

**‘How engaged are you?’ Pakistan vs. United Kingdom – A cross-cultural study of the
effects of customer engagement in the digital era**

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Abstract

The explosive global growth in digital media has given firms unparalleled opportunities to enhance their engagement with consumers and build brand relationships. However, consumers' responses may vary depending on their national cultural context, and they may consume and share brand information differently. This study therefore explores, in different national contexts, the effects of social media marketing activities on customer engagement and customer engagement on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value. We use commitment–trust theory to examine the model. Data were gathered from a total of 592 consumers in two different national market settings, i.e. the UK and Pakistan. The results confirm overall the effects of social media marketing activities on customer engagement, of customer engagement on brand trust and brand commitment, and of brand trust on brand commitment, both directly and based on the cultural moderator, suggesting the customer engagement effects are stronger in collectivist cultures. These findings fill several gaps in knowledge on the relationships between social media dimensions, customer engagement, and key brand outcomes, and also enable managers and policymakers to understand the need to take national culture into account in social media activities. The study's limitations are also discussed.

Keywords - Customer engagement, social media marketing activities, brand trust, brand commitment, brand value, national culture.

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

Customer engagement is defined as customers' emotional, behavioural, and cognitive manifestation, which is driven by their motivation for interactions with focal objects (Ji et al., 2022; Nisar et al., 2023). It is the outcome of a brand's effort to motivate and empower customers to voluntarily contribute to its functions (Wongsansukcharoen, 2022). Gligor et al. (2022) suggest that customer engagement is an important marketing strategy that has emerged as a concept of increasing relevance in the recent marketing literature. This importance stems mainly from the links between engagement and various branding topics, suggesting that customer engagement enhances numerous brand evolution constructs, including, importantly, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value (Harrigan et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022; So et al., 2024).

Not surprisingly, much of the customer engagement in today's world occurs through the use of social media tools (Harrigan et al., 2017; Khattak and Yousaf, 2022; Aljarah et al., 2024). These tools are especially value as they enable brands to reach large numbers of people more effectively than traditional means and to transform them from passive observers into active participants, since consumers can easily contribute by commenting, reviewing, creating, and sharing content on brands across different networks (Khattak and Yousaf, 2022). This creation and delivery of messages from customers can have a direct influence on their and other customers' preferences, attitudes, and behaviours (Gomez et al., 2019). Brands take deliberate initiatives to use social media in their everyday tactics to achieve positive results in terms of gaining a larger market share as well as empowering customers to engage with them, building trust and commitment, and adding value to the brand (Zollo et al., 2020; Aljarah et al., 2024).

Previous researchers have provided some small demonstrations of the effect of social media marketing on consumer engagement and how brands can benefit; however, little is known about the separate effects of social media marketing dimensions on customer engagement or on brand evaluation constructs such as trust, commitment, and value (Harrigan et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2021; Khattak and Yousaf, 2022). Prior research suggests that social media marketing dimensions differ in their conceptual meanings, effectiveness, and intended purpose (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Each dimension, as an individual dimension, has a unique impact both on customer engagement and, indirectly, on brand evaluation constructs (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Ebrahim, 2020; Aljarah et al., 2024). Hence, we use all the dimensions in this study as independent constructs.

Furthermore, there is little evidence in the literature regarding how customer engagement's effect on brand evaluation is affected by culture (Petersen et al., 2015; Messner, 2022; Lee and Park, 2022; Connell et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2024). Culture is an important theme in the context of international business. It influences customers' emotional processes through differential processing and makes them react differently to international marketing strategies, including customer engagement tactics (Lee and Park, 2022; Connell et al., 2023). When brands engage customers in different international markets, they use tactics that are suited to the chosen country's specific customs and norms (Kim et al., 2022). Although there are various cultural dimensions, as suggested by the literature, the individualistic and collectivist dimensions are the most significant and noticeable in the marketing literature (Nguyen et al., 2014; Seger-Guttmann and MacCormick, 2014; Kitirattakarn et al., 2019). The previous literature has noted that these two dimensions are influential and have different effects and degrees of persuasion regarding how consumer engagement affects brand evolution constructs (Frank et al., 2015; Petersen et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2022). These qualities make

these dimensions a perfect resource for examining the effect of customer engagement on brand evaluation constructs (Kitirattarkarn et al., 2019).

Taking this into consideration, the study fills the gap in the literature by examining the relationships between social marketing dimensions, customer engagement, and other brand related relational constructs. Hence, this study examines the effect of social media marketing dimensions on customer engagement; furthermore, it examines the effects of customer engagement on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value, both directly and based on the moderating effect of national culture. Five research questions are derived from this aim: (i) Do social media marketing dimensions have an effect on customer engagement?; (ii) Does customer engagement has an effect on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value?; (iii) Does customer engagement have an effect on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value based on the moderating effect of national culture in an international business context?; (iv) Does brand trust have an effect on brand commitment and brand value?; and finally, (v) Does brand commitment have an effect on brand value?

We used commitment–trust theory to define the model. This theory suggests that social media marketing has changed the role between brands and consumers from transactional-orientated to relationship-orientated (Pansari and Kumari, 2018; de Silva, 2020). Brands, by means of creating content on social media marketing, engage consumers with their ongoing campaigns and in return receive relational exchanges, such as trust, commitment, and value (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Vivek et al., 2012). Brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value are the ‘sine qua non’ or ‘building blocks’ to successful relationships formed in the return of engagements made by brands through social media marketing activities (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Bao and Wang, 2021). Taking this theory into consideration, we have examined the effects of social media marketing dimensions on

customer engagement, and subsequently on relational constructs such as brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value, both directly and based on the moderating effect of national culture.

582 items of data were collected from two international cultures, i.e., UK and Pakistan. These countries were selected due to their high vs. low scores on the Hofstede scale, i.e., the UK is an individualistic culture and Pakistan is a collectivistic culture (Clearly Cultural, 2021). The data were collected from their largest cities, i.e., London and Karachi, respectively (Statista, 2020). A survey through non-probability sampling was used to collect the data and SEM was used to analyse the data.

The study starts with a literature review and then presents the hypotheses, methodology, analysis, findings and discussion, and finally, the contributions, limitations, and future research avenues.

Literature review

Customer engagement is an emerging concept that has attracted great interest from academics and marketing managers in diverse industries (Hollebeek et al., 2022) and from both practitioners and academics (Brodie et al., 2011; Gligor et al., 2022; So et al., 2024). The concept was originally proposed and studied in the organisational behaviour and psychology contexts, but then, over time, it was also introduced into the fields of sociology, political science, human resources, and, recently, marketing (Liu et al., 2018).

In the marketing literature, customer engagement has been conceptualised in various ways; a few of these views are addressed below. Bowden (2009) gave the first account and defined it as a behavioural construct, which is necessary for core economic transactions. They further suggested that it is a behaviour through which consumers make voluntary contributions

that have a brand focus but go beyond what is fundamental to the transaction and that it results from motivation.. Vivek et al. (2012, p. 133) defined it as the intensity of customers' participation in connection with brand offerings that either the customer or the brand initiated. Brodie et al. (2011, p. 260) regarded it as a psychological state that occurred by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal object in core relationships. In addition, Mollen and Wilson (2010) defined customer engagement, based on cognitive and affective commitment, as having an effective bond with the brand, as exemplified by an electronic or non-electronic mediator to communicate the value of the brand.

These definitions overall are categorised into three streams: firstly, there is the behavioural viewpoint, where consumer engagement can be seen as a behavioural indicator towards a brand; secondly, it can be explained as a psychological state that occurs in conjunction with customers' interactive experiences with a brand and also consists of cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social elements; and finally, consumer engagement can be explained as a psychological process that describes the mechanism by which customers form loyalty towards a brand (Liu et al., 2018, p. 2).

In recent years, some marketing scholars have taken an interest in customer engagement and have researched the topic. Zhang et al. (2017) explored the influence of customer engagement on stickiness and word-of-mouth and found it had a significant effect on both these constructs. Harrigan et al. (2018) examined its effect on the customer's self– brand connection, advocacy of the brand, and brand usage intent, and found a positive effect. Islam et al. (2019) confirmed the effect on brand experience and repatronage intent, while So et al. (2016) identified the effect on brand loyalty and brand evaluation. Prentice et al. (2019) demonstrated the effect on behavioural engagement towards the brand, and Benham et al. (2021) showed a positive effect on co-creation and relationship quality. There is also some

evidence that customer engagement also has a significant effect on customers' attachment, satisfaction, performance, profitability, trust, and commitment (Bowden, 2009; Kumar et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2018; Barari et al., 2021; Aljarah et al., 2024).

The growing interest in the topic has run in parallel to the ongoing evolution of innovative social media technologies that have been dubbed Web 2.0, particularly tools like blogs, wikis, and other social networking sites (Liu et al., 2021). Consumer engagement on social media is regarded as the most important benefit that a brand receives (Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2020; Khattak and Yousaf, 2022); it gives customers the power to engage with the brand and its related elements by becoming active users, producers, co-producers, and, in some cases, destroyers (Liu et al., 2021).

