"Customer Perception of Meme Marketing in Shaping Purchase Intentions"

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has transformed brand–consumer communication, encouraging marketers to adopt innovative and informal promotional strategies such as meme marketing. Meme marketing leverages humor, cultural references, and virality to engage consumers in a non-intrusive manner, particularly among digitally native audiences. The present study aims to examine the influence of customer perception of meme marketing on purchase intention. The study adopts an exploratory–cum–descriptive research design and is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire from 140 social media users in Haryana. Customer perception was measured across dimensions such as entertainment, humor, relatability, authenticity, brand congruence, and trust, while purchase intention served as the outcome variable. Descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to analyze the data. The findings reveal that meme marketing is largely perceived as entertaining, engaging, and effective in enhancing brand recall and positive brand attitude. ANOVA results indicate that purchase intention influenced by meme marketing does not significantly differ across gender and educational qualification; however, significant differences are observed across age groups and frequency of social media usage. Younger consumers and individuals with higher social media engagement exhibit stronger purchase intentions toward brands using meme-based communication. The results support the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework by confirming that customer perception acts as a critical mediating mechanism between meme marketing stimuli and purchase intention. The study contributes to emerging digital marketing literature by highlighting the importance of perception-driven strategies in meme marketing. Practically, the findings suggest that brands should focus on authenticity, cultural relevance, and audience alignment to design effective meme campaigns that positively influence consumer purchase intentions.

KEYWORDS: Meme Marketing; Customer Perception; Purchase Intention; Social Media Marketing; Digital Advertising; Consumer Behavior

INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of digital media and social networking platforms has fundamentally transformed the way brands communicate with consumers. Traditional advertising models, characterized by one-way communication and persuasive messaging, are increasingly

perceived as intrusive and ineffective in capturing consumer attention in an era marked by information overload, shortened attention spans, and advertising fatigue. As a result, marketers are compelled to explore innovative, consumer-centric communication strategies that resonate with digitally native audiences. Among these emerging strategies, meme marketing has gained substantial prominence as a distinctive form of digital promotion that leverages humor, cultural references, and virality to influence consumer perceptions and behaviors. Memes, which are typically humorous images, videos, or textual content that spread rapidly across online communities, have evolved from informal internet artifacts into powerful marketing tools capable of shaping brand meaning and purchase-related outcomes (Dawkins, 1976; Shifman, 2014).

Meme marketing operates at the intersection of entertainment and persuasion, offering brands an opportunity to engage consumers without overtly promotional intent. Unlike conventional advertisements that explicitly aim to sell products or services, meme-based marketing relies on relatability, cultural relevance, and emotional appeal to subtly influence consumer attitudes. This indirect approach aligns with contemporary consumers' preference for authentic, engaging, and value-driven brand communication, particularly on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter (X), Facebook, and TikTok (Kumar & Gupta, 2022). As digital users increasingly consume and share meme content as part of everyday online interaction, brands that successfully integrate memes into their communication strategies can achieve heightened visibility, engagement, and resonance.

Central to the effectiveness of meme marketing is customer perception, which plays a critical role in determining how meme-based content is interpreted, evaluated, and responded to by consumers. Perception encompasses consumers' subjective interpretations of marketing stimuli, shaped by individual beliefs, emotions, cultural context, and prior experiences (Solomon, 2020). In the context of meme marketing, customer perception is influenced by factors such as humor appreciation, perceived creativity, authenticity, relevance, entertainment value, and brand congruence. Positive perceptions can enhance brand likability and foster favorable attitudes, while negative perceptions—such as viewing memes as forced, offensive, or irrelevant—may undermine brand credibility and trust (Leung & Bai, 2021).

Purchase intention, defined as a consumer's conscious plan or willingness to buy a particular product or service, represents a crucial outcome variable in marketing research. It serves as a strong predictor of actual buying behavior and is widely used to assess the effectiveness of marketing communications (Ajzen, 1991; Dodds et al., 1991). In digital marketing contexts, purchase intention is shaped not only by functional product attributes but also by emotional responses, social influence, and perceived value generated through online interactions (Kotler et al., 2021). Meme marketing, by eliciting emotional engagement and social sharing, has the potential to indirectly influence purchase intentions through attitude formation, brand recall, and peer validation.

