



A Conceptual Review of Social Media Marketing Outcomes: Brand Image and the Conditional Pathway to Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

This study reviews prior research to explain how social media marketing (SMM) influences brand image, and ultimately purchase intention—and highlights that the link from SMM → purchase intention is often inconsistent and may depend on mediators. This is a conceptual / literature-based paper: it builds the framework using deductive reasoning and a systematic review of prior literature. The findings suggest that a strong brand image plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between social media marketing efforts and actual purchasing behavior.

Keyword: Digital Marketing, Brand Image, Purchase Intention

ABSTRAK

Studi ini meninjau penelitian sebelumnya untuk menjelaskan bagaimana pemasaran media sosial (SMM) memengaruhi citra merek, dan pada akhirnya niat pembelian—dan menyoroti bahwa hubungan dari SMM → niat pembelian seringkali tidak konsisten dan mungkin bergantung pada mediator. Metode penelitian menggunakan konseptual/berbasis literatur: membangun kerangka kerja menggunakan penalaran deduktif dan tinjauan sistematis terhadap literatur sebelumnya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa citra merek yang kuat memainkan peran penting dalam menjembatani kesenjangan antara upaya pemasaran media sosial dan perilaku pembelian aktual.

Keyword: Pemasaran Digital, Brand Image, Keinginan Membeli

1. Introduction

Social media marketing has repeatedly been shown to strengthen brand awareness and stimulate brand engagement, yet these outcomes do not consistently translate into stronger purchase intention. Ramadhani & Prasasti (2023) and Jeromina & James (2024) report non-significant effects of social media marketing on purchase intention, reinforcing the idea that the relationship is not linear or automatic (Jeromina & James, 2024). These findings suggest that social media marketing may be effective at enhancing visibility, reach, and consumer interaction, but the pathway from exposure and engagement to actual purchasing decisions is more complex and likely depends on additional psychological and relational factors. One explanation for these mixed results is that purchase intention often requires more than awareness and engagement; it frequently depends on consumer trust, perceived credibility, and overall evaluations of the brand. In many contexts, consumers may enjoy and engage with content (liking, sharing, commenting) without developing the level of confidence necessary to form a clear intention to purchase. This is especially likely when consumers perceive social media content as overly promotional, when influencer messages are seen as less authentic, or when the product category involves higher perceived risk. Therefore, the non-significant effect reported in several studies may indicate that social media marketing influences purchase intention indirectly, operating through

mediating variables such as brand trust, consumer attitudes, and perceived value, or that the strength of the influence depends on specific consumer perceptions and contextual conditions.

Moreover, although brand image is frequently acknowledged as an important predictor of purchase intention, its role as a mediating mechanism between social media marketing and purchase intention remains underexplored. Existing research such as (Faisal & Ekawanto, 2022) and (Hasan & a, 2023), indicates that brand image significantly influences purchase intention, implying that consumers are more likely to intend to buy when they hold favorable brand associations (e.g., quality, prestige, innovativeness, reliability, or self-congruence). However, what remains insufficiently addressed is *how* social media marketing activities specifically contribute to shaping and strengthening brand image. The mechanisms are often assumed rather than empirically unpacked—such as whether brand image is constructed through perceived interaction quality, storytelling content, influencer credibility, electronic word-of-mouth, or user-generated content. This gap is critical because understanding the formation of brand image through social media interactions can explain why social media marketing sometimes fails to translate into purchase intention even when engagement is high.

One critical aspect of addressing these gaps is the need for a clearer theoretical framework that integrates multiple constructs influencing consumer behavior. Many studies have identified positive effects of social media marketing on brand image; however, the pathways through which these outcomes translate into purchase intention remain inadequately explored (Irshad & Ahmad, 2019);(Birgün & Çalışkan, 2017)). Developing a robust theoretical model that incorporates mediating factors such as brand trust and customer engagement can provide marketers with actionable insights that improve strategic planning (Xu & Ozuem, 2019). For instance, examining how brand engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention can help brands tailor content strategies that foster stronger emotional and relational bonds with consumers, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase decisions (Birgün & Çalışkan, 2017).

