

Investigating the Impact of Social Media Marketing Activities in Enhancing Consumer Brand Engagement on Instagram in the Fashion Industry of Sri Lanka

Asanga Ranasinghe^{1*}, Shajiny Selvarajah²

Department of Marketing Management, Postgraduate Institute of Management, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Colombo, Sri Lanka

***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media has transformed traditional marketing by offering dynamic platforms for consumer engagement. Despite the dominance of Instagram in terms of engagement rates, limited empirical research has explored its role in driving consumer-brand interactions, particularly within the fashion sector, when examined through the lens of the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). This study investigates how five social media marketing strategies – interaction, trendiness, entertainment, customization, and electronic word of mouth – affect customer brand engagement on Instagram, with particular attention to the visual and interactive features of the platform that appeal to user motivations and gratifications. Guided by a positivistic philosophy and a deductive approach, the study collected data through a structured survey distributed to Instagram users in Sri Lanka who actively engage with fashion brands, yielding 449 valid responses following data screening. Reliability of the measurement scales was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7. An ordered probit regression model was applied to analyse the data, as it is well suited to handling ordinal dependent variables. The results indicate that word of mouth, interaction, and trendiness have significant positive effects on customer brand engagement, while customization and entertainment show significant negative effects, suggesting that Sri Lankan consumers respond differently to these strategies than reported in prior international studies, potentially due to contextual factors such as price sensitivity and trust concerns. These findings extend the application of UGT to the Instagram context and offer practical insights for marketers seeking to strengthen brand engagement in the Instagram-driven fashion market, underscoring the importance of tailoring social media marketing strategies to local consumer behaviour rather than assuming universal effects across markets.

Keywords: social media marketing; Instagram; customer brand engagement; Uses and Gratification Theory; fashion industry

INTRODUCTION

The traditional media landscape has been revolutionized by social media, as it enables marketing and advertising operations to occur on a single platform. In today's world, social media provides opportunities for companies to build relationships with their customers (Dananjana et al., 2024). The modern digital age is characterized by the presence of social media, which serves as a communicative tool that significantly impacts society (Saliya, 2024). The global business sector has widely recognized the need to invest in the digital domain, particularly in various social media platforms (Husain et al., 2022). Digital spending by e-commerce and related businesses worldwide grew from \$380.75 billion in 2020 to \$491.70 billion in 2021 and is projected to reach approximately \$785.08 billion by 2025 (Liaqat, 2023; Hoekstra & Leeftang, 2022). The evolution of marketing trends highlights social media as an innovative channel that enables businesses to engage with their audience and buyers (Hasan et al., 2023). E-commerce platforms have increased product

accessibility, thus fuelling the rapid growth of social media marketing in the fashion and skincare sectors (Levina et al., 2023).

Through social media, brands can quickly establish consumer engagement via effective and flexible communication. Furthermore, social media provides brands with analytical capabilities that help assess the influence and effectiveness of their communication in engaging target customers, thereby highlighting its potential for consumer engagement (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Social media is a useful tool that includes a variety of social networks and visual formats designed to inspire customer interactions. It has also been the focus of research across a range of product categories and market contexts (Dissanayake et al., 2019). In addition to facilitating actions that increase brand exposure, social media marketing plays a significant role in fostering meaningful conversations between consumers and marketers (Hafez, 2021). Although social media marketing (SMM) continues to be explored as a modern marketing approach, its influence on consumer intentions remains somewhat limited (Jamil et al., 2022; Chyrak et al., 2024). Despite its widespread use and potential to generate a large volume of user-generated content, marketers face several challenges when implementing social media marketing strategies (Malesev & Cherry, 2021).

