

## The effect of social media marketing on customer buying intention on the context of entrepreneurial firms: Moderating role of customer involvement

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the social media marketing characteristics affecting customer buying intention. The model was theoretically based on and explored using a quantitative approach. A survey strategy was adopted, and a five-point Likert questionnaire was distributed to Jordanian citizens. A total of 237 responses were received. The hypothesis testing followed structural equation modeling using SPSS software. The findings suggest that all social media marketing subcontracts exhibit a significant positive effect on buying intention, whereby accessibility is the highest. Customer involvement also moderates the relationship between social media marketing and customer buying intention. The proposed model provides new insights into social media marketing drivers affecting buying intentions and engagement with an entrepreneurial brand or product. This study reaffirms that social media marketing can significantly influence the success of Jordanian entrepreneurial firms and understanding how to use this tool effectively can significantly change how businesses operate.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's world, productivity and business innovation are outcomes that entrepreneurship can add to an economy. This phenomenon can improve living standards and wealth, and enable the emergence of new markets, which is undoubtedly a drive for many businesses. Furthermore, the complexities and dynamic nature of business environments today require firms to utilize new innovative methods and tools to reach out to a broader market and tap into new spaces that have never been considered before.

In Jordan, businesses constantly adopt innovative approaches to enhance their outreach. This enables penetration into new markets (Growhome, 2020). Entrepreneurship is gaining attention among the younger generation in Jordan for various reasons (Growhome, 2020). Entrepreneurship refers to the opportunities that individuals and firms seek, regardless of the resources they attain, which inject ideas into the market and lead to significant economic growth for the firm. Entrepreneurial firms can facilitate the success of different tools and achieve their goals, and the Internet is one of the most powerful tools. It is utilized for marketing purposes, particularly on social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Consumers use social media platforms to search for products or brands and communicate with the brands and companies with which they feel connected with (Vivek et al., 2014). This real-time communication emphasizes that social media channels provide two-way interaction that must entail trust and commitment to build customer loyalty in the long run

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(Vivek et al., 2014). Especially that the evolution of the internet has re-carved how firms shape their online image, and that's why firms are shifting away from traditional marketing methods and from only ".com" into more innovative and virtual forms. Therefore, understanding social media tactics will help understand buying behaviors and future intentions (Pham & Gammoh, 2015). As a result of this shift, a new phenomenon that blends marketing strategies using social media as a tool is known as social media marketing (SMM) (Gordhamer, 2010). Although SMM is widely addressed in the literature, there seems to be very little investigation into the SMM characteristics that lead to buying intentions. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of SMM (independent variable) on customer buying intention (dependent variable) in Jordanian entrepreneurial firms. The current research aims to answer the following question: *How does SMM with its four characteristics affect customers' buying intentions?*"

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Internet and Social Media

The Internet plays a crucial role in today's contemporary world, and it has carved a different approach for businesses and organizations to operate. It also affects consumer behavior and how customers respond to products and services (Kailler, 2017). In recent years, social media platforms have influenced customer choices and decisions. Social media have been utilized as a strong marketing platform and have facilitated day-to-day operations to better understand customers' buying intentions (Kailler, 2017). According to Ahmed and Zahid (2014), social media and the Internet are effective facilitation channels that firms and customers use to engage with each other and reach broader target markets (Berthon et al., 2012). Firms have adopted this approach to gain maximum value and extend the capacity of their reach (Ampofo, 2011), which has resulted in a shift in the way firms communicate; they no longer respond as much through traditional marketing channels, but instead rely on an integrated marketing approach that consists of SMM to obtain information on customer preferences and the factors, reasons, and characteristics contributing to consumers' choices (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014). Entrepreneurship has become a crucial concept in the current business climate and is considered a promising research area in business management (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011).

### 2.2 Customer Buying Intention

Marketing research has seen extensive interest in buying intentions and whether this leads to actual buying behavior. Social media tools, such as email, websites, forums, and knowledge sharing over the Internet, influence customers' decision-making processes, experiences, and future buying intentions (O'Brien, 2011). Despite the evolving social media mechanisms adopted by firms, the process of making a decision that determines the purchasing intention of a customer remains the same. First, a potential customer gains knowledge and awareness of a product through the participation and input of other users. Second, they will develop either a positive or negative idea or image of that product. Third, they acted on it. This sequence does not change, regardless of marketing and advertising tools and methods. Therefore, utilizing user-generated content as a strategic focus created and developed by consumers in response to a specific brand or company influences knowledge of the product, perception/feeling towards it, and actions that lead to it. On the other hand, Jin and Kang (2011) describe buying intentions as behaviors leading to the decision to purchase a product spontaneously and on a short-term basis.

Abdullah et al. (2016) found that interactivity with technologies, such as mobile commerce, has a crucial impact on customers' buying intention and proposed a strong relationship between interactivity and buying intention. Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2014) confirmed this hypothesis. Hence, the interactivity of social media advertising carves and shapes buying intentions towards products advertised through social media ads. Therefore, buying intention is a universally used tool to measure the effectiveness of a marketing strategy, which, in turn, estimates predicted sales. (Morwitz, 2014).

### 2.3 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

According to Coremetrics (2010), social media is one of the most rapidly growing marketing techniques in the world. SMM is a product of social media platforms that is used for advertising products and services at a low cost, yet multiplied outreach (Thao & Anh, 2020). This new era has forced businesses to think outside the box, as it affects brand reputation, brand management, and consumer decision making in many different dimensions (Godey et al., 2016).

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and advertising are the two basic strategies that facilitate successful SMM. However, this can only be facilitated through the openness of communication and information sharing (Wibowo et al., 2021), speed of information dispensary and real-time response, accessibility to online platforms, and participation through purchasing a product or service or simply intending to engage with that product or service in the future. Nevertheless, an important attribute of SMM is the sharing of information, promoting products/services, exercising customer service, entertainment, and capitalizing on the relationship between the business organization or brand and the customer (Shen & Bissell, 2013).