Furthermore, by using social media, customers can forward, share, comment on, and like the content of the brand. Thus, social media can contribute to customer engagement by strengthening and enhancing interactions, involvements, and relationships (Cheung et al., 2020; Aljarah et al., 2024). Ihejirika et al. (2021) suggested that customer engagement on social media could be both active and passive, where the latter may involve simply viewing and reading content, while the former is based on participatory, interactive, and dialogic attributes. However, both active and passive engagements play a significant role in influencing consumers through the targeted use of social media and making them to connect with the brands.

The extant literature examining the effects of social media marketing on consumer engagement has largely focused on the benefits that consumers receive from brands and/or brand communities (Liu et al., 2018). Walsh et al. (2013) suggested that a positive relationship existed between customers' social media usage and brand image. Mangold and Faulds (2009) found that customers felt highly engaged with the brand when they could submit comments,

and that this had a positive effect on the brand's image and reputation. Chahal and Bala (2017) found that customers' engagement in social media marketing gave them the power to enhance their brand knowledge, evoked strong feelings and associations towards the brand, increased their preferences, and had a positive effect on brand equity. Liu et al. (2018) suggested that there were various key benefits for consumers' engagement through the usage of social media marketing: firstly, relational benefits, such as trust relationships with the brand; secondly, functional benefits, such as information on the brand's uses; thirdly, hedonic benefits, such as feelings of pleasure after purchasing the brand; and fourthly, social benefits, such as social identification after consuming the brand. Similarly, in recent years, Liu et al. (2021) examined the effect of luxury brands' social media marketing activities on customer engagement and found a significant effect.

Despite these studies, there is only limited evidence in the literature on social media marketing and its effects on customer engagement within the branding context, resulting in several gaps in knowledge. Firstly, previous researchers have examined social media marketing activities only as a whole construct and examined their effects on customer engagement. Hence, a study examining the effect of each dimension of social media marketing activities on customer engagement is of value. As noted above, all the social media marketing dimensions differ from each other in terms of their conceptual meanings and effectiveness, and using them as a multi-dimensional construct does not clearly define the effects on customer engagement (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Ebrahim, 2020).

Moreover, there is limited evidence on the effect of customer engagement on brand evaluation. The literature suggests that brands engage customers by giving them the opportunities to participate in their campaigns, such as social media (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Lee and Park, 2022; Aljarah et al., 2024). Engaged customers over time develop

positive and mutual exchange relationships (So et al., 2021; 2024). These relationships are sufficient to form trust, commitment, and value towards the brand (Rather et al., 2019; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022). Earlier researchers have recognised customer engagement as a key behaviour in which customers are willing to spend their countless resources, and this only becomes possible due to trust, commitment, and value, which customers show towards the brand. Hence, our second objective is to examine the effects of customer engagement on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value.

In addition, we examine the effects of brand trust on brand commitment and of brand commitment on brand value. The literature suggests that, once brand trust based on customer engagement is formed, consumers are likely to develop brand commitment and brand value (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002). First, starting with the effect of brand trust on brand commitment, it is suggested that brand trust develops enduring desires to maintain a relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). This leads consumers to create emotional bonds and a sense of feelings of commitment to the brand (Tong et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020). Hence, it is important to examine the effect of brand trust, generated based on customer engagement, on brand commitment.

Furthermore, brand commitment's effect on brand value is examined. Brand commitment can result in the development of sentimental feelings and can cause consumers to invest additional resources into maintaining the relationship by perceiving the brand as valuable (Wong, 2023). When consumers find robust links between themselves and the brand, they form a strong connection and believe that the brand has a higher value (Jamshidi and Rousta, 2020). Thus, brand value helps consumers assume that they will have positive gains in return for a commitment to the brand, exceeding the earlier efforts created by means of engagement resulting in brand value (Hessling et al., 2018). Hence, our next objective is to

examine the effects of brand trust on brand commitment and brand commitment on brand value.

In addition to the above, this study also examines the moderating effect of cultures and how these factors effect the relationship between customer engagement and other constructs. Customers' cross-cultural differences are explained as one of the biggest challenges to the brands (Connell et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2024). These differences distinctly affect customers' choices, preferences, perceptions, expectations, behaviours, and intentions (Kim et al., 2022). Similarly, cultural differences have a different impact on customers' reactions to firms' engagement tactics (Nguyen et al., 2014). Cultural comparative studies on this topic provide evidence of different reactions and suggest how customers in different cultures distinctly behave towards the firms' investment in establishing engagement (Lee and Park, 2022). Further, limited evidence also indicates that culture has a different effect on engagement on relational constructs with collectivist and individualist societies showing different impacts of customer engagement on relational constructs (Roy et al., 2018). These differences have also been noted by firms such as Apple, McDonald's, Pepsi, etc., who use cultural differences in their strategies and benefit from incorporating culture into their customer engagement frameworks (Bradley, 2004), giving vital importance to consider the effect of culture on the effects of customer engagement on relational constructs. Considering this, our next objective is to examine the moderating effect of culture and examines the relationship between customer engagement and relational constructs, i.e., trust, commitment, and value. These relational constructs are used because the main purpose of customer engagement is to enhance trust, commitment, and value (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Roy et al., 2022).

Although culture has various dimensions, as defined by Gered Hofstede (1980), such as individualism, collectivism, less power, high power, weak uncertainty avoidance, strong

uncertainty avoidance, small power distance, large power distance, femininity, masculinity, long-term orientation, and short-term orientation, this study, as suggested by previous researchers, takes only the individualistic/collectivist dimensions into consideration (Taras et al., 2010; Seger-Guttmann and MacCormick, 2014; Petersen et al., 2015; Barari et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2024). According to researchers, dimensions other than individualism/collectivism are not considered influential on customer engagement (Messner, 2022) since they have little impact on consumer engagement factors, such as attitudes, behaviours, experiences, feelings, thoughts, lifestyles, etc., and are less predictive than the individualistic and collectivist dimensions (Seger-Guttmann and MacCormick, 2014; Frank et al., 2015; Barari et al., 2021).

Furthermore, these dimensions are part of a value system that predisposes the relationship of an individual to his/her collectivity in society (Chu and Choi, 2011). In an individualistic society, the ‘self’ represents an individual’s own self; therefore, independence and individuality are valued, while in a collectivistic culture, the self is defined by in-group memberships, and interdependence and group harmony are valued (Tsai and Men, 2017). Hence, this paper examines how culture affects the relationship between customer engagement and other constructs based only on the individualistic and collectivist dimensions.

Based on the above discussion, this study examines firstly the effects of social media marketing dimensions on customer engagement; the effects of customer engagement on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value, both directly and based on the moderating effect of national cultures; the effects of brand trust on brand commitment and brand value; and finally, the effect of brand commitment on brand value. The conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

<< Insert Figure 1 here >>

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on commitment–trust theory, which has its roots in psychology, sociology, and social psychology (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Bao and Wang, 2021; Bhandari et al., 2022). This theory combines the concept of two constructs in the relationship marketing context, i.e. trust and commitment. Both are crucial in building and sustaining successful relationships. Trust between exchange partners reduces the vulnerability of the relationship and enhances commitment, which in turn leads to various other meaningful relational outcomes, such as motivation, confidence, cooperation, reputation, satisfaction, loyalty, purchase intention, communication, cooperative behaviours, performance, productivity, etc. (Yuan et al., 2019; Bhandari et al., 2022; Abid et al., 2023).

Commitment–trust theory can also be applied to the building of relationships between brands and consumers during the development of customer engagement through social media marketing (Chou et al., 2023; Ozuem et al., 2024). Social media marketing has changed the traditional roles of consumers and brands (Vivek et al., 2012; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). It has turned the relationship from transactional exchanges into relational exchanges in which brands can create customer engagement by creating and sharing content, having conversations, forming communities, connecting with like-minded individuals, advocating, etc.

Previous researchers have suggested that customer engagement between customers and brands is vital in developing and maintaining relationships (Vivek et al., 2014; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022). Favourable thoughts and expectations elevated using engagement help customers build trust, commitment, and value towards the brand (Brodie et al., 2011; Islam and Rahman, 2016; de Silva, 2020; Chou et al., 2023; Ozuem et al., 2024). Chou et al. (2023) suggested that customers did not immediately trust, commit, or value a firm they had

never interacted with before. These relational attributes emerge by means of repeated interactions or engagement, and social media marketing plays a significant role in generating them, i.e., first generating engagement, which later forms trust, commitment, and value towards the brand (So et al., 2021). These relationships are also examined based on the moderating effect of culture. Distinct cultures have different values and they see these relationships differently (Levy and Gvili, 2020; Gvili and Levy, 2021; Zhong et al., 2024).

Furthermore, based on the evidence that customer engagement fosters brand trust, it is also suggested that customer engagement indirectly causes brand commitment through brand trust, which then becomes a source of developing brand value (Khan et al., 2020). Brand trust is essential in encouraging a bond between the brand and consumers. It occurs due to the brand's constant efforts in developing and maintaining a relationship with customers by means of engagement (Li et al., 2020). Once, brand trust is built, it leads to the formation of commitment towards the brand (Li et al., 2020). Brand commitment represents a long-term desire to continue and maintain an important and successful relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It reduces uncertainty and creates behavioural and psychological attachments, which saves customers the cost of seeking new relational exchanges with other brands. Chou et al. (2023) suggested that besides all the other benefits, the main purpose of brand commitment was to help consumers calculate future values from the brand, i.e., gains in the future. In other words, brand commitment is a source to nurture value towards the brand (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Considering this, we have examined the effects of brand trust on brand commitment and brand commitment on brand value, using the commitment-trust theory.

