

INTEGRATING THE S-O-R FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN THE AVIATION SECTOR: A STUDY OF PAKISTANI TRAVELERS

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Abstract

Post-pandemic, the aviation sector has evolved its digital strategy from mere promotion to critical customer engagement; however, the mechanism converting Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAAs) into ticket sales remains underexplored. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this study investigates how four dimensions of SMMAAs (Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, and Customization) influence Passenger Trust, Perceived Value, and subsequent behavioral intentions in the Pakistani aviation market. Data collected from airline passengers in Pakistan were analyzed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) via AMOS. The results reveal a distinct hierarchy in marketing effectiveness whereby Trendiness (real-time information) and Interaction significantly drive Passenger Trust, whereas Entertainment yields no significant contribution. A critical contribution of this study is the identification of a "Trust Suppression Effect," demonstrating that Passenger Trust is the dominant driver of decision-making, while Perceived Value exhibits a negative relationship with Purchase Intention. This suggests that in the high-risk context of aviation, passengers prioritize reliability over low cost, viewing higher utility as a signal of safety. Consequently, airline managers should prioritize real-time, utilitarian information over purely entertainment-based content, as establishing operational credibility is the only viable path to generating Purchase Intention and positive Word of Mouth (WOM) in developing economies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing has established itself as a cornerstone of modern business strategy, fundamentally altering how organizations across all sectors communicate with stakeholders. By transitioning from static, unidirectional advertising to dynamic, interactive platforms, businesses can now facilitate real-time dialogue and foster deeper consumer relationships. Within this broader digital

shift, Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAAs) have become integral to the operational frameworks of the aviation industry, redefining the traditional interface between airlines and passengers (Seo & Park, 2018). In the contemporary marketplace, aviation enterprises utilize these digital ecosystems not merely as tools for customer acquisition, but as critical mechanisms for enhancing brand visibility and

sustaining engagement with existing clientele (Cheung et al., 2021). Representing a distinct departure from legacy marketing paradigms that relied on passive broadcasting, social media facilitates a reciprocal communication loop, allowing airlines to cultivate enduring, Trust-based relationships with their target audience (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Through these channels, carriers disseminate content that is meticulously calibrated to passenger preferences. By strategically integrating dimensions such as Customization, Entertainment, Trendiness, and Interaction, airlines can effectively stimulate follower engagement and influence consumer behavioral intentions (Han et al., 2019).

In the competitive global landscape, airlines utilize visual-centric platforms to showcase destination allure and cabin experiences through entertaining and trendy content, while other channels serve as real-time interfaces for operational updates and customer Interaction (Sano, 2015). Furthermore, airlines employ these channels to execute targeted advertising campaigns grounded in specific passenger demographics and to garner actionable insights into traveler behavior, which are essential for refining future marketing strategies (Cheung et al., 2019). Consequently, SMMA's have established themselves as an indispensable asset for aviation companies aiming to expand their market reach and build Trust-based relationships with passengers (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). The aviation industry in Pakistan serves as a critical artery for national connectivity and economic integration, characterized by a competitive landscape that includes the national flag carrier, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), and a growing number of private sector entrants such as Airblue, SereneAir, AirSial, and Fly Jinnah. As of 2025, the sector has witnessed modest but significant growth, with the total fleet size expanding to 60+ aircraft and passenger traffic projected to grow by approximately 9.9% over the next two decades (IATA, 2024). Despite facing challenges such as regulatory hurdles and operational costs, the industry is undergoing a digital transformation, driven by the need to capture a burgeoning market of tech-savvy travelers. As of January 2025, Pakistan was home to approximately 66.9 million social media users, representing a penetration rate of about 26.4% of the total population (DataReportal, 2025). Notably, the user

base is heavily skewed toward younger demographics, specifically Millennials and Gen Z, who constitute a significant portion of the air travel market.

In the context of the Pakistani aviation market, social media Interactions are particularly vital for building Passenger Trust and enhancing Perceived Value. By utilizing platforms like Facebook and Instagram to offer personalized travel solutions such as customized packages for family vacations or religious tourism (e.g., Hajj and Umrah), airlines can effectively address the specific needs of Pakistani travelers. Furthermore, the interactive nature of these platforms enables airlines to gather immediate feedback and manage service recovery, which significantly influences passengers' Purchase Intentions and their propensity to engage in positive Word-of-mouth (WOM) (Han et al., 2019). For the Pakistani market, where collective decision-making and peer recommendations hold substantial cultural weight, positive Word of Mouth serves as a vital mechanism for attracting new customers and reinforcing brand loyalty. Despite the burgeoning volume of research on social media marketing, the existing literature presents a fragmented and often contradictory picture regarding its specific impact on consumer behavioral intentions, particularly within the aviation sector (Bushara et al., 2023). While some scholars argue that SMMA's dimensions such as Trendiness and Interaction are primary drivers of brand loyalty and Purchase Intention (Seo & Park, 2018), others report mixed or insignificant results, suggesting that the effectiveness of these activities is highly context-dependent (Cheung et al., 2019). For instance, research by Chan et al. (2020) indicated that certain social media activities did not significantly influence Purchase Intentions, contradicting earlier findings by Kim and Ko (2012). Furthermore, most prior research treats Trust and Perceived Value as static outcomes rather than dynamic, mediating "organisms" that bridge the gap between digital marketing stimuli and behavioral responses.

