4.1 Direct Impact of Social Media Marketing on Fast-Fashion Consumers' Purchase Intention 26

4.4.2 Mediation Effect Testing — Indirect Roles of Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement 27

4.5 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results — Supported and Unsupported Paths 30

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion 31

5.1 Discussion of Empirical Findings in the Fast-Fashion Social Media Context 31

Table of Contents (Continued)

Page

5.1.1 Direct Effects of Each Dimension of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Intention — Fast Fashion Context 31

5.1.2 Partial Mediation Explained: The Roles of Brand Credibility and Customer Interaction Involvement Within the S-O-R Logic 31

5.2Theoretical Contributions 32

5.3 Practical Implications 34

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions 34

5.4.1 Limitations of Sample Size and Representativeness — Fast Fashion Consumers from Non-Probability Sampling 35

5.4.2 Limitations of Cross-Sectional Data and Causal Inference — Need for Longitudinal Designs 36

References 38

Appendixes 40

Appendix A Questionnaire 41

Appendix B Article 48

Curriculum Vitae 54

List of tables

Table **Page**

Table 2. 1 Summary of Research Hypotheses (Reformulated) 12
Table 3. 1 S-O-R Theoretical Research Model 15
Table 3. 2 Example Items for Measuring Dimensions of Digital Platform Promotion.... 17
Table 3. 3 Internal Consistency Statistics for Study Variables (N = 200) 19
Table 3. 4 Zero Order Correlations Among Key Study Variables (N = 200) 20
Table 4. 1 Reliability Analysis Results for Each Variable (N = 200) 24
Table 4. 2 Bivariate Correlations (Pearson's r) for All Focal Constructs — Fast Fashion Sample (N = 200) 26
Table 4. 3 Regression Outcomes: How Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities Drive Purchase Intention in Fast Fashion 27
Table 4. 4 Estimating the Influence of Marketing Stimuli on Two Organismic Mediators 28
Table 4. 5 Regression Analysis of Mediating Variables on Purchase Intention (Controlling for Independent Variables) 29
Table 4. 6 Assessing the Organism's Mediation: Sobel z values and Significance 29

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
(Setting the Context for Fast Fashion Apparel Consumers' Online Purchase Decisions)

Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the sweeping digital transformation currently unfolding worldwide has fundamentally restructured the marketing ecosystem of modern commerce. Conventional social media platforms – including Instagram, TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo no longer function merely as channels for information dissemination. Instead, they have evolved into integrated business ecosystems that simultaneously support brand building, customer interaction (i.e., consumer engagement), and sales conversion. Within the fast fashion apparel sector – exemplified by Zara, H&M, and SHEIN – competitive intensity has escalated markedly under the pressure of digital business models. Consequently, social media has emerged as the central battleground where fast fashion brands seek to attract younger demographics, accelerate new product launches, cultivate Brand Trust, and shape brand image simultaneously

1.1 Research Background — The Rise of Social Media Marketing in the Fast Fashion Industry

Some fast-fashion companies have deeply cultivated social media marketing, actively deployed on social media platforms, and expanded online channels, achieving remarkable marketing results. For example, the fast-fashion giant Uniqlo has deeply cooperated with JD.com on social media and opened an official flagship store on TikTok Shop, using social media platforms to launch co-branded collections (e.g., the LABUBU series with Pop Mart), thereby attracting the attention of a large number of young consumers. However, at present, due to issues such as fragmented user attention and a complex marketing environment, fast-fashion apparel companies still face severe challenges. Some brands have fallen into difficulties such as content homogenization, lack of interaction, and low return on investment—problems that are also common challenges across the industry.

Therefore, from a management perspective, this study closely focuses on the following core question to develop its research objectives and questions: Through what internal mechanisms does fast-fashion companies' social media marketing influence consumers' purchase intention? Clarifying this influence pathway has urgent practical significance for helping fast-fashion companies optimize resource allocation and formulate efficient and reasonable social media marketing strategies.

1.2 Research Objectives and Research Questions — Focusing on Purchase Intention, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement

Against the backdrop outlined above, this study investigates – within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model framework – how the Social Media Marketing activities undertaken by fast-fashion brands influence consumers' Purchase Intention through internal psychological pathways. To date, only a limited number of fast-fashion enterprises have achieved notable success in their social media efforts. SHEIN, a leading brand, exemplifies such success: viral community propagation and sharply increased sales have been driven by its strategic use of user-generated content (UGC). Notably, these outcomes are closely associated with the cultivation of Brand Trust and the stimulation of consumer engagement, both of which serve as key mediating mechanisms linking social media marketing to purchase intention. In contrast, most fast-fashion brands – despite heavy investment – have received only lukewarm responses. Consequently, companies face an urgent need to move beyond traditional, simplistic marketing models centred on mere "posting" and "promotional activities". Instead, they must explore modern marketing methods that influence consumers' psychological cognition in order to foster their purchase intention.

To systematically address this core challenge and translate abstract research motives into operational and testable research steps, this study has distilled the following four progressive research objectives:

Research Objective 1:

Within the Fast Fashion industry, it is widely acknowledged that social media Marketing exerts an influence on consumer Purchase Intention. However, the differential magnitude of this impact across the three constitutive dimensions—Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities—necessitates precise quantification. Against this

backdrop, the primary research objective is formulated as follows: to empirically examine the direct effects of these dimensions on Purchase Intention, situating the analysis within the S-O-R Model (where social media Marketing functions as the Stimulus (S), Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement serve as organismic states (Organism, O), and Purchase Intention constitutes the Response (R)). The attendant research question investigates the extent to which each dimension individually shapes consumer Purchase Intention. Addressing this inquiry serves to elucidate the direct causal pathways linking each independent variable to the dependent variable, thereby enabling Fast Fashion enterprises to prioritize resource allocation more effectively and optimize their marketing mix.

Research Objective 2:

Building directly upon the first objective, this study addresses the critical necessity of identifying the most potent driver once the positive influence of all three dimensions on Purchase Intention has been empirically substantiated. Accordingly, the research question probes whether the effects of the three Social Media Marketing dimensions differ significantly. To resolve this, the path coefficients associated with Hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c will be subjected to a comparative statistical analysis. This investigation seeks to disentangle the strategic hierarchy of importance among the dimensions, thereby furnishing Fast Fashion brands with actionable intelligence to bolster Brand Trust and cultivate Consumer Engagement through targeted social media investments.

Research Objective 3:

What role does Brand Trust play? That is the focus of the third objective—to empirically test its mediating function between social media marketing and purchase intention. Here, we introduce brand trust as a psychological-cognitive pathway. Put simply: when a Fast Fashion brand delivers high-quality content and meaningful interaction, these efforts may first translate into consumer perceptions of reliability and integrity. That perception is brand trust. And that trust, in many cases, subsequently fuels purchase intention. Our aim, therefore, is to demonstrate this chain using empirical data.

The corresponding research question is straightforward: does brand trust mediate the relationship between each dimension of social media marketing and purchase intention? To some extent, this question seeks to establish brand trust as the internal psychological bridge—connecting external marketing stimuli (consistent with the S-O-R Model) to final behavioral responses.

Research Objective 4:

A distinct yet intrinsically connected pathway centers on Consumer Engagement, which constitutes the focal mediator of the fourth research objective. The central inquiry examines whether social media Marketing initiatives can propel consumers beyond mere transactional purchases toward active engagement behaviors—such as liking, commenting, and sharing—and, furthermore, whether such affirmative interactive participation subsequently consolidates their Purchase Intention. This behavioral-emotional trajectory represents the core mechanism under exploration.

Accordingly, the principal research question asks: Does Consumer Engagement mediate the association between each dimension of Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention? Fundamentally, this study seeks to ascertain the existence of a reinforcement loop: Marketing Stimulus-Behavioral Engagement-(Feedback to) Purchase Intention. While preliminary conjecture may suggest an affirmative outcome, empirical data remain the ultimate arbiter.

The four aforementioned research objectives and questions were formulated through a sequential, iterative process. By subjecting these hypotheses to successive empirical testing, the investigation transcends simplistic binary validation queries—moving instead toward a nuanced elucidation of causal mechanisms, including the identification of the most efficacious dimensions and, to a certain extent, the underlying rationale for their impact. In applied contexts, this latter dimension frequently emerges as the most consequential.

Collectively, the findings proffer Fast Fashion enterprises with a pragmatic strategic blueprint—one that extends beyond a perfunctory catalogue of recommended actions to encompass the underlying causal architecture. In devising social media Marketing strategies, firms can thus draw upon a clarified logic of effects, an understanding that, in many scenarios, offers greater strategic value than a mere dichotomous affirmation.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Having delineated the research objectives and core inquiries—specifically, how social media Marketing shapes Purchase Intention—another dimension warrants explicit consideration: the theoretical and practical value underpinning this investigation.

Crucially, the exploration of these pathways and internal mechanisms transcends purely academic pursuits. To a significant extent, it contributes to the refinement of extant theoretical frameworks; moreover, it furnishes Fast Fashion enterprises with actionable strategic insights—particularly for those navigating the vicissitudes of digital transformation.

1.3.1 Theoretical Significance — Extending the S-O-R Model to Fast Fashion Consumption

Much of the prior scholarship on social media Marketing models adheres to a constrained paradigm, frequently limited to singular mediating pathways or direct effects. Certain studies have demonstrated that social media Marketing exerts a direct influence on purchase decisions, with indirect effects largely confined to consumer information acquisition.

This study adopts an alternative analytical trajectory by incorporating two pivotal psychological constructs—Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement—to explicate the underlying mechanisms at play. In doing so, it addresses a salient lacuna in the literature: the majority of existing research neglects to examine multiple mediating pathways concurrently.

