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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON YOUTH BUYING BEHAVIOR
IN AN EMERGING COUNTRY

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Abstract. The research aims to investigate the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on youth buying behavior in Pakistan. This study is empirically supported by the results of a survey conducted by the authors in ten universities in Lahore city (Pakistan) in March-June 2020 on a sample of 244 students (social media users) aged from 18 to 35. By conceptually dividing social media marketing into SMM advantages and website design & features, the purpose of this study became more specific: (1) to find the relationship between SMM advantages (convenience, timesaving, security of knowledge) and youth buying behavior; (2) to find the relationship between website features & design and youth buying behavior. Results of the analysis of the aggregate influence of SMM advantages on Pakistani youth buying behavior showed that they increase the intention to purchase by 42.9%. At the same time, website design & features used within social media marketing have even more positive effects on youth buying behavior, increasing the intention to purchase by 55.2%. Young buyers in Pakistan prefer attractive and well-designed websites or social media with many unique features for buying products and services. Thus, all research hypotheses are proved based on the survey data: social media marketing raised by unit positively affects Pakistani youth buying behavior by 53.5%, and the rest 46.5% could be conditioned by other non-market external and internal factors. The novelty of this study lies in investigating behavior patterns of the fast-growing segment of consumers of Pakistan, which, are the most active consumers of goods and services and social media users today and in the future.

Keywords: social media marketing (SMM); consumer buying behavior; youth; Pakistan; regression and ANOVA analysis.

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1. Introduction

Since its inception in 1996, social media has managed to infiltrate half of the 7.7 billion people in the world (Dean, 2021). Social network platforms almost tripled their total user base in the last decade, from 970 million in 2010 to the number passing 4.48 billion users in July 2021 (Dean, 2021). Social media help companies to successfully organize their communication with target consumers. Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the commercial behavior initiated via social media (Zhang and Daugherty, 2009; Kazaka, 2009, 2012; Harvey et al., 2011; Tiago and Veríssimo, 2014; Jankovic, 2020). There are two types of SMM: user-generated content-based and social-based SMM (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Chan and Guillet, 2011; Zeng and Wei, 2013; Alves et al., 2016). Such social media as blogs and micro-blogs, social networks, content communities, forums, and wiki are becoming increasingly popular among users. It also motivates companies to communicate in this environment (Kazaka, 2011).

Social media has been widely used by firms as a marketing strategy tool. In 2021, 91.9 percent of the USA marketers in companies largest than 100 employees were expected to use social media for marketing purposes (Statista Research Department, 2022a).

Social media marketing has acquired surprising changes in the way by which companies interact with customers by offering their goods and services. Buying behavior of consumers influences the advertisers. A need to understand consumers' needs arises. It is especially important to understand the needs of growing consumer segments. In emerging countries, as a rule, youth is a growing segment of consumers. Besides, digital technologies have already impacted the lifestyle of youth the most, almost in all countries, irrespective of their development stage. The research aims to investigate the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on youth buying behavior in Pakistan. We believe that the study, ultimately, could be instrumental in finding the consistent patterns of the buying behavior of youth of similar emerging countries too.

The research is vigorous and has explicit implications for the marketers to efficiently use the internet for positioning their products. Social media marketing opens new horizons for marketers through its latest strategies of promoting services and products, these styles cannot be experienced while using old traditional styles and practices. In the present, organizational survival in the market and their efficiency in generating more profit with performance can be influenced by investigating buying behavior and customer satisfaction. Therefore, firms are more sensitive to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing strategies in determining consumer buying behavior. This study is empirically supported by the results of a survey conducted by the authors in ten universities in Lahore city (Pakistan) in March-June 2020 on a sample of 244 students (social media users) aged from 18 to 35. Survey data is processed using the regression and ANOVA analysis methods.

In the next chapter of the article, the authors provide a relevant literature review to form the theoretical background and shape the originality of this study. Then a conceptual framework of the study and research methodology is described, then research results and discussion are provided, as well as conclusions and recommendations for future research on the relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and youth buying behavior.

