

**Social media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE): a mediated analysis for the social-media marketing strategies of destination brands in Pakistan**

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**Abstract**

With the advancements in the technology, social media has gained a significant importance in the tourism sector, markedly for destination branding. Literature has ample work available on the branding but scant literature is available on the social media marketing strategies and its impact on branding specifically the branding of northern destinations of Pakistan. To fill the mentioned gap in the literature, this study has conceptualized the framework of social media engagement and its impact on the destination brand visit intention of the tourists as a consequent of positive engagement on the social media-based destination brand platforms. The study has analyzed the impact of social media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) on Intention to Visit (ITV) and the mediated impact of Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) in this relationship. The study has used a quantitative approach and has collected a sample of 351 visitors of northern destinations of Pakistan i.e. Naltar Valley and Fairy Meadows in this study, via purposive sampling: a non-probability sampling technique and the analysis has been done by using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on Smart PLS 4. The results have revealed that there is a positive and significant relation between the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and Intention to Visit (ITV) and the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) significantly and positively mediates this relationship.

The results have shed light on the notable need for the northern destination brands of Pakistan to develop such marketing strategies for their social media based destination brand platforms that engage the tourists and visitors in those platforms by the provision of adequate information and lucrative user friendly pertained facilities that enable them to share the positive and worthwhile experiences to facilitate the social media based destination brand community.

**Keywords:** Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE); Intention to Visit (ITV); Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE)

### Introduction

With the proliferation of social media in every walk of life, gaining the information prior to making a decision is no more a problem and tourism industry is not exempted from this. With the inclusion of social media there are varied means by which the tourists can search information related to various destinations in no time (Buhalis et al., 2019; Leung, 2020). This is creating the opportunity for the marketers to engage with visitors on various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WeChat and TripAdvisor via various co-creation activities (Lund et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2020). The increase in the monthly active social media users is accounted to the growth in the amount of time spend on the social media networks as the internet users spend 136 minutes on social media per day (Statista, 2018). With the inclusion and advancement of social media in every field of life, the marketers and the tourism practitioners have shifted their focus from mere sales to developing the positive relations with the visitors on various social media platforms which aim to stimulate the positive emotions of the tourists and at the same time strengthen their intention to visit as well (Veloutsou & Mafe, 2020; Leung, 2019). Positive emotions play a significant role in driving the behaviors of the tourists. According to Cohen and Areni (1991) the positive emotions are affective states of the tourists and it is characterized by the various episodes of feelings and likings of any object or event. These emotions or the likings can be at the pre-travel stage (Gnoth, 1997) and can also be developed by the exposure to the information or the memorable experiences that can be gained via different media sources like any traditional resources or the advertisements on the websites (Septianto et al., 2020) and also with the help of interactions of individuals on various online platforms (Kim & Johnson, 2016; Dessart et al., 2015). The Social Media Based Destination Brand Community also helps practitioners to generate favorable assessments about the target destinations and also to strengthen the relationships between the tourists and the destinations (Hays et al., 2013). With the emergence of social media platforms, organizations are expanding their geographic reach to vast number of buyers (Gao et al., 2018) but at the same time with this emergent trend of social media, customers have also increasingly empowered by the social media and to a large extent taking control of the communication process as well by becoming collaborators, commentators and creators of the messages (Hamilton et al., 2016). As with the passage of time the role of social media has evolved from mere a marketing

tool to that of an intelligence source of marketing with the help of which the companies can observe, analyze and then predict the relevant potential behaviors of customers. Thus it has become very crucial for the marketers to utilize and leverage the social media tools to the maximum as their competitive advantage and at the same time to attain a superior performance (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

Despite the well-understood significance of the social media inclusion for customer engagement activities, relatively very few firms have effectively strategized their social media engagement and appearance (Griffiths & Mclean 2015; Choi & Thoeni, 2016). Social media campaigns have a strong influence on the customer base and the performance of the firms. Now adays the crucial challenge for many firms is not to initiate their social media campaigns but to integrate their social media presence with their marketing strategy so they can develop a long term valuable relationship with the customers (Schult & Peltier, 2013; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Although some reviews on social media phenomena are available in the literature (Salo, 2017; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016) but an integrative analysis of the strategic marketing perspective of the social media is missing in literature (Li et al., 2021). Hence, to address this problem, this study has conceptualized the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) model and has analyzed its impact on the Intention To Visit (ITV) of tourists, particularly in the northern destinations for Pakistan. Moreover, to analyze this impact in a deeper sense, the mediated impact of Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) has been analyzed. Therefore, to cater the mentioned research concerns, this study is designed to answer the following research question:

RQ1: What impact does social media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) bring on the Intention to Visit (ITV) of tourists of northern areas of Pakistan?