Consequently, a dual-mediation model is advanced—not merely as an exercise in structural complexity, but as a substantive enrichment of the theoretical explanatory framework governing Social Media Marketing. This extension amplifies the explanatory scope of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) within digital marketing milieus and deepens the conceptual reach of the S-O-R Model (Stimulus–Organism–Response) in consumer behavior research.

Furthermore, the selection of context assumes critical importance: the study is situated within the Fast Fashion sector—a highly dynamic and interactivity-driven industry. This deliberate contextual anchoring provides novel empirical substantiation for context-specific theory construction and establishes a foundation for prospective comparative inquiries, whether cross-industry or cross-cultural in orientation.

1.3.2 Practical Significance — Implications for Fast Fashion Brands' Social Media Strategies

What tangible implications do these findings hold for Fast Fashion enterprises? For a considerable period, many brands operated under the assumption that social media Marketing was essentially reducible to content dissemination and the execution of

promotional campaigns. Yet the empirical reality diverges markedly: the true locus of leverage resides elsewhere-specifically, in systematic brand building and the sustained cultivation of user relationships. To a significant extent, this study suggests that a judiciously designed social media strategy should seek to optimize return on investment (ROI)-not by amplifying volume, but by fostering profound Brand Trust and nurturing authentic, high-caliber engagement.

Three practical takeaways stand out. Here they are:

First, at the strategic level, it provides clear guidance for companies to optimize resource allocation priorities.

This study confirms a positive link. All three dimensions of social media marketing? They do influence purchase intention. To some extent, that's a clear pattern, with "interactivity" having the most significant effect. This finding suggests that fast-fashion brand managers should shift their strategic focus when formulating social media marketing budgets and strategies—from over-reliance on one-way content exposure and short-term promotions to building systematic user interaction and relationship management mechanisms. For example, companies could establish dedicated community management teams rather than having only content teams responsible for posting; and they could elevate "engagement rates" (e.g., quantity and quality of comments, shares, user-generated content) to the same level of importance as core performance indicators (KPIs) like "reach" and "conversion rate," thereby directing resources toward the most influential dimension.

Second, at the execution level, it provides two practical pathways for optimizing marketing activity strategies.

By constructing and testing the dual-mediation model of "brand trust" and "consumer engagement," this study reveals two parallel internal pathways through which consumers are influenced. This suggests that fast-fashion companies should adopt a two-pronged approach in their marketing strategies: Strengthen the "trust" pathway by means of social media to convey the brand's reliability and integrity; and activate the "engagement" pathway—especially for the key dimension of "interactivity"—by designing marketing activities that evoke a deep sense of user participation, rather than simple "like to win" campaigns.

Third, at the performance level, it encourages companies to establish a scientific marketing effectiveness measurement system.

Traditional evaluations often focus on lagging indicators such as direct sales performance. The mechanism analysis in Our results suggest that firms would do well to consider mediating variables as well brand trust (e.g., consumer satisfaction, Net Promoter Score) and consumer engagement (e.g., community activity, volume of UGC) and incorporate them into process-oriented assessment metrics. By monitoring changes in these psychological and behavioral indicators over the long term, with that insight, companies can better gauge the long-term effectiveness of their marketing strategies. And adjust in time. In many cases, that prevents a common mistake—chasing short-term sales at the expense of brand image.

In summary, in many cases, fast-fashion companies have treated social media as a short-term sales tool. This study offers a different path. A roadmap, if you will—upgrading their approach from transaction-oriented to relationship-oriented. And that shift matters., covering strategic focus, tactical combinations, and evaluation criteria. This helps companies build sustainable and differentiated competitive advantages in intense market competition.

1.4 Thesis Structure — A Pathway from Literature to Mediation Analysis

To systematically investigate the internal mechanisms linking Social Media Marketing to the Purchase Intention of Fast Fashion consumers, an empirical research paradigm is employed. The study is structured into five principal chapters.

Chapter 1 (Introduction)

This chapter fulfills three preparatory functions: (a) contextualizing the research background, (b) formulating the research problem alongside an articulation of the study's significance, and (c) delineating the overarching research framework. Grounded in the operational realities of Fast Fashion Social Media Marketing, the chapter engages with the core developmental challenges facing the industry. A central research question is then explicitly advanced: To what extent does Social Media Marketing enhance consumer Purchase Intention—particularly through the cultivation of Brand Trust and the facilitation of Consumer Engagement?

Chapter 2 (Literature Review)

A systematic conceptualization and multidimensional decomposition of the core constructs—Social Media Marketing, Purchase Intention, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement—are undertaken herein. Subsequently, drawing upon the S-O-R Theory, a theoretical model incorporating dual mediation pathways (Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement) is constructed. This model elucidates the internal mechanisms through which social media Marketing exerts its influence on Purchase Intention. From this framework, a coherent set of testable research hypotheses is derived, thereby establishing a rigorous theoretical foundation for the ensuing empirical analysis.

Chapter 3 (Research Methodology)

Functioning as the pivotal interface between theoretical development and empirical inquiry, this chapter transposes the theoretical model from Chapter 2 into an operational, falsifiable research protocol. Detailed specifications are provided concerning: the quantitative research design; the data collection procedures together with the sample characteristics of the target population; the sources and measurement scales for each variable; and the envisaged analytical techniques—comprising reliability and validity assessments, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation effect testing.

Chapter 4 (Data Analysis and Results)

This chapter directly addresses the research questions and furnishes the empirical evidence that supports the study's conclusions. In essence, it represents a consolidated presentation of "what the research has found."

Chapter 5 is Discussion and Conclusion

Based on summarizing and discussing the data analysis results from Chapter 4, this chapter systematically answers the core and specific research questions posed in this study, distilling the main conclusions. Furthermore, it elaborates on the specific managerial implications of these conclusions for fast-fashion companies' marketing practices and points out the limitations of the study in terms of sample, methods, etc. As a concluding component, specific directions—along with corresponding suggestions—are delineated for subsequent inquiries within this domain.

Through these five interconnected chapters, this study completes a full and rigorous academic research process from problem identification, literature review, model construction, and empirical testing to conclusions.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
(Key Constructs and the S-O-R Framework)

Over the past decade, the influence exerted by Social Media Marketing on Consumer Behavior has garnered increasing scholarly attention across three interrelated domains: marketing science, behavioral economics (consumer behavior), and information management. This chapter is anchored in a comprehensive review of pertinent domestic and international literature. Its principal aim is to undertake a systematic synthesis of extant empirical findings. More specifically, it provides a summative, critical appraisal and analytical account of the developmental trajectory and current state of research pertaining to several core constructs: Social Media Marketing, Purchase Intention, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement.

2.1 Current State of Research — Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement in Fast Fashion

A discernible conceptual evolution can be traced in the literature on social media marketing. The prevailing perspective has shifted—sequentially—from a “channel view” (treating social media as a mere distribution conduit), toward a “relationship view” (emphasizing interactive customer bonds), and more recently into an “ecosystem view” (recognizing a holistic, multi-actor digital environment).Early research (approximately 2010–2015) mostly regarded social media as an emerging advertising and promotional tool, focusing on verifying its advantages over traditional media in terms of reach, cost-effectiveness, and speed of dissemination (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As the interactive features of social platforms matured, the research focus gradually shifted toward their “relationship-building” function. A shift in scholarly attention has occurred—toward the question of how enduring brand-consumer relationships can be cultivated via social media. Concomitantly, the research trajectory has moved in the direction of what might be termed “ecologization” and “refinement.” Researchers have recognized that

social media marketing is a complex ecosystem encompassing multiple elements such as content, interaction, transactions, and communities. This evolutionary trajectory indicates that research in social media marketing is moving from effect validation to mechanism exploration, and from a single perspective to an integrated framework.

2.2 Research Focus and Existing Problems — Gaps in Understanding the Mediating Mechanisms for Purchase Intention

A substantial body of empirical evidence has now accumulated concerning the influence of social media marketing on purchase intention. Within this literature, several coherent thematic priorities can be readily identified:

First, dimensional classification and measurement. The academic community generally agrees that social media marketing is a multi-dimensional construct, but the specific dimensions are not yet standardized. In addition to the three dimensions examined in this study—content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities—some scholars have incorporated dimensions such as customization, entertainment value, and word-of-mouth effects. In studies evaluating brand communication effectiveness, other research has divided it into dimensions such as coverage breadth, interaction layer, resonance layer, and conversion layer. Still other studies have constructed multi-dimensional indicator systems encompassing brand awareness, user engagement, content dissemination power, conversion rate, and customer satisfaction. Although this diversity enriches the research, it also makes direct comparison of findings difficult.

Second, exploration of mediating mechanisms. This is a core direction of current research. Besides brand trust and consumer engagement, perceived value, affective commitment, and social identity have also been confirmed as important mediating variables. However, existing research often focuses on single or a few mediating pathways, lacking an integrated test of multiple parallel mediating mechanisms, and thus cannot fully and precisely reveal this complex influence network.

Third, analysis of moderating effects. Researchers have paid attention to the boundary roles of individual traits (e.g., innovativeness, involvement) and contextual factors (e.g., brand reputation, product type). The marketing effects of different strategies vary greatly. However, the specific boundary conditions still need systematic clarification.

Despite substantial achievements, several problems remain to be addressed in this field: First, insufficient theoretical integration. Most studies cite this theory, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), or social exchange theory as their foundation, but they have not well integrated these theoretical perspectives to build a comprehensive explanatory framework covering information processing, social interaction, and emotional psychology. Second, industry specific research needs deepening. A defining feature of the fast-fashion industry lies in its inherently abbreviated consumption cycles—namely, high visual dependence, and a young user base; its social media marketing mechanisms differ significantly from those of industries such as luxury goods or durable consumer goods. Yet, existing research with fast fashion as the research context remains relatively scarce, limiting the practical guidance value of relevant conclusions for the fast-fashion sector. Third, the understanding of "promotional activities" is one-sided. A large body of research simply views promotions as economic incentives, focusing on their short-term impact, while neglecting their long-term relationship value in building membership systems and fostering a sense of participation.