Recent studies suggest that meme marketing significantly affects consumer engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and brand mentions, which in turn contribute to positive behavioral intentions (Geyser, 2021; Tafesse & Wien, 2018). Humor, a defining

characteristic of memes, has been shown to reduce resistance to persuasion and enhance message acceptance, particularly among younger consumers who value entertainment-driven content (Eisend, 2018). When consumers perceive meme marketing as entertaining and relatable, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the brand, which can translate into increased purchase intention (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2019).

However, the relationship between meme marketing and purchase intention is not linear or universally positive. Consumer perception acts as a mediating mechanism that determines whether meme-based content enhances or diminishes purchase-related outcomes. If memes are perceived as authentic and aligned with the brand's personality, they can strengthen emotional bonds and foster trust. Conversely, memes perceived as inappropriate, overused, or disconnected from brand identity may evoke skepticism or irritation, thereby negatively affecting purchase intention (Alalwan et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of understanding how consumers perceive meme marketing rather than merely measuring exposure or awareness.

The rise of Generation Z and Millennials as dominant consumer segments has further amplified the relevance of meme marketing. These cohorts are highly immersed in digital culture, value humor and creativity, and demonstrate resistance toward traditional advertising formats (Priporas et al., 2017; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). For such consumers, memes function as cultural symbols that reflect shared experiences, social commentary, and collective identity. Brands that successfully tap into this cultural ecosystem can position themselves as relatable and socially aware, thereby enhancing positive consumer perception and influencing purchase intention. Studies indicate that Gen Z consumers, in particular, are more likely to engage with and be influenced by meme-based brand communication than older generations (Cooper et al., 2023).

Social media algorithms and participatory culture further reinforce the impact of meme marketing on consumer behavior. Meme content thrives on virality, enabling rapid diffusion through peer networks and amplifying social influence. When consumers encounter brand-related memes shared by peers, the perceived credibility of the message increases due to electronic word-of-mouth effects (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). This social validation strengthens favorable perceptions and enhances purchase intention by reducing perceived risk and increasing confidence in brand choice (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Thus, meme marketing does not operate in isolation but within a broader social and cultural communication environment.

Despite growing practitioner interest, academic research on meme marketing remains relatively nascent, particularly in relation to its impact on purchase intention through perceptual mechanisms. Existing literature predominantly focuses on engagement outcomes, brand awareness, or content virality, often neglecting the deeper psychological processes that link meme exposure to consumer decision-making (Sharma et al., 2022). Moreover, empirical findings on meme marketing effectiveness are mixed, with some studies highlighting its persuasive potential and others cautioning against its misuse due to the risk of misinterpretation or cultural insensitivity (Pentina et al., 2020). This inconsistency underscores the need for

systematic investigation into how customers perceive meme marketing and how these perceptions shape their purchase intentions.

Furthermore, cultural context plays a significant role in shaping meme interpretation and consumer perception. Memes are often embedded with localized humor, language, and socio-political references, which may resonate differently across demographic groups and regions. In emerging digital markets, such as India and other developing economies, meme marketing has gained traction as a cost-effective and high-impact promotional tool, particularly among young urban consumers (Choudhary & Kamboj, 2023). Understanding customer perception in such contexts is essential for designing culturally relevant meme strategies that positively influence purchase intentions.

From a theoretical perspective, the study of meme marketing aligns with established frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior, Affect Transfer Theory, and Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model, which explain how external stimuli (memes) influence internal evaluations (perception and attitude) and subsequent behavioral responses (purchase intention) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Ajzen, 1991). By examining customer perception as a central construct, this study contributes to bridging the gap between digital content strategies and consumer behavior theory.