RQ2: What mediated impact does Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) bring on the relationship of social media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) with the Intention to Visit (ITV) of tourists of northern areas of Pakistan?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE)**

East Asian countries always attract the western tourists to visit and then become loyal visitors to these destinations. It has a lot to do with the authenticity of destination the visitors visit or have the intention to visit. The impact of destination authenticity has been analyzed on the place attachment, destination satisfaction and the engagement of social media by the western tourists and it is empirically found that among the three facets of destination authenticity: conformity, realness and the transformation, the conformity and realness not only develop the destination attachment but also make them engage on the social media by liking the posts and commenting on the destination related posts (Kim & Kim, 2020). In this digital age, it is pertinent for the destination

brands to establish their presence on the social media platforms and engage the tourists and the visitors and make them actively participate in the social media based destination brand communities effectively. It has been revealed that the social media brand engagement influences the destination brand value co-creation with the help of destination brand patriotism, so it is suggested that brands should engage the local residents as the destination brand value co-creators in order to create the destination brand value co creation (Amani, 2024). The use of Instagram successfully develops the destination brand equity by influencing its loyalty dimension by the entertainment and interaction dimensions of the social media. This works in a way that the people who use social media by being online and following the account and the destination posts on Instagram, they get the entertainment value, feel joy and relaxation which makes them loyal with the destination brands and hence develop the destination brand equity (Mansur et al., 2021). The activities that involve the behavioral, cognitive and the emotional stimulation of the social media users of destination brands play an important role in strengthening the image of the brands and particularly on social media the inspirational photography of the destinations serves the effective role in creating the users engagement and thus the development of destination brand images (Stepaniuk, 2015). Many studies have shown that the interactivities of destination brand social media users generate the better destination brand image and the engagement of the users. In this regard, it has been found that the destination brand specific and the destination brand related attributes generate most reactions of the destination brand users, which is the interactivity in the study at hand (Huertas & Roig, 2016). For the destination brands on social media, the theme of the photography determines the engagement of the destination brand social media users and the pertained marketing strategies. The engagement of destination brand social media users is gauged through the three determinants of social media engagement that include the number of likes, comments and the share of the photographic posts by the users hence advising the destination brand managers and the marketing strategists to post the inspiring and the exciting destination brand photographic content on their social media platforms (Song et al., 2021).

#### **Intention to Visit (ITV)**

Culture of the countries plays an important role in developing the intention to visit of the visitors for the destinations. In this regard, for the development of Australian tourist's intention to visit various holiday destinations, perceived cultural distance and the Clark and Pugh's index is proved to be a strongly related measure (Ng et al., 2007). With the help of theory of planned behavior (TPB), it has been examined that the past experiences, cultural tour involvement and the perceived control are the valid constructs for predicting the visitors and tourists' intention to visit the world cultural heritage site in the next 12 hours. This explains that the past experiences, perceived control and the cultural tours involvement help the visitors to develop their intention to visit the world cultural sites (Shen et al., 2009). The inclusion of self-service technologies (SSTs) are a new addition in the tourism industry and it has helped the tourists to gain the best experience of the tourists destinations without the presence of a tourist guide and

augmented reality (AR) is one of the SSTs. In this regard, to analyze the impact of augmented reality, its three aspects have been studied to measure its impact on the readiness to use the AR and the intention to visit of the tourists. Among the three aspects of AR namely, technology readiness, visual factor of AR and the situational factor, it has been revealed that among the three factors, technology readiness predicts the usefulness and ease of AR and that affects the intention to use AR and then with the help of its information the intention to visit the tourist destinations by the tourists and the visitors is shaped (Chung et al., 2015). Environment concerns and its impacts exert a substantial influence in the development of societies. It has been revealed that the environmental concern influences the perceived behavioral control, the subjective norms and the moral obligations that further influences the tourist's intention to visit the green hotels and this also reveals the need to accommodate more green hotels (Chen & Tung, 2014). Tourists involvement in the online platforms of destination management organizations (DMOs) play a significant role in the development of Destination image (DI) and in this regard particularly the cognitive image and the affective image; which is an antecedent of tourist's intention to visit the destinations and at the same time it has also been found that the type of platform visitors use and the destination itself also makes a difference in developing the destination image (Molinillo et al., 2018). Attitude of the tourists towards the green hotels, sense of obligation, perceived behavioral control and the corporate image of green hotels act as the significant drivers to develop the intention to visit of the tourists and visitors (Eid et al., 2021). Destination image influences the tourists to make up their minds to visit the destinations. Destination image with the inclusion of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and tourist's satisfaction affects the tourist's loyalty and their intention to visit the destinations (Kanwel et al., 2019).

#### **Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and Intention to Visit (ITV)**

Recently there has been a great focus on creating the co-creation activities with the visitors and by doing so their positive emotions are stimulated and their loyalty with the brand has also generated as a competitive advantage for the brand (Chung & Koo, 2015; Prayag et al., 2017; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Social media destination brand community is a two-way communication as with the tourists and the marketers and also among the tourists (Williams et al., 2019; Hook et al., 2018). The destination practitioners initiate a spontaneous communications on the social media platforms with the tourists to engage them and this communication can be in the form of photos, videos and other relevant information regarding the destinations (Hook et al., 2018; Zadeh et al., 2019; Moran et al., 2020). As there are various ways to interact with the tourists on the social media, so Social Media Destination Brand Community is considered as an emerging and dynamic platform to interact with the tourists (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015). With the help of various communication websites, social media makes the relationship of tourists and the brands and that in turn influences the behaviors and the travel decision making of the tourists (Majeed & Kim, 2024). Moreover, the authenticity of the destination brand, destination brand love, destination