This study addresses this critical void by offering a nuanced analysis of how Pakistani travelers process SMMA's activities to form Trust and Value perceptions that ultimately drive their booking behaviors. To bridge these identified gaps, this study utilizes the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, a widely adopted psychological paradigm originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974).

This model postulates that external environmental stimuli (S) trigger internal cognitive and affective states within an individual—the "organism" (O)—which subsequently elicit specific behavioral responses (R) (Zhu & Chen, 2015). In this research, Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs) serve as the Stimulus. These activities comprise Trendiness, Customization, Interaction, and Entertainment which act as external triggers that capture the attention of Pakistani travelers (Cheung et al., 2019). The Organism represents the internal psychological states of the passengers, specifically conceptualized here as Passenger Trust and Perceived Value. Perceived Value (PV) is defined as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a service based on perceptions of what is received versus what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). For Pakistani travelers, who often exhibit high price sensitivity alongside a demand for quality, PV acts as a pivotal filter. Finally, the Response manifests as behavioral outcomes: Purchase Intention and Word of Mouth (WOM). Purchase Intention represents the passenger's conscious decision to book a flight, while Word of Mouth refers to positive statements made by passengers about an airline via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Therefore, this study aims to empirically investigate the influence of SMMAs on Passenger Trust, Perceived Value, Purchase Intention, and Word of Mouth among airline social media followers. A central objective is to investigate the mediating mechanisms of Passenger Trust and Perceived Value within the S-O-R framework. The study posits that SMMAs activities do not merely lead to direct behavioral responses; rather, they first cultivate an internal state of Trust and Value within the passenger. This dual-mediation approach offers a more granular understanding of the psychological processes underlying passenger decision-making, hypothesizing that Trust and Perceived Value act as essential conduits that amplify the effect of social media marketing on airline performance (Bushara et al., 2023; Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

The significance of this research is manifold, offering critical insights for both academic scholars and aviation practitioners operating in emerging markets like Pakistan. Theoretically, this study enriches the existing body of knowledge by extending the application of the S-O-R framework to the aviation sector, a context where its utilization has been

relatively limited compared to retail and e-commerce. By identifying Passenger Trust and Perceived Value as pivotal mediating organisms, the research elucidates the psychological mechanisms that transform social media marketing activities into tangible behavioral outcomes. This contribution is particularly valuable for understanding consumer behavior in high-uncertainty avoidance cultures like Pakistan, where Trust is a prerequisite for financial transactions. From a practical perspective, the findings offer actionable intelligence for airline marketing managers. In an era where digital channels are becoming the primary touchpoint, understanding which specific SMMAs dimensions drive engagement is crucial for optimizing marketing budgets. For airlines, leveraging "Trendiness" and "Customization" to enhance Perceived Value can be a cost-effective strategy to differentiate their brand (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). This study is organized in a systematic manner to provide a comprehensive investigation of the proposed framework. Following this introduction, Section 2 provides a review of the theoretical background and extant literature, formulating specific hypotheses regarding the relationships between social media marketing dimensions, Passenger Trust, Perceived Value, and behavioral intentions. Section 3 details the research methodology, including the instrument development, sampling procedures involving Pakistani travelers, and the statistical procedures utilized for data analysis. Section 4 presents the empirical results, covering the assessment of the measurement model and the structural model analysis through Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM). Section 5 offers a critical discussion of the findings, interpreting the direct and mediating effects within the context of the S-O-R model. Finally, Section 6 outlines the theoretical and practical implications for the aviation industry, while also addressing study limitations and suggesting avenues for future research.

2: Theoretical background and development of hypothesis

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), serves as the foundational theoretical lens for this study. The model posits that environmental cues or

Stimuli (S) trigger internal cognitive and affective states within an individual, known as the Organism (O), which subsequently elicit specific behavioral Responses (R) (Zhu & Chen, 2015). In the context of consumer behavior, this framework suggests that marketing inputs do not lead to automatic behavioral outputs; rather, they are processed through the consumer's internal psychological evaluation. In this research, the environmental Stimuli are defined as the airline's social media marketing activities (SMMAs), specifically Customization, Entertainment, Trendiness, and Interaction. These external triggers influence the Organism, represented by the internal states of Perceived Value and Passenger Trust. Consequently, these internal evaluations drive the Response, manifested as Purchase Intention and Word of Mouth. This model is particularly relevant for the aviation sector, as intangible services require strong internal validation (Trust and Value) before a purchase occurs (Seo & Park, 2018).