Both customers and marketers consider social media to be a valuable resource, and in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals conducting business on social media platforms in Sri Lanka (Dananjana et al., 2024). With the rapid growth of mobile broadband and fixed internet subscriptions, companies in Sri Lanka are increasingly investing in social media marketing. As of January 2024, 7.50 million individuals in Sri Lanka were active on social media, representing 34.2% of the total population. Additionally, there were 32.49 million active cellular mobile connections, equivalent to 148.2% of the population, highlighting the country's high mobile penetration (Datareportal, 2024). The potential of social media marketing in Sri Lanka is becoming increasingly apparent to businesses of all sizes, including micro and small enterprises (Hewapathirana, 2023). Instagram, in particular, is gaining popularity as a tool for consumer engagement, especially among younger demographics. Businesses use the platform to share visually appealing content that highlights their products or services, making it a favoured channel among companies (Dananjana et al., 2024). Changes in consumer purchasing behaviour driven by physical constraints have led to a shift away from traditional retail toward online channels. As a result, the fashion retail sector in Sri Lanka has embraced digital marketing and online sales. Regardless of the industry, effective marketing messages are essential for building brand equity and influencing consumer behaviour (Saliya, 2024).

Although earlier studies have recognised the potential of social media marketing initiatives to promote user engagement behaviour and self-brand connection, a large portion of this research is still conceptual in character. There are currently few empirical studies on the consumer engagement (CE) notion, especially in relation to brand fan sites. Furthermore, the majority of previous research has focused on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, frequently highlighting particular post formats or content categories (Peeroo et al., 2015). There is a dearth of empirical study examining the ways in which social media marketing initiatives impact consumer engagement and self-brand connection on Instagram, despite the fact that Instagram has emerged as the top global platform in terms of engagement rate (Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021). This leaves a significant knowledge gap on how user behaviour and Instagram-specific features influence brand-consumer interactions. Thus, this study identifies the impact of social media marketing strategies on customer engagement in consumer brand engagement on Instagram for fashion products, guided by five research objectives: to identify the impact of interaction, trendiness, entertainment, customisation and word of mouth as social media marketing strategies on customer brand engagement on Instagram for fashion products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Marketing Activities

The ongoing rise in social media popularity makes it a valuable platform for companies to use as a marketing tool, as it attracts a large number of users (Jacobson et al., 2020). More businesses are engaging in social media activities related to brand equity and brand engagement, as well as communication efforts such as information search and promotions, making active participation increasingly mainstream (Li et al., 2020; Tang and Raheem, 2023). By integrating social media into their advertising strategies, businesses can build stronger

connections, resulting in enhanced relationship bonds and increased brand value (Ebrahim, 2020). The perceived reliability of social media platforms often surpasses that of traditional media, enabling businesses to collect valuable customer feedback and foster better connections (Saliya, 2024).

Effective communication through social media has become a central marketing principle that directly influences consumer brand involvement (Ashley and Tuten, 2015). Social media marketing has become widely accessible, allowing business representatives to maintain online communication with their clients more easily. Common strategies employed in social media marketing include interaction, entertainment, trendiness, customization, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Wirga et al., 2022). Digital content marketing (DCM) has emerged as a predominant strategy in recent years (Carlson et al., 2018). Enhancing the customer experience through the creation of meaningful content is a key DCM approach for strengthening consumer connections. The effectiveness of such content can be measured by consumer engagement levels on platforms that provide analytical tools and insights (Dwivedi et al., 2020; Tang and Raheem, 2023).

However, the success of content-based marketing strategies continues to be challenged by evolving social media algorithms and the rapidly changing preferences of consumers. Erwin et al. (2023) noted that marketers face difficulties in maintaining audience engagement due to these algorithmic changes, which increasingly favour interactive and data-driven content. As a result, the use of analytics and machine learning powered by artificial intelligence has become essential for evaluating content effectiveness and adapting it to current trends (Haleem et al., 2022). By combining data-driven strategies with creative content development, brands can ensure their content-based marketing remains relevant, adaptable, and competitive in the dynamic digital landscape (Maulana et al., 2025).

Customer Engagement

Organizations utilize the customer engagement approach as a means of retaining existing clients while attracting new ones. Customer engagement depends on multiple factors, including product or service quality, customer satisfaction levels, perceived value, and diverse cultural backgrounds (Quynh et al., 2020). A comprehensive analysis across various contexts is required to develop a robust understanding of consumer engagement and to strengthen its theoretical foundation (Yasara and Abeysekara, 2023).

