Digital Marketing and Online Consumer Buying Behaviour in Global Fashion E-Commerce: The Mediating Role of Consumer Trust

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines how digital marketing may shape online consumer buying behaviour in global fashion e-commerce through consumer trust. Grounded primarily in the Stimulus-Organism-Response perspective and trust-based relationship logic, digital marketing is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, and personalised advertising. The paper argues that these digital stimuli influence consumers' trust evaluations, which subsequently shape purchase-related responses in online fashion environments. By positioning consumer trust as a mediating mechanism, the framework responds to fragmented prior research that often treats digital marketing as a single construct or examines direct effects without explaining the psychological pathway through which marketing activities influence online buying behaviour. The paper develops propositions for future empirical testing and discusses implications for digital marketers, fashion e-commerce firms, and researchers studying trust formation in cross-border online consumption.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Consumer Trust; Online Consumer Buying Behaviour; Fashion E-Commerce; Social Media Marketing; Influencer Marketing; Personalised Advertising

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have changed the way business engages with consumers and have revolutionised how organizations can market their products and services via digital media. Digital marketing has been rapidly expanding due to the widespread use of the internet, smartphones, social media, artificial intelligence, and data analytics, allowing businesses to connect with consumers more effectively and provide them with personalized marketing experiences. Digital marketing has thus emerged as a strategic approach for businesses to shape consumer decisions and foster customer loyalty in today's global marketplace, where competition is rising (Kotler et al., 2021; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). The fashion e-commerce market is a global sector that has grown tremendously within the last ten years, as the internet has become more available, consumers have become mobile, and their lifestyles have shifted. The online search for product information, comparing options and shopping for fashion products internationally are now firmly entrenched in consumer routine. Fashion e-commerce companies have to employ digital marketing tactics, including social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, and custom advertising to capture customers' attention, boost involvement and enhance buying results, to stay competitive. (Shahidi Hamedani et al., 2025). Even with these developments, however, consumers have concerns about the credibility of information, the protection of their privacy, the safety of their payments and the reliability of online retailers when they use the Internet for transactions. As a result, it has become increasingly vital for online shopping to be influenced by how trustworthy the consumers perceive the website to be. Trust is a psychological mechanism which helps to overcome consumers' perceived risks and stimulate positive online transactional behavior. Existing literature has indicated that consumer trust can be increased through digital marketing

activities, which in turn can impact their online consumer buying behaviour (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen et al., 2003). While previous studies focused on the relationship between digital marketing, consumer trust and consumer buying behaviour, few studies have tested the concept of digital marketing as a multidimensional construct and have simultaneously discussed the mediating effect of consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry. Moreover, the vast changes in the digital environment requires a more detailed knowledge of the impact of different marketing strategies on consumer trust and how it ultimately affects consumer buying behavior in the digital environment in the global market. (Ilmi et al., 2024; Yunus et al., 2022). Thus, this conceptual paper aims to examine how digital marketing affects online consumer buying behavior in the context of trust as a mediating variable in the world of global fashion e- commerce. In particular, digital marketing is perceived in four perspectives: social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, and personalized advertising. These online marketing strategies are thought to affect consumers' online buying behaviour, via consumer trust. (Limbu & Huhmann, 2024).

This chapter provides the foundation for the study by presenting the background of the research, the problem statement, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, and the definitions of key terms.

Background of the study

Digital marketing is central to the international fashion e-commerce customer journey, where consumers encounter brand messages across social platforms, influencer endorsements, informative content and personalised advertisements. Unlike physical retail, cross-border online fashion purchases introduce uncertainty about sizing, authenticity, payment security, privacy and returns. These concerns make consumer trust a plausible mechanism linking marketing exposure to buying-related responses. This conceptual paper therefore integrates four digital marketing dimensions within a Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) explanation, supplemented by Commitment–Trust Theory, to develop propositions for future testing.

Therefore, digital marketing is becoming a crucial strategy that allows businesses to connect with a broader audience, cultivate personalized customer journeys, and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market (Kotler et al., 2021). Digital marketing offers special advantages for businesses over traditional marketing, such as the ability to interact with consumers in real-time, measure the performance of marketing campaigns and connect with consumers over a number of different digital touchpoints, allowing for the creation of long-term customer relationships (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). The increase in digital marketing has also played a significant role in the fast growth of e-commerce in the world. International market report revealed that e-commerce sales still grow every year as people are more and more able to access the internet, and mobile commerce is being adopted by people, with people preferring the convenience of buying online.

Consumers are increasingly turning to digital platforms to find information about a product, compare prices, read consumer reviews and make purchasing decisions. The change has resulted in consumer behavior moving beyond the brick and mortar shopping experience and towards digital shopping environments, forcing companies to adjust their approach and create better digital marketing strategies to capture and keep customers.

(Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022) This global fashion e-commerce industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors in ecommerce. Consumers appreciate the convenience, variety, low prices and global availability of fashion products purchased via the internet.

