HOW SHORT-LIVED CONTENT CREATES LONG-TERM BONDS: A STUDY OF EPHEMERAL MARKETING, BRAND LOVE, AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN FASHION BRANDS

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Abstract

The rapid growth of ephemeral content on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok has significantly transformed the way fashion brands interact with consumers. Unlike permanent posts, ephemeral content is short-lived, interactive, and perceived as more authentic and immediate, creating a sense of intimacy and real-time engagement that resonates strongly with digital audiences. Despite its growing popularity in contemporary marketing practices, empirical evidence examining its influence on deeper consumer–brand relationships remain limited, particularly in developing economies. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the impact of Ephemeral Content Marketing (ECM) on Brand Love and Customer Engagement, while examining the mediating roles of Advertising Value, Self-Brand Connection, and Brand Authenticity within the fashion industry in Pakistan. Grounded in Advertising Value Theory, Self-Expansion Theory, and Authenticity-Based Branding, this study proposes a structural model explaining how ephemeral content shapes consumers' perceptions of value, identity alignment, and authenticity toward brands. Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire from 179 Pakistani consumers who actively follow fashion brands on social media. The proposed model and hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with 10,000 bootstrap resamples to ensure the robustness and reliability of the estimated relationships and mediation effects. The findings reveal that Ephemeral Content Marketing significantly enhances consumers' perceptions of Advertising Value, Self-Brand Connection, and Brand Authenticity. These constructs, in turn, positively influence Brand Love, which emerges as a key emotional driver of Customer Engagement. While Advertising Value contributes to the development of Brand Love, it does not directly influence engagement, suggesting that emotional attachment and identity alignment play a stronger role in motivating consumer interaction. Moreover, Self-Brand Connection and Brand Authenticity demonstrate strong direct and indirect effects on engagement, indicating that consumers are more likely to interact with brands they perceive as personally meaningful and authentic. Overall, the study highlights the strategic role of ephemeral content as a relational marketing tool

capable of strengthening emotional bonds and fostering interactive consumer–brand relationships in the digital fashion marketplace of developing economies.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, digital marketing has undergone a substantial transformation as social media platforms increasingly shape the ways brands communicate with consumers. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok have introduced formats of communication that are instantaneous, informal, and highly interactive, enabling brands to engage with audiences in ways that differ significantly from traditional one-way advertising models. Consumers now encounter brand messages within the same social environments where they interact with friends, influencers, and personal networks, which has fundamentally altered expectations regarding brand communication. Instead of passive information transmission, contemporary marketing increasingly emphasizes participation, dialogue, and experiential interaction between brands and consumers (Voorveld et al., 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Within this evolving digital ecosystem, ephemeral content short-lived content that disappears after a limited time has emerged as one of the most influential communication formats.

Ephemeral content includes formats such as Instagram Stories, Snapchat updates, and temporary TikTok posts that are available only for a short period before disappearing. Unlike permanent social media posts, ephemeral content creates a sense of urgency and immediacy that encourages users to engage quickly before the content disappears. This temporality generates psychological responses such as fear of missing out, heightened attention, and the perception of authenticity and spontaneity, which are often difficult to achieve through traditional advertising formats (Nguyen et al., 2025). As a result, ephemeral content has rapidly become an integral component of contemporary digital marketing strategies. Brands increasingly rely on temporary content to share behind-the-scenes moments, announce limited offers, introduce new products, and communicate in a more personal and relatable tone. Ephemeral Content Marketing can

therefore be understood as the strategic use of short-lived digital content to communicate brand messages, stimulate consumer interest, and strengthen brand associations. Because such content appears alongside personal updates from friends and social contacts, it becomes embedded within the daily social media experiences of users. This integration blurs the boundary between social and commercial communication, meaning that consumer responses are often shaped by perceptions of content value, relevance, and authenticity rather than by explicit promotional intent (Pittman et al., 2022). In this context, ephemeral content provides brands with an opportunity to communicate in a more conversational and humanized manner, which may enhance consumer trust and emotional connection.

The influence of ephemeral content marketing is particularly evident in industries characterized by visual storytelling, symbolic consumption, and rapidly changing trends, such as the fashion industry. Fashion consumers increasingly use social media not only to obtain product information but also to seek inspiration, entertainment, and opportunities for self-expression (Kim and Ko, 2012). Fashion brands therefore use ephemeral formats to showcase seasonal collections, preview limited editions, provide behind-the-scenes insights, and interact with audiences in real time. The temporary nature of such content aligns closely with the fast-moving nature of fashion trends, reinforcing perceptions of novelty, exclusivity, and immediacy. In highly competitive digital environments where audiences are exposed to vast volumes of marketing messages, ephemeral content can help brands maintain visibility while simultaneously strengthening emotional connections with consumers.

Another important feature of ephemeral content is its ability to convey a less formal and more relatable communication style. Traditional advertising often relies on highly polished

messages that may appear overly corporate or distant from everyday consumer experiences. In contrast, temporary content allows brands to present more spontaneous, transparent, and authentic narratives. This shift reflects broader cultural expectations that marketing communication should appear open, genuine, and socially relatable (Napoli et al., 2014). When fashion brands adopt a more approachable and humanized tone through ephemeral content, consumers may perceive them as more trustworthy and socially aligned, thereby increasing emotional attachment.

These dynamics are particularly relevant in the context of Pakistan's fashion industry, which has experienced rapid growth alongside expanding digital connectivity and social media usage. Well-established local brands such as Khaadi, Sapphire, and Gul Ahmed now compete not only with each other but also with international fast-fashion retailers whose digital marketing strategies often rely on visually sophisticated and professionally produced content. In this competitive environment, Pakistani fashion brands must navigate the expectations of increasingly discerning consumers who are sensitive to inauthentic or overly promotional brand messages (Zafar et al., 2025). Younger audiences, particularly Generation Z and millennials, tend to value transparency, authenticity, and cultural relevance in brand communication. Ephemeral content often perceived as raw, spontaneous, and less curated appears well suited to meet these expectations.

However, the mere presence of temporary content does not necessarily guarantee meaningful consumer engagement or stronger brand relationships. For example, a fashion brand might share daily Instagram Stories illustrating the design process or sourcing of fabrics. While such content may captivate some viewers and deepen their emotional attachment to the brand, other users may scroll past it without forming any significant connection. This variation in consumer response raises an important question: what psychological mechanisms explain how ephemeral content translates into meaningful consumer–brand relationships?

Three mechanisms appear particularly relevant in this regard: Advertising Value, Brand Authenticity, and Self-Brand Connection. Advertising Value refers to consumers' evaluation of the usefulness, Informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and aesthetic appeal of marketing content (Ducoffe, 1995; Ye et al., 2017). These dimensions' shape whether audiences perceive digital content as worthwhile and engaging. In emerging markets such as Pakistan, credibility and relevance may play especially important roles because consumers are often cautious about commercial communication.

Brand Authenticity represents another crucial factor influencing consumer perceptions of marketing communication. Authentic brands are generally perceived as transparent, consistent, and aligned with their communicated values (Napoli et al., 2014). Research indicates that younger consumers increasingly favor brands that demonstrate honesty and social relevance, particularly within digital environments where skepticism toward advertising is common (Nguyen et al., 2025; Zafar et al., 2025). Local fashion brands may benefit from stronger authenticity perceptions because their heritage, cultural narratives, and local identity resonate more closely with Pakistani consumers.

The third mechanism, Self-Brand Connection, operates at the level of consumer identity. It reflects the extent to which individuals integrate a brand into their self-concept or view the brand as representative of who they are or aspire to become (Shimul and Phau, 2023). Fashion consumption is inherently expressive and symbolic, often reflecting personal values, cultural belonging, and social identity. Through ephemeral content that highlights diverse identities, sustainability initiatives, or cultural heritage, fashion brands may foster deeper emotional connections that extend beyond transactional relationships.