Hypotheses

Effect of social media marketing activities on consumer engagement

Social media marketing refers to digital applications, web tools, platforms, or technological systems that help with collaboration and the sharing of information with and among online community members (Cheung et al., 2020; So et al., 2024). It is an effective and inexpensive way to reach consumers. In the literature, social media marketing activities are described based on five dimensions: so-called entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisations, and word-of-mouth (WOM). Entertainment refers to social media attempts to offer content that is full of interest and fun (Kim and Ko, 2012). Interaction, the second dimension, refers to the brand's capability to create and facilitate two-way communication with customers and allow them to exchange, share, and communicate on social media (Liu et al., 2021). Trendiness, which is the third dimension, refers to giving customers the latest information about the brand on social media. Customisation, the fourth dimension, involves the brand's customisation of information or services. Finally, eWOM reflects customers' willingness to pass information to others (Kunz et al., 2017).

The literature suggests that the main aim of brands is to use social media marketing activities and their dimensions to create engagement with their customers (Kim and Ko, 2012; Liu et al., 2021). Social media transforms the role of customers and enables them to engage with brands by creating and sharing information, generating content, forming communities, and interacting with one another on various brand-related topics (Shawky et al., 2020; Quach et al., 2020; Khattak and Yousaf, 2022; Aljarah et al., 2024). These qualities alter customers' roles and allow them to be innovators, co-producers, contributors, influencers, and advocates on social media (Shawky et al., 2020).

The importance of social media marketing activities to customer engagement within the branding context has also been noted by academics. However, rather than studying the effects, they have mostly studied customer engagement within the context of social media, with the exception for Liu's et al. (2021) study. Dhaouti (2014) examined the effect of customer engagement metrics on brand pages and the size of the brand community on a social media platform. Schvinski et al. (2016) examined the effect of passive consumption on brand-related social media content and found that passive consumption had a minimum level of engagement. Devereux et al. (2019) analysed the effects on customer engagement of a brand's social media posting characteristics, including the day of posting and platform on which the activity was posted. They found that Facebook created the highest level of engagement and that there was no specific day of the week that affected customer engagement. Similarly, Lei et al. (2017) examined the effect of different types of social media posts, i.e. content and calls, on customer engagement. They found that brand-related images, videos, calls to win, and calls to act had a significant effect on customer engagement. Recently, Liu et al. (2021) examined the effect of luxury brands' social media marketing activities on customer engagement and found a significant effect.

Although the importance of social media marketing activities on customer engagement is noticeable, there is still limited literature on the topic; in particular, there is inconsistency between the conceptualisation and operationalisation of customer engagement, and limited research has examined the effects of the individual dimensions of social media marketing activities on customer engagement (Liu et al., 2021; So et al., 2024). The previous literature indicates that each dimension of social media marketing activities has a distinct effect (Moslehpour et al., 2022). Customers respond to each dimension differently and evaluate some of them more critically than others; for example, interaction, trendiness, and entertainment are found to be more influential than the others (Trunfio et al., 2021). Since

there is limited knowledge on the effects of the individual dimensions of social media marketing activities on customer engagement, our first hypothesis is:

H1: The social media marketing dimensions of (1a) entertainment, (1b) interaction, (1c) trendiness, (1d) customisation, and (1e) word-of-mouth have a positive influence on customer engagement

Effect of customer engagement on brand trust

Brand trust is the committed and personal connection between customers and the brand (Li et al., 2020). It is the customers' willingness to depend on the competence of the brand to achieve its acknowledged function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). It plays a significant role in creating a bond between the brand and customers (Bowden, 2009; Yang and Ngo, 2022) and indicates to customers that the brand is reliable, will keep its promises, will provide significant products and services, and will not disappoint customers (Kholis and Ratnawati, 2021).

An important part of building trust with a brand is via customer engagement (So et al., 2014). Through the engagement process, customers interact with various facets (i.e. cognitive, emotive, and behavioural) of the brand and gather information about it (Kholis and Ratnawati, 2021; Aljarah et al., 2024). When customers engage with the brand, they accelerate the process of building an enduring relationship, resulting in the creation of trust between the brand and consumers (So et al., 2016; 2021). A high level of engagement with the brand can build high brand trust, while a low level of engagement can lower brand trust (Li et al., 2020; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022).

These explanations are also in line with commitment–trust theory, which suggests that customer engagement through social media marketing forms a relational-orientated connection between customers and brands (de Silva, 2020). When customers engage with the

brand, they create a psychological connection towards it and form a long-standing relationship, including brand trust (Rather et al., 2019; de Silva, 2020; Yang and Ngo, 2022). However, there is weak evidence for the above, which suggests a need for further exploration (Vohra and Bhardwaj, 2019). Thus, our next hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Customer engagement has a positive effect on brand trust

Effect of customer engagement on brand commitment

Brand commitment has been suggested as one of the central concepts within the context of relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Hussain et al., 2020). It is defined as customers' desire to maintain a relationship with the brand (Khodabandeh and Lindh, 2021). It refers to customers' emotional or psychological attachment to the brand, which makes them stay connected with the brand by means of continuously buying it and choosing it over the other available alternatives (Harrigan et al., 2018; Khodabandeh and Lindh, 2021; Aljarah et al., 2024). Committed customers resist attitudinal and behavioural change, continue to behave favourably towards the brand, consider it as an integral part of their lives, and engage in a prolonged relationship with it (Raju et al., 2009).

Similarly to the previous hypothesis, which suggests the effect of customer engagement on brand trust, it can also be hypothesised that customer engagement results in a higher level of brand commitment (Brodie et al., 2011). Customers with a higher level of engagement devote themselves to actions that support their favourite brand (Chan et al., 2014; Harrigan et al., 2018; Gligor et al., 2022), spending time and effort in constantly interacting with the brand (Chou et al., 2023). They also build a sense of belongingness and cooperate with the brand in the value-adding process to help satisfy their and other customers' needs (Rather and Sharma, 2016; Gligor et al., 2022). Over time, these customers form brand

commitment, generate emotional bonds, and spread positive word-of-mouth (Hur et al., 2018; Li et al., 2020).

Despite these studies, there is only limited evidence on the direct effect of customer engagement on brand commitment (Vivek et al., 2012; de Silva, 2020; Chou et al., 2023). Hence, to understand this relationship further, our next hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Customer engagement has a positive effect on brand commitment

Effect of customer engagement on brand value

Brand value is specified as the value received by the customers regarding the brand (Sanchez-Iglesias et al., 2024). It is a central concept within the context of brand management. The early conceptualisation of brand value goes all the way back to Zeithaml's (1988) study, in which brand value represented customers' overall evaluation of what was given to and received from the brand. This definition views brand value as an overall assessment of the trade-off between what is paid and what is earned (Merz et al., 2018). Leek and Christodoulides (2012) suggest that this trade-off is based on both the functional and emotional qualities that are encompassed in brand value, and that this encourages the development of the relationship between customers and the brand.

Accordingly, it can be suggested that customer engagement has a significant role in the creation of brand value. Firms can benefit from the upsurge of social media platforms to enhance customer engagement, which can further result in customers' cognitive or emotional investments in a brand (Lee and Park, 2022; Nisar et al., 2023). These investments are important elements in establishing a relationship with a brand and developing brand value, resulting in the creation of a positive brand evaluation for customers by building feelings, aiding self-expression, and providing positive feelings of having good taste in brand choices

(Pansari and Kumar, 2018; Liu et al., 2021). Furthermore, successful brands with a higher level of value help to enhance brand recognition and purchase intention (Kumar et al., 2010).

However, there is limited evidence of the specific relationship between customer engagement and brand value. In most cases, researchers have used constructs similar to brand value to study the effects of customer engagement (Vivek et al., 2014; Quach et al., 2020). Exploratory research by Vivek et al. (2014) confirmed the importance of customer engagement for a construct similar to brand value, i.e. customer value. They suggested that when customers recognised the importance of engagement ‘as a self-justifying end in itself’, they developed value towards the firm. Quach et al. (2020) examined the effects of customer engagement on co-created value and confirmed that one influenced the other. Zhang et al. (2017) examined the effects of three dimensions of customer engagement, i.e. conscious participation, enthusiasm, and social interaction, on the three dimensions of a similar but conceptually different construct to brand value, i.e. the customer value dimensions of functional value, hedonic value, and social value. Their results suggested that, apart from the effect of the customer engagement dimension of social interaction on the customer value creation dimensions of functional value and social value, all the other relationships were significant.

Nevertheless, despite the significance of the topic, there is only limited research on the effect of customer engagement on brand value. Thus, our next hypothesis is:

H4: Customer engagement has a positive effect on brand value

Effect of brand trust on brand commitment

Evidence from the previous literature suggests that brand trust performs a significant role in the establishment of commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri and Holbrook,

2001; Tong et al., 2018). When consumers show trust towards a brand, they build an emotional bond, thus creating a commitment towards it, so they can continue receiving emotional benefits that arrive owing to the trust (Erkem and Hancer, 2015). Brand trust, in this sense, is the cardinal forerunner of brand commitment and can be achieved only once trust towards the brand is fulfilled or, in other words, when the vulnerability is accepted (Tong et al., 2018). Hence, integrity and reliability towards a brand provide confidence or assurance that the brand will perform as per its promises, generating positive and favourable attitudes, and resulting in customers being committed towards it (Erkmen and Hancer, 2015).

