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A Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis of Brand Perception on Social Media: Investigating the Roles of Culture, Trust, Personality, and Consumer Attitude in China and Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The marketing in today's scenario is progressing at face pace due to changes in consumer attitude and preferences with the advent of extensive social media usage. This study investigates the factors influencing brand perception of consumers. The study focuses on two comparing the consumers brand perception based on cultural differences. Specific hypotheses were evaluated because of the mediated relations of brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior and culture among social media and brand perception. Data from 389 young respondents were gathered and evaluated through Structural equation models. The findings were further analyzed through sixty-seven semi structured interviews to reach an in-depth analysis. The findings suggest that Culture plays a significant mediating role between social media and brand perception in both countries. However, trust, was only significant in Pakistan. Attitude and personality did not show a significant mediating role in both countries.

Keywords: Social Media; Brand Perception; Brand Personality; Brand Trust; Attitude; Culture

Introduction

As customers are progressively engulfed with several types of communications in marketing, several studies are carried out to focus on the significance of brand perception in consequence of these communication strategies (Keller et al., 2023; Aaker & Moorman, 2023; Christodoulides et al., 2021; Burmann et al., 2022). The significance of brand perception for scholars and managers is undisputed. What is less clear are the factors that lead towards customers being able to positively perceive brands, consequently, will buy and repurchase these brands.

There is significant literature on how brands communicate to customers through different mediums. However, the advent of extensive use of social media by customers has influenced the communication strategies of brand (Kaplan, 2022). Different studies have established that perception of the brand through social media is linked with trust and satisfaction with a brand (Laroche & Richard, 2021; Kim & Ko, 2022; Godey et al., 2022). According to [9] over 4.66 billion people around the globe are connected online,



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which is 60.1% of the population of the globe (IWS, 2015), out of which 2.7 billion or 60% are from Asia (e.g. China having 35.7% users and Pakistan having 3.6% users in Asia). Social media is increasingly used in all places and at times almost by 100% cellular phones globally (DataReportal, 2023). The increasing usage of social media creates hope for marketers to contact potential buyers. According to (Quesenberry, 2021), social media gives potential to develop awareness, create trust and interest through quickly spreading of product opinions and experiences. (Bruhn et al., 2021) further investigated that personality and social characteristics of social media users' impact in developing trust and brand equity among its users. Social media facilitates marketers interact with larger number of customers and attain quick feedback from them. Customers response to social media promotions are much higher than the promotions through other means (Voorveld, 2022). The reason behind higher rate of response is due to the reason that social media allows consumers to convey their perceptions about products or services to the community. According to (Baum et al., 2022) knowledge of the product is formed through search and use of knowledge that may be through social media or conventional media. For example, Apple increased its global marketing spending in last three years (from \$170 billion to \$205 billion) which results in 21% increase in the revenue (Statista, 2023). According to Brands in Asia, (2020), although global advertising budget has decreased in 2020 due to Covid-19, the social media advertising budget has increased to 8% from 2019 reaching \$336 billion in 2020. Magna Global (2020) forecasted that social media ad spending in China will reach \$97.8 billion in 2021, which is 12.5% high from 2020. While digital advertising spending in Asia Pacific is expected to grow by 63% in 2024. Similarly, in 2020 26% of the total advertising budget (\$440 million) is spent on digital advertising in Pakistan and is expected to grow up to 49% by 2023.

Several researches have investigated the impact of social media influences on brand perception (Laroche & Richard, 2021; Bruhn et al., 2021; Baum et al., 2022). A positive brand perception can help in developing a strong brand equity in comparison to the competitive brand (Schivinski et al., 2023; Yoo et al., 2021). Moreover, this brand perception helps customers create similar perception about the product associated with the brand (Tan et al., 2021). Brand perception is established since memory and cognition of customers about a brand further influenced by their emotions (Burmam et al., 2022; Biehl-Missal & Saren, 2022; Esch et al., 2021). Further studies have discussed varying factors that influence social media brand perception of customers. These factors may include brand loyalty, brand community, brand relationship, brand experience, brand trust (Bruhn et al., 2021; Schivinski et al., 2023; Akhtar et al., 2022; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2021; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2022; Hajli & Sims, 2021; Habibi et al., 2022; Merz et al., 2022; Wallace et al., 2021). However, the dynamic affiliation among social media, culture, and brand perception is yet to be studied by considerable researchers.

Phao (Phau et al., 2021) explored that brand perception can easily be developed among social media users and non-users in homogeneous cultures as compared to the customers belonging to heterogeneous cultures. This concerns the global brands who believe in developing standardized promotional strategies for multicultural countries (Foscht et al., 2022; De Mooij, 2021). Foscht (Foscht et al., 2022) established that meaning of culture in the scenario of brand perception is directly linked with the personality of a brand and requires connecting it to Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Various companies are extending their brand range by launching new products across the globe regularly, it is vital to investigate whether customers brand perceptions are similar in all prospective



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regions. In this scenario, multinational firms must consider the influence of various cultural backgrounds while considering the same position as perceived in the same manner. Consequently, the influence of culture differences can describe the success or failure of a brand in specific region or country. Regardless of the significance of this effect, a few studies investigated the role of culture on brand trust, and attitude/behavior (Aaker et al., 2022; Hofstede et al., 2023). The role of culture on brand perception was further investigated towards the difference in perception and association of categories of products belonging to that brand (Erdem et al., 2022; Holt & Cameron, 2022).