When consumers perceive higher advertising value, stronger authenticity, and meaningful self-brand connections, these perceptions may collectively strengthen emotional attachment to a brand. Such attachment is often conceptualized as Brand Love, defined as a deep emotional bond characterized by passion, affection, and long-term

commitment (Batra et al., 2012; Choi et al., 2024). Brand Love, in turn, is closely associated with Customer Engagement, which encompasses behavioral interactions such as liking, sharing, commenting, and advocating for brands on social media (Hollebeek et al., 2014). These relational outcomes are particularly important in digital environments where brand success depends not only on consumer attention but also on sustained interaction and loyalty.

Despite the growing practical importance of ephemeral content marketing, empirical research examining its psychological and relational outcomes remains limited, particularly in developing economies. Most existing studies focus on developed markets and frequently examine general social media marketing rather than temporary content specifically. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of how ephemeral content shapes perceptions of value, authenticity, and identity connection, and how these mechanisms ultimately influence emotional attachment and engagement.

Literature Review
Theoretical Underpinning

The rapid expansion of social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok has transformed the way brands communicate with consumers. One of the most prominent developments in this digital environment is the rise of ephemeral content, defined as short-lived digital posts that disappear after a limited period of time. This form of communication has significantly altered online marketing practices and consumer interactions with brands. Within this evolving context, constructs such as Ephemeral Content Marketing, Advertising Value, Self-Brand Connection, Brand Authenticity, Brand Love, and Customer Engagement have gained increasing scholarly attention in explaining consumer–brand relationships. Recent research suggests that temporary yet authentic digital content can influence both cognitive evaluations and emotional responses, ultimately shaping consumers' behavioral engagement with brands (Nguyen et al., 2025).

To explain the relationships among these constructs, this study adopts two complementary theoretical perspectives: Advertising Value Theory and Self-Concept Based Relationship Theory. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive explanation of how ephemeral content marketing influences consumer perceptions, emotional attachment, and engagement behaviors. Advertising Value Theory focuses on the cognitive evaluation process through which consumers assess marketing messages, whereas Self-Concept Based Relationship Theory explains how consumers develop emotional connections with brands that reflect or reinforce their identity. Integrating these theoretical perspectives allows the present study to link short-term digital interactions with long-term relational outcomes such as brand love and customer engagement.

Advertising Value Theory, initially proposed by Ducoffe (1995), posits that consumers evaluate advertising messages based on the perceived value they derive from them. Advertising is considered valuable when it provides entertainment, useful information, credibility, or practical relevance. These evaluations influence consumer attitudes toward the advertisement and the associated brand. In the context of ephemeral content marketing, this theory becomes particularly relevant because temporary posts compete for consumer attention within highly dynamic social media feeds. Users typically make rapid judgments about whether content is worth their attention before it disappears. Content that is visually engaging, informative, entertaining, and aligned with contemporary trends is therefore more likely to be perceived as valuable and to generate favorable brand evaluations. In the competitive digital environment of Pakistan's fashion industry, ephemeral content that delivers higher advertising value can enhance consumer attention and strengthen positive brand perceptions.

Although Advertising Value Theory explains how consumers cognitively evaluate marketing content, it does not fully capture how these evaluations translate into emotional attachment and long-term consumer–brand relationships. To address this limitation, the present study incorporates Self-

Concept Based Relationship Theory, which suggests that consumers form stronger relationships with brands that reflect or enhance their self-identity (Belk, 1988; Park et al., 2010). According to this perspective, brands serve not only functional purposes but also symbolic roles that allow individuals to express their personal values, aspirations, and lifestyles. When brand communication aligns with consumers' self-concept, individuals are more likely to internalize the brand as part of their identity, thereby strengthening self-brand connections and emotional attachment.

Ephemeral content marketing is particularly effective in activating these identity-based mechanisms because it frequently features informal, behind-the-scenes, and lifestyle-oriented narratives that portray brands in a relatable and authentic manner. In the fashion industry, where consumption is closely associated with identity expression and social signaling, temporary content enables brands to communicate symbolic meanings that resonate with consumers' evolving self-images. Within the Pakistani context, where fashion brands often embody themes of cultural identity, modernity, and social belonging, such alignment can significantly strengthen consumer–brand relationships.

By integrating Advertising Value Theory with Self-Concept Based Relationship Theory, the proposed framework explains how ephemeral content marketing influences consumer engagement through both cognitive and emotional mechanisms. When ephemeral content is perceived as valuable, authentic, and identity-relevant, it strengthens self-brand connection and brand authenticity, which foster brand love. This emotional attachment subsequently motivates customer engagement behaviors, including liking, sharing, commenting, and interacting with brand content on social media.

Ephemeral Content Marketing

Ephemeral Content Marketing (ECM) refers to the strategic use of short-lived digital content by brands to communicate promotions, narratives, and interactive messages that attract consumer attention and stimulate emotional responses (Bayer et al., 2016). Unlike permanent social media posts, ephemeral content is characterized by immediacy, informality, and perceived authenticity, typically disappearing within a limited time frame such as 24 hours. Common examples include Instagram Stories, Snapchat posts, and temporary TikTok updates (Voorveld et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2025). These formats allow brands to communicate with audiences in a more spontaneous and real-time manner, creating a sense of closeness and immediacy in digital interactions.

The growing adoption of ephemeral content represents an important shift in brand–consumer communication. Instead of relying solely on polished and permanent advertisements, brands increasingly use temporary and interactive content to maintain continuous engagement with consumers. Previous studies suggest that the effectiveness of ECM can be explained through several dimensions, including entertainment, trendiness, Informativeness, interactivity, aesthetic appeal, and relevance (Nguyen et al., 2025). These characteristics influence how consumers perceive the value and attractiveness of digital content.

From a psychological perspective, the temporary nature of ephemeral content creates urgency and perceived scarcity, encouraging consumers to pay attention and interact before the content disappears (Li et al., 2020). This dynamic is particularly relevant in the fashion industry, where visual appeal and rapidly changing trends make ephemeral formats an effective tool for sustaining consumer interest and engagement.

Entertainment Value of Ephemeral Content

Entertainment value refers to the extent to which ephemeral content is perceived as enjoyable, humorous, or emotionally engaging by consumers. In digital marketing, entertainment is widely recognized as a key factor influencing positive consumer responses to advertising, particularly on social media where users primarily seek relaxation and enjoyment (Manthiou et al., 2018). Ephemeral formats such as Instagram Stories and TikTok posts enable brands to integrate creative elements including humor, music, storytelling,

and visual effects. These features enhance the entertainment appeal of content and capture audience attention. Prior studies indicate that entertaining content generates positive emotions, strengthens brand perceptions, and increases perceived advertising value, ultimately encouraging stronger consumer engagement with brands (Kim and Ko, 2012).

Trendiness and Timeliness in Ephemeral Content

Trendiness reflects the degree to which content appears current, fashionable, and aligned with ongoing cultural or social trends. Ephemeral content is particularly effective in communicating trendiness because its short lifespan allows brands to respond quickly to emerging topics, seasonal events, or viral discussions (Godey et al., 2016). Content that reflects contemporary trends signals that a brand is socially aware and connected with its audience. Research suggests that trendy content enhances consumer perceptions of brand relevance and stimulates higher engagement levels (Koay et al., 2020). In fast-changing digital environments, especially within the fashion industry, timely content helps brands maintain visibility and reinforces their image as innovative and responsive to consumer interests.