2. Literature Review

The process of communicating information, by employing non-personal and openly sponsored communication to promote/sell any idea, goods and services is known as advertising (Hee and Yen, 2018). Centuries ago advertisements were used as a tool to promote a firm's services, information, and goods that a business or market wants to sell to customers. After it, social media advertisements have evolved as giving a message about the usefulness of a good or service to attract customers. Nowadays, there is a different kinds of advertising channels, for example, covert, social, print, celebrity, broadcast, surrogate, and outdoor advertisements, etc., used by firms as a medium to market their products while informing the customers about the promotion of products (Nartey, 2010).

The findings of José García et al. (2009) have different implications for research and also practical use. First, helpfulness, perceived trust, and convenience are basic to the accomplishment of a web-based exchanging framework. Second, perceived protection influences consumers' convictions in trust. Since trust and helpfulness are the most vital forerunners of social expectation, managers can increase turnover by improving customers' opinions about security instruments a company is using.

At the cultural level, the consumption patterns of a particular society impact the buying behavior of people. Some previous research showed that Muslims would buy a product based on advice from the religious community, or others; whereas the Chinese would never buy products by consulting other on their opinion since they rely on their own opinion on products or services they need (He et al., 2010). At the social level, the opinion may vary across social classes with low, middle, and upper income due to different priorities and consumption structures, e.g., consumers with lower income may seek to fulfill their needs rather than find advertised and high-quality products. On the other hand, buying decisions in higher social classes may differ as they may seek to obtain advertised and branded products (Chahal and Rani, 2017). In addition, psychological factors, such as 'word of mouth' influence the consumer perception through social media and social networking sites (Cetinã et al., 2012; Javaria et al., 2020). To conclude, understanding of factors, impacting consumers' preferences facilitates the formulation of successful marketing strategies tackling selected segments of consumers (Muniady et al., 2014).

Nowadays, marketing endorsements have become a key factor in attracting consumers; they are used to achieve a company's goals and good reputation (Lim et al., 2017). In the age of globally connecting technology known as the Internet, media influencers have emerged as endorsers of marketing (Freberg et al., 2011). Media influencer engages the consumers by updating them regularly with the latest knowledge about the most recent information (Liu et al., 2012). According to Lim et al. (2017), social media marketing has become the most effective and cost-efficient marketing tool. Perhaps in recent years, social media marketing has proved it as a potential endorser. Most companies invite social media marketers such as bloggers, vloggers, social marketers, website marketers, etc. to be their brand ambassadors.

According to results of Stephen (2016), buying behavior based on social media marketing is growing rapidly due to the increase in technology use. Social media information is becoming one of the major influencing factors for consumer decision-making. His research was realized to elaborate on how consumers are influenced by the social environment. Furthermore, his research elaborated on consumer issues. He identified five dimensions such as consumer social culture, mobile environment, effects of social environment on buying behavior, responses to social advertising, and 'word of mouth (WOM) (Stephen, 2016). Previous articles collectively shed light from a different perspective on the social media marketing environment and its influence on consumer buying behavior (Harvey et al., 2011; Kazaka, 2012; Jankovic, 2020). Although, there is still a necessity to understand more deeply social media marketing advantages as a part of the consumer social experience.

In the world, the total number of people using social media grew by 9.2% between April 2019 and January 2020 (Dean, 2021). When looking at the number of social media users growing by region, Europe had the slowest increase of new active users at 4.9%. Whereas Asia was the most considerable social media user base growth at 17.0%, followed by Africa increasing by 13.9% (Dean, 2021). Thus, social media marketing is a big challenge for Pakistan, where active social media penetration in January 2022 was lower than the worldwide average and lower than in many countries of Asia. In Asia, the UAE is the leader with an active social network penetration rate of 106.1%. Malaysia ranked in second place with 91.7% and South Korea ranked third, with 91.2%. In January 2022, the overall worldwide average social media penetration rate was 58.4% (Statista Research Department, 2022b). The specifics of Southern Asia (also Pakistan) is 27% female vs. 73% male users of social media (in Western Europe, 50% female vs. 50% male users) (Dean, 2021). At the same time, the specifics of Pakistan itself is a relatively low share of internet users in the country: 55.6% of the population in 2021 (in India – 61.6%, in China – 70.8%, in Latvia – 82.2%, in the USA – 95.5%) (Statista Research Department, 2021).