Despite above findings, majority of the researches on social media have focused on marketing communications (Tuten & Solomon, 2023; Rapp et al., 2022), brand awareness (Schivinski et al., 2023) and brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2022). Some studies have focused on the challenges related to media (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2021). Few descriptive studies have also presented theoretical analysis of social media most out of these studies are descriptive than empirical (Ngai et al., 2022; Qualman, 2023; Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2021). Some researchers have investigated the impact of trust on social media and customer intentions (Laroche & Richard, 2021; Bruhn et al., 2021; Baum et al., 2022; Habibi et al., 2022). However, the impact of cultural dimensions on social media brand perception was yet to be studied in this perspective.

Walsh et al., (Walsh et al., 2021) found a new perspective of trust in the relationship of consumer loyalty, brand personality, and attitude/behaviour in the marketing communication literature. Conversely, the concept of cultural diversity still awaited investigation. A clear gap was found between the theory and practical implication of this concept due to the importance of the role culture plays in the development of brand perception. Realizing the above variability in the field of social media marketing and drawing motivation from latest researchers, this research investigates the link among social media interactions and customer perceptions of the brands, and subsequently how those interactions relate to preferred marketing results. This study is developed to fill this gap by understanding the influence of culture in creating positive customer perception and engagement. Considering the importance of trust and awareness on brand equity of social media, this research is built to extend the earlier researches conducted by previous researchers (Demuyakor & Sackey, 2022; Stephen & Bart, 2022; Whiting et al., 2021). The study is based on the hypothesis that the affiliation among social media advertising on the perception of a brand is mediated by brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior, and moderated by culture. Hence, the study makes several contributions by investigating the interaction of social media effects on the perception of the brand using real cross-cultural data. These social media advertising effects on brand, trust, attitude and perceptions between two countries are further investigated.

Theoretical Framework (A Cross-Cultural Approach)

Researchers generally adopt diffusion of innovation theory for studying new ideas, advancements spread within a social organization and consumer brand perceptions in diverse cultures (Rogers et al., 2023). The theory postulates that customers perceive brand as having the characteristics of reliability, altruistic, competent, honest, complexity, observability, trialability, relative advantage, and compatibility (Greenacre et al., 2021). The diffusion of these novel platforms of social media around the globe has various effects on different cultures but eventually endorses understanding and interrelatedness between universal societies.

Intercultural exchange of ideas is precarious today in this blended and globalised world, where diverse cultures meet each other regularly, particularly through social media



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platforms e.g., Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and others. This intercultural communication helps in sharing information through these social media platforms and encourage cultural harmony and develop a global brand community (Zhao & Zhan, 2022; Chen & Zhang, 2022). Hence, social mediums of interaction represent an important means of linking various cultures, places, people, and ideas provide new platforms through which people can interact and communicate with each other across the globe, without being constrained by the boundaries of distance and time.

A firm's global approach comprises of expanding one's perception about diverse means of life; during this practice, individuals want to learn and gain more knowledge about differences in cultures. Chen and Miike and Chen (Chen & Zhang, 2022; Miike & Yin, 2022) explain that "Unfolding the self is a process of transforming and moving oneself from the lower to a higher level of the developmental ladder of human beings". This paths way towards cultural relativism. Culture relativism involves analysing another culture with their own for finding differences and similarities (Matsumoto et al., 2022). The process of change starts with interactions; hence, these interactions must be effective and appropriate accordingly (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2022). This explains how globalization has become an essential part of our lives as we have become more interdependent and interconnected with cultures around the globe through social media (Demuyakor & Sackey, 2022; Chen & Zhang, 2022; Flew & Waisbord, 2021).

As a result of extensive mobility of people globally has given rise to the use of social media by immigrants to communicate within their home country as well as the new country, they are living in (Demuyakor & Sackey, 2022). Chen (Chen & Zhang, 2022) and Sudaryanto (Sudaryanto et al., 2022) describes that this interaction between the home and host country and their interaction through social media; facilitates in the intercultural adoption of societal norms and culture. Realizing the importance of social media interactions for cultural acquaintance (Croucher et al., 2022), this study investigates the role of social media marketing in enhancing brand perception in China and Pakistan.

Conceptual Framework

A strong perception can lead to a better competitive position of that brand (Yoo et al., 2021), and in the same time affects purchase decision of customers (Schivinski et al., 2023). Consequently, brands develop an active relationship with customers based on the brand-consumer perception, while consumers can utilise this perception in developing overall image of a brand, as found by Tan (Tan et al., 2021) that a product with stronger brand perception may be deduced by customers as a product of high quality.