Informativeness of Ephemeral Content

Informativeness refers to the extent to which marketing content provides useful, relevant, and accurate information that assists consumers in making decisions. Although ephemeral formats are often associated with entertainment, informational value remains an important determinant of advertising effectiveness (Ducoffe, 1995). Short-lived posts can convey product details, promotional offers, or brand updates through concise messages and visual demonstrations. Research indicates that informative content increases perceived advertising value and reduces irritation, making consumers more receptive to brand communication (Van-Tien Dao et al., 2014). When ephemeral content successfully balances clarity and brevity, it can strengthen positive brand attitudes and encourage consumer interaction,

particularly in digital environments where information is consumed quickly.

Interactivity in Ephemeral Content

Interactivity refers to the degree to which consumers can actively participate in or respond to marketing content rather than passively viewing it. Social media platforms offer various interactive tools such as polls, quizzes, swipe-up links, and reaction buttons that transform ephemeral content into two-way communication. These interactive features increase consumer involvement and create a sense of participation and control (Muntinga et al., 2011). Empirical studies show that interactive content enhances user engagement and strengthens behavioral responses such as commenting, sharing, and reacting to brand messages (Ibrahim and Aljarah, 2023). By encouraging immediate responses before the content disappears, ephemeral formats amplify user engagement and contribute to stronger consumer–brand relationships.

Aesthetic Quality of Ephemeral Content

Aesthetic quality refers to the visual appeal, design harmony, and overall presentation of marketing content. On visually driven platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, aesthetic elements play a crucial role in attracting consumer attention and generating emotional responses (Li and Xie, 2019). Even in temporary formats, visually appealing images, colors, and layouts enhance consumer engagement and increase perceived entertainment value. Studies indicate that aesthetically pleasing content can strengthen emotional connections and positively influence brand perceptions (Bazi et al., 2023). However, overly polished presentations may reduce perceived authenticity. Therefore, effective ephemeral content often balances professional design with a relatable and spontaneous appearance.

Perceived Relevance of Ephemeral Content

Perceived relevance refers to the degree to which marketing content aligns with consumers' personal interests, needs, and situational context. In digital environments where users face constant

information overload, relevant content is more likely to capture attention and encourage cognitive processing (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989). Ephemeral content relies heavily on contextual relevance because its short lifespan requires immediate engagement. Messages that reflect users' cultural context, daily activities, or current interests are more likely to be perceived as meaningful and valuable. Research shows that relevant advertising reduces resistance and enhances engagement by creating a stronger connection between the brand message and the consumer's personal experiences (Pieters et al., 2002).

Advertising Value

Advertising value refers to the extent to which consumers perceive advertising content as useful, informative, entertaining, credible, relevant, and worth their attention rather than intrusive or irritating (Ducoffe, 1995; Logan et al., 2012). In the context of ephemeral content, advertising value reflects audiences' subjective evaluation of whether short-lived brand messages provide meaningful benefits within a limited viewing period. Prior studies suggest that advertising value is shaped by both utilitarian elements, such as informativeness and credibility, and hedonic elements, such as entertainment, while irritation reduces its effectiveness (Ye et al., 2025). This construct is particularly important in digital environments where consumers are exposed to large amounts of competing content and must quickly decide what deserves their attention. In fashion marketing, ephemeral content that is visually appealing, relevant, and credible is more likely to generate favorable brand attitudes. Thus, advertising value functions as a key psychological mechanism through which temporary brand communication influences consumer perceptions and relational outcomes.

Self-Brand Connection

Self-brand connection refers to the extent to which consumers integrate a brand into their self-concept and use it to express who they are or who they aspire to become (Park et al., 2010). In this sense, brands serve not only functional purposes but also symbolic roles that help individuals communicate identity, values, and lifestyle. This construct is especially relevant in the fashion industry, where consumption is closely tied to self-expression and social recognition. Research shows that stronger self-brand connection leads to attachment, brand love, advocacy, and loyalty because consumers perceive the brand as part of their personal identity (Shimul and Phau, 2023). In digital environments, ephemeral content can strengthen this connection by presenting brands through informal, behind-the-scenes, and lifestyle-oriented narratives that feel relatable and human. Such content allows consumers to imagine themselves within the brand's symbolic world. Therefore, self-brand connection provides an important explanation of how temporary digital interactions may develop into deeper emotional and behavioral relationships with brands.

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity refers to consumers' perception that a brand is genuine, honest, transparent, and consistent with its stated values and identity (Napoli et al., 2014). In contemporary digital markets, authenticity has become a critical determinant of trust and emotional attachment because consumers are increasingly skeptical of highly polished and overly commercialized brand communication. Ephemeral content is often viewed as especially effective in signaling authenticity because it appears spontaneous, less scripted, and more immediate than permanent advertising formats. Through behind-the-scenes posts, real-time updates, and informal storytelling, brands can present themselves in ways that feel more human and believable. Prior research shows that authentic brands are more likely to foster trust, emotional connection, and loyalty among consumers (Zafar et al., 2025). In the fashion industry, authenticity is particularly significant because brands are evaluated not only by product quality but also by symbolic meaning and cultural relevance. Thus, brand authenticity serves as a major relational mechanism linking ephemeral communication with stronger consumer-brand relationships.

Brand Love

Brand love refers to a deep emotional attachment that consumers develop toward a brand, characterized by affection, passion, closeness, and long-term commitment (Batra et al., 2012; Ahuvia, 2016). It goes beyond satisfaction or preference by reflecting an intense emotional bond in which the brand becomes personally meaningful to the consumer. The literature suggests that brand love emerges when consumers perceive a brand as identity-relevant, emotionally rewarding, and authentic. In such cases, the brand is no longer seen only as a product provider but as an important part of the consumer's life experience. In digital marketing settings, storytelling, visual communication, and emotionally resonant interactions can play a major role in strengthening brand love. Ephemeral content may contribute to this process by creating a sense of intimacy, immediacy, and everyday connection with the brand. As a result, brand love becomes a powerful predictor of loyalty, advocacy, and sustained engagement, making it a central outcome in consumer-brand relationship research.

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement refers to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement of consumers with a brand beyond mere purchase activity (Hollebeek et al., 2014). It includes actions such as paying attention to brand content, feeling emotionally connected, commenting, sharing, recommending, and participating in brand-related interactions. In digital environments, engagement is considered a key indicator of relationship strength because it reflects active and ongoing consumer participation in the brand experience. Research shows that engagement is driven not only by functional value but also by emotional attachment, identity alignment, and interactive communication. In the context of ephemeral content, engagement may be intensified by the temporary and immediate nature of posts, which encourages consumers to respond quickly before the content disappears. This creates a stronger sense of urgency, participation, and closeness. In fashion marketing, customer engagement is particularly important because brand success often depends on visibility, social interaction, and consumer advocacy across social media platforms.

Purchase Behavior as the Economic Core of Engagement

Purchase behavior represents the first and most direct dimension of customer engagement because it reflects repeated buying, preference, and psychological commitment to a brand. Engaged consumers do not purchase randomly; rather, they deliberately return to preferred brands despite the availability of alternatives (Harmeling et al., 2017). In fashion markets, this is evident when consumers repeatedly choose the same brand for seasonal occasions due to trust, familiarity, and identity expression. Digital platforms strengthen this process by embedding brands into everyday life. Ephemeral content, such as limited-time product stories or promotional posts, encourages repeat buying and gradually reinforces long-term consumer–brand relationships.