Notably, no specific definition of SMM has been established yet. However, researchers define the term as the process by which online users are connected to each other through viral communication channels (Pentina et al., 2012). Some consider

it an effective tool that firms use to gain popularity among customers by gaining recognition through social media platforms (Moretti & Tuan, 2014). However, others consider SMM as the exploitation of social media platforms to promote brands and products of interest (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). An additional perspective of SMM is the creation, distribution, promotion, and consumption of personalized relationships with customers (Godey et al., 2016). Regardless, common characteristics exist within all these definitions, such as bringing value to all parties using these social media platforms and encouraging users to recommend and view their feedback to other users (Kumar et al., 2013). However, social media platforms differ in blogs, pictures, videos, and wikis (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Another critical feature of SMM is the cross-communication and marketing channels created by businesses and firms. Babac (2011) highlighted recent shifts in the marketing landscape. According to the researcher, the changes in communication mechanisms between business organizations and consumers have shifted in the last decade from a no-connection exchange to a contrary shift to what is happening today. The emergence of social media has changed the traditional method of interaction to obtain feedback. In addition to the power of WOM, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has had an enormous impact on consumers; it is more informative, influential, and powerful than traditional methods of marketing and promotion because of how WOM travels.

This drives marketers to seriously consider and strategize the impacts of SMM in terms of the futuristic impacts that online communities can have on customers' buying intentions (Ramsunder, 2011). Kim et al. (2015) supported this view. Their study revealed that every interaction on social media could affect a customer's purchasing intention regarding a product or service. Hence, the direct interaction of SMM has lasting effects (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). In this study, the components of SMM that will be discussed and based on supporting research are openness, speed, accessibility, and participation. After presenting the literature, the following hypothesis is proposed.

*H1: There is a significant relationship between SMM and customer buying intention in entrepreneurial firms in Jordan. Level  $\leq 0.05$ .*

### 2.3.1 Openness

According to Barnes (2011), SMM is characterized by openness, as it is an easy-to-use mechanism that enables users to create content and share it with other users. On the other hand, Safko (2010) refers to openness as the limit to which information is available to the public on social media platforms. Another definition by Bannister and Connolly (2012) states that openness refers to the revelation of information in a reachable manner. However, a consensus affirms that barriers to accessing information are limited when it comes to social media, as it is characterized by openness to feedback, accessibility, sharing of information freely, and active participation (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). Several studies (Treem & Leonardi 2012) investigate the positive impact of social media openness on firms and organizations and emphasize the need to better understand the concept of "openness" to strategies, effective decisions, and capitalize on business opportunities. They also added that openness facilitates innovation and product development; open information sharing, and a helpful communication environment are advantageous inputs to this process.

Although the nature of social media platforms depends on the degree of perceived openness, it varies, as some appear more open than others (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). For example, openness on social networking sites is perceived as the most essential and prominent characteristic that differentiates it from other social media types (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). This finding supports the idea that openness is a critical attribute of an effective SMM strategy. After presenting the literature, this study proposes the following sub-hypothesis:

*H1a: There is a significant relationship between openness and customer buying intention in entrepreneurial firms in Jordan. Level  $\leq 0.05$ .*

### 2.3.2 Speed

According to Taprial and Kanwar (2012), speed refers to the pace at which information is readily available as soon as it is published on a relevant platform. Additionally, it denotes the ability to share content with family and friends immediately. Finally, it states the capability to instantaneously communicate in real-time events. This preserves accuracy and reliability (Ahmed, 2017). Furthermore, the phenomenon of impatient customers in various contexts is becoming a common characteristic among all types of (Ma et al., 2020). This means that offering real-time communication will accelerate customers' decision speed, meaning that decisions are made more quickly (Ma et al., 2020).

As Godey et al. (2016) mention in their research on SMM, brands aim to build a company that is flexible in responding to market trends and consumer behaviors. Therefore, the traditional advertising approach has shifted from well-thought and thorough campaigns to a spontaneous responsive approach that feeds off real-time interaction (Kallier, 2017). Furthermore, in countless service systems, customers can endure only a limited waiting time for a service, and they leave the system if their

service has not begun within that time (Ma et al., 2020). This finding supports the notion that the speed of response is important if firms aim to increase outreach (Wibowo, 2021).

This element of speed in SMM and exchange of information is prominent in various product and service industries as well as medicine and health (Sobowale et al., 2020), online travel agent websites (Lee and Hong, 2016), e-commerce, and the hotel and tourism industry (Abou-Shouk & Khalifa, 2017).

Although research confirms that communication processes in the virtual world are faster than face-to-face exchange because of the technology facilitating this, the speed of decision-making in the virtual world is much faster as well (Heydari et al., 2011). Hence, a significant advantage of SMM is the spread speed. This is how quickly the information is dispensed. By contrast, the traditional WOM method does not capture these opinions or views, as they are intangible and disappear. On the other hand, social media WOM has the capability to retain that knowledge and information (Thao & Anh, 2020) and communicate it with users. Interestingly, Ghose et al. (2012) stated that 87% of customers rely on online user-generated content to make hotel-related purchase decisions, in contrast to the traditional WOM generated through marketers. This reaffirms that the speed at which users share information with family and friends or post product/service reviews on various platforms significantly influences the effectiveness of SMM. After presenting the literature, this study proposes the following:

*H1b: There is a significant relationship between speed and customer buying intention in entrepreneurial firms in Jordan. Level  $\leq 0.05$ .*

### 2.3.3 Accessibility

The improvement in information accessibility is considered a crucial element of social media effectiveness and impact, as highlighted by Schultz et al. (2012). The development of the Internet has meant that social media platforms provide an excellent environment for firms to generate and access information (Llopis-Amorós et al., 2019). However, it also allows users to engage in interactions through communication with each other (Hajli, 2014). This means that people no longer need to be physically present in meetings or business-related activities, thus offering easier access to information. Furthermore, the primary interface of the Internet and social media platforms means that users do not need high-level skills to navigate through these platforms (Westlund & Weibull, 2013). Arguably, although accessing social media does not require special skills, this area of accessibility can be linked to digital literacy (Nielsen & Schroder, 2014). Even in countries where social media accessibility is not a barrier, generalizing people's abilities to 'easily' access and navigate a platform is inaccurate (Nielsen & Schroder, 2014).