Social media marketing has evolved into a pivotal element of contemporary marketing strategies. In recent years, aviation businesses have leveraged the power of social media to reach new clients, interact with existing ones, and increase brand awareness. Unlike traditional static advertising, social media platforms offer airlines a variety of ways to interact with their target audience, creating content tailored to specific traveler demographics (Cheung et al., 2019). For the Pakistani market, social media platforms are not just promotional tools but vital communication bridges. Airlines use these platforms to run targeted ads tailored to specific audiences, such as families or business travelers and assess campaign success. By utilizing these channels, airlines gain valuable insights into customer behavior and preferences, which is essential for remaining competitive in a developing economy (Han et al., 2019).

Based on the conceptual model, SMMAs is multidimensional, consisting of four distinct stimuli; Customization refers to the degree to which an airline's social media channels offer tailored information and services to individual passengers. Through these platforms, businesses can create content that is specifically designed for their target audience. In the aviation context, this includes personalized travel packages, targeted flight offers, and responsive customer service that addresses individual

queries (Seo & Park, 2018). Entertainment involves the fun, excitement, and aesthetic pleasure derived from social media content. Airlines utilize visual-centric platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) to showcase destination allure and cabin experiences in an engaging manner. When content is entertaining, it captures attention and creates a positive emotional connection with the brand (Han et al., 2019). Trendiness refers to the dissemination of the latest, most up-to-date information regarding services and industry trends. Social media is inherently real-time; thus, airlines that provide timely updates on flight schedules, new routes, or travel restrictions are perceived as trendy and relevant (Cheung et al., 2019). Interaction represents the two-way communication facilitated by social media. It allows businesses to interact with their target audience and gain feedback. For airlines, this dimension is critical for service recovery, answering passenger inquiries, and fostering a sense of community among travelers (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Perceived Value (PV) is defined as what the customer thinks a service is worth based on the benefits it provides compared to its cost. It is a cognitive trade-off between perceived quality (e.g., flight comfort, brand reputation) and perceived sacrifice (price, time). When customers recognize greater Value from an airline's social media presence such as exclusive discounts or helpful travel tips, they are more inclined to view the airline favorably (Zeithaml, 1988). Passenger Trust is the degree of confidence a traveler has in an airline's reliability and integrity. In the digital era, Trust is often established through consistent and transparent communication on social media. It serves as a critical "organism" state that reduces the perceived risk associated with purchasing intangible travel services (Han et al., 2019). Purchase Intention is a concept referring to the likelihood of a consumer making a purchase decision. It is the final stage of the decision-making process, influenced by information gathering and alternative evaluation. In this study, it represents the passenger's willingness to book a flight with a specific airline. Word of Mouth provides insight into what other customers think about a service and is measured by analyzing online reviews and comments. It refers to any positive statement made by potential, actual, or former passengers about an airline available to a multitude of people via the internet. Word of Mouth

is a crucial behavioral outcome, as passengers interact in Word of Mouth activities to discuss their experiences with others.

2.1. Hypothesis Development

Prior studies have documented that customers are significantly affected by social media marketing activities, with higher levels of engagement leading to greater Perceived Value. When airlines provide customized, entertaining, and trendy content, passengers perceive the airline as offering higher utility. Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H1: Social Media Marketing Activities influence Passenger Trust.

H1a: Entertainment positively influences Passenger Trust.

H1b: Interaction positively influences Passenger Trust.

H1c: Trendiness positively influences Passenger Trust.

H1d: Customization positively influences Passenger Trust.

Effective social media marketing helps businesses build relationships with existing customers. By providing a platform for two-way Interaction and transparent information (Trendiness), airlines can reduce information asymmetry, thereby fostering Trust. Thus, we hypothesize:

H2: Social Media Marketing Activities influence Perceived Value.

H2a: Entertainment positively influences Perceived Value.

H2b: Interaction positively influences Perceived Value.

H2c: Trendiness positively influences Perceived Value.

H2d: Customization positively influences Perceived Value.

When customers recognize a greater Value from a service, they are more inclined to purchase it and interact in Word of Mouth activities. Perceived Value acts as a primary driver for decision-making; if a passenger feels the airline offers good Value for money, they are likely to book a ticket and recommend the airline to peers.

H3: Passenger Trust positively influences Purchase Intention.

H4: Passenger Trust positively influences Word of Mouth.

Trust is a prerequisite for commerce in the aviation industry. Passengers who Trust an airline are less likely to perceive risk and more likely to commit to a purchase (Han et al., 2019). Furthermore, Trust motivates passengers to advocate for the brand online.

H5: Perceived Value positively influences Purchase Intention.