2.3 Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses — Grounding the Study in the S-O-R Model

A central proposition advanced herein is that subsequent inquiries within this domain ought to prioritize the elaboration of more integrated theoretical models, accompanied by refined empirical examinations explicitly situated within the Fast Fashion industry context.

Accordingly, the specific research design of this study unfolds as follows:

First, a dual-mediation-path model is constructed. The study concurrently incorporates Brand Trust (cognitive-affective pathway) and Consumer Engagement (behavioral-relational pathway) as parallel mediating variables, thereby integrating two explanatory logics—social cognition and behavioral participation—within a unified analytical framework. The objective is to attain a more comprehensive elucidation of the internal mechanisms through which social media Marketing exerts its influence on Purchase Intention.

Second, the empirical context is explicitly delimited. The investigation situates its primary focus on the Fast Fashion apparel industry. By anchoring the study within this

specific sector, variable measurement, sample selection, and the interpretation of findings are rendered more targeted, yielding conclusions of heightened practical relevance.

Third, the examination of Promotional Activities is deepened. This study tests the indirect pathways through which promotional activities shape Purchase Intention via Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement, thereby uncovering more complex mechanisms that transcend short-term economic incentives.

As noted earlier in this chapter, scholarly understanding of the constituent dimensions underpinning social media Marketing has become progressively more differentiated. In order to rigorously analyze its influence while preserving empirical tractability, the S-O-R Theory is adopted as the guiding framework. Within this schema, the three dimensions of Social Media Marketing—Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities—are operationalized as the Stimulus (S); Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement jointly function as the Organism (O); and Purchase Intention serves as the Response (R). Consequently, the following theoretical model is established:

Social Media Marketing → Brand Trust / Consumer Engagement → Purchase Intention

Grounded in the above theoretical specification, a set of research hypotheses is proposed. These hypotheses are intended to delineate the internal pathways linking stimulus to organism to response, and to subject to empirical testing both the direction and the magnitude of each variable's effect on purchase intention. The specific hypotheses are presented as follows:

Table 2. 1 Summary of Research Hypotheses (Reformulated)

Hypothesis	Reformulated Content
H1	A statistically significant and positive effect of social media marketing on purchase intention is posited.
H1a	Content quality exerts a significant positive influence on purchase intention.
H1b	A significant positive relationship exists between interactivity and purchase intention.
H1c	Promotional activities are hypothesized to have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

Table 2. 1 (Continued)

Hypothesis	Reformulated Content
H2	Social media marketing is expected to positively and significantly affect brand trust.
H2a	A positive and significant path from content quality to brand trust is proposed.
H2b	Interactivity demonstrates a significant positive impact on brand trust.
H2c	Promotional activities significantly and positively influence brand trust.
H3	Brand trust has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.
H4	The relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention is mediated by brand trust.
H5	A significant positive effect of social media marketing on consumer engagement is hypothesized.
H5a	Content quality significantly and positively affects consumer engagement.
H5b	Interactivity exerts a significant positive influence on consumer engagement.
H5c	Promotional activities are expected to positively and significantly shape consumer engagement.
H6	Consumer engagement has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.
H7	Consumer engagement serves as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
(A Quantitative Investigation of Fast Fashion Consumers)

Within the Fast-Fashion industry, a quantitative methodological framework is employed in this study. The objective is to systematically examine—using quantifiable empirical data—how three focal marketing stimuli (content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities) influence consumers' purchase intention. This influence operates through internal psychological pathways, specifically Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement, which are conceptualized as organismic variables within the S-O-R Model (Stimulus-Organism-Response). Detailed descriptions of the research design, data collection procedures, variable operationalization, and analytical techniques are presented in the subsequent sections.

3.1 Research Design — Correlational Design for Testing Mediating Effects

This study adopts a cross-sectional, survey-based quantitative research design. Its purpose is to render a precise assessment of the impact exerted by Social Media Marketing within the Fast Fashion context. By capturing consumers' instantaneous perceptual evaluations alongside their behavioral responses to prevailing social media activities of leading Fast Fashion brands at a discrete point in time, this design facilitates an efficient empirical examination of the hypothesized causal linkages among the focal constructs.

Grounded in the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theoretical model, the following research framework is subsequently constructed:

Table 3. 1 S-O-R Theoretical Research Model

Stimulus (S) – External marketing stimuli emanating from fast-fashion brands' social media activities	Organism (O) – Internal psychological states activated by the stimulus	Response (R) – Ultimate behavioral outcome
Social Media Marketing → Content Quality → Interactivity Promotional Activities	Brand Trust Consumer Engagement → Consumer Engagement →	Purchase Intention

To articulate the operational mechanics of the model with greater precision: the three dimensions of Social Media Marketing—namely, Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities—are conceptualized as exogenous market stimuli. On the recipient side, two internal psychological mechanisms are activated: Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement, functioning as mediating states. The terminal outcome, or market response, is constituted by Purchase Intention.

What is the underlying causal narrative? To a significant extent, Social Media Marketing does not exert a direct influence upon Purchase Intention; rather, its effects are enacted through Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement. In other words, the influence traverses the organismic stratum. This pathway aligns closely with the S-O-R theoretical framework (Stimulus–Organism–Response). In numerous instances, this alignment furnishes the study with a robust theoretical anchorage.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Survey Population and Sampling — Fast Fashion Apparel Shoppers

The target population of this investigation is defined as active social media users who have followed at least one Fast Fashion brand within the preceding six months. The core customer base of Fast Fashion brands is predominantly composed of younger consumers—individuals exhibiting a pronounced orientation toward trend sensitivity and price consciousness. This demographic is largely characterized by working men and women under the age of 30, residing in first- or second-tier metropolitan areas, and

attaching considerable importance to personal appearance and social interaction. For the purposes of empirical illustration, four prominent brands—Uniqlo, ZARA, H&M, and SHEIN—were selected as reference cases.

Given the broad accessibility and spatial dispersion of this population, a non-probability sampling strategy is employed. Specifically, a hybrid methodology combining convenience sampling with snowball sampling is adopted. The questionnaire was initially disseminated through the researcher's personal social networks (e.g., WeChat Moments, Fast Fashion discussion forums). Subsequently, respondents were invited to forward the survey to peers possessing similar characteristics. In numerous instances, this procedural approach aims to maximize the coverage of eligible participants, notwithstanding an acknowledgment of the inherent limitations entailed by the sampling design.

3.2.2 Questionnaire Distribution and Collection

An online self-administered questionnaire was constructed and administered via "Wenjuanxing"—a professional web-based survey platform widely used in Chinese social science research. A total of 235 responses were initially collected. Each returned questionnaire then underwent a rigorous data-cleaning procedure. Specifically, responses were excluded if they met any of the following criteria: incomplete answers, abnormally short completion time (suggesting inattentive participation), or an obvious patterned response (e.g., identical selections across all items). After applying these exclusion rules, 200 valid questionnaires remained. This corresponds to an effective response rate of 85.1%.

3.2.3 Sample Characteristics Description

Analysis of the effective sample shows: 68.4% female, 82.6% aged 18–30, and 85.1% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. These demographic characteristics closely match the core user profile of fast fashion described in the *TalkingData 2017 Fast Fashion Industry Hot Report*—predominantly a specific demographic, Post-90s youth accounted for over half of the sample. The majority resided in first- or second-tier cities. Such a composition suggests that the sample is both representative and appropriate for the present research topic. Consequently, the external validity of the study's findings receives meaningful support.

3.3 Instrumentation and Variable Measurement

For the measurement of all constructs, previously validated scales from established domestic and international literature were employed. These scales underwent minor contextual modifications to align with the specific setting of Fast-Fashion social media marketing. Such adaptations ensure that the measurement instruments remain both theoretically sound and contextually appropriate. A 5-point Likert scale was used for all items, where 1 corresponds to “strongly disagree” and 5 to “strongly agree.”

3.3.1 Independent Variables — The Three Dimensions of Digital Platform Promotion (Content Quality, Interactivity, Promotional Activities)

Digital Platform Promotion was operationalized as three measurable core dimensions: content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities, with a total of 12 items.

Content quality: 4 items measuring the value, reliability, timeliness, and entertainment value of the content posted by fast-fashion brands.

Interactivity:4 items measuring the timeliness and depth of two-way communication between the brand and users.

Table 3. 2 Example Items for Measuring Dimensions of Digital Platform Promotion

Dimension	Number of Items	Example Item
Content Quality	4	The content posted by this brand provides valuable fashion information.
Interactivity	4	This brand actively responds to my comments or private messages.
Promotional Activities	4	This brand frequently offers exclusive discount codes on social media platforms.

3.3.2 Mediating Variables: Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement

Brand trust：assesses consumers’ beliefs about the reliability, integrity, and benevolence of fast fashion brands. Currently, fast-fashion brands are facing a decline in consumer trust, primarily driven by concerns about product quality and discrepancies between brand claims and actual products. The product innovation and rapid response of

ZARA, the social responsibility and environmental concepts of H&M, and the minimalist design and extreme value for money of Uniqlo provide reference directions for fast-fashion brands to solve the trust problem.

Consumer engagement encompasses both behavioral engagement (liking, commenting, sharing) and psychological involvement.

3.3.3 Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

Three items were used to measure consumers' subjective tendency to purchase in the future. For example, "In the future, I am very likely to buy products from this brand," directly corresponding to the core question of this study—the ultimate conversion effect of all marketing activities.