Parveen et al. (2015) stated that accessibility allows organizations to control the type of content and information they seek to convey to their clients and customers in a timely manner. Hence, developers such as Apple and Google have been working on their operating systems, such as iOS and Android, to improve the accessibility interface of their platforms. Although information accessibility is a crucial subject in the marketing field, there are few studies on this topic.

Parra-Lopez et al. (2011) stated that the ability to access information is important in many settings. In their research on intentions to use social media in organizing and taking vacation trips, they identified that it is essential for social media platforms to enable easy accessibility for travelers to not only read and access information, but also contribute by sharing their tourism experiences. Furthermore, earlier research (Parra-Lopez, 2011) found that platforms that are easy to use and learn are flexible and that allow primary navigation and participation will encourage users to contribute to content within these platforms.

In the research on "Developing an Accessible and Inclusive Social Media Presence," Spina (2018) recommended that in order to make websites and platforms more accessible, firms should consider color contrast to cater for color-blind people, font, text, layout, keeping the content simple and avoiding patterns, including captions and transcripts or even audio descriptions to name a few. The researcher also stated that keeping up with a platform's accessibility features was done by following their official web pages. Hafez et al. (2017) supported this notion. The authors concluded that barriers to the accessibility of social media platforms include layout and color contrast. After presenting the literature, this study proposes the following:

*H1c: There is a significant relationship between accessibility and customer buying intention in entrepreneurial firms in Jordan. Level  $\leq 0.05$ .*

### 2.3.4 Participation

Although various studies have focused on social media and its determinants, few have incorporated the perspective of "participation" as a key element of SMM (Nemec et al., 2019). According to Delone and McLean (2018), the benefits of participation are significant, as they are determinants of the value of the information system of any firm. Ranjan and Read (2016) classified customer participation as a crucial component and factor in the production process. Participation refers to the interaction between interested parties that allows them to remain engaged and in contact with each other. (Stelzner, 2010). The

researcher also explained participation as the extent to which customers are engaged in service production, emphasizing it as a key characteristic of social media that drives customer participation, which results in higher purchasing intentions. Hsu and Lin (2008) illustrated that social norms are one of the determinants of participation, proposing that they are defined as the level to which the user notices their participating activities in a blog, group, and event. Moreover, Tynan et al. (2010) point out that participation leads to high consistency among customers. Hence, firms should consider all the factors necessary to motivate customers to participate and engage in communication exchanges.

In the case of social media, there are two types of customer participation: direct and indirect. Direct transactions are customers' behavior during the purchasing process. Indirect transactions include what customers recommend to each other, which is called e-WOM, searching for specific information while deciding what to purchase, and after-sales after the purchasing process is completed (Zhang et al., 2014).

In order to motivate customer participation, firms establish platforms that satisfy customers' interests for value creation, which will actually result in enhancing brand satisfaction (Hosseini, 2013). (Chen et al., 2011) posit that when customers share feedback, they automatically participate in co-production activities. In their research on the gains of user participation in social media, Hsu & Lin (2008) pointed out that participation has a significant impact on knowledge sharing. Furthermore, users participate in online communities by providing positive feedback about a product or service. This means that information and feedback are advertising the product or service for the brand before any "active" advertising takes place. After presenting the literature, this study proposes the following:

*H1d: There is a significant relationship between participation and customer buying intention in entrepreneurial firms in Jordan. Level  $\leq 0.05$ .*

### 2.5 Customer Involvement

Entrepreneurs and employees in firms deal with diverse customers who have different characteristics (e.g., skills, educational level, culture exposure, and overall knowledge). These characteristics will contribute in one way or another to the interaction process that occurs between the firms and the customer (Yoo & Arnold, 2016). Moreover, such characteristics highlight how customers behave towards business firms (Yoo & Arnold, 2016). Human and Biesanz (2011) pointed out that these individual characteristics help in the "judgment ability" of individuals and in deciding how they behave.

Customer characteristics are skills, abilities, and the limit to which the customer is involved. The latter is defined as "customer involvement" (Yoo et al., 2016). Customer involvement ranges from personal conversations and interacting with others on social networking sites to affecting the consumption of specific brands on brand-related sites (Libai et al., 2010). Hence, involvement differs from one type of site to another, which means that different levels of involvement lead to different eWOM behavioral outcomes (Dessart et al., 2015). This is because the involved customers are likely to convey their feedback and experiences to others. Hence, they either recommend or advise others not to purchase a specific brand or product (Islam & Rahman, 2016).

Customer involvement is one of the most attractive new concepts among firms in today's business settings. It has gained much attention in several industries and is therefore regarded as one of the most searched and investigated areas (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Andreu et al. (2010) highlighted that customer involvement refers to a customer's psychological state towards a specific brand or product, which reflects the importance of that brand/product. Moreover, the researchers stated that the level of customer involvement affects the degree of brand loyalty, the decision-making process involved in selecting a product, and the purchasing decision. The question that remains is why do firms care to understand customer involvement more? First, Henderson et al. (2014) state that firms pay full attention to customer involvement to motivate them. Accordingly, this will lead to strong long-term connections between firms and customers. In a psychological state, customer involvement leads not only to purchasing a specific brand/product but also fosters action; customers will provide their feedback or like the brand's page because of the experience or product they enjoy (Brodie et al., 2011). Hsieh and Chang (2016) stated that customer involvement enhances the quality of the relationship between the customer and the brand and motivates the customer's purchasing intention toward a brand.