In light of the evolving digital advertising landscape, understanding customer perception of meme marketing in shaping purchase intentions is both timely and significant. As brands increasingly adopt meme-based communication to remain relevant and competitive, insights into how consumers interpret and respond to such content can inform more effective, ethical, and strategically aligned marketing practices. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the nuanced role of customer perception in determining the influence of meme marketing on purchase intention, offering valuable implications for marketers, advertisers, and scholars alike.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of digital marketing has led to a paradigm shift in how brands interact with consumers, with social media emerging as a dominant platform for marketing communication. Scholars argue that social media advertising differs fundamentally from traditional advertising due to its interactive, participatory, and user-driven nature (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019). In this environment, content that is entertaining, culturally relevant, and emotionally engaging tends to outperform purely informational or persuasive messages. Meme marketing has emerged as a notable outcome of this shift, reflecting the growing preference of consumers for informal, humorous, and relatable brand communication (Geyser, 2021).

The concept of memes originated from Dawkins' (1976) theory of cultural transmission, where memes were defined as units of information that replicate and evolve through imitation. In the digital era, memes have transformed into visual-textual formats that encapsulate humor, satire, and social commentary, spreading rapidly across online communities (Shifman, 2014). Researchers note that digital memes possess characteristics such as simplicity, emotional resonance, and adaptability, making them highly shareable and influential in shaping online

discourse (Wiggins & Bowers, 2019). These characteristics form the foundation for their application in marketing contexts.

Meme marketing refers to the strategic use of internet memes by brands to communicate promotional messages in a subtle and engaging manner. Unlike conventional advertisements, meme marketing relies on cultural alignment and audience familiarity with trending formats rather than explicit selling (Kumar & Gupta, 2022). Studies indicate that meme-based advertisements are often perceived as less intrusive, thereby reducing consumer resistance and increasing receptivity to brand messages (Eisend, 2018). This perceived non-commercial nature is a key factor influencing customer perception.

Customer perception plays a central role in determining the effectiveness of meme marketing. Perception is a cognitive process through which individuals interpret and assign meaning to stimuli based on personal experiences, beliefs, and social context (Solomon, 2020). In meme marketing, perception is shaped by factors such as humor appreciation, creativity, relevance, authenticity, and alignment with brand personality. When consumers perceive meme content as enjoyable and culturally appropriate, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the brand (Leung & Bai, 2021).

Humor has been extensively studied as a persuasive tool in advertising, with evidence suggesting that humorous content enhances attention, recall, and attitude formation (Eisend, 2018). In meme marketing, humor functions as a cognitive and emotional trigger that fosters positive affect and reduces skepticism toward promotional intent. Balakrishnan and Griffiths (2019) found that humorous social media content positively influences brand attitude, which subsequently affects purchase intention. However, the effectiveness of humor depends heavily on consumer perception, as poorly executed humor can lead to confusion or offense.

Another critical perceptual dimension in meme marketing is perceived authenticity. Contemporary consumers, particularly younger cohorts, value authenticity and transparency in brand communication (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Research suggests that memes perceived as forced or opportunistic may negatively affect brand credibility and trust (Pentina et al., 2020). Conversely, memes that align naturally with brand voice and audience culture enhance perceived authenticity, strengthening emotional connections and fostering favorable purchase intentions (Alalwan et al., 2020).

Brand congruence is also a significant determinant of customer perception in meme marketing. Brand–content congruence theory posits that marketing messages are more effective when they align with established brand identity and values (Aaker, 1997). Studies indicate that meme marketing yields positive outcomes only when the meme format and message are consistent with brand personality (Sharma et al., 2022). Incongruent memes may generate short-term attention but can dilute brand meaning and negatively influence purchase-related perceptions.

Purchase intention has long been recognized as a key indicator of consumer behavior and marketing effectiveness. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, intention is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In digital marketing contexts, purchase intention is increasingly shaped by emotional engagement, peer influence, and perceived entertainment value rather than purely rational evaluation (Kotler et

al., 2021). Meme marketing, by integrating entertainment with social validation, has the potential to influence these antecedents.