International fashion brands, like SHEIN, ASOS, Zalando, Zara Online, H&M; Online, and Zalora have taken advantage of digital technologies to expand their operations into several markets overseas and to employ advanced digital marketing to boost engagement with customers and online sales. As a result, it has become more competitive in the global fashion e-commerce sector and to stay competitive, fashion retailers have to be continually innovating their online marketing strategies. (McKinsey & Company, 2024; Statista, 2024). Fashion e-commerce companies are now relying heavily on digital marketing as consumers are constantly bombarded with different types of such marketing efforts online. Social media marketing provides opportunities to brands to connect directly with consumers on platforms like Instagram, TikTok,

Facebook, and X, to boost brand awareness and customer engagement. The other marketing trend that has taken the roof down is influencer marketing - - social media influencers endorse products to their audience, which in turn affects consumer behavior and attitudes. Additionally, content marketing offers a source of valuable, informative, and educational information that helps educate consumers and builds brand credibility, while personalized advertising leverages consumer data and AI algorithms to create tailored ads that align with consumer preferences and purchasing habits. All of these digital marketing tactics contribute to how consumers view brands and assess products during the e- commerce process. (Appel et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Even with these technological advances, purchasing online is still tied to a number of issues that could cause consumers not to actually purchase. However, unlike the physical store, consumers have no way to physically inspect products before buying them, which leads to more uncertainty about product quality, authenticity and the reliability of the seller. Payment security, privacy protection, fraudulent transactions, misl-eading product information, and the misuse of personal data are also concerns for consumers. The uncertainties generate perceived risks that can lessen the purchasing interest of consumers of products over the internet especially of those coming from not well known retailers who are exposed to international markets. Hence, building consumer trust is one of the key factors to a successful online business relationship. (Makhitha & Ngobeni, 2024).

Consumer trust is a key factor that has been identified as playing a significant role in consumer's intention to conduct e-transactions. Trust means that consumers believe in the online retailer's ability to keep its promises, to keep their information confidential, to offer them a secure payment system, to provide them with the products they had expected, and that the online retailer will protect their information (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen et al., 2003). The results of previous studies have proved that increase in consumer trust results in decrease in perceived risk, improvement in consumer satisfaction, increase in brand loyalty, and increased repeat purchase behaviour. Businesses are therefore prioritizing trust-building mechanisms, such as clear communication, secure payment methods, genuine customer reviews, prompt customer service, and consistent product delivery to boost the confidence of consumers in online shopping experiences. (OECD, 2022; Kumar et al., 2023). While there are many studies that have looked at digital marketing and online consumer buying behaviour, there are several limitations within the literature. Previous studies have concentrated on individual digital marketing strategies (e.g., SM marketing, influencer marketing), instead of conceptualizing digital marketing as a multidimensional construct with several interconnected strategies. Moreover, the previous studies on the relationship between digital marketing and consumer buying behavior have mostly focused on the direct influence of digital marketing on consumer buying behavior, and have paid relatively little attention to the mediating effects of consumer trust in this relationship between digital marketing and consumer buying behavior. This means that the psychological processes and their relationships between digital marketing and consumer buying processes are not well understood. (Alalwan, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Further, much of the existing empirical evidence has come from studies from single countries or developed economies, which hampered the generalizability of research findings to the increasingly globalized fashion e-commerce industry. It's more important than ever to learn how digital marketing affects consumer trust and online consumer buying behaviour in an international setting as fashion retailers expand into new markets around the world. This gap brings into light the necessity of conducting more empirical research with a more comprehensive theoretical framework, which would explain the relationships between digital marketing, consumer trust and online consumer buying behaviour. (OECD, 2023; UNCTAD, 2024).

Hence, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to assess the effect of Digital marketing on Online consumer buying behavior while considering consumer trust as a mediator in the fashion e- commerce industry of the world. In particular, digital marketing is thought of in terms of four dimensions: social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing and personalised advertising. The purpose of this research is to examine the effect of these digital marketing strategies on consumers' online purchasing behavior based on consumer trust.

The global fashion e-commerce environment provides a useful context for examining trust formation because customers cannot inspect products before purchase and may transact with unfamiliar international retailers. Social media interaction, influencer credibility, informative content and advertising relevance offer

different trust-related signals. Yet personalised advertising may also trigger privacy concerns, while influencer endorsements may be perceived as commercially motivated. The central issue is therefore not simply whether digital marketing attracts attention, but when its distinct forms support sufficient confidence to encourage purchasing and repeat engagement. This study proposes consumer trust as a common psychological mechanism while recognising that the effects of individual marketing dimensions may differ.

Problem Statements

Existing research provides substantial insights into digital marketing and online purchase decisions, but studies frequently examine isolated channels or emphasize direct associations. This makes it difficult to explain how several forms of digital communication may operate through consumer trust in cross-border fashion shopping. The proposed framework addresses three conceptual gaps: (i) fragmented treatment of four digital marketing dimensions, (ii) insufficient articulation of trust as the intervening psychological mechanism, and (iii) limited integration of fashion-specific uncertainties into the explanation of consumer responses. Because the present study is conceptual, these gaps motivate propositions rather than claims of newly established empirical effects.