Advertising has emerged as means of developing customer loyalty, sales efficiency, and awareness, in the recent decade marketing trends had changed a lot (Wymbs, 2011; Cole et al., 2017). Social media marketing has attracted the attention of researchers (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). Lamberton and Stephen (2016) worked on the exploration of mobile and social media marketing from 2000 to 2015. Over these 15 years, social media marketing has revolutionized the traditional marketing concept. It has created more ways to sell, engage, learn, and provide marketing services to consumers. Their research found differences in perspectives on the above three marketing ways from 2000 to 2015 (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016).

Dahiya and Gayatri (2018) studied social media marketing used by the automobile industry of India. They noticed, that many other businesses such as music, fashion, banking, clothing, books, gaming, etc. were using social media marketing too. The purpose of their research was to understand the influence of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior in the passenger cars market. Dahiya and Gayatri (2018) used a mixed methodology for their study. Researchers concluded that most of the respondents (75%) used websites as a social channel of communication, while buying a car they used social networking sites. Results of Dahiya's and Gayatri's study suggested that social media marketing was capable of triggering awareness of mega-brand products such as automobiles. In addition, it appeared, that the consumers were engaged by communicating with each other on social platforms.

Haider and Shakib (2017) revealed the impact of social image on buying behavior of customers. In their research, the scientists suggested a conceptual model that embraces the impact of four independent variables on consumer buying behavior. Primary and secondary data were collected for analysis. The obtained results showed a statistically significant positive relationship between familiarity, social imaging in an advertisement, advertisement spending, and consumer buying behavior (Haider and Shakib, 2017). This study shed light on some very important factors that can be instrumental for promotional and advertisement business.

Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the above literature review are that there is still a gap in research about the impact of social media marketing on youth (as more active internet and social media users) buying behavior. Especially this is topical for emerging countries, such as Pakistan, which still are on their way to gaining momentum in economic development. This gap needs can be filled by examining the effect of social media marketing on buying behaviors of this rising sector of consumers. The authors hope to contribute to narrowing this gap through their original research based on an empirical survey of Pakistani youth on how their buying behavior hypothetically is influenced by social media marketing.

3. Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

Consumer buying behavior is the main concept of this study that includes individuals, groups, and organizations' activities of selection, purchasing, disposal, or use of goods, services, experiences, or ideas to meet the demand of customers suggested by Shih et al. (2015). According to Dudovskiy (2013), consumer buying behavior is related to buying and disposing of goods to get the satisfaction of physical, emotional, and other needs. Consumer buying behavior is the intention to buy a good or service. The consumer always has the power and right to decide between buying (Young Kim, & Kim, 2004). According to Shethna (2019), four main external factors that influence the consumers' buying behavior are personal, social, psychological, and cultural distinctions. In turn, Haider and Shakib (2017) suggested also considering an environmental factor while investigating the impact of social media marketing on youth buying behavior.

The next figure presents the conceptual framework for the investigation of the impact of social media marketing on consumers' buying behavior. It includes, firstly, the authors' conceptual understanding of the social media marketing (SMM) as the combination of SMM advantages (convenience, timesaving, security) (Haider and Shakib, 2017) and website design & features (Ranganathan and Ganapathy, 2002) and, secondly, the conceptual understanding of the consumers' buying behavior empirically interpreted by the intention to purchase. Consumer buying behavior is hypothetically influenced by both social media marketing as a market factor and a set of non-market external and internal factors (Figure 1).