Previous studies in marketing have commonly identified significant effects of a social media on brand perception. For example, a study conducted by (Nielsen, 2022) reveals that 70% of the consumers assess social media pages to get information related to brands and products while 49% of them make purchase decisions based on information they gathered from social networking sites. Global Web Index Social Report (GWI, 2022) published that 66% of customers use social media to learn about brands and believe the online influencer more than the brand websites. This also proves that in comparison to conventional mediums of marketing, social media allows instant reaction to all concerned parties. Baum (Baum et al., 2022) indicated that the probability for individuals to recommend or buy a specific brand increase after they start following that brand through social media. This was further initiated by research conducted by GE concluding that customers respond more positively to advertising of a brand on social media than through traditional means (GE HealthCare, 2022). Further, Hudson (Hudson et al., 2022)



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investigated the customer brand relationship through social media and found that customers who viewed the advertisement videos through social media had 83% more positive perceptions than the same through paid advertising (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2022). However, these studies are unclear about the factors that ascertain the customers behavior due to the use of social media.

Hollebeek (Hollebeek et al., 2021) established that customers' proactive communication with their favourite brand on social media platforms can be regarded as "a customer's level of emotional, behavioural and cognitive interest in that specific brand". It has been determined that regular social interaction among two persons frequently leads to closeness and interdependence (Harrigan et al., 2021), brand communication through social media can work for an interactive social relatedness and foster sense of intimacy. It is suggested that brand perception will be increased when consumers get involved with their favourite brand through social media platforms (Rapp et al., 2022). Customer perception assists not only the brands but also customers in the reduction of time they spend finding information and evaluation of products with competitor brands (De Mooij, 2021; Ries & Trout, 2021).

Hollebeek (Hollebeek et al., 2022) established that customers identify brand and describe them accordingly as a personality. Brand personality was defined as the "set of human characteristics connected to a particular brand name", where the personality of a brand is like the personality of a human (Aaker et al., 2022). Aaker (Aaker et al., 2022) further recognised the five key aspects of brand personality: "sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness". These brand personalities can be perceived by connecting them with the type of personalities of their customers. For example, CEO of Apple is realised as hip and unconventional; Apple's products are considered hip and revolutionary. Meanwhile, ways of thinking and acting of human beings are different based on their background (relates to different cultures). Consequently, when firms are going to develop marketing strategies and personality of a brand across the globe, they compare the cultural background of marketing manager with other markets. Furthermore, the current study tries to determine that there are cultural variations because of perceived significance of the personality of a brand.

Brand trust can be defined as the "willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2021), while (Morgan & Hunt, 2021) and (Rousseau & Fried, 2021) recognized that "the notion of trust is only relevant in situations of uncertainty". Particularly, e-trust decreases the uncertainty in a certain environment where customers feel at risk since they certainly realize that they can believe in the trusted brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2021; Gefen & Straub, 2022). Developing and maintaining a trust based relationship among customer and brand in social media platform becomes a major challenge for the brand managers, especially in such a competitive environment where maintain distinctive capabilities can lead to intense competitive pressures (Barney & Hesterly, 2022). Brand trust plays a significant role in the perception of a brand. Particularly, the role of trust is crucial because it affects various elements (privacy and security) important for transactions in an online environment. Without developing trust, development of electronic business cannot meet its goals (Pavlou & Fygenon, 2021). Although trust in a brand has a history of being the attention in management and marketing literature. Regardless of recent development in popularity and use of trust, the integral uncertainty in the developing certain environment for e- consumer which brings the problem of trust in a brand to the front of research in marketing, accompanied several motivating consequences for theory and practice.



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Attitudes play a distinctive role in marketing. This owes specifically to the point that several studies confirm the influence of marketing tools on attitude, moreover, there is an apparent link between behaviour and attitude the “so-called attitude-behavior hypothesis” (Foscht et al., 2022). This hypothesis keeps that attitude defines behaviour, and the probability of purchase is subject to constructive attitude. The prediction of behaviour can be supported by further elements, for example, habits, personal and social (Foscht et al., 2022; Sudaryanto et al., 2022; Ajzen & Sheikh, 2022).

Generally, there are two models on this subject. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2022) and (Ajzen, 2021) established that “theory of reasoned action”, undertakes that “individuals consider the consequences of their actions before taking a decision”. (Ajzen & Kruglanski, 2022) stretched this theory to consider the “perceived behavioural control” element to attain the model. While on the other hand, (Fazio & Rucker, 2022) established that “expanded theory of reasoned action”, argues that “this occurs in particular under two specific sets of circumstances”, firstly, “attitude is accepted spontaneously thanks to the sheer presence of the object of the attitude”, secondly, “if perception of the object under consideration is changed for the better or the worse and thus, the qualities of the object emerge accordingly”, (Foscht et al., 2022).

Several scholars define culture in their own way in previous studies, it is undisputed that the culture of human beings affects their behaviour and decisions (Hofstede & Minkov, 2022; Trompenaars & Coebergh, 2021). Culture is the combination of various components, for example, religion, standards, values and language (Hall, as cited in Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022). These factors affect the approach in which individual consumers perceive diverse stuff, leading towards the key roles of a culture (De Mooij & Beniflah, 2022). In marketing processes, people living in specific culture perceive brands differently to others.