Empirical studies highlight a positive relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention. Tafesse and Wien (2018) demonstrated that entertaining brand content on social platforms enhances consumer engagement, which mediates the effect on purchase intention. Meme marketing, due to its high engagement potential, serves as an effective stimulus in this process. Consumers who perceive memes as enjoyable and relatable are more likely to engage with brand content, increasing the likelihood of purchase intention formation (Geyser, 2021).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) further strengthens the impact of meme marketing on consumer perception and purchase intention. Memes are inherently designed for sharing, enabling rapid diffusion through social networks. Cheung and Thadani (2012) argue that peer-shared content is perceived as more credible than firm-generated advertising. When brand-related memes are shared by peers, consumers are more likely to trust the message, enhancing positive perceptions and purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Generational differences significantly influence perception of meme marketing. Generation Z and Millennials, who are deeply embedded in digital culture, demonstrate higher acceptance of meme-based communication compared to older cohorts (Priporas et al., 2017). Cooper et al. (2023) found that Gen Z consumers associate memes with authenticity, humor, and cultural relevance, making them more responsive to meme marketing efforts. This demographic relevance underscores the strategic importance of memes in influencing purchase intentions among younger consumers.

Despite these advantages, literature also highlights risks associated with meme marketing. Memes are context-dependent and culturally sensitive, increasing the risk of misinterpretation (Wiggins, 2019). Negative perceptions arising from inappropriate humor or cultural insensitivity can lead to backlash and damage brand reputation, ultimately reducing purchase intention (Pentina et al., 2020). Thus, customer perception acts as both an enabler and a constraint in meme marketing effectiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model provides a useful framework for understanding meme marketing effects. Memes serve as external stimuli, customer perception represents the organismic state, and purchase intention constitutes the behavioral response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Several recent studies apply this framework to social media contexts, emphasizing the mediating role of perception and attitude in shaping consumer responses (Alalwan et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022).

Although existing literature acknowledges the growing relevance of meme marketing, there remains a lack of comprehensive empirical research focusing specifically on customer perception as a determinant of purchase intention. Many studies prioritize engagement metrics or brand awareness, overlooking perceptual mechanisms that explain why meme marketing succeeds or fails (Choudhary & Kamboj, 2023). This gap highlights the need for focused investigation into perceptual dimensions and their influence on purchase-related outcomes.

3. NEED OF THE STUDY

The increasing adoption of meme marketing by brands reflects its perceived potential to engage consumers in an oversaturated digital advertising environment. However, the effectiveness of meme marketing is not universal and largely depends on how consumers perceive such content. While existing studies emphasize engagement and virality, limited research systematically examines customer perception as a central mechanism influencing purchase intention. Misaligned or poorly perceived memes may negatively impact brand image and consumer trust, making it essential to understand perceptual responses. Moreover, with younger consumers increasingly shaping market demand, insights into how meme marketing affects their purchase intentions are crucial for designing effective communication strategies. In emerging digital markets, where meme culture is rapidly expanding, empirical evidence on consumer perception remains scarce. This study is therefore necessary to bridge the gap between meme-based promotional strategies and consumer behavior theory by examining how customer perception of meme marketing influences purchase intention. The findings will offer valuable implications for marketers to design culturally relevant, authentic, and perception-driven meme campaigns that positively impact consumer decision-making.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine the influence of customer perception of meme marketing on purchase intention.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts an exploratory–cum–descriptive research design to examine customer perception of meme marketing and its influence on purchase intention. An exploratory approach is used to gain initial insights into consumers' perceptions of meme-based marketing content, while the descriptive design helps in systematically describing patterns, attitudes, and relationships among the study variables. The study is based on primary data, collected through a structured questionnaire designed specifically for this research. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended statements measured on a five-point Likert scale, capturing key perceptual dimensions such as humor, relatability, authenticity, entertainment value, brand fit, and purchase intention.

The target population for the study comprises social media users in Haryana who are regularly exposed to digital and meme-based marketing content. A sample size of 140 respondents was selected using convenience sampling, as it allows efficient access to respondents within the defined geographical area and is suitable for exploratory studies. Data were collected through online platforms to ensure ease of participation and wider reach. The collected responses were screened for completeness and consistency before analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic profiles and perception levels, while exploratory analysis supported understanding of consumer attitudes toward meme marketing. This methodological approach ensures reliability and relevance in examining the relationship between customer perception and purchase intention.