brand engagement and other online social media destination brand communities (SMDBC) are the antecedents of the behaviors of tourists such as the visit and revisits, destination brand choices and various electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Majeed & Kim, 2024). The Instagram as a social media platform is proved to be a successful tool in creating the destination brand equity because the elements of tourist's interactions and the entertainment aspects together create the destination brand equity by having a strong effect on the loyalty of destination brand equity (Mansur et al., 2021). Social media based destination brand community (SMBDBC) plays a significant role in evoking and shaping tourists emotions including love, joy and positive surprise which in turn significantly develops the consumers intention to visit and the co-creation (Cheung et al., 2021).

H<sub>1</sub>: Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) has a significantly positive relationship with the Intention to Visit (ITV)

#### **Mediating role of Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE)**

Nowadays destinations need a distinctive factor more than ever and for that purpose, destinations should have to create such a relationship with the tourists that they have memorable experiences and revisit the destination and highly recommend it to others. This entails the destinations to have a tourist engagement for the effective achievement of their goals (Freitas et al., 2023). It has been found that there is a positive affect of customer engagement in the development of customer trust, co-creation and loyalty (Rather et al., 2019). The dimensions of customer's engagement have a differing effect on the customer experience and the identification of the destination and it then consequently affects the behavioral intentions of tourists towards the destination (Rather, 2020). There is a positive influence of destination brand authenticity and the destination brand self-congruence on the destination brand engagement, recommendation intention and the revisit intention and among these the destination brand engagement has mediated this relationship. This also indicated the significance of destination brand engagement and helps the marketers to ensure the destination brand engagement of tourists and by doing so improve their destination performance in destination brand management (Chen et al., 2020). The dimensions of customer based engagement namely affective, cognitive and the behavioral engagement has differential affects on the customer-based co-creation, which in turn affects the revisit intention of tourists. Age moderated the relationship of customer-based co-creation and the customer revisit intention in a way that as the consumer gets older this impact gets stronger (Satar et al., 2024). Customer engagement behaviors are not just a positive word of mouth (WOM) but also include the voluntarily assistance with other customers, posting on websites and blogs, recommendations and referrals to other visitors (van Doorn et al., 2010; de Matos & Rossi, 2008). Contextual factors such as the political, economic, social and environmental aspects also play a vital role in developing the customer engagement behaviors and hence influence them (van Doorn et al., 2010). The creditability of micro endorsers play a significant role in influencing the audience behaviors and it influences the audience more who are more likely to be persuaded by

the credible speakers and travel vloggers play a positive role in influencing the audience (Xiao et al., 2018; Schouten et al., 2020).

H<sub>2</sub>: Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) has a positively significant relationship with the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE)

H<sub>3</sub>: Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) has a positively significant relationship with the Intention To Visit (ITV)

H<sub>4</sub>: Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) mediates the significantly positive relation of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and the Intention to Visit (ITV)

### **Theoretical Support**

#### **Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model**

The conceptual model of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and behavioral response i.e. Intention To Visit (ITV) and its additional mediated affect of Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) is theoretically supported and explained by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The recent marketing and tourism literature have adopted the SOR Model to elucidate the impact of stimulus i.e. external influences, consumer cognitive or internal processes that is considered as organism and lastly the responses of the consumers are the resultant consumer behaviors (Kim et al., 2020; Kamboj et al., 2022; Carlson et al., 2018).

To elucidate further in this context, the external influences or the environmental stimulus are the conceptualized information and the interactive experiences that visitors and tourist get from the virtual platforms (Islam & Rehman, 2017; Cheah et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2015) while organism is conceptualized as the emotional intermediary state of the user that devises the response to the stimulus (Zhang et al., 2014) and the response is the outcome or the user's behavioral intention including intention to recommend to others, purchase or repurchase intention or the loyalty of the customer (Cheah et al., 2021; Ting et al., 2019). In the context of social media inclusion, the stimulus is the features of the virtual environment that facilitates the users to gain the information and other interactive experiences that are reflected in the different features of the Social Media Based destination Brand Community (SMBDBC) (Wirtz et al., 2013; Islam & Rehman, 2017). The organism is the social media community user's emotional state that also includes all the previous engagement related experiences that shape the emotions of the users that are specifically evoked by the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community (SMBDBC) (Kim et al., 2020). The response in this regard is the attitudinal outcomes of the social media community user that further devises the intention of the user to co-create and visit the destination that is being discussed in that Social Media Based destination Brand Community (SMBDBC) (Cheah et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021).

The SOR Model laid the foundation for the conceptual model of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and the Intention To Visit (ITV) with the mediated impact of Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE). The theory has devised the foundational support for the said model and explains that the external stimulus which is the lucrative and appealing information and experiences regarding the northern destinations of Pakistan namely Naltar Valley and the Fairy Meadows; is usually shared by the destinations brand managers, marketers and travel practitioners and other visitors and tourists, inspire and motivate the visitors and the tourists who get engaged in the social media platforms where the destination brand community shares their experiences and the related information and thus the visitor's behaviors result in the development of their intention to visit or revisit those destinations.