Researchers commonly use “Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions” while studying different cultures. Although there are several questions on the validity and reliability of Hofstede’s indices (Foscht et al., 2022; McSweeney, 2023; Taras et al., 2022) along with the implementation when analysing individuals, there is no comprehensive scale like Hofstede’s indices, no choice but to use Hofstede’s indices. Furthermore, to ensure comparability, it was supposed to be compulsory to use Hofstede’s indices.

Model Development

Even though the relationships exist between social media and brand perception, and between culture and brand perception, not even a single model exists to briefly describe the associations among these constructs. The aim of this study was to fill the current gap in literature, while also examining the mediating and moderating roles of all variables.

Based on the conceptual framework, 11 hypotheses are developed for this study and divided into two categories. The first category is mediated/ moderated relationships denoted by M, whereas the second category is partial affiliation denoted by P. Each hypothesis is tested in China and Pakistan. The formation and development of the structure of hypotheses have been influenced by (Walsh et al., 2021).

HM1: Brand personality significantly mediates the relationship between social media and brand perception.

HM2: Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between social media and brand perception.

HM3: Attitude/behaviour significantly mediates the relationship between social media and brand perception.



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HM4: Culture significantly moderates the relationship between social media and brand perception.

HP1: A Significant relationship exists between social media and brand personality.

HP2: A Significant relationship exists between social media and brand trust.

HP3: A Significant relationship exists between social media and attitude/behaviour.

HP4: A Significant relationship exists between brand personality and brand perception.

HP5: A Significant relationship exists between brand trust and brand perception.

HP6: A Significant relationship exists between attitude/behaviour and brand perception.

HP7: A Significant relationship exists between culture and brand perception.

A hypothetical model showing the relationships between social media, brand personality, brand trust, attitude/behavior, culture, and brand perception is suggested in Figure 1. To define brand dependent effects on these relationships, the model is examined in the perspective of two different cultures by using the product category of mobiles. The predominant hypothesis is that variables - brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior - significantly mediate the association among social media and brand perception, and culture significantly moderates the relationship between social media and brand perception, in both countries.

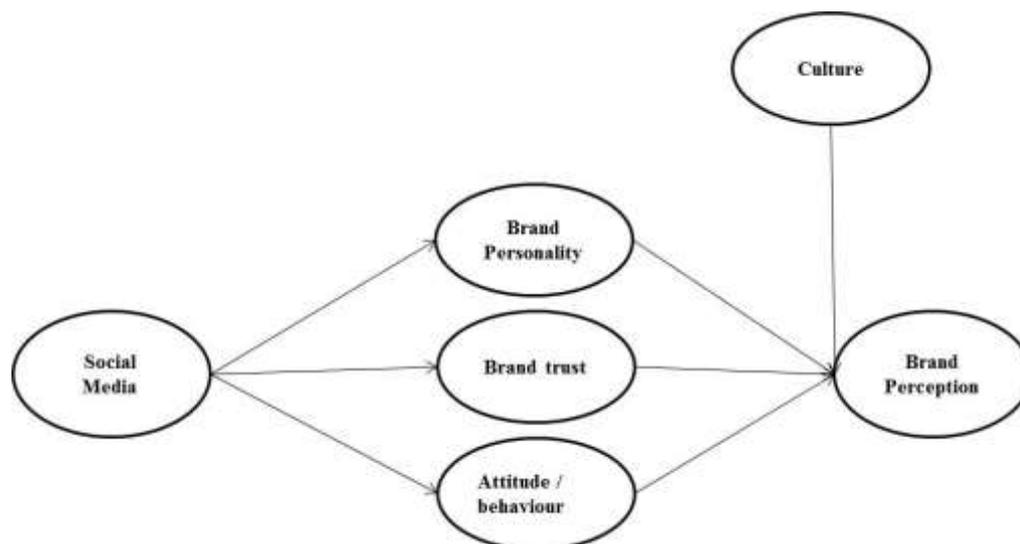


Fig. 1. Proposed study model

Methodology

A questionnaire- based quantitative approach was used to test the perception of a brand and to examine the influences of social media and four mediators (brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior) and culture as a moderator on consumers of two different cultures. The basic purpose of this research was to find the factors that determine the perception of a brand as the dependent variable; so, the emphasis was not only to measure the brand perception itself but also independent variable i.e., social media. See Table 1 for questionnaire details. This study expects the result of positive cross-cultural influence of social media and its combined role with mediating variables on brand perception. The two countries, China and Pakistan were collected based on Hofstede's Cultural indices. These two countries were selected due to their compatibility in terms of a developing country.



