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The Impact of Meme Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement in the Saudi Market

By Sara Salem Bahbaishi[1], Abrar Sameer Khayyat[2]

ABSTRACT:
Meme-based promotional tactics have become a prevalent strategy in social media marketing; nonetheless, empirical validation of their cross-cultural effectiveness continues to be scarce. The current study reapplies and regionally tailors the methodological design proposed by Rathi and Jain (2024) to investigate how meme marketing initiatives shape purchase intentions among Saudi social media consumers, while positioning consumer engagement as the intervening mechanism. Data were collected via an online, cross-sectional quantitative survey. A total of 284 eligible Saudi participants, ranging between 18 and 40 years of age, completed a 22-item survey derived from pre-validated psychometric measures, which was subsequently rendered into Arabic following a forward-backward translation protocol. Analytical procedures relied upon Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Empirical outcomes indicated that meme marketing practices exert a strong, positive influence on engagement ($\beta = 0.692$, $p < .001$), and that engagement, in turn, serves as a significant positive predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.373$, $p < .001$). The observation of a significant direct path between meme marketing and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < .001$), alongside an indirect effect through engagement ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < .001$), provides support for a partial mediation effect. These results not only reaffirm but also broaden existing scholarly evidence to the Arabian Gulf region, thereby enriching the theoretical underpinnings of Uses and Gratifications Theory and Social Cognitive Theory. On a practical level, the findings deliver data-informed strategic insights for brand stewards and digital communication practitioners active in the Saudi market.

Keywords: Meme Marketing; Consumer Engagement; Purchase Intention; Social Media Marketing; Saudi Arabia; Replication Study

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally altered the digital marketing landscape. Within this environment, meme marketing — the deliberate use of culturally resonant, shareable digital content to stimulate brand engagement and message diffusion — has gained substantial commercial traction (Malodia et al., 2022; Razzaq et al., 2023). Brands such as Heinz, Gucci, and Wendy's have leveraged meme campaigns to generate millions of impressions at relatively low cost (Bury, 2016; Malodia et al., 2022). Compared to the 1% click-through rate associated with standard online ads, meme-driven social media campaigns generate a substantially higher engagement figure of 30% (Paquette, 2019).

Despite its growing prevalence, empirical research on meme marketing (MM) effectiveness remains limited in scope and geographical reach. Most existing studies are

[1]Master's Degree Scholar, King Abdul-Aziz University, Faculty of Business Administration.
[2] Assistant Professor, King Abdul-Aziz University.

qualitative or case-based (Brubaker et al., 2018; Chuah et al., 2020), and quantitative evidence has been generated predominantly in non-Arab contexts (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). The foundational quantitative study — Rathi and Jain (2024) — examined these relationships among Indian social media users and explicitly called for cross-cultural replications.

Saudi Arabia presents a compelling context for such replication. With 35.33 million social media users accounting for 94.3% of the population (Global Media Insight, 2023), the Kingdom ranks among the world's most digitally connected societies. As a direct outcome of Vision 2030—the country's overarching modernization initiative—the Saudi digital marketplace has grown rapidly, and social media platforms have concurrently become essential vehicles for marketing communications and consumer involvement (Alharthi et al., 2026). Understanding how digital marketing mechanisms such as meme marketing influence consumer behavior in this rapidly evolving market is therefore of both academic and practical significance. Saudi Arabia's digital landscape is also platform-specific: the country has among the world's highest per-capita rates of Snapchat and Twitter/X usage, alongside rapid growth in TikTok among younger audiences, providing fertile ground for meme-based marketing content. Moreover, Saudi consumer behavior is shaped by a distinctive cultural context rooted in Islamic values, collectivist social norms, and a strong emphasis on family and community; drawing on Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions framework, Saudi Arabia scores high on collectivism, dynamics that amplify social modeling effects and give peer endorsement and social proof heightened persuasive weight (Long & Maisel, 2010). Islamic cultural norms further shape the boundaries of acceptable marketing communication, as memes respectful of religious and family values are more likely to resonate positively, while culturally incongruent content may generate adverse consumer reactions (Sudigdo & Khalifa, 2020). This cultural specificity reinforces the necessity of context-specific empirical research rather than assuming direct transferability of findings from non-Muslim majority markets such as India, where the source study was conducted. Yet, as Alsaadi et al. (2024) note, research on digital marketing and purchase intention (CPI) in Saudi Arabia remains limited, and no empirical study has tested the meme marketing–engagement–purchase intention pathway in this market.