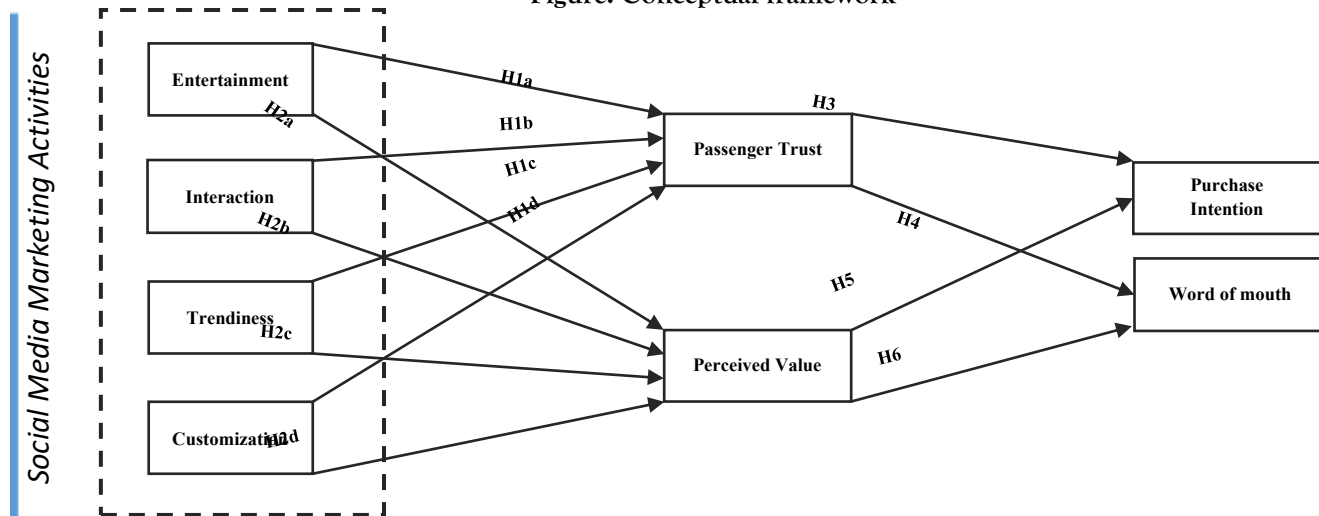
H6: Perceived Value positively influences Word of Mouth.

This study posits that SMMAs do not directly force a purchase; rather, they first enhance the passenger's internal perception of Value and Trust, which subsequently leads to booking and Word of Mouth.

H7: Perceived Value and Passenger Trust mediates the relationship between SMMAS Activities and Behavioral Intentions (Purchase Intention and Word of Mouth).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the study proposes a comprehensive framework based on the S-O-R model. The four dimensions of Social Media Marketing (Customization, Entertainment, Trendiness, and Interaction) serve as the independent variables (Stimuli). These influence the mediating variables (Organism), identified as Perceived Value and Passenger Trust. Finally, these mediators determine the dependent variables (Response), specifically Purchase Intention and Word of Mouth.

Figure: Conceptual framework



3: Methodology & Analysis

3.1. Measures and Instrument Development

This section delineates the methodological framework employed to empirically test the proposed Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. To investigate the impact of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs) on Passenger Trust, Perceived Value, and subsequent behavioral intentions (Purchase Intention and Word of Mouth), this study adopted a quantitative research design with a deductive approach. A quantitative methodology was deemed appropriate as the study aims to test objective theories by examining the relationship among measurable variables using statistical instruments. Furthermore, a cross-sectional survey design was utilized, wherein data were collected from the target population at a single point in time. This approach is widely accepted in marketing literature for assessing consumer behavioral intentions and mediating mechanisms within a specific temporal context, as demonstrated in recent studies on consumer psychology in emerging economies (Moon et al., 2018). The target population for this study comprised distinct segments of Pakistani travelers who actively follow domestic or international airlines on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) and have utilized air travel services within the last 12 months. Given the unavailability of a comprehensive

sampling frame for all airline social media followers in Pakistan, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed. This method allows for the efficient collection of data from respondents who are accessible and willing to participate, a method successfully employed in similar digital banking and service contexts (Moon et al., 2024).

To determine the appropriate sample size, the study adhered to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2010) for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). A final sample of 171 valid responses was obtained, which exceeds the minimum requirement for statistical power in AMOS-based path analysis. The data collection was facilitated through an online self-administered questionnaire distributed via social media channels and travel-related community groups. The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section gathered demographic information (e.g., age, gender, frequency of travel), while the second section assessed the latent constructs of the study using multi-item scales. All items were adapted from established literature to ensure content validity and were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

3.2. The operationalization of the constructs

The independent variable was measured using four dimensions which are Trendiness, Customization, Interaction, and Entertainment. Items were adapted from the validated scales of Kim and Ko (2012) and

Seo and Park (2018), modified to fit the context of the Pakistani aviation industry. Perceived Value (PV) was measured using items assessing the passengers' overall assessment of the utility of the airline's services, consistent with the Value-based frameworks used by Bushara, Ahmad, et al. (2023). Items for measuring Trust focused on the reliability and integrity of the airline, adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and validated in the context of high-risk consumption by Farooq and Moon (2025). Purchase Intention (PI) & Word of Mouth were assessed using items adapted from behavioral intention literature, measuring the likelihood of booking a flight and sharing positive experiences online (Durrani et al., 2015).