Furthermore, the role of demographic factors in shaping consumer responses to social media marketing warrants greater attention. Different consumer segments—particularly younger generations such as Gen Z—often exhibit distinct behaviors, expectations, and preferences when interacting with brands online (Pellegrino & Abe, 2023). Addressing this gap would allow marketers to develop more targeted campaigns that align with specific audience characteristics, thereby improving the effectiveness of social media strategies (X. Chen, 2023). In addition, the interplay between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media marketing is crucial for understanding consumer perceptions and behavioral outcomes. Prior studies show that eWOM can significantly influence brand image and purchase intention (Moses et al., 2019). however, the mechanisms through which eWOM interacts with firm-driven social media marketing efforts remain insufficiently understood. Investigating these dynamics could help brands better harness user-generated content, strengthen perceived credibility, and enhance marketing performance (Vrontis et al., 2021). Lastly, addressing these gaps is essential for advancing academic knowledge in marketing. The current literature often lacks explicit theoretical grounding and clearly testable hypotheses, which constrains the ability to draw generalizable conclusions (Irshad & Ahmad, 2019); By establishing a more rigorous academic foundation, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in social media environments, ultimately benefiting both scholars and practitioners.

Addressing these gaps is important for several reasons. First, clarifying the relationships among social media marketing, brand image, and purchase intention can help firms design campaigns that go beyond visibility and engagement to influence deeper drivers of buying decisions. Second, as social media platforms and consumer behaviors continue to evolve, marketers need evidence-based guidance on which social media activities most effectively build favorable brand perceptions and strengthen purchase intention. Ultimately, a more comprehensive understanding of these pathways can support more effective marketing strategy, improved consumer engagement quality (not just quantity), and stronger outcomes in terms of purchase intention and sales performance.

2. Literature Review

Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing (SMM) refers to the strategic use of social media platforms to market products, services, and ideas by facilitating interactive communication between brands and consumers. Building on

broader definitions of social media as internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, SMM leverages participatory and networked environments to support marketing goals such as increasing brand awareness and driving sales (Xie, 2023; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this environment, social media functions as a *hybrid* element of the promotion mix: it enables brands to communicate directly with consumers while also enabling consumers to communicate with one another, often outside the firm's direct control (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Consistent with this logic, SMM is commonly characterized by two-way interaction, real-time feedback, and engagement, allowing brands to build relationships and continuously adapt their messaging based on audience responses (Khanom, 2023; Faisal & Ekawanto, 2022).

In practical terms, SMM encompasses a mix of content creation, paid advertising, and customer interaction activities designed to increase visibility and strengthen customer relationships. This view aligns with strategic perspectives that describe SMM as cross-functional and interdisciplinary, requiring alignment across organizational goals, culture, and governance to manage social media efforts effectively (Felix et al., 2017). Recent strategy-focused work also emphasizes that social media marketing strategy can vary in maturity and scope (e.g., social content strategy, social commerce strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy), reinforcing that SMM is not a single activity but a coordinated set of strategic choices (Li et al., 2021). At the campaign level, research frequently operationalizes SMM through dimensions such as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth, which capture how consumers perceive and respond to brand activities on social platforms (Kim & Ko, 2012). Moreover, evidence from branded content research shows that content format and creative strategy are closely linked to engagement outcomes (Ashley & Tuten, 2015), and that post characteristics such as vividness and interactivity help explain variations in likes and comments on brand fan pages (de Vries et al., 2012).

Moreover, social media marketing is recognized for its cost-effectiveness compared to traditional marketing channels. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram provide businesses with tools to target specific demographics based on user data, such as age, location, and interests, thereby optimizing marketing efforts (Piranda et al., 2022). This targeted approach not only enhances the efficiency of marketing campaigns but also improves the relevance of the content delivered to potential customers ("Impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior: A comparative study of traditional marketing channels and digital platforms", 2024). These metrics help brands refine their marketing strategies and content to better resonate with their audience, ultimately driving higher conversion rates (Mukherjee, 2020). This measurement logic is consistent with the view that social media metrics should be tied to marketing objectives and interpreted as indicators of customer "investments" (e.g., attention, interaction, sharing), rather than relying only on traditional ROI assumptions (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Collectively, these perspectives position SMM as a dynamic marketing approach that combines relationship-building, content strategy, and data-driven optimization—an area that continues to evolve rapidly alongside changes in technology, platform design, and consumer behavior (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Brand Image