To bridge the existing research gaps, the current study reapplies the framework established by Rathi and Jain (2024) within the Saudi Arabian context. The empirical inquiry is structured around three pivotal aims: evaluating the direct influence of meme-centric promotional tactics on consumer engagement, determining the subsequent effect of this engagement on CPIs, and exploring the mediating mechanism through which engagement transmits the impact of meme marketing to consumer behavior. Methodologically, it relies on a quantitative approach, gathering primary data through a cross-sectional survey and employing PLS-SEM for statistical inference. The projected contributions are twofold: it provides a robust empirical validation of the meme marketing model in an Arab Gulf setting, while simultaneously offering actionable, data-driven implications for digital marketing practitioners operating in Saudi Arabia.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Change management and change factors

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Dawkins (1976) originally introduced the term Internet meme to describe cultural units disseminated through behavioral copying. Shifman (2013) subsequently refined this understanding, characterizing internet memes as digitally borne material passed across individuals, with the potential for modification as it moves through networks. In marketing, MM refers to the strategic deployment of such content by brands to stimulate audience interaction and message diffusion (Razzaq et al., 2023). The literature identifies five key dimensions of MM activities: interaction, trendiness, entertainment, informativeness, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM; Bilgin, 2018; Sharma et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2018).

The advantages of MM are well documented. Meme-based campaigns cost less than traditional digital promotion (Bury, 2016; Williams, 2000). Paquette (2019) reports a 30% social media engagement rate for MM, compared to just 1% for Google AdWords click-through rates a striking contrast that reflects the power of relatable, shareable content. Memes utilizing popular templates lower the cognitive effort required for audiences to contextualize a brand message (Malodia et al., 2022), and their creation is relatively simple, enabling rapid response to trending cultural moments. Crucially, MM transcends traditional unidirectional communication by positioning consumers as active participants and co-creators (Kozinets et al., 2008; Merz et al., 2009).

Drawing on established social media marketing literature (Bilgin, 2018; Sharma et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2018), Rathi and Jain (2024) operationalized MM activities as a multi-dimensional construct with five sub-dimensions. Entertainment captures the enjoyability and interest of brand meme content. Interactiveness reflects the degree to which meme content enables information sharing and opinion exchange. Trendiness measures the currency and cultural relevance of meme content. Informativeness assesses the utility of memes in conveying accurate product-related information. Finally, e-WOM drives consumers to share and recommend brand memes, which is how memes spread organically. This five-factor framework serves as the measurement basis for the independent variable in the present study.

Despite the growing commercial adoption of MM, the empirical literature remains limited, and most early studies were qualitative or case-based in nature (Brubaker et al., 2018; Chuah et al., 2020). More recent quantitative work has begun to address this gap. Meme marketing grabs consumers' attention and boosts their purchase intentions by pairing smart, funny content with current cultural events and news. (Lee et al., 2019). Vasile et al. (2021) found that memes shape consumer attitudes, perceptions, and CPIs in digitally connected environments. Nanayakkara and Liyanage (2021) provided cross-cultural empirical evidence from Sri Lanka that MM improves online consumer engagement. Most comprehensively, Rathi and Jain (2024) the source study for the present replication applied Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to a sample of 452 Indian social media users and confirmed that MM activities have a positive influence on ENG ($\beta = 0.745$, $p < 0.05$) and CPI ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < 0.05$), with ENG partially mediating the latter relationship (indirect effect $\beta = 0.485$, $p < 0.05$). Collectively, this body of evidence establishes a consistent pattern; however, most of the studies are based in Western or South and Southeast Asian contexts, leaving the Saudi market entirely unexamined. Notably, no empirical study to date has investigated MM within the Saudi cultural context, representing a significant geographical and cultural gap in the literature that the present study directly addresses.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinning

This study applies two complementary theoretical frameworks, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), both employed by Rathi and Jain (2024) and directly relevant to explaining how MM shapes consumer behaviour on social media.