The modern concept of customer engagement has emerged in the digital age. Organizations build relationships with customers through active participation, which enhances brand recognition and fosters customer loyalty (Rather et al., 2018). Multiple strategies such as marketing campaigns, updated website content, social media interaction, and outreach via mobile or wearable devices enable organizations to achieve these goals (Shawky et al., 2019).

The Role of Social Media in Consumer Engagement

The extent of social media customer engagement has expanded significantly in recent years, driven by emerging tools and technological advancements (Muhammad et al., 2021). Corporate organizations now utilize social media platforms to strengthen customer relationships and support marketing engagement initiatives. These platforms allow organizations to actively involve customers in the co-creation of marketing content and value. Social media interactions have also transformed customer service, enhancing business responsiveness to client needs (Seyyedamiri and Tajrobehkar, 2021).

Social media has a powerful impact on business operations through its content creation capabilities, improving customer service processes and increasing brand appeal to potential clients. When companies implement these techniques, they influence customer behaviour even before a purchase decision is made. The integration of social media platforms into online marketing strategies has become a core element of modern corporate practices – a concept widely referred to as social media marketing (Li et al., 2021). Businesses promote their products and services through various platforms, enhancing brand recognition via word-of-mouth marketing while also managing corporate reputation and maintaining stakeholder relationships (Parveen et al., 2016; De Alwis, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

Uses and gratification theory identifies the reasons and mechanisms behind individuals' interest in adopting innovative technologies to fulfil their unique needs and preferences (Chen, 2011; Katz et al., 1973). Research on how users consume different media platforms often relies on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which is discussed in detail by Gao and Feng (2016). Extant literature has utilised uses and gratification theory in examining how individuals interact with digital platforms, including internet-based technologies (Kaur et al., 2020) and social media (Dhir et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has examined the individual gratification derived from social networking services including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs and review sites (Bevan-Dye, 2020; Capriotti et al., 2020; Belanche et al., 2019). The theory posits that individuals actively seek specific media content to fulfil particular needs and objectives while maintaining their preferred perceptions. Media content consumption offers various types of gratification, which the theory explains alongside users' platform preferences. UGT has been widely applied by scholars in the field of social media research (Ngai et al., 2015). With the growing popularity of social media, UGT has been employed in numerous studies to identify the driving forces behind the use of social networking platforms and the goals individuals aim to achieve through them.

Interaction

Interaction is a crucial characteristic that distinguishes social networking sites from other forms of media. A brand's social media presence provides customers with a platform for open and personal interaction with both the brand and fellow users (Park and Namkung, 2022). Social media interaction occurs when users can effortlessly converse and exchange thoughts or information within online communities (Liao et al., 2021). There is significant potential for direct, two-way engagement between users and service providers. This interaction can enhance brand affinity and credibility (Wirga et al., 2022).

Interaction involves the exchange of information and perspectives with others (Godey et al., 2016). It offers valuable insights to consumers searching for specific products or services, while simultaneously providing marketers with opportunities to retain visitors on their platforms and encourage engagement with peers and brand-related content (Moslehpour et al., 2020). According to Kim and Ko (2012), interactions allow brands to understand customer engagement levels and their willingness to purchase a product or service. Furthermore, interaction fosters social media engagement, encourages consumer advocacy, and facilitates reciprocal information sharing (Jarrett, 2008). Moslehpour et al. (2020) also indicate that social media interaction enhances a brand's visibility and overall engagement. Grounded in the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), it is identified that media which fulfils individuals' interests along with their perspectives is considered the preferred media. The interactions that enable consumers to exchange information and engage in two-way communication help maintain their preferred perception in using social media.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media marketing interaction has a significant impact on customer brand engagement on Instagram.

Trendiness

Social media trendiness reflects a brand's ability to project the latest and most fashionable information about itself, such as new ideas related to the brand (Fetais et al., 2023). Khan et al. (2019) define trendiness in the fashion industry based on up-to-date data and trend-related information. Trendiness communicates innovative products, novelty, and awareness of evolving consumer behaviour to audiences (Knezevic et al., 2021). Exposure to cutting-edge fashion trends can be beneficial by serving as style inspiration and boosting self-esteem, enabling consumers to become trendsetters among their peers (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Ercis et al., 2024).