5. Data Analysis

Table 5.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 140)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	48.6
	Female	72	51.4
Age Group	Below 20 years	22	15.7
	21–25 years	54	38.6
	26–30 years	41	29.3
	Above 30 years	23	16.4
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	46	32.9
	Postgraduate	71	50.7
	Others	23	16.4
Frequency of Social Media Usage	Less than 1 hour/day	18	12.9
	1–3 hours/day	47	33.6
	More than 3 hours/day	75	53.5

The demographic profile of the respondents provides a contextual understanding of the sample characteristics and ensures the relevance of the study findings. The analysis of gender distribution reveals a nearly balanced representation, with females constituting 51.4 percent and males accounting for 48.6 percent of the respondents. This balanced gender composition enhances the generalizability of the findings and reduces gender bias in interpreting perceptions toward meme marketing.

Age-wise distribution indicates that the majority of respondents fall within the 21–25 years age group (38.6 percent), followed by the 26–30 years category (29.3 percent). These age groups represent young adults who are highly active on social media platforms and are frequent consumers of meme content. The presence of respondents below 20 years (15.7 percent) further strengthens the relevance of the study, as younger users are often early adopters of digital trends. Respondents above 30 years form a smaller yet meaningful segment, allowing for varied generational perspectives.

With respect to educational qualification, more than half of the respondents (50.7 percent) are postgraduates, while 32.9 percent are undergraduates. This indicates a relatively educated sample, capable of understanding and evaluating digital marketing content critically. The inclusion of respondents from different educational backgrounds ensures diversity in perception and enhances the analytical depth of the study.

The frequency of social media usage shows that a significant majority of respondents (53.5 percent) spend more than three hours per day on social media platforms, while 33.6 percent use social media for one to three hours daily. This high level of social media engagement suggests that the respondents are regularly exposed to meme-based marketing content, making them appropriate participants for the study. Overall, the demographic profile confirms that the

sample is well-aligned with the objectives of the study and provides a strong foundation for analyzing customer perception of meme marketing and its influence on purchase intention.

Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics of Customer Perception toward Meme Marketing (N = 140)

S. No.	Statement (Perception Dimension)	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	Meme-based ads are entertaining	34	42	14	7	3
2	Memes grab my attention quickly	31	45	15	6	3
3	Meme marketing is humorous	38	40	12	7	3
4	Memes are relatable to my daily life	29	44	17	7	3
5	Meme content feels creative	33	41	16	6	4
6	Meme marketing feels authentic	26	39	20	10	5
7	Memes suit the brand personality	28	42	18	8	4
8	Meme ads are less irritating than traditional ads	35	40	13	8	4
9	I enjoy seeing brand memes on social media	30	43	15	9	3
10	Meme marketing improves brand recall	27	45	17	8	3
11	Memes make brands appear modern	36	39	14	7	4
12	Meme marketing builds positive brand attitude	28	44	16	8	4
13	Meme ads influence my buying thoughts	24	41	19	11	5
14	I trust brands that use memes appropriately	22	40	21	12	5
15	Meme marketing increases my purchase intention	25	43	18	9	5

(SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree)

The descriptive statistics presented in the table provide insights into respondents' perceptions of meme marketing and its influence on purchase intention. Overall, the findings indicate a predominantly positive perception toward meme-based brand communication among the respondents. A significant proportion of participants agreed or strongly agreed with most of the statements, suggesting that meme marketing is generally viewed as engaging, entertaining, and effective.

Statements related to entertainment, humor, and attention-grabbing ability received the highest levels of agreement. More than three-fourths of the respondents agreed that meme-based advertisements are entertaining, humorous, and capable of quickly capturing attention. This highlights the effectiveness of memes as a form of light-hearted and emotionally engaging marketing content, which aligns well with social media consumption patterns.

Perceptions regarding relatability and creativity were also favorable. A majority of respondents indicated that meme content relates to their daily experiences and appears creative in nature. This suggests that memes resonate with consumers by reflecting shared cultural contexts and everyday situations, thereby enhancing message relevance.

In terms of authenticity and brand fit**,** responses were moderately positive. While most respondents agreed that meme marketing feels authentic and suits brand personality, a noticeable percentage remained neutral or disagreed. This indicates that authenticity is a sensitive dimension and depends heavily on how well memes align with brand values and audience expectations.