2.2.1 Social Cognitive Theory

SCT, developed by Bandura (1986), suggests that individuals gain knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors through observational learning and social modeling. People observe others, particularly those perceived as influential or similar, and adopt comparable behaviors when they anticipate positive reinforcement. In the MM context, SCT explains the viral spread of brand content: when consumers observe peers engaging with brand memes, the embedded social proof legitimizes and encourages similar behavior in others (Das, 2023). This dynamic is especially potent among Gen Y and Gen Z users and is amplified in collectivist contexts such as Saudi Arabia, where in-group peer influence strongly shapes individual behavior (Long & Maisel, 2010). This supports hypothesis 1, as peer modelling drives consumer engagement with brand memes.

2.2.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

UGT frames audiences as active and goal-directed in their media consumption. UGT was originally conceptualized by Katz and Blumler (1974) for traditional broadcast media and later extended to social media (Cahya & Triputra, 2017; Das, 2023). Rather than passively absorbing content, individuals select platforms and specific content types based on the specific needs they seek to satisfy: entertainment, information, social identity expression, or community belonging. When brand memes satisfy these needs simultaneously, they generate deep, voluntary, and intrinsically motivated engagement that is especially likely to influence purchase intentions (Bolos et al., 2016). In Saudi Arabia, where social media use is driven by high entertainment and social connectivity motivations (Global Media Insight, 2023), UGT offers a culturally fitting lens for understanding consumer responses to memes. Together, SCT and UGT provide mutually reinforcing explanations for MM's influence: SCT accounts for norm-driven behavior change through social modeling, while UGT explains active, need-driven content engagement. These frameworks collectively inform hypothesis2, as gratification derived from memes fosters purchase intention.

2.3 Meme marketing and Consumer Engagement

MM has emerged as an interactive form of social media marketing that enables brands to communicate with consumers through entertaining, relatable, timely, and shareable content. In the present study, MM activities comprise informativeness, trendiness, interaction, entertainment, and e-WOM, reflecting both the content characteristics of memes and their capacity to stimulate consumer participation. These characteristics can encourage consumers to visit brand pages, read brand memes, like content, comment, and interact with brand-related posts. The relationship between MM and consumer engagement (ENG) can be explained through UGT and SCT. UGT explains that consumers pick media content based on what they're looking for, whether that's entertainment, learning something new, or interacting socially. Since memes can simultaneously provide entertainment and opportunities for social interaction, consumers

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may be motivated to engage more actively with meme-based brand content. SCT further suggests that individuals learn and respond through observing the behavior of others. When consumers observe peers interacting with or sharing brand memes, such social modeling can encourage similar engagement behaviors. Empirical evidence supports this relationship. Nanayakkara and Liyanage (2021) found that MM improves online consumer engagement, while Rathi and Jain (2024) reported a significant positive relationship between MM activities and ENG among Indian social media users ($\beta = 0.745$, $p < 0.05$). The replication of this relationship in the Saudi context is therefore theoretically and empirically justified.:

H1: MM activities have a significant positive effect on consumer engagement.

2.4 Consumer Engagement and Purchase Intention

Conceptualized by Vivek et al. (2012), ENG is defined as the level of a customer's active mental, bodily, and affective participation in brand-related encounters. Extant research suggests a positive association between engagement levels and CPIs (Boyer & Hult, 2006; Rosetta Consulting, 2014). In contrast, CPI, following Wells et al. (2011), denotes the subjective probability of acquiring a marketed good or service subsequent to being exposed to promotional material. Importantly, engagement is posited to influence consumer purchasing responses by augmenting brand familiarity and cementing the psychological rapport between the consumer and the brand. When consumers repeatedly interact with brand content, they may develop more favorable perceptions and stronger interest in the brand's products or services. From a UGT perspective, satisfying entertainment, informational, and social needs through branded memes can create positive associations with the brand, which may contribute to CPIs. Similarly, SCT suggests that observing the engagement of others with brand-related content can provide social cues that influence consumers' own attitudes and behavioral intentions. Previous research provides empirical support for the association of ENG and CPI. Boyer and Hult (2006) found that ENG significantly predicts online CPIs, while Toor et al. (2017) demonstrated the importance of ENG in the relationship between social media activities and CPI. Most importantly, Rathi and Jain (2024) found a significant positive effect of ENG on CPI. Therefore, consumers who actively engage with brand-related meme content are expected to demonstrate stronger CPIs.