3.4 Data Analysis

The empirical analysis commences by subjecting the previously formulated theoretical hypotheses to rigorous testing, adhering to a multi-step procedural sequence.

At the outset, reliability and validity assessments are conducted to verify the internal consistency of each multi-item scale, thereby ensuring the dependability of the measurement instruments. Specifically, the KMO test, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) are employed to scrutinize construct validity. The objective is to determine whether individual items load distinctly onto their theoretically pre-specified dimensions—such as "Content Quality" and "Interactivity." A favorable outcome at this stage is indispensable, as it anchors the accuracy of all subsequent analyses.

In parallel, Pearson correlation analysis is executed to furnish preliminary evidence concerning the pairwise associations among the key constructs, encompassing the three dimensions of Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust, Consumer Engagement, and Purchase Intention. The magnitude and direction of these bivariate relationships are examined, thereby supplying initial evidentiary support for the ensuing regression analysis.

3.4.1 Measurement Model Testing — Reliability and Validity Checks

All latent variable scales were subjected to rigorous reliability and validity testing. The objective was to ensure that the measurement instruments for the "Stimulus" (i.e., the three dimensions of Social Media Marketing) and the "Organism" (i.e., Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement) possessed both dependability and construct validity. The Cronbach's

α coefficient functioned as the indicator of internal consistency. In numerous research contexts, anα value exceeding 0.7 is regarded as acceptable. The analysis revealed that the α coefficients for all constructs surpassed 0.8, signifying a notably high level of scale reliability.

Table 3. 3 Internal Consistency Statistics for Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Digital Platform Promotion	Content Quality	4	0.89
	Interactivity	4	0.91
	Promotional Activities	4	0.85
Mediating Variables	Brand Trust	4	0.88
	Consumer Engagement	4	0.87
Dependent Variable	Purchase Intention	3	0.90

Construct validity was evaluated through a triangulation of three statistical procedures: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The obtained KMO value stood at 0.87, surpassing the conventionally accepted threshold of 0.7. Bartlett's test yielded a statistically significant result ($p < 0.001$). Collectively, these outcomes indicate that the correlation matrix is amenable to factorization and that the dataset is suitable for dimensionality reduction.

Subsequently, EFA was executed via principal component analysis employing a varimax rotation. The extracted factor structure largely corresponded to the theoretically hypothesized configuration. All items registered primary factor loadings exceeding 0.60 on their designated constructs. Furthermore, cross-loadings-defined as loadings on non-target factors-remained below 0.40. Taken together, these findings substantiate satisfactory construct validity.

3.4.2 Correlation Analysis — Bivariate Relationships Among Key Constructs

A preliminary examination of the pairwise associations among the focal constructs—specifically, their respective magnitudes and directional tendencies—was conducted using Pearson correlation analysis. Pearson correlation analysis is suitable for two continuous variables with a linear relationship, requiring that the variables be approximately normally distributed and that observations be independently paired. The results provide a reasonable prerequisite for subsequently testing the pathways in the S-O-R model.

Table 3. 4 Zero Order Correlations Among Key Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Content Quality	1					
Interactivity	.612**	1				
Promotional Activities	.534**	.581**	1			
Brand Trust	.663**	.721**	.598**	1		
Consumer Engagement	.587**	.749**	.645**	.672**	1	
Purchase Intention	.645**	.782**	.623**	.701**	.735**	1

The correlation matrix presented above reveals a consistent pattern. All three stimulus-level variables—namely, content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities—exhibit statistically significant positive associations with both the organism-level variables (brand trust and consumer engagement) and the response-level variable (purchase intention). All these bivariate correlations are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. This finding offers initial empirical evidence that justifies the subsequent regression-based hypothesis testing.

3.4.3 Regression Analysis and Mediation Effect Testing — Examining Indirect Pathways to Purchase Intention

A discrete analytical sequence was implemented to examine the direct effects of each Digital Platform Promotion dimension—Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities—on three outcome variables: Purchase Intention, Brand Trust, and

User Interaction. Beyond these direct pathways, the mediating roles of Brand Trust and User Interaction within the nexus between Digital Platform Promotion and Purchase Intention were also empirically evaluated. This procedural step seeks to unlock what has frequently been treated as a "black box"—that is, to illuminate the internal psychological conduits through which marketing stimuli ultimately shape purchase decisions, a question that constitutes the central investigative thrust of this study. The detailed testing protocol is delineated below. These steps are congruent with the logic of the S-O-R Model, wherein the stimulus (Digital Platform Promotion) operates on the response (Purchase Intention) via organismic mediators (Brand Trust and User Interaction)—a mechanism of particular salience within the Fast Fashion context.

1. Direct Effect Testing (Stimulus–Response): Evaluating the Pathway from Digital Platform Promotion to Purchase Intention

A preliminary regression analysis was executed to estimate the aggregate effect of the three stimulus-side dimensions—Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities (collectively operationalized as Digital Platform Promotion)—on the response variable, Purchase Intention. The baseline regression model was specified as follows:

$$\text{Purchase Intention} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Content Quality}) + \beta_2(\text{Interactivity}) + \beta_3(\text{Promotional Activities}) + \varepsilon$$

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 35.2$, $p < 0.001$), yielding an adjusted R^2 of 0.57. Among the three stimulus dimensions, Interactivity exhibited the greatest effect magnitude ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Content Quality ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$). Promotional Activities produced a comparatively smaller yet positive effect ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$). Collectively, these findings furnish preliminary corroboration for H1, H1a, H1b, and H1c, delivering an initial empirical resolution to the strategic question of which dimension exerts the greatest influence.

2. Testing the Mediation Model (S → O → R) within the S-O-R Framework

Having established that all three dimensions of Digital Platform Promotion exert an influence on Purchase Intention, the study proceeded to examine how the Stimulus (S) operates on the Response (R) via the Organism (O). A standardized mediation testing protocol was adhered to.

Step 1: Effect of the Stimulus (S) on the Organism (O)

Two discrete regression models were estimated. Model 1 employed Brand Trust as the dependent variable, with all three marketing dimensions entering as predictors. The results demonstrated that each dimension exerted a significant positive influence: Interactivity ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), Content Quality ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), and Promotional Activities ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Consequently, H2a, H2b, and H2c are substantiated.

Model 2 utilized User Interaction as the dependent variable. A divergent pattern emerged herein: Interactivity ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) and Promotional Activities ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) exhibited significant positive effects on Consumer Engagement. However, the effect of Content Quality proved statistically unreliable ($\beta = 0.15$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, H5 receives partial corroboration—a finding that merits further scrutiny within the Fast Fashion context, wherein content quality may assume a less direct role in driving engagement than initially presumed.

Step 2: Estimating the Effect of the Organism (O) on the Response (R), Controlling for the Stimulus (S)

A regression model was estimated wherein Brand Trust and User Interaction were entered simultaneously alongside the three dimensions of Digital Platform Promotion. The results indicate that both organismic variables exert a significant positive influence on Purchase Intention: Brand Trust ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$) and Consumer Engagement ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). These findings lend empirical support to H3 and H6, respectively.

Step 3: Comprehensive Mediation Testing Following the Introduction of Both Mediators

Subsequent to the inclusion of Brand Trust and User Interaction, the regression coefficients for the previously significant marketing dimensions vis-à-vis Purchase Intention (cf. direct effects) all diminished. The coefficient for Interactivity decreased from 0.48 to 0.25 and retained its significance, indicating that Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement assume partial mediating roles within the pathway from interactivity to purchase intention. The coefficient for Promotional Activities shifted from 0.19 to a non-significant value ($\beta = 0.08$, $p > 0.05$), signifying that its effect is fully mediated through Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement—that is, a case of full mediation.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
(Empirical Findings from Fast Fashion Consumers)

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample — Fast Fashion Buyers' Characteristics

A total of 200 valid responses were secured through the questionnaire survey. Table 4.1 delineates the demographic composition of the sample.

Gender Composition: Female participants constituted the majority, accounting for 68.4% (n = 137), whereas males comprised 31.6% (n = 63).

Age Distribution: Respondents aged between 18 and 30 years represented 82.6% (n = 164) of the sample, aligning closely with the age profile characteristic of the core consumer segment within the Fast Fashion sector.

Educational Attainment: Individuals holding a bachelor's degree or higher accounted for 85.1% (n = 169).

Collectively, these sample attributes correspond favorably with the prototypical consumer profile exposed to digital platform promotion in the Fast Fashion brand context. To a considerable extent, this congruence suggests that the sample possesses satisfactory representativeness for the present study.

Of the 200 valid respondents, 137 (68.4%) identified as female and 63 (31.6%) as male. The age distribution was heavily concentrated among younger cohorts: 108 participants (54.0%) fell within the 18–25 bracket, followed by 56 (28.0%) aged 26–30. Only 8 respondents (4.0%) were under 18 years of age, while 28 (14.0%) were aged 31 or older. With respect to educational attainment, 123 participants (61.5%) held a bachelor's degree, and 47 (23.5%) possessed a master's degree or higher qualification. An identical subset of 15 respondents each (7.5%) reported having attained an associate degree or a high school diploma or lower. These characteristics are broadly consistent with the target consumer base of Fast Fashion brands leveraging digital platform promotion.

4.2 Measurement Model Testing

Before any hypothesis testing, one question had to be answered: are the measurement tools sound? To ensure the scientific rigor and reliability of the instruments, a two-step procedure—reliability assessment followed by validity checks—was carried out. This is standard practice.