Taking this into consideration, our next hypothesis is:

H5: Brand trust has a positive effect on brand commitment

Effect of brand commitment on brand value

Our next hypothesis examines the effect of brand commitment on brand value. Generally, researchers on the topic have examined the reverse effect, i.e. the effect of value on commitment (Kim et al., 2008; Benjamin et al., 2020). According to them, when high brand value is presented, consumers evaluate the match between their needs and offerings, and this generates a feeling of belongingness and commitment towards the brand Kim et al., 2008; Iglesias et al., 2019). In other words, when consumers have received a high level of functional or emotional benefits, it is expected that they will buy the brand again and, hence, commit to it (Chaudhari and Holbrook, 2002; Das et al., 2019).

There is some limited evidence suggesting that the reverse effect may also be possible. According to these studies, the function of brand commitment is to enhance brand value (e.g. Osuna-Ramirez et al., 2017). Customers who are committed to the brand prefer to continue the relationship in the long run rather than switching to alternative brands (Chaudhari and

Holbrook, 2002; Tang et al., 2018). They have confidence that the values or benefits they receive from the brand by maintaining the relationship or committing to the brand will be higher than the benefits they would receive from terminating the relationship (Osuna-Ramirez et al., 2017). Commitment, thus, forms a desire to maintain the relationship with the brand in the long run by maintaining and improving its value, suggesting that brand commitment is an antecedent of brand value.

Hence, our next hypothesis is:

H6: Brand commitment has a positive effect on brand value

Effect of culture as a moderator

Prior research suggests that an individual's willingness to engage with brand-related information is based entirely on his/her cultural characteristics, i.e. the culture s/he was brought up in (Gvili and Levy, 2021). Culture is defined as 'a set of traits that are shared by the set and were transmitted, where traits are characteristics of human societies that are potentially transmitted by non-genetic means' (Birukou et al., 2009, p. 4). It is an important factor that affects individuals' set of beliefs, norms, thinking, and values that are prevalent in any given society (Kitirattarkarn et al., 2019). It separates people from one group from those of another and acts as a major driver in the formation of individuals' behaviours. Therefore, marketing professionals are required to adjust the communications as well as the offerings according to the cultural nuances of individual groups (Levy and Gvili, 2020; Gvili and Levy, 2021; Zhong et al., 2024).

Hofstede's (1980) study is one of the most influential studies within the cultural context. His cultural dimensions, such as individualism versus collectivism, less power versus high power, weak uncertainty avoidance versus strong uncertainty avoidance, small power

distance versus large power distance, femininity versus masculinity, and finally long-term orientation versus short-term orientation, are a few of the notable dimensions studied in national cultures. Of these different individual cultural levels, individualism and collectivism have been widely used in an international business context and are indicated as having a relatively high predictive power and a dominant impact compared with the other cultural dimensions (Taras et al., 2010; Seger-Guttmann and MacCormick, 2014; Frank et al., 2015; Petersen et al., 2015; Barari et al., 2021). Individualism suggests that people look after only themselves and their immediate family, and value personal welfare, independence, and decisions they make on their own (Griffith et al., 2014). In contrast, collectivism suggests that people look after the welfare of the members of society, value social belonging and inter-dependency, and make mutual decisions (Zhao et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2024).

On the continuum with individualism and collectivism at either end, national societies are usually divided into two groups, i.e. they are either more individualistic or more collectivist (Barari et al., 2021). The idea that there is a significant difference between individuals in these two groups is supported by the limited literature on the topic. Tsai and Men (2017) suggested that consumers from individualistic cultures engaged less on social media, while consumers from collectivist cultures were more likely to participate in content consumption and generation activities. Chu et al. (2016) suggested that customers' engagement in social media was different depending on their culture, such that individualists engage and share information on social media to create a distinct online identity, while collectivists engage and disseminate information to share their experiences and increase significant others' well-being. Gvili and Levy (2021) examined the effect of online shoppers' culture as drivers of engagement with brand-related information sharing. Their results suggested that the above relationships were moderated by culture and that the impact of collectivistic culture was higher than that of the individualistic culture. Similarly,

Kitirattarkarn et al. (2019) examined whether culture, both at the national and personal levels, influenced consumers' engagement with different types of brand-related user-generated content on social media. They found that individualists gave importance to informative content, while collectivists gave importance to entertainment social content in brand-related user-generated content.

Apart from these limited studies in the literature, there is little knowledge of how consumers with collectivist and individualistic traits behave towards brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value. While it is suggested that consumers from collectivist cultures have a higher degree of customer engagement based on relational constructs (Roy et al., 2018; Leonhardt et al., 2020; Levy and Gvili, 2020), but there is limited empirical evidence of the moderating effect of culture on the relationship between engagement and relational constructs. Accordingly, our final hypothesis is:

H7: Culture significantly moderates the relationship between customer engagement and (7a) brand trust, (7b) brand commitment, and (7c) brand value, such that a significant relationship is found among consumers from collectivist cultures than among those from individualistic cultures.

Methodology and analysis

Ten constructs were utilised for this study, i.e. entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, WOM, customer engagement, brand trust, brand commitment, brand value, and culture. The items used to measure and examine these constructs were adopted from the existing literature and were assessed by means of a 7-point Likert scale. The data were collected from two international markets, and analysis was conducted on both, including aggregated structural analysis (Nazarian et al., 2021).

The items for the dimensions of social media marketing activities were taken from Kim and Ko's (2012) study. The items for customer engagement were taken from So et al. (2016) and were measured on four dimensions: identification had four items, enthusiasm had five items, attention had five items, absorption had six items, and interaction had five items. The six items for brand trust were collected from Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman's (2005) study. The items for brand value were drawn from Chahal and Bala (2017) and were measured on three dimensions as follows: brand awareness was measured using four items, brand association was measured using five items, and brand loyalty was measured using six items. The four items for brand commitment were collected from Eisingerich and Rubera (2010). Finally, the six items for the collectivist culture were taken from Yoo et al. (2011). All the items for each construct had factor loading over 0.70 for both datasets (Hair et al., 2014), as shown in Table 1.

In total, 582 items of data were collected from the two international markets, i.e. the UK and Pakistan. The data were collected from 4 June 2021 to 8 August 2021. The data were selected using the convenience sampling method, i.e., a total of $67 \text{ items} * 5 + 2 \text{ moderating groups} = 455$ data items was adequate. As per the recommendations of Floyd and Widaman (1995), having five to 10 samples per variable is sufficient. Additionally, extra data were collected based on the suggestions of Malhotra (2010) and Hair et al. (2014), which were specifically for the purposes of checking for non-response bias, conducting multivariate data analysis, examining the measurement items, and applying structural equation modelling (SEM).

The data were collected from the UK and Pakistan. These countries were selected owing to their high vs. low scores on the Hofstede scale: the UK was placed 3rd among individualistic countries on Hofstede's scale, while Pakistan came 4th among collectivistic

cultures (Dhaundiyal et al., 2020; Chun et al., 2021; Clearly Cultural, 2021). A few earlier researchers have used a similar method to study collectivist and individualist cultures, and used countries from both spectrums (Izogo et al., 2020; Levy and Gvili, 2020; Huang and Zhang, 2021). Individualistic and collectivistic cultures are used in this study firstly as they are good predictors of customer engagement factors, such as attitudes, behaviours, experiences, feelings, thoughts, lifestyles, etc., and secondly because individuals' relationship with collectivity in a given society differs (Taras et al., 2010; Frank et al., 2015; Petersen et al., 2015; Barari et al., 2021; Messner, 2022). Hence, the UK, in which individuals strive to achieve personal goals and value individuality, while Pakistan, in which individuals emphasise peer-bonding, group-centred values, and egalitarian behaviours, are suitable for a comparative cross-cultural study (Sivadas et al., 2008).

London was chosen because it is the capital of the UK and is a highly competitive market (Bevir, 2021). Not only is London the national capital, but it is also an international business hub, and has the largest GDP of the UK's regions, with a GDP of \$2.64 trillion in 2020 (Sensier and Devine, 2020; Hussain et al., 2023). In addition, the individualistic nature of the national culture made London a suitable location for collecting data. In comparison, Pakistan was selected as representing a collectivist society. Pakistan has a GDP of more than \$263 billion a year (Statista, 2020; Clearly Cultural, 2021). The data were collected from Karachi, Pakistan's most populous international city. Lying in the south of the country, it is the main financial and industrial centre, and has an international business outlook (Statista, 2021). The city accounts for about 42% of national GDP, 70% of income tax revenue, and 62% of sales tax revenue (Citiesabc, 2021).