H2: Consumer engagement has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

2.5 Consumer Engagement Mediation

ENG may serve as an important mechanism through which MM activities influence CPI. MM can initially attract consumers through entertaining, informative, interactive, and socially relevant content. When consumers respond to such content by visiting brand pages, reading memes, liking posts, or commenting on brand content, they become more actively involved with the brand. This increased engagement can strengthen brand familiarity, positive affect, and social connection, which may subsequently enhance CPI (Toor et al., 2017; Vivek et al., 2012). The mediating role of ENG is also supported theoretically. UGT suggests that people don't just consume media randomly; they actively pick content that fulfills their specific desires, whether that's entertainment, learning, or

socializing (Katz & Blumler, 1974). When MM fulfills these needs, consumers may become more involved with the brand, creating favorable conditions for purchase-related responses. Similarly, SCT suggests that social interactions and observed behaviors within online networks can reinforce consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions (Bandura, 1986; Das, 2023). Rathi and Jain (2024) provide direct empirical support for this proposed mediation relationship. Their study found that ENG partially mediates the relationship between MM activities and CPI. This indicates that MM can influence CPI not only through direct persuasion but also by first stimulating ENG. The present study extends this framework by examining whether this mediating mechanism is also applicable among social media users in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Consumer engagement mediates the relationship between meme marketing activities and consumer purchase intention.

MM may influence CPI directly because memes can communicate product-related information while simultaneously creating entertaining, relatable, and culturally relevant brand experiences. Unlike conventional advertising, memes can integrate marketing messages into content that consumers perceive as socially relevant and enjoyable. Such characteristics can increase attention toward the brand and influence consumers' perceptions and purchase-related attitudes (Lee et al., 2019; Vasile et al., 2021). Previous research provides evidence that meme-based communication can influence consumer purchase-related responses. Lee et al. (2019) demonstrated that internet memes can increase consumers' inclination toward purchasing associated products, while Vasile et al. (2021) found that memes can shape consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions by connecting brands with cultural identity and social aspirations. Similarly, Malodia et al. (2022) showed that MM can create emotional associations between consumers and brands through humor, relatability, and cultural relevance. Rathi and Jain (2024) provide further support for the direct relationship between MM activities and CPI. Their study demonstrated that MM can directly influence CPI, in addition to its indirect influence through ENG. This finding suggests that consumers may develop CPIs from the persuasive, informative, entertaining, and relatable characteristics of meme-based brand content, even without relying entirely on active engagement behaviors. Accordingly, the present study proposes that MM activities can directly influence consumers' CPIs within the Saudi social media context. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Meme marketing activities have a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

H1 is grounded in UGT and supported empirically by Malodia et al. (2022) and Rathi and Jain (2024). H2 is supported by Boyer and Hult (2006) and Toor et al. (2017). H3 reflects the partial mediation pathway identified by Rathi and Jain (2024).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Context

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, consistent with the positivist, deductive orientation of replication research (Saunders et al., 2019). The study targeted active Saudi social media users aged 18–40 who were familiar with memes and meme-based marketing.

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3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

This study employed a non-probability, convenience sampling technique to recruit active Saudi social media users aged 18–40 years who were familiar with memes and meme-based marketing. Although the non-probability sampling method has limitations in terms of the generalizability of the findings, it facilitates access to relevant respondents and allows for a deeper understanding of the research subjects and their perceptions. The survey was distributed through Instagram, X, and Snapchat. A total of 514 questionnaires were distributed; after screening for eligibility, 284 fully completed responses were retained. This sample is adequate for PLS-SEM in a three-construct model (Hair et al., 2019).

3.3 Measurement Instrument

The instrument replicates Rathi and Jain's (2024) validated 22-item questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. MM activities (second-order construct) were measured by 15 items across five dimensions adapted from Bilgin (2018) and Sharma et al. (2021). ENG was measured by 4 items adapted from Yadav and Rahman (2018). CPI was measured by 3 items adapted from Toor et al. (2017). The instrument was translated into Arabic through forward translation, back-translation, and expert panel review to ensure cultural equivalence.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM statistical technique in SmartPLS 4.1.1.7 (Hair et al., 2022). The PLS-SEM analysis constituted a two-stage analysis: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment. Since data were collected from a single source, common-method bias was assessed using the full collinearity VIF method (Kock, 2015). The measurement model assessment included reliability and validity of items and constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). The structural model tested path coefficients. Mediation was examined via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples at a 95% confidence interval (Zhao et al., 2010).