### Theoretical Framework

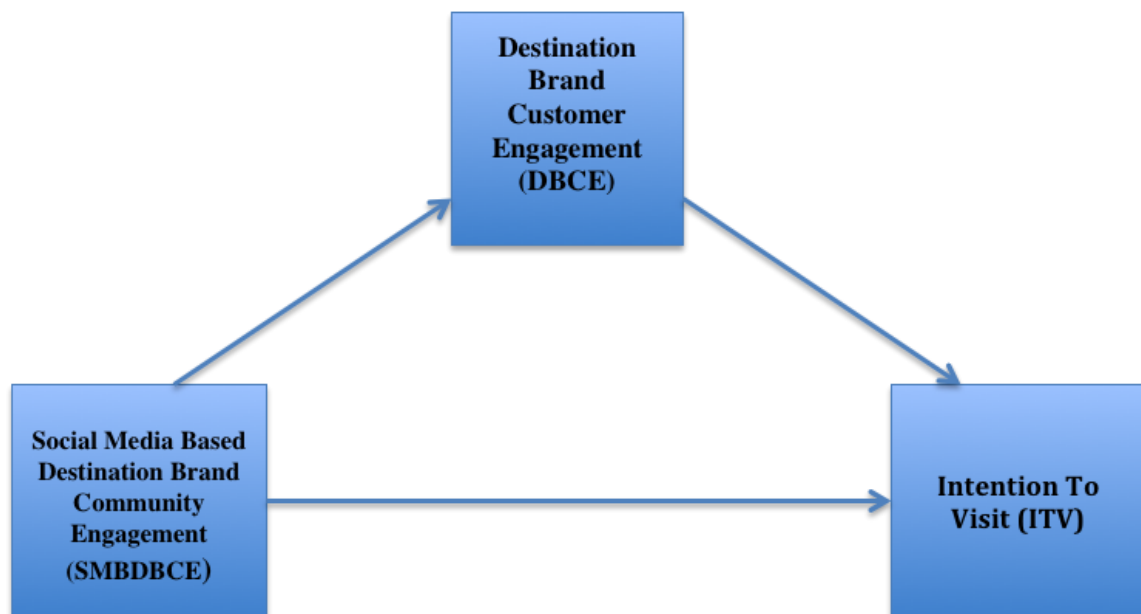


Figure 1. The mediated relationship of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and Intention To Visit (ITV) with the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) as the mediator

### Methodology

#### Sample

This study aimed to analyze the impact of social media based destination brand visitor's engagement on their intentions to visit the northern destinations of Pakistan. This

research gravitates around the tourism sector of Pakistan and for this purpose the deductive research approach has been used and for a quantitative study, the sample of 351 visitors or the tourists of the targeted destinations of northern areas of Pakistan: Naltar Valley and the Fairy Meadows has been collected as the research respondents by the purposive sampling method: a non-probability sampling technique and the data has been analyzed by the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on Smart PLS 4.1.1.1.

### Instruments

This is a quantitative study and for the collection of data from the visitors or the tourists of northern areas of Pakistan, already developed questionnaires are used because they are more suitable to the context to the study and hence can collect the data in more authentic and unbiased manner. So, the data for the study has been collected by adopting the measurement items from prior studies. For this study, 6 items for Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) (Cheung et al., 2021), 11 items for Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) (Harrigan et al., 2017) and for Intention to Visit (ITV) 3 items (Cheung et al., 2021) and 2 items (Morrison et al., 2023) have been used to measure the mentioned constructs.

### Analysis

Partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) by SmartPLS v 4.1.1.1 has been applied for analysis purposes. PLS-SEM has been considered a suitable analysis for the study because it is usually preferred for studies having complex model structures that have direct and indirect relationships (Hair et al., 2017). Moreover, PLS-SEM supports the goal of causal-prediction with the explanatory and predictive approaches (Hwang et al., 2020; Chin et al., 2020). In addition to that, the recent studies in the same context, particularly the studies in tourism marketing have used the PLS-SEM for analysis purposes and have exhibited its robustness in the structural and measurement assessments and (Ting et al., 2019; Harrigan et al., 2017).

### Results

#### Measurement Model Results

To examine the reliability and validity of the structural model of the research, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) has been executed and the results have shown that for all the constructs the values of factor loadings of all the items are  $> 0.7$ , the values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than  $> 0.5$ , Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and the Composite Reliability (CR) are  $> 0.60$  and hence all these have met the standard criteria (Hair et al., 2019; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The details of the measurement model are presented in Table 1 given below.