Referral Behavior and the Quiet Power of Recommendations

Referral behavior reflects consumers' willingness to recommend a brand to others, thereby extending engagement beyond personal purchase. Unlike direct transactions, referrals generate credibility because consumers attach their own reputation to the recommendation (Wirtz et al., 2013). In digital settings, referrals occur through shared stories, discount codes, links, and informal word of mouth on platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram. In fashion markets, such recommendations often influence purchase decisions more effectively than formal advertising. Ephemeral content can accelerate this process by making brand messages timely, shareable, and socially relevant, especially during cultural occasions when consumers actively exchange fashion-related suggestions and opinions.

Social Influence as Non-Transactional Engagement

Social influence refers to the broader impact consumers have on how others perceive a brand through visible online actions such as liking, commenting, reposting, reviewing, or tagging

(Harmeling et al., 2016). This form of engagement goes beyond personal recommendation and contributes to the collective reputation of a brand. In fashion markets, where identity and image are highly important, such public interactions shape perceptions of whether a brand is trendy, ethical, affordable, or aspirational. Ephemeral content strengthens this dimension by encouraging immediate participation through polls, reaction buttons, and interactive story features. As a result, consumers become active contributors to the brand's wider cultural and social meaning.

Knowledge Sharing and Co-Creation
Knowledge sharing refers to the contribution of consumer insights, opinions, and experiences that add value to both brands and other consumers. This may include feedback on product quality, fit, usability, or styling suggestions, all of which reduce uncertainty in decision making and support co-creation processes (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). In fashion markets, such knowledge often spreads through comments, reviews, and story responses on social media. Ephemeral content enhances this process because its informal and real-time nature encourages spontaneous consumer reactions. These interactions provide brands with immediate market intelligence while also helping potential buyers make more informed choices, thereby strengthening the overall engagement ecosystem.

Hypothesis Development
Advertising Value Theory suggests that consumer responses to advertising depend on the perceived benefits provided by the content rather than mere exposure (Ducoffe, 1995). In ephemeral content environments, users must quickly evaluate whether content is worth their attention before it disappears (Bayer et al., 2016). Prior research shows that entertaining, informative, and relevant social media content enhances perceived advertising value and encourages positive consumer responses (Kim and Han, 2014; Voorveld et al., 2018). In the fashion industry, particularly in competitive markets such as Pakistan, visually appealing and trend-oriented ephemeral content may increase the perceived

usefulness and enjoyment of brand communication. Therefore, ephemeral content marketing is expected to enhance advertising value.

H1: Ephemeral Content Marketing positively influences Advertising Value.

Beyond cognitive evaluation, ephemeral content also influences how consumers psychologically relate to brands. Fashion consumption often reflects identity expression and social belonging. Ephemeral formats such as stories, reels, and interactive features provide repeated exposure to brand lifestyles and communities, allowing consumers to associate their identity with the brand. This process strengthens self-brand connection.

H2: Ephemeral Content Marketing positively influences Self-Brand Connection.

Ephemeral communication can also signal authenticity because it appears spontaneous, less edited, and more transparent than traditional advertising. When fashion brands share behind-the-scenes content, real-time updates, or customer interactions, consumers may perceive them as honest and genuine, particularly in markets where trust is highly valued.

H3: Ephemeral Content Marketing positively influences Brand Authenticity.

Advertising value may further shape emotional responses toward brands. When content is perceived as entertaining, informative, and relevant, consumers develop positive feelings that strengthen emotional attachment.

H4: Advertising Value positively influences Brand Love.

However, perceived value alone may not always lead to behavioral interaction. Consumers may appreciate brand content without actively engaging with it.

H5: Advertising Value positively influences Customer Engagement.

Authenticity also plays an important role in developing emotional bonds. When consumers perceive a brand as genuine and transparent, they feel more comfortable developing emotional attachment.

H6: Brand Authenticity positively influences Brand Love.

Similarly, authentic brands are more likely to encourage interaction because consumers are more willing to publicly associate with brands they trust.

H7： Brand Authenticity positively influences Customer Engagement.

Identity alignment further strengthens emotional attachment. When consumers see a brand as part of their identity, the relationship evolves beyond transactions into emotional commitment.

H8: Self-Brand Connection positively influences Brand Love.

Self-brand connection can also motivate consumers to interact with brand content as a form of self-expression.

H9: Self-Brand Connection positively influences Customer Engagement.

Brand love represents the strongest emotional bond between consumers and brands. Consumers who love a brand are more likely to engage in advocacy, interaction, and repeated purchasing.

H10: Brand Love positively influences Customer Engagement.

Ephemeral content marketing may also influence brand love indirectly through psychological mechanisms.

H11: Advertising Value mediates the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Brand Love.

H12: Self-Brand Connection mediates the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Brand Love.

H13: Brand Authenticity mediates the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Brand Love.

Similarly, ephemeral content may influence engagement through these mechanisms.

H14: Advertising Value mediates the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Customer Engagement.

H15: Self-Brand Connection mediates the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Customer Engagement.

H16: Brand Authenticity mediates the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Customer Engagement.

Brand love may also act as a key emotional bridge between perceptions and engagement.

H17: Advertising Value and Brand Love jointly mediate the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Customer Engagement.

H18: Self-Brand Connection and Brand Love jointly mediate the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Customer Engagement.

H19: Brand Authenticity and Brand Love jointly mediate the relationship between Ephemeral Content Marketing and Customer Engagement.

Finally, brand love may mediate the influence of psychological mechanisms on engagement.

H20: Brand Love mediates the relationship between Advertising Value and Customer Engagement.

H21: Brand Love mediates the relationship between Self-Brand Connection and Customer Engagement.

H22: Brand Love mediates the relationship between Brand Authenticity and Customer Engagement.
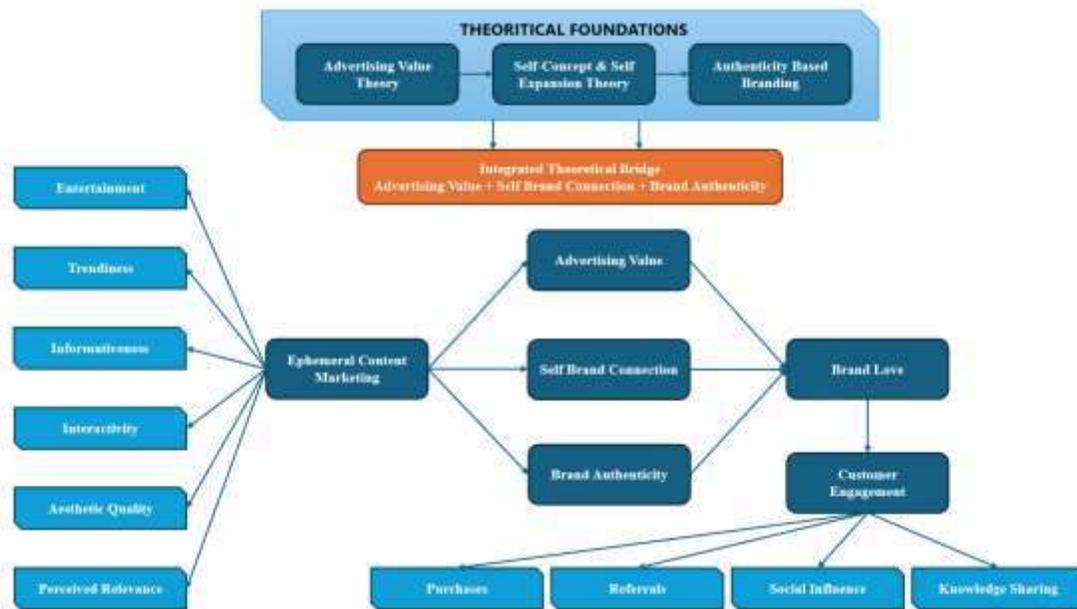
Figure: 1