4. Results

4.1 Sample Profile

Table 1 presents the respondent characteristics. The sample was predominantly female (67.6%) and concentrated in the 25–30 age group (32.4%), with the majority holding a Bachelor's degree (65.8%). Over 40% reported 4–6 hours of daily social media use.

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics (n = 284)

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Female	192 (67.6%)
	Male	92 (32.4%)
Age	18–24	59 (20.8%)
	25–30	92 (32.4%)
	31–35	54 (19.0%)
	36–40	44 (15.5%)

Education	Secondary/High School	19 (6.7%)
	Undergraduate	187 (65.8%)
	Postgraduate	77 (27.1%)
Daily Social Media Usage	1–3 hours	89 (31.3%)
	4–6 hours	114 (40.1%)
	More than 6 hours	74 (26.1%)

4.2 Common Method Bias

CMB was assessed in the data through a full collinearity test. All first-order constructs were regressed on randomly generated variables. The VIF values of all endogenous variables of this model were below 5, which indicated that common method bias was not suspected in this model (Kock, 2015).

4.3 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model assessment was conducted using the repeated indicator approach since MM was a second-order construct that was operationalized as a reflective-reflective construct. Table 2 presents reliability and validity results for the first-order items and constructs. The internal consistency was assessed using outer loading values. Outer loadings of all items were above the recommended threshold of 0.708, which shows that items have satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2022). Construct reliability was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. These values were found above 0.70, establishing construct reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Moreover, convergent validity was established, as the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These findings indicate that each construct explained more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.

Figure 1: Measurement Model: Reliability and Convergent Validity

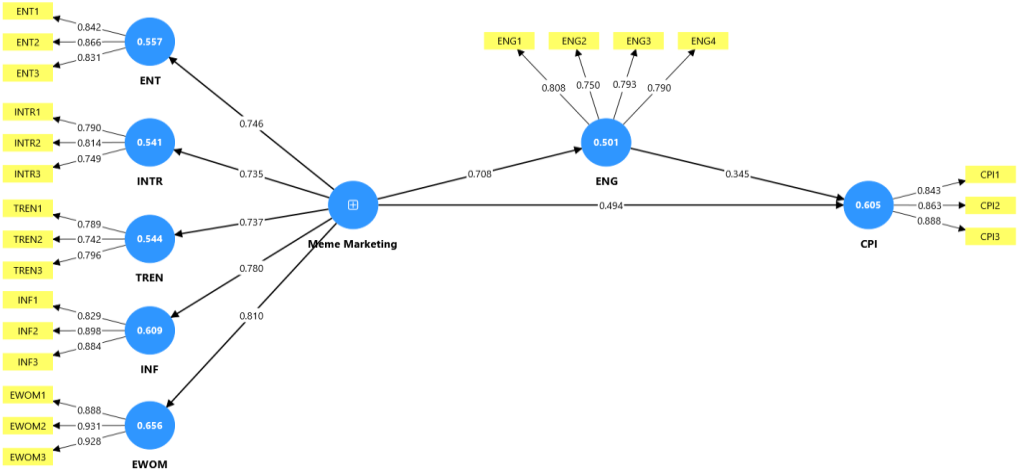

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Table 2: Measurement Model: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable	Items	l	rho_c	α	AVE
Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)	CPI1	0.843	0.899	0.832	0.748
	CPI2	0.863			
	CPI3	0.888			
Engagement (ENG)	ENG1	0.808	0.866	0.793	0.617
	ENG2	0.75			
	ENG3	0.793			
	ENG4	0.79			
Entertainment (ENT)	ENT1	0.842	0.883	0.802	0.716
	ENT2	0.866			
	ENT3	0.831			
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM)	EWOM1	0.888	0.94	0.904	0.839
	EWOM2	0.931			
	EWOM3	0.928			
Informativeness (INF)	INF1	0.829	0.904	0.84	0.758
	INF2	0.898			
	INF3	0.884			
Interaction (INTR)	INTR1	0.79	0.828	0.688	0.616
	INTR2	0.814			
	INTR3	0.749			
Trendiness (TREN)	TREN1	0.789	0.819	0.671	0.602
	TREN2	0.742			
	TREN3	0.796			

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; α = Cronbach's Alpha; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Discriminant validity was analyzed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Table 3 presents the first-order HTMT values, which were below the conservative threshold of 0.85 for most of the construct pairs. The highest value (0.851) was observed between CPI and ENG. This value is only slightly above the conservative criterion, though it remains under the 0.90 benchmark frequently advocated for measures that are conceptually associated (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, the constructs can still be considered empirically distinct.