**Table 1 Measurement Model (Estimates)**

Construct	Items	Loadings $\alpha$	CR (rho_c)AVE
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DBCE	DBCE4	0.813	0.9040.926	0.677
	DBCE5	0.848		
	DBCE6	0.777		
	DBCE7	0.805		
	DBCE8	0.863		
	DBCE9	0.827		
ITV	ITV1	0.868	0.9300.947	0.781
	ITV2	0.903		
	ITV3	0.876		
	ITV4	0.921		
	ITV5	0.850		
SMBDBCE	SMBDBCE1	0.800	0.8840.912	0.633
	SMBDBCE2	0.743		
	SMBDBCE3	0.817		
	SMBDBCE4	0.834		
	SMBDBCE5	0.829		
	SMBDBCE6	0.747		

*Note.* Abbreviations: DBCE = Destination Brand Customer Engagement, ITV= Intention To Visit, SMBDBCE = Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement

### **Discriminant Validity**

To access the discriminant validity of the research model, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio has been used (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Henseler et al., 2015) and the results have demonstrated that the values of all the variables are falling below the predetermined minimum threshold level of 0.9 (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Hair et al., 2024; Ringle et al., 2023; Ringle et al., 2024) and thus indicating an adequate HTMT ratio as a measure of discriminant validity of the model. The HTMT ratio for the research model is presented in the Table 2 given below.

**Table 2 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio**

	DBCE	ITV	SMBDBCE
DBCE			
ITV	0.830		
SMBDBCE	0.843	0.824	

*Note.* Abbreviations: DBCE = Destination Brand Customer Engagement, ITV= Intention To Visit, SMBDBCE = Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement

Furthermore, the discriminant validity of the research model has been accessed by using the Fornell and Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the results have shown that the square roots of the AVEs for the constructs of the research model are greater

than the corresponding correlations of the corresponding latent variables or putting another way, the diagonal values are exceeding than the non-diagonal values of the table and thus confirming the discriminant validity of the research model. Table 3 is showing the values of the discriminant validity that is accessed by the Fornell and Larcker criterion for all the constructs of the research model.

**Table 3 Fornell-Lacker Criterion**

	DBCEITV	SMBDBCE
DBCE	0.823	
ITV	0.766	0.884
SMBDBCE	0.766	0.754

*Note.* Abbreviations: DBCE = Destination Brand Customer Engagement, ITV= Intention To Visit, SMBDBCE = Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement

### Structural Model Results

To examine the structural model of the research, Bootstrapping procedure has been executed on SmartPLS 4 and the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ),  $p$ -values,  $R^2$  and  $f^2$  values are analyzed and using a two-tailed test, hypothesis are tested by considering the significance of the path coefficients among the constructs (Hair et al., 2017) and adhering to the predefined acceptable threshold criterion (i.e.  $t \geq 1.96, p \leq 0.05$ ). Figure 2 is showing the path diagram of outer loadings of valid items of the research constructs and  $R^2$  whereas Figure 3 is demonstrating the Bootstrapping of the structural model showing path coefficients,  $p$ -values, factor loadings of the items and the  $R$  square values.

**Figure 2 Algorithmic Analysis of Structural Model**

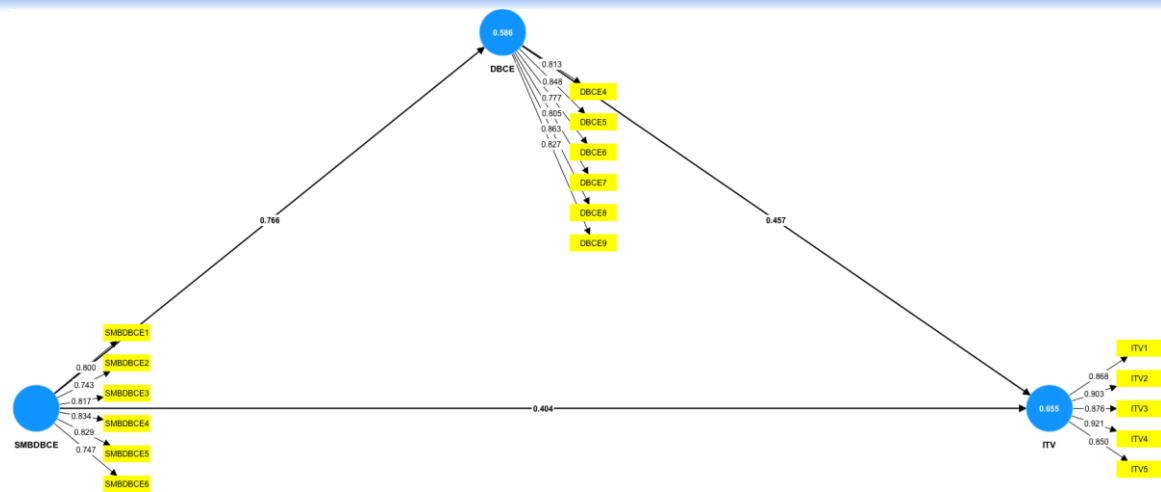
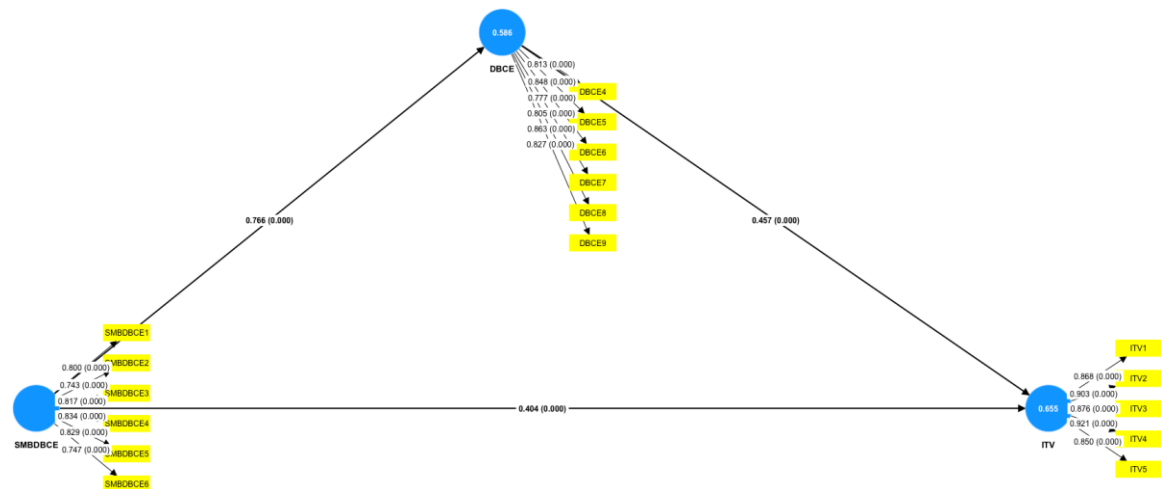