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Questionnaire Design

For the purpose of investigating the variables, social media, brand personality, brand trust, attitude/behavior, and culture, five-point Likert scales, anchored by “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (5) was used. The Questionnaire was developed (Items were selected from literature and modified according to the study to increase the validity) based on the construct measurements which have been adopted from earlier studies. The authors are fluent in Urdu, English and Chinese. They translated the English version of questionnaire into both languages (Urdu, Chinese), and then it was interpreted back into English to check the quality of translation. This bilingual approach helped to assume the translation is accurate and valid in both languages. All discrepancies were resolved to improve the quality of questionnaire before the final data collection started. To further improve the quality and validity of the measures, we asked many experts to review the questionnaire. These specialists included PhD students and professors in the field of marketing and e-business. They had significant experience in different methods of survey. They suggested a few slight remarks regarding the wordings and sequence of some questions and outline of the questionnaire. Based on their suggestions, the final questionnaire was further modified. We asked participants to think and list “the top three brands of mobile phones that came into your mind”. This question shaped the basis as the predictor of the perception of a brand (Akhtar et al., 2022; Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2022).

Table 1: - Overview of quality criteria.

	Results from China				Results from Pakistan			
	AVE	Composite reliability	R square	α	AVE	Composite reliability	R square	α
Social media	0.812	0.945	-	0.853	0.851	0.905	-	0.832
Brand personality	0.805	0.928	0.894	0.860	0.826	0.911	0.721	0.831
Brand trust	0.831	0.951	0.481	0.795	0.849	0.931	0.793	0.883
Attitude	0.774	0.899	0.451	0.798	0.761	0.875	0.842	0.940
Culture	0.763	0.911	0.587	0.847	0.779	0.821	0.530	0.942
Brand perception	0.754	0.889	0.834	0.934	0.801	0.879	0.998	0.953

We asked participants about their overall brand perception, rather than perception characteristics (Aaker, 2021), as users are recognised as the ambassadors of a brand. Brand perception questions (see Table 2) were developed to measure the perceptions of the users specific to that brand. In accordance with the similar strategy used to examine



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all other variables, brand personality was checked for the participant's quickly perceived brand. Several researchers have established that brand trust is affiliated with the satisfaction, safety, honesty and perceived reliability of a brand (Akhtar et al., 2022; Habibi et al., 2022; Lau et al., 2021).

Sample Population

The target population of this study is population of university students (young people who are avid users of social media). A questionnaire was circulated among business, economics and e-commerce students at major universities in both countries. In total, 431 respondents completed the questionnaire. 42 responses were excluded due to unrelated replies to the screening question. Thus, 389 valid replies were selected to test the hypothesis of this research. To observe the possible non-response bias, we matched the structure of the first and last 50 respondents. The result showed that there were no significant variances, refusing any apprehension of non-response bias for this research. Most of the respondents 217 (55.78 %) were male, whereas 172 (44.22 %) were female. To further check the integrity of data, an in-depth interview was also conducted with participants by making appointment with them through email. Sixty-seven (55.78%) participants were also interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the tendency for the use of social media in improving brand trust and perception and to review the results of the questionnaire. Data of interview was analysed manually by using content analysis. We checked and confirmed the normality of the data, whether it did or did not meet the minimum level of SEM.

Results

Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS SEM) software was used to check the proposed relations among the variables used in this hypothetical model (Fig. 1). Structural equation models were used to check all relations in each country's model and facilitated an evaluation of tests by using data fetched for both countries. (Anderson & Gerbing, as cited in Hair et al., 2021) explains how structural equation modelling allows the testing of various kinds of variables simultaneously, and it is found statistically effective. Its grouping of statistical methods confirms that a thorough structural model can be recognised.

Four sets of tests were conducted to check the validity and reliability of each hypothesis: item reliability, internal consistency reliability, discriminant validity and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022). (Hair et al., 2022), established that "for the establishment of internal consistency reliability, values of composite reliability (CR) must be greater than 0.7". The results shown demonstrate that the hypothesis in this study (from both countries) achieved composite reliability greater than 0.889 (in China) and 0.821 (in Pakistan), showing decent internal consistency. (Hair et al., 2022; Hulland & Houston, 2021) recognised that "for item reliability, an individual item must exhibit significant standardised loadings above 0.7 ($p < 0.001$)". The lowermost loading of an item is 0.703, which is above the threshold of 0.70. (Hair et al., 2022) established that "to confirm convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) of a construct must be over 0.5". In this study results from China are between 0.754 (brand perception) and 0.831 (brand trust) while results from Pakistan are between 0.761 (attitude/behavior) and 0.851 (social media) as presented in Table 3, endorsing convergent validity.



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Table 2: - Square of correlation between latent variables.

	Results from China						Results from Pakistan					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social media	0.95						0.91					
Brand personality	0.64	0.88					0.69	0.94				
Brand trust	0.67	0.64	0.86				0.74	0.63	0.88			
Attitude	0.68	0.67	0.63	0.85			0.61	0.67	0.63	0.89		
Culture	0.51	0.57	0.57	0.54	0.81		0.63	0.64	0.64	0.67	0.88	
Brand perception	0.47	0.54	0.61	0.53	0.58	0.88	0.65	0.69	0.65	0.68	0.71	0.87

*Boldface numbers are the square root of the AVE.