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional research design to examine the influence of ephemeral content marketing on consumer–brand relationships in Pakistan's fashion industry. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to test hypothesized relationships among multiple constructs using statistical techniques. The cross-sectional design involves collecting data from respondents at a single point in time to analyze their perceptions and attitudes toward ephemeral content used by fashion brands on social media platforms (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The research is grounded in positivist research philosophy, which assumes that social phenomena can be objectively measured and analyzed through empirical observation and statistical analysis (Saunders, 2012). Consistent with this philosophy, the study follows a deductive research approach, deriving hypotheses from established theoretical frameworks including Advertising Value Theory, Self-Concept and Self-Expansion Theory, and Authenticity-Based Branding. A survey-based research strategy was employed to collect primary data from Pakistani consumers who follow fashion brands on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, where ephemeral content formats like stories and short videos are widely used. The target population consisted of social media users aged eighteen years and above who are exposed to fashion-related ephemeral content. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that respondents had relevant experience with the phenomenon being studied. Data were collected through an online self-administered questionnaire, which was distributed through social media channels and direct messaging. A total of 322 responses were initially received, and after data screening and removal of incomplete or invalid responses, 179 valid responses were retained for analysis. The questionnaire included multi-item scales adapted from established studies to measure ephemeral content marketing, advertising value, self-brand connection, brand authenticity, brand love, and customer engagement using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)

with SmartPLS, which allows testing of complex relationships among latent constructs. Ethical principles were maintained by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents throughout the research process.

Data Analysis and Results
Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents provides an overview of the sample characteristics used in this study. The gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 92 male respondents (51.4%) and 87 female respondents (48.6%), indicating equal representation of both genders. In terms of age, the largest group of respondents falls within the 25–34 years' category (40.8%), followed by 18–24 years (24.6%), 35–44 years (21.2%), and 45 years and above (13.4%), suggesting that the majority of participants are young adults who are typically active on social media platforms. Regarding marital status, 53.6% of respondents are single while 46.4% are married, reflecting a relatively balanced composition. In terms of education, the majority of respondents hold a Bachelor's degree (43.6%), followed by Master's degrees (29.1%), Intermediate or below (16.2%), and MPhil/PhD qualifications (11.2%), indicating that most participants have a relatively high educational background. Concerning employment status, 50.8% of respondents are employed, 23.5% are students, 17.3% are self-employed, and 8.4% are unemployed, showing that most participants are economically active. Regarding income distribution, 35.8% earn between PKR 50,001 and 100,000 per month, followed by 25.7% earning below PKR 50,000, 22.9% earning between PKR 100,001 and 150,000, and 15.6% earning above PKR 150,000, indicating a diverse income range among respondents. In terms of online fashion purchasing behavior, 39.7% of respondents purchase fashion items two to three times per month, 26.3% purchase once a month, 18.4% purchase weekly, and 15.6% rarely purchase online. Social media usage is relatively high, with 38.0% spending 1–3 hours daily, followed by 31.3% spending 3–5 hours, 19.0% more than 5 hours, and 11.7% less than 1 hour. Instagram is the most commonly used platform (40.2%), followed by Facebook (27.4%), TikTok (21.2%), and Snapchat (11.2%), while 42.5% of respondents view ephemeral content such as stories or reels daily, indicating that the sample consists of active social media users who are frequently exposed to ephemeral marketing content.

Table-1
Demographic Profile

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	92	51.4
	Female	87	48.6
Age	18-24 years	44	24.6
	25-34 years	73	40.8
	35-44 years	38	21.2
	45 years and above	24	13.4
Marital Status	Single	96	53.6
	Married	83	46.4
Education Level	Intermediate or below	29	16.2
	Bachelor's	78	43.6
	Master's	52	29.1
	MPhil/PhD	20	11.2
Employment Status	Student	42	23.5
	Employed	91	50.8
	Self-employed	31	17.3
	Unemployed	15	8.4
Monthly Income (PKR)	Below 50,000	46	25.7
	50,001 to 100,000	64	35.8
	100,001 to 150,000	41	22.9
	Above 150,000	28	15.6
Online Fashion Purchases	Weekly	33	18.4
	23 times per month	71	39.7
	Once a month	47	26.3
	Rarely	28	15.6
Time Spent on social media (daily)	Less than 1 hour	21	11.7
	13 hours	68	38
	35 hours	56	31.3
	More than 5 hours	34	19
Primary Social Media Platform	Instagram	72	40.2
	Facebook	49	27.4
	TikTok	38	21.2
	Snapchat	20	11.2
Ephemeral Content (Stories/Reels)	Daily	76	42.5
	Several times a week	61	34.1