The more aesthetically pleasing the features on social media brand websites are, the more successful they are in engaging customers. Prior research indicates that enhancing both the intellectual and emotional aspects of the

customer experience leads to increased consumer brand engagement (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019; Bilal et al., 2021). Consumers' desire for information drives their participation on social networking sites, as seen in their engagement with brand-related content through actions such as likes, comments, and shares (Ki et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2024). According to the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), individuals consider the preferred media that satisfies their interests and perspectives, such as the novelty and trendiness of Instagram's marketing strategies in relation to clothing products.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social media marketing trendiness has a significant impact on customer brand engagement on Instagram.

Entertainment

Entertainment is a crucial element in fostering positive emotions among social media followers toward a brand (Wirga et al., 2022). It encourages engagement and creates a continuous desire for online browsing (Kakar et al., 2023). Compelling social media marketing (SMM) content can provide users with engaging and intriguing material that strengthens their connection to a brand (Changani & Kumar, 2024). Brand pages that include games, stories, contests, prizes, interactive animations, images, and videos are perceived as enjoyable, fun, and visually appealing. These elements provoke excitement and satisfy the sensory and emotional needs of consumers, thereby motivating them to engage with brand-related content (Plantin et al., 2018; Bilal et al., 2021).

Entertainment on social media elicits favourable feelings, enhances engagement, and supports sustained usage of the platform (Torres et al., 2018). Companies that deliver content exceeding consumers' entertainment expectations are more likely to elicit favourable behavioural responses such as customer engagement, loyalty, and brand equity. The enjoyable, fun and visually appealing aspects of entertainment on Instagram in relation to fashion products satisfy the needs of consumers, which is grounded in the arguments of the Uses and Gratification Theory.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Social media marketing entertainment has a significant impact on customer brand engagement on Instagram.

Customization

The customization aspect offers valuable insights, while social media provides a platform for individuals to access relevant information and express their opinions freely. It aims to deliver personalized content and tailored services (Wirga et al., 2022). Social media allows marketers to share brand-related information that aligns with consumer needs. The personalization approach within social media platforms is based on individual connections, whereas traditional commercial media operates through general mass communication (Khan et al., 2024).

Customizing consumer information from multiple sources through personalization has proven to be an effective strategy for enhancing customer satisfaction (Kakar et al., 2023). Tailored messaging outperforms traditional media in attracting consumer attention, as customers respond more positively to social media content that reflects their personal interests (Wilson et al., 2024). Instagram as a platform provides consumers the opportunity to receive customised marketing messages on fashion products, satisfying their need for customised and personalised products. Grounded in the Uses and Gratification Theory, this study identifies customisation as a marketing strategy that satisfies gratification of the needs associated with using Instagram in relation to fashion products.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Social media marketing customization has a significant positive effect on customer brand engagement on Instagram.