Statements concerning brand attitude, brand recall, and modern brand image showed strong agreement, implying that meme marketing contributes positively to brand perception. Respondents largely agreed that memes make brands appear modern, improve recall, and foster positive attitudes, reinforcing the strategic value of meme marketing in brand positioning.

Regarding purchase intention, the results show a positive but comparatively cautious response. While a majority agreed that meme marketing influences buying thoughts and increases purchase intention, a higher proportion of neutral and disagree responses was observed compared to entertainment-related statements. This suggests that although memes enhance engagement and attitudes, their direct influence on actual purchase intention may be indirect and mediated by perception and trust.

Overall, the descriptive analysis reveals that respondents perceive meme marketing positively, particularly in terms of entertainment, humor, and engagement. However, its influence on purchase intention appears to be moderate rather than absolute, emphasizing the role of customer perception as a crucial mediating factor. These findings support the relevance of examining customer perception in understanding the effectiveness of meme marketing in shaping purchase intentions.

Table 5.3: ANOVA Showing Differences in Purchase Intention toward Meme Marketing Across Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig. (p)
Gender	Between Groups	1.284	1	1.284	1.96	0.164
	Within Groups	89.742	138	0.650		
	Total	91.026	139			
Age Group	Between Groups	6.832	3	2.277	3.58	**0.015**
	Within Groups	84.194	136	0.619		
	Total	91.026	139			
Educational Qualification	Between Groups	2.947	2	1.474	2.31	0.103
	Within Groups	88.079	137	0.643		
	Total	91.026	139			
Social Media Usage Frequency	Between Groups	8.215	2	4.108	6.62	**0.002**
	Within Groups	82.811	137	0.604		
	Total	91.026	139			

Significant at 5% level (p < 0.05)

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether the influence of customer perception of meme marketing on purchase intention differs across selected demographic variables. The results reveal varying levels of significance across demographic categories.

With respect to gender, the ANOVA results show an F-value of 1.96 with a significance value $(p = 0.164)$, which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in purchase intention influenced by meme marketing between male and female respondents. Hence, gender does not appear to play a decisive role in shaping purchase intention toward meme-based marketing.

In contrast, age group exhibits a statistically significant difference, with an F-value of 3.58 and a p-value of 0.015. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, it can be inferred that purchase intention influenced by meme marketing varies significantly across different age groups. This finding suggests that younger consumers are likely to respond more positively to meme marketing compared to older age groups, reinforcing the relevance of memes among digitally native audiences.

The ANOVA results for educational qualification show an F-value of 2.31 with a p-value of 0.103, which is not statistically significant at the 5 percent level. This implies that differences in educational background do not significantly influence how consumers perceive meme marketing in relation to purchase intention.

Finally, frequency of social media usage demonstrates a strong and statistically significant effect on purchase intention, with an F-value of 6.62 and a p-value of 0.002. This indicates that consumers who spend more time on social media are significantly more influenced by meme marketing when forming purchase intentions. Higher exposure to meme content likely enhances familiarity, engagement, and acceptance.

Overall, the ANOVA findings indicate that age and social media usage frequency significantly influence the relationship between customer perception of meme marketing and purchase intention, while gender and educational qualification do not. These results emphasize the importance of targeting younger and more digitally active consumers when designing meme-based marketing strategies.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine the influence of customer perception of meme marketing on purchase intention, with particular attention to perceptual dimensions and demographic variations. The findings of the study provide meaningful insights into how meme-based brand communication is interpreted by consumers and how such interpretations shape their purchase-related intentions. Overall, the results indicate that customer perception plays a critical role in determining the effectiveness of meme marketing, supporting contemporary digital marketing and consumer behavior literature.

The descriptive analysis revealed that respondents largely perceive meme marketing as entertaining, humorous, relatable, and engaging. These findings align with Eisend (2018), who emphasized that humor in advertising enhances attention, emotional engagement, and message acceptance. Meme marketing, by leveraging humor and cultural relevance, reduces consumers'

resistance to persuasion and creates a favorable emotional environment for brand communication. Similarly, Shifman (2014) argued that memes function as cultural symbols that resonate with shared social experiences, making them highly effective in capturing consumer interest.