Table 3 First–order Discriminant Validity

	CPI	ENG	ENT	EWOM	INF	INTR	TREN
CPI							
ENG	0.851						
ENT	0.679	0.617					
EWOM	0.727	0.774	0.546				
INF	0.716	0.668	0.479	0.639			
INTR	0.610	0.648	0.678	0.586	0.622		
TREN	0.632	0.581	0.718	0.576	0.670	0.714	

The first-order measurement model demonstrated satisfactory indicator reliability and validity, which allowed the study to proceed with the subsequent higher-order construct assessment. The latent variable scores of the first-order constructs were extracted to proceed with the second-order measurement analysis. Table 11 presents the assessment of the second-order measurement model. The outer loading of all the items were above the recommended threshold of 0.708, thereby demonstrating satisfactory indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2022). The constructs' reliability was measured through Cronbach's alpha (α) and the composite reliability (CR), which were found above the benchmark value 0.7 for all latent variables. Furthermore, the convergent validity was analyzed using the AVE values, which were found above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4 Second–order Measurement: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable	Items	l	rho_c	α	AVE
Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)	CPI1	0.843	0.899	0.832	0.748
	CPI2	0.863			
	CPI3	0.888			
Engagement (ENG)	ENG1	0.808	0.866	0.793	0.617

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	ENG2	0.75			
	ENG3	0.793			
	ENG4	0.79			
Meme Marketing (MM)	ENT	0.72	0.876	0.825	0.586
	EWOM	0.886			
	INF	0.789			
	INTR	0.652			
	TREN	0.622			

Discriminant validity of the second-order model was analyzed through HTMT ratios. Table 5 shows the pairwise HTMT ratio of MM, ENG and CPI. Although CPI and MM showed the highest value (HTMT = 0.859), this value remains below the more liberal criterion of 0.90 recommended for conceptually related constructs (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2022). The results show that the second-order constructs are empirically distinct while maintaining the expected conceptual relationships, thereby providing adequate evidence of discriminant validity for the higher-order measurement model. The second-order measurement model shows that items and constructs demonstrated reliability and convergent validity.

Table 5 Second – Order Discriminant Validity

	CPI	ENG	MM
CPI			
ENG	0.851		
MM	0.859	0.84	

4.4 Structural Model Assessment

After satisfactory measurement model assessment, this study proceeded with structural model assessment. The coefficient of determination of CPI was found to be 0.595, which shows that the model has moderate explanatory power. Moreover, the variance inflation factor for all endogenous variables was below 3.3, indicating that the data were free of multicollinearity issues. Table 3 presents the hypothesis testing. H1 was supported ($\beta = 0.692$, $t = 19.293$, $p < .001$). H2 was supported ($\beta = 0.373$, $t = 5.813$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect confirming H3 was significant ($\beta = 0.258$, $t = 5.324$, $p < .001$). The direct effect remained significant after introducing the mediator ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < .001$), confirming partial mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). The total effect of MM on CPI was $\beta = 0.723$ ($p < .001$). While all structural relationships are statistically significant, the effect-size results provide a clearer indication of their substantive importance. The effect sizes indicate that MM → ENG ($f^2 = 0.921$) has a large effect, while MM → CPI ($f^2 = 0.278$) has a moderate effect. The effect of ENG → CPI ($f^2 = 0.179$) is comparatively