An email and web survey were forwarded to consumer groups, who were found through convenience sampling and the snowball sampling technique (Srinivassan et al.,

2002; Khaneja and Hussain, 2024). The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information. Furthermore, the participants were given two choices regarding the completion of the questionnaire. They had the choice of visiting the web page, where they would find a copy of the questionnaire, or of filling in and forwarding the questionnaire that was attached to the email. The questionnaire also included additional demographic information, i.e. age and gender. In total, 290 valid responses were received from the UK and 292 valid responses were received from Pakistan. In the UK dataset, a considerable proportion of the total pool of respondents, i.e., 53.8%, were young consumers and 46.2% were older consumers, while 58% were female and 42% were male. In the data collected from Pakistan, 52.1% were young consumers and 47.9% were older consumers, while 49.2% were female and 50.8% were male.

For the present research paper, we chose examples of five famous international business brands from the list of 100 global FTSE brands (Inter Brand, 2020): Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and Samsung. These brands were adopted because they were famous in both countries and had a wide international presence.

Furthermore, in a two-step approach, measurement and structural models were used separately on both datasets. The first step, i.e. the measurement model, was performed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the unidimensionality of the constructs and the validity of the measures (Hair et al., 2014; Hussain et al., 2023). Reliability tests, i.e. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, were performed to measure the internal consistency at the item and construct levels, respectively; both were found to be over the proposed value of 0.70 in both datasets (Malhotra, 2010), as shown in Table 1. Hence, the reliability requirements were confirmed.

Additionally, convergent, discriminant, and nomological validity tests were performed. Convergent validity was performed using AVE. According to Hair et al. (2014), the value of AVE should be equal to or above 0.5 to confirm the condition above. Notably, the AVEs in both datasets were found to be above 0.5, suggesting that a greater proportion of the variance observed in the items used was justified by their hypothesised constructs, as shown in Table 1.

Discriminant validity was examined ‘by comparing the AVE for the focal measure with a similar but conceptually different construct; and the square of the correlation between the two factors’ (Li and Petrick, 2008; pp. 79–80). According to the recommendations of prior researchers (Malhotra, 2010; Hussain et al., 2020, 2023; Khaneja and Hussain, 2024), discriminant validity, which reveals the relationships between the factors, should be less than the desired value of 0.92. The observed values were below 0.92 in both datasets, confirming these requirements (Hair et al., 2014), as shown in Table 1.

<< Insert Table 1 here >>

For the UK dataset, the root mean square error of approximation residual (RMSEA) was calculated at 0.039, standardised root mean residual (SRMR) was 0.035, normed comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.927, and non-normed fit index (NNFI) was 0.923. For the Pakistan dataset, RMSEA was 0.033, SRMR was 0.031, CFI was 0.937, and NNFI was 0.931. Generally, higher values (i.e. > 0.80) for CFI and NFI and lower values (i.e. < 0.08) for RMSEA and SRMR show that the measures are desirable and possess a good fit (Hair et al., 2014). Hence, from the initial results, it was noted that, in most cases, the fit was considered adequate.

The risk of common method bias was checked by means of Harman’s (1967) single factor test. Common method bias is a risk when all the responses are collected with the same

type of scale. The results suggested 36% of the variance was found in the first dataset, i.e. the data collected from the UK, while 32% of the variance was found in the second dataset, i.e. the data collected from Pakistan (Quaddus and Woodside, 2015). In addition, a common latent factor test using a χ^2 difference test between the constrained and unconstrained models was performed (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The χ^2 test suggested that the two models were significantly different and showed a significant variance, leading to the retention of the CLF. The model was imputed and used for further analysis in the structural analysis (Hussain et al., 2020, 2023; Khaneja and Hussain, 2024).

Lastly, to examine the hypothesised relationships (both direct and moderating), SEM was estimated using IBM SPSS Amos 26.0. The results from the first dataset, i.e. the UK, suggested that RMSEA was 0.043, SRMR was 0.040, CFI was 0.914, and NNFI was 0.91. For the second dataset, i.e. the data from Pakistan, RMSEA was 0.038, SRMR was 0.036, CFI was 0.921, and NNFI was 0.917. All these values show an acceptable model fit.

Results

Subsequently, the direct hypotheses were tested. The results from the first dataset suggested that H1a ($\gamma = 0.77$, $p < 0.05$), H1b ($\gamma = 0.6$, $p < 0.05$), H1e ($\gamma = 0.76$, $p < 0.05$), H2 ($\gamma = 0.782$, $p < 0.05$), H3 ($\gamma = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$), and H5 ($\gamma = 0.573$, $p < 0.05$) were confirmed. However, H1c ($\gamma = 0.32$, $p > 0.05$), H1d ($\gamma = 0.58$, $p > 0.05$), H4 ($\gamma = 0.232$, $p > 0.05$), and H6 ($\gamma = 0.425$, $p > 0.05$) were not confirmed.

The results from the second dataset suggested that H1a ($\gamma = 0.78$, $p < 0.05$), H1b ($\gamma = 0.832$, $p < 0.05$), H1c ($\gamma = 0.541$, $p < 0.05$), H1d ($\gamma = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$), H1e ($\gamma = 0.643$, $p < 0.05$), H2 ($\gamma = 0.688$, $p < 0.05$), H3 ($\gamma = 0.83$, $p < 0.05$), and H5 ($\gamma = 0.612$, $p < 0.05$) were confirmed. Meanwhile, H4 ($\gamma = 0.481$, $p > 0.05$) and H6 ($\gamma = 0.451$, $p > 0.05$) were not confirmed.

The final results are based on the aggregated results. These are presented in Table 2 and explained below. H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e, regarding entertainment ($\gamma = 0.83$, $p = 0.000$), interaction ($\gamma = 0.93$, $p < 0.05$), trendiness ($\gamma = 0.78$, $p < 0.05$), customisation ($\gamma = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$), and WOM ($\gamma = 0.89$, $p < 0.05$), were found to have a significant effect on customer engagement.

The results for H2 suggested that customer engagement ($\gamma = 0.92$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant effect on brand trust. Similarly, those for H3 suggested that customer engagement ($\gamma = 0.92$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant effect on brand commitment. Moreover, H5 suggested that brand trust ($\gamma = 0.90$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant effect on brand commitment. Contrarily, H4 and H6 were not supported ($\gamma = 0.437$, $p > 0.05$; $\gamma = 0.71$, $p > 0.05$) since they were found to have insignificant effects on brand value. These values are shown in Table 2.

<< Insert Table 2 here >>

The regression results show a moderation effect of collectivist culture, i.e. the interaction variable of collectivism and customer engagement has a positive relationship with brand trust (H7a: $B = 0.18$, sig, shown in Figure 2a), brand commitment (H7b: $B = 0.33$, sig, shown in Figure 2b), and brand value (H7c: $B = 0.19$, sig, shown in Figure 2c). This suggests that individualistic culture dampens the positive relationship between customer engagement and brand trust (H7a), customer engagement and brand commitment (H7b), and finally customer engagement and brand value (H7c). Overall, these results mean that, in a collectivist culture, customer engagement has a significant relationship with brand trust (H7a), brand commitment (H7b), and brand value (H7c) than in a less collectivist (or more individualistic) culture. Interval models are shown in Figures 2a, b, and c.

<< Insert Table 3 here >>

<< Insert Figure 2a here >>

<< Insert Figure 2b here >>

<< Insert Figure 2c here >>

Findings and discussion

The aggregated findings suggest that digital media, i.e. social media marketing activities, had a significant effect on customer engagement. These findings are in line with previous similar findings, where the researchers have confirmed the effect of social media marketing activities on customer engagement (Gomez et al., 2019; Shawky et al., 2020; Quach et al., 2020; So et al., 2024). However, the findings from the UK dataset did not produce the same results for all the social media marketing dimensions. A few of the findings from this dataset relating to particular dimensions were not in alignment with the overall findings; for example, trendiness and customisation were not found to have any effect on customer engagement, suggesting that UK consumers did not consider these two dimensions when forming engagement.

Next, regarding the supported effect of customer engagement on brand trust, as posited in H2, the results, both from the separate datasets and overall, are in line with previous findings (Hsu et al., 2012; Vohra and Bhardwaj, 2019; Li et al., 2020; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022) where researchers confirmed the effect of customer engagement on similar constructs to trust. This study has thus minimised the gap in knowledge by extending the effect of customer engagement to brand trust. These findings are a contribution to the literature.

Thirdly, regarding the effect of customer engagement on brand commitment, as stated in H3, the results, both from the separate datasets and overall, suggest that customer

engagement has a positive effect on brand commitment. Again, while previous researchers have explored the effect of customer engagement on similar constructs to brand commitment (Vivek et al., 2012; Rather and Sharma, 2016; Gligor et al., 2022), no prior research had examined the effect of customer engagement on brand commitment; hence, these findings make a further contribution to the literature.

Next, regarding H5, i.e. the effect of brand trust on brand commitment, the results, both from the separate datasets and overall, suggest that brand trust has a positive impact on brand commitment. Once again, the outcomes are in line with the findings in the previous literature (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Erkem and Hancer, 2015; Brown et al., 2019). Indeed, there is strong evidence of this relationship in the literature, and the results of this study agree with the previous findings.

