



Master of Business Administration

LCMB7035 - Dissertation

**The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intentions in
the UK Fast-Fashion Retail Industry: A Multi-Case Study of Zara and
Selected Competitors**

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30 May 2026

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted for any other award. All sources have been duly acknowledged. I understand that any plagiarism will be treated as a serious academic offence.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nabia', written over a horizontal line.

Signed: _____

Date: 30 May 2026

AI Use Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that artificial intelligence tools were used during the preparation of this dissertation, in accordance with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David policy on AI use in academic work. All AI-assisted content has been reviewed, verified against the cited sources, and adapted to reflect my own analytical judgement. Responsibility for the content, arguments, and conclusions presented in this dissertation remains entirely my own.

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Abstract

The rise of social media as a dominant marketing channel has profoundly altered consumer-brand interactions in the UK retail landscape, creating both opportunities and strategic challenges for fast-fashion retailers operating in one of the most digitally mature fashion markets in Europe. This dissertation examines the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions in the UK fast-fashion retail industry through a qualitative, secondary data, multi-case study design. Two research objectives structure the inquiry. The first objective is to analyse how social media marketing strategies are associated with consumer purchase intentions across five UK-active fast-fashion brands. The second objective is to evaluate the documented effectiveness of social media marketing in driving purchasing decisions and to identify the conditions under which that effectiveness is moderated in the UK context. These objectives are addressed through a single overarching research question: How does social media marketing influence consumer purchase intentions in the UK fast-fashion retail industry, and under what conditions does this association translate into documented purchasing behaviour?

Five UK-active fast-fashion brands are examined: Zara, H&M, SHEIN, ASOS, and Uniqlo. Data were drawn from company annual reports, market research publications, industry analyst reports, and reputable business press covering the period 2019 to 2025. The analytical framework integrates Kim and Ko's (2012) five-dimensional social media marketing activities model with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, mapping entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and electronic word-of-mouth onto attitude formation and subjective norm signalling pathways that are proposed to drive purchase intention.

Addressing Objective 1, the study finds that entertainment and trendiness dimensions are consistently associated with positive UK consumer attitude formation, particularly for TikTok-heavy strategies targeting Generation Z audiences. Interaction and electronic word-of-mouth activate subjective norm signalling when influencer source credibility is maintained. Addressing Objective 2, the study finds that the association between social media marketing and purchase intention is conditional: ASOS's industry-leading UK earned media value of GBP 109.8 million alongside a 16% revenue decline demonstrates that macroeconomic conditions and competitive pricing can moderate whether purchase intention converts to actual purchasing behaviour. Uniqlo's low-investment social media strategy identifies product-quality-consistency as an alternative

attitude formation pathway not specified in existing frameworks, extending Kim and Ko's (2012) model.

Four theoretical contributions are made: extending Kim and Ko's (2012) framework to UK fast-fashion; identifying eWOM credibility fatigue as a boundary condition; specifying UK-relevant moderating conditions on the purchase intention-to-behaviour chain; and demonstrating the value of secondary data multi-case design for theoretical refinement. Five managerial implications are provided with implementation guidance differentiated by brand scale. Limitations include the impossibility of causal attribution from secondary data and the absence of UK-disaggregated figures for some cases.

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List of Abbreviations

ASOS	ASOS Plc
CMA	Competition and Markets Authority
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
EMV	Earned Media Value
FY	Financial Year
H&M	Hennes and Mauritz AB
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PBC	Perceived Behavioural Control
PI	Purchase Intention
SMM	Social Media Marketing
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
UGC	User Generated Content
UK	United Kingdom

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

With the rapid development of social media, the way fast-fashion retailers in the United Kingdom interact with customers has changed significantly. A study reported that 82% of adults in the UK were regular social media users by 2024, indicating the marketing opportunities these platforms offer UK retailers (Ofcom, 2024a). UK consumers spent a median of more than 2 hours a day on social media, with fashion among the most engaging categories, and the 16 to 34 age group was identified as highly dependent on social media for fashion discovery and purchase (Deloitte, 2024). The UK fast fashion industry is vast, competitive, and rapidly digital, with McKinsey and Company (2024) estimating the UK fashion market at around GBP 62 billion in 2023. In this context, social media marketing strategies are becoming a key priority for UK fast-fashion retailers seeking to gain a competitive edge.

1.2 Industry Context and Competitive Landscape

The UK fast-fashion sector is characterised by short product life cycles, rapid trend responsiveness, and intense competition across both physical and digital channels. Five brands provide the analytical foundation for this study: Zara, H&M, SHEIN, ASOS, and Uniqlo. These brands have been chosen because they cover the whole spectrum of UK business models, from fully digital retailers to a mix of digital and store, from mass marketing with influencers to minimal marketing with product-led strategies. Table 1.1 provides an overview of each brand's presence in the UK and their dominant social media marketing approach.

Table 1.1: Overview of Key Competitors in the UK Fast-Fashion Market. Made by the author based on the company's annual reports.

Brand	Parent / HQ	UK Presence	Primary Platforms	Revenue (Latest FY)	Key SMM Approach
Zara	Inditex, Spain	60+ stores, e-commerce	Instagram, TikTok	EUR 27.78bn (FY2024)	Minimalist visual content; no traditional advertising

H&M	H&M Group, Sweden	280+ stores, e-commerce	Instagram, TikTok, YouTube	SEK 234.5bn (FY2024)	Influencer collaborations; sustainability campaigns
SHEIN	SHEIN Group, Singapore	Online only	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube	USD 32bn approx. (2023)	Micro-influencer haul content; mass UGC generation
ASOS	ASOS Plc, UK	Online only, UK HQ	Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest	GBP 2.9bn (FY2024)	ASOS Insiders programme; community-led UGC
Uniqlo	Fast Retailing, Japan	15+ UK stores, e-commerce	Instagram, YouTube	JPY 2.644trn (FY2024)	LifeWear brand storytelling; product-led content

Zara is the leading brand of the Inditex Group, with more than 60 stores in the UK and a rapidly expanding e-commerce channel, and accounted for EUR 27.78 billion in revenue in FY2024 (INDITEX, 2025b). With over 280 stores in the UK, H&M Group has invested significantly in digital and influencer marketing and recorded global net sales of SEK 234.5 billion for FY2024 (H&M Group, 2025). SHEIN is a purely online brand in the UK, where it has established a significant consumer base through micro-influencer collaborations and had a turnover of about GBP 1.55 billion in 2023 (Reuters, 2025). Headquartered in London, the UK's largest purely online fashion retailer, ASOS, was the top brand for Instagram earned media value in 2024, with a total earned media value of GBP 109.8 million (Kolsquare, 2025). With more than 15 stores across the UK, Uniqlo takes a product-driven approach to brand storytelling, which is a refreshing alternative to the influencer-heavy marketing strategies of its rivals (Fast Retailing, 2025).

1.3 Rationale and Research Gap

While UK retailers invest heavily in social media marketing, they often fail to understand any correlation between the various actions they take and how they influence consumers' buying behaviours. There has been rapid growth in the academic literature on social media marketing (SMM) and consumer purchase intention, yet many gaps remain. The majority of studies have been conducted on luxury fashion brands, have an older and higher income sample and have been

based on survey methodologies, and have examined a single brand or platform, with results not necessarily applying to the UK fast-fashion retail sector (Kim and Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016). In the UK fast-fashion market, there are unique conditions regarding its competitive structure, digital adoption, and sustainability claims regulation that have not been explored in previous multi-brand secondary datasets analyses (Competition and Markets Authority, 2024). In addition, the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention in the UK context of macro-economic pressures, as in the case of the ASOS revenue paradox (Section 4.5), is not covered by the literature. This study addresses those gaps by analysing the relationship between social media marketing and consumer purchase intentions across 5 fast-fashion brands operating in the UK, using a multi-case secondary data design, with outcomes measured in real-world rather than survey-reported purchase intentions.

1.4 Research Relevance and Contribution

This study contributes to both academic knowledge and professional practice. Academically, it applies and extends Kim and Ko's (2012) social media marketing activities framework and Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour to a UK fast-fashion context that has not previously been examined through multi-case secondary data analysis, and identifies a product-quality-consistency attitude formation pathway absent from existing models. Practically, the findings address both research objectives by identifying the specific SMM dimensions, platforms, and implementation approaches most consistently associated with positive consumer purchase intention outcomes in the UK fast-fashion market, and by specifying the conditions under which those associations are moderated by macroeconomic and reputational factors.

1.5 Research Aim, Objectives, and Research Question

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to examine the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions in the UK fast-fashion retail industry, with particular focus on the strategies and practices of Zara and selected competitors.

Research Objectives

Objective 1: To analyse how social media marketing strategies are associated with consumer purchase intentions across five UK-active fast-fashion brands, examining which specific dimensions of social media marketing activity activate the attitude formation and subjective norm signalling pathways of the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Objective 2: To evaluate the documented effectiveness of social media marketing in driving consumer purchasing decisions in the UK fast-fashion sector, and to identify the conditions under which that effectiveness is moderated by contextual factors including macroeconomic conditions, sustainability credibility, and competitive pricing pressures.

Research Question

How does social media marketing influence consumer purchase intentions in the UK fast-fashion retail industry, and under what conditions does this association translate into documented purchasing behaviour across the five selected brands?

1.6 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 has set out the research background, the UK competitive landscape, the rationale, the aims, two research objectives, and the research question. The critical review of the literature in the field of social media marketing, consumer purchase intention, and the theoretical underpinning for the research is presented in Chapter 2, along with the introduction of the conceptual framework. The research methodology is explained in Chapter 3, which includes a philosophical stance, a case study design, data sources, and an analytical approach. Chapter 4 reports on the results of five case studies on the use of social media marketing by Zara and four fast-fashion competitors in the United Kingdom. The findings discussed in Chapter 5 are interpreted and discussed in relation to the two research objectives. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the dissertation's contribution, identifies its limitations, and offers suggestions for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews previously published literature relevant to social media marketing and consumer purchase intention in the context of fast-fashion retail in the United Kingdom. The chapter has been organised around four purposes: to provide the theoretical underpinnings for the study; to summarise and synthesise existing empirical evidence in the key thematic areas; to identify research gaps that warrant the current study; and to propose a conceptual framework for the case analysis in Chapter 4 and the discussion in Chapter 5. The literature covered the following four major themes: the definition and dimensions of social media marketing; the theory of planned behaviour as a theoretical framework for consumer purchase intention; social media marketing in the fashion industry with a sustainability dimension; and the influence of eWOM and influencer marketing on consumer behaviour. General literature on social media use that does not focus on marketing or consumer behaviour is not included. This review forms the basis for both research objectives, the analysis of the relationship of SMM dimensions and purchase intention and the assessment of the conditions moderating the effectiveness of SMM.

2.2 Thematic Overview of the Literature

2.2.1 Social Media Marketing: Definition and Key Dimensions

Since social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram were introduced as commercial channels in the early 2010s, social media marketing in the retail landscape has undergone a significant transformation. Social media is a class of internet-based applications that allow individuals or groups to create and share user-generated content, and social media marketing is the use of such applications by organisations for marketing and relationship-building (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The definition has been gradually evolving as platforms have become more varied, and Tuten and Solomon (2021) now include the concept of “strategic management of brand presence across platforms via content, community, and data-driven audience engagement.” In 2024, 82% of all adults in the UK used social media, indicating the overall size of the market in which the five case brands exist (Ofcom, 2024b). While the UK is one of the most digitally mature

fashion retail markets in Europe, the engagement rate for fashion content always outperforms the European average (Balchandani, Rolkens and D'Auria, 2024).

Kim and Ko (2012) developed the most commonly used framework for measuring social media marketing activities in relation to luxury brands by analysing luxury brands' social media posts, which they divided into five dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation and electronic word of mouth. Entertainment is content designed to delight consumers, elicit a positive mood, and entertain. Two-way communication and community building between the brand and the consumer are measured through interactions. Trendiness indicates how topical the content is with respect to consumers' interests. Customisation indicates personalised or algorithmically targeted content engagement. Electronic word-of-mouth reflects how much consumer-generated content, reviews and influencer activity can extend and amplify the brand's social media footprint. This framework was later tested and confirmed by Godey et al. (2016) in a multi-country study of luxury fashion, and all five dimensions were found to be positively related to brand equity and purchase intention. Both studies, however, suffer from a significant shortcoming: the study participants are exclusively luxury fashion consumers, with very different demographic profiles, platform preferences, and price sensitivity compared to their UK fast-fashion counterparts, who make up the target audience of the five brands analysed in this study.