Digital marketing has been determined to have a positive impact on purchase intention and purchasing decision by some researchers, others have reported a weak or insignificant relationship between digital marketing and purchase intention and purchasing decision depending on the digital marketing strategy used, industry characteristics and consumer demographic. The above-mentioned findings are not consistent, indicating that the digital marketing's impact on online consumer buying behaviour is still ambiguous and needs further empirical research, especially in the global fashion e- commerce sector (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022; Kotler et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Existing literature mostly has focused on a single aspect of digital marketing, including social media marketing, influencer marketing, online advertising, and email marketing. While valuable insights are gained from these studies, digital marketing is a multidimensional construct, and each of its different components influences the perceptions and purchase decision making of consumers. It's important to remember that few of the dimensions will be realized without any other dimension and that in isolation, it is unlikely to accurately show the integrated impact of multiple digital marketing tactics a consumer might experience during a purchase. As a result, it is necessary to redefine digital marketing as multidimensional, comprising of social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, and personalised advertising, in order to gain a holistic understanding of its impact on online consumer buying behaviour (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022; Kotler et al., 2021; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Kannan & Li, 2017). Consumer trust has always been regarded as one of the most critical factors in consumer's purchase decision in online context because reducing uncertainty, perceived risk and consumers' concerns about online transactions. Trust helps people feel more confident about online retailers, which can help them to make purchases even without in-person interaction. A few studies have investigated the direct link between digital marketing and consumer buying behaviour, but few have explored the possibility of consumer trust being the mechanism between digital marketing and online consumer buying behaviour.As a result, the role of consumer trust as a mediator between e-commerce and fashion context has been inadequately studied, especially in the context of global fashion e-commerce (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen et al., 2003; Pavlou, 2003; Kim et al., 2008). While digital marketing technologies are continually improving, consumers remain concerned about privacy concerns, payment security, deceptive advertising, fake products, and the trustworthiness of online retailers. Many of these concerns are more noticeable in cross- border e-commerce sites, where consumers may not be familiar with the e-commerce seller that is selling across the border. However, recent research shows that trust is still one of the biggest challenges consumers face before they can make an online purchase, despite the fact that increasingly they are making online purchases. Thus, comprehending the role of digital marketing strategies in boosting consumer trust is crucial to fostering positive online consumer buying behavior and enhancing customer retention in the global fashion e-commerce market (Kim et al., 2008; OECD, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024; Gefen et al., 2003). Previous studies on digital marketing and consumer behaviour have been devoted to the general area of e-commerce, retail, hospitality, banking or specific countries. Fewer studies have focused on these relationships in the global fashion e-commerce market, where customers encounter distinct issues pertaining to product authenticity, size and fit uncertainty, return policies, cross-border logistics, and

product evaluation before physical inspection. The fashion industry is growing globally and is moving towards digitalization via online, and there is a lack of empirical evidence to cover the effect of digital marketing strategies on consumer trust and online consumer buying behaviour in this specific industry. Consequently, more empirical studies are needed to offer industry-specific evidence that is relevant to the unique aspects of global fashion e-commerce (McKinsey & Company, 2024; Statista, 2025; Deloitte, 2024; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). Existing literature has mainly focused on direct relationship between digital marketing and online consumer buying behaviour, whereas few studies have focused on the psychological process that links these two. The two theories combine the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory and the Commitment-Trust Theory and provide a better theoretical basis for understanding the impact of digital marketing activities (stimulus) on consumer trust (organism) and, consequently, the behavior of online consumers (response). Whilst there has been a plethora of isolated studies using each theory in marketing and consumer behaviour research, few empirical studies have combined these theoretical approaches within a global fashion e-commerce setting. This conceptual paper aims to enhance the current literature by focusing on consumer trust as a mediating variable between multidimensional digital marketing and the online consumer buying behaviour (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Eroglu et al., 2001; Vieira, 2013).

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the influence of social media marketing on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry? RQ2: What is the influence of influencer marketing on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry? RQ3: What is the influence of content marketing on consumer trust in the global fashion e- commerce industry? RQ4: What is the influence of personalized advertising on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry? RQ5: How does consumer trust influence purchase intention in the global fashion e- commerce industry? RQ6: How does consumer trust influence purchase decision in the global fashion e- commerce industry? RQ7: How does consumer trust influence customer loyalty in the global fashion e- commerce industry? RQ8: How does consumer trust influence repeat purchase behaviour in the global fashion e- commerce industry?

RQ9: What is the influence of digital marketing on online consumer buying behaviour in the global fashion e-commerce industry? RQ10: Does consumer trust mediate the relationship between social media marketing and online consumer buying behaviour? RQ11: Does consumer trust mediate the relationship between influencer marketing and online consumer buying behaviour? RQ12: Does consumer trust mediate the relationship between content marketing and online consumer buying behaviour? RQ13: Does consumer trust mediate the relationship between personalized advertising and online consumer buying behaviour?

Research Objectives

RO1: To examine the influence of social media marketing on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry. RO2: To examine the influence of influencer marketing on consumer trust in the global fashion e- commerce industry. RO3: To examine the influence of content marketing on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry. RO4: To examine the influence of personalized advertising on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry. RO5: To examine the influence of consumer trust on purchase intention in the global fashion e-commerce industry. RO6: To examine the influence of consumer trust on purchase decision in the global fashion e-commerce industry. RO7: To examine the influence of consumer trust on customer loyalty in the global fashion e-commerce industry.

RO8: To examine the influence of consumer trust on repeat purchase behaviour in the global fashion e-commerce industry. RO9: To examine the influence of digital marketing on online consumer buying behaviour in the global fashion e-commerce industry. RO10: To examine the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between social media marketing and online consumer buying behaviour.