Apart from all the significant direct relationships, both of the datasets and the final overall findings confirmed that two of the direct hypotheses, H4 and H6, were not significant, i.e. customer engagement and brand commitment were found to have no effect on brand value. These findings are not in line with the previous findings (Delgado-Ballester and Munera-Aleman, 2005; Osuna-Ramirez et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2017), where researchers confirmed the effects of customer engagement and brand commitment on constructs similar to brand value. There could be various reasons why these effects were not found in the present study; one of these could be that consumers who are engaged and/or are committed to the brand do not think of the value they receive from the brand. Hence, customer engagement and brand commitment have not been shown to make any contribution to brand value.

Finally, in terms of the moderating effect of national culture on the effects of customer engagement on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value, the study produced new findings that culture has a significant effect, i.e. that these effects are higher among consumers

from a collectivist culture than among those from an individualistic culture. Previous studies have confirmed a positive moderating effect of national cultures, and especially of collectivist cultures, by using similar constructs in their studies (Kitirattarkarn et al., 2019; Gvili and Levy, 2021; Zhong et al., 2024), but ours is the first to show the specific role of national culture as a moderator between customer engagement and the constructs of brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value.

The support found for most of the hypotheses confirms the contribution made by the theoretical model. This study has thus confirmed, based on commitment–trust theory, that the dimensions of social media marketing activities as a tool are able to create customer engagement and enhance customers’ relational exchanges, i.e. trust and commitment, between brands and consumers (Pansari and Kumari, 2018; de Silva, 2020; Bao and Wang, 2021). However, the findings on brand value were not confirmed, suggesting that brands using social media are limited to creating relational exchanges with customers through engagement: while they can create trust and commitment, they are unable to form value towards their brands. Furthermore, the theory has also confirmed the influence of national culture, suggesting that customer engagement on social media marketing significantly affects all the relational constructs, with customers in collectivist cultures placing more importance on customer engagement and the relationships formed through it.

Theoretical implications

This study has various theoretical and managerial implications. First, in terms of theoretical contributions, it contributes to the area of customer engagement, international cultural differences, and digitalisation, by examining the effects of each social media marketing dimension on customer engagement and then exploring the effects of customer engagement on

brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value, both directly and through the moderating effect of cultural differences based on two national cultures.

Although there is conceptual evidence in the literature on the effects of social media marketing activities on customer engagement (Islam et al., 2019; Khattak and Yousaf, 2022), only limited evidence exists on the effects of the individual dimensions of social media marketing activities on customer engagement. Our findings thus add to the knowledge on these relationships.

Next, a contribution is also made to understanding the effect of customer engagement on the three relational constructs, i.e. brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value. While earlier studies (e.g. Islam and Rahman, 2016; Li et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022) examined the effect of customer engagement on similar constructs, once again only limited evidence was available on the effects of customer engagement on the three constructs investigated in the present study, especially evidence based on commitment–trust theory, which articulates that engaged customers show higher trust towards the brand, which further results in commitment and value (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Furthermore, this is the first study to empirically examine the proposed conceptual framework, i.e., the effects of customer engagement on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value based on the moderating effect of two different national cultures. There is some evidence on this topic in the literature, where previous researchers have examined the effects of customer engagement on relational constructs within the cultural context (Roy et al., 2018; Connell et al., 2022; So et al., 2024), but limited evidence is found between customer engagement and brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value in two different cultural contexts, i.e. collectivism and individualism, making this a novel contribution.

Finally, the study contributes to the literature based on the trust-commitment theory. Based on this theory, our research supports the notion that engagement caused by means of social media marketing activities plays a significant role in forming trust and commitment. This means that social media is a contemporary method to create engagement, resulting in the formation of trust and commitment. Although there are some suggestions in the literature (de Silva, 2020; Wang et al., 2020; Bao and Wang, 2021; Ozuem et al., 2024) suggesting that digital marketing and its platforms can form trust and commitment through engagement, but there is no empirical evidence on the effects of social media marketing dimensions on customer engagement, trust and commitment, directly and based on the moderating effect of culture. Hence, this study contributes to the literature by showing how social media marketing plays a significant role in developing engagement and further, forming trust and commitment towards the brand, and these effects are highly prevalent in a collectivistic society than in a less collectivistic society.

Managerial implications

Regarding managerial implications, first and foremost, the findings will help managers and policymakers to understand the importance of digital media in enhancing customer engagement. Brands use social media as a marketing tool to attract customers and enhance their experiences. Each social media dimension, i.e. entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and WOM, plays a significant role in building customer experiences. These experiences further help in bringing customers close to the brands and forming a relationship with them. Trust and commitment are the main antecedents of any relationship and achieving them is the main goal of brands. The findings have validated the above explanations and once again remind managers and policymakers to understand the importance of social media tools, not only in enhancing customer engagement, but also in understanding that customer

engagement leads to the creation and maintenance of close ties between their brands and customers. These findings suggest that, once customers are engaged with brands, they form a relationship in the form of trust and commitment. These relational constructs form a close tie between customers and their favourite brands.

Next, the findings will also help managers to understand the importance of these relationships in different cultural settings. It is found that the relationship between customer engagement and brand trust, brand commitment, and brand value is higher in collectivist societies than in their individualistic counterparts. This means that, since individuals within collectivistic societies are emotional, dependent, and responsible towards other members, they equally show trust, commitment, and value towards brands. The earlier literature has identified that humans' ability to form lasting relationships with brands is highly evident in collectivist cultures (Xie et al., 2019). These traits are different in individualistic societies, where individuals give high priority to themselves and consider themselves as independent and unique; thus, they are less likely to form relationships, including with brands (Triandis et al., 1988; Seger-Guttmann and MacCormick, 2014). These cultural differences will help managers and policymakers to use strategies that are suitable for individual cultures.

Limitations and future studies

This study has a few limitations, which can be reduced when conducting future research. Firstly, this study used convenience and snowball non-probability sampling methods. A future study could reduce this limitation by conducting a similar study based on probability sampling. Secondly, this study collected data from only two countries, one individualistic and one collectivist, i.e. the U.K. and Pakistan, while various other countries with higher and lower scores for collectivist and individualistic cultures were not involved in this study (Hofstede-Insights, 2021). For example, the United States and Australia are the most

individualistic societies, while Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia have the most collectivist societies (Hofstede-Insights, 2021). Hence, this represents a limitation. A future study could mitigate this limitation by conducting a similar study in different national cultural contexts.

Thirdly, this study has not used various customer engagement dimensions, such as interaction, attention, absorption, identification, and enthusiasm, in the model (So et al., 2014; 2024); a future study could consider these dimensions. Next, various brand relationship constructs that are important in the context of branding, such as satisfaction, loyalty, image, self-brand connection, attachment, equity, etc., are missing from this study (Bowden, 2009; Li et al., 2020). This gap could be minimised by conducting a study addressing these additional constructs. Similarly, a potential study could analyse the effects of the model on attitudinal and behavioural constructs (Chan et al., 2014). Finally, another gap is based on the cultural dimensions used in this study. A future study could take other cultural dimensions into account and could use them as moderating factors (Hofstede, 1980).