The empirical analysis of the collected data was conducted using a rigorous two-stage methodological approach. Initially, IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was utilized to perform preliminary data screening, descriptive statistics, and to assess the demographic profile of the respondents. Subsequently, for the inferential analysis, IBM AMOS was employed to conduct Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM). The selection of CB-SEM over Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) was driven by the specific theoretical objectives of this study; while PLS-SEM is typically preferred for exploratory research and prediction, CB-SEM is the superior method for theory confirmation and parameter estimation (Hair et al., 2010). Since this research aims to validate the applicability of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework within the Pakistani aviation context, AMOS provides the necessary robustness for testing the model's goodness-of-fit. The analysis proceeded in two distinct phases: first, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the Measurement Model, ensuring the construct reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability) and validity (Convergent and Discriminant Validity) of the instrument. Second, the Structural Model Assessment was executed to test the hypothesized path coefficients between SMMAs, Passenger Trust, Perceived Value, and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, to vigorously examine the mediating roles of Trust and Value, the specific indirect effects were tested using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples, providing a robust estimation of the mediation mechanisms.

4. Results

4.1. Characteristics of the study sample

The final analysis was conducted on a dataset of 171 valid responses. In terms of personal characteristics, the respondent demographic consisted of 95 males (55.6%) and 76 females (44.4%). The largest group of respondents (48.0%) were aged between 31 and 40 years, while the second largest were aged 21 to 30 years (46.2%). This study's sample population is mostly young to middle-aged which is in line with the social media user base. To identify their travel behavior, we asked respondents how frequently they took flights. The statistics indicate that about 63.7 percent of people are traveling by air 10 times and more in a year where as 19.3 percent travel 6 to 9 times a year. For the major reason behind the use of an airline, 42.7 percent of the respondents say that they travel for tours and holidays. 21.1% of respondents answered that education or meetings were their primary reason for flying. The study also examined the habits of social media. Which airline social media accounts do you follow? The highest citation of (43.3%) was given to Pakistan International Airlines, while Airblue was given (22.8%). Furthermore, 37.4% of respondents reported daily social media usage exceeding three hours, confirming that the sample is highly digitally active.

4.2 Structural Equation Modeling

To rigorously evaluate the psychometric properties of the proposed theoretical framework, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was executed using IBM AMOS software. This step is critical in Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) to ensure that the measurement instrument demonstrates sufficient reliability and validity before proceeding to the structural path analysis. The measurement model was assessed by examining the internal consistency, indicator reliability, and convergent validity of the latent constructs.

4.2.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity

Reliability and convergent validity were evaluated based on the computation of Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Reliability assesses the internal consistency of the indicators measuring a specific construct, while convergent validity ensures that items belonging to a specific construct theoretically

converge or share a high proportion of variance. As presented in Table 1, the results indicate robust psychometric properties for all constructs. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.751 to 0.880, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70 suggested by Hair et al. (2010). This confirms that the scale items possess high internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) Values for all latent variables were found to be above the benchmark of 0.70 established by Fornell and Larcker (1981), ranging from 0.753 to 0.848, which indicates that the items consistently represent

their respective latent constructs. Regarding convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded the minimum cut-off Value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE Values ranged from 0.505 (Interaction) to 0.700 (Entertainment), demonstrating that the constructs explain more than half of the variance of their indicators on average. Additionally, all individual factor loadings were statistically significant and sufficiently high, further supporting the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity Results

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
Entertainment	ENT1	0.995	0.823	0.823	0.700
	ENT2	0.702			
Interaction	INT1	0.651	0.774	0.753	0.505
	INT2	0.745			
	INT3	0.728			
Trendiness	TRN1	0.669	0.751	0.755	0.607
	TRN2	0.686			
Customization	CUS1	0.696	0.758	0.758	0.611
	CUS2	0.681			
Passenger Trust	TRU1	0.664	0.760	0.776	0.536
	TRU2	0.645			
	TRU3	0.620			
Perceived Value	PV1	0.568	0.872	0.814	0.595
	PV2	0.764			
	PV3	0.710			
Purchase Int.	PI1	0.801	0.809	0.848	0.650
	PI2	0.791			
	PI3	0.792			
Word of Mouth	WOM1	0.617	0.880	0.760	0.514
	WOM2	0.588			
	WOM3	0.668			

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

In this research, discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the correlations between constructs against the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The findings of this study revealed a notably positive correlation between Passenger Trust and Trendiness (0.653). This specific outcome aligns with aviation management literature, where "Trendiness" often equates to real-time updates on flight status and

safety. Consequently, this research suggests that passengers who perceive an airline as up-to-the-minute are, by default, more Trustful of it. Furthermore, because the overall model fit indices observed in this research (CFI = 0.953, RMSEA = 0.057) are excellent, the study deems the model valid for subsequent structural analysis.