Recent research has found that the impact of each dimension is platform-architecture- and consumer-segment-dependent. SMM attribution and measurement remain longstanding methodological challenges, as platform algorithm changes may not accurately reflect UK consumer behaviour in pre-2020 studies (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The SMM-purchase intention relationship is context-dependent, depending on the consumer, content type, and platform choice (Tafesse and Wien, 2018). This conditionality directly motivates the second research objective of the present study, which concerns the role of conditionality in SMM effectiveness in the UK fast-fashion context.

2.2.2 Consumer Purchase Intention and the Theory of Planned Behaviour

The stated probability that a consumer will buy a product or service within a given time period is called purchase intention. It is the primary dependent variable in the SMM effectiveness literature (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The strength of the intention-behaviour linkage depends on the

product category, the consumer segment, and the contextual circumstances: if there are external barriers, such as price or accessibility pressures, even high intention may not lead to purchasing behaviour, as illustrated by the ASOS case discussed in Chapter 4. Purchase intention in digital marketing research is often measured as willingness to buy or brand attitude scores, or indirectly through behavioural variables such as engagement rates and earned media values related to commercial outcomes.

The most widely accepted theory of purchase intention is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which posits that three factors determine behavioural intention: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1991). In the UK consumer behaviour context, attitudes are formed from positive brand evaluations, which result from content exposure and information processing. Peer recommendations, influencer endorsements and visible social proof of others' purchasing behaviour are all factors that shape subjective norm activation. In the retail domain, perceived behavioural control is likely to be a function of ease of access to the purchase pathway, such as price, platform convenience, and other factors (Hajli, 2015). Consumer engagement has been further identified as a mediating mechanism linking brand interaction to purchase intention, with hedonic engagement experiences showing particularly strong effects on fashion purchase decisions (Rodríguez, Valiño, Ripoll and García-Henche, 2023). The TPB has been identified as the most consistently supported theoretical framework for explaining digital purchase intention across product categories and cultural contexts.

Some studies directly applied the TPB to a UK sample and concluded that using Instagram content leads to both attitude formation and subjective norm signalling among the female consumers in Generation Z, thus stimulating the intention to make impulse purchases of fashion products (Djafarova et al., 2021; Bowes, 2021; Wojdyla and Chi, 2024). Notably, micro-influencer content demonstrated greater attitude-forming power than celebrity endorsement, which aligns with the ASOS Insiders programme studied in Chapter 4 (Djafarova et al., 2021; Bowes, 2021). The TPB's focus on the intention-behaviour gap is directly relevant to Objective 2 of this study, which focuses on the conditions under which purchase intention does not lead to purchasing behaviour (Diddi et al., 2019).

2.2.3 Social Media Marketing in the Fashion Industry

Social media has become the dominant marketing channel for fashion retailers globally, with Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube the three platforms most consistently associated with fashion discovery and purchase intention among UK consumers. The younger age group of 18 to 34 is more likely to discover and buy fashion on social media than through any other channel, highlighting the importance of SMM in the UK's fast-fashion retailing strategy (Deloitte, 2024). Attitude and trust mediate the relationship between TikTok fashion content and purchase intention among Generation Z, consistent with the entertainment and trendiness paths proposed by Kim and Ko (2012) (Lacap et al., 2025), while livestream selling on TikTok further combines real-time interaction with entertainment to drive fashion purchase intention (Thuy and Quang, 2025).

One unique aspect of the new SMM frameworks is sustainability. Sustainability perceptions moderate the effect of Zara's trendy content on consumers' attitudes toward purchasing, with individuals with higher ethical consumption values showing weaker effects (Baena, 2024), while corporate social responsibility initiatives can positively influence consumer brand engagement and purchase intention when credibility is established (Valiño, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, García-Henche and Barriopedro, 2023). The Competition and Markets Authority (2024) has issued guidance on green claims in UK fashion, creating a framework for a new era of enforcement that results in legal and reputational risks for brands making sustainability claims that cannot be supported operationally, while the type of sustainability claim itself produces differential effects on brand credibility and consumer attitudes (Sander, Föhl, Walter and Demmer, 2021). Generation Z consumers include digital sustainability communication in their fashion buying process, indicating that brands that use social media to communicate their sustainability should be careful to ensure that their operations align with that message, or else risk a credibility gap that will lessen the impact of the attitude formation effect (Del, Jimenez and Ruiz-Vinals, 2025). This sustainability dimension is a unique UK-specific moderating variable incorporated into the adapted conceptual model in Section 2.4.

For objective 1 of this study, platform-specific dynamics are becoming increasingly important. Recent studies explored virtual influencer formats and concluded that eWOM credibility is consistent across sources of virtual content, indicating that the credibility mechanism is consistent across new content modalities (Cho, 2025; Yin et al, 2025). The number of saves, shares, and comment threads is a more reliable indicator of purchase intention activation than passive

measures such as impressions (Florenthal, 2019; Dolan et al., 2019), with the aesthetic and compositional qualities of Instagram content directly influencing purchase intentions through digital visual engagement (Valentini, Romenti, Murtarelli and Pizzetti, 2018). This distinction also underlies the analytical interpretation in Chapter 4, which suggests that high follower counts for Zara do not automatically produce proportionate purchase intention activation.

2.2.4 eWOM and Influencer Marketing

Electronic word-of-mouth has been one of the most widely explored mechanisms in the social media marketing and purchase intention literature. Within the social media environment, eWOM is expressed through influencer posts, user-generated content, brand-tagged posts, and review content disseminated on digital platforms (Dolan et al., 2019). The level of credibility, which refers to the genuineness, expertise, and trustworthiness of the eWOM source, is a key factor in whether eWOM can trigger subjective norm signalling and consequently boost purchase intention (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Pham et al., 2024). The two most predictive credibility components of purchase intention are influencer trustworthiness and perceived expertise (Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020), with consumer cosmopolitanism further moderating the online review-purchase intention relationship (Tran, 2020). Beyond source characteristics, the cultural context in which eWOM is received also shapes its effectiveness, as demonstrated by meta-analytic evidence showing that online review effects on purchase intention vary systematically across national cultures and platform types (Qiu and Zhang, 2023). Attitude towards fashion influencers has a significant effect on purchase intention, with perceived authenticity acting as a mediator (Handranata and Kalila, 2025), and social commerce features can further induce impulsive buying urges through influencer content (Shamim, Azam and Islam, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

One boundary condition highlighted in recent literature is credibility fatigue, which occurs when the number of posts endorsed by influencers is too high, leading to a loss of perceived credibility for individual posts and decreasing the effectiveness of the eWOM mechanism. This was demonstrated by Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024) in an experiment showing that the purchase-intention-activating effect of eWOM was significantly reduced when it was over-endorsed by a single influencer. The scale of influencers and their relationship to authenticity is a structural tension directly relevant to the SHEIN case studied in Chapter 4, in which a network of around 39,000 influencers worldwide creates a tension between scale and authenticity. Al-Abdallah, Khair

and Jatto (2026) identified that a social norm dimension (social identity) is a mediator between the influencer-purchase intention relationship, consistent with the subjective norm construct of the TPB. A moderation effect of gender was also found in a study, confirming that eWOM source effects are higher for women (Saif and Nofal, 2026). This finding is particularly relevant for UK fast-fashion brands that primarily target young women.

A key takeaway from the literature that is practically significant is the distinction between credibility-first and volume-first eWOM strategies, which underpins the comparative analysis of ASOS and SHEIN in Chapters 4 and 5. eWOM trust and UGC quality positively affect purchase intention; however, these findings are limited to a Vietnamese sample and therefore cannot be directly applied to the UK context (Pham et al., 2024; Tafolli, Qema and Hameli, 2025). This gap demonstrates the importance of the secondary data analysis of UK data carried out in Chapter 4 and addresses the first research objective, which examines the relationship between each SMM dimension and UK consumers' purchase intentions, while meta-analytic evidence confirms that source credibility, content quality, and influencer-brand congruence are the most robust predictors of influencer marketing outcomes (Wang, Krause and Henkel, 2024).

2.3 Theoretical Foundation and Contribution

This study combines two frameworks to develop an analytical model to explore the relationship between social media marketing and the purchase intention of UK consumers. The main theory is Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, which explains how SMM activities are proposed to influence purchase intentions through attitude formation and subjective norm signalling. The second framework is Kim & Ko's (2012) five-dimensional SMM activities model, which operationalises those inputs to those TPB activities. Each was well validated on its own, and when combined, they can help identify which parts of the SMM trigger which parts of the TPB under certain circumstances (Zeqiri et al., 2024; Godey et al., 2016).

The study aims to contribute to the integrated framework in three ways, which are directly motivated by the two research objectives. First, to address Objective 1, the study introduces a third attitude-formation input: product-quality-consistency, which will capture the evidence from the Uniqlo case: Positive brand evaluation can be generated without the presence of entertainment or trend if the functional quality is consistently good. Second, Objective 2, sustainability credibility

and macroeconomic conditions are moderators of the purchase intention-to-behaviour conversion step in the study, which were not included in Kim and Ko's (2012) luxury-brand model but have been seen in each of the UK fast-fashion cases. Third, the study considers credibility fatigue due to over-endorsement by the influencers as a boundary condition for the eWOM-subjective norm pathway, corroborated by Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024) and the SHEIN case. This study recognises that a causal relationship could not be established using secondary data analysis (Dwivedi et al., 2021). All associations are summarised as "propositions" and not as causal relations that have been verified.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrates the theoretical background discussed in this chapter into a logical-analytic model that informs the analysis of the cases in Chapter 4 and the cross-case discussion in Chapter 5. The framework consists of two interrelated parts, each corresponding to one of the two research questions. The first one is the operationalisation of social media marketing activities by Kim and Ko (2012), with five dimensions that relate to Objective 1. It is suggested that entertainment, trendiness, and customisation will affect purchase intention by shaping attitudes, leading to positive brand evaluations driven by engaging, contextually relevant content. Interaction and eWOM are suggested to impact purchase intention through subjective norm signalling, which normalises purchase behaviour through credible peer recommendations and influencer endorsements. The second element, about Objective 2, is the outcome of consumer purchase intention, defined as the documented likelihood or willingness of the UK consumers to purchase from a given brand following the social media engagement, with moderating elements specified at the conversion stage between purchase intention and behaviour, in this case, macroeconomic pressure, sustainability credibility, and credibility fatigue.

The conceptual framework is given in Figure 2.1. The diagram depicts the SMM dimensions on the left, the attitude formation and subjective norm pathways in the centre, the primary output of consumer purchase intention on the right, and the moderating conditions on the process of converting purchase intention into purchasing behaviour. The framework is adapted from Kim and Ko (2012) and Ajzen (1991), with the addition of the moderating conditions and the product-quality-consistency pathway included by this study. In the secondary data context of this study,

purchase intention is evidenced through documented engagement metrics, earned media values, UK sales data, and industry benchmarking reports rather than survey-reported attitudes.