RO11: To examine the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between influencer marketing and online consumer buying behaviour. RO12: To examine the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between content marketing and online consumer buying behaviour.

RO13: To examine the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between personalized advertising and online consumer buying behaviour.

Significance Of the study

The study offers three prospective contributions. Theoretically, it combines the S–O–R sequence with Commitment–Trust Theory to explain why different digital marketing stimuli may influence buying-related responses through trust. Managerially, it highlights credible influencer partnerships, transparent product information, responsible personalisation and responsive social engagement as potentially relevant trust-building practices. Methodologically, it specifies distinct propositions that future research may test using appropriately validated measures; no empirical results are reported here.

Theoretical Significance

This conceptual paper extends the body of knowledge on the aspects of digital marketing, consumer trust and consumer buying behaviour in the context of the global fashion industry e-commerce market and makes an important contribution to the literature in these areas. This conceptual paper proposes digital marketing as multidimensional construct which has social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing and personalized advertising. While other studies mainly focused on digital marketing as a single construct, this conceptual paper is conceptualizing digital marketing as a multidimensional construct. In addition, this conceptual paper adds to the current literature by incorporating the Stimulus- Organism--Response (S-O-R) Theory and the Commitment--Trust Theory. The S-O-R Theory illustrates that digital marketing strategies (stimulus) can bring influence to the psychological response of the consumers which eventually leads to online consumer buying behaviour (response). Additionally, the Commitment--Trust Theory serves as an additional level of support for the importance of consumer trust as a basic mechanism in building long-term business- consumer relationships. This conceptual paper thus adds to the development of consumer behaviour and digital marketing theories in the international fashion e-commerce realm.

Practical Significance

This research would benefit fashion e-commerce companies in developing strategies to enhance their online marketing campaigns and boost customer confidence and trust. Understanding the most effective dimensions of digital marketing which impact online consumer buying behaviour and consumer trust can help businesses allocate marketing resources more effectively and create a more effective customer engagement strategy. Furthermore, the outcomes can help international fashion companies and online retailers create digital marketing strategies that boost consumer trust, streamline the shopping journey, and foster repeat sales, ultimately boosting market competitiveness and sustainability.

Managerial Studies

The study highlights useful managerial implications for marketing managers, digital marketing specialists, brand managers, and e- commerce specialists in the global fashion e- commerce industry. This conceptual paper's findings would aid managers to understand the role of various digital marketing strategies in building consumer trust and influencing online consumer buying behavior, thereby helping them gain a deeper insight into this effect. Specifically, the results will allow managers to determine which aspect of digital marketing (social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, and personalized advertising) is the most effective at improving consumer trust and driving positive consumer actions, such as a purchase. These insights will help organisations manage their marketing resources more effectively and create integrated digital marketing strategies that meet consumer expectations and preferences (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022; Kotler et al., 2021). In addition, the insights gained will help marketers create more impactful social media marketing campaigns, identify influencers with credibility for better brand authenticity, develop engaging digital content that could improve customer relationships, and craft a target ads strategy that would provide better customer experience and respect consumer privacy. These digital marketing efforts can benefit consumer acquisition and boost customer loyalty, stimulate repeat consumer purchases and further the long-term customer relationship. It is believed that these managerial insights will

enhance the performance of marketing, boost the competitive advantage, and facilitate the sustainable growth of business in the more competitive global fashion e-commerce market (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Kannan & Li, 2017; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Methodological Significance

For future empirical work, the four digital marketing dimensions, consumer trust and buying outcomes should be operationalised with validated measures. Researchers could assess indirect effects using structural equation modelling and bootstrapped confidence intervals, provided an appropriate sample and research design are developed. These procedures are recommendations for subsequent testing, not methods implemented in this conceptual paper.

The previous studies mostly were concerned only with the direct links whereas this research is aimed into investigating direct and indirect effects through mediation analysis. The results will be expected to give empirical proof in applying the method of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) specifically with a method of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in studying complex relationships between digital marketing, consumer trust, and consumer buying behavior.

Societal and Policy Significance

This conceptual paper's results could additionally profit policy makers, consumer protection agencies, and those that oversee digital commerce. By understanding the key elements of consumer trust, policymakers can help develop policies that enhance the security of online transactions, safeguard consumer privacy, and encourage ethical digital marketing practices. Additionally, the research could raise awareness for consumers regarding the significance of a trustworthy online shopping ecosystem and inspire companies to more responsibly market products that can support sustainable development in the global digital economy.

Definitions of key terms

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is the use of digital technologies, Internet-based platforms and electronic communication channels to promote products and services, involve consumers and establish long-term customer relationships. Digital marketing offers organizations the ability to engage consumers in real time, provide tailored marketing content, and track marketing performance using data-based analytics, unlike traditional marketing. It involves a number of online marketing techniques such as social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, search engine marketing, email marketing and personalized advertising which can shape the attitudes of consumers, decision to buy, and purchasing behaviour (Kotler et al., 2021; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022).

Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is when consumers are prepared to trust an online retailer, brand or digital platform based on expectations of competence, reliability, honesty and delivery of promises. Consumer trust helps minimize uncertainty and risk, especially when it comes to the security of transactions, privacy protection, and online retailers' information, in an online environment. Consumer trust is one of the most significant factors that influence consumers' purchasing decision and build their loyalty to a business (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen et al., 2003).

Online Consumer Buying Behaviour

Online consumer buying behaviour is the behaviour of consumers involved in seeking information, considering alternatives, decision making and post purchase behaviour in the Internet. It includes what consumers do in response to marketing stimuli, technological influences, and psychological assessment in digital environments that both impact and are impacted by consumers' purchase decisions (Schiffman et al., 2022; Kotler et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a thorough and critical integration of the literature available on digital marketing, consumer trust and online consumer buying behaviour in the fast developing global fashion e-commerce ecosystem. In today's digital age, businesses are undergoing a transformation at an unprecedented speed, and with thousands of businesses existing in the digital space, it has become a necessary condition for an organization to know the relationships between digital promotional strategies and the decision-making process of consumers in order to gain sustainable competitive advantage. This chapter provides a systematic review of relevant empirical studies and theoretical propositions that provide the basics needed to tackle the identified research gaps and conceptually model the mechanisms that underlie online purchasing. These multi-disciplinary views provide a solid academic foundation for the proposed conceptual framework.

Given the high methodological standards of a conceptual paper, the present review is explicitly oriented more toward comparing alternative theoretical frameworks than simply summarising previous literature, and is more focused on identifying the existing contradictions in the literature and examining the shortcomings of previous research designs. One of the drawbacks in the existing body of knowledge is that they are considering digital marketing as a single variable and not as a multi-dimensional environment in which the consumers are operating at the same time. In light of this, the chapter analyzes digital marketing in terms of the four dimensions that constitute the field: social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing and personalized advertising, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of how different stimuli affect the global digital consumer. In addition, this literature review provides a foundation for incorporating the Stimulus- Organism-Response (S-O- R) Theory with the Commitment-Trust Theory. This chapter challenges traditional approaches that emphasize direct relationship between marketing activities and sales, which dominate the current literature, and highlights the importance of the psychological evaluations that take place in the process of cross- border digital transactions. The aim of this review is to highlight how digital marketing tactics (the "stimulus") can effectively be mapped onto online consumer buying behaviour (the "response") and how consumer trust (the "organism") is a critical mediating variable. The chapter is methodologically organised, presenting the conceptual investigation from a macro-environmental perspective to specific relationships between variables. It first explores the industry context, highlighting special logistical and consumer issues in international

This section synthesises the relationships underlying the proposed model: digital marketing stimuli and trust, trust and purchase-related responses, and the direct and indirect pathways linking marketing to behaviour. The global fashion e-commerce setting introduces particular uncertainty regarding authenticity, fit, returns, payment security and personal data. The S–O–R framework positions consumer trust as the organism-level evaluation, while Commitment–Trust Theory explains why confidence in a retailer may support continued relationships. The propositions remain untested and should be interpreted as theoretically grounded expectations.

Setting of the Industry

Digital technologies have revolutionized the world of business and changed the way people interact, market and deliver products to other countries. High-speed Internet, the mobile revolution, artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analysis have become the impetus for digitalization in retail. As a result, the ways of brick-and-mortar buying and selling have dramatically shifted towards digital buying and selling environments, and businesses are now forced to come up with increasingly sophisticated and data-driven digital marketing strategies to reach wider audiences and customise their customer experience in the dynamic international market (Kotler et al., 2021; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). The overall digital growth has seen the global fashion e-commerce market, which includes apparel, footwear, accessories, and beauty products, become one of the fastest- growing and competitive markets globally. The trend is most notable due to the changing nature of consumer lifestyles, which are often overwhelmingly influenced by the convenience of mobile commerce, accessibility to products and services around the world, and the ability to get price comparisons and access to wider product ranges with a single click and in real time. The major international fashion brands such as SHEIN, ASOS, Zalando, Zara Online, H&M; Online, and Zalora have successfully used these digital technologies to break into several international markets in one go, creating complex digital

ecosystems that aim to be a part of the global market (McKinsey & Company, 2024; Statista, 2024). These international fashion giants heavily depend on the innovation of their marketing and international supply chain for their operational success and competitive edge in the global market. But, in today's saturated online promotion environment, digital marketing has turned into the key to success in this area. While managing social media campaigns, collaborating with influencers, and tailoring ads to individual tastes, brands are expected to actively influence customer attitudes and increase engagement with various audiences in different cultural and geographic areas (Appel et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023). However, even with all these enormous technological advances and market possibilities, the fashion e- commerce market globally has unique and formidable problems which actually affect consumer purchasing behavior. The most obvious problem with operations is that online shoppers are not able to physically check the material quality, sizing and fit of fashion items before they buy them online. This separation creates an inherent uncertainty for consumers about the authenticity of products and makes cross-border logistics, return policies, and international supply chain efficiency much more complex and difficult, making online shopping much riskier than offline shopping (Makhitha & Ngobeni, 2024; Deloitte, 2024). Cross-border electronic transactions involve further psychological dangers, in addition to the product-related challenges. With more and more customers buying from foreign brands that they do not recognize, their fears and concerns about payment security, privacy of their data, false product information, and fraudulent transactions skyrocket. The high perceived risks constitute significant barriers to market entry and completion of transactions, demonstrating that merely having a large volume of marketing is not enough to ensure sales in the global market (OECD, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024). As such, building and sustaining strong consumer confidence is the absolute top priority in the fashion e-commerce market. Since online retailers operate across a wide geographical reach, they need to leverage their multidimensional digital marketing approach in order to grab the attention of the customer, but also to guarantee him or her that there are no real risks and that the website is reliable, secure and authentic (Statista, 2025; Shahidi Hamedani et al., 2025).