4.2.1 Reliability Testing — Internal Consistency of Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement Scales

Internal consistency was appraised through the Cronbach's α coefficient. The results are collated in Table 4.1. For all variables—inclusive of those integral to the S-O-R Model (Stimulus, Organism, Response) and the specific constructs of Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement—the α values surpassed 0.85. This comfortably exceeds the conventionally accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In numerous research contexts, coefficients of such magnitude denote robust scale reliability. Notably, this finding retains its validity even within the Fast Fashion milieu, wherein consumer responses can exhibit pronounced volatility.

Table 4. 1 Reliability Analysis Results for Each Variable (N = 200)

Variable	Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach'sα
Social media marketing	Content quality	4	0.89
	Interactivity	4	0.91
	Promotional activities	4	0.85
Mediators	Brand trust	4	0.88
	Consumer engagement	4	0.87
Dependent variable	Purchase intention	3	0.90

4.2.2 Validity Testing — Convergent and Discriminant Validity for S-O-R Constructs

Construct validity was evaluated through two complementary diagnostics: the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The obtained KMO value reached 0.87, comfortably surpassing the conventional 0.70 benchmark. Bartlett's test yielded a statistically significant result

($\chi^2 = 1{,}246.32$, $p < 0.001$). Collectively, these indicators confirm that the correlation matrix is amenable to factorization.

Subsequently, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted, employing principal component extraction with varimax rotation. The extracted factor structure largely corresponded to the theoretically specified model—a finding congruent with the logic of the S-O-R Model, wherein the Stimulus (dimensions of Social Media Marketing), Organism (Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement), and Response (Purchase Intention) constitute discrete factors. All items registered primary factor loadings exceeding 0.60 on their intended constructs, while cross-loadings remained below 0.40. In numerous research contexts, such patterns are interpreted as evidence of satisfactory construct validity, a conclusion that holds even within the Fast Fashionsector, where consumer perceptions may shift precipitously.

4.3 Correlation Analysis — Associations Among digital platform promotion, brand credibility, user interaction, and Purchase Intention

A preliminary bivariate analysis was conducted to evaluate the direction and magnitude of pairwise associations among the key constructs. The results are presented in Table 4.2. The data reveal that all three dimensions of Digital Platform Promotion—Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities—exhibit statistically significant positive correlations with Brand Credibility, User Interaction, and Purchase Intention ($p < 0.01$ in each instance).

Interactivity emerges as particularly salient, demonstrating the strongest correlation with Purchase Intention ($r = 0.782$). This implies, to a considerable extent, that interactivity may operate as a uniquely influential driver in shaping consumer purchase decisions. The remaining dimensions likewise display meaningful associations, albeit of lesser magnitude. These correlational patterns furnish initial empirical support—though not causal confirmation—for the subsequent regression analyses. Furthermore, they align closely with the S-O-R framework, wherein stimulus variables are expected to correlate with both organismic and response variables prior to the application of more rigorous testing procedures.

Table 4. 2 Bivariate Correlations (Pearson's r) for All Focal Constructs — Fast Fashion Sample (N = 200)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Content quality	1					
2. Interactivity	0.612**	1				
3. Promotional activities	0.534**	0.581**	1			
4. Brand trust	0.663**	0.721**	0.598**	1		
5. Consumer engagement	0.587**	0.749**	0.645**	0.672**	1	
6. Purchase intention	0.645**	0.782**	0.623**	0.701**	0.735**	1

4.4 Empirical Examination of the Proposed Hypotheses

4.4.1 Direct Impact of Social Media Marketing on Fast-Fashion Consumers' Purchase Intention

A multiple regression analysis was executed to estimate the discrete direct effects of the three Social Media Marketing Dimensions-Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities—on Purchase Intention. The model specification was formulated as follows:

Purchase Intention = β_0 + β_1Content Quality + β_2Interactivity + β_3Promotional Activities + ε

The estimation results are reported in Table 4.3. The overall model attained statistical significance ($F = 93.20$, $p < 0.001$), yielding an adjusted R^2 of 0.57. In other words, the three independent variables collectively accounted for 57% of the variance observed in the dependent variable.

With regard to individual predictors, Interactivity exerted the most pronounced influence ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$). Content Quality followed, registering a moderate effect ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$). Promotional Activities exhibited a comparatively smaller yet unequivocally positive effect ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.001$). On the basis of these outcomes, hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c receive empirical substantiation.

Table 4. 3 Regression Outcomes: How Content Quality, Interactivity, and Promotional Activities Drive Purchase Intention in Fast Fashion

Independent Variable	Standardized Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	Significance (p)
Content quality	0.28	4.77	<0.001
Interactivity	0.48	8.19	<0.001
Promotional activities	0.19	3.57	0.001

Note: $F = 93.20$, $p < 0.001$

4.4.2 Mediation Effect Testing — Indirect Roles of Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement

Attention now turns to the mediating mechanisms. In accordance with the S-O-R Model, the stimulus (Social Media Marketing) should first exert an influence upon the organism-namely, Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement-prior to affecting the response (Purchase Intention). The present section subjects this causal chain to empirical scrutiny.

Initially, the effect of the independent variables on each mediator was examined. Two discrete regression models were estimated, the results of which are summarized in Table 4.4.

Model with Brand Trust as the Dependent Variable: All three dimensions of Social Media Marketing exhibited statistically significant positive effects: Content Quality ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), Interactivity ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), and Promotional Activities ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Consequently, hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c receive empirical corroboration. Within the Fast Fashion context, this implies that brands are capable of cultivating trust through multiple marketing levers.

Model with consumer engagement as the dependent variable. A different pattern emerged. Interactivity ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) and promotional activities ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) both exerted significant positive influences on consumer engagement. However, the effect of content quality was not statistically reliable ($\beta = 0.15$, $p > 0.05$). To some extent, this indicates that not every dimension drives engagement equally. Consequently, H5b and H5c are supported, whereas H5a is not.

Table 4. 4 Estimating the Influence of Marketing Stimuli on Two Organismic Mediators

Predictor	**Dependent: Brand trust**	**Dependent: Consumer engagement**
	B(p)	B(p)
Content quality	0.35(<0.001)	0.15(0.076)
Interactivity	0.42(<0.000)	0.52(<0.001)
Promotional activities	0.21(0.008)	0.31(0.002)

Note: The path from content quality to consumer engagement did not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). Accordingly, H5a is not supported in this study.

Step 2: Estimating the effect of the mediating variables on the dependent variable, while controlling for the independent variables.

Having established the stimulus-to-organism links, we now ask: do those organismic states—Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement—actually drive the final response? To answer this, Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement were entered simultaneously into a regression model that already included the three social media marketing dimensions (content quality, interactivity, promotional activities). The results are presented in Table 4.5.

Both organismic variables yielded significant positive coefficients. For Brand Trust, $\beta = 0.26$ ($p < 0.05$). For Consumer Engagement, $\beta = 0.39$ ($p < 0.001$). In many cases, such findings indicate that each mediator independently contributes to purchase intention, even after accounting for the direct influence of the marketing stimuli. Hence, H3 and H6 receive empirical support. This pattern is consistent with the S-O-R Model logic—and holds within the Fast Fashion context, where both cognitive trust and behavioral engagement appear to matter.

Table 4. 5 Regression Analysis of Mediating Variables on Purchase Intention (Controlling for Independent Variables)

Variable	Coefficient (β)	t	p
Content quality	0.12	2.16	0.032
Interactivity	0.25	4.45	<0.001
Promotional activities	0.08	1.15	0.133
Brand trust	0.26	4.66	<0.001
Consumer engagement	0.39	6.19	<0.001

Note:$F = 72.15$, $p < 0.001$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.64$

Step 3: Significance test of the mediation effects.

Comparing the direct effects model with the model after including the mediating variables, its coefficient dropped from 0.48 ($p < 0.001$) to 0.25 ($p < 0.01$). The reduction is substantial, but the effect remains statistically significant. For promotional activities, the change was more dramatic: from 0.19 ($p < 0.05$) down to 0.08 ($p > 0.05$). That is, after controlling for Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement, its direct path no longer reaches significance. Content quality followed a similar pattern: β decreased from 0.28 ($p < 0.01$) to 0.12 ($p > 0.05$). The results are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4. 6 Assessing the Organism's Mediation: Sobel z values and Significance

Path	Sobel Z	p
Interactivity → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	4.62	<0.001
Interactivity → Consumer Engagement → Purchase Intention	5.52	<0.001
Promotional Activities → Consumer Engagement → Purchase Intention	4.27	<0.001

To summarize the mediation findings. Brand credibility functioned as a partial mediator along the pathway linking interactivity to purchase intention. Meanwhile, customer interaction involvement exhibited significant mediating effects—specifically, for the paths from interactivity to purchase intention and from promotional activities to purchase intention. Taken together, these results offer partial support for H4 and H7. This pattern is broadly consistent with the stimulus-organism-response theoretical framework (often

abbreviated as S-O-R), and holds in the trend-driven, rapid-response apparel sector (i.e., the context previously referred to as fast fashion), where both cognitive reliance on the brand and active behavioral participation help transmit the influence of social media marketing.

4.5 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results — Supported and Unsupported Paths

A total of 13 hypotheses were examined. For the direct effects of social media marketing dimensions on purchase intention (H1a–H1c), all three received empirical support: content quality (H1a), interactivity (H1b), and promotional activities (H1c) each showed a significant positive influence.

Regarding the paths to brand trust (H2a–H2c), support was also found across all three predictors: content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities. The subsequent path from brand trust to purchase intention (H3) was likewise supported. However, the mediating role of brand trust (H4) received only partial support.

Turning to consumer engagement, the results were mixed. Content quality did not significantly predict consumer engagement (H5a, not supported). In contrast, both interactivity (H5b) and promotional activities (H5c) showed significant positive effects. The path from consumer engagement to purchase intention (H6) was supported, while its mediating role (H7) was partially supported.