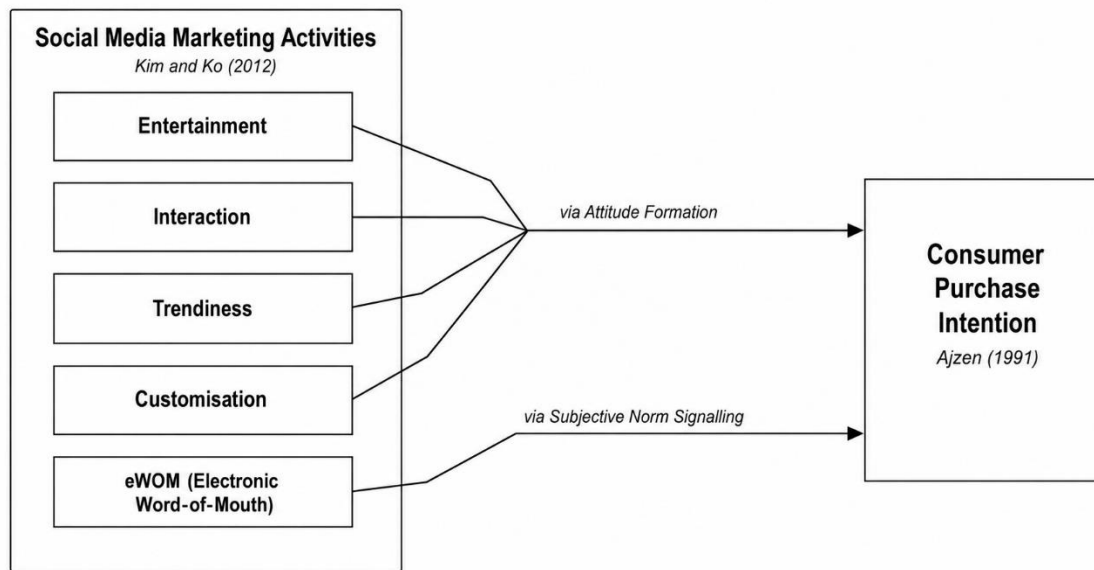


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework for Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intentions. Adapted from Kim and Ko (2012) and Ajzen (1991).

The framework is used to structure case analysis (Chapter 4) and provides the categories for assessing each brand's UK social media marketing strategy and documented outcomes. Chapter 5 focuses on cross-case comparison, and patterns of convergence and divergence are identified through the framework. The framework is explicitly revised in Section 5.4 in light of empirical evidence from the five cases.

2.5 Summary Table of Key Literature

Table 2.5 presents a summary of twelve studies that have contributed to this dissertation. The table is set up in 7 columns to facilitate easy comparison of the theoretical foundations, methodological approach, key findings, limitations, and their relevance to both research objectives.

Table 2.5: Summary of Key Literature. Made by the author.

Author(s) & Year	Theory / Framework	Key Constructs	Methodolog y	Key Findings	Limitation s / Gaps	Relevance to Study
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Kim and Ko (2012)	SMM Activities Framework	Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, eWOM	Survey, luxury fashion	Five SMM dimensions significantly influence purchase intention	Luxury context only; limited to single brand	Provides the five-dimensional analytical framework applied across all five cases
Ajzen (1991)	Theory of Planned Behaviour	Attitude, Subjective Norm, PBC, Intention	Theoretical review	Intention is the strongest predictor of behaviour	Does not address digital or social media contexts	Core mechanism linking SMM dimensions to purchase intention throughout the study
Godey et al. (2016)	SMM and Brand Equity	Engagement, Loyalty, Purchase Intention	Survey, multi-country, luxury	SMM dimensions enhance brand equity and purchase intention	Luxury focus; survey-only design	Validates Kim and Ko (2012) in cross-national context; informs UK fast-fashion extension
Djafarova and Bowes (2021)	Impulse Buying and SMM	Instagram, Gen Z, Impulse Purchase	Qualitative interviews, UK	Instagram activates impulse purchase intention in UK Gen Z	Small qualitative sample; UK only	Directly supports UK attitude formation claims in Chapter 5
Chetioui et al. (2020)	Influencer Marketing and PI	Credibility, Trustworthiness, Purchase Intention	Survey, fashion	Influencer credibility mediates	Survey-based; fashion	Supports eWOM credibility arguments

				purchase intention effects	general context	used throughout Chapters 2 and 5
Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024)	Over-endorsement and eWOM	Credibility fatigue, Moderated mediation	Survey, experimental	High influencer volume reduces eWOM authenticity and PI	Lab conditions; limited to Instagram	Explains SHEIN credibility risk; boundary condition in the conceptual framework
Pham et al. (2024)	Social Commerce and PI	eWOM, Trust, Intention	Survey, Vietnam	eWOM trust and UGC quality drive purchase intention	Non-UK context; single country	Supports eWOM-subjective norm pathway in the conceptual framework
Lacap et al. (2025)	TikTok and Gen Z PI	Attitude, Trust, Purchase Intention	Survey, Philippines	TikTok fashion content drives Gen Z PI via attitude and trust	Non-UK; survey only	Supports SHEIN and H&M TikTok mechanisms analysed in Chapter 4
Baena (2024)	Sustainability and PI	Ethical Intention, Fast Fashion	Empirical study, Zara	Sustainability considerations influence Zara purchase intentions	Single-brand focus	Relevant to sustainability moderator in Chapters 5 and 6

Dwivedi et al. (2021)	Digital and SMM Research Agenda	SMM effectiveness, Attribution	Literature review	SMM-PI attribution remains methodologically complex	Broad scope; not fashion-specific	Justifies secondary data approach and attribution limitations acknowledged
Tafesse and Wien (2018)	SMM and Purchase Behaviour	Engagement, Context, PI	Survey, multiple brands	SMM-PI relationship is conditional and context-dependent	Survey-based	Central to conditionality argument in Chapter 5 and Objective 2
Ofcom (2024a, 2024b)	UK Social Media Usage	Platform usage, Demographics	National survey, UK	82% of UK adults use social media regularly	Aggregated ; not brand-specific	Establishes UK market scale and context underpinning Objective 1

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored four main themes pertinent to the influence of social media marketing on consumers' purchasing intentions in the UK fast-fashion retail industry. The literature agrees that social media marketing is related to purchase intentions through attitude formation and subjective norm signalling, consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The five-dimensional framework offers a valid analytical structure for investigating these relationships (Kim and Ko, 2012). The eWOM literature and literature on influencers emphasise the importance of source credibility and authenticity over volume, which also presents a boundary condition in high-volume influencer programs. Sustainability credibility is a new situation-specific moderator of attitude formation effects and is strengthened by the active CMA regulatory scrutiny in the UK. There are still important research gaps: the majority of studies have been conducted in the area of luxury fashion, and within non-UK consumer contexts, primary survey methods are predominant,

which limits the ability to observe actual commercial results, and no study has compared the results of SMM practice and purchase intention evidence across multiple UK fast fashion brands using secondary data. The following gaps provide direct justification for the two research objectives and the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 addresses both objectives using the case analysis that is provided in the conceptual framework (Section 2.4), while Chapter 5 follows with the cross-case discussion.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and rationalises the research methodology applied to meet the research aim, the two objectives, and the research question presented in Chapter 1. An analysis of how social media marketing influences consumers' purchasing intentions is needed for 5 fast-fashion brands operating in the UK. One research question is how SMM impacts consumers' purchasing intentions in the UK and under what conditions this link to purchasing behaviour becomes a reality. This question requires a methodology capable of understanding brand strategy and commercial results in their real-world context, rather than consumer attitudes as represented in surveys. This chapter follows the Research Onion and explains the philosophical approach and design choices; Sections 3.3 to 3.7 explain case selection, data sources, analysis and research quality; Section 3.8 discusses ethics, and Section 3.9 provides a chapter summary.

3.2 Research Philosophy, Approach, and Design

The philosophical foundation, research approach, and overall design of this study are organised using Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2019) Research Onion, illustrated in Figure 3.1 below.

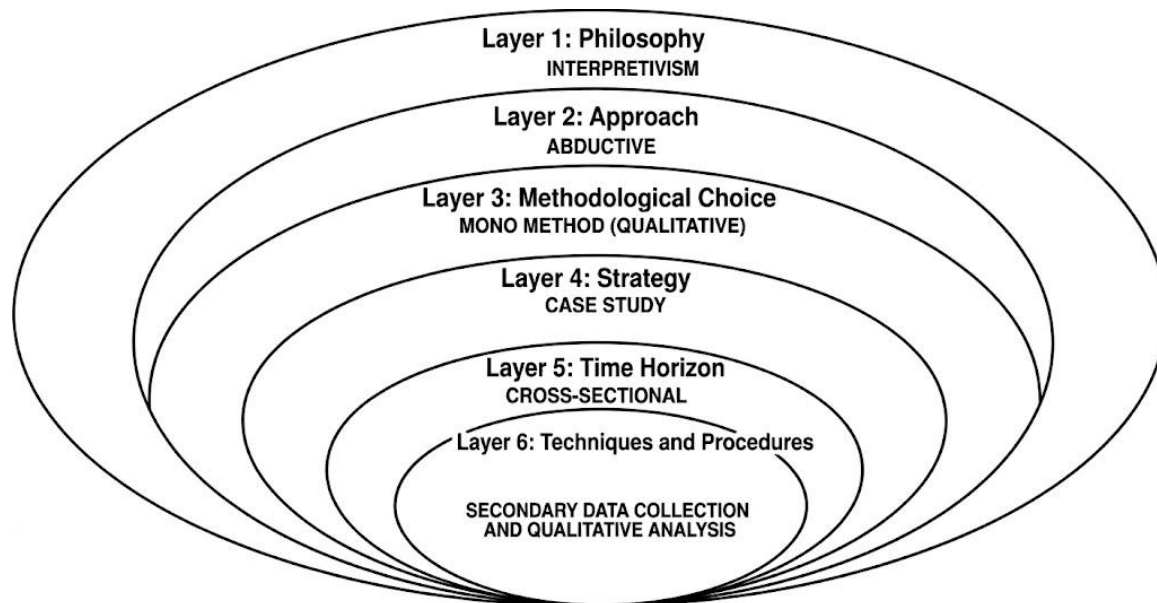


Figure 3.1: Research Onion. Adapted from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019).

Following the interpretivist philosophy of research, this study recognises that consumer behaviour and marketing strategy are contextually situated and cannot be reduced to universal laws that can be applied irrespective of the market conditions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), as shown in the outermost layer of Figure 3.1. Interpretivism is suitable for the research question, which explores how and under what conditions SMM relates to the intention to purchase in the UK fast-fashion retail context and does not involve statistical generalisation. Primary survey data, which would be required by positivism, which is assumed to be objective and measurable, and would relate to quantitative methods, would be beyond the scope and purpose of this secondary data study.

This study takes an abductive approach to theory development by moving inward, through Figure 3.1. Abductive reasoning is an iterative process between theory and empirical findings, in which theory is revised in light of unexpected findings (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 guided initial case analysis. Still, the analysis remained open, allowing evidence outside the framework to extend or complicate it, leading to the development of a product quality consistency pathway from the Uniqlo case and a macroeconomic moderator specification from the ASOS case. This is an iterative, theory-building approach and would be appropriate for multi-case qualitative studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). The chosen method, reflected in the middle layers of Figure 3.1, is qualitative multi-case study analysis, with secondary data as the primary data source (see Section 3.3).

3.3 Research Strategy

In this study, a qualitative multi-case study approach is used, drawing on secondary data. A case study is used to describe the empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its context, where the distinction between the phenomenon and its context is often not clear (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) states that three criteria need to be met for a case study to be appropriate, which are: the purpose of the study is to understand the phenomenon in its context; the researcher has no control over the events and the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined; and the current study of social media marketing and its association with consumer purchase intention in UK fast-fashion meets all the three criteria. Secondary data is used because the research question is based on actual brands and real-world results, rather than on consumer attitudes/perceptions at a given time. Secondary qualitative research using publicly available

Internet data is a methodologically rigorous and growing approach to the study of organisational behaviour and marketing strategy (Cheong et al., 2023; Ruggiano and Perry, 2019).

A multiple case study design is preferable to a single case study design because it allows for analytical generalisation across cases through the replication logic (Yin, 2018). Five cases offer enough variation to reveal standard patterns and critical contingencies, but not so many as to overwhelm a secondary data study. Patterns across multiple cases support stronger analytical claims about the association between SMM dimensions and purchase intention; divergent cases, such as Uniqlo, identify theoretically significant boundary conditions that qualify those claims.

3.4 Case Selection and Sampling Strategy

Cases were selected using purposive sampling, following the recommendations of Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2018). A purposive sample is a sample of information-rich cases intended to elucidate the phenomenon of interest rather than a representative sample. Five criteria were used to select cases: relevance (each brand must be an active UK fast-fashion retailer and have a documented and publicly visible SMM presence); information richness (must have a sufficient amount of publicly available secondary data across multiple types of data sources); diversity across dimensions of business model, UK market presence and primary SMM strategy; currency (must have data available between the year 2019-2025); and credibility (must be data available from multiple verifiable data sources from reputable organisations). Based on this criterion, five brands were selected: Zara, H&M, SHEIN, ASOS, and Uniqlo, all of which are actively operating in the UK. The selected cases are summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Overview of Selected Cases. Made by the author based on company annual reports and industry sources.