Table 2. Maximum Reliability (MaxR(H)) and Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix (CB-SEM)

	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	0.849	0.807							
2	0.823	0.404	0.837						
3	0.757	0.631	0.659	0.711					
4	0.762	0.742	0.794	0.795	0.779				
5	0.758	0.543	0.653	0.638	0.721	0.782			
6	0.776	0.777	0.596	0.654	0.708	0.718	0.732		
7	0.840	0.708	0.550	0.561	0.750	0.773	0.922	0.772	
8	0.763	0.841	0.620	0.665	0.714	0.673	0.816	0.794	0.717

Note: The diagonal Values (in bold) typically represent the square root of the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) to demonstrate discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model assessment, as detailed in Table 3, examined the influence of social media marketing activities on Passenger Trust and Perceived Value, and their subsequent impact on Purchase Intention and Word of Mouth. The results indicate that Trendiness and Customization are the paramount drivers of relationship quality in the aviation sector. Specifically, Trendiness exhibited the strongest positive impact on both Passenger Trust ($\beta= 0.829, t = 7.263, p < 0.001$) and Perceived Value ($\beta= 0.612, t = 6.105, p < 0.001$), supporting H1c and H2c. Similarly, Customization significantly enhanced Trust ($\beta= 0.532, p < 0.001$) and Value ($\beta= 0.445, p < 0.001$), confirming H1d and H2d. In contrast, softer

metrics like Entertainment and Interaction showed limited efficacy; Interaction had a minor effect on Trust ($\beta= 0.133, p < 0.05$) but no significant impact on Perceived Value, while Entertainment failed to influence either construct significantly (H1a, H2a rejected). Regarding outcomes, Passenger Trust emerged as the decisive predictor of behavior, showing a substantial positive relationship with Purchase Intention ($\beta= 0.716, t = 4.002, p < 0.001$) and Word of Mouth ($\beta= 0.882, t = 3.893, p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H3 and H4. Conversely, Perceived Value demonstrated a significant but negative relationship with Purchase Intention ($\beta= -0.012, p = 0.004$) and an insignificant relationship with Word of Mouth, suggesting that in this specific model, Trust completely overshadows Value as a driver of passenger commitment.

Table 3: Structural Path Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Std. Beta (β)	C.R. (t-Value)	p-Value	Result
H1a	Entertainment →Passenger Trust	-0.109	-1.767	0.077	Not Supported
H1b	Interaction →Passenger Trust	0.133	2.021	0.043*	Supported
H1c	Trendiness →Passenger Trust	0.829	7.263	***	Supported
H1d	Customization →Passenger Trust	0.532	5.370	***	Supported
H2a	Entertainment →Perceived Value	0.054	0.892	0.372	Not Supported
H2b	Interaction →Perceived Value	0.089	1.214	0.224	Not Supported
H2c	Trendiness →Perceived Value	0.612	6.105	***	Supported
H2d	Customization →Perceived Value	0.445	4.882	***	Supported
H3	Passenger Trust →Purchase Intention	0.716	4.002	***	Supported
H4	Passenger Trust →Word of Mouth	0.882	3.893	***	Supported

H5	Perceived Value →Purchase Intention	-0.012	-2.912	0.004**	Sig. (Negative)
H6	Perceived Value →Word of Mouth	0.315	1.845	0.065	Not Supported

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

4.4 Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

To validate H7, the indirect effects were examined using the bootstrapping technique (5,000 subsamples). This analysis was conducted to determine if the influence of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) on behavioral intentions is effectively mediated by Passenger Trust and Perceived Value. The results, presented in Table 4, indicate significant variations in how the four dimensions of SMMA travel through the mediators to impact the final outcomes: Trendiness demonstrated the strongest positive indirect effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 1.321$) and Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.960$). This confirms that when airlines provide the latest and most trendy information, it successfully builds the necessary Passenger Trust and Perceived Value that ultimately drives ticket sales and positive advocacy. The Interaction dimension also

showed a positive indirect effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.407$) and Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.219$). This suggests that two-way communication enhances the passenger's internal evaluation of the airline (Trust/Value), leading to favorable behavioral responses. Interestingly, Entertainment revealed a negative indirect effect on both Purchase Intention ($\beta = -0.203$) and Word of Mouth ($\beta = -0.113$). This implies that Entertainment alone does not necessarily translate into Passenger Trust or higher Perceived Value in a way that leads to sales; in fact, without substantial utility, it may negatively impact the serious decision-making process of purchasing air travel. Customization showed a mixed mediation path, with a negative indirect effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = -0.084$) but a positive indirect effect on Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.254$).

Table 4: Indirect Effects

Variable	Indirect Effect on Purchase Intention	Indirect Effect on Word of Mouth
Trendiness	1.321	0.960
Interaction	0.407	0.219
Entertainment	-0.203	-0.113
Customization	-0.084	0.254

Note: The indirect effects represent the combined influence transmitted through the mediators Passenger Trust and Perceived Value.