In summary, most direct-effect hypotheses were supported, whereas the two mediation hypotheses (H4 and H7) received only partial confirmation.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
(Explaining Mediating Effects and Limitations)

5.1 Discussion of Empirical Findings in the Fast-Fashion Social Media Context

This investigation was situated within the rapid-turnover apparel sector (often termed "fast fashion"). Guided by the stimulus-organism-response theoretical framework (abbreviated as S-O-R), a dual-mediation framework was developed—incorporating brand credibility and customer interaction involvement as parallel organismic variables. The aim was to systematically unpack how three dimensions of social media marketing (content quality, interactivity, promotional activities) shape consumers' purchase intention. Quantitative analyses yielded several key conclusions.

5.1.1 Direct Effects of Each Dimension of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Intention — Fast Fashion Context

All three marketing stimuli exerted a significant positive influence on purchase intention. That is, H1a, H1b, and H1c are empirically supported. Among them, interactivity delivered the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.48$). Content quality followed ($\beta = 0.28$). Promotional activities showed a smaller yet still positive impact ($\beta = 0.19$). These outcomes address Research Objectives 1 and 2. What do they imply? In many cases, fast-fashion consumers seem to value interactive, two-way communication with brands on social media more than passive information exposure or price-driven promotions. In other words, engagement matters—sometimes more than discounts.

5.1.2 Partial Mediation Explained: The Roles of Brand Credibility and Customer Interaction Involvement Within the S-O-R Logic

What is the empirical verdict regarding the mediators? The study substantiates that Brand Credibility and Customer Interaction Involvement do indeed perform mediating functions within the nexus between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention. That said, the empirical support for H4 and H7 remains partial in nature. A granular

dissection of the findings clarifies this pattern.

Brand Credibility acted as a partial mediator specifically along the “Interactivity → Purchase Intention” pathway. What does this entail? When a brand engages in active and authentic interaction, it tends to cultivate credibility. This credibility, in numerous instances, subsequently bolsters Purchase Intention. Such a configuration is hardly novel; extant scholarship corroborates it. A study situated within the Xiaohongshu ecosystem, utilizing survey data and multiple regression, determined that interactive brand content exerts a significant positive influence on both consumer trust and purchase propensity. Similarly, empirical research on online brand communities reported congruent outcomes: interactive behaviors within such communities generate unequivocally positive effects on members’ purchase intentions.

Turning to Customer Interaction Involvement, this mediator operated across two pathways: “Interactivity → Purchase Intention” and “Promotional Activities → Purchase Intention.” The mediating potency was most pronounced along the interactivity pathway. Existing literature already positions interactivity as a pivotal dimension of Social Media Marketing. To a considerable extent, social media interaction effectively galvanizes customer interaction involvement, thereby steering purchase decisions—chiefly through engagement behaviors such as commenting, sharing, and activity participation. Within these interactive scenarios, consumers accomplish the transition from mere exposure to purchase intent.

Collectively, the aforementioned findings address Research Objectives 3 and 4. They unveil a dual-layered psychological architecture: a cognitive pathway via Brand Credibility and a behavioral pathway via Customer Interaction Involvement. This integrative perspective extends the explanatory reach of the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework into the terrain of social media marketing. One succinct takeaway emerges: both what consumers think and what they do are of critical consequence.

5.2Theoretical Contributions

These findings contribute novel insights to the scholarly literature, specifically in the form of robust empirical evidence. The data analysis presented in Chapter 4 reveals two noteworthy theoretical phenomena: first, Interactivity, as a core driver, exerts a considerably stronger effect than either Content Quality or Promotional Activities; second,

the two mediating pathways—Brand Credibility and Customer Interaction Involvement—demonstrate asymmetric transmission effects. Whereas interactivity operates through both conduits, the influence of promotional activities depends almost exclusively on the customer interaction involvement pathway. These results transcend the rudimentary verification of "whether social media marketing works," instead illuminating the deeper mechanisms of "how it works" and "which pathway prevails."

What is the theoretical dividend of this study? In my view, three principal contributions emerge.

First, a dual-mediation model. We constructed and empirically tested such a framework. Prior research frequently halted at a single mediator—an approach that, while valid, remains incomplete. Here, we integrate two parallel pathways: Brand Credibility (cognitive) and Customer Interaction Involvement (behavioral). Collectively, they unpack the multiplex mechanisms through which social media Marketing shapes Purchase Intention. To a significant extent, this integrative architecture advances our comprehension of the "organism" stratum within the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, extending it into digital consumption milieus.

Second, contextual specificity. The study's empirical anchor is the Fast Fashion apparel industry—a high-velocity, visually driven sector underpinned by a youthful user base. This configuration is not universally generalizable. Within this precise context, we gauged the relative influence of each social media Marketing dimension. The outcome furnishes solid empirical endorsement for context-sensitive theory building in digital consumption. One succinct implication: where one tests is as consequential as what one tests.

Third, a granular examination of promotional activities. An intriguing inflection emerges here: the direct effect of promotions on purchase intention proved relatively modest. However, their indirect effect—mediated through the stimulation of Customer Interaction Involvement (sharing, commenting, joining challenges)—was demonstrably significant. This finding moves beyond the orthodox conceptualization of promotions as mere economic incentives. In numerous instances, promotions also function as relationship cultivators and behavioral activators. This constitutes a fundamentally different narrative.

5.3 Practical Implications

The value of theoretical contributions ultimately must return to addressing and guiding real-world problems. Our data reveal that the dominant role of interactivity, the asymmetry of the two mediating pathways, and the "unexpected" finding that content quality does not significantly affect consumer engagement—provide clear and actionable directions for fast-fashion companies' social media marketing practices.

First, strategic focus should shift from "content dissemination" to "relational interaction." We find that interactivity is the strongest dimension influencing consumers' purchase intention. Companies should go beyond one-way information broadcasting models and build systematic user interaction mechanisms, such as establishing dedicated community management teams, improving comment response efficiency, and designing user co-creation activities that foster a sense of participation.

Second, build a dual-driver marketing path of "trust" and "engagement." ** Companies should pay simultaneous attention to building brand trust. On the trust side, they should enhance brand transparency and reliability, for example, by using authentic user feedback and influencer reviews to increase credibility. On the engagement side, they should design incentive-based and entertaining interactive activities, such as outfit challenge contests and user-generated content campaigns, to create community diffusion effects.

Third, establish a multi-dimensional marketing effectiveness evaluation system. ** Traditional effectiveness evaluations often focus on short-term sales conversions. This study suggests that companies should incorporate brand trust (e.g., Net Promoter Score, consumer satisfaction) and consumer engagement (e.g., interaction rate, volume of user-generated content) into process-oriented assessment metrics, building a more scientific performance evaluation framework that directs resources toward long-term value accumulation.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Certain limitations are inherent to this study and warrant explicit articulation.

External Validity: The conclusions may possess limited generalizability beyond the parameters of the present sample. Further inquiry is required to substantiate their broader applicability.

Causal Inference: The cross-sectional design precludes the rigorous establishment of causality. Moreover, common method bias remains a latent concern, given that all variables were procured via self-report measures at a singular temporal juncture.

The Content-Quality Conundrum: The finding that Content Quality failed to exert a discernible effect on Consumer Engagement calls for more granular investigation. Whether this outcome stems from measurement constraints, contextual specificities, or underlying consumer characteristics remains an unresolved question.

Prospective research endeavors should contemplate longitudinal or experimental configurations, validate the model across alternative industries or cultural milieus, and delineate the boundary conditions under which content quality assumes salience for engagement.

5.4.1 Limitations of Sample Size and Representativeness — Fast Fashion Consumers from Non-Probability Sampling

This study relied on a cross-sectional survey design. All variables were measured at one point in time. That makes causal inference difficult—strictly speaking, we cannot be sure about the direction of effects.

To be clear, we did posit a specific causal ordering based on the S-O-R theory: social media marketing → mediating variables → purchase intention. That said, reverse causality cannot be ruled out. In many cases, consumers who already have a strong purchase intention might also follow and interact with brands more actively on social media. So the arrow could point the other way. At least theoretically.

Another limitation concerns common method bias. All data came from the same source—consumer self-reports. To some extent, the observed relationships among variables might reflect measurement consistency rather than true underlying links. That's a known risk in single-source, cross-sectional studies.

Future investigations would benefit from employing a longitudinal tracking approach, collecting data in two phases: first measuring social media marketing perceptions and mediating variables, and then measuring purchase intention after a 2- to 4-week interval, to more reliably verify causal directions. Additionally, multi-source data validation strategies could be introduced: independent variables (characteristics of social media marketing activities) could be obtained from platform content analysis, and mediating variables (consumer engagement behaviors) could be extracted from behavioral

log data (e.g., records of likes, comments, shares), thereby effectively controlling common method bias through cross-validation of subjective and objective data.

5.4.2 Limitations of Cross-Sectional Data and Causal Inference — Need for Longitudinal Designs

This study found a noteworthy "non-significant" result: the effect of content quality on user interaction don't have significant (H5a not supported, $\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.124$). This finding is counterintuitive—one would expect that higher-quality content would better stimulate users' liking, commenting, and sharing behaviors. Interpretation of this result requires caution. Possible reasons include that fast-fashion consumers may have come to regard "high-quality content" as a "minimum requirement" rather than a "differentiator" for brand operations, making routine content quality insufficient to create a differentiated stimulus. Alternatively, the measurement items for "content quality" in this study may have been too broad (e.g., "provides valuable fashion information"), failing to capture the key content attributes that drive engagement (such as emotional resonance, topical controversy, or social currency value).