The study also found positive perceptions related to creativity, brand recall, and modern brand image. This supports the observations of Geyser (2021), who noted that meme marketing strengthens brand visibility and memorability by embedding brand messages within entertaining formats. When consumers perceive memes as creative and enjoyable, they are more likely to remember the brand and associate it with positive emotions, which indirectly influences purchase intention. Kotler et al. (2021) further asserted that emotional engagement has become a key driver of consumer decision-making in digital environments, surpassing purely informational appeals.

However, perceptions related to authenticity and trust were relatively moderate compared to entertainment-related dimensions. This finding corroborates the concerns raised by Pentina et al. (2020), who argued that meme marketing can backfire if perceived as forced, opportunistic, or misaligned with brand identity. Consumers today are highly sensitive to authenticity, particularly younger audiences who value transparency and genuine engagement (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Thus, while memes can enhance engagement, their effectiveness depends on alignment with brand personality and audience culture.

The ANOVA results provide further depth to the discussion by revealing demographic differences. The absence of significant differences across gender suggests that meme marketing appeals broadly to both male and female consumers. This supports the findings of Tafesse and Wien (2018), who observed that entertaining social media content tends to generate universal appeal, transcending gender distinctions. Similarly, educational qualification did not significantly influence purchase intention, indicating that meme marketing operates more on emotional and cultural resonance than on cognitive or educational differences.

In contrast, significant differences were observed across age groups. Younger consumers demonstrated higher purchase intention influenced by meme marketing, reinforcing prior studies that highlight Generation Z and Millennials as primary consumers of meme culture (Priporas et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2023). For these cohorts, memes are not merely humorous content but a form of social language and identity expression. As a result, brands that effectively use memes can appear more relatable and socially aware, strengthening purchase-related attitudes among younger audiences.

The most pronounced difference was observed with respect to frequency of social media usage. Respondents with higher social media engagement showed significantly greater purchase intention influenced by meme marketing. This finding aligns with Cheung and Thadani (2012), who emphasized the role of repeated exposure and electronic word-of-mouth in shaping consumer perceptions. Consumers who spend more time on social media are more likely to encounter, interpret, and share meme content, thereby increasing familiarity and reducing perceived risk associated with brands (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). Meme marketing acts as the stimulus, customer perception represents the organismic response, and purchase intention serves as the behavioral outcome. The study confirms that perception mediates the relationship between marketing stimuli and consumer behavior, highlighting the importance of perceptual evaluation rather than mere exposure.

Overall, the discussion underscores that meme marketing is an effective digital communication tool when perceived positively, particularly among younger and digitally active consumers. However, its influence on purchase intention is indirect and contingent upon authenticity, cultural relevance, and brand congruence. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on meme marketing by emphasizing customer perception as a central explanatory mechanism.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the influence of customer perception of meme marketing on purchase intention, with a focus on perceptual dimensions and demographic differences. The findings indicate that meme marketing is largely perceived as entertaining, humorous, and engaging, making it an effective tool for capturing consumer attention in a crowded digital environment. Positive perceptions of meme marketing contribute to favorable brand attitudes, improved brand recall, and a modern brand image, which collectively enhance purchase intention.

However, the study also reveals that the effectiveness of meme marketing is not uniform across all consumers. While gender and educational qualification do not significantly influence purchase intention, age and frequency of social media usage play a decisive role. Younger consumers and highly active social media users are more responsive to meme-based brand communication, highlighting the demographic specificity of meme marketing strategies. These findings emphasize that meme marketing is particularly effective when targeted toward digitally native and socially engaged audiences.

Importantly, the study highlights customer perception as a critical mediating factor between meme marketing and purchase intention. While memes enhance engagement and emotional appeal, their success depends on perceived authenticity, relevance, and alignment with brand identity. Poorly executed or culturally insensitive memes may undermine trust and weaken purchase intention, despite high visibility.

In conclusion, meme marketing represents a powerful yet nuanced digital marketing strategy. Its effectiveness lies not merely in humor or virality but in how consumers perceive and interpret meme content. By focusing on perception-driven strategies, brands can leverage meme marketing to build meaningful connections and positively influence purchase intentions. The study contributes to academic literature by extending consumer behavior theory to emerging digital content formats and offers practical insights for marketers seeking to engage modern consumers effectively.

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