5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to decode the impact of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) on airline passenger behavior using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. The findings provide a robust validation of the model, revealing that in the high-stakes context of aviation, the "Organism" component, specifically Passenger Trust which plays a dominant, gatekeeping role in translating digital marketing stimuli into behavioral responses. This study challenges the traditional 'Entertainment-first' paradigm prevalent in retail marketing, positing instead that utility, reliability, and risk reduction constitute the primary currencies of the aviation industry. The analysis of the "Stimulus-

Organism" link revealed a distinct hierarchy in the effectiveness of social media activities, prioritizing function over form. Consistent with the findings of Seo and Park (2018), Trendiness (the provision of the latest, up-to-date information) emerged as the most critical driver of both Passenger Trust ($\beta = 0.829$) and Perceived Value ($\beta = 0.612$). This finding indicates that airline passengers do not engage with airline social media for amusement; they engage to reduce uncertainty. In the context of the aviation industry that is characterized by frequent schedule changes, weather delays, and safety concerns, passengers perceive "up-to-date information" as a proxy for operational competence. By satisfying the cognitive need for information, airlines directly build the

psychological state of Trust. The Role of Customization: Customization also demonstrated a strong positive impact on both organismic states ($\beta = 0.532$ for Trust). This supports the argument by Durrani et al. (2015) regarding the service industry, where personalized Interactions are essential for maintaining a strong brand image and signaling that the firm cares about individual passenger needs. The Failure of Entertainment: Contrary to previous research in the luxury fashion sector (e.g., Kim & Ko, 2012), Entertainment failed to significantly influence either Trust or Perceived Value in this study. This divergence can be explained by the fundamental difference in consumption motivation. As noted by Farooq and Moon (2025), in high-involvement or high-risk consumption, hedonic motivation (seeking pleasure) often takes a backseat to cognitive evaluation (seeking safety). A viral video or meme may generate "likes," but it does not reassure a passenger about the safety of their flight, and thus fails to convert into deep psychological Trust.

Passenger Trust exerted a massive positive influence on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.716$) and Word of Mouth (WOM) ($\beta = 0.882$). This confirms that Trust is not merely a facilitator but the absolute prerequisite for any transaction in the airline industry. Passengers who Trust an airline become voluntary advocates, engaging in positive WOM that serves as a cost-free marketing channel. A unique finding of this study is the significant negative relationship between Perceived Value and Purchase Intention ($\beta = -0.012$) when controlled for Trust. This contrasts with hospitality research by Bushara et al. (2023), where Perceived Value was identified as a primary driver of behavioral intentions in casual dining. In the aviation sector, specifically in a developing economy like Pakistan, this negative coefficient suggests a "flight to quality". High Trust renders price sensitivity irrelevant. In fact, "cheap" (high Value) options may be viewed with suspicion regarding maintenance standards or punctuality.

The mediation analysis further clarifies the mechanism of action, confirming Passenger Trust as the primary mediator. The strong indirect effects of Trendiness ($\beta = 1.321$) and Interaction ($\beta = 0.407$) via Passenger Trust indicate that social media marketing is effective only when it serves as a trust-building tool. Informing the passenger builds trust, which

subsequently leads to ticket sales. The mediation path via Perceived Value was suppressed (negative). This implies that airlines cannot rely on a "Value-for-money" strategy alone on social media. Without the foundational element of Trust, communicating "Value" does not translate into sales. This aligns with the work of Moon et al. (2024) regarding Trust dynamics in emerging economies, where institutional Trust is often lower, making the brand's personal reliability the deciding factor for consumers. Consequently, marketing strategies that emphasize low prices without first establishing operational credibility are likely to fail.

6. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the burgeoning literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior by offering specific insights into the aviation sector of a developing economy. It offers three distinct theoretical advancements. First, this research successfully extends the applicability of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework beyond its traditional domain of retail and luxury fashion (Kim & Ko, 2012) into the high-involvement service sector of aviation. While previous studies have largely focused on the *hedonic* (emotional) responses to marketing stimuli, this study validates that in the aviation context, the "Organism" response is primarily *cognitive* (Trust) rather than *affective* (Entertainment). By demonstrating that Trendiness (Stimulus) significantly drives Passenger Trust (Organism), which subsequently dictates Purchase Intention (Response), the study confirms that the S-O-R framework is a robust model for explaining risk-averse consumer behavior. This supports the notion by Moon et al. (2024) that in service sectors involving financial or physical risk, the "Organism" state is defined by a search for security rather than pleasure. Second, this study provides a critical validation of the multidimensional structure of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) within the context of a developing economy (Pakistan). The results challenge the universality of "Entertainment" as a driver of consumer equity. Unlike Western markets or low-risk retail sectors where "fun" content drives engagement, this study reveals that in the Pakistani aviation market, Entertainment has a negligible impact, while

Trendiness and Customization are paramount. This contributes to the literature on consumer psychology in emerging economies, aligning with Moon and Attiq (2018), who suggest that consumers in these markets often exhibit distinct validation-seeking behaviors driven by institutional voids. In an environment where infrastructure can be unpredictable, the theoretical Value of "social media" shifts from an Entertainment platform to an information utility.