Figure 3 Bootstrapping of Structural Model



The results of hypothesis testing have shown that all the hypotheses of the research model are accepted. The results revealed that Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) has a positively significant relationship with Intention To Visit (ITV) has ( $\beta = 0.404, p = 0.000$ ) confirming the H<sub>1</sub> Hypothesis, while the impact of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) on Destination Brand Community Engagement (DBCE) has ( $\beta = 0.766, p = 0.000$ ) and is confirming the H<sub>2</sub>, Destination Brand Community Engagement (DBCE) on Intention To Visit (ITV) ( $\beta = 0.457, p = 0.000$ ) is also positive and significant and it accepts the H<sub>3</sub> Hypothesis.

To analyze the mediating effect of Destination Based Customer Engagement (DBCE) mediating analysis has been executed. The indirect effect of Destination Brand

Community Engagement (DBCE) on the relationship of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) with the Intention To Visit (ITV) is ( $\beta = 0.350, p = 0.000$ ) is positively significant and thus the H<sub>4</sub> hypothesis of the research model has been accepted. The results have shown that there is a complementary partial mediation in the model as the direct and indirect both the effects in the model are positively significant and the effect of complementary partial mediation is 46%, which exhibited that the 46% of effect in the model is via mediation. This implies that the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) plays a positively significant and considerable role in eliciting the Destination Based Customer Engagement (DBCE) by the visitors and the tourists of Northern areas of Pakistan: namely the Fairy Meadows and the Naltar Valley being the targeted destinations of the very research study, which in turn drives their Intention To Visit the mentioned tourists destination brands. The details of the hypothesis testing results are showcasing in the Table 4A and 4B given below.

**Table 4A PLS SEM Analysis of Research Model**

Total Effects (SMBDBCE -> ITV)			Direct Effects (SMBDBCE -> ITV)			Indirect Effects (SMBDBCE -> DBCE -> ITV)			
Coefficient	T value	p-value	Coefficient	T value	p-value	Hypothesis	Coefficient	T value	p-value
0.754	26.086	0.000	0.404	5.063	0.000	SMBDBCE -> DBCE -> ITV	0.350	5.267	0.000

*Note.* Abbreviations: DBCE = Destination Brand Customer Engagement, ITV= Intention To Visit, SMBDBCE = Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement

**Table 4B PLS SEM Analysis of Research Model**

Hypothesis	Relationships	Original Sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	(STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values	Decision
H <sub>1</sub>	SMBDBCE -> ITV	0.404	0.398	0.808	5.063	0.000	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	SMBDBCE -> DBCE	0.766	0.765	0.036	21.414	0.000	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	DBCE-> ITV	0.457	0.462	0.075	6.092	0.000	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	SMBDBCE -> DBCE -> ITV	0.350	0.355	0.066	5.267	0.000	Supported

*Note.* Abbreviations: DBCE = Destination Brand Customer Engagement, ITV= Intention To Visit, SMBDBCE = Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement

In addition to that, to access the explanatory power of the research model, the Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>) has also been analyzed and the results has revealed that the R<sup>2</sup> value for Destination Based Community Engagement (DBCE) is (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.586) and for Intention To Visit (ITV) is (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.655) and this has indicated that the R<sup>2</sup> values for the constructs of the model have exceeded the pre-determined acceptable threshold

values benchmark i.e. ( $R^2 \geq 0.10$ ) (Falk & Miller, 1992; Chin, 1998). These results have explained that the endogenous constructs are explained accurately by the exogenous constructs of the model as a meaningful variation in the endogenous variables is explained by the exogenous constructs of the model. The  $R^2$  value of Intention To Visit (ITV) is ( $R^2 = 0.655$ ) which indicates that the very research model explains the 66% of the variance in the endogenous construct i.e. Intention To Visit (ITV).