Case	Industry	Firm Size	UK Presence	Key SMM Focus	Primary Data Sources
Zara	Fast fashion	Large	60+ stores, e-commerce	Visual content, influencer volume	INDITEX (2025b); Modash (2026); Kolsquare (2025)
H&M	Fast fashion	Large	280+ stores, e-commerce	Influencer campaigns,	H&M Group (2025); CORQ (2025)

				sustainability messaging	
SHEIN	Fast fashion	Large	Online only	Micro- influencer, UGC, haul content	Reuters (2025); Modash (2026); Rawshot (2025)
ASOS	Fast fashion	Mid-large	Online only, HQ UK	Insiders programme, community UGC	ASOS (2024); Kolsquare (2025)
Uniqlo	Fast fashion	Large	15+ UK stores, e- commerce	LifeWear storytelling, selective endorsement	Fast Retailing (2025); Fast Retailing Group (2024)

The five cases cover full-digital retailers with no physical presence in the UK (SHEIN and ASOS) and hybrid store-and-online businesses (Zara, H&M, and Uniqlo). The set includes the UK's largest online fashion retailer, ASOS; the ultra-fast-fashion disruptor, SHEIN; the European store-based retailers with a big presence in the UK, Zara and H&M; and the product-driven Japanese brand with a growing UK presence, Uniqlo. This diversity will ensure that the cross-case analysis reveals both common mechanisms and model-specific contingencies, enabling both research tasks to be addressed with evidence from meaningfully different operational contexts.

3.5 Data Sources and Data Collection

Four categories of secondary data were used in this study. The detailed information on audited financial data, strategic disclosures, and documented SMM investment information is sourced from company-published materials, such as annual reports, investor presentations, and press releases, for Inditex, H&M Group, ASOS, Fast Retailing, and SHEIN. A limitation of these sources is that they are prepared primarily for investor and public relations purposes and may present an overly optimistic picture of UK performance. Data on consumer behaviour in the UK, social media usage benchmarks, and digital marketing performance figures are sourced from

market research and industry analyst reports from Statista, Kolsquare, Modash, Ofcom, McKinsey & Company, and Deloitte. They provide general sectoral analysis but may not necessarily apply to specific brands; the methodology for calculating metrics such as earned media value may not be fully explained. The campaigns and results of each brand are analysed independently by reputable business and trade press outlets, including Marketing Dive, TheIndustry.fashion, and Reuters. The case evidence was interpreted in light of the theoretical and empirical findings from the academic studies identified in Chapter 2.

Data collection was conducted in a structured, sequential manner. The sources were located by searching Google Scholar, Scopus, investor relations websites of the case companies and major financial news websites. Sources were checked for credibility, recency (with priority given to 2019-2025) and direct relevance to UK social media marketing strategy and consumer purchasing outcomes. The evidence was structured by case, following the Chapter 4 case study format. Following the triangulation practice recommended by Farquhar, Michels and Robson (2020), where multiple sources reported different figures for the same metric, the most recent and most frequently corroborated figure was used.

3.6 Data Analysis Approach

The conceptual framework detailed in Chapter 2 guided the data analysis. The five SMM dimensions served as the initial analytical categories, with the two TPB mechanisms providing the interpretative pathways through which evidence was organised. The analysis was open to evidence that stretched or complicated the framework, being consistent with the abductive process discussed in Section 3.2. The within-case analysis created a coherent narrative for each brand on the UK background, challenge or opportunity in SMM, strategy and implementation, and documented outcomes. Data from multiple sources were synthesised and triangulated to check facts and minimise bias from sources (Yin, 2018). The cross-case synthesis then revealed the patterns and differences among the five brands operating in the UK. It categorised them thematically, by the dimensions of the SMM and TPB mechanisms. The analysis deliberately refrains from making causal statements, and all results are presented as associations based on converging evidence rather than as causal relationships reproduced by experiments.

3.7 Research Quality and Rigour

The quality of the research was evaluated based on the four criteria proposed by Yin (2018): construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Construct validity was ensured by using multiple data sources within the UK for each case, and the data definitions of the constructs were operationally clear, based on the conceptual framework in Chapter 2. Systematic analysis, guided by the framework, preserved internal validity by using explicit reasoning to link the evidence to the conclusions; it took into account alternative explanations, and conclusions were qualified when the evidence was ambiguous or partial. External validity in case study research is in terms of analytical rather than statistical generalisability (Yin, 2018). The five varied cases, with the logic replicated, provide the basis for analytically generalisable conclusions regarding the conditions under which SMM is related to purchase intention in the UK fast-fashion context, as addressed by the research question and the two objectives. To ensure reliability, detailed documentation of all data sources, case selection criteria, and analytical procedures was completed using a structured case analysis template for all five cases.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data and does not involve human participants, primary data collection, or sensitive personal information. All data sources are from the public domain and are fully cited in the reference list in line with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David's referencing guidelines. The data are presented accurately, and selective reporting, which would impact the results, has been avoided. Where company-published material is used in a way that could indicate a bias towards positive self-representation, this is clearly identified and balanced with data from independent third-party sources. No access to proprietary or confidential data. Respect is given to the organisations examined, and they are not misrepresented. The study was conducted in accordance with the University's research ethics guidelines, and no formal ethics committee approval was required because the data were all secondary and publicly available.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the methodology of this study. An interpretivist philosophy was used to facilitate a contextually grounded analysis of the association between social media marketing strategies and consumer purchase intentions in the UK fast-fashion market. An abductive process

was adopted, in which the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2 was iteratively refined in light of the secondary data and unexpected findings from the cases. A multi-case approach was deemed most suitable for addressing the research question, examining the mechanisms and conditions underlying SMM effectiveness across five UK active fast-fashion brands. Purposive sampling guided by five criteria yielded the selected cases. The data were taken from company annual reports, UK market research publications, business press and academic studies, and analysed using a structured, framework-guided, within-case and cross-case approach. Construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability were used to address research quality. The results are presented in five case studies in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study through five focused case studies examining how UK-active fast-fashion brands use social media marketing in association with consumer purchase intentions, thereby providing the empirical foundation for addressing both research objectives. Secondary data used for all evidence is sourced from publicly available sources, including company Annual Reports, UK market research publications, reputable industry press, and academic studies. Each case is analysed using Kim and Ko's (2012) five dimensions of SMM and the TPB pathways (Ajzen, 1991), and evidence is derived to support Objective 1 by testing the relationship between purchase intentions and specific SMM dimensions. To answer Objective 2, the effectiveness and conditionality of SMM, evidence on commercial outcomes and moderating conditions are presented. Each chapter ends with a cross-case summary table and a chapter summary, which links to the discussion in Chapter 5.

4.2 Case Study 1: Zara

4.2.1 Introduction and Background

Zara is the flagship brand of the Inditex group, which is based in Arteixo, Spain, with more than 60 stores in the United Kingdom and a growing e-commerce website. In FY2024, the Inditex group generated EUR 27.78 billion in revenue from Zara, of which online sales accounted for EUR 7.19 billion, a 12% increase compared to the previous year and 26.3% of the total group's sales (INDITEX, 2025b). Competing with H&M, ASOS, and SHEIN in the UK, both on retail and eCommerce platforms, Zara is known as a leader in fast fashion.

4.2.2 The Challenge or Opportunity

Zara's central UK SMM challenge during the study period was converting extraordinary social media reach into measurable consumer engagement and purchase signal generation. Though the brand ranked second in the world for influencer mentions in 2023 and has around 62 million followers on Instagram, its content strategy was mostly one-way, preventing it from engaging in real bidirectional communication (Statista, 2024; Modash, 2026). Its UK strategy still lacked

interaction and eWOM dimensions compared with some rivals, who have been introducing more structured influencer networks and community-building features and mechanics (Wang et al., 2025), which has been documented as a risk of not resulting in scale-to-proportionate purchase intention formation. This challenge is directly relevant to Objective 1 because it asks whether trendiness and entertainment alone are enough to provoke purchase intent among UK consumers without interaction and eWOM investment.

4.2.3 Approach and Implementation

Zara's UK SMM approach relies on a relatively limited number of high-quality, editorially placed Instagram and TikTok posts rather than a high-frequency content calendar. Zara works with around 9,000 influencers worldwide who create aspirational minimalist imagery rather than interactive or conversational content (Modash, 2026). The most active strength Zara has is the trendiness dimension; around twice a week, Zara launches a new collection in the UK that is planned through social media, so that trend awareness is created and customers will visit the UK website more or go to its physical outlets to find it (Wang, 2025). These drops are spread across Instagram editorial content and quick TikTok videos, all while maintaining the brand's aesthetic and aligning with current UK fashion trends. The limited entertainment dimension is deliberate, as Zara's high-end positioning within the fast-fashion sector would be undermined by humorous or easily viral formats. There is customisation, with specific product recommendations in Instagram Stories and on the UK website, but not to the algorithmic level of the data-driven personalisation SHEIN offers in its feed. Compared to a formally managed ambassador programme, eWOM in the United Kingdom's fashion industry is primarily generated by third-party UK fashion press and natural influencers (INDITEX, 2025a).

4.2.4 Outcomes and Results

Zara's UK SMM approach produces strong passive reach with moderate engagement depth. Kolsquare (2025) estimated Zara's UK Instagram earned media value at approximately GBP 103.7 million in 2024, and INDITEX (2025b) reported online sales growth of 12% in FY2024, consistent with the view that social media content supports e-commerce traffic. Earned media value is a derived metric calculated from engagement data rather than a direct measure of purchase conversion; this limitation is acknowledged, and the figure is presented as indicative of social

media impact rather than confirmed revenue attribution. The evidence for the trendiness and attitude-formation pathways is found to be active. In contrast, limited interaction and eWOM investment suggest that the subjective norm pathway is not systematically followed, as in competitor cases.

4.3 Case Study 2: H&M

4.3.1 Introduction and Background

H&M Group, headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, operates over 280 stores in the United Kingdom alongside a significant UK e-commerce channel. The group reported global net sales of SEK 234.5 billion in FY2024, with online sales representing approximately 30% of total group revenue (H&M Group, 2025). However, H&M's CEO acknowledged in early 2025 that the brand faces intensifying competition in the fast-fashion sector, particularly from ultra-fast-fashion rivals, and must accelerate strategic improvements to maintain its market position (Reid, 2025). H&M is a direct competitor to Zara in the UK, both in terms of retail offerings and for younger, digital-first audiences on TikTok and Instagram.

4.3.2 The Challenge or Opportunity

During the study, H&M had two documented concurrent issues directly related to Objective 2. The first was digital performance: after several years of profitability losses, H&M strategically launched a digital relaunch in late 2024, aiming to enhance the quality and commercial impact of its social media marketing. The second was negative reputation: the UK has seen allegations of greenwashing (e.g., by the Competition and Markets Authority (2024), which called out the fashion industry for false sustainability claims) and a documented risk that sustainability-themed content might trigger negative consumer attitudes, as well as positive, a moderating condition directly relevant to Objective 2.

4.3.3 Approach and Implementation

In the UK, H&M's SMM approach involves working with influencers, activating campaigns through events, and delivering sustainability messaging across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The 113% increase over the study period reflects the scope of H&M's systematic influencer investments rather than organic earned media growth, driven by a trend-led global

approach from macro to micro influencers in the UK (CORQ, 2025). Another important activation for the UK was the Charli XCX collaboration, which included a pop-up in central London and a shoppable social media campaign on Instagram and TikTok, generating significant UGC from attendees. The interaction aspect was boosted using Instagram Stories polls, live shopping, and comment engagement mechanics. The programmatic influencer approach supported this eWOM dimension, with UK creators creating large-scale outfit-of-the-day content using H&M products. A multidimensional approach was used to directly tackle both the attitude-formation pathway (entertainment and trendiness) and the subjective norm pathway (structured eWOM), in which case H&M is an instructive case for Objective 1.