Table 3a: - Results of SEM from both countries (mediated / moderated relationships).

	China	Pakistan
HM1: Brand personality → social media → brand perception	Not Supported	Not Supported
HM2: Brand trust → social media → brand perception	Not Supported	Supported
HM3: Attitude → social media → brand perception	Supported	Not Supported
HM4: Culture → social media → brand perception	Supported	Supported

HM denotes hypotheses regarding moderated / mediated relationships.

Table 3b: - Results of SEM for two countries

	China	Pakistan
H1: social media → brand personality	Supported	Supported
H2: social media → brand trust	Supported	Supported
H3: social media → attitude	Supported	Supported
H4: brand personality → brand perception	Not Supported	Not Supported
H5: brand trust → brand perception	Not Supported	Supported
H6: attitude → brand perception	Supported	Not Supported
H7: culture → brand perception	Supported	Supported

For suitable discriminant validity, (Fornell et al., 2022) established that “the square root of each construct's AVE needs to be greater than its correlation with each of the remaining constructs”. The results shown in Table 4 fulfil this criterion. Hence, the discriminant validity of all hypotheses can be established.

Henseler (Henseler et al., 2023) recommends the “coefficient of determination (R^2)” to assess the predictive power of the model for the dependent constructs, while (Hair et al., 2022) defined that “the R^2 value of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 can be described as substantial, moderate, or weak coefficient of determination”. Correspondingly, (Chin et al., 2022) recommends the “relevant points as 0.67 (substantial), 0.33 (moderate) and 0.19 (weak)”. The results from both countries show that in China; the R^2 of two endogenous variables 0.481 (for brand trust) and 0.451 (for attitude/behavior) are in between moderate and substantial level while culture in both countries 0.587 in China and 0.530 in Pakistan is



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near to substantial level, following Chin’s criterion. Hence, the model for both countries has a decent predictive power.

Structural Equation Model results prove that attitude/ behavior towards social media and culture of China have positive significance effects on brand perception (Fig. 2), in contrast to Pakistan, where brand trust and culture have positive significant effects on brand perception of social media (Fig. 3). Although the results of brand personality were found insignificant, all hypotheses related to culture in both countries were supported.

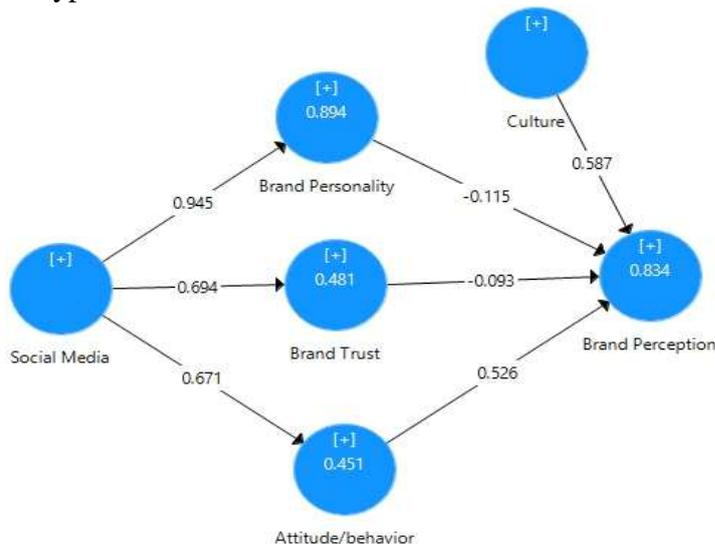


Fig. 2. Brand perception China

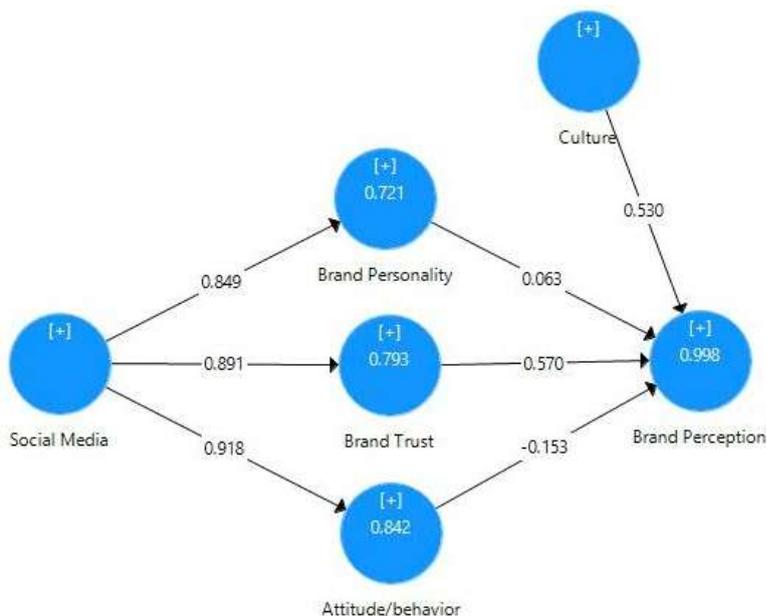


Fig. 3. Brand perception Pakistan

Discussion and Implications

The objective of this research was to investigate the role of social media in brand perception, mediated by brand personality, brand trust, attitude/behavior, and moderated by culture. It was hypothesized that brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior mediated, and culture significantly moderate the relationship between brand perception and social media in both countries.