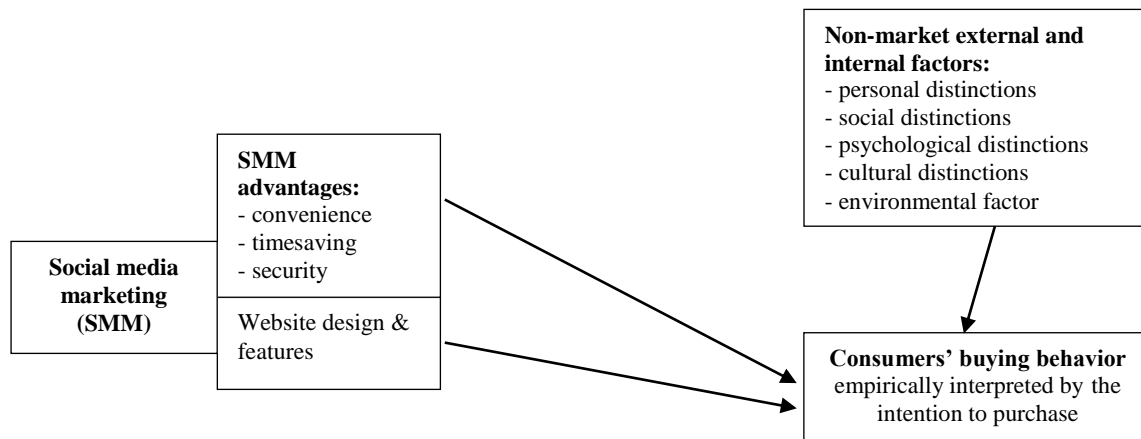


Figure 1. The conceptual framework for the investigation of the impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior
Source: elaborated by the authors based on Young Kim, & Kim, 2004; García et al., 2009; Stephen, 2016; Haider and Shakib, 2017; Shethna, 2019.

Thus, by conceptually dividing social media marketing into SMM advantages and website design & features, the purpose of this study became more specific:

- (1) to find the relationship between SMM advantages (convenience, timesaving, security of knowledge) and youth buying behavior;
- (2) to find the relationship between website features & design and youth buying behavior.

As was already mentioned in the introduction to this article, the research object of this study is youth, i.e. people aged from 18 to 35. To the surprise of many observers, Pakistan’s last census revealed faster-than-expected population increases. High fertility continues to drive substantial population growth in the world’s fifth most populated country (Goujon et al., 2020). Figure 2 presents the actual and forecasted demographic structure in Pakistan. It clearly shows that individuals, aged from 15 to 36 comprise the most important part of the economically active population. Forecasted data until the year 2037 shows, that this segment will grow by 57%. Therefore, it is very important to understand patterns of reasons for buying behavior of people belonging to this group since that would allow using their buying capacity.