Word of Mouth

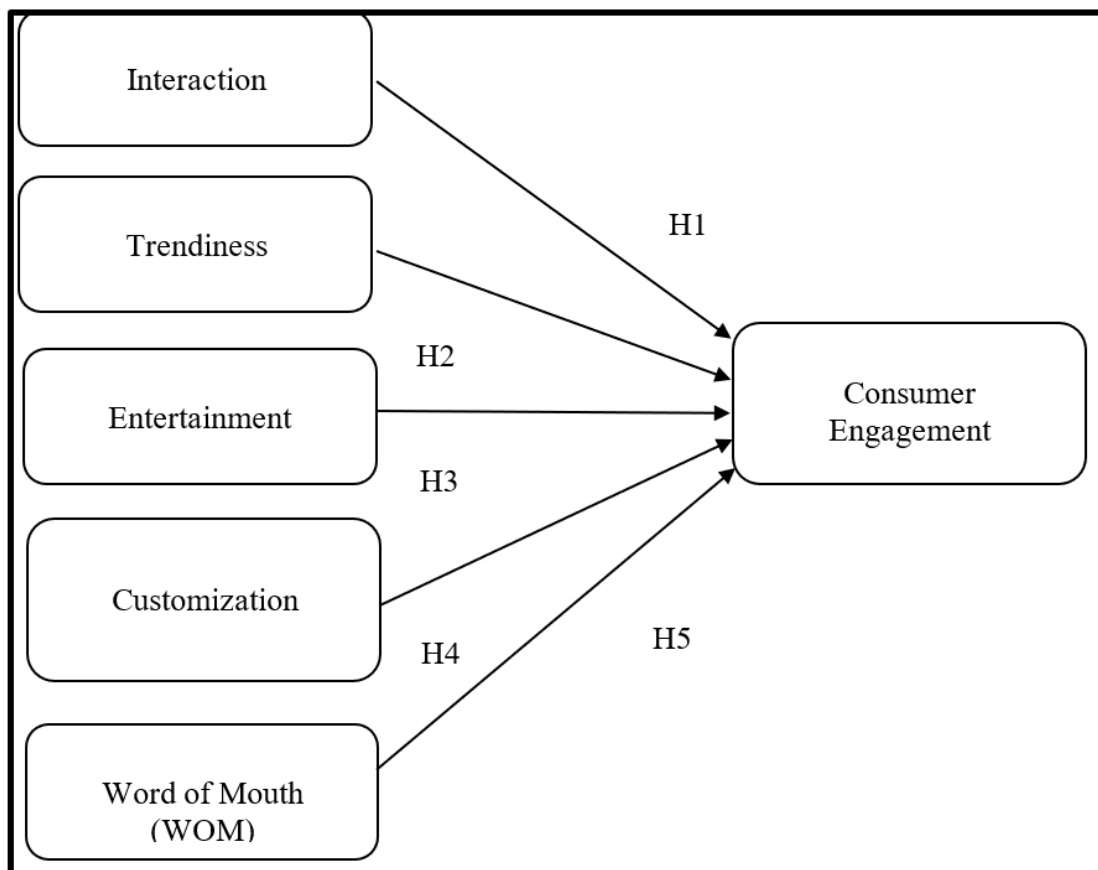
Social media development has enabled consumers to assess products and brands through word-of-mouth feedback from other users on social media platforms (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). The sharing of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) among consumers fosters feelings of closeness and emotional attachment between businesses and their customers, while also generating positive emotions for consumers (Brodie et al., 2013). Social media platforms make eWOM both accessible and actionable, resulting in positive brand experiences that enhance consumer emotions and strengthen consumer–brand relationships (Huang et al., 2024).

The volume of data generated through eWOM on social media provides marketers with deep insights into consumer behaviour patterns (Verma & Yadav, 2021). Moreover, given the greater influence of eWOM compared to traditional personal experience, companies often encourage or solicit customers to generate eWOM about their brands to foster brand communities and shape consumer perceptions (Gvili & Levy, 2018). Instagram as an online platform facilitates eWOM, providing a platform for consumers to share views and experiences with other consumers, thereby satisfying their social needs. Grounded in the Uses and Gratification Theory, users engage with digital platforms to satisfy their needs and perspectives.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Electronic word-of-mouth has a significant positive effect on customer brand engagement on Instagram.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author (2025)

METHODOLOGY

The research uses quantitative methods to study the impact of social media marketing activities on enhancing consumer engagement on Instagram in Sri Lanka. This study used a deductive research approach connected to the positivist paradigm for statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). The deductive technique involves

statistical analysis grounded in current theory, while the inductive approach formulates new theory based on empirical data (Thundeniya & Dissanayake, 2024). The study deployed convenience sampling as a method to obtain population diversity. The method provides appropriate solutions for explanatory research by collecting data efficiently from Instagram users whose fashion brand engagements determine their selection (Taherdoost, 2016). This study selected Instagram users from Sri Lanka who actively engage with fashion brands on social media as its target audience. The sample size was computed using Cochran's formula, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error (Cochran, 1977). The study employed a final sample of 449 valid responses following data screening to eliminate incomplete answers. The data collection process relied on an online survey platform that reached Sri Lankan consumers who interact with fashion brands on Instagram.