Brand image is a key component of brand knowledge and is closely related to what consumers know and feel about a brand through the associations stored in their memory. In this sense, brand image is formed and reinforced by consumers' brand associations, which become organized in customers' minds and shape how they interpret and evaluate a brand (Hasan & a, 2023). Brand image can therefore be understood as the overall "picture" of a brand that exists in the marketplace—reflecting not only what a brand offers, but also what it represents to consumers. More specifically, brand image refers to how a product or brand is portrayed in people's minds and how consumers understand and interpret the product's attributes, features, and meanings (Chatterjee & Basu, 2020; Faisal & Ekawanto, 2022). Because it is perception-based, brand image is not limited to objective product performance; it also includes the subjective impressions that consumers develop from exposure, experiences, and brand communications. As a result, brands with strong and favorable images tend to be better positioned to influence consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Brand image is often described as a multi-dimensional construct that includes both tangible and intangible elements. Tangible aspects may include the physical attributes of a product, such as packaging and design, while intangible elements encompass emotions, associations, and symbolic meanings connected to the brand (Yazid & Kawiryan, 2023). This dual structure highlights that brand image is created not only through what the product *is*, but also through what the brand *means* to consumers. For example, a brand that effectively

communicates its identity and values and maintains consistent interactions with its audience can strengthen emotional attachment and improve overall perceptions (Saleem et al., 2015). Finally, brand image is shaped by multiple influences, including marketing strategy, customer experience, and digital engagement. In particular, social media interactions increasingly contribute to image formation because consumers encounter brands through content, conversations, and ongoing engagement on platforms. When social media marketing delivers relevant and engaging content that matches audience needs and expectations, it can strengthen brand associations and enhance brand image (Hu & Zhang, 2023).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention (PI) is a core construct in marketing and consumer behavior, commonly defined as a consumer's conscious plan or willingness to buy a particular product or brand. Because intentions reflect motivational readiness, PI is widely used as a proximal indicator of future purchasing behavior and as an outcome variable for evaluating marketing effectiveness (Spears & Singh, 2004). The conceptual basis of PI is strongly grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TRA argues that behavior is preceded by intention, which is primarily shaped by attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TPB extends this model by adding perceived behavioral control (PBC) to reflect constraints that may prevent consumers from acting on their intentions (e.g., limited budget, product availability, time) (Ajzen, 1991). This is especially relevant in purchasing contexts because consumers may intend to buy but still fail to purchase if they perceive insufficient control or face situational barriers. Evidence also supports TPB's explanatory power: a meta-analytic review found that TPB variables account for substantial variance in intention and behavior across domains, reinforcing that intention is systematically predictable from attitudes, norms, and control perceptions (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

In online and social commerce settings, PI is shaped strongly by trust and perceived risk, because the consumer faces greater uncertainty (e.g., seller reliability, payment security, product authenticity). Pavlou (2003) shows that integrating trust and perceived risk with acceptance variables helps explain intention to transact online, highlighting that PI depends not only on marketing appeal but also on uncertainty reduction and perceived safety. Related work integrating trust into online shopping models also supports trust as a key determinant that complements technology beliefs (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003). Because trust is multidimensional, measurement-focused research proposes and validates structured trust constructs for e-commerce, enabling more consistent evaluation of how trust predicts intention across studies (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002).

Another major driver of PI—especially online—is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and user-generated information. A systematic review and integrative model explains that eWOM influences consumer behavior by shaping perceptions through social communication processes and information evaluation (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Extending this logic, research on online reviews shows that consumers are influenced by both informational cues (e.g., argument quality, diagnosticity) and normative cues (e.g., ratings, rankings), which affect information adoption and, in turn, purchase-related intentions (Filieri, 2015). This explains why PI may increase even without direct brand messaging: consumers often form intentions after interpreting peer signals that reduce uncertainty and strengthen perceived value or credibility. Beyond information and trust, PI can also be shaped by environmental cues that generate affective responses. Online retailing research suggests that “virtual store atmospherics” (design, layout, interactivity, ease of navigation) can influence consumers' cognitive and emotional states, which then affect approach behaviors such as purchase intention (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001).