Online Consumer Buying Behaviour

Online consumer buying behaviour is the sequence of thinking and activities that a consumer engages in from the initial search for information from the internet about a product or service, to evaluate alternatives, making a decision and post purchase behaviour.

Purchase intention is a crucial part of this chain of behaviour, representing the consumer's intention or likelihood of making an online purchase following exposure to digital marketing campaigns. Many scholars have found positive impacts of marketing stimuli on consumers' purchase intentions (Alalwan, 2023; Chaffey & Ellis- Chadwick, 2022; Yunus et al., 2022), but other scholars have found weak or statistically insignificant relationships, which greatly rely on the digital strategy used and the demographic of the target audience.

Overcoming the hurdle of intention to action, the real behavioural outcome is when a consumer overcomes these perceived risks and decides to purchase a product online. The results are inconclusive in the previous studies on the direct effect of digital marketing on this behaviour, highlighting the need for conceptualization of the variables in specific measurable actions. These aspects of seller trust, international brands they don't recognize or a fit product can make a big difference in a consumer's desire to finalize this purchase.

Therefore, the application of targeted digital marketing strategies has the potential to mitigate some of these uncertainties in the industry and break through the multi-layered nature and complexity of consumer's psychological evaluations (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Ilmi et al., 2024; Makhitha & Ngobeni, 2024). Finally, successful purchasing behaviour is not just about a one-off sale, but is the basis of customer satisfaction and repeat purchasing. With the advent of the digital era, businesses have the opportunity to connect with customers on a personal and real-time basis, which can help them create lasting connections and build brand loyalty in a fast-paced and dynamic digital marketplace. Although businesses may not always prioritize the importance of trust in Online Reputation Management, the empirical studies have revealed that the ones that do in a consistent manner, contribute to the trust in Online Reputation Management, with respect to their

brand image and their reversion to the same online platform for the next transactions, (Appel et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2023; Shahidi Hamedani et al., 2025).

Digital Marketing

Based on Chapter 1, it is known that digital marketing is the most important independent variable that affects consumer behaviour in modern e-commerce. It is related to the promotion of products, participation of consumers and the establishment of long-term relationships through the use of an internet-based platform and electronic communication channels. Previous studies have focused on one aspect of digital marketing, but digital marketing is a multidimensional phenomenon where all these strategies are interconnected and are responsible for the formation of consumers' perceptions. Including only one dimension does not provide an integrated view of all the dimensions consumers face during the online shopping journey, which need to be included in a comprehensive framework consisting of four key dimensions (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022).

Social Media Marketing

Brands can connect with their audience via social media channels like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and X directly. By engaging in real- time interaction between fashion retailers and global audiences, building a sense of community, and expanding brand awareness, this digital touchpoint opens up new avenues for customer interaction and engagement.This digital touchpoint offers opportunities for real-time interaction, fostering a sense of community and expanding brand awareness, thereby increasing customer interaction and engagement (Appel et al., 2022).

Influencer Marketing

Fashion influencer marketing is a strategy that has taken the fashion world by storm by leveraging social media personalities' influence on their loyal followers to market fashion products. In the global fashion industry, relying on the credibility and reach of these individuals, brands can play a pivotal role in influencing consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and ultimately purchase decisions, thereby making a significant impact (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Content Marketing

Content marketing is all about producing and sharing useful, informative, and interesting digital content. This approach doesn't seek to directly sell a product, but rather informs consumers, establishes brand trust, and fosters ongoing ties and connections by delivering valuable content that resonates with consumer interests and lifestyle goals (Alalwan, 2023).

Personalized Advertising

Personalised advertising leverages consumer data, big data analytics, and AI to show personalised ads based on a person's preference and past shopping behaviours. This personalized strategy allows for highly personalized product suggestions, making the online shopping journey more enjoyable for customers and boosting the marketing campaign's impact (Limbu & Huhmann, 2024).

Customer Trust

Customer trust is defined as the willingness of a consumer to place trust in an online retailer, the brand and/or the digital platform, with the firm expectation that the entity is competent, reliable, honest, and fulfils its promises. Trust on the global fashion e-commerce market is an important psychological factor that helps to actively minimize the uncertainty, risk, and vulnerability of consumers in the process of online shopping. Trust has been seen as a primary solution to some of the major concerns consumers have about the security of payment gateways, the safety of personal data and the credibility of the product representations offered by the seller they are not familiar with (Makhitha & Ngobeni, 2024; Kumar et al., 2023). While customer trust has been noted as a primary determinant of customers' willingness to conduct transactions on the Internet,

this variable has been measured alone in much of the literature to date. This conceptual paper has identified customer trust as an important mediating variable between the multi-dimensional digital marketing strategies and the final online consumer buying behaviour. In this way, trust is, as Ilmi et al. (2024)

and Limbu & Huhmann (2024) explained, the psychological bridge that makes it possible to understand digitally how marketing tactics - - like genuine influencer endorsements and clear content marketing - - are able to lower the perceived risk and boost consumer trust in the online environment. Although the e-commerce technologies are continuously evolving, lack of trust is one of the most significant obstacles consumers face in making cross-border purchases, according to recent research. It is therefore crucial to comprehend how businesses can systematically invest in efforts that foster trust, such as creating genuine consumer reviews and personalized, responsive communication, to support positive consumer buying behaviour and to sustain consumer retention in the long run (OECD, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024).