Researchers such as Islam et al. (2019) have revealed that customer involvement is strengthened through service quality, which has a crucial impact on the level of involvement. Interactivity can be classified as an important factor in exploring the driving factors of brand involvement. On the other hand, the outcomes of brand involvement may include WOM, satisfaction, and trust (Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018), as they are the result of a particular interaction, experience, or engagement with a brand, product, or service.

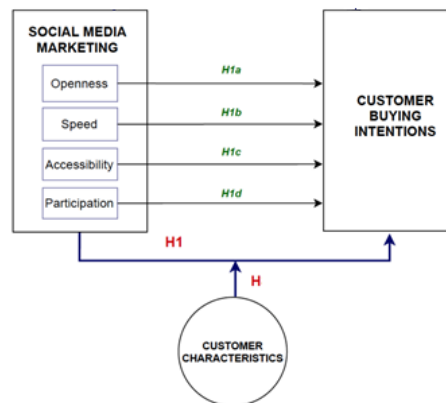
Bylund and Lindgren (2017) posit that customers are considered co-creators for brands, as they contribute to the process of providing insights to other customers. Grönroos (2012) posit that when more customers engage with the firm as co-creators, customers are more likely to remain attached and loyal to the firm itself. In this context, Molinillo et al. (2020) illustrate that eWOM and this co-creation process are enhanced through customer involvement. Moreover, researchers pointed out several

factors related to social interactivity, such as family influence, advertisements, and television or social media presence. After presenting the literature, this study proposes the following:

*H2: Customer involvement moderates the relationship between SMM and customer buying intention in entrepreneurial firms in Jordan. level  $\leq 0.05$*

### *Proposed Conceptual Model*

Having said this, and based on the literature review, Fig. 1 represents the proposed conceptual model including the hypotheses intended for this research study.



**Fig. 1.** Proposed Research Model

### **3. Research Methodology**

The research methodology designed for this research study is quantitative research. A survey questionnaire was developed to test the hypotheses of the conceptual model in Figure 2.2. The survey consists of closed-ended questions, and the scaling measurement used in this study is on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A non-probability convenience sampling technique is used in this study. As a result, 237 respondents who benefited from Jordanian entrepreneurial firms formed the sample for this research. The response rate of the questionnaire was noteworthy; all responses were included, as the response rate was 100%, with no outliers detected. To analyze the data, structural equation Modelling (SEM) is necessary to assess the relationships among the variables and the quality and validity of the constructs/scales utilized.

### **4. Data Analysis and Results**

This study collected and analyzed 237 respondents from the sample population. A summary of the sample profiles is presented as follows:

#### **Demographic Summary:**

- **Gender:** The percentage of females 74.68% was higher than that of males (25.32%), showing a clear gender disparity.
- **Age:** Respondents aged 31-40 years accounted for 40.51% followed by 18-30 years accounted for 36.29% of respondents. Over 50 years accounted for 5.91% and the 41-50 years category accounted for 17.30% of the population.

**Education level:** Bachelor's degree holders were 54.01%, and master's degree holders represented 27.85%. Doctoral degree holders were 4.22%, college degree holders were 5.06%, and high school or lower qualification was 8.86%.

**Knowledge of using computers and social media:** Excellent knowledge of using computers and social media was 55.70%, very good knowledge of using computers and social media was 34.60%, and good knowledge of using computers and social media (9.70%). The last category did not account for any percentage.

#### *Construct Validity and Reliability Tests*

The results show that, with respect to Cronbach's alpha, the highest was for participation ( $\alpha = 0.899$ ), while the second highest was for the sub-construct customer involvement ( $\alpha = 0.878$ ). However, the least-rated reliability test was used for construct

accessibility ( $\alpha = 0.785$ ). From the foregoing findings, since the minimum threshold was 0.70, this meant that all constructs were internally consistent and reliable. The reliability of the constructs was further confirmed by the composite reliability test, and Brown (2012) noted that the minimum threshold was 0.70. From the results in Table 1, the minimum composite reliability was 0.821 for accessibility, and none of the constructs had an alpha coefficient of less than 0.70, which meant that all the constructs used in this study were internally consistent and reliable.

**Table 1**  
Reliability Testing

	items	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability
Openness	5	0.867	0.867	0.904
Speed	3	0.864	0.865	0.917
Accessibility	2	0.785	0.761	0.821
Participation	5	0.899	0.902	0.926
Customer involvement	10	0.878	0.882	0.902
Buying intention	2	0.795	0.795	0.868
Social Media Marketing	15	0.826	0.841	0.938
Customer Buying Intention	2	0.855	0.892	0.914

*Validity Tests: Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

This research comprises three major constructs: social media marketing (SMM), customer characteristics (CC), and customer buying intention (INT). As the research constructs and sub-constructs were measured as latent variables, CFA was carried out using SPSS, and the initial measurement model is presented in Fig. 2. The corresponding path coefficients are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Initial CFA Measurement Model – Convergent Validity

			Estimate	Standardized	S.E.	C.R.	P
Openness	OPN1	← OPN	1.000	.657			
	OPN2	← OPN	1.334	.820	.126	10.585	.000
	OPN3	← OPN	1.356	.825	.128	10.633	.000
	OPN4	← OPN	1.345	.804	.129	10.429	.000
	OPN5	← OPN	1.106	.658	.122	9.090	.000
Speed	SPD1	← SPD	1.000	.836			
	SPD2	← SPD	.994	.844	.069	14.513	.000
	SPD3	← SPD	.973	.791	.072	13.451	.000
Accessibility	ACC1	← ACC	1.000	.426			
	ACC2	← ACC	1.867	.970	.413	4.525	.000
Participation	PTC1	← PTC	1.000	.817			
	PTC2	← PTC	.946	.741	.075	12.599	.000
	PTC3	← PTC	.983	.855	.064	15.338	.000
	PTC4	← PTC	.937	.852	.061	15.276	.000
	PTC5	← PTC	.914	.721	.073	12.582	.000
Customer involvement	INV1	← INV	1.000	.490			
	INV2	← INV	.956	.473	.106	9.028	.000
	INV3	← INV	.879	.392	.127	6.899	.000
	INV4	← INV	1.027	.471	.173	5.947	.000
	INV5	← INV	1.035	.484	.171	6.052	.000
	INV6	← INV	.800	.338	.172	4.645	.000
	INV7	← INV	1.032	.416	.189	5.452	.000
	INV8	← INV	1.372	.569	.205	6.705	.000
	INV9	← INV	2.109	.995	.245	8.622	.000
	INV10	← INV	.769	.298	.183	4.192	.000
Customer Buying Intention	INT1	← INT	1.000	.537			
	INT2	← INT	1.633	.999	.167	9.760	.000