4.3.4 Outcomes and Results

The digital relaunch contributed to positive performance in the UK (H&M Group, 2025); however, the annual report does not disaggregate UK revenue, making precise attribution impossible. CORQ's (2025) 113% EMV growth figure is the highest documented percentage increase in any H&M UK SMM initiative during the study period, and this supports the interaction and eWOM TPB pathways. The Charli XCX campaign demonstrates that event-linked social content can simultaneously activate attitude formation through entertainment and subjective norm signalling through visible peer engagement, addressing Objective 1 for the H&M case. The greenwashing accusations are also a current and well-documented sustainability credibility gap that weakens the positive attitude effects of sustainability-related content and thus remains an active moderating risk for Objective 2.

4.4 Case Study 3: SHEIN

4.4.1 Introduction and Background

SHEIN is a quick-fashion retailer with no physical stores in the United Kingdom; it's purely online. In 2023, the company's revenue from UK businesses was about GBP 1.55 billion, making it one of the top fashion online retailers in the UK (Reuters, 2025). SHEIN's brand strategy first targets influencers and is primarily social media algorithm-optimised for TikTok and Instagram, with a focus on the demographics of the UK's younger Millennials and Generation Z.

4.4.2 The Challenge or Opportunity

SHEIN's UK SMM challenge has analytical value for both research objectives. For Objective 1, the issue is how to maintain a certain level of authenticity in eWOM among approximately 39,000 influencers worldwide and ensure that the content is engaging enough to sustain the attitude-formation mechanism. A challenge in Objective 2 is that if SHEIN is successful in the UK, it might be due to its extremely low pricing, which is not necessarily indicative of SMM quality and is hard to discern from secondary data. Furthermore, the sustainability credibility challenge posed by consumers, regulators, and media over environmental and labour practices has been documented as relevant to the attitude formation pathway (Rajvanshi et al., 2023; Competition and Markets Authority, 2024).

4.4.3 Approach and Implementation

SHEIN's UK SMM is based on 3 mechanisms that are directly related to Objective 1. The first is the deployment of mass micro-influencers: Modash (2026) found about 39,000 influencers worldwide, and users in the UK create a disproportionately high amount of content on Instagram and TikTok. The incentives given to each influencer are usually free products, which drive high volumes of UGC at a low incremental cost, mostly through unboxing or “try on” content. The second mechanism is that by 2025, the SHEIN haul hashtag had gained over 10 billion views globally, including on TikTok, with UK consumers among the most active viewers, highlighting the potential of haul-format content to drive mass attitude formation and align the brand with excitement, variety, and affordability (Rawshot, 2025). The third one is the algorithmic customisation. SHEIN's product recommendation system provides hyper-personalised feeds for UK consumers based on their browsing and purchase history, forming a continuous loop of customisation (Keijzer, 2023). It is the mechanisms of entertainment and trendiness that are the most powerful, directly triggering the TPB pathway for attitude formation. The high number of influencers also poses the credibility fatigue risk identified by Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024), a boundary condition of the eWOM-subjective norm pathway.

4.4.4 Outcomes and Results

In the UK, SHEIN's results are of commercial importance for Objective 2. The UK's GBP 1.55 billion in revenue in 2023, without any physical retail stores, is proof that entertainment and eWOM mechanisms are correlated with significant online purchase behaviour (Reuters, 2025). It

can not be discerned from secondary data whether this is due to SMM quality or extreme price competitiveness, and this confound is a fundamental limitation acknowledged for Objective 2. The sustainability criticisms are a documented moderating condition that may diminish the impact of haul content on attitude formation among UK consumers who are aware of SHEIN's environmental record, although SHEIN's own 2024 Sustainability and Social Impact Report outlines ongoing initiatives in supply chain transparency and circular fashion programmes (SHEIN, 2025).

4.5 Case Study 4: ASOS

4.5.1 Introduction and Background

ASOS Plc is the UK's largest purely online fashion retailer, headquartered in London. In FY2024, the company's total revenue dropped by 16% to GBP 2.9 billion, due to macroeconomic pressures on consumer discretionary spending in the UK and a strategic reset that led to lower promotional activity (ASOS, 2024). Even with the drop in revenue, ASOS was the top UK fashion brand for earned media value, achieving GBP 109.8 Million (Kolsquare, 2025).

4.5.2 The Challenge or Opportunity

The ASOS case is the most analytically significant for Objective 2 because it presents a direct empirical contradiction of the assumption that strong SMM performance automatically produces revenue growth. In this context, ASOS has achieved industry-leading UK social media performance, despite significant revenue decline, indicating that macroeconomic conditions can play a role in the purchase intention-to-behaviour conversion step beyond the influence of SMM quality, as evidenced by the UK's decline in consumer discretionary spending (CDS) measured by the broader ONS retail sales data during 2023-2024. The 'moderating influence' of a concurrent risk of brand dilution from over-discounting was also noted in ASOS's strategic review for FY2024.

4.5.3 Approach and Implementation

ASOS's primary UK SMM mechanism is the ASOS Insiders programme, relaunched in February 2024. This programme deployed 36 ASOS employees as full-time social media brand ambassadors, each creating content from a genuine personal perspective. By combining brand knowledge with the authentic consumer identities of content creators, this internal micro-

influencer model ensures eWOM credibility and directly meets Lou and Yuan's (2019) credibility needs. According to Embryo (2025), ASOS's United Kingdom Instagram programme generated 56,000 posts in 2024 by 6,715 influencers. In addition to eWOM, ASOS's interaction dimension is enhanced by comment engagement, Instagram Story polls, and style challenges; customisation is expanded to algorithmic personalisation, which delivers targeted product recommendations based on consumer behaviour in the United Kingdom (BrandVM, 2024). This interaction, eWOM and customisation, is a solution for Objective 1 as it shows how different dimensions of SMM can be combined to enhance both TPB pathways.

4.5.4 Outcomes and Results

ASOS ranked as the top social media performer in the UK based on the EMV measure in 2024, with GBP 109.8 million in revenue (Kolsquare, 2025). The Insiders programme clearly led to an increase in the perceived credibility of eWOM and in subjective norm signalling among UK consumers, providing strong evidence to support Objective 1. In contrast, ASOS saw a 16% drop in revenue in FY2024 due to macroeconomic pressures and lower promotional activity (ASOS, 2024). This case provides the most direct evidence for Objective 2: the purchase intention-to-behaviour conversion step cannot be overcome by strong SMM performance, even in the presence of other structural economic factors. The counterfactual analysis of what the decline would have been in the absence of SMM investment is not possible with second-hand data and is therefore limited.

4.6 Case Study 5: Uniqlo

4.6.1 Introduction and Background

Uniqlo is the flagship brand of Fast Retailing Group, headquartered in Tokyo, Japan, operating over 15 stores in the United Kingdom alongside a UK e-commerce platform. Fast Retailing Group reported global revenue of JPY 2.644 trillion in FY2024, with Uniqlo international operations contributing positively (Fast Retailing Group, 2024). Uniqlo positions itself through the LifeWear concept: high-quality, functional, accessible clothing designed for everyday use, differentiating it from trend-driven competitors in the UK market.

4.6.2 The Challenge or Opportunity

Uniqlo's UK SMM challenge is the analytical inverse of SHEIN's and directly relevant to Objective 1: where SHEIN risks credibility fatigue from over-exposure, Uniqlo risks under-engagement in a UK social media environment that rewards frequent and entertaining content. According to Lesiuk (2026), Uniqlo's social media engagement is not particularly high given its turnover level, suggesting the brand has chosen between volume and a consistent brand. There has also been a focus on cotton sourcing, which the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (2021) raised questions about practices within the supply chain from Xinjiang, a consideration relevant to the discussion of sustainability credibility as a moderating condition in Objective 2.

4.6.3 Approach and Implementation

Uniqlo's UK SMM strategy is characterised by restrained, product-focused content emphasising the functional and quality dimensions of its LifeWear range rather than trend participation or entertainment. According to Fast Retailing (2025), the use of social media is more about product launch announcements and engaging only a limited number of social media influencers, specifically for high-value collections, and not as an ongoing content operation. The trendiness dimension is moderate: Uniqlo falls into seasonal trends in the UK but does not try to pioneer them. The entertainment aspect is relatively low: content is informative and aspirational, but not seeking humour and viral challenge formats. eWOM is evident in selective influencer partnerships for UK launches and in organic consumer advocacy from the UK's loyal customer base, who appreciate functionality and value consistency. Importantly for Objective 1, the Uniqlo case implies that product-quality-consistency, the consistent delivery of functional performance at an acceptable price level, can trigger positive attitudes of the consumers through a mechanism that Kim and Ko (2012) did not originally conceptualise in their five-dimensional framework.

4.6.4 Outcomes and Results

Fast Retailing Group (2024) reported robust global revenue growth in FY2024, with Uniqlo international being a positive contributor; However, the UK-specific financial data is not disaggregated in public reporting, as documented. The most important analytical contribution of the Uniqlo case for both objectives is not a specific UK metric, but a structural finding: a product-led brand with a modest SMM profile can sustain strong UK commercial performance, with direct implications for Objective 2.

4.7 Summary of Cross-Case Analysis

4.7.1 Recurring Triggers Across Cases

Across all five UK-active brands, trendiness and entertainment dimensions are the most consistently active SMM mechanisms associated with positive consumer outcomes, appearing in different forms in the strategies of Zara, H&M, SHEIN, and to a lesser degree ASOS. The eWOM dimension is structurally present in all five cases but varies substantially in scale and design, from SHEIN's mass micro-influencer deployment to Uniqlo's selective seasonal partnerships. This cyclical trend of trendiness and eWOM activation offers cross-case support for the attitudes-formation and subjective-norm-signalling pathways mentioned in the conceptual framework and directly targets Objective 1.

4.7.2 Shared Implementation Patterns

One thing that came through in the more commercially documented cases was that the successful SMM implementation was not just deployed to a platform for a year or two, but a conscious decision for the platform and a multi-year investment in SMM or content capability. Each of these is an ongoing capability investment, such as ASOS's Insiders programme, H&M's tiered influencer system, and SHEIN's UGC framework. Brands with better-established, structured SMM infrastructure, namely ASOS and SHEIN, achieved more measurable, consistent purchase-related results, indicating that the sophistication of implementation is a factor for Objective 2.

4.7.3 Major Differences Across Cases

The cases were materially different in terms of business model, scale in the UK, and the key SMM-focused dimension. While SHEIN and ASOS were purely online sellers, the social media acquisition channel was responsible for both online and offline UK sales for Zara, H&M and Uniqlo. The scale of the influencer programme ranged from SHEIN's network of 39,000 influencers worldwide (Modash, 2026) to Uniqlo's strategy of selecting certain seasons for its programme, which means brands have different positioning logics. The attitude formation mechanism also varied across content types: SHEIN and H&M used positive affect through the entertainment function, whereas Uniqlo used it through the quality function, further verifying that the mechanism differs across content types.

4.7.4 Emerging Patterns for Both Objectives

Cases with clearer SMM implementation logic and measurable UK engagement KPIs produced more documentable outcomes, addressing Objective 1. The ASOS revenue paradox, where GBP 109.8 million in UK Instagram EMV coexisted with a 16% revenue decline, provides the most direct evidence for Objective 2, demonstrating that macroeconomic conditions can moderate whether purchase intention converts to actual purchasing behaviour, independent of SMM quality. The cross-case patterns are summarised in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.7.

Brand	Entertainment	Interaction	Trendiness	Customisation	eWOM
Zara	 Medium	 Low	 High	 Medium	 Medium
H&M	 High	 High	 High	 Medium	 High
SHEIN	 High	 Medium	 High	 Low	 High
ASOS	 Medium	 High	 Medium	 High	 High
Uniqlo	 Low	 Low	 Medium	 Medium	 Medium

Figure 4.1: Cross-Case Comparison of SMM Dimensions Across Five UK Fast-Fashion Brands. Made by the author based on case evidence (Sections 4.2 to 4.6).

Table 4.7: Cross-Case Summary of SMM Dimensions, Purchase Intention Outcomes, and Objectives Addressed. Made by the author.