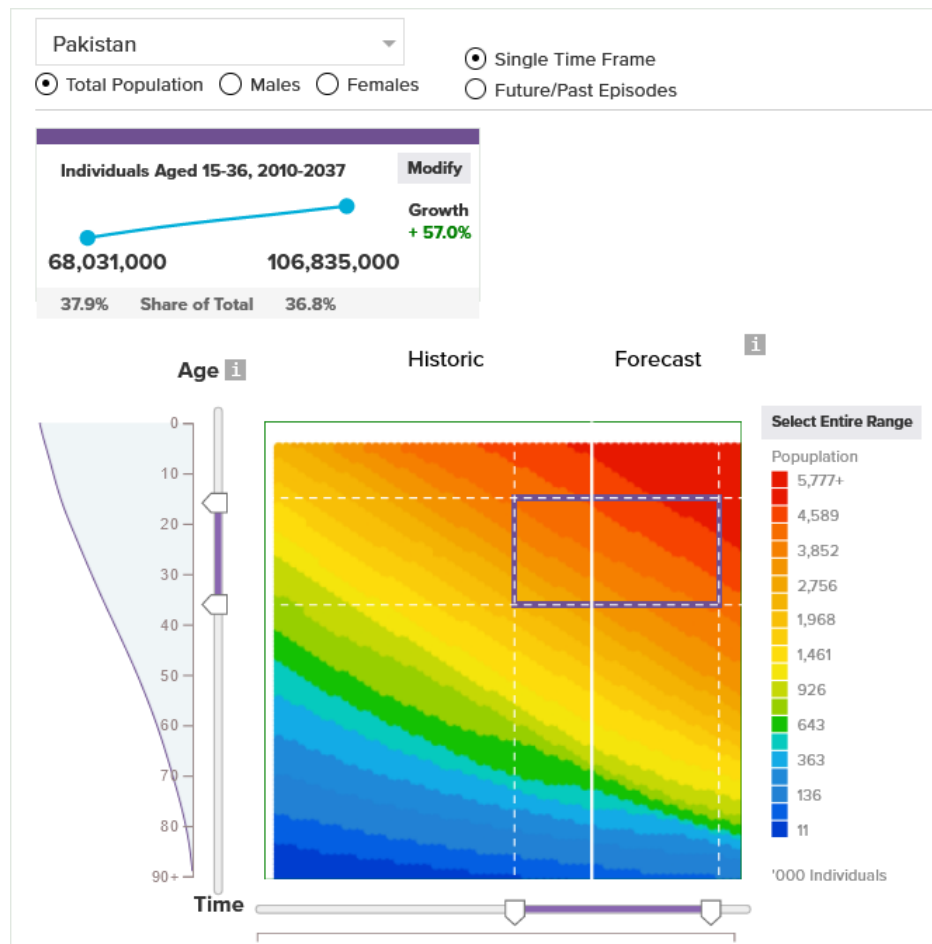


Figure 2. The actual and forecasted demographic structure in Pakistan

Source: Passport (Euromonitor International)

<https://www.portal.euromonitor.com/portal/dashboard/dashboarddetails#/>

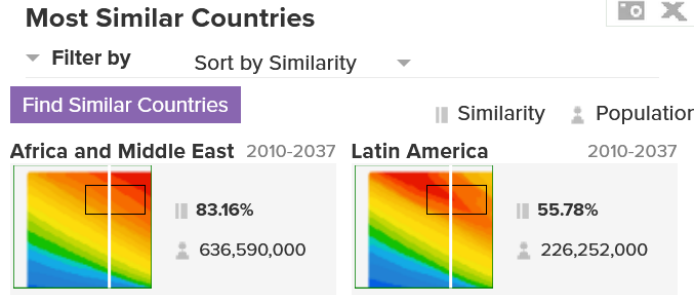


Figure 3. The actual and forecasted demographic structure in the most similar regions

Source: Passport (Euromonitor International)

<https://www.portal.euromonitor.com/portal/dashboard/dashboarddetails#/>

The Figure 3 above presents two the most similar regions by the population structure and its forecast, filtered automatically by Passport database. We see that similarity level of Asia and Middle East region is 83.16%, and, respectively, Latin America is found to be similar by 55.78%. This similarity allows to assume, that results of the research may allow to reveal consistent patterns of youth buying behavior in other similar emerging countries too.

The following hypotheses were framed, in tune with the above research objectives:

Hypothesis 1: Social media marketing advantages influence Pakistani youth buying behavior positively.

Hypothesis 1a: Convenience in social media marketing influences Pakistani youth buying behavior positively.

Hypothesis 1b: Timesaving by social media marketing influences Pakistani youth buying behavior positively.

Hypothesis 1c: Security of knowledge in social media marketing influences Pakistani youth buying behavior positively.

Hypothesis 2: The website's unique features & design influence Pakistani youth buying behaviors positively.

Hypothesis 3: Social media marketing influences Pakistani youth buying behaviors positively.