Underpinning Theories

This research uses existing psychological and marketing theories to build a robust theoretical underpinning for the conceptual framework proposed in this conceptual paper, as it entails considering the complex mechanisms that underlie online consumer purchase behaviour. As mentioned in conceptual paper methodologies, it is important that relevant theories be explicitly included and synthesized together to explain the relationship between variables and to fill the gap in the existing theories in the field of global business. The research firmly grounded in these specific theories successfully elucidates the psychological responses as a result of the external digital marketing stimuli, which in turn affect the definitive response of the subject's behavior (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022).

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory forms the foundation of the present study and offers a very structured perspective to investigate the influence of the digital environmental stimuli on consumers' purchasing behavior. In this context, the "Stimulus" is the external factors in the environment; in this case, the multi-dimensional marketing strategies consumers constantly face (social media, influencer, content and personalized advertising). The 'Organism' is the consumer's internal cognitive and emotional evaluations, which are well represented in this conceptual paper with the development of customer trust. Lastly, the "Response" covers the end-behaviors which align with the dimensions of online consumer buying behaviour, including purchase intention and purchase decision (Alalwan, 2023; Appel et al., 2022). The S-O-R Theory has been extensively used in general retail research, however, its use has not been thoroughly investigated in the context of the global fashion market and the highly complex digital marketing environment. The incorporation of this theory enables the study to clearly break away from the direct effect models that have been traditionally used, and offers solid empirical evidence for the need to build psychological trust on the internal level before positive and sustained purchasing behaviour is achieved through the use of external, digital stimuli (Shahidi Hamedani et al., 2025; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Commitment–Trust Theory

Commitment–Trust Theory complements S–O–R by explaining why confidence in an exchange partner is central to ongoing consumer–retailer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In global fashion e-commerce, trustworthy product claims, secure transactions and dependable fulfilment may encourage both immediate purchase decisions and longer-term loyalty. This perspective adds a relational explanation to the S–O–R psychological sequence; it does not imply that trust guarantees a transaction or that the proposed effects have already been empirically demonstrated.

This conceptual framework is designed to demonstrate how TPB can be interconnected with the trust-building processes of digital marketing, and how favorable purchasing decisions and customer loyalty are not just impulsive reactions, but well-calculated intentions. If consumers perceive that the digital marketing approach is transparent, informative and personalized and thus increases their perceived control, then the

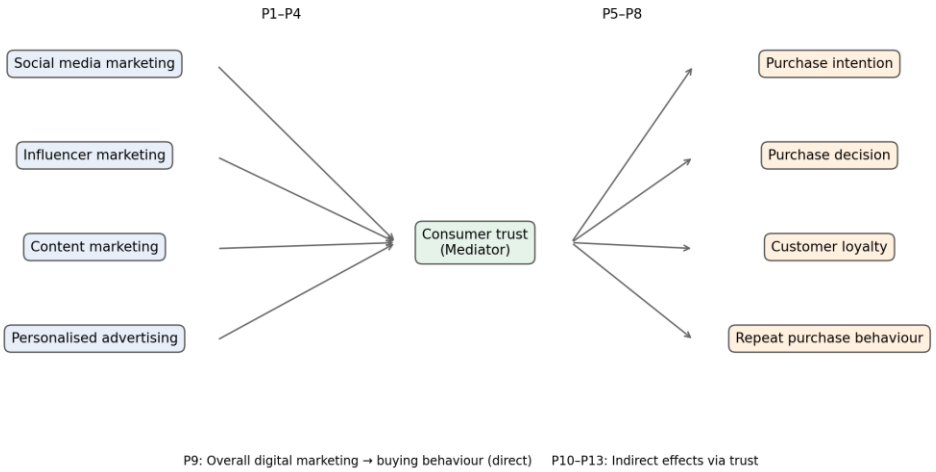
latter's behavioral intention will naturally become measurable and concrete repeat purchase behavior in the competitive digital marketing environment (Chaffey & Ellis- Chadwick, 2022; Limbu & Huhmann, 2024).

Development of Research Framework

Figure 1 presents the original conceptual model. Social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing and personalised advertising are treated as four distinct digital marketing dimensions (stimuli). Each is proposed to influence consumer trust (organism; P1–P4), which is proposed to influence purchase intention, purchase decision, customer loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour (responses; P5–P8). Consumer trust is also proposed to mediate the association between each marketing dimension and overall online consumer buying behaviour (P10–P13). The framework additionally retains the proposed direct association between overall digital marketing and online consumer buying behaviour (P9). These relationships are propositions, not empirical findings.