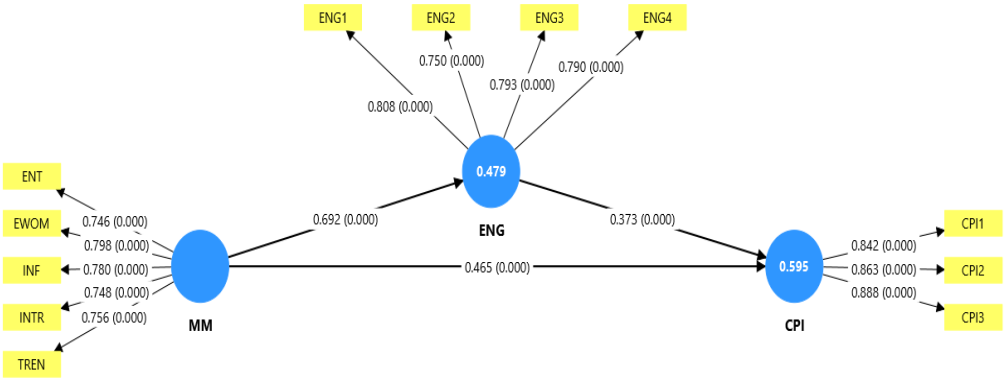
smaller but still meaningful. Overall, the findings indicate that meme marketing has substantial practical relevance, particularly in generating consumer engagement and influencing purchase intention.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Path	β	SE	t	95% CI	f^2
H1: MM → ENG	0.692	0.036	19.293	[0.633, 0.751]	0.921
H2: ENG → CPI	0.373	0.064	5.813	[0.268, 0.480]	0.179
MM → CPI (direct)	0.465	0.064	7.270	[0.359, 0.568]	0.278
H3: MM → ENG → CPI (indirect)	0.258	0.049	5.324	[0.182, 0.341]	
Total Effect (MM → CPI)	0.723	—	—	—	

Note: β = standardized path coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = 95% bootstrap confidence interval (5,000 resamples). MM = Meme Marketing Activities; CPI = Consumer Purchase Intention. All p < .001.β
SE
t
95% CI
f^2

Figure 2. Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing



5. Discussion

This study set out to examine whether the MM–ENG–CPI model is replicable in the Saudi market. All three hypotheses were supported, broadly replicating Rathi and Jain (2024).

The findings support H1, indicating that MM positively influences ENG. This result is consistent with Rathi and Jain (2024), who reported a similar positive relationship in

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the Indian context. It also aligns with previous research suggesting that entertaining, interactive, culturally relevant, and shareable meme content can encourage ENG (Lee et al., 2019; Malodia et al., 2022; Vasile et al., 2021). The finding therefore reinforces the role of MM as an effective engagement-oriented social media strategy in the Saudi context.

The positive relationship between ENG and CPI is consistent with previous research showing that engagement with social media content can strengthen consumers' purchase-related responses (Boyer & Hult, 2006; Toor et al., 2017). The finding also aligns with research indicating that meme-based communication can influence consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Malodia et al., 2022; Vasile et al., 2021). However, the magnitude of the relationship in the present study ($\beta = .373$) was considerably lower than that reported by Rathi and Jain (2024) ($\beta = .651$). This difference may reflect contextual or platform-related variation between the Saudi and Indian samples. Saudi consumers' engagement with highly visual and socially oriented platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram may not translate into CPI in the same way as engagement in other platform environments. Methodological differences, sample characteristics, and changing patterns of social media consumption may also contribute to differences in effect magnitude. However, these explanations were not directly tested in the present study and should therefore be considered possible interpretations rather than established causes. Future comparative research could explicitly examine cultural context, platform type, and consumer characteristics as moderators of the engagement–purchase intention relationship.

The findings support H3, demonstrating that ENG mediates the relationship between MM and CPI. This result is consistent with Rathi and Jain (2024) and supports the broader view that engagement can serve as an important mechanism through which social media marketing influences consumer responses. The significant direct and indirect relationships further suggest that MM influences CPI both directly and through ENG, indicating a complementary mediation pattern..

The findings also demonstrate that MM has a significant positive direct influence on CPI. This finding is consistent with Rathi and Jain (2024), who also reported a significant direct relationship between MM and CPI among Indian social media users. The finding further aligns with previous research suggesting that memes can influence consumers' purchase-related attitudes and intentions by providing relevant information, creating emotional associations, and making brands more relatable and memorable (Lee et al., 2019; Vasile et al., 2021). In the Saudi context, this suggests that MM can influence CPI beyond its role in generating ENG, indicating that well-designed memes may directly shape consumers' perceptions and consideration of branded products or services.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study extends the cross-cultural applicability of the MM model to the Arab Gulf region, addressing an explicitly identified gap (Alsaadi et al., 2024; Rathi & Jain, 2024). It extends UGT beyond traditional and Western media settings to meme-based marketing communication in an Arab context, and contributes to SCT by providing evidence that observational learning and peer modeling operate in the Saudi social media environment.