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Specific hypotheses were evaluated since their mediated relations among social media and brand perception. Out of three mediational relationships, not even a single relationship is fully supported in both countries, while moderated relationship is fully supported in both countries. Just one Hypothesis M_1 had to be totally overruled.

Culture is a significant moderating factor between social media and brand perception, while trust is also a significant mediating factor among social media and brand perception. Attitude/ behaviour and brand personality did not mediate the association among social media and brand perception in Pakistan, while the mediating nature of brand personality and brand trust did not mediate the association between social media and brand perception in China. Interestingly, the relationship between brand personality in both countries is a negative one. (Carlson et al., 2022) also found the negative effect of brand personality on brand preference.

An important variable identified in current research is trust in a brand: this variable was found to have a positive significant association with brand perception only in Pakistan and interestingly not in China. Unexpectedly, brand personality did not describe the perception of a brand in both countries, while brand trust describes and attitude/behavior did not describe brand perception in Pakistan; however, there was a significant association of attitude/behavior found, and brand trust is not found in China. This opposes the existing literature, which has emphasised the significance of brand trust and brand personality for the perception of customers in both countries.

To further enhance the understanding of the model, we discuss the partial association. Five hypotheses found supported in both countries, while only Hypothesis P_4 was totally rejected.

This study found that brand personality does not explain perception for products either in China or Pakistan. This result is not expected. A few studies have found a likely description for this negative relationship between brand personality and brand perception (Azoulay et al., 2022; Freling & Forbes, 2021). In taking preventive measures to keep these brands, customers may, be avoiding disclosure of the name of a brand.

The significant finding from current research is the unquestionable role of culture in developing brand perception in social media. In this research, the only impact of culture was recognised to be significant variables of brand perception for the products in both countries in partial affiliation analysis. Results of this study represent the present literature of marketing. However, researchers are engaged in testing other variables like assurance with intentions of customer loyalty (Walsh et al., 2021); affective attitude, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty (Akhtar et al., 2022; De Mooij, 2021); sports brand and social media (Carlson et al., 2022); and augmented reality and brand recognition (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2022).

Theoretical Contribution

The proposed model (Fig. 1) was evaluated in two different countries with one product category. The resulting models (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) have implications for scholars and practitioners, specifically for mobile manufacturers and marketers in China and marketers in Pakistan wishing to develop strategic plans to create positive perception of their brands in prospective consumers.

Interdisciplinary research is a new phenomenon, especially considering intercultural analysis of brand perception and loyalty (Steenkamp, 2023). However, this study takes a leap in investigating the comparative role of culture in developing brand perception for customers. The new world after pandemic has enumerated the new horizons through digitalization, where social media marketing becomes the essence of engaging customers



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(Dwivedi et al., 2023). Primarily, we show that social media has a positive significant effect on brand perception, and valid research constructs in the context of social media and brand perception. We expand the current literature and test an important hypothesis about effects of social media on brand perception, adding new facts to the literature. Unique to our research, we propose that social media have a positive significant relationship with culture, brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior in both countries. These outcomes recommend that customers' perception of a brand in both countries is created in a different manner.

This study also extends the recent perspective of diffusion of innovation theory by giving empirical support for the mediating roles of brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior while moderated by culture in the relationship between social media and brand perception. In the perspective of online businesses, this study pinpoints tactical competence of social media that assists certain kinds of resources and information, improving businesses' competitive advantages.

Therefore, this study shows novel ideas to categorise online customers, which provide a base for psychographic segmentation, based on activities of respondents on diverse social media platforms. Also, present research contributes to the current knowledge of brand perception in an online atmosphere, in broader term, particularly on social media platforms in view of their practical and theoretical importance in the current trends.

Managerial Implications

This study checked the effects of social media usage on consumer brand perception by using cross-cultural interview and survey data. The findings indicate that social media usage has a positive effect on brand perception and other advertising outcomes. The usage of social media, brand personality, brand trust, attitude/behavior, and culture were all manipulated and measured by different techniques. The results were validated by various samples including consumers from Pakistan, China.

Generally, convincing proof was found to indicate that use of social media makes a clear difference. These findings were evident through the markets of two countries. So, for managers, it's better to invest in social media platforms to gain more marketing advantages, emerging study referred to previous that indicates that brands using social media to remain in contact with their consumers in a significant way have a positive impact on outcomes (Demuyakor & Sackey, 2022; Stelzner, 2023).

Our study extends the knowledge of brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior on consumer brand perception in different cultures through social media. Attitude/behavior and trust are the central substances helping relational lens to assess' interaction of social media with a brand. More usage of social media will guarantee more success for sophisticated brands such as Chocolates. Though, for the brands operating in different cultures, managers must consider introducing different strategies when managing their accounts on social media (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Hanna et al., 2022).