3. Methode

To construct the conceptual framework, deductive reasoning is applied, drawing on the theoretical foundations of the impact of social media marketing on brand image and purchase intention. By analyzing past research, we seek to develop a model that connects these variables and provides a theoretical understanding of how social media marketing influence brand image, and purchase intention. This conceptual model is validated through a systematic review of relevant academic literature, industry reports, and case studies that emphasize the influence of environmentally conscious marketing on purchasing intention. This methodology allows for a deeper theoretical exploration of the factors influencing Social Media Marketing on Brand Image and Purchasing Intention. The study aims to offer insights for future empirical research and inform practical strategies in Social Media Marketing.

4. Result and Discussion

The Correlation between Social Media Marketing Brand Image

Social media is an efficient way of interacting with current and potential customers for businesses and developing a positive brand image (Yusuf, 2018)). Social media marketing plays a crucial role in shaping brand image, which is essential for influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors. This relationship is further supported by Suariedewi, who highlights that social media quality positively impacts brand image, suggesting that engaging and informative social media profiles can significantly influence consumer perceptions (I Gusti Agung Ayu Mas Suariedewi & I Gusti Ayu Athina Wulandari, 2023). the role of social media advertising content in shaping brand image is underscored by Adetunji et al., who found that both hedonic and functional brand images mediate the effects of social media advertising on consumer behavior (Raji et al., 2019). This suggests that the type of content shared on social media platforms can significantly influence how consumers perceive a brand, thereby affecting their behavioral intentions.

The effectiveness of social media marketing in enhancing brand image is also supported by findings that emphasize the role of interesting, vivid, and interactive content in shaping favorable consumer perceptions. For example, Rifki Warri Zain and Irmayanti Hasan (2024) highlight that engaging social media content can cultivate consumer interest and strengthen brand image. Similar evidence shows that content characteristics (e.g., vividness and interactivity) increase consumer responses to brand posts and improve brand-related evaluations (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeftang, 2012). Moreover, research on branded social content indicates that creative strategy and content execution influence consumer engagement—an important route through which consumers form impressions and associations about brands (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Studies across industries also confirm that social media marketing activities significantly affect brand image and related brand equity outcomes (Seo & Park, 2018; Godey et al., 2016).

In addition, integrating electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) into social media strategies has been shown to strengthen brand image because it enables authentic consumer-to-consumer interactions and social proof that reinforce positive brand meanings (Solihin & Ahyani, 2022). Foundational evidence also demonstrates that eWOM can directly influence brand image and purchase intention, showing that consumers' online discussions meaningfully shape how brands are perceived and evaluated (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Broader reviews further explain that eWOM affects consumer judgments by shaping credibility and information evaluation processes (Cheung & Thadani, 2012), and empirical work shows that eWOM in social media influences purchase intention through information quality, credibility, usefulness, and adoption (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Overall, these studies collectively illustrate that social media marketing is integral to building and maintaining a positive brand image: by using engaging content, fostering emotional connections, and encouraging consumer interactions (including eWOM), brands can strengthen brand perceptions, which can subsequently influence consumers' purchase-related decisions.

The Correlation between Brand Image and Purchase Intention

Understanding the relationship between brand image and purchase intention is crucial for businesses aiming to enhance consumer engagement and drive sales. The relationship between brand image and purchase intention has been extensively studied, revealing that brand image significantly influences consumers' purchasing decisions across various contexts. Brand image serves as a critical mediator that shapes consumer perceptions and attitudes toward a brand, ultimately affecting their intention to purchase. Brand image is consistently identified as a significant factor influencing purchase intention across various studies. It serves as a critical cue for consumers when making purchasing decisions, as it helps them form subjective judgments about a brand. Apparel brand image and perceived quality significantly influence consumers' purchase intention, with self-congruity and perceived quality acting as mediators (L. Chen et al., 2021). Social media marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping brand image and, consequently, purchase intention. A positive relationship exists between social media marketing efforts and brand image, which in turn enhances purchase intention. This indicates that effective social media strategies can amplify the impact of brand image on consumer behavior.