The partial mediation structure further clarifies that ENG is an important but not exhaustive mechanism through which MM influences purchase behavior.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for brand managers, digital marketers, marketing agencies, and other practitioners operating in the Saudi market. First, meme marketing demonstrated a large effect on consumer engagement, indicating substantial practical relevance for generating engagement. Brands can therefore consider meme-based content as part of their social media marketing strategies, particularly through entertainment, interaction, trendiness, informativeness, and e-WOM. Second, e-WOM demonstrated the highest outer loading among the meme marketing dimensions ($\lambda = 0.886$), indicating that shareability is particularly prominent within the overall meme marketing construct in this sample. Marketers may therefore prioritize content that encourages consumers to share and recommend brand-related memes. However, this finding reflects the relative importance of e-WOM as an indicator of meme marketing rather than direct evidence that sharing behavior independently increases purchase intention. Third, meme marketing showed a moderate effect on consumer purchase intention, while consumer engagement demonstrated a smaller but meaningful effect on purchase intention. These results indicate that the relationships are not only statistically significant but also substantively relevant for marketing decision-making. The significant direct effect of meme marketing on purchase intention, together with the significant indirect effect through consumer engagement, suggests that practitioners may adopt a two-pronged strategy: creating engaging meme content while also incorporating useful and persuasive product or service information. Finally, the large effect of meme marketing on engagement and moderate effect on purchase intention support its potential strategic relevance within the social media marketing mix in the Saudi context. However, these findings concern purchase intention rather than actual purchasing behavior. Therefore, the results should not be interpreted as evidence that meme marketing will produce a corresponding increase in actual sales or purchases. Instead, they indicate that meme marketing has practical potential for strengthening consumer engagement and purchase intentions. Future research using behavioral measures such as click-through rates, conversion rates, or actual purchase data could provide stronger evidence of its commercial impact.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that provide directions for future research. First, the use of non-probability convenience sampling facilitated access to relevant Saudi social media users and enabled a deeper understanding of their perceptions; however, it may introduce selection bias and limit the generalizability of the findings. This limitation is particularly relevant given the predominance of female and younger respondents in the sample. Future studies should therefore prioritize probability-based sampling and larger, more demographically diverse samples to improve representativeness and external validity. Second, the cross-sectional design captures respondents' perceptions at a single point in time and therefore does not establish temporal or causal relationships among meme marketing, ENG, and CPI. Longitudinal research should consequently be prioritized to examine how these relationships develop over time and provide stronger

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evidence regarding temporal effects. Third, the study measures consumer purchase intention through self-reported responses rather than actual purchasing behavior. Future research should therefore incorporate objective behavioural indicators, such as actual purchase data, click-through rates, engagement metrics, or conversion rates, to determine whether meme marketing translates into measurable consumer behaviour. Finally, the study focuses exclusively on Saudi social media users, which limits the extent to which the findings can be extended to other cultural and market contexts. Cross-GCC comparative studies, particularly involving the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar, could therefore examine whether the relationships identified in this study remain consistent across different national and cultural settings. Future research may also extend the model by incorporating additional constructs, such as brand trust, brand equity, and brand loyalty, to provide a broader understanding of the mechanisms through which meme marketing influences consumer responses.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of meme marketing on CPI, mediated by consumer engagement, among 284 Saudi social media users. PLS-SEM confirmed that meme marketing significantly influenced consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.692$) and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.465$ direct; $\beta = 0.258$ indirect), with partial mediation confirmed. These findings replicate Rathi and Jain (2024) in a Gulf Arab context, extending UGT and SCT to Arab digital consumer behavior and providing practical evidence for Saudi-based marketers. Limitations include convenience sampling, a predominantly female sample, and a cross-sectional design. Future research should employ probability sampling, longitudinal designs, objective behavioral measures, and cross-GCC comparative studies.

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