The data were collected through a structured questionnaire, which was developed following an extensive review of the literature on social media marketing and brand engagement. Reliability assessments were used to determine study quality, as they measure the consistency between the items (Marar et al., 2023). The study used Cronbach's Alpha to test the reliability of each measurement scale separately. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to measure participant reactions toward fashion brand content displayed on Instagram. SPSS was employed to analyse the gathered data (Herath & Wanigasuriya, 2025). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic findings, and an ordered probit regression analysis was then used to evaluate the relationships between social media marketing activities and consumer brand engagement as the outcome variable. Siedlecki (2020) demonstrates that a descriptive research design is a prevalent methodology employed to collect data regarding current conditions through questionnaires. Therefore, a descriptive and explanatory research design is utilised to investigate the causal relationships among variables.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	152	33.9%
	Female	297	66.1%
Age	20 - 30	168	37.4%
	31 - 40	138	30.7%
	41 - 50	143	31.8%
Occupation	Student	112	24.9%
	Professional	227	50.6%
	Own Business	59	13.1%
	Employed	51	11.4%

The statistics demonstrate interesting information on the demographic breakdown of the sample. The sample is predominantly female, standing at 66.1%, while males account for 33.9%. With the largest group falling in the 20–30 years range (37.4%), followed by 41–50 years (31.8%), and 31–40 years (30.7%), the sample is fairly balanced in terms of age. By occupation, the majority are professionals (50.6%), followed by students (24.9%), business owners (13.1%), and other employed individuals (11.4%). Overall, there is a bias in the sample towards females, with more young professionals and students, indicating a diversity of professional experience and career stages.

Reliability

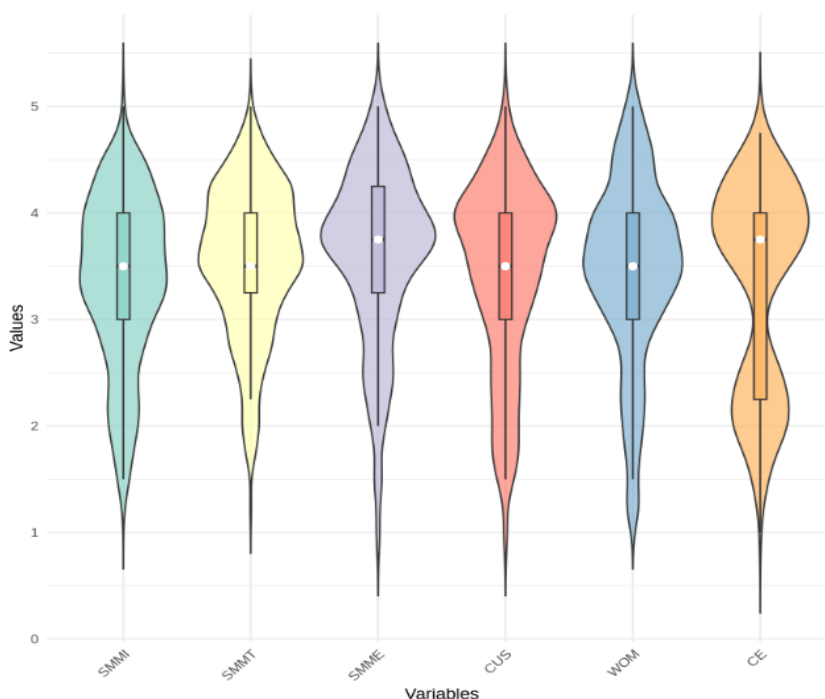
The internal reliability of the variables was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for the five independent variables of interaction, trendiness, entertainment, customisation and word of mouth, and the dependent variable of customer engagement. The reliability statistics are presented in Table 2. A value above 0.7 was considered to confirm reliability.