Occasionally	29	16.2
Rarely	13	7.3

N = 179

Measurement Model

Measurement model evaluation was conducted before testing the structural relationships to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study. Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement and was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Validity ensures that the constructs accurately measure the theoretical concepts they represent. The evaluation involved examining factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) to establish convergent validity, while discriminant validity was also assessed to confirm that the constructs were conceptually distinct. This assessment provides a reliable foundation for structural model testing.
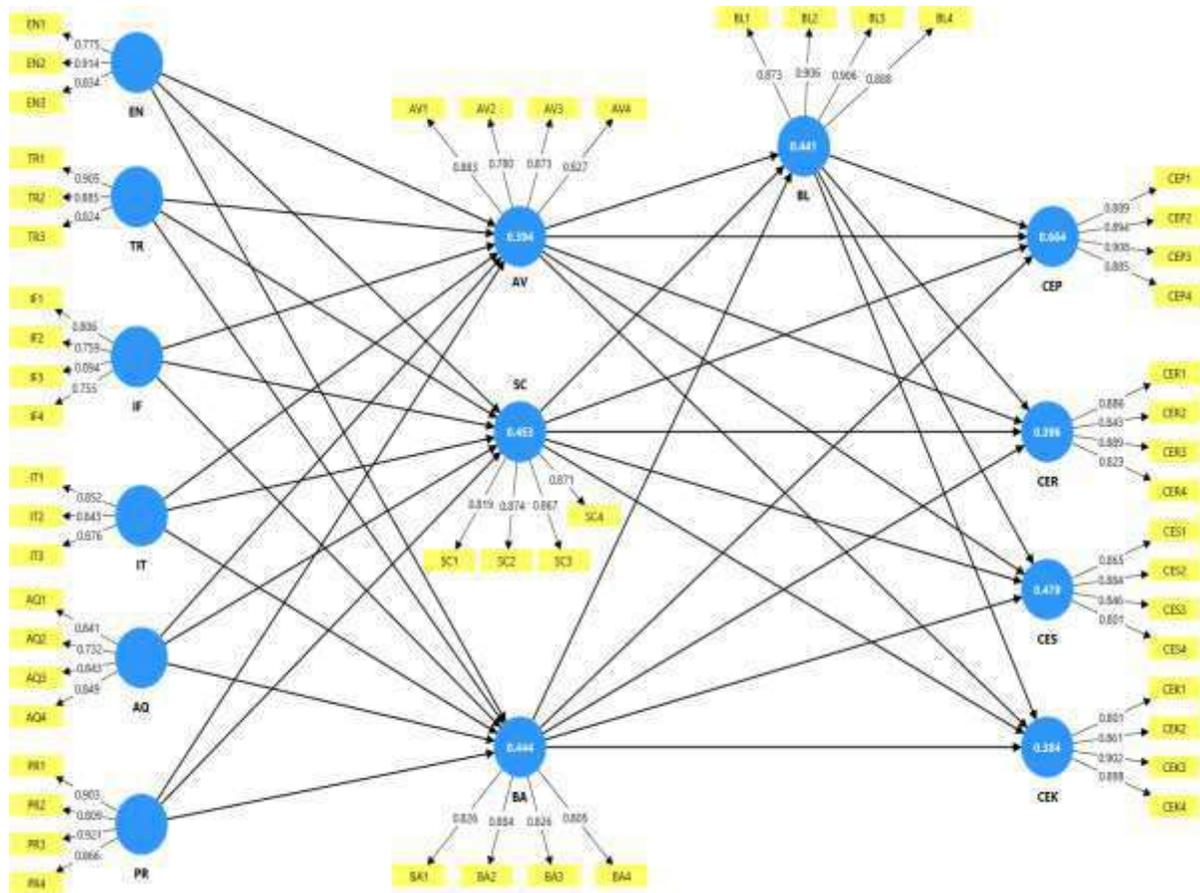
Figure: 2
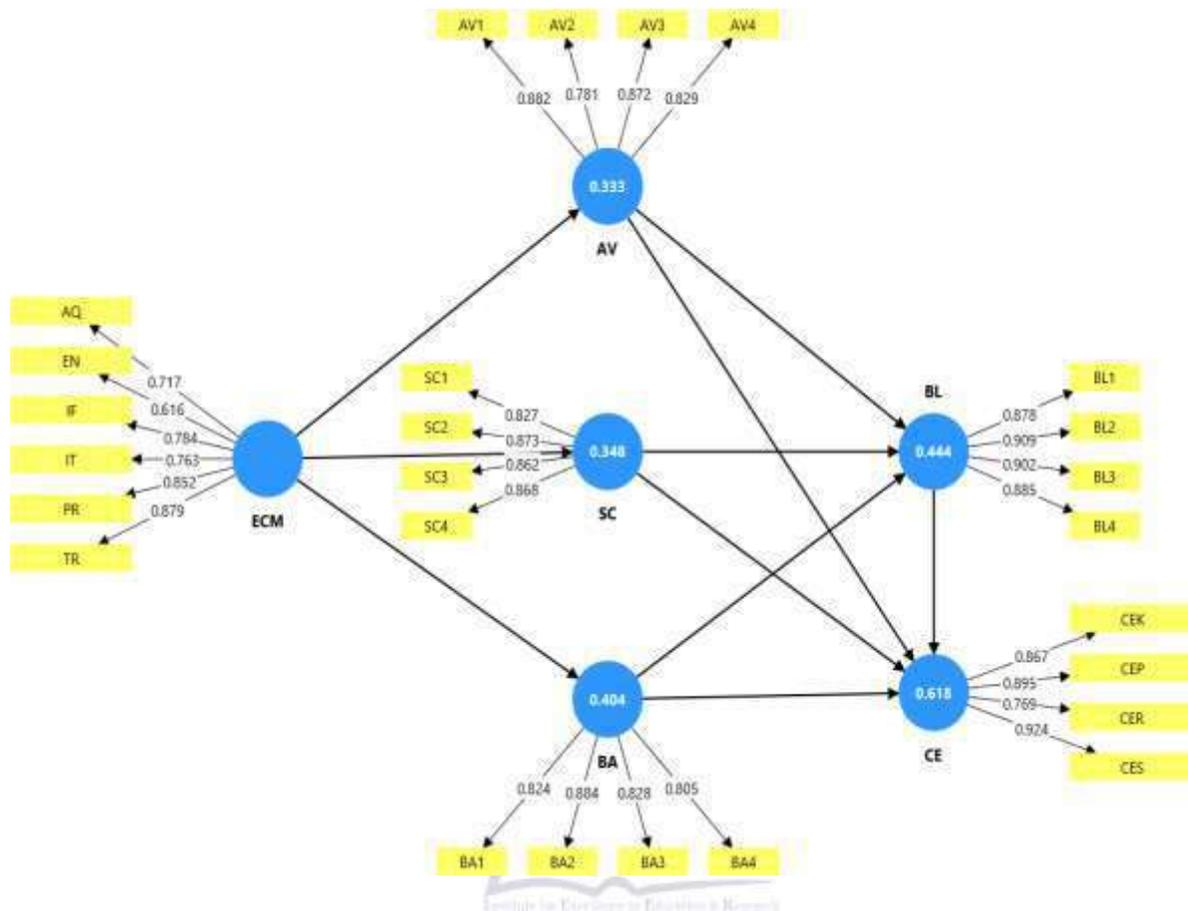
Figure: 3

The measurement model indicates that all constructs demonstrate acceptable reliability and validity. Indicator loadings are above recommended thresholds, confirming strong relationships between items and their respective constructs. The model also shows adequate explanatory power, with R^2 values indicating that advertising value, self-brand connection, and brand authenticity significantly contribute to explaining brand love and customer engagement outcomes. (Churchill, 1979; Jarvis et al., 2003; Henseler et al., 2015).

Table-3
Factor Loadings

Item	AV	BA	BL	CE	ECM	SC
AV1	0.882					
AV2	0.781					
AV3	0.872					
AV4	0.829					
BA1		0.824				
BA2		0.884				
BA3		0.828				
BA4		0.805				
BL1			0.878			
BL2			0.909			
BL3			0.902			
BL4			0.885			
CEK				0.867		
CEP				0.895		
CER				0.769		
CES				0.924		
AQ					0.717	
EN					0.616	
IF					0.784	
IT					0.763	
PR					0.852	
TR					0.879	
SC1						0.827
SC2						0.873
SC3						0.862
SC4						0.868

Reliability and Validity Measures

Reliability and validity were assessed using PLS-SEM procedures. Internal consistency was examined through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity was evaluated using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs showed Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values above 0.70 and below 0.95, indicating strong internal consistency without item redundancy (Hair et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2022).

Table-4
Reliability Analysis (First Order)

	Cronbach alpha	Composite Reliability	Number of Item
Advertising Quality (AQ)	0.834	0.889	4
Engagement Value (EV)	0.796	0.880	3
Informativeness (IF)	0.818	0.880	4
Interactivity (IT)	0.822	0.893	3
Perceived Relevance (PR)	0.898	0.929	4
Trendiness (TR)	0.842	0.905	3
Advertising Value (AV)	0.863	0.907	4
Self-Brand Connection (SC)	0.880	0.918	4
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.856	0.902	4
Brand Love (BL)	0.916	0.940	4
Customer Knowledge Sharing (CEK)	0.890	0.923	4
Customer Purchases (CEP)	0.916	0.941	4
Customer Referrals (CER)	0.884	0.919	4
Customer Social Influence (CES)	0.871	0.912	4

The reliability analysis of the first-order constructs indicates strong internal consistency across all variables in the study. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.796 to 0.916, while composite reliability values range from 0.880 to 0.941, all exceeding the recommended threshold of **0.70**, confirming acceptable reliability. Constructs such as Brand Love, Customer Purchases, and Perceived Relevance show particularly high reliability, indicating strong consistency among their measurement items. Additionally, each construct is measured using **three to four items**, which further supports scale stability. Overall, these results demonstrate that the measurement items consistently capture their respective constructs, confirming the adequacy of the scales for further analysis in the structural model.