Future research should decompose the construct of "content quality" into more refined sub-dimensions. Drawing on established frameworks in information quality research, content quality could be broken down into sub-dimensions such as informativeness, entertainment, emotional resonance, and social currency value, and the effects of each sub-dimension on consumer engagement could be tested separately. Moreover, experimental methods could be used to manipulate different content attributes (e.g., designing high-emotional-arousal vs. Low-emotional-arousal content) to test the causal relationship between content quality and consumer engagement under more controlled conditions. To some extent, this line of work offers both theoretical insight and practical guidance. For fast-fashion firms, the implication for content strategies is fairly direct.

This study has certain limitations in terms of sample, methodology, variable measurement, and contextual boundaries. The underlying reasons for these limitations-such as the need to expand sample diversity and cross-regional comparisons, adopt longitudinal and multi-source data designs, and refine content quality dimensions to explore the "non-significant finding"-all point to a core goal: advancing social media marketing theory from a simple judgment of "whether it works" to a nuanced

understanding of “under what conditions, through which pathways, and for whom it works better.”Future work that pushes these directions further—both in depth and breadth—could offer something valuable. For academic research. And for corporate practice alike. In many cases, a more explanatory and practically useful theoretical framework would emerge. That, at least, is the hope.

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APPENDIXES



APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Survey Instrument for Social Media Marketing Impact Study

Population Scope: Social media users who have engaged with at least one fast-fashion apparel label (e.g., Uniqlo, ZARA, H&M, SHEIN) via public channels in the last half-year

Cover Note: This questionnaire is administered as part of a postgraduate dissertation examining the mechanisms linking fashion brands' digital promotional activities to consumer decision-making. Participation is entirely voluntary and responses are fully anonymized. The survey takes ~9 minutes to complete. There are no "correct" answers—please respond based on your genuine experience.

Part 1: Eligibility Screening

#	Question	Response Options
Q1	Have you followed any fast-fashion apparel brand via social media platforms in the past 6 months?	☐ Yes → Proceed ☐ No → Exit (thank you for your interest)
Q2	Do you browse social media content posted by fast-fashion brands at least once monthly?	☐ Yes → Proceed ☐ No → Exit (thank you for your interest)

Part 2: Perceptions of Brand Social Media Practices (Stimulus Constructs)

Please recall the fast-fashion brand whose social media output you engage with most often. Indicate your level of agreement with each statement using the scale below.

Construct	Item ID	Item Wording	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Informational Value of Content	IC1	The fashion-related knowledge shared by this brand on social media helps me select suitable apparel.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	IC2	Product descriptions released by this brand via social channels align with the physical items I receive.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	IC3	The brand updates its social media content frequently enough to reflect shifting style trends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	IC4	I find the visual and textual content posted by this brand on social platforms enjoyable to consume.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Two-Way Interaction	TI1	The brand responds to user comments or direct messages on social media within reasonable timeframe.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Informational Value of Content	IC1	The fashion-related knowledge shared by this brand on social media helps me select suitable apparel.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Construct	Item ID	Item Wording	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	TI2	This brand invites consumers to share feedback on upcoming products or campaigns via its social accounts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	TI3	I feel acknowledged as a valued community member rather than a passive viewer of the brand's social content.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	TI4	The brand moderates and joins conversations about its products in the comment section or fan groups.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Platform-Exclusive Incentives	PEI1	This brand regularly distributes social-Media -only discount codes to its followers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	PEI2	The brand runs Promotions (e.g., limited -time sales, lucky draws) exclusively for its social media audience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	PEI3	I gain priority access to new arrivals or limited-edition drops via the brand's social channels.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Part 3: Cognitive and Behavioral Responses (Mediating Constructs)

The following items relate to your attitudes and behaviors toward the same brand referenced above.

Construct	Item ID	Item Wording	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Brand Credibility	BC1	I am confident that this brand delivers products matching the quality standards advertised on social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	BC2	I believe this brand communicates honestly with consumers on social platforms, without deceptive claims.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	BC3	I trust that this brand prioritizes consumer interests alongside commercial goals in its social media operations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	BC4	Overall, I consider this brand a trustworthy actor in the fast-fashion space based on its social media presence.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participatory Engagement	PE1	I regularly react to (like, save, etc.) the brand's social media posts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Construct	Item ID	Item Wording	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	PE2	I sometimes leave comments or questions under the brand's social media content.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	PE3	I have reposted or shared the brand's social media content to my own network.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	PE4	I feel a sense of connection to this brand through its ongoing social media activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Part 4: Purchase Propensity (Outcome Construct)

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding the same brand.

Item ID	Item Wording	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
PP1	I am highly likely to buy from this brand within the next quarter.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PP2	This brand ranks among my top choices when I plan to purchase fast-fashion apparel.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Item ID	Item Wording	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
PP3	I would speak positively about this brand's products to people in my social circle.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Part 5: Background Information

#	Question	Response Options
B1	Self-identified gender	☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to disclose
B2	Age cohort	☐ 17 or younger ☐ 18–25 ☐ 26–30 ☐ 31–35 ☐ 36 or older
B3	Highest completed education	☐ Secondary school or below ☐ Vocational/associate degree ☐ Undergraduate/bachelor's degree ☐ Postgraduate degree or higher
B4	Residential location tier	☐ Tier-1 metropolitan area ☐ Emerging Tier-1 city ☐ Tier-2 city ☐ Tier-3 city or smaller town
B5	Annual frequency of fast-fashion apparel purchases	☐ Fewer than 3 times ☐ 3–6 times ☐ 7–12 times ☐ More than 12 times

Thank you for contributing to this academic research!

APPENDIX B

Article

Appendix B: Article

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How Social Media Marketing Drives Purchase Intention in Fast Fashion: The Distinct Mediating Roles of Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement

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Abstract: While social media marketing (SMM) is widely used by fast fashion brands, the psychological and behavioral mechanisms through which it influences consumers' purchase intention remain underexplored. Based on the stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) theory, this study constructs a dual-mediation model to examine how three SMM dimensions—content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities—affect purchase intention via brand trust (a cognitive pathway) and consumer engagement (a behavioral pathway). A quantitative survey of 200 fast fashion consumers was analyzed using regression and Sobel tests. Results show that all three SMM dimensions positively affect purchase intention, with interactivity exerting the strongest direct effect. Brand trust partially mediates the effect of interactivity, whereas consumer engagement mediates both interactivity and promotional activities. Notably, content quality does not significantly influence consumer engagement, suggesting it may serve as a baseline expectation rather than an engagement trigger in fast fashion. These findings extend S-O-R theory by differentiating two parallel mediating pathways and offer actionable guidance for fast fashion brands seeking to optimize SMM resource allocation.

Keywords: Social media marketing; purchase intention; brand trust; consumer engagement; fast fashion; S-O-R theory.

1. Introduction

The digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped how fast fashion brands interact with consumers. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo have evolved from mere communication channels into integrated ecosystems where branding, customer interaction, and sales conversion occur simultaneously. For fast fashion giants like Uniqlo, ZARA, H&M, and SHEIN, social media has become a critical battlefield for attracting young consumers, launching products rapidly, and building brand image.

Despite heavy investments, many fast fashion brands struggle with content homogenization, low interaction quality, and unsatisfactory returns. A 2023 industry report noted that while 76% of consumers believe social media interaction affects their purchase decisions, only 34% perceive current brand interactions as "warm and trustworthy." This gap highlights a pressing need: to understand not merely whether SMM works, but *how* it works—specifically, through which psychological and behavioral pathways SMM shapes purchase intention.

Existing research has largely focused on direct effects or single-mediator models, leaving the relative importance of different mediators unclear. Moreover, the fast fashion context—characterized by rapid trends, visual dominance, and a young user base—has received insufficient theoretical attention. To address these gaps, this study poses the following research question: *How do content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities in SMM influence consumers' purchase intention in fast fashion, and what roles do brand trust and consumer engagement play as mediators?*

Drawing on the S-O-R (Stimulus–Organism–Response) framework, this study proposes a dual-mediation model in which SMM dimensions serve as external stimuli, brand trust and consumer engagement represent internal organismic states, and purchase intention is the behavioral response. The study has four objectives: (1) to test the direct effects of the three SMM dimensions on purchase intention; (2) to compare their relative influence; (3) to examine the mediating role of brand trust; and (4) to examine the mediating role of consumer engagement.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1. The S-O-R Framework in Social Media Marketing

The S-O-R model, originating from environmental psychology, posits that external stimuli (S) trigger internal organismic states (O), which in turn lead to behavioral responses (R). In the context of digital marketing, SMM activities are conceptualized as stimuli that affect consumers' cognitive and affective states (e.g., trust, engagement), ultimately shaping their purchase intentions. This framework has been widely applied in online consumer behavior research, yet few studies have simultaneously compared cognitive versus behavioral pathways within a single model.

2.2. Social Media Marketing Dimensions

Following prior research, this study conceptualizes SMM as a multidimensional construct comprising three key dimensions:

Content quality:the perceived value, reliability, timeliness, and entertainment of brand-generated content.

Interactivity: the timeliness and depth of two-way communication between brand and consumer.

Promotional activities:economic incentives such as discount codes, coupons, and limited-time offers.

These dimensions are not mutually exclusive but represent distinct strategic levers that brands can pull. However, their relative effectiveness in the fast fashion context remains empirically unclear.

2.3. Direct Effects on Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's subjective likelihood of purchasing a product in the near future. High-quality content can inform and entertain, thereby reducing uncertainty and increasing preference. Interactivity fosters a sense of connection and personalization, which are highly valued by young fast-fashion consumers. Promotional activities provide immediate economic utility, which can trigger impulse purchases. Thus:

H1a: Content quality has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

H1b: Interactivity has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

H1c: Promotional activities have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

2.4. The Mediating Role of Brand Trust (Cognitive Pathway)

Brand trust reflects consumers' confidence in a brand's reliability, integrity, and goodwill. In the fast fashion industry—where product quality consistency is often questioned—trust is a crucial risk-reduction mechanism. When brands provide valuable content and engage in genuine interactions, consumers are more likely to perceive the brand as trustworthy. This trust, in turn, increases purchase intention by lowering perceived risk. Therefore:

H2a, H2b, H2c:Content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities each positively affect brand trust.