Table 2: Reliability

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St. Dev	Cronbach's Alpha
SMMI	1.25	5.00	3.367	.787	0.844
SMMT	1.25	5.00	3.558	.697	0.824
SMME	1.00	5.00	3.604	.796	0.772
CUS	1.00	5.00	3.419	.868	0.801
WOM	1.25	5.00	3.458	.843	0.764
CE	1.00	4.75	3.316	.950	0.809

Estimated results of the research hypotheses were derived using an ordered probit regression model, with each independent variable's impact on customer brand engagement on Instagram assessed in the context of Sri Lanka. The analysis is based on a survey with 449 valid responses gathered from Instagram users in Sri Lanka. A violin plot (Figure 2) depicts the distribution of Likert-scale scores for the dependent variable of customer brand engagement along with the five independent variables. Considering the shape of the violin plot, it is evident how the responses are distributed. Mean values for the independent variables of SMMI, SMMT, SMME, CUS and WOM are centred around 3.5 to 4.5, showing a relatively symmetrical, normal distribution skewed mostly towards positive agreement. The dependent variable of customer engagement shows a varied distribution; the median is high, however a larger spread is observed, skewed rightward.

An ordered probit regression was employed to examine how the independent variables SMMI, SMMT, SMME, CUS and WOM influence customer brand engagement, summarised in Table 3. Among the variables, the coefficient values provide further information about the direct effect of each independent variable. The unstandardized coefficients reveal that WOM ($\beta = 1.187$), SMMI ($\beta = 0.470$), and SMMT ($\beta = 0.362$) have significant, positive effects on customer engagement, with the strongest effect revealed by WOM. CUS ($\beta = -0.278$) and SMME ($\beta = -0.408$) possess negative coefficients, showing that customization and social media marketing entertainment negatively impact engagement, although the impact remains significant (CUS, $p = 0.012 < 0.05$; SMME, $p = 0.001 < 0.05$). In summary, the regression analysis illustrates that social media marketing, specifically WOM, SMMI, and SMMT, contribute significantly and positively to customer engagement, while CUS and SMME have a significant negative impact on customer brand engagement.

Figure 2: Violin Plot


Source: Author (2025)

Table 3: Ordered Probit Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	z-value	p-value	95% CI
WOM	1.187	0.1493	7.95	0.000***	[0.894, 1.480]
CUS	-0.278	0.110	-2.50	0.012**	[-0.495, -0.060]
SMME	-0.408	0.124	-3.30	0.001***	[-0.650, -0.165]
SMMT	0.362	0.089	4.05	0.000***	[0.187, 0.536]
SMMI	0.470	0.075	6.24	0.000***	[0.322, 0.618]

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$. Pseudo R^2 : 0.1784; Log-likelihood: -503.1975; LR Chi-square: 218.55 ($p < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research indicate the effect of social media marketing activities (SMMAs) on consumer brand engagement on Instagram among Sri Lanka's fashion industry. Instagram marketing activities were found to be powerful in influencing consumer brand engagement, with four main sub-dimensions: interaction, trendiness, entertainment, and customization. These factors align with prior research that identifies the impact of such factors on social media visibility and engagement for brands (Kakar et al., 2023; Wirga et al., 2022). Social media marketing activities in terms of enabling information sharing, conversation or opinion exchange, and ease of delivering opinions were identified by Kim and Ko (2012), which is consistent with the findings of this study showing a significant impact on customer brand engagement on Instagram. Trendiness in terms of the newest information and its effect on customer response (Kim and Ko, 2012) is consistently depicted in this study in the context of Instagram customer brand engagement. eWOM, which includes passing information to friends and others and enabling content uploads, impacts consumer response (Kim and Ko, 2012), and this study indicates similar results, with a significant positive impact identified.

Customisation as a strategy, which includes customised information and services, impacts positive responses towards brands and has been identified as having a significant positive impact in extant literature (Kim and Ko, 2012). However, the findings of this study identify a negative significant impact on customer engagement. This may be due to various context-specific features among Sri Lankan consumers, such as price sensitivity (Rodrigo & Yatawara, 2024). Similarly, the social media marketing strategy of entertainment, identified as a fun and interesting influence on customer response in extant literature (Kim and Ko, 2012), shows a negative significant impact in this study. This may be due to trust issues and lower engagement associated with digital inequalities in Sri Lanka as a developing nation compared to more developed countries.