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Figure 1: Conceptual model

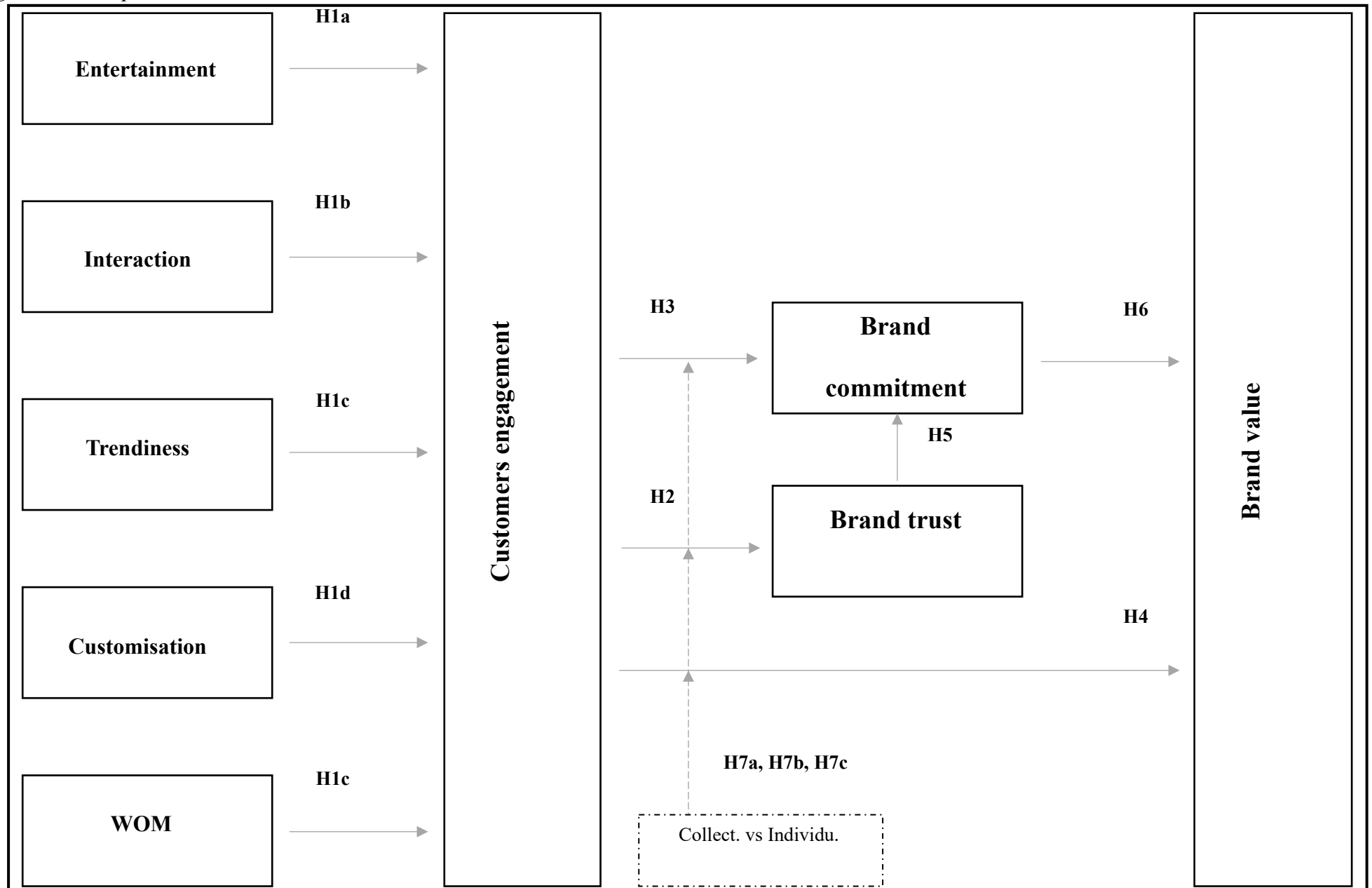


Figure 2a: The moderation effect of culture on customer engagement (CE)
with brand trust (BT)

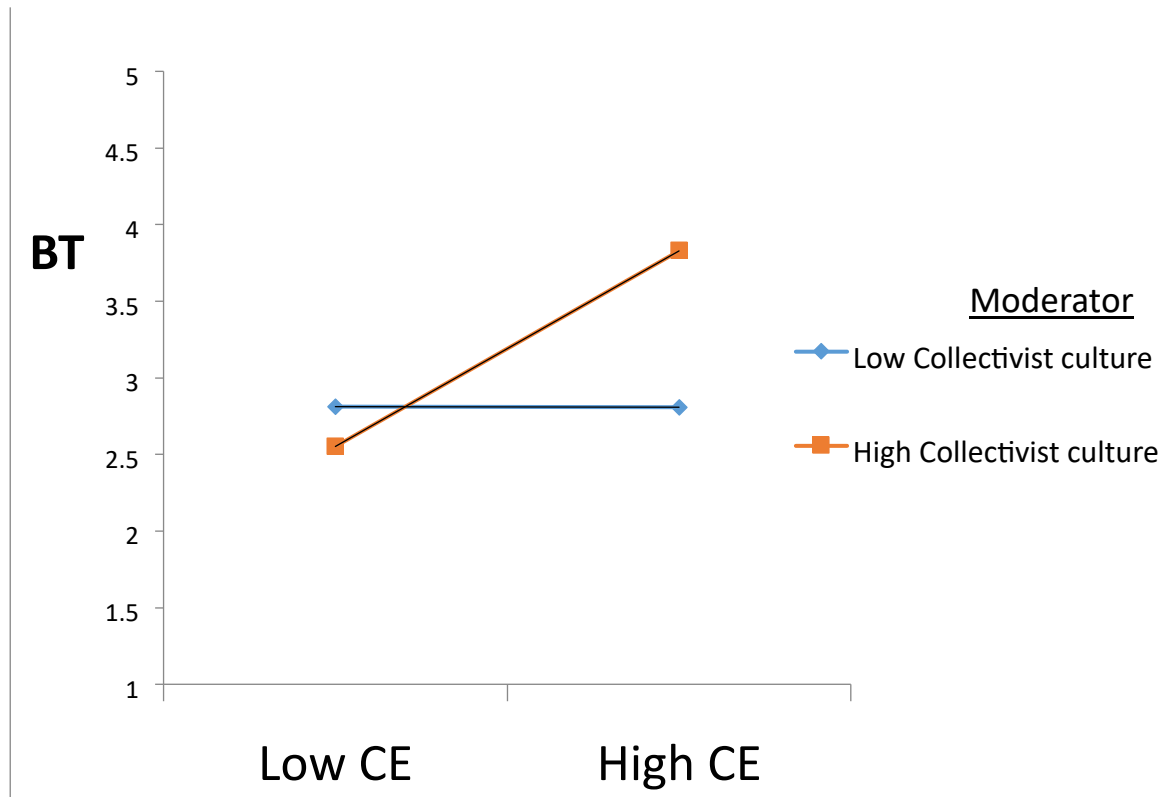


Figure 2b: The moderation effect of culture on customer engagement (CE)
with brand commitment (BC)

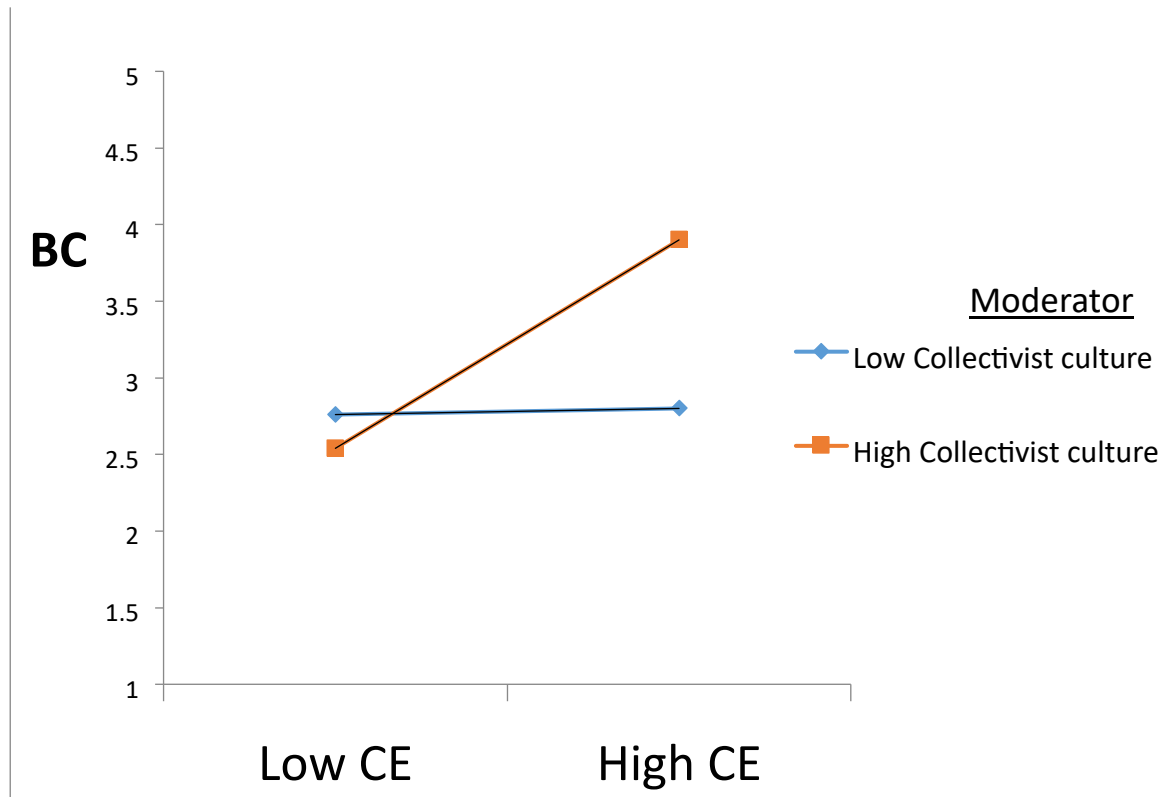


Figure 2c: The moderation effect of culture on customer engagement (CE)
with brand value (BV)