Brand	Strongest SMM Dimension(s)	UK Purchase Intention Evidence	Key Limitation	TPB Pathway Activated	Objectives Addressed
Zara	Trendiness; Visual entertainment	GBP 103.7m Instagram EMV (Kolsquare,	Limited interaction; no UK-	Attitude formation	O1: SMM dimensions active; O2:

		2025); online sales +12% (INDITEX, 2025b)	disaggregated data	(trendiness pathway)	Trendiness most effective for Zara
H&M	Interaction; eWOM	113% EMV growth (CORQ, 2025); Charli XCX event drove UK engagement	Greenwashing allegations moderate trust	Subjective norm + attitude formation	O1: Interaction drives norm signalling; O2: Event-linked SMM effective
SHEIN	Entertainment; eWOM	GBP 1.55bn UK revenue (Reuters, 2025); 10bn+ SHEINHaul TikTok views (Rawshot, 2025)	Credibility fatigue risk; price confound unresolved	Attitude formation (entertainment pathway)	O1: Entertainment-eWOM combination active; O2: Price confound limits attribution
ASOS	Interaction; eWOM; Customisation	GBP 109.8m UK Instagram EMV (Kolsquare, 2025); industry-leading performance	Revenue declined 16% despite SMM leadership	Subjective norm signalling + attitude	O1: eWOM credibility strongest mechanism; O2: Macro conditions moderate conversion
Uniqlo	Trendiness (product quality signal)	Strong FY2024 global growth; stable UK store performance (Fast Retailing Group, 2024)	No disaggregated UK financial data	Attitude formation (quality-consistency pathway)	O1: Alternative attitude formation pathway; O2: SMM not always primary driver

4.8 Chapter Summary

The chapter introduces five case studies on the association between the social media marketing strategies of Zara, H&M, SHEIN, ASOS, and Uniqlo and consumers' purchase intentions in the UK market. The cases show that the trendiness and entertainment dimensions relate to attitude formation across all five brands, and the interaction and eWOM dimensions show subjective norm signalling more distinctly in the ASOS and H&M cases, addressing Objective 1. Product-quality-consistency is considered an attitude-formation input that the Kim and Ko (2012) framework does not mention, as identified in the Uniqlo case. As to Objective 2, the ASOS case shows that when the macroeconomic environment caps consumer discretionary spending in the UK, strong SMM performance does not automatically lead to revenue growth, and the SHEIN case illustrates the SMM credibility moderator and the lack of consensus on the price-SMM confound. The results presented in this chapter serve as the foundation for the cross-case synthesis in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Purpose and Positioning

The chapter introduces five case studies on the association between the social media marketing strategies of Zara, H&M, SHEIN, ASOS, and Uniqlo and consumers' purchase intentions in the UK market. The cases show that the trendiness and entertainment dimensions relate to attitude formation across all five brands, and the interaction and eWOM dimensions show subjective norm signalling more distinctly in the ASOS and H&M cases, addressing Objective 1. Product-quality-consistency is considered an attitude-formation input that the Kim and Ko (2012) framework does not mention, as identified in the Uniqlo case. As to Objective 2, the ASOS case shows that when the macroeconomic environment caps consumer discretionary spending in the UK, strong SMM performance does not automatically lead to revenue growth, and the SHEIN case illustrates the SMM credibility moderator and the lack of consensus on the price-SMM confound. The results presented in this chapter serve as the foundation for the cross-case synthesis in Chapter 5.

5.2 Analytical Framework and Logic

The conceptual framework established in Chapter 2 proposes two pathways through which SMM dimensions are associated with UK consumer purchase intentions, addressing Objective 1. Purchase intention is linked to entertainment, trendiness, and customisation through attitude formation, suggesting that positive brand evaluations are driven by entertaining, contextually relevant content. Purchase intention is related to interaction and eWOM through subjective norm signalling, as credible peer and influencer messages provide social proof that normalises purchase behaviour. The macroeconomic context, sustainability credibility, and credibility fatigue due to over-endorsement by influencers are identified as relevant moderating factors in the purchase intention-to-behaviour conversion stage (Objective 2). The analysis applies replication logic (Yin, 2018): patterns appearing across multiple cases support stronger claims; divergent cases such as Uniqlo and ASOS identify theoretically significant boundary conditions. Cross-references to specific cases use precise evidence from Chapter 4 rather than general assertions.

5.3 Cross-Case Synthesis: Compare and Contrast with Literature

5.3.1 Entertainment and Trendiness: Driving Attitude Formation

According to the literature, entertaining, trend-led social media content is linked to a positive attitude towards a brand, thereby activating the attitude-formation mechanism of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Kim and Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016). This prediction is supported by consistent, though not ubiquitous, evidence from UK cases involving the five brands. SHEIN's extensive UK evidence is the SHEINHaul hashtag, which has accumulated over 10 billion views globally, and UK consumers are amongst the most engaged with the content (Rawshot, 2025), demonstrating the positive effect driven by the haul format, which is tied to the brand's excitement and affordability. The findings of Lacap et al. (2025) reveal that the attitude and trust of Gen Z users of TikTok fashion content are both mediators of the relationship between TikTok fashion content and purchase intention, consistent with SHEIN's documented approach in the UK. Complementary evidence from Zara suggests that trendiness, presented through high-quality editorial imagery and frequent collection drops, is linked to positive consumer attitudes and impulse purchase intention among Generation Z UK consumers (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).

The Uniqlo case is an important qualification. Compared to its similarly sized revenue peers in the UK, Uniqlo produces relatively less entertainment-related content and has a smaller social media following, yet continues to enjoy high product sales. This is because it is a pathway to attitude formation towards a product, in which a positive brand evaluation results from the confidence built by the functional performance, with no entertainment content involved. This pathway is not included in Kim and Ko's (2012) luxury-brand model. It builds on Objective 1 by identifying at least 2 mechanisms underlying attitudes toward fast fashion in the UK. The interim takeaway for Objective 1 is that Kim and Ko's (2012) framework can be extended to the UK fast-fashion context, with entertainment and trendiness as the most effective drivers of attitude formation for trend-dependent brands. Still, for brands whose value proposition is more functional than trend, product-quality-consistency can be equally effective.

Another possible explanation also needs to be recognised. As mentioned in section 4.4.4, SHEIN's commercial scale in the UK might be driven more by its low price positioning than by SMM quality. This confound is that the theory does not confirm the association between entertainment attitude formation and SHEIN, but rather presents it as consistent with it.

5.3.2 Interaction: Building Engagement and Subjective Norm

From the literature, it is expected that interactive SMM can deepen the communication process and improve the quality of attitude development by strengthening relationships between consumers and brands and by engaging in subjective norm signalling, when combined with community visibility (Dolan et al., 2019; Florenthal, 2019). This prediction can be partly confirmed by case studies in the UK, with H&M and ASOS being the most notable. By integrating social elements, H&M's Charli XCX London event activation offers a glimpse of how live experiences can enhance the interaction dimension, providing consumers with exclusive, participatory opportunities to engage with the brand organically (CORQ, 2025). This aligns with the findings of Dolan et al. (2019), who concluded that hedonic and social motivations are the most important ones in engaging consumers with brand content. ASOS's Insiders programme is structurally different yet equally effective, as the brand's employees serve as a 'persistent social voice', fostering a continuous dialogue with the brand community that transcends the singularity of campaign moments. The credibility of employee influencers upholds the authenticity that Lou and Yuan (2019) identify as the most critical factor influencing eWOM.

As seen in Figure 4.1, Zara's relatively low interaction scores indicate that, even for a brand as global as Zara's, one-way content is not enough. This is a conscious brand strategy, as the minimalist brand image of Zara does not fit well in the conversational route, which is partly offset by the 'trendiness' dimension in the attitude formation route (Wang et al., 2025). The difference between Zara's high reach and low interaction level, and ASOS's lower reach and stronger interaction level, indicates that, as Florenthal (2019) has stated, engagement depth is more suited to predict purchase intention activation than passive reach metrics. Addressing Objective 1, the interim takeaway is that interaction most effectively supports purchase intention when it creates authentic, participatory community experiences that UK consumers actively choose to join, whether through events, ambassador programmes, or UGC incentivisation, rather than when it is used simply to amplify one-way content distribution.

5.3.3 eWOM and Influencer Marketing: Subjective Norm Activation

The literature confirms that credible eWOM can act as a normalising mechanism by providing social proof visible to the public, thereby enhancing the subjective norm signalling that leads to purchase behaviour. This prediction is corroborated by the UK case evidence, where the key

boundary condition is credibility, not volume. ASOS provides the most convincing evidence in the UK that credibility-first eWOM is linked to successful subjective norm activation. The Insiders programme is built on the premise of featuring content created by people known to be true fashion fans, not just paid influencers, which helps ensure source credibility at programme scale. This credibility-first approach resonates with UK consumers and has seen Kolsquare's estimate of UK Instagram EMV (2025) for ASOS, the highest in UK fashion that year, reach and influence consumers more effectively than volume-first alternatives. The internal employee model of the Insiders programme directly meets the need for source trustworthiness, identified as the most powerful credibility component influencing purchase intention (Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020).

This credibility fatigue risk is evident in SHEIN, which has a network of around 39,000 influencers, raising the possibility that all of them may be perceived as paid promotion, thereby weakening the eWOM-subjective norm pathway over time (Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa, 2024). Another study's results indicate that eWOM source effects are gender contingent (Saif and Nofal, 2026), suggesting that brands in the UK targeting primarily female Generation Z audiences may be more robust against credibility fatigue than those targeting mixed-gender audiences. Addressing Objective 1, the interim takeaway is that the eWOM-subjective norm pathway is most reliably activated in the UK fast-fashion context through long-term, contextually congruent influencer relationships with strong perceived authenticity rather than high-volume transactional partnerships.

5.3.4 Customisation and Personalisation: Relevance and Intention

The literature suggests that personalised social media content will have a positive impact on purchase intention because it will lead to higher perceived relevance of the brand communications to the UK consumers, which in turn will activate attitude formation with higher content quality and brand relationship quality (Kim and Ko, 2012; Hajli, 2015). This prediction is best supported by UK case evidence: in the cases of ASOS and SHEIN, algorithmic personalisation extends SMM customisation throughout the digital consumer journey (BrandVM, 2024; Keijzer, 2023). Personalised email and on-platform recommendations, like ASOS and SHEIN's data-driven product recommendation system, both set up ongoing cycles of customisation that keep consumers engaged beyond any given post.

Again, there's a qualification with the Uniqlo case. While customisation through algorithmic approaches is not specified in Uniqlo's SMM in the UK, it is optional, as consumers who engage with Uniqlo already have positive attitudes towards the LifeWear proposition; thus, algorithmic customisation is additive but not required for attitude formation (Fast Retailing, 2025). For Objective 1, the main takeaway is that customisation enhances activation of purchase intention for UK fast-fashion brands, through the lens of their highly individualised, trend-oriented target audiences, in which personalised discovery is a critical component of engagement. For brands whose UK consumer base is attracted by a consistently defined brand proposition, customisation contributes at the margin but is not a precondition for effective attitude formation, qualifying Kim and Ko's (2012) framework with a brand-positioning contingency not present in their original luxury-brand analysis.

5.4 Integration to Conceptual Model

Based on the evidence from the two research objectives, the original conceptual framework from Chapter 2 can be modified in three ways, all of which are warranted by the cross-case synthesis in Section 5.3. First, product-quality-consistency is incorporated as a third input to the attitude formation process, in addition to entertainment and trendiness, to reflect the Uniqlo mechanism as demonstrated in Section 4.6 and supported by Ugwuanyi, Sarker and Jaffari (2026), who revealed that between the two attitude changes, the product-quality-consistency pathway is a mediator in the relationship between SMM and purchase intention. Second, macroeconomic conditions, competitive pricing pressure, and sustainability credibility are identified as moderators of the purchase intention-to-behaviour conversion step, going beyond merely contextual background factors, a modification directly driven by the ASOS revenue paradox, the H&M greenwashing evidence and the CMA (2024) regulatory context, all of which form part of Objective 2 findings. Third, the boundary condition of the eWOM-subjective norm pathway is credibility fatigue due to over-endorsement of influencers, as derived from Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024) and the structural risk identified in the SHEIN case.

Figure 5.1 presents the revised TPB pathway flow incorporating all modifications.