This study involved respondents-students from ten universities in Lahore (the largest city in Punjab, Pakistan). The convenient sampling technique was used, to calculate the sample size (Table 1). The data were collected through a questionnaire, which was designed according to the conceptual framework for the investigation of the impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior (Figure 1). The survey consisted of two parts. The first part was to understand the socio-demographic profiles of respondents, using a nominal scale. The second part covered the perception of respondents, regarding the constructs of the conceptual framework (Figure 1), using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed among university students in Lahore city (Pakistan) from March to June 2020.

In this research primary data was collected by using a structured questionnaire. Respondents were selected by non-probability sampling due to time and resources constraints. Both self-administered paper-based surveys and online surveys were conducted. 300 questionnaires were distributed. To fill out the questionnaire, it took on average 10-15 minutes by hand or online. An online questionnaire was developed on Google drive and distributed through e-mails and social networks. Out of 300, 150 questionnaires were sent online, and the rest 150 were distributed offline. Out of 150 online questionnaires, 130 were returned and from offline distributed questionnaires 114 were returned. So, a total sample of 244 respondents-students was considered as a final sample of this study.

The instrument has been designed based on a five-point Likert scale, from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The scale for consumers’ buying behavior starts from 1 for ‘never’, then 2 for ‘very rare’, 3 for ‘sometimes’, 4 for ‘often’, 5 for ‘very often’. The respondents were asked to select one degree, which is suitable in their opinion. The authors used statistical methods of regression and ANOVA analysis, and SPSS software for analyzing variables and quantifying relationships between them.

4. Results and Discussion

The data in Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of 244 respondents in this survey. Most of the respondents are male (57.4%), the age of 63.1% of respondents is between 18 and 20 years, the education is usually BSc / BA (42.6%), but there are also MSc / MA and MPhil is about to employed of private workers and their response rate 48.4%.

Table 1. The summary of socio-demographic profiles of respondents, n = 244, March-June 2020

Variables	Positions	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	140	57.4
	Female	104	42.6
Age	18-20	154	63.1
	21-25	72	29.5
	25-30	8	3.3
	31-35	10	4.1
Education	Intermediated	75	30.7
	BSc / BA	104	42.6
	MSc / MA	46	18.9
	MPhil	19	7.8
Employment	Employed government official	78	32.0
	Employed private worker	118	48.4
	Business owner	34	13.9
	Unemployed	14	5.7

Source: calculated and elaborated by the authors using their data an SPSS software

The results of reliability analysis show that Cronbach’s Alpha is above 0.70 (0.817, number of items – 26), which means that the data and instrument are reliable for further analysis.

Furthermore, the data in Table 2 shows that all SMM advantages, as well as website design & features, influence consumers’ buying behavior positively, increasing the estimated frequency of purchases. They have the greatest

positive effect (42.9%) in the aggregate. If we will analyze them separately, the time-saving advantage has the most positive effect (42.6%) on buying behavior. Although, even more than SMM advantages, website design & features influence consumers’ buying behavior – by 55.2%. Social media marketing has positive relation and affects Pakistani youth buying behavior by 53.5%. These results are in line with findings of the previous studies conducted in different countries in Asia (Teo and Yeong, 2003; Young Kim and Kim, 2004; Haider and Shakib, 2017; Hee and Yen, 2018).

Table 2. Results of the regression analysis, n = 244, March-June 2020

Variables	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error
Convenience	0.271 ^a	0.073	0.069	0.56812
Timesaving	0.426 ^b	0.181	0.178	0.53392
Security of knowledge	0.278 ^c	0.077	0.073	0.56692
SMM advantages	0.429	0.184	0.180	0.53315
Website design & features	0.552	0.304	0.302	0.49215
Social media marketing as a whole	0.535	0.286	0.283	0.49215

Note: The dependent variable is the intention to purchase.

Source: Calculated and elaborated by the authors using their own data an SPSS software.

The data of Table 3 shows the results of ANOVA analysis for social media marketing (SMM) advantages (convenience, timesaving, security) as well as website design & features effects on consumers’ buying behavior measured by the frequency of purchases. From the table data, it can be observed the value of F is greater than 2, and p-value is significant, which means there is a significant relationship between independent and dependent variables also found by Teo and Yeong (2003), Haider and Shakib (2017), Young Kim and Kim (2004), Hee and Yen (2018).