Convergent validity was violated for two constructs. The first was customer involvement, where the standardized path coefficient for INV included three problem items: INV3 ( $\beta = 0.392$ ), INV6 ( $\beta = 0.338$ ), and INV10 ( $\beta = 0.298$ ). Since these items were less than 0.40, they were eventually excluded from the analysis. The subsequent CFA measurement model showing the revised results is illustrated in Fig. 3. From the final measurement model above, as shown in Table 4, all path coefficients met the minimum standardized path coefficient criteria. For openness, the minimum path coefficient was for OPN1 ( $\beta = 0.657$ ), and for speed, the minimum coefficient was for SPD3 ( $\beta = 0.791$ ) and for accessibility ACC1 ( $\beta = 0.426$ ) and PTC5 ( $\beta = 0.914$ ) for participation, AWR5 ( $\beta = 0.601$ ) for brand awareness, IMG4 ( $\beta = 0.732$ ) for brand image, INV7 ( $\beta = 0.416$ ) for customer involvement, and INT1 ( $\beta = 0.537$ ) for customer buying intention.

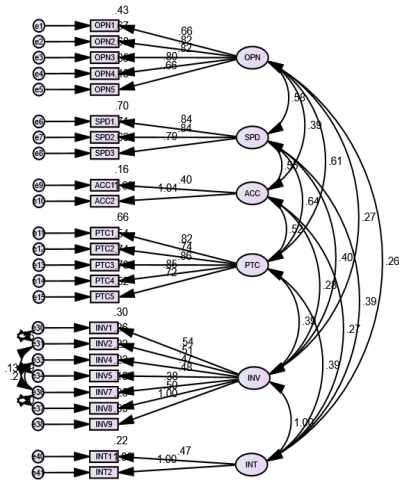


Fig. 2. Initial CFA Measurement Model

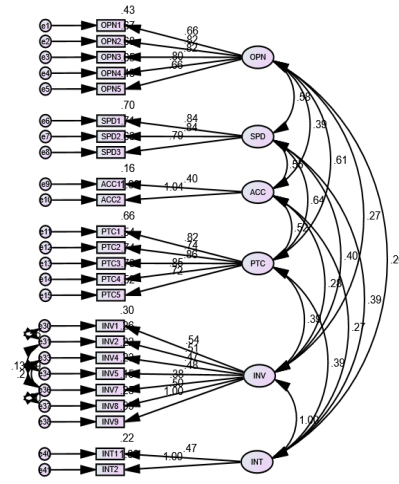


Fig. 3. Final CFA Measurement Model

Table 3  
Final CFA Measurement Model – Convergent Validity

			Estimate	Standardized	S.E.	C.R.	P
Openness	OPN1	← OPN	1.000	.657			
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	INV4	← INV	1.027	.471	.173	5.947	.000
	INV5	← INV	1.035	.484	.171	6.052	.000
	INV7	← INV	1.032	.416	.189	5.452	.000
	INV8	← INV	1.372	.569	.205	6.705	.000
Customer Buying Intention	INT1	← INT	1.000	.537			
	INT2	← INT	1.633	.999	.167	9.760	.000

Table 4  
Final CFA Measurement Model – Discriminant Validity

			HTMT	Fornell–Larcker	S.E.	C.R.	P
OPN	↔	SPD	.265	.578	.044	5.963	.000
OPN	↔	ACC	.111	.426	.033	3.404	.000
OPN	↔	PTC	.253	.612	.041	6.202	.000
OPN	↔	INV	.067	.275	.020	3.387	.000
OPN	↔	INT	.083	.261	.025	3.322	.000
SPD	↔	ACC	.188	.590	.049	3.808	.000
SPD	↔	PTC	.325	.642	.047	6.940	.000
SPD	↔	INV	.119	.400	.027	4.474	.000
SPD	↔	INT	.152	.392	.033	4.562	.000
ACC	↔	PTC	.161	.557	.043	3.768	.000
ACC	↔	INV	.050	.294	.017	2.908	.004
ACC	↔	INT	.064	.290	.022	2.932	.003
PTC	↔	INV	.106	.396	.024	4.488	.000
PTC	↔	INT	.135	.386	.030	4.563	.000
INV	↔	INT	.204	.254	.037	5.557	.000



Thus, from the preceding analyses, both convergent and discriminant validity were satisfactory; therefore, the construct validity was also satisfactory. Overall, only four measurement items were excluded from the study, and all constructs were retained.