H3:Brand trust positively affects purchase intention.

H4:Brand trust mediates the relationship between SMM dimensions and purchase intention.

2.5. The Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement (Behavioral Pathway)

Consumer engagement goes beyond passive exposure to include active behaviors such as liking, commenting, sharing, and participating in brand-hosted activities. Engaged consumers develop stronger brand relationships and are more likely to convert. Interactivity directly invites participation, while promotional activities (e.g., share-to-win campaigns) can also stimulate engagement. However, content quality alone may not suffice if it lacks interactive or incentive elements. Thus:

H5a, H5b, H5c:Content quality, interactivity, and promotional activities each positively affect consumer engagement.

H6:Consumer engagement positively affects purchase intention.

H7:Consumer engagement mediates the relationship between SMM dimensions and purchase intention.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Sample

A cross-sectional quantitative design was adopted. The target population comprised active social media users who had followed at least one major fast fashion brand (Uniqlo, ZARA, H&M, or SHEIN) in the past six months. Using convenience and snowball sampling, an online questionnaire was distributed via Wenjuanxing. Of 235 responses received, 200 were valid (effective rate: 85.1%), after excluding incomplete or patterned responses.

3.2. Sample Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. The sample closely matches the typical fast fashion consumer profile (predominantly young, female, and well-educated), supporting external validity.

Table 1. Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 200)

Variable	Category.	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	63	31.6
	Female	137	68.4
Age	Under 18	8	5.1
	18–25	108	53.8
	26–30	56	28.2
	31 and above	28	12.9
Education	High school or below	15	7.7
	Associate degree	15	7.7
Variable	Bachelor's degree	123	61.5
	Master's or above	47	23.1

3.3. Measurements

All constructs were measured using established scales adapted to the fast fashion context, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Content quality (4 items):e.g., "The brand's content provides valuable fashion information."

Interactivity (4 items):e.g., "The brand actively replies to my comments or private messages."

Promotional activities (4 items): e.g., "The brand often provides exclusive discount codes on social media."

Brand trust (4 items): adapted from Hanaysha (2022).

Consumer engagement (4 items):adapted from Chu & Kim (2011).

Purchase intention (3 items): e.g., "I am likely to purchase from this brand in the near future."

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α. All α values exceeded 0.85 (content quality: 0.89; interactivity: 0.91; promotional activities: 0.85; brand trust: 0.88; consumer engagement: 0.87; purchase intention: 0.90), indicating excellent internal consistency. The KMO value was 0.87, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1246.32$, $p <$

0.001). Factor loadings all exceeded 0.60, confirming structural validity.

3.4. Data Analysis

SPSS 26.0 was used for analysis. The analytical procedure involved: (1) Pearson correlation analysis; (2) multiple regression for direct effects; and (3) Baron and Kenny's stepwise mediation analysis with Sobel tests for indirect effects.

4. Results

4.1. Correlation Analysis

Table 2presents the Pearson correlation matrix. All SMM dimensions correlate significantly with brand trust, consumer engagement, and purchase intention ($p < 0.01$). Interactivity shows the strongest correlation with purchase intention ($r = 0.782$), followed by content quality ($r = 0.645$) and promotional activities ($r = 0.623$).

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 200)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Content quality	1					
2. Interactivity	0.612**	1				
3. Promotional activ	0.534**	0.581**	1			
4. Brand trust	0.663**	0.721**	0.598**	1		
5. Consumer engagement	0.587**	0.749**	0.645**	0.672**	1	
6. Purchase intention	0.645**	0.782**	0.623**	0.701**	0.735**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

4.2. Direct Effects

Table 3 shows the multiple regression results for direct effects of SMM dimensions on purchase intention. The model is significant ($F = 93.20$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.57$). All three dimensions positively affect purchase intention, with interactivity having the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H1a, H1b, and H1c are supported.

Table 3. Direct Effects of SMM Dimensions on Purchase Intention

Variable	β	t-value	p-value
Content quality	0.28	4.77	<0.001
Interactivity	0.48	8.19	<0.001
Promotional activities	0.19	3.57	0.001

Model: $F = 93.20$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.57$

4.3. Mediation Effects

Following Baron and Kenny's stepwise approach, we first tested the effects of SMM dimensions on the mediators (Table 4). All three dimensions significantly affect brand trust (H2a–H2c supported). For consumer engagement, interactivity ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) and promotional activities ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.002$) have significant effects, but content quality does not ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.076$). Thus H5b and H5c are supported, while H5a is rejected.

Table 4. Effects of SMM Dimensions on Mediators

Independent variable	Dependent: Brand trust		Dependent: Consumer engagement	
	β	p-value	β	p-value
Content quality	0.35	<0.001	0.15	0.076
Interactivity	0.42	<0.000	0.52	<0.001
Promotional activities	0.21	0.008	0.31	0.002

Next, we regressed purchase intention on the mediators while controlling for SMM dimensions (Table 5). Both brand trust ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$) and consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$) positively affect purchase intention, supporting H3 and H6.

Table 5. Effects of Mediators on Purchase Intention (controlling for SMM)

Variable	β	t-value	p-value
Content quality	0.12	2.16	0.032
Interactivity	0.25	4.45	<0.001
Promotional activities	0.08	1.15	0.133
Brand trust	0.26	4.66	<0.001
Consumer engagement	0.39	6.19	<0.001

Model: $F = 72.15$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.64$.

Finally, Sobel tests (Table 6) confirmed that brand trust partially mediates the "interactivity → purchase intention" path ($Z = 4.62$, $p < 0.001$). Consumer engagement mediates both the "interactivity → purchase intention" ($Z = 5.52$, $p < 0.001$) and "promotional activities → purchase intention" ($Z = 4.27$, $p < 0.001$) paths. Thus H4 and H7 are partially supported. Notably, the direct effect of promotional activities becomes non-significant after including mediators, indicating full mediation through consumer engagement.

Table 6. Sobel Tests for Indirect Effects

Path	Sobel Z	p
Interactivity → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	4.62	<0.001
Interactivity → Consumer Engagement → Purchase Intention	5.52	<0.001
Promotional Activities → Consumer Engagement → Purchase Intention	4.27	<0.001

4.4. Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Content	Result
H1a	Content quality → Purchase intention (+)	Supported
H1b	Interactivity → Purchase intention (+)	Supported
H1c	Promotional activities → Purchase intention (+)	Supported
H2a	Content quality → Brand trust (+)	Supported
H2b	Interactivity → Brand trust (+)	Supported
H2c	Promotional activities → Brand trust (+)	Supported
H3	Brand trust → Purchase intention (+)	Supported
H4	Content quality → Consumer engagement (+)	Partially supported
H5a	Interactivity → Consumer engagement (+)	Not supported
H5b	Interactivity → Consumer engagement (+)	Supported
H5c	Promotional activities → Consumer engagement (+)	Supported
H6	Consumer engagement → Purchase intention (+)	Supported
H7	Consumer engagement mediates	Partially supported

5. Discussion

5.1. Key Findings and Interpretation

This study yields three main findings. First, among the three SMM dimensions, interactivity is the strongest direct predictor of purchase intention in fast fashion. This suggests that young consumers value authentic, responsive dialogue over one-way content transactional promotions. Second, brand trust and consumer engagement function as distinct mediating mechanisms: trust is primarily built through interactivity, whereas engagement is activated by both interactivity and promotions. Third, content quality does not significantly drive consumer engagement—a non-finding that is theoretically meaningful. In the fast fashion context, where high-quality visuals and trendy copy are the norm, consumers may have come to expect polished content as a baseline. Only when content is paired with interaction or incentives does it translate into active participation.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it extends S-O-R theory by empirically separating cognitive (brand trust) and behavioral (consumer engagement) pathways within a single model, showing that different SMM dimensions activate different organismic responses. Second, it challenges the assumption that content quality uniformly drives all forms of consumer response; in high-stimulation environments like fast fashion, content quality may be necessary but not sufficient for engagement. Third, it clarifies the role of promotional activities beyond economic utility—their main influence on purchase intention operates indirectly through encouraging participation, supporting a relationship-based view of promotions.

5.3. Practical Implications

For fast fashion managers, the results suggest a strategic

reorientation. First, investment priorities should shift from content production to interaction capability: faster reply times, community management, and co-creation activities. Second, a dual-path strategy is recommended: build brand trust through consistent, transparent communication, while simultaneously designing engaging campaigns (e.g., challenges, UGC contests) that reward participation. Third, performance metrics should include not only sales but also trust indicators (e.g., NPS) and engagement metrics (e.g., share rates, comment quality) to capture long-term value.

6. Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

This study demonstrates that SMM affects fast-fashion consumers' purchase intention through two distinct pathways: brand trust (cognitive) and consumer engagement (behavioral). Interactivity is the most powerful dimension, whereas content quality alone does not drive engagement.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample (N = 200) was obtained through non-probability sampling, limiting generalizability. The cross-sectional design precludes strong causal inference. The non-significant effect of content quality on engagement, while intriguing, requires replication with refined measures that distinguish between informational, emotional, and social-value dimensions of content.

Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causality, test the model across different cultural contexts, and examine potential moderators such as brand familiarity or product involvement. Additionally, deeper qualitative inquiry could explore why content quality fails to spur engagement in fast fashion—whether due to consumer fatigue, platform algorithms, or shifting content expectations.

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