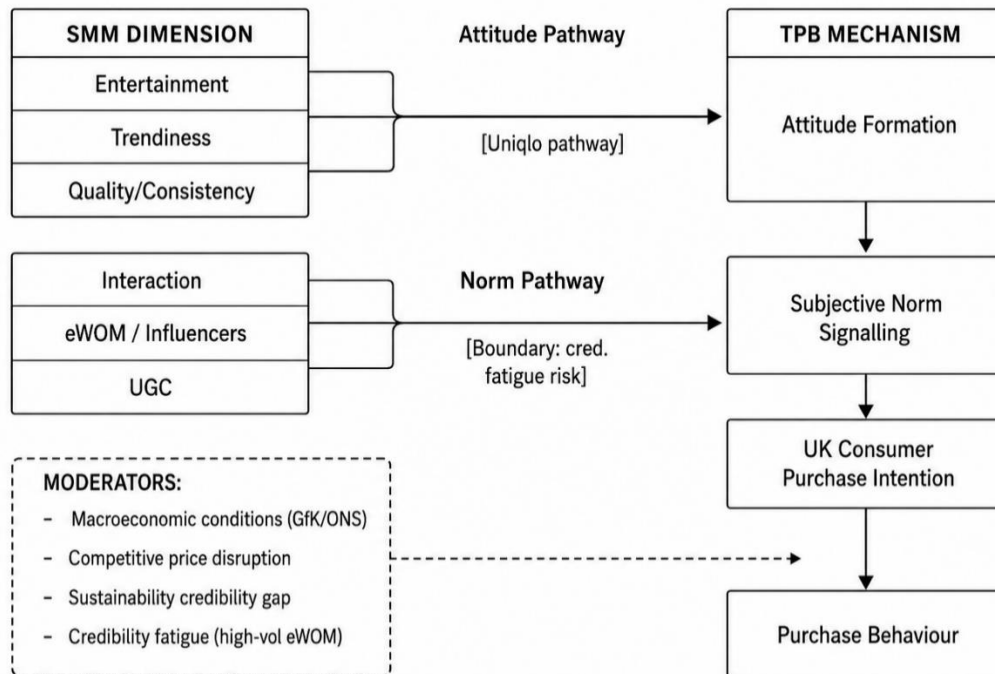


Figure 5.1: Detailed TPB Pathway Flow Across Five UK Fast-Fashion Cases. Made by the author.

Figure 5.2 isolates the sustainability credibility and macroeconomic moderator pathways, which are the additions most directly relevant to Objective 2.

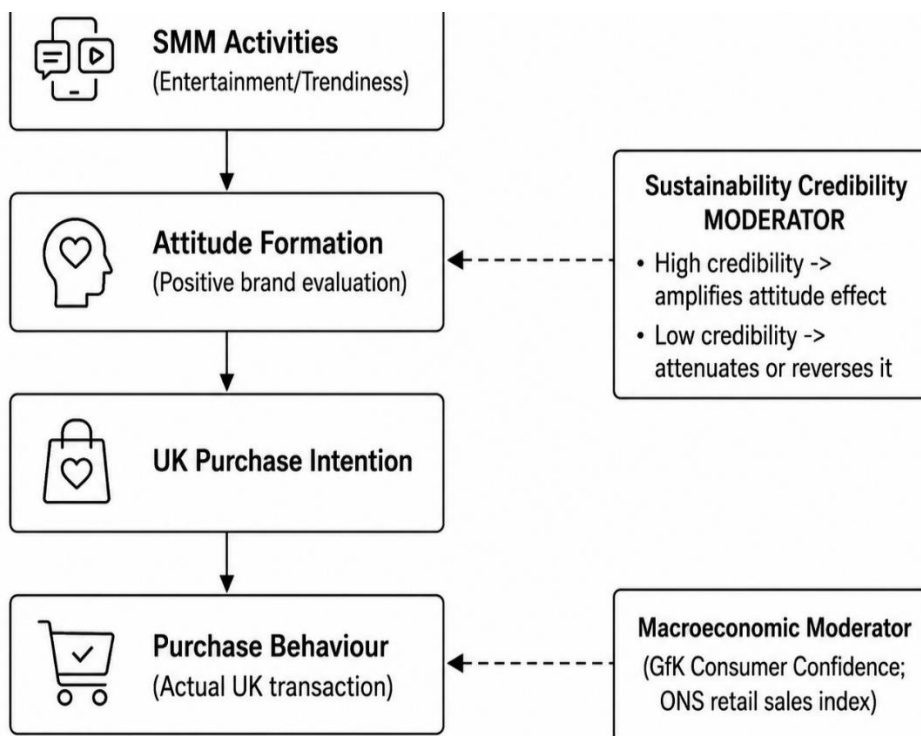


Figure 5.2: Sustainability Credibility and Macroeconomic Moderator Pathways in UK Fast-Fashion. Made by the author.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2, taken together, constitute the new conceptual model that replaces the original Figure 2.1 as the basis for the conclusions of this study. The case evidence for the U.K. showed that moderating conditions exist at the purchase intention-to-behaviour conversion stage, which the original framework assumed were automatic but instead were found to be dependent on economic and reputational factors, outside of SMM quality; this is the most significant theoretical change for Objective 2.

Table 5.1 maps the key findings from Chapters 4 and 5 directly onto the two research objectives, providing an explicit statement of how each finding addresses, supports, or qualifies each objective.

Table 5.1: Findings Mapped to Research Objectives. Made by the author.

Research Objective	Summary of Findings Addressing Objective	Supported / Extended / Challenged	Cross-reference
Objective 1: Analyse how SMM strategies are associated with consumer purchase intentions across five UK fast-fashion brands	Entertainment, trendiness, and eWOM dimensions are consistently associated with attitude formation and subjective norm activation among UK consumers. The TPB pathways are active across all five cases, though the specific dominant dimension varies by brand strategy.	Supported and extended: the literature prediction that SMM activates TPB mechanisms is confirmed; the study adds a product-quality-consistency pathway absent from Kim and Ko (2012).	See Sections 5.3.1 to 5.3.4; Figure 5.1; Table 4.7
Objective 2: Evaluate the documented effectiveness of SMM in driving purchasing	SMM is associated with purchase intention activation across all cases; however, the ASOS paradox demonstrates that strong SMM performance does not automatically convert to commercial outcomes when macroeconomic conditions	Extended and partially challenged: core SMM-PI links are supported; the conditionality of the PI-to-behaviour conversion under UK economic conditions extends Tafesse	See Sections 5.3.3, 5.4, 5.5; Figures 5.1 and 5.2; Section 6.3

decisions and identify the conditions under which that effectiveness is moderated	suppress UK consumer spending. Sustainability credibility moderates the attitude formation pathway for H&M and SHEIN.	and Wien (2018) and qualifies straightforward effectiveness claims.	
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5.5 Robustness Considerations

Several alternative explanations and data quality considerations need to be explicitly acknowledged to maintain intellectual honesty in the strength of the analytical claims. Attribution is the most basic issue, as all attributions within the framework of this study are merely linkages grounded in converging secondary evidence rather than proven causal connections. ASOS's UK Instagram EMV (Kolsquare, 2025) of GBP 109.8 million is a derived metric, calculated using a standard cost-per-engagement formula and documented engagement; the exact calculation formula is not documented, and therefore, this could not be independently verified and should only be treated as an indicative figure in terms of social media impact and not a confirmed commercial return. Further, the GBP 1.55 billion in revenue for SHEIN in 2024 was derived from news reports, not audited accounts, and the connection between SHEIN's revenue and its SMM strategy cannot be separated from the pricing advantage using secondary data.

A second concern is source bias. Company annual reports, which contain primary financial information for each case, are intended for investors and the public and can gloss over negative results or failures. This is achieved by checking each factual claim against other sources, including trade press, analyst reports, and academic studies. Thirdly, macroeconomic conditions and pricing strategy are identified as reasons for the ASOS revenue decline in the analysis, rather than through econometric analysis. The counterfactual question of whether the decline would have been larger without the SMM investment cannot be assessed, which means the study cannot conclude that ASOS's SMM was ineffective, only that macroeconomic conditions moderated the revenue conversion of strong purchase intentions.

5.6 Practical Synthesis

The cross-case synthesis yields five insights and speaks to both research objectives that are ready for practice. First, micro-influencer authenticity consistently outperforms macro-influencer reach in activating eWOM credibility and subjective norm signalling in the UK fast-fashion market, as evidenced by ASOS's EMV leadership relative to SHEIN's higher-volume but less structured programme; UK brands should therefore prioritise long-term, contextually congruent influencer relationships over high-volume transactional partnerships. Second, content should be delivered differently across platforms: TikTok for entertainment and trendiness, Instagram editorial for aspiration and attitude formation, and micro-influencer Reels for interaction and eWOM, and not be viewed as interchangeable distribution channels. Thirdly, UGC campaigns that involve UK consumers' participation provide self-reinforcing social proof, going beyond the brand itself in how it is activated. Fourthly, SMM effectiveness is now contingent upon sustainability credibility in certain sectors of the UK consumer population where ethical consumption intentions exist, such as the H&M greenwashing risk and the CMA (2024) enforcement environment. Fifth, macro-economic monitoring based on the GfK UK Consumer Confidence Index should be used to decide whether it is appropriate to shift SMM investment from awareness to conversion, given the ASOS case, which indicated that macro-economic conditions can affect SMM quality in shaping purchase behaviour outcomes.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the five findings from the UK case studies in light of the conceptual framework, including both research objectives. Addressing the objective 1, Entertainment and trendiness are consistently linked to the formation of consumer attitudes in the UK. At the same time, Kim and Ko's (2012) multidimensional framework can be complemented by product-quality-consistency as a means of shaping consumer attitudes toward functional brands. Interactions and eWOM are linked to subjective norm signalling when source credibility and authenticity are preserved, with credibility fatigue as the most prominent boundary condition. The conditional relationship between SMM and purchase intention in the UK context is supported: good SMM does not automatically translate into revenue, given macroeconomic factors that can dampen consumer discretionary spending, and credibility in sustainability is becoming a more important moderating variable. The revised conceptual model presented in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, and the

explicit objective-findings linkage in Table 5.1, provide the theoretical and empirical foundation for the conclusions in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the theoretical and managerial implications of the dissertation research and highlights some limitations and recommendations for future research. The research aimed to examine the effect of social media marketing on consumers' purchasing decisions in the UK fast-fashion retail industry. This aim was achieved through two research objectives and a research question, which were answered using secondary data and a multi-case study across five brands operating in the UK. It is structured as follows: Section 6.2 provides a summary focused on the main findings; Section 6.3 discusses the theoretical implications for both research objectives; Section 6.4 discusses managerial implications by brand scale; Section 6.5 outlines the limitations and suggestions for further research; and Section 6.6 provides a closing statement.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The cross-case analysis presented in Chapter 5 yields five key findings, based on case evidence and the literature and directly related to at least one of the two research objectives. Both the entertainment and trendiness dimensions of SMM are invariably linked to positive UK consumer attitude formation in the five cases; product-quality-consistency is an equally effective alternative pathway for product-led brands and extends Kim and Ko's (2012) framework to address Objective 1. The interaction and eWOM dimensions relate to subjective norm signalling by UK consumers, with the authenticity of micro-influencers and long-term, rather than high-transaction, relationships with influencers being more effective in driving long-term activation. Building on Objective 2, it is found that the SMM-purchase intention association is conditional in the UK context: the drop in ASOS's revenue despite being the best performer in the UK in terms of social media suggests that macro-economic conditions, competitive intensity and pricing strategy moderate the SMM-purchase intention-purchasing behaviour association, in line with and extending the findings of Tafesse and Wien (2018). When attitude formation and subjective norm activation are strong, social media marketing can affect UK purchase intention and purchasing behaviour, both online and offline. In the UK fast-fashion segment, where there are ethical consumption intentions, sustainability credibility is becoming a prerequisite for SMM to be effective over time, backed by the CMA's (2024) active regulatory scrutiny.

6.3 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theory of social media marketing, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and consumer purchase intention in the context of fast fashion in the UK at four levels. There are clear connections between each contribution and the two research objectives.