Table-5
Constructs Reliability Statistics: High Order

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Ephemeral Content Marketing (ECM)	0.862	0.898
Advertising Value (AV)	0.863	0.907
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.856	0.903
Brand Love (BL)	0.916	0.941
Self-Brand Connection (SC)	0.880	0.917
Customer Engagement (CE)	0.887	0.923

Convergent validity

Convergent validity was evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures the proportion of variance a construct explains in its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All constructs reported AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that more than half of the indicator variance is captured by the latent constructs, thus confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table-6
Average variance extracted (AVE) (First Order)

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Advertising Quality (AQ)	0.669
Engagement Value (EV)	0.711
Informativeness (IF)	0.649
Interactivity (IT)	0.735
Perceived Relevance (PR)	0.767
Trendiness (TR)	0.760
Advertising Value (AV)	0.709
Self-Brand Connection (SC)	0.736
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.698
Brand Love (BL)	0.798
Customer Knowledge Sharing (CEK)	0.751
Customer Purchases (CEP)	0.799
Customer Referrals (CER)	0.741
Customer Social Influence (CES)	0.722

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to assess convergent validity of the constructs. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2019), AVE values above **0.50** indicate acceptable convergent validity. In this study, AVE values for the first-order constructs range from **0.649 to 0.799**, showing that each construct explains a substantial portion of the variance of its indicators. These results confirm that all constructs possess adequate convergent validity and that multicollinearity among indicators is not a concern.

Table-7
Average variance extracted (AVE) (Higher Order)

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Ephemeral Content Marketing (ECM)	0.598
Advertising Value (AV)	0.709
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.699
Brand Love (BL)	0.798
Self-Brand Connection (SC)	0.735
Customer Engagement (CE)	0.750

Similarly, for the higher-order constructs, AVE values ranged from 0.598 to 0.798. Ephemeral Content Marketing (ECM) had an AVE of 0.598, Advertising Value (AV) 0.709, Brand Authenticity (BA) 0.699, Brand Love (BL) 0.798, Self-Brand Connection (SC) 0.735, and Customer Engagement (CE) 0.750. These results present in table 4.5(b) confirm that the higher-order constructs adequately capture the shared variance of their respective indicators without significant multicollinearity.

Discriminant validity
The evaluation of discriminant validity was performed using Fornell Larcker criterion and the heterotrait -Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The Fornell-

Larcker test showed that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each of the constructs were larger than the inter construct-relations and therefore supported construct distinctiveness (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Further, the full range of HTMT ratios were less than the recommended cut-offs (0.85/0.90) and therefore, offered formidable evidence of discriminant validity in the measurement model (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table – 8
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Ratios for Discriminant Validity (First Order)

	AQ	AV	BA	BL	CK	CP	CR	CS	EV	IF	IT	PR	SC
AQ													
AV	0.558												
BA	0.639	0.628											
BL	0.550	0.622	0.570										
CK	0.355	0.362	0.518	0.597									
CP	0.492	0.603	0.670	0.804	0.802								
CR	0.529	0.488	0.655	0.448	0.563	0.602							
CS	0.555	0.463	0.640	0.686	0.883	0.839	0.769						
EV	0.298	0.416	0.382	0.686	0.355	0.703	0.414	0.541					
IF	0.630	0.390	0.514	0.517	0.482	0.580	0.454	0.499	0.532				
IT	0.497	0.507	0.632	0.615	0.608	0.711	0.548	0.749	0.496	0.597			
PR	0.584	0.642	0.587	0.700	0.643	0.835	0.521	0.723	0.519	0.636	0.727		
SC	0.396	0.317	0.391	0.514	0.500	0.603	0.459	0.481	0.471	0.677	0.415	0.638	
TR	0.739	0.562	0.649	0.616	0.493	0.741	0.578	0.675	0.619	0.774	0.672	0.815	0.514

In the Table 8, Fornell-Larcker assessment, the square root of the average variance extracted by all the constructs is larger than the inter-construct correlations, thus supporting discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table – 9
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Ratios for Discriminant Validity (Higher Order)

	AV	BA	BL	CE	ECM
AV					
BA	0.628				
BL	0.622	0.570			
CE	0.556	0.720	0.743		
ECM	0.661	0.732	0.788	0.864	
SC	0.317	0.391	0.514	0.593	0.670

The HTMT ratios were examined to assess discriminant validity among the higher-order constructs. According to recommended guidelines, HTMT values below **0.90** indicate adequate discriminant validity. As shown in Table 9, all HTMT values range between **0.317 and 0.864**, which are within the acceptable threshold. This confirms that each construct is conceptually distinct from the others and that discriminant validity is established for the higher-order measurement model.

Table – 10
Fornell Larcker Criterion First Order

	AQ	AV	BA	BL	CEK	CEP	CER	CES	EN	IF	IT	PR	SC	TR
AQ	0.818													
AV	0.474	0.842												
BA	0.546	0.541	0.836											
BL	0.474	0.556	0.505	0.893										
CEK	0.309	0.326	0.454	0.550	0.867									
CEP	0.431	0.541	0.596	0.749	0.734	0.894								
CER	0.462	0.430	0.574	0.408	0.500	0.542	0.861							
CES	0.478	0.409	0.558	0.621	0.775	0.751	0.674	0.850						
EN	0.225	0.348	0.322	0.588	0.317	0.604	0.343	0.452	0.843					
IF	0.521	0.332	0.433	0.449	0.423	0.507	0.394	0.423	0.426	0.806				
IT	0.410	0.430	0.542	0.548	0.539	0.631	0.480	0.639	0.403	0.505	0.857			
PR	0.508	0.571	0.520	0.639	0.581	0.753	0.470	0.644	0.440	0.549	0.640	0.876		
SC	0.347	0.278	0.346	0.464	0.452	0.543	0.413	0.422	0.402	0.578	0.370	0.571	0.858	
TR	0.614	0.487	0.558	0.541	0.443	0.661	0.507	0.589	0.499	0.637	0.563	0.715	0.445	0.872

In the case of the higher-order constructs Square root of AVE ranged between 0.836 (BA). to 0.894 (BL), which is always more than the inter-construct correlations. For instance, Ephemeral AVE by Content Marketing (ECM) was 0.773 which was higher than the correlations of it with. Customer Engagement (0.767) and Brand Love (0.696).

Equally, Customer Engagement (CE). presented a square root of AVE of 0.866, which is stronger than correlations with BL (0.688) and AV (0.498). These findings affirm that the developed constructs of higher order are empirically individual and liberated. has to do with discrimination validity.

Table – 11
Fornell Larcker Criterion High order.

	AV	BA	BL	CE	ECM	SC
AV	0.842					
BA	0.541	0.836				
BL	0.556	0.505	0.894			
CE	0.498	0.630	0.688	0.866		
ECM	0.577	0.636	0.696	0.767	0.773	
SC	0.278	0.346	0.467	0.531	0.590	0.858

Fornell-Larcker analysis demonstrates that both first-order and higher-order constructs satisfy the discriminant validity criteria, supporting the reliability and conceptual distinctiveness of the measurement model for subsequent structural analyses.

Structural Equation Modeling
To test the hypothesized interrelations of constructs, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on SmartPLS was used to concurrently test the relationship among these constructs. SEM allowed measuring both the measurement and the structural aspects, and as a result, provided an opportunity to estimate the path coefficients, significance rates, and explanatory power, thus providing a rigorous evaluation of the effect of direct, mediating, and moderating in the proposed research model.