Research consistently indicates that a positive brand image strengthens consumers' purchase intentions, as proposed in customer-based brand equity theory where favorable brand knowledge (including strong brand associations/image) increases positive consumer responses to marketing (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). For

instance, Yuszana and Tunjungsari show that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) improves purchase intention indirectly through brand image among users of an online ticketing application, demonstrating the mediating role of brand image in a digital service setting (Yuszana & Tunjungsari, 2024). Similarly, Nastiti et al. find that corporate rebranding enhances purchase intention through improvements in brand image, reinforcing that a favorable brand image can strengthen consumer evaluations and encourage purchase decisions even when the product/service is relatively high involvement (Nastiti et al., 2021).

Beyond firm-driven branding activities, brand image is also shaped by consumer-generated communications in digital environments. Prior research shows that eWOM can be a powerful driver of both brand image and purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012), and broader syntheses explain that eWOM affects consumer decision-making through credibility and information evaluation mechanisms that influence downstream intentions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016). In line with this, Adetunji et al. demonstrate that user-generated content (UGC) on social media significantly influences both functional and hedonic brand image, which subsequently affects purchase intention, highlighting how consumer interactions on digital platforms reshape brand meaning and buying decisions (Adetunji, Sabrina, & Sobhi, 2017). Supporting this mechanism, Raji et al. also show that brand-related communications on social media (e.g., advertising and sales promotion content) can enhance brand image, which then contributes to favorable behavioral intentions, reinforcing the central role of brand image in digital marketing pathways (Raji, Rashid, & Ishak, 2019). In digital environments. Prior research shows that eWOM can be a powerful driver of both brand image and purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012), and broader syntheses explain that eWOM affects consumer decision-making through credibility and information evaluation mechanisms that influence downstream intentions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016). In line with this, Adetunji et al. demonstrate that user-generated content (UGC) on social media significantly influences both functional and hedonic brand image, which subsequently affects purchase intention, highlighting how consumer interactions on digital platforms reshape brand meaning and buying decisions (Adetunji, Sabrina, & Sobhi, 2017). Supporting this mechanism, Raji et al. also show that brand-related communications on social media (e.g., advertising and sales promotion content) can enhance brand image, which then contributes to favorable behavioral intentions, reinforcing the central role of brand image in digital marketing pathways (Raji, Rashid, & Ishak, 2019).

The Correlation between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention Intervening Brand Image

Recent evidence suggests that the association between social media marketing (SMM) and purchase intention is best understood as a mediated relationship, in which SMM primarily works by shaping consumers' brand-related perceptions—especially brand image—rather than producing a uniformly strong direct effect. Consistent with customer-based brand equity logic, brand image reflects the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations that guide consumers' evaluative and behavioral responses (Keller, 1993). In social media contexts, SMM exposes consumers to interactive and relational brand cues (e.g., entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth features) that can strengthen brand perceptions and, through these perceptions, increase purchase intention (Kim & Ko, 2012; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

This pattern aligns with broader findings that brand image can be the key “bridge” translating social media communication into intentions: for example, both functional and hedonic brand image significantly mediate the effects of social media advertising and promotion content on behavioral intention, and the direct advertising–intention link may be insignificant without the brand-image pathway (Raji et al., 2019). Echoing this mixed evidence, a recent systematic review synthesizes that purchase intention in the social media era is often explained by interconnected mechanisms involving SMM, eWOM, brand image, and brand trust—supporting the view that brand image is a frequent but not universal mediator (Novilia et al., 2025).

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant impact of social media marketing on brand image, and purchase intention. It emphasizes that social media is an efficient channel for businesses to interact with current and potential customers and build a positive brand image, especially when brands maintain high-quality, engaging, and informative social media profiles that meaningfully influence consumer perceptions. In addition, the paper notes that incorporating electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) into social media strategies further reinforces brand image because authentic consumer-to-consumer interactions and social proof strengthen positive brand meanings and can contribute to purchase-related decisions. A favorable brand image not only enhances

consumer perceptions but also significantly boosts purchase intention, as consumers are more likely to buy from brands they perceive positively. The findings suggest that a strong brand image plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between social media marketing efforts and actual purchasing behavior.

Future research should focus on integrating demographic factors, consumer engagement patterns, and evolving social media trends to refine marketing strategies. As digital landscapes continue to evolve, brands must continuously adapt and optimize their social media efforts to maximize consumer engagement and drive conversions effectively

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