The first contribution, primarily addressing Objective 1, is an adaptation of Kim and Ko's (2012) five-dimensional framework of SMM activities to UK fast fashion. The Uniqlo case reaffirms the idea that attitude formation can be initiated solely by product-quality consistency, not by entertainment or trendiness content, which is not addressed in Kim and Ko's (2012) luxury-brand model. This finding validates Ugwuanyi, Sarker and Jaffari (2026), who revealed that consumer-brand engagement was a mediator between SMM and purchase intentions, both through content and reputation pathways, and adds to their model in proposing product-quality reputation as a latent brand engagement pathway in the context of UK fast-fashion retail. The generalisability of this extension is most relevant to product-led brands with strong functional propositions and less relevant to high-trend, low-loyalty segments where entertainment content is the principal way of discovery.

The second contribution, which addresses both objectives, identifies boundary conditions in the eWOM-subjective norm relationship specific to the UK fast-fashion market. As a boundary condition for Objective 1, the credibility fatigue mechanism detailed by Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024) can be seen as a structural risk to SHEIN's UK strategy, as a massive influencer programme will lead to audience fatigue and scepticism, potentially undermining the viability of the eWOM approach. Objective 2 findings about the conditions in which eWOM effectiveness is maintained are supported by Saif and Nofal's (2026) gender moderation result, which indicates that if a brand is primarily targeting a female audience from Generation Z, then it can maintain the credibility of the influencers at a higher volume than brands with a mixed gender audience. These boundary conditions can further clarify the application of the eWOM-subjective norm pathway in the context of UK fast fashion and provide more specific guidance on when this pathway is successful or compromised, as outlined in the general eWOM literature.

The third contribution, mainly related to Objective 2, is the conditionality of the SMM-purchase intention-behaviour chain in the UK market. The ASOS UK case shows that structural economic moderators are not overcome, even by best-in-class SMM performance, when macroeconomic

pressure on consumer discretionary spending in the UK is high. This study reinforces the conditional, context-dependent nature of the SMM-purchasing relationship suggested by Tafesse and Wien (2018). It adds three UK-specific moderating conditions: macroeconomic pressure on consumer spending, competitive pricing disruption from new market entrants and brand equity erosion from over-discounting. These specifications offer practical boundary conditions for UK marketing managers and the theoretical insight into the operation of TPB constructs in adverse economic conditions.

The fourth is methodological and serves both objectives. The study uses secondary data and a multi-case design in the UK, going beyond a primary survey, and demonstrates the analytical value of real-world brand strategy evidence for theoretical refinement. The secondary data approach also reveals contingencies, namely the ASOS revenue paradox and the Uniqlo low-SMM-high-performance pattern, which are not evident in a single-brand survey and would not have been possible to show in the same way using survey data alone. Secondary data multi-case analysis is an underutilised yet valuable method for research in social media marketing and consumer behaviour (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

6.4 Managerial Implications

This study generates five managerial implications for UK fast-fashion marketing professionals. Every implication is based on cross-case evidence, linked to both the research aims and distinguished by brand scale, thus enabling practical implications to be relevant across the spectrum of fast-fashion UK brands.

The first implication is directly tied to the results of Objective 1, which showed that eWOM credibility can be influenced, so long-term micro-influencer partnerships are preferable to short-term partnerships with large numbers of individuals. ASOS's Insiders programme yielded GBP 109.8 million in UK Instagram EMV, with 36 employee ambassadors and 6,715 structured influencer partnerships (Kolsquare, 2025), while SHEIN's employee-led programme on Instagram was the largest in terms of the number of individual influencers. When choosing influencers, UK marketers should prioritise contextual congruence, authentic audience interaction, and multi-post commitment. Micro-influencers in the UK fashion space have high follower engagement, with a benchmark of over 3% (Kolsquare, 2025). For large brands, that can be an internal ambassador

programme like the one ASOS has with their 'Insiders'; for the SME or start-up, a small group of 5-10 nano-influencers on niche UK fashion communities can do the job at a lower cost and legally activate subjective norm signalling.

The second implication is to use platform-specific content formats as separate mechanisms for different TPB pathways (in response to the platform-differentiation finding of Objective 1). TikTok haul content activates entertainment and trendiness to shape attitude, Instagram editorial content activates aspiration and visual brand evaluation, and micro-influencer Reels and Stories activate interaction and eWOM to signal subjective norms. Rather than cross-posting the same content, UK brands should develop separate content briefs for each platform, which is important for maximising content effectiveness on each platform. Large and mid-size brands should designate platform leads; SMEs should focus on just one platform where their target UK audience is most active until they can afford to be present on multiple platforms.

The third implication is to create UGC infrastructure to support self-sustaining social proof (as per Objective 1's UGC findings). Structured UGC campaigns, such as ASOS's community showcase mechanics or SHEIN's SHEINHaul hashtag, show that eWOM can reach far beyond a brand's own content marketing efforts (Rawshot, 2025). It involves a branded hashtag with clear participation rules, a weekly UGC feature slot within owned channels, and a free product seed programme to encourage adoption. If the ratio of UGC to brand content is greater than 1:1, it suggests the community is self-feeding. This is a budget-friendly strategy that is available to brands of all sizes.

The fourth implication, related to the sustainability credibility finding from Objective 2, is to consider sustainability credibility a precondition for SMM effectiveness within UK ethical consumer segments. As demonstrated by the greenwashing challenges faced by H&M, sustainability-related social claims that cannot be substantiated operationally pose regulatory and reputational risks, in light of the CMA (2024) guidance on green claims. That will involve commissioning an independent sustainability audit and making the results available to the public in the UK before using sustainability claims on social media. For mid-size brands, becoming a recognised third-party-certified organisation before making sustainability claims is a proportionate step. SMEs are advised not to make sustainability claims under UK SMM at all until they are sure they have operational alignment with the UK regulation.

The fifth implication is to monitor and adjust to the macroeconomic moderation of UK purchase conversion (Objective 2 finding). As ASOS's FY2024 growth shows, strong social media performance in the UK does not necessarily translate into the desired commercial impact in an environment where UK consumer discretionary spending is under pressure. The quarterly review can be linked to the GfK UK Consumer Confidence Index and to the social engagement-to-conversion ratio, enabling tactical campaign changes to conversion-led content when leading indicators signal macroeconomic contraction. This pivot can be based on algorithmic calculations for large brands that can perform econometric modelling; for SMEs, it can be an approximation calculated manually every quarter by comparing site conversion rates to publicly released GfK data.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study has four main limitations. One is the use of secondary data and the inability to draw causal conclusions about the specific SMM activity and purchasing outcome. Each finding is an association, not an experimentally established cause-and-effect relationship, and this is recognised throughout the analysis. The second is the lack of disaggregated UK financial information for SHEIN and Uniqlo, with global information provided, and the caveat that UK performance could differ. The third is the supply-side focus: this study examines what brands do and the commercial results they achieve. Still, it does not have access to the attitudinal and normative processes at the consumer level, which are crucial to mediating between SMM activities and purchasing. The fourth is the SHEIN case, which could not be solved by secondary data analysis, where the association between entertainment attitude formation and SMM quality might be price-driven rather than demand-driven.

Three research avenues will directly help remove these limitations and should be pursued. First, primary mixed-methods research that uses secondary data analysis alongside consumer survey or interview data would greatly enhance causal attribution and enable the direct measurement of attitude formation and subjective norm activation in response to specific types of content in the UK, thereby directly addressing both research objectives with primary data. Second, for objective 2, a longitudinal panel study that observes fast-fashion SMM investment in the UK and commercial results over a 3-5-year period would allow macroeconomic cycles to be examined as moderators of the relationship between SMM and purchase intention over time. Third, natural

experiment analyses of how changes in platform policies (e.g., TikTok algorithm updates and Instagram shopping feature tweaks) influence the dynamics of content and commerce would provide quasi-causal attribution from secondary data, which is not possible with pure observational analysis.

6.6 Closing Statement

The current study investigated the association between social media marketing and consumer purchase intentions for five fast-fashion brands active in the UK and found that this relationship is real, contextually structured, and conditional. Objective 1 (entertainment), trendiness, and authentic eWOM are consistently linked to attitude formation and subjective norm activation among UK consumers. In contrast, product-quality-consistency represents a previously unexplored pathway to attitude formation. Whether purchase intentions translate into actual purchasing behaviour in the UK marketplace is limited by macroeconomic conditions, sustainability credibility and source credibility fatigue (Objective 2). The theory proposed in this study can serve as a basis for further research on social media marketing in the UK retail industry. At the same time, the managerial implications can provide practical guidance based on brand size. The main takeaway is that genuine, honest, and platform-specific social media investment leads to more sustainable consumer engagement in the UK, and that the volume of undifferentiated content campaigns is ineffective in the current macroeconomic climate of strong purchase intent and lower actual purchasing behaviour.

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Appendix A: UK SMM Performance Data Summary

Table A1 provides a concise summary of the key secondary data metrics used to assess each brand's UK social media marketing performance and its association with purchase intention outcomes.

Table A1: UK SMM Performance Data by Brand (Secondary Evidence Summary). Made by the author.

Brand	UK Instagram EMV (2024)	Approx. Influencer Network	Primary UK Platforms	Documented UK Revenue / Performance
Zara	GBP 103.7m (est.)	~9,000 globally (Modash, 2026)	Instagram, TikTok	Online sales +12% (FY2024); 26.3% of group total
H&M	EMV +113% YoY	Tiered; thousands globally	Instagram, TikTok, YouTube	SEK 234.5bn global net sales (FY2024)
SHEIN	Not separately reported for UK	~39,000 globally (Modash, 2026)	TikTok, Instagram	GBP 1.55bn UK revenue (2023)
ASOS	GBP 109.8m (#1 UK fashion)	6,715 influencers; 36 Insiders	Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest	GBP 2.9bn revenue (FY2024); -16% YoY
Uniqlo	Not separately reported for UK	Selective; launches only	Instagram, YouTube	JPY 2.644trn global (FY2024); UK not disaggregated

Appendix B: Managerial Implications Scorecard

Table B1 provides a structured scorecard expanding on the five managerial implications presented in Section 6.4.

Table B1: Managerial Implications Scorecard. Made by the author.

Implication	Concrete Action	Why It Matters	How to Implement	Metrics to Monitor	Applicability by Brand Size
1. Micro-influencer relationships	Build a tiered UK roster; prioritise 12-month minimum partnerships with creators under 100k followers	Authenticity drives eWOM credibility; Lou and Yuan (2019) confirm credibility as the key purchase-intention activator	Recruit via Kolsquare or Modash; set multi-post briefing cycles; provide editorial guidelines	Engagement-to-follower ratio: target above 3% for micro-influencers; post-level EMV trend	Large brands: internal Insiders model. SMEs: 5-10 nano-influencers in niche UK communities
2. Platform-specific content	Deploy TikTok hauls for entertainment and trendiness; Instagram editorial for aspiration; Reels for eWOM activation	Each platform activates a different TPB pathway; treating them as interchangeable dilutes effectiveness	Appoint a platform lead per channel; create separate content briefs per platform	Platform-specific engagement depth (saves, shares, comments); conversion attribution where available	Mid-to-large brands. SMEs: focus on one platform until resources allow expansion
3. UGC infrastructure	Launch a branded hashtag with clear participation mechanics; feature UGC in	Self-sustaining social proof amplifies subjective norm activation beyond brand posts	Design hashtag challenge; free product seed tier; feature top UGC monthly	Hashtag reach growth month-on-month; UGC-to-brand-content ratio	All sizes; minimal budget required

	owned channels weekly				
4. Sustainability credibility	Commission independent sustainability audit before embedding sustainability claims in UK social content	CMA (2024) scrutiny means unaligned claims risk regulatory action and consumer trust erosion	Engage BCORP or third-party certifier; trace all social sustainability claims to audit evidence	UK brand sentiment score for sustainability; CMA-flagged claims monitoring	Large and mid brands: third-party certification. SMEs: avoid sustainability claims until operationally aligned
5. Macroeconomic monitoring	Build a quarterly review linking GfK UK Consumer Confidence Index to social-to-conversion ratio	Strong SMM alone does not guarantee revenue under adverse macro conditions	Subscribe to GfK index; set conversion ratio thresholds triggering tactical campaign pivots	UK social engagement-to-conversion ratio quarterly; GfK score correlation with basket completion	Large brands: econometric modelling. SMEs: Google Analytics goal tracking vs. GfK data