To check the explanatory power of the exogenous constructs of the research model, the effect size ( $f^2$ ) of the paths in the model are also examined and according to the pre-defined acceptance threshold values, the effect size is large if  $f^2 \geq 0.35$ , medium is the  $f^2 \geq 0.15$  and small if  $f^2 \geq 0.05$  and 0.02 is the cut off value (Cohen, 1988). The results have shown that the effect size of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) in explaining Destination Based Customer Engagement (DBCE) is ( $f^2 = 1.416$ ) while the effect size of Destination Based customer Engagement (DBCE) in explaining the Intention To Visit (ITV) is ( $f^2 = 0.251$ ) and the effect size of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) in explaining the Intention To Visit (ITV) is ( $f^2 = 0.195$ ). This indicates that the effect size of all the mentioned constructs and their paths falls under considerably acceptable ranges and among all the mentioned paths the effect size of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) on Destination Based Customer Engagement (DBCE) is higher. Table 5 is showing the  $R^2$  and  $f^2$  results.

**Table 5 Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) and Effect Size ( $f^2$ )**

Endogenous constructs	$R^2$	$R^2$ adjusted
DBCE	0.5860	0.585
ITV	0.6550	0.653

Model Paths	$f^2$
DBCE -> ITV	0.251
SMBDBCE -> DBCE	1.416
SMBDBCE -> ITV	0.195

*Note.* Abbreviations: DBCE = Destination Brand Customer Engagement, ITV= Intention To Visit, SMBDBCE = Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement

### Discussion

The results of the study have revealed lucrative insights related to the destination brand marketing strategies and about the behavioral outcomes of the tourists and the visitors. Prior marketing studies have examined the impacts of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) on various consumer's attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Laroche et al., 2012; Prayag et al., 2017; Habibi et al., 2016) but this study has specifically extended the literature by linking the impacts of Social Media

Based Brand Destination Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) with the tourism and destination context (Jovicic, 2019; Moro & Rita, 2018; Laroche et al., 2012). The study has found the significantly positive impact of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) in developing the Intention to Visit (ITV) of visitors of the northern destinations of Pakistan namely; Naltar Valley and the Fairy Meadows and the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) mediates this relationship significantly and positively. By saying so, the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) shapes the desired behavioral outcome of visitors and the tourists i.e. the Intention To Visit (ITV) the destinations: the Naltar Valley and the Fairy Meadows by positively influencing their emotions and the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) facilitates this influential process by providing the relevant information, sharing of positive and exciting experiences and assisting other tourists and visitors by answering their queries and concerns in the online destination brand communities. In this study, the Intention to Visit (ITV) is a behavioral outcome and it entails the tourists to be fully satisfied and have an exceptional experience with the brand destinations whereas the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) is operationalized as the social media based destination brand online communities like on Facebook and Instagram where the tourists share their views, experiences and the relevant information that can help the other visitors, practitioners and destination brand management to make the pertained decisions accordingly. However, the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) is the engagement of the visitors and the tourists of the mentioned destinations in the social media based brand communities that play the facilitating role in realizing the desired behavioral outcome of the visitors and the tourists i.e. Intention To Visit (ITV) (Cheung et al., 2021). The results have exhibited that the positive Intention To Visit (ITV) of the visitors are significantly dependent on the influence of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) facilitates and shapes the very behavioral responses of the visitors and the tourists of the destinations mentioned by being fully engaged, satisfied and involved in the Social Media Based Destination Brand Communities and thus having a strong and positive tourist-destination relationship with the Naltar Valley and the Fairy Meadows. At the same time, the results have shown the significance of the destination brand marketing efforts and strategies for developing the visitor-destination relationships and the realization of goals in the tourism sector.

### **Conclusion**

This study has offered valuable and pragmatic insights for the destination brand management, tourism practitioners, academicians, researchers, visitors, tourists and the branding and marketing literature. Earlier studies have documented the relationship of the customer and the brand management, brand loyal and commitment (Coelho et al., 2019; Kumar & Nayak, 2019; Fetscherin et al., 2019; Laroche et al., 2012; Habibi et al., 2016) but scarce literature is available providing the linkage between the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and the