Table 3. Results of ANOVA analysis, n = 244, March-June 2020

Variables	Indicators	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	f-stats	Sig.
Convenience	Regression	6.168	1	6.168	19.111	0.000 ^a
	Residual	78.107	242	.323		
	Total	84.276	243			
Time-saving	Regression	15.287	1	15.287	53.626	0.000 ^b
	Residual	68.988	242	0.285		
	Total	84.276	243			
Security	Regression	6.498	1	6.498	20.218	0.000 ^c

	Residual	77.778	242	0.321		
	Total	84.276	243			
SMM advantages	Regression	15.486	1	15.486	54.480	0.000
	Residual	68.789	242	0.284		
	Total	84.276	243			
Website design & features	Regression	25.661	1	25.661	105.947	0.000
	Residual	58.614	242	0.242		
	Total	84.276	243			
Social media marketing as a whole	Regression	24.137	1	24.137	97.131	0.000
	Residual	60.138	242	0.249		
	Total	84.276	243			

Note: The dependent variable is the intention to purchase.

Source: calculated and elaborated by the authors using their own data an SPSS software.

Results of the analysis of the aggregate influence of SMM advantages on Pakistani youth buying behavior showed that they increase the intention to purchase by 42.9%. At the same time, website design & features used within social media marketing have even more positive effects on youth buying behavior, increasing the intention to purchase by 55.2%. Young buyers in Pakistan prefer attractive and well-designed websites or social media with many unique features for buying products and services. Thus, all research hypotheses are proved based on the survey data: social media marketing raised by unit then positively affects Pakistani youth buying behavior by 53.5% and rest 46.5% could be other non-market external and internal factors such as personal distinctions, social distinctions, psychological distinctions, cultural distinctions, or environmental factor (Figure 1).

5. Conclusions

This study was empirically supported by the results of the survey conducted by the authors in ten universities in Lahore city (Pakistan) in March-June 2020 on a sample of 244 students (social media users) aged from 18 to 35. The study aimed to examine the relationship between social media marketing (SMM) advantages (convenience, timesaving, security) and website design & features conceptually included in social media marketing as a whole and the Pakistani youth buying behavior. Regression and ANOVA analysis of the survey data was conducted, and it was found that social media marketing (especially website design & features) influences buying behavior, statistically significantly increasing the Pakistani youth's intention to purchase.

Based on the authors' elaborated conceptual framework for the investigation of the impact of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior (Figure 1), firm managers and marketers can understand the effects of the market and non-market factors. Young consumers, who are interested and looking for further information about products, can enhance their knowledge about the product from websites. The results of this study show in sequence such as convenience, timesaving, and security's p-value 0.000 clear evidence that it has a positive and significant impact on Pakistani youth buying behavior. Furthermore, F-value of social media marketing advantages, website design & features, and social media marketing, which is more than 2, and p-value = 0.000

show the existence of a statistically significant positive relationship between a dependent (youth buying behavior) and independent variable.

The main limitation of this study is the specific object of study - Pakistani university students from one large city located in the east of the country. This means, firstly, that the survey respondents were active educated social media users, which is not typical for the entire population of Pakistan. Secondly, the survey respondents were urban people from one region of the country.

These limitations make it possible to extend the results of this study only to digitally active and interesting to marketers and businesses segment of the population of Pakistan, which, nevertheless, are the most active consumers of goods and services and social media users today in the future.

The authors, therefore, believe that the results of this study would be practically valuable and helpful for Pakistani company managers, academic communities as well as potential investors to design successful policies by considering the significant positive influence of social media marketing (especially of its element as website design & features) on Pakistani youth buying behavior. Further research in this area can be done to find and analyze the new social media marketing (SMM) advantages, as well as to study the gender specificity of consumer buying behavior and social media use in Pakistan, and other emerging countries.

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