## Descriptive Statistics

### Social Media Marketing

The summary statistics for the social media marketing construct, along with the four subconstructs, are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD
I feel I can receive other people's comments easily	3.80	.934
I feel I can express my opinions easily	3.63	.999
I feel I can exchange new ideas with others openly	3.57	1.009
I feel I can exchange information openly	3.51	1.028
Type of social media provides a good environment for me to participate in the things/communities I care about	3.62	1.041
<b>Overall Openness</b>	<b>3.63</b>	<b>.810</b>
I can quickly browse the product and information I need on the social media platforms	4.02	.897
The contents I publish on social media platforms are available to my friends quickly	3.95	.884
I can communicate with my friends on social media platforms instantaneously immediately due to influence of external factors	3.94	.923
<b>Overall Speed</b>	<b>3.97</b>	<b>.799</b>
I do not need to know special and advanced skills to use social media platforms	3.41	1.007
I feel easy to join the groups and communities that I am interested in	3.98	.826
<b>Overall Accessibility</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>.772</b>
I feel I can take an active part in the communities I care about	3.69	.830
I feel I can do my best to stimulate the communities I care about	3.46	.866
I feel I can offer useful information to the communities I care about	3.79	.780
I feel I can help and support the communities I care about	3.81	.745
Type of social media provide a good environment for me to participate in the things/communities I care about	3.69	.880
<b>Overall Participation</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>.691</b>
<b>Overall Social Media Marketing</b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>.596</b>
<b>Customer Involvement</b>	Mean	SD
My transaction with this firm is very important to me	3.61	.809
My activity with this firm is continually of interest to me	3.49	.806
I am highly involved in reading information about this firm's services	3.57	.864
If after I purchase from a firm my choice proves to be wrong, I would be really annoyed	3.88	.855
You can tell a lot about a person by the firm he or she chooses to purchase from	3.24	1.027
Where I shop is extremely important to me	3.58	.956
I really enjoy the process of purchasing a specific product or service	3.73	.840
<b>Customer involvement</b>	<b>3.59</b>	<b>.648</b>
<b>Buying intention</b>		
I will definitely buy products online in the near future	3.58	.961
I expect to purchase through the internet in the near future	3.73	.846
<b>Overall Buying intention</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>.791</b>

The overall mean rating for the construct social media marketing was  $\mu = 3.74$  ( $\sigma = 0.596$ ), and this meant that overall, the mean rating for social media marketing was positive being greater than the midpoint, with the highest mean rating being for speed ( $\mu = 3.3.97$ ;  $\sigma = 0.799$ ), then accessibility ( $\mu = 3.70$ ;  $\sigma = 0.722$ ), then participation ( $\mu = 3.69$ ;  $\sigma = 0.880$ ) and the least being openness ( $\mu = 3.63$ ;  $\sigma = 0.810$ ). Regarding the moderator, the mean rating was for customer involvement ( $\mu = 3.59$ ,  $\sigma = 0.648$ ). Lastly, the third and last constructs were the dependent variables, which measured customer buying intention ( $\mu = 3.65$ ;  $\sigma = 0.791$ ).

## Structural Equation Modelling

The main independent variable was social media marketing (SMM), whereas the main dependent variable was Customer Buying Intention (INT). The other variable was customer characteristics (customer involvement) was a moderating variable. The research hypotheses were as follows.

### H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between SMM and the customer buying intention

*H<sub>1a</sub>- There is a significant relationship between openness and customer buying intention.*

*H<sub>1b</sub>- There is a significant relationship between speed and customer buying intention.*

*H<sub>1c</sub>- There is a significant relationship between accessibility and customer buying intention.*

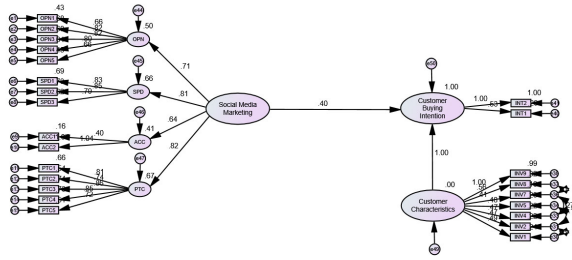
*H<sub>1d</sub>- There is a significant relationship between participation and customer buying intention.*

### H<sub>2</sub>- Customer characteristics moderates the impact of SMM on customer buying intention.

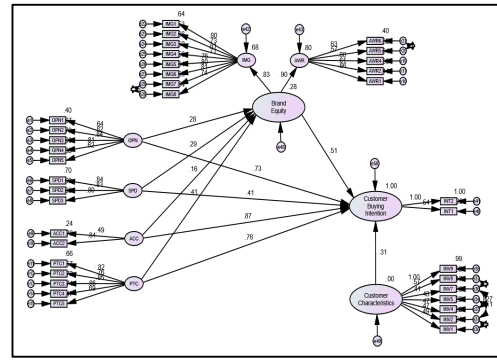
Gana et al. (2019) argued that the presence of latent variables in the model being tested entails the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) as a more robust statistical technique to test the study hypotheses instead of regression analysis. Nevertheless, as Hair et al. (2014) note, there are two forms of SEM: covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM). For this study CB-SEM was selected because the multivariate normality had not been violated, as well as that the sample size used was greater than 200 (Mertler & Reinhart, 2017).

**Hypothesis 1: The Direct Effects**

The structural equation model showing the broader hypotheses, which is the main effect of the broad constructs, is presented in Fig. 4.



**Fig. 4.** SEM – Main Model (Model 1)



**Fig. 5.** SEM SMM Sub-Hypothesis Model (Model 2)

The corresponding results are tabulated in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
SEM Main Effects – Model 1

		Estimate	Standardized	S.E.	C.R.	P	R-Square	Overall R <sup>2</sup>
INT	← SMM	1.062	.843	.119	8.907	.000	.711	0.742
INT	← INV	1.307	.637	.204	6.407	.000	.406	

The relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and customer buying intention (INT) was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta_{SMM} = 0.843$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, the direct effect of customer characteristics (INV–customer involvement) on customer buying intention (INT) was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta_{INV} = 0.637$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Based on these results, the key results for the first hypothesis of this study were confirmed to be statistically significant. Therefore, it follows that there was a statistically significant relationship between social media marketing and the customer buying intention. More importantly, the overall R-square of 0.742 indicates that all other variables explained 74.2% of the variance in the dependent variable.

**Hypothesis 1a-1d: Effects of SMM Sub-Constructs**

SEM testing of the sub-hypotheses for social media marketing is presented in Fig. 5. Table 7 below presents the respective path coefficients and their significance.