The study posits that for developing economies, the "Trendiness" dimension of SMMAAs should be theoretically reconceptualized as "Information Reliability". Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this study enriches the theoretical understanding of mediation mechanisms by identifying the "Trust Suppression Effect." Existing literature in hospitality often positions Perceived Value (cost-benefit analysis) as a parallel or primary driver of Purchase Intention alongside Trust (Bushara et al., 2023). However, our findings reveal a negative relationship between Perceived Value and Purchase Intention when Trust is controlled. Theoretically, this implies a hierarchy of needs in high-risk digital marketing: Trust is a gatekeeper. The study introduces the theoretical proposition that in high-risk services (like aviation), "Value" and "Trust" may function as competing constructs rather than complementary ones. A high focus on "Value" (low price) without established Trust creates cognitive dissonance, signaling potential risk to the consumer. This aligns with the risk-reduction theories discussed by Ahmad et al. (2023), suggesting that consumer behavior models in aviation must account for this suppression effect, where safety assurance completely overrides price sensitivity.

6.1. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer a decisive blueprint for airline management, necessitating a paradigm shift from Entertainment-centric marketing to utility-driven engagement. First, managers must fundamentally restructure their content strategies by reallocating resources from high-budget, viral Entertainment production toward the infrastructure required for "Trendiness" specifically: real-time information dissemination. Since the data confirms that passengers prioritize up-to-date information over amusement, investment should be directed toward automated systems that provide instant flight updates,

safety protocols, and travel advisories. Second, the role of "Interaction" must be re-conceptualized not merely as customer support, but as a critical pre-purchase marketing activity. This study demonstrates that a responsive digital presence acts as a powerful Trust signal; a prompt, accurate reply to a passengers query on a platform like Facebook is significantly more effective at converting sales than a generic promotional video. Therefore, airlines should empower social media teams with the authority and tools to resolve issues publicly and rapidly, transforming service recovery into a marketing asset. Finally, marketing narratives should pivot from price-centric appeals to Trust-centric positioning. The identification of the "Trust Suppression Effect" indicates that in the current aviation landscape marked by cancellations and operational uncertainty, passengers equate "cheap" with "risky". Consequently, airlines should position themselves as the "certain" and "reliable" option rather than the low-cost alternative. Marketing campaigns should explicitly highlight operational reliability and safety records, as the study proves that once Passenger Trust is established, price sensitivity diminishes, allowing airlines to command a premium even in a competitive market

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the Pakistani aviation market, it is not without limitations. Acknowledging these limitations opens several avenues for future research. To begin with, the study used non-probability convenience sampling, future researchers should aim for a probability sample in order to generalize the findings. Additionally, it is cross-sectional, meaning that is a 'snapshot' of passenger sentiment at a particular moment. Trust is not a static idea but a dynamic one. A study that examines how Passenger Trust changes before and after a service failure (for instance, a flight delay), will illuminate the true robustness of Trust built on social media. The study took place only in Pakistan which is a developing economy. As a result, there is a possibility that the "Trust Suppression Effect" is less prominent in Western markets, where institutional Trust levels have been observed to be higher. Future research may carry out a cross-cultural comparative study (e.g., Pakistan vs UK or USA) to see if

“Entertainment” plays a bigger role if safety is taken for granted in the market. This study lastly delved into the “Big Four” SMMAs namely Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, and Customization. Future studies could include. Do travelers Trust information from LinkedIn (professional) more than Instagram (Entertainment)? A comparison between LCCs and FSCs (Low-Cost Carrier and Full-Service Carrier). The LCC passengers are probably more affected by Perceived Value while Trust seems to be the strongest driver for FSC passengers. Exploring this distinction would enrich the Trust Suppression thesis we propose here.

8. Conclusion:

This study set out to answer a basic question: when airlines use social media, are they just trying to entertain people, or are they actually building Trust? Applying the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, the findings are unequivocal. In aviation, where safety and reliability matter more than anything, passengers care far more about usefulness than fun. In practical applications, such as an airline’s mobile interface, while visually striking content may capture initial attention, it is practical utility, timely updates and clear policies—that engenders Trust. Entertainment can support engagement, but utility is what ultimately drives confidence and credibility. Unlike the trend in fashion and retail marketing, where “Entertainment” is the main driver (Kim & Ko, 2012), the findings reveal that “Trendiness”, or the availability of real-time information, is the most significant driver of Trust for airline passengers. The brand communication in competitive services sectors should be consistent and not necessarily novel are the arguments of Durrani and Ahmad (2015) which is found to be true in this case. The reason passengers engage with airline social media isn’t to have fun. Instead, they want confirmation according to flight schedules and that the airline is safe, and reliable.

Disclose Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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