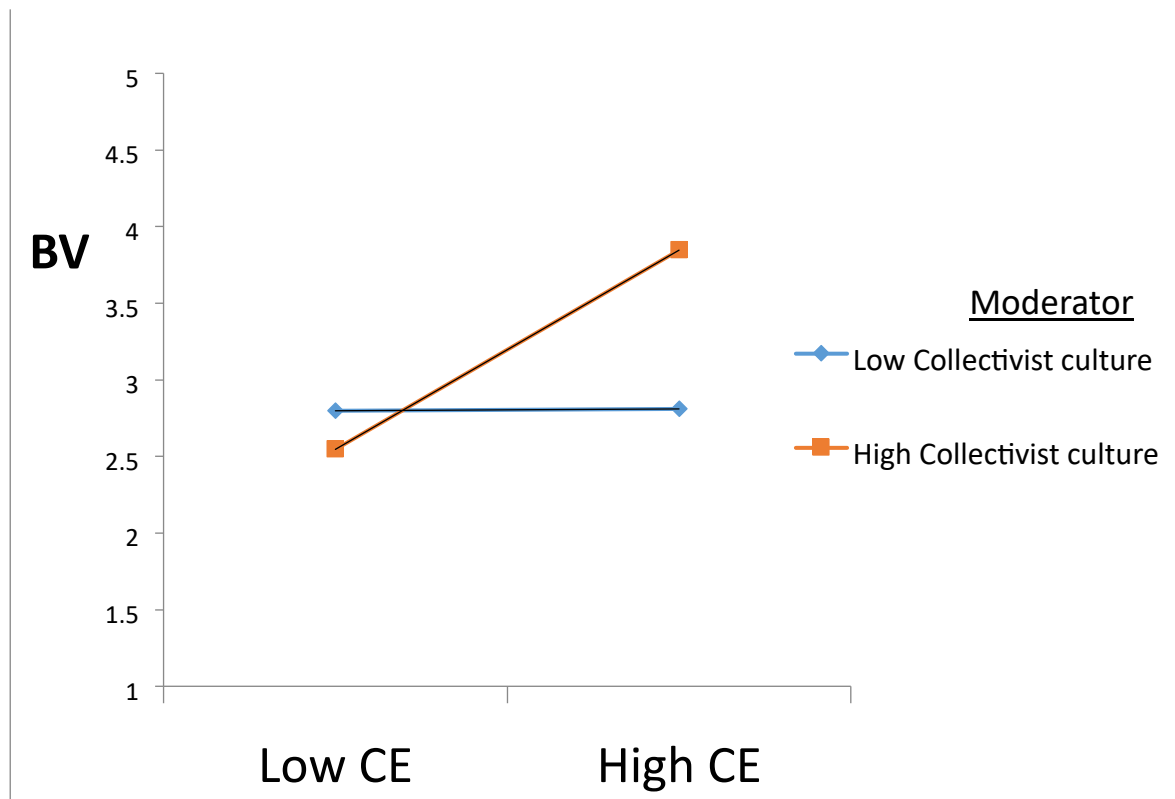


Table 1. Items, factor loading, Cronbach's Alpha, AVE, discriminant validity, composite reliability, and references.

	UK					Pakistan					
Construct and items	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Discriminant validity	Composite reliability	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Discriminant validity	Composite reliability	References
Entertainment		0.86	0.510	0.714	0.83		0.81	0.508	0.712	0.786	Kim and Ko (2012)
Using social media is fun,	0.85					0.82					
Contents shown in social media seem interesting.	0.84					0.79					
Interaction		0.80	0.53	0.728	0.837		0.83	0.55	0.741	0.836	Kim and Ko (2012)
Social media enables information sharing with others,	0.81					0.83					
Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through social media,	0.85					0.82					
It is easy to deliver my opinion through social media.	0.72					0.73					
Trendiness		0.79	0.627	0.791	0.811		0.74	0.611	0.781	0.764	Kim and Ko (2012)

Content shown in social media is the newest information,	0.87					0.84					
Using social media is very trendy.	0.78					0.73					
Customisation		0.81	0.527	0.725	0.782		0.83	0.541	0.735	0.787	Kim and Ko (2012)

Social media offers customised information search.	0.86					0.85					
Social media provides customized service.	0.74					0.76					
Word-of-mouth		0.74	0.62	0.787	0.793		0.72	0.63	0.793	0.769	Kim and Ko (2012)
I would like to pass along information on brand from social media to my friends.	0.77					0.76					
I would like to upload contents from social media on my blog or micro blog.	0.85					0.82					
Customer engagement		0.78	0.69	0.830	0.982		0.77	0.68	0.824	0.982	So et al. (2016)
1. Identification		0.77					0.76				
When someone criticizes this brand,	0.74					0.76					

it feels like a personal insult.											
When I talk about this brand, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.	0.78					0.78					
This brand’s successes are my successes.	0.86					0.85					
When someone praises this brand, it feels like a personal compliment.	0.90					0.84					
2. Enthusiasm		0.83					0.83				
I am heavily into this brand.	0.76					0.73					

I am passionate about this brand.	0.77					0.78					
I am enthusiastic about this brand.	0.75					0.77					
I feel excited about this brand.	0.91					0.95					
I love this brand.	0.93					0.90					
3. Attention		0.81					0.84				

I like to learn more about this brand.	0.75					0.75					
I pay a lot of attention to anything about this brand.	0.77					0.74					
Anything related to this brand grabs my attention.	0.86					0.95					
I concentrate a lot on this brand.	0.83					0.82					
I like learning more about this brand.	0.71					0.73					
4. Absorption		0.83					0.80				
When I am interacting with the brand, I forget everything else around me.	0.74					0.79					
Time flies when I am interacting with the brand.	0.86					0.83					
When I am interacting with brand, I get carried away.	0.85					0.91					

When interacting with the brand, it is difficult to detach myself.	0.93					0.83					
In my interaction with the brand, I am immersed.	0.84					0.83					
When interacting with the brand intensely, I feel happy.	0.85					0.72					
5. Interaction		0.83					0.85				
In general, I like to get involved in brand community discussions.	0.73					0.80					
I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the brand community.	0.79					0.84					
I am someone who likes actively participating in brand community discussions.	0.88					0.93					

In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people in the brand community.	0.91					0.92					
I often participate in activities of the brand community.	0.92					0.88					

6. Brand trust		0.77	0.562	0.749	0.914		0.79	0.545	0.73	0.915	Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001)
Brand will offer me a product with a constant quality level.	0.82					0.85					
Brand will help me to solve any problem I could have with the product.	0.81					0.79					
Brand will offer me new products I may need.	0.80					0.83					
Brand will be interested in my satisfaction.	0.86					0.82					
Brand will value me as a consumer of its product.	0.76					0.76					

Brand will offer me recommendations and advices on how to make the most of its product.	0.74					0.76					
Brand value		0.86	0.661	0.813	0.958		0.88	0.68	0.82	0.957	Chahal and Bala (2017)
1. Brand Awareness		0.79					0.83				
The brand is familiar.	0.79					0.80					
The brand is well recognised.	0.82					0.82					
The brand recall symbols and logos.	0.83					0.79					
The brand is quickly recognised on its features.	0.85					0.85					
2. Brand Association		0.85					0.83				

The brand has clear and positive image.	0.82					0.77					
The brand has a personality.	0.78					0.76					
The brand has a trustworthiness and credibility.	0.71					0.72					
The brand has a sense of belongingness.	0.74					0.74					

The brand has a unique identification.	0.73					0.76					
3. Brand Loyalty		0.84					0.82				
I won't switch to another brand.	0.79					0.81					
I have a strong preferences to brand.	0.73					0.72					
I have a favourable perceptions of the brand.	0.74					0.73					
I will recommend the brand to others.	0.70					0.71					
I am committed to continue with the brand.	0.84					0.85					
I spread positive comments regarding the brand.	0.75					0.76					
Brand commitment		0.86	0.710	0.842	0.961		0.87	0.691	0.831	0.942	Eisingerich and Rubera (2010)
I feel loyal towards the brand; even if the brand was difficult to buy.	0.95					0.88					
I would still keep buying it.	0.93					0.91					
I am willing to go the extra mile to remain a customer of brand.	0.93					0.91					
I will not buy brand in the future.	0.90					0.88					

<i>Culture (collectivist culture)</i>		0.94	0.64	0.80	0.938		0.95	0.67	0.818	0.918	Yoo et al. (2011)
Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group.	0.77					0.78					
Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties.	0.84					0.82					
Group welfare is more important than individual rewards.	0.85					0.83					
Group success is more important than individual success.	0.86					0.80					
Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group.	0.86					0.78					
Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer.	0.89					0.83					

Table 2: Results of direct hypotheses testing

H	Hypotheses	UK			Pakistan			Aggregated – Final results			
		Estimate	CR	P	Estimate	CR	P	Estimate	CR	P	Result
H1a	Entertainment -> customer engagement	0.77	6.731	***	0.78	7.477	***	0.83	9.13	***	Supported
H1b	Interaction -> customer engagement	0.68	7.212	***	0.832	9.961	***	0.93	12.23	***	Supported
H1c	Trendiness -> customer engagement	0.32	3.322	< 0.05	0.541	6.611	***	0.78	8.434	***	Supported
H1d	Customisation -> customer engagement	0.58	5.586	< 0.05	0.59	6.332	***	0.64	6.587	***	Supported
H1e	WOM -> customer engagement	0.76	6.821	***	0.643	7.145	***	0.89	10.72	***	Supported
H2	Customer engagement -> brand trust	0.782	8.823	***	0.688	9.210	***	0.92	13.59	***	Supported
H3	Customer engagement -> brand commitment	0.59	6.662	***	0.83	8.473	***	0.92	9.953	***	Supported
H4	Customer engagement -> brand value	0.232	4.412	< 0.05	0.481	5.571	< 0.05	0.437	5.513	< 0.05	Not supported
H5	Brand trust -> brand commitment	0.573	7.389	***	0.612	7.565	***	0.90	10.243	***	Supported
H6	Brand commitment -> brand value	0.425	4.799	< 0.05	0.451	5.091	< 0.05	0.71	1.23	< 0.05	Not supported

Table 3: Results of indirect hypotheses testing

Moderation effect (Advertising credibility)									
Hypotheses						B-value	T-value	P	Results
H7a	Culture	...>	Customer engagement	>	Brand trust	0.18	9.810	***	Supported
H7b	Culture	>	Customer engagement	>	Brand commitment	0.33	10.223	***	Supported
H7c	Culture	...>	Customer engagement	>	Brand value	0.19	6.871	***	Supported