**Table 7**  
SEM SMM Sub-Constructs – Model 2

		Estimate	Standardized	S.E.	C.R.	P	R-Square	Overall R <sup>2</sup>
INT	← INV	1.067	.307	.131	4.158	.000	.094	0.817
INT	← OPN	.857	.734	.070	12.179	.000	.539	
INT	← SPD	.956	.409	.120	7.967	.000	.167	
INT	← ACC	.948	.866	.062	15.220	.000	.750	
INT	← PTC	.967	.758	.076	12.797	.000	.575	

With respect to the effect of the sub-constructs of SMM on customer buying intention (INT), all the relationships were positive relationships as well as being statistically significant. The major effect was seen with accessibility ( $\beta_{ACC} = 0.866$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), while the second highest was participation ( $\beta_{PTC} = 0.758$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), and the third was openness ( $\beta_{OPN} = 0.734$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), while the least was speed ( $\beta_{SPD} = 0.409$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Together with the direct effect of customer characteristics (INV) on customer buying intention (INT) ( $\beta_{INT} = 0.307$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). From the above, it can be confirmed that there is a statistically significant

relationship between openness and customer buying intention, speed and customer buying intention, accessibility and customer buying intention, and participation and customer buying intention. The overall r-square of 0.817 indicates that 81.7% of the variance in the dependent variable was explained by all other variables.

## Hypothesis 2: Testing Moderation Effect of Customer Characteristics

The second research hypothesis tested the moderating effect of customer characteristics, that is, customer involvement (INV) on the relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and customer buying intention (INT). To achieve this, Hayes Process Macro for SPSS was used, as recommended by Lee (2017). The output of the analysis is shown in Fig. 6.

Model Summary							
	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
Model	.937	.878	.034	556.365	3.000	233.000	.000

Model							
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
constant	-.265	.202	-1.312	.191	-.662	.133	
SMM	.474	.059	8.023	.000	.357	.590	
INV	.822	.066	12.383	.000	.691	.952	
Int_1	-.059	.018	-3.262	.001	-.095	-.023	

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):							
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p		
X*W	.006	10.639	1.000	233.000	.001		

Fig. 6. Moderation Effect of Customer Characteristics (INV)

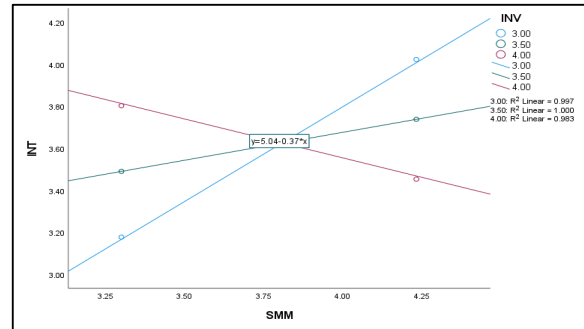


Fig. 7. Interaction Plot - Moderation Effect of Customer Characteristics

The overall relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and customer buying intention (INT) moderated by customer characteristics (INV) was statistically significant,  $F(3, 233) = 556.365, p < 0.05$ ; the corresponding R-square was 0.878, meaning that 87.8% of the variance in customer buying intention was explained by both the direct effect of SMM and the moderation effect of INT. However, considering the individual effects, the direct effect of social media marketing (SMM) on the customer buying intention (INT) was statistically significant ( $\beta_{SMM} = 0.474, t = 8.023; p < 0.05$ ).

The direct effect of customer characteristics (INV) on the customer buying intention (INT) was also statistically significant ( $\beta_{INV} = 0.822, t = 12.383; p < 0.05$ ). Finally, the moderating effect of customer characteristics was measured as INT\_1 (SMM\*INV), and the moderation was statistically significant ( $\beta_{Int_1} = -0.059, t = -3.262; p < 0.05$ ). The corresponding interaction plot is shown in Fig. 7. Chang (2019) argued that, for a significant moderation effect, interaction plots must not be parallel. This was confirmed in the interaction plot above, where the effect of SMM on INT changed under different moderating variable conditions. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the researcher confirms that customer characteristics moderate the impact of SMM on customer buying intention.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study investigates the interrelationships among SMM, customers' buying intentions, and customer characteristics in entrepreneurial firms in Jordan. In particular, the study examined the important SMM dimensions that had the greatest effect on buying intentions. The research not only addressed the research hypotheses, but also expanded beyond exploring all direct relationships among all variables. In addition, this study revealed the moderating effects of customer characteristics (customer involvement) on the relationship between SMM and buying intentions. When analyzing the direct effect of SMM on customer buying intentions (H1) in the direct model, the findings illustrate a significant positive effect of SMM on buying intentions; SMM explained 71% of the R2 of variance in buying intentions.

These findings are supported by Kim and Ko (2012), who found that SMM influences buying intentions. A similar notion was proposed by Manzoor et al. (2020) in their study of the effects of SMM and its antecedents. The researchers concluded that SMM has a greater influence on purchase intention than trust. Such findings conclude that customers hold power today, and that power can be controlled and redirected through effective SMM strategies and approaches.

Similar to the research results of Chan et al. (2013), this study found that openness (H1a) had a significant positive effect on buying intentions. This means that flexible channels of communication, a positive environment that encourages voicing an opinion, the exchange and sharing of information, and one's ability to showcase views and opinions on a social media platform encourage the customer to reconnect with the brand, product, or service (Chan et al, 2013). In addition, the effect of speed on customer buying intention (H1b) is statistically significant and positive ( $\beta_{SPD} = 0.291; p < 0.05$ ). However, it was interesting to see that speed had the least effect on buying intentions compared to all other SMM sub-constructs. This finding is interesting because the speed of accessing information, sharing content, and instant communication with colleagues and friends is

important in today's virtual world (Ahmed et al., 2017). This finding is in line with the study conducted by Arora et al. (2018) that speed within a social media marketing context can be related to firm size. Larger businesses communicate and reply faster to content than do smaller companies. This can be a logical reasoning, as the firms in the research are small entrepreneurial firms that do not have entire departments designated to manage information on social media platforms. Hence, although speed has a significant positive effect, it has the least effect in comparison with all the other SMM sub-constructs. The findings of this study agree with those of Chen et al. (2011), who showed that social media openness and speed are important factors that influence consumers' risk of engaging with a brand through social media.