The results of this study show that attitude/behavior and brand trust are essential and critical constructs for considering customer-brand perception in use of social media context. Extending the literature that brand personality brand trust is a significant construct for measuring consumer-brand perception (Keller & Swaminathan, 2022), this study proves its significance for social media advertising and classifying how brand personality brand trust relates to other behavioural results such as electronic word of mouth.

Examining the deviations and differences among cross-culture and how that affect the attitude/behavior of the consumer are important for international marketing (Soares et al.,



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2022). However, our current study gives strong evidence that customers from different cultures perceive the same brand with the same positioning differently. Demuyakor & Sackey Demuyakor, J., Sackey, J., & Oppong-Asante, G. (2022). Social media brand engagement and cross-cultural brand perception: A comparative study of China and Ghana. *Journal of Global Information Management*, 30(5), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.4018/JGIM.20220901.0a6> recognised that if a company desires to accomplish the same perception of a brand in two different cultures, brand managers of the company need to develop positioning strategy in the way which focuses on key components of both cultures that enable customers to perceive the same brand in the same way. Such as, if the required element is “sophistication” and customers do not perceive that the brand as sophisticated, then the firm must have to develop marketing strategies that focus on creating the customer perception of the “brand sophistication” by focusing of cultural artefacts and norms specifically depicting “sophistication” in that culture. Consequently, they can position brand in each country according to the cultural differences present there. While on the other hand, the company has a choice to focus on a specific characteristic in one country but not in other countries, keeping in consideration the self- identity for the culture of each country. However, the current study proves that developing same strategies for all countries can result in varying and sometimes controversial image of the brand and suggests that the firm must focus on developing global brand strategies keeping in consideration the cultural differences in mind.

The findings of this study further suggest the managers focus on developing social media advertising appeals and relationships with their customers due to their importance in the current post-covid highly competitive scenario. Being at the front position on social media is of specific significance, and managers may use the strategies and structure from this research to attain higher brand perception.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

Like all other studies, this study also has few limitations. The sample data was collected from two countries which are not enough to check the effects of several types of social media on behaviours and perception of a brand, a limitation can be removed in a future study. We select only one mobile brand and two countries from the same continent as the empirical testing ground for brand perception and the results can only be applied to limited extent. More research is needed to involve other products’ sample frames to validate the findings of the study. To check the effects of global cultural dimensions on brand perception, brand personality, brand trust, attitude/behavior, satisfaction and interaction of social media, future studies might consider more countries from different continents. Finally, to understand the factors e.g., role of social media in brand perception, in-depth analysis of the type of social media interaction is needed.

Despite limitations, the study provides a strong foundation for future work on the use of social media and development of a brand based on intercultural adaptation (Croucher et al., 2022). To check the pivotal implications of the social media usage effects on customer brand perception a field experiment study can be conducted to investigate customers’ original interaction of social media and commitment to a brand at a point in time. Further research could also integrate the role of social media in final purchase decision in developing countries. Current research focused only on brand perception. Some other factors emerging in a review of the literature that may also be helpful to understand the customer’s brand perception with an emotional attachment on social media (Aaker & Moorman, 2023; Gensler et al., 2023). It is also beneficial to check the



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moderating effects of cultures or developing countries on brand perception through social media (Dwivedi et al., 2023). A new concept of augmented reality can be investigated over social media marketing experiences (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2022). Factors such as experience, expectations, brand recalls, peer group opinion and strength of a brand may spotlight on circumstances under which brand perception can be more effective.

Conclusion

The motivation behind this study was to identify the effects of social media on the perception of a brand from customers living in diverse cultures. Keeping in view the culture of both countries, a hypothetical model was developed and investigated by using SPLS SEM. The current model described the role of social media on brand perception mediated by brand personality, brand trust, and attitude/behavior while moderated by culture, and established significant differences among both cultures. As a part of non-traditional marketing communications, social media is keenly investigated and used by the firms.

Investigating brand perception in the perspective of culture as moderator and brand personality, attitude/behavior as mediator is a new and novel idea in the marketing literature. Distinguishing from brand perception study, as categorised by the role of memory, awareness, personality, attitude/behavior, and trust in brand perception, specifically when distinguishing among two different cultures, can be used to foresee brand perception. The outcomes of the study are supposed to play an important role in literature and practice since social media can be explained as a novel, but a quickly mounting platform for developing affiliations with customers and shaping constructive picture of the brands in their viewpoint.

The outcomes of the current study explain that valuable drivers on social media are the most important drivers of brand perception followed by recognition of the message between friends, relevancy of the message, and providing applications and presence on various social media platforms. Social media is a platform where people share knowledge and directives between each other, search for fun and sincerity, as well as want to entertain themselves.

This research has established an important role in moderating the customer's perception. This study finds significant variances among the brand perception of different cultures. Finally, the attractiveness of the message between friends also enhances positive brand perception. Therefore, firms can offer discounts and other incentives to the social media users' drives and build strong relationships with its customers to achieve brand loyalty and brand influences in social media.

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