destination brands. This study has extended the marketing and branding literature by examining the influencing role of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) on the desired behavioral outcome of the tourists and the visitors i.e. Intention To Visit (ITV) for the destinations of the study: The Naltar Valley and the Fairy Meadows and also has analyzed the mediating impact of Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) in this process. The results of the research study have shown that the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) shapes the desired behavioral outcome for the destination brand i.e. Intention To Visit (ITV) and the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) intervenes this process significantly and positively and thus facilitates it. This attributes to the effectiveness and pertinence of the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) that includes its user friendliness, provision of related useful information, sharing of experiences and views by the visitors and the tourists that evoke the behavioral responses of the other tourists and visitors in the form of their Intention To Visit (ITV) the mentioned destinations. This has highlighted the deduction that Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) is an effective driver of the tourists and the visitor outcomes i.e. Intention To Visit (ITV) in this study and thus helps developing the destination-tourists relationships and at the same time called the attention towards the significance of these destination brand communities on social media, the pertained marketing strategies to promote and manage the brand online and also to maintain the brand destinations in a way that fulfills the expectations of the visitors and tourists. The consequent engagement of visitors and the tourists in these Social Media Based Destination Brand Communities plays a pivotal role in facilitating the process of developing this tourists-destination relationships by convincing the visitors and making them excited to visit the mentioned destinations by sharing the relevant and exciting information like price comparisons, opening hours, transportation and hotels information and alike (Cheung et al., 2021). The prevalence and proliferation of the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) highlights the effectiveness and the crucial need to attract and retain the tourists and visitors by influencing and holding their Intention To Visit (ITV) even in this dynamic environment and competitive business settings. Moreover, undoubtedly the relevant, up to date and the top notch marketing strategies and the efficacious presence on the social media in the form of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) that smoothly enables the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) for the attainment of tourist-destination relationship and the other related tourism goals is inevitable. Thus, the destination brand management, marketing and tourism practitioners should devise the marketing and branding strategies in congruence to these pragmatic enlightenments.

### **Implications**

In the light of academics and theoretical aspect, many past studies have analyzed the customer-brand relationship aspects (Dessart and Duclou, 2019; Coelho et al., 2019; Fetscherin et al., 2019; Laroche et al., 2013) and the impact of social media brand

communities and the customer engagement with them (Laroche et al., 2012) but the linkage of brand, tourists and destinations is scarce in literature. This study extended the branding and tourism literature by incorporating the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model to examine the impact of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) that drives the Intention To Visit (ITV) of tourists and visitors. This elucidates the behavioral responses and outcome of tourists: Intention To Visit (ITV) with the help of stimulus i.e. Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) and with the facilitating inclusion of organism i.e. the Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) in this study as it helps in shaping and influencing the affective faculties of the tourists to devise their behavioral outcome i.e. Intention to Visit (ITV).

From a practical and managerial perspective, the study has also highlighted the sheer pertinence of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) in tourism and branding contexts and thus advises the marketing, branding and tourism practitioners and destination brand management to be more active and vigilant in terms of managing and updating the Social Media Based Destination Brand Communities (SMBDBC) by creating integrative content like engaging destination related posts and pictures, interactive communication such as chat and queries sessions, availability of pricing of various tour packages, transportation, opening hours, suitable weather to visit, food information, user friendly interface of these social media based communities and alike. Moreover, the destination brand can initiate advertising campaigns on these social media based destination brand communities by enabling and encouraging the inclusion and participation of tourists and visitors by introducing brand ambassadors, awarding prizes and certificates for participating in those campaigns, helping and facilitating others by catering their concerns and queries and thus by doing so, enlightening the positive emotions in tourists that influence them to devise their desired behavioral tourism centered responses among which the Intention To Visit (ITV) is the most desirable and lucrative for all the stakeholders involved.

#### **Future Recommendations**

The present study has conceptualized and shed light on the impact of Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) on the Intention To Visit (ITV) and also analyzed the mediating impact of Online Destination Brand Customer Engagement (DBCE) about the northern destinations of Pakistan. There are still a lot of aspects regarding the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement and other social media based marketing strategies for the destination brands that need to be studied for branding and marketing literature. This study was conducted for the northern destinations of Pakistan namely: Naltar Valley and Fairy Meadows, the future research can include other destinations of other regions of the world. Moreover, future researches can analyze other destination brand marketing strategies and their impact on the Intention To Visit and other behavioral outcomes of the tourists and visitors including but not limited to destination brand loyalty, re-visit intention, value co-creation intentions, brand commitment, evoking positive emotions

in tourists and visitors. The green aspect of marketing and branding strategies, destination brands and the social media based destination brand communities and the visitors and tourist's engagement can also be a fruitful area of research. A comparative study can also be done to gauge the engagement of customers or the tourists regarding different online Social Media Based Destination Brand Engagement (SMBDBCE) platforms and destinations brands that can help the tourism practitioners and the marketers to devise marketing strategies in accordance to tourists and visitors preferred destinations and social media platforms, their engagement and responses on these platforms. The very study has used Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) as a single predictor of the behavioral outcomes; other lucrative models of social media marketing strategies and Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) can also be devised with the help of other supporting theories. The same research model can also be replicated on other destination brands and in other countries to get valuable insights about those destinations. Along with the primary data, the secondary marketing data can also be incorporated to get a more comprehensive analysis about the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement and its behavioral outcomes (Cheung et al., 2021). In addition to that, the negative effects of the Social Media Based Destination Brand Community Engagement (SMBDBCE) are not analyzed in this study, the future studies can study the negative impacts as well (Cooper et al., 2019) and on the same coin, to enrich the relevant literature, the negative effects of value heterogeneity of tourists on their behavioral and emotional responses and outcomes can also be analyzed (Liao et al., 2021).

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