The effect of accessibility on customer buying intention (H1c) is positive and significant ( $\beta_{ACC} = 0.866$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This construct produced the highest significance value among all the constructs in this study. The effect of accessibility in this study is in line with the research conducted by Krypton and Satra (2018). Their study explored how social media marketing affects customers' online transactions and shopping behavior. The researchers found that accessibility had a significant effect on behavioral practices. Similarly, Onarely et al. (2018) found that social media e-marketing exaggerated shopping behaviors and accessibility affected futuristic behaviors to engage with the brand. This variable has the most significant effect on customer buying intention because most of the population is young and they engage in many social media platforms to access information, connect, engage, and socialize.

Participation (H1d) had a significant positive effect on buying intention ( $\beta_{PTC} = 0.758$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding concludes that by actively participating in entrepreneurial firms' social media platforms, customers can reinforce their relationship with the brand. This finding aligns with that of Zheng et al. (2013), who explored the role of building brand loyalty through user engagement on social media platforms. The researchers found that the characteristics of social media content have a strong effect on consumers' online participation and engagement, and subsequently on loyalty behaviors. The results reveal that customers value the opportunity to voice and share their views, thoughts, and experiences.

The effect of customer characteristics (H2) in the form of customer involvement moderates the relationship between SMM and buying intention. This relationship was positive and statistically significant.  $F(3, 233) = 556.365$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Over 87% of the variance in customer buying intention is explained by both the direct effect of SMM and the moderation effect of customer involvement. Therefore, it can be concluded that SMM variables have a stronger influence on buying intentions of customers who are highly involved and engaged with the brand. This is because engagement or involvement in online communities strengthens interpersonal interactions and the sense of community (Zheng et al., 2013). Thakur (2019) found that customer engagement moderates between customer satisfaction and buying or continuance intentions. This is confirmed in the context of mobile shopping and travel applications. This is because customer involvement is a psychological process that leads to the formation of buying intentions and brand loyalty. This indicates that, in the setting of Jordanian customers, the effectiveness of the social media strategy and marketing approach is important, but customers who engage, communicate, and offer a clear process for purchasing a product or service are more likely to repurchase those who do not. This could be due to the educational and literacy levels of the population.

### *5.1 Theoretical Implications*

This study makes theoretical contributions to more than one area. The proposed conceptual model extends existing literature in the SMM space. It takes a multitude of variables and layers on the board to determine the latent relationships among the variables. The proposed conceptual model is added to the literature, specifically in the affiliation between SMM and buying intentions, particularly in the context of entrepreneurial firms. It empirically addressed how SMM explains future buying intentions in entrepreneurial firms and introduced a multidimensional model with a level of complexity that provides advanced insight by utilizing mediation and moderation relationships. This revealed important attributes relating to customers, expectations, and characteristics appropriate to a given group in a particular country. Additionally, the study provides empirical and theoretical evidence to support the idea that entrepreneurial SMM indeed affects buying intentions in the proposed model. From a theoretical viewpoint, the recommended model represents an analysis of SMM and extends Ahmed et al.'s (2017) study by adopting the multidimensional approach. Specific features of firm-customer interaction and expectations did indeed provide interesting findings.

### *5.2 Practical Implications*

The practical implications that can benefit management and firms are significant and multi-layered. It is vital that entrepreneurial firms in Jordan study opportunities and maximize their educated and skilled workforce (Growhome, 2020). The insufficient number of traditional jobs available in Jordan for university graduates also means that firms need to invent opportunities to create a rising entrepreneurial ecosystem with better opportunities.

For this research context and the SMM sub-constructs, accessibility was the highest influencer of buying intentions. This enforces that ease of accessing social media platforms and communities is the strongest driver for consumers to re-engage. Focusing on creating an easily accessible platform that encourages participation and communication will lead to a better connection to the brand. Furthermore, businesses in Jordan should focus on creating marketing content that generates value

(Growhome 2020). The biggest blunder of these entrepreneurial firms must refrain from developing marketing strategies, and content only focused on sales. Customers will see right through that, and with no value derived, they will most likely leave the brand. Customers want to engage in user-generated content (Kim & Ko, 2012). This approach could be beneficial for entrepreneurial firms to encourage participation, and by doing so, entrepreneurial firms in Jordan can harvest better brand loyalty. Industry leaders in the SMM field have focused on creating stronger connections with communities. This is accomplished by knowing the target audience very well.

The findings of this research also emphasize that entrepreneurial firms need to focus on creating logos, banners, and distinct guidelines to capture audience attention, build brand awareness, and carve an image into the customer's mind by focusing on visual branding (colors, videos, etc.) and consistency. In addition, building a crowd culture around the brand, product, or concept offered by entrepreneurial firms in Jordan will harvest a special image and slogan that people in Jordan can identify when they see (Chittende, 2021). They associate this with the entrepreneurial brand immediately. This is because the association is engraved in their subconscious minds (Chittende 2021).

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Similar to all research, this study presents several limitations. The sample population displayed skewed sex, age, and education level. Most participants were women, under 40, highly educated, and computer-literate. This skewness leaves other demographic groups underrepresented. Furthermore, the sample population reflects entrepreneurial firms in Jordan only and does not provide a comprehensive representation of a middle eastern view. Due to this limitation, generalizing the findings should be done with caution.

Lastly, the inclusion of other variables could be incorporated in the model, that is, customer loyalty, to understand what drives customers not only to "intend" to engage with the brand but to conduct the business transaction. Including other dimensions such as trust to buy online, and endorsement of celebrities could all be future avenues of research. The inclusion of such constructs provides an additional dimension and leads to further development and refinement of the conceptual model.

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