The findings highlight the significance of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), entertainment, and social media interaction in building consumer brand engagement. These findings are also supported by previous researchers, who note that social media advertising not only boosts customer interactions but also creates positive word-of-mouth that reinforces brand perceptions (Huang et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). These results add to the literature and offer relevant insights for marketers, underscoring the fact that Instagram marketing strategies centred on entertainment, interactivity, and customization are crucial in developing strong customer-brand relationships.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the existing literature by applying UGT theory in the context of social media, enriching its application to Instagram. It deepens the understanding of the gratifications sought through interaction, trendiness, entertainment, customisation and word of mouth. Furthermore, this study contributes to the extant literature by applying UGT theory to social media literature, specifically to Instagram customer engagement, which remains underexplored in the literature.

Practical Implications

According to this research, user engagement on social media platforms can be improved by prioritising brand participation that is consumption-based, contribution-based, and creation-based. Entertainment, personalisation, engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, and trendiness are all ways in which brands can enhance the effectiveness of social media marketing. Additionally, videos can foster an anthropomorphic representation of the business, reducing the separation between consumers and enhancing their enjoyment. Ultimately, businesses should create an environment that encourages electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), allowing users to share their experiences, remarks, and discussions on the brand's official platforms and thereby acquire further knowledge.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, data were collected using convenience sampling, which may introduce sampling bias and limits the extent to which the findings can be considered representative of the broader population of Instagram users in Sri Lanka. Second, the sample was predominantly female and relatively young, which restricts the generalisability of the results across other demographic groups, such as older consumers and male consumers, who may respond differently to social media marketing activities. Third, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, capturing consumer engagement at a single point in time; this limits the ability to establish causal relationships between social media marketing activities and customer brand engagement or to observe how such engagement evolves over time. Fourth, although the reliability of the measurement scales was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, the study did not conduct additional validity testing, such as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which would further strengthen confidence in the robustness of the measurement model. Finally, the research was geographically confined to Sri Lanka and focused exclusively on Instagram, without considering how the findings might differ across other cultural contexts or other popular social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should employ probability sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling, to improve sample representativeness and strengthen the external validity of findings. Researchers are also encouraged to conduct additional validity testing, including confirmatory factor analysis, to further establish the robustness of the measurement model. Comparative studies involving multiple countries or cultural settings would help determine whether the observed negative effects of entertainment and customisation are unique to the Sri Lankan market or reflect broader consumer behaviour trends across different cultural and economic contexts. Incorporating longitudinal research designs would provide valuable insight into how consumer engagement evolves over time and would allow researchers to draw stronger causal inferences regarding the effects of social media marketing activities. Furthermore, future studies could examine mediating variables such as brand trust, perceived authenticity, and consumer satisfaction to better understand the mechanisms through which social media marketing activities influence customer brand engagement. Finally, comparing Instagram with other platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube would provide a broader understanding of social media marketing effectiveness across different digital environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the significant impact of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on brand engagement among consumers, with a focus on Instagram in Sri Lanka's fashion industry. The findings suggest that Instagram marketing activities such as interaction, trendiness, entertainment, and customization are potent drivers of brand awareness, image, and perceived quality. In addition, the study highlights the roles of social media engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in maintaining positive brand attitudes and interactions. The study is beneficial to social media marketers interested in optimizing social media usage,

particularly on platforms like Instagram. It contributes to the current literature on social media marketing and offers practical implications for brands seeking to improve consumer-brand relationships in the digital era.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, CONFLICT OF INTEREST, AND DATA AVAILABILITY

Ethical approval: This study involved the voluntary participation of adult Instagram users in Sri Lanka who engage with fashion brands on the platform. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Postgraduate Institute of Management, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Prior to data collection, all participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before they completed the online survey. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were treated anonymously and used solely for the purposes of this academic research. The study posed no more than minimal risk to participants, as it involved only self-reported attitudinal data collected through a standard Likert-scale questionnaire.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this work.

Data availability: The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly archived due to participant privacy considerations, as respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality when consenting to take part in the survey. The anonymised dataset supporting the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author, Dr. Asanga Ranasinghe, upon reasonable request.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) to assist with language editing, manuscript formatting, and structural refinement of the text. All intellectual content, arguments, analysis, theoretical frameworks, and conclusions presented in this paper are entirely the work of the authors. The authors have reviewed, edited, and take full responsibility for all content published in this paper. Generative AI tools were not used to generate original research ideas, data, or academic claims.

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