The application of digital marketing as a multidimensional construct directly addresses the previous theoretical limitations which did not capture the interconnectedness of digital ecosystems (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023). As per this conceptual model, the independent variable, called STIMULUS, is represented by the four critical factors of digital marketing namely: social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing and personalized advertising. Customer trust as the psychological process, which handles these digital stimuli, is the mediator (Organism) that helps to lessen the perceived risks of the digital cross-border transactions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen et al., 2003). Last but not least, the dependent variable (Response) is actively measured by four different outcomes of online consumer buying behaviour, purchase intention, purchase decision, customer loyalty, and repeat purchase behaviour (Schiffman et al., 2022; Kotler et al., 2021). This all-inclusive approach allows for a complete picture of the effectiveness of multidimensional digital strategies in giving companies a sustainable competitive advantage (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Kannan & Li, 2017).

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework (P1–P13)



Development of Propositions

The integrated theoretical foundation and research objectives result in the following propositions that articulate the proposed direct and mediating relationships between the constructs.

Digital Marketing Dimensions and Consumer Trust

The social media platforms and the influence of influencers offer live interactions and social proof, crucial factors that boost brand awareness and actively influence consumers' positive attitudes toward less-known international brands (Appel et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Moreover, valuable content and use of AI tailored advertisements boost brand credibility and help consumers receive highly relevant product recommendations, thereby reducing perceived risks and building confidence in the digital market, which are

essential to bridge the trust gap and strengthen the digital marketplace's credibility (Alalwan, 2023; Limbu & Huhmann, 2024).

Therefore, the following propositions are proposed: P1: Social media marketing has a positive influence on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry. P2: Influencer marketing has a positive influence on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry. P3: Content marketing has a positive influence on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry. P4: Personalized advertising has a positive influence on consumer trust in the global fashion e-commerce industry.

Consumer Trust and Online Consumer Buying Outcomes

It has always been acknowledged that consumer trust is a crucial element in online transactions, a trust that buyers have when they believe that sellers will keep their word, take care of their payment and safeguard their personal information (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen et al., 2003). Increased trust levels minimize customers' doubts regarding the physical nature of fashion products purchased online, which directly affects their intention to purchase, purchase decision, and loyalty, thereby increasing their likelihood of returning to the platform for future purchases (OECD, 2022; Kumar et al., 2023). So the following propositions are set up: P5: Consumer trust has a positive influence on purchase intention in the global fashion e-commerce industry. P6: Consumer trust has a positive influence on purchase decision in the global fashion e-commerce industry. P7: Consumer trust has a positive influence on customer loyalty in the global fashion e-commerce industry. P8: Consumer trust has a positive influence on repeat purchase behaviour in the global fashion e-commerce industry.

The Direct and Mediating Effects

Past studies show that digital marketing, in general, influences consumer buying behavior but the direct impact without psychological processing can be inconsistent (Yadav & Rahman, 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Consumer trust, defined as the belief that goods are authentic and that data privacy is ensured, is believed to be the key underlying mechanism that can successfully convert initial marketing stimuli to concrete online buying behaviour, as perceived risks regarding authenticity of the product and data privacy are high (Kim et al., 2008; UNCTAD, 2024). Based on this, the following direct and mediating propositions are proposed: P9: Digital marketing has a positive influence on online consumer buying behaviour in the global fashion e-commerce industry. P10: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and online consumer buying behaviour. P11: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and online consumer buying behaviour. P12: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between content marketing and online consumer buying behaviour.

P13: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between personalized advertising and online consumer buying behaviour.

Conceptual Framework and Propositions

The framework specifies 13 propositions for future empirical evaluation. P1–P4 concern the four marketing dimensions and consumer trust; P5–P8 concern trust and four buying outcomes; P9 concerns the overall direct marketing–behaviour relationship; and P10–P13 concern dimension-specific indirect effects through trust. The conceptual contribution lies in mapping these pathways within a unified explanation rather than reporting statistical support. Future research should clarify whether the four marketing dimensions are modelled separately or as a higher-order composite and distinguish intention, completed purchase and post-purchase outcomes in measurement.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This model suggests that online fashion retailers should evaluate marketing effectiveness partly through consumer trust rather than reach or engagement alone. Social media interactions may communicate responsiveness; influencers may offer social proof when endorsements are credible; informative content may

reduce product uncertainty; and personalised advertising may improve relevance but can undermine trust if privacy expectations are violated. The S–O–R perspective explains the transition from external cues to internal trust evaluations and then to buying-related responses, while Commitment–Trust Theory highlights the relational importance of reliability over time. The model remains conceptual: proposed associations may be weaker or vary across markets, brand familiarity and perceived risk. Future studies should test the 13 propositions and compare actual purchasing with intentions and loyalty.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This conceptual paper integrates four digital marketing dimensions, consumer trust and four online consumer buying outcomes in global fashion e-commerce. Its contribution is a structured set of 13 testable propositions supported by S–O–R and Commitment–Trust Theory. Empirical research is needed to establish whether the proposed relationships hold across markets and whether privacy concerns, brand familiarity, product uncertainty or cross-border shopping experience alter their strength. Longitudinal or behavioural data would help distinguish intentions from actual purchases and repeat purchasing. No causal or statistical claims are made in the present paper.

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