Table – 12
Total Effect (Path Coefficients)

Path Coefficient	β	SD	T-Values	P-Values
ECM -> AV	0.577	0.071	8.164	0.000
ECM -> SC	0.59	0.064	9.245	0.000
ECM -> BA	0.636	0.063	10.039	0.000
AV -> BL	0.362	0.081	4.488	0.000
AV -> CE	0.036	0.084	0.429	0.668
BA -> BL	0.208	0.086	2.413	0.016
BA -> CE	0.334	0.067	4.992	0.000
SC -> BL	0.294	0.08	3.674	0.000
SC -> CE	0.22	0.07	3.138	0.002
BL -> CE	0.396	0.09	4.391	0.000
ECM -> AV -> BL	0.209	0.063	3.32	0.001
ECM -> SC -> BL	0.174	0.057	3.043	0.002
ECM -> BA -> BL	0.132	0.061	2.155	0.031
ECM -> AV -> CE	0.021	0.05	0.413	0.680
ECM -> SC -> CE	0.13	0.045	2.875	0.004
ECM -> BA -> CE	0.212	0.053	4.014	0.000
ECM -> AV -> BL -> CE	0.083	0.032	2.611	0.009
ECM -> SC -> BL -> CE	0.069	0.031	2.236	0.025
ECM -> BA -> BL -> CE	0.052	0.027	1.934	0.053
AV -> BL -> CE	0.143	0.047	3.043	0.002
SC -> BL -> CE	0.117	0.047	2.496	0.013
BA -> BL -> CE	0.082	0.039	2.115	0.034

The structural model results show several significant relationships among the study variables. Ephemeral Content Marketing (ECM) has a strong positive influence on Advertising Value (AV) (β = 0.577, p < 0.001), Self-Brand Connection (SC) (β = 0.590, p < 0.001), and Brand Authenticity (BA) (β = 0.636, p < 0.001), indicating that ephemeral content significantly enhances consumers' perceptions of value, identity connection, and authenticity of fashion brands. Advertising Value significantly influences Brand Love (BL) (β = 0.362, p < 0.001), but its direct effect on Customer Engagement (CE) is insignificant (β = 0.036, p = 0.668). This suggests that although consumers perceive value in ephemeral marketing content, it does not directly translate into engagement unless emotional attachment is developed. Brand Authenticity significantly affects Brand Love (β = 0.208, p = 0.016) and Customer Engagement (β = 0.334, p < 0.001), while Self-Brand Connection also positively influences Brand Love (β = 0.294, p < 0.001) and Customer Engagement (β = 0.220, p = 0.002). Furthermore, Brand Love strongly influences Customer Engagement (β = 0.396, p < 0.001), highlighting its central role in driving behavioral outcomes.

The mediation results further show that Advertising Value, Self-Brand Connection, and Brand Authenticity significantly mediate the relationship between ECM and Brand Love. Additionally, Self-Brand Connection and Brand Authenticity significantly mediate the relationship between ECM and Customer Engagement, while

Advertising Value does not. Sequential mediation results indicate that Brand Love further strengthens the indirect effects on engagement, particularly through the pathways ECM → AV → BL → CE and ECM → SC → BL → CE.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reveal that ephemeral content marketing (ECM) strongly influences advertising value, self-brand connection, and brand authenticity, confirming hypotheses H1–H3. These results indicate that ephemeral content functions not merely as a communication channel but as a meaningful social interaction space where consumers evaluate content based on usefulness, entertainment, and relevance (Ducoffe, 1995). In Pakistan's fashion market, ephemeral formats such as stories and reels allow consumers to experience brands in everyday contexts, which enhances perceived authenticity and identity alignment. Consistent with prior studies (Voorveld et al., 2018; Belanche et al., 2020), such content appears less intrusive and more engaging than traditional advertising. The results also show that advertising value, self-brand connection, and brand authenticity positively influence brand love (H4, H6, H8), suggesting that emotional attachment develops when consumers perceive content as valuable, identity-relevant, and trustworthy. However, advertising value does not directly affect customer engagement (H5), indicating that cognitive appreciation alone does not lead to behavioral interaction. Instead, self-brand connection and brand authenticity significantly drive engagement (H7, H9), highlighting the role of identity expression and trust in social media interaction. Furthermore, brand love strongly predicts customer engagement, acting as the emotional mechanism that converts perceptions into behavior. Mediation results confirm that ECM influences brand love through advertising value, self-brand connection, and authenticity, while engagement is primarily driven through identity alignment, authenticity, and emotional attachment. Overall, the findings demonstrate that ephemeral content affects consumer engagement through a psychological pathway where value, identity, and

authenticity first create brand love, which ultimately motivates interaction and participation. This study provides several theoretical, practical, and managerial contributions to understanding ephemeral content marketing and its role in consumer–brand relationships. Theoretically, the research extends advertising value theory by demonstrating that ephemeral content functions not merely as a communication channel but as a psychological trigger that shapes consumer perceptions. In temporary digital environments, advertising value becomes more emotional and contextual, as short-lived content such as stories and reels creates a sense of immediacy and relevance. The study also advances self-brand connection theory by showing that identity alignment can emerge even through brief interactions with ephemeral content. This suggests that symbolic resonance rather than duration drives identity-based brand relationships. In addition, the findings reposition brand authenticity theory by indicating that authenticity in digital contexts may arise from informality and spontaneity rather than only from long-term consistency or heritage. Another important theoretical contribution is the central role of brand love, which acts as a bridge between psychological perceptions and behavioral engagement. Advertising value, identity alignment, and authenticity first create emotional attachment, which then motivates engagement behaviors.

From a practical perspective, the results highlight that ephemeral content is effective because it appears authentic, interactive, and integrated into everyday social media experiences. For fashion brands in Pakistan, short videos, behind-the-scenes moments, and real-life storytelling can generate stronger emotional responses than highly polished advertisements. The findings also indicate that identity alignment and authenticity encourage engagement more than informational value alone, meaning that brands should design ephemeral content as narratives rather than isolated promotional messages.

Managerially, the study suggests that fashion marketers should shift from campaign-based thinking to relationship-oriented communication.

Ephemeral content should be managed strategically by teams that understand brand identity and consumer psychology. Investing in authentic storytelling, influencer alignment with brand values, and user-generated content can strengthen emotional connections with consumers.

However, the study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at one point in time and may not reflect long-term emotional changes. Self-reported data may also introduce bias, and the sample primarily represents digitally active Pakistani consumers, limiting generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal methods, incorporate digital behavioral data, and compare different platforms and demographic groups to better understand how ephemeral content shapes consumer engagement over time.

Conclusion

This study began with a seemingly simple question: whether brief and temporary fashion content on social media platforms has any meaningful impact on consumers. While ephemeral content disappears within 24 hours, the findings show that its psychological effects are not temporary. Instead, such content shapes consumers' perceptions of brands, influences how they relate to them, and determines their willingness to engage. By examining ephemeral content marketing through advertising value, self-brand connection, brand authenticity, brand love, and customer engagement, the study moves beyond the traditional sales funnel and focuses on the psychological pathway that leads from attention to emotional attachment and engagement.

The results indicate that ephemeral content marketing is not merely a promotional tool but a relationship-building mechanism. In the Pakistani fashion context, where clothing is closely linked to identity, social status, cultural traditions, and everyday expression, brands appearing in social media stories become part of consumers' social and emotional environments. The study demonstrates that ephemeral content enhances advertising value, strengthens self-brand connection, and increases brand authenticity. These mechanisms interact with one another: advertising value encourages attention, self-brand connection fosters personal relevance, and authenticity builds trust. Together they create the conditions for brand love to develop.

Brand love emerged as the central emotional mechanism linking perceptions to engagement. Consumers do not interact with brands simply because the content is useful or entertaining; they engage because the brand holds personal meaning. This explains why advertising value alone did not directly lead to engagement, while self-brand connection and authenticity did. Engagement on social media is often a form of identity expression rather than a reaction to informational value.

The study also contributes to understanding digital branding in emerging markets such as Pakistan, where trust, social influence, and identity play significant roles in consumer behavior. Ephemeral content can help brands appear more human, approachable, and authentic in such environments. However, the research also recognizes limitations, including the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data. Overall, the findings highlight that ephemeral content may be temporary in form, but it can create lasting emotional connections and meaningful brand relationships.

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