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## Social Media Marketing Activities: The Role of Culture in the Indian Context

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**Abstract:** Social media marketing (SMM) has become a cornerstone of contemporary business strategy, enabling brands to engage with consumers and drive commercial outcomes. A vast body of literature has explored the influence of social media marketing activities (SMMAs) on brand-related constructs and consumer behaviours, such as brand equity, purchase intention, and loyalty. However, a significant gap exists in the comprehensive integration of cultural variables into these research frameworks. This paper reviews the existing literature on SMMAs and their impact on consumer behaviour, with a specific focus on the unique cultural landscape of India. The analysis highlights that while SMMAs noticeably influence consumer outcomes, their effectiveness is profoundly mediated by cultural norms, values, and socio-economic dynamics specific to the Indian market. The paper argues for a more nuanced approach to SMM that accounts for cultural adaptation, regional diversity, and the digital divide, suggesting that a culturally sensitive framework is essential for designing effective and resonant marketing strategies in India.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Culture, Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Strategies

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### Introduction

- **Social Media Users in India:**

India, home to one of the largest and most rapidly growing populations of internet users, has witnessed a dramatic surge in social media adoption over the last decade. Scholars and market analysts have increasingly focused on understanding the trends, demographics, behavioral patterns, and impacts of social media usage in the Indian context.

### ➤ **Demographics and Growth Trends:**

Multiple sources note the exponential increase in Indian social media users, crossing 470 million active users by early 2023 [Kemp, 2023]. Factors influencing this include cheaper data (Jio effect), affordable smartphones, and government Digital India initiatives. Urban centres dominate usage, but rural penetration is rapidly increasing.

### ➤ **Gender, Age, and Socio-economic Participation**

Studies highlight a significant gender gap, with men comprising a higher proportion of users [Pew Research Centre, 2022]. Young adults (18-29) dominate, but older adults show increasing engagement (Mishra et al., 2021).

### ➤ **Platform Preferences and Usage Patterns:**

WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook remain the most popular platforms, with Instagram and local apps like ShareChat gaining traction ([Kemp, 2023]). Short-video apps (e.g., Moj, Josh) surged post-TikTok ban.

### ➤ **Urban–Rural Divide:**

Digital divides persist, driven by literacy, connectivity, and cultural factors ([Mishra et al., 2018]). However, language localization and cheaper data are closing this gap.

Social media, as a digital phenomenon, encompasses a broad range of platforms and services that facilitate online interaction, content sharing, and communication. These platforms can be mined for actionable patterns that benefit various stakeholders, highlighting their role as a data-rich environment ripe for analysis and application (Gundecha et al., 2012). Zhu et al. (2012) categorize these platforms into relationship-building, self-media, collaboration, and creative outlets, illustrating the diverse functions social media serves in fulfilling human needs. The proliferation of these platforms has dramatically altered communication, commerce, and culture worldwide.

In this context, social media marketing (SMM) has rapidly become an integral component of contemporary marketing strategies, enabling brands to engage with consumers in novel and interactive ways (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019). It provides a dynamic space for companies to amplify brand presence, cultivate customer relationships, and drive sales growth (Shang et al., 2022). Firms now recognize social media as a strategic tool for marketing, brand building, and creating strong customer relationships (Jia et al., 2022; Zia et al., 2022). With India's rapidly increasing internet penetration and diverse socio-economic landscape, the country presents a unique case for the study of social media users. As user engagement is influenced by various factors, including content and psychological states (Dolan et al., 2016), marketers must understand how to tailor their strategies effectively.

The purpose of this paper is to review the existing literature regarding social media marketing activities and their impact on consumer behaviour in order to explore the gap thereby setting a new literature review.

### **A Review Of Existing Literature**

The extant literature provides extensive insights into how various components of social media marketing activities (SMMAs) drive consumer-related outcomes. Most studies focus on examining the direct and indirect effects of these SMMA dimensions on brand-related constructs and associated behavioral intentions.

### • **Social Media Marketing Activities and Brand Outcomes**

Several studies have examined how SMMAs influence brand-related outcomes. Malarvizhi et al. (2022) found that SMMAs influence brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty among Malaysian portable tech gadget consumers. The study highlighted that brand equity partially mediates the effects of SMMAs on brand

awareness and brand image, which in turn positively affect brand loyalty and willingness to pay a premium price. Similarly, Yadav and Rahman (2017) identified five key dimensions of SMMAs in e-commerce—Interactivity, Informativeness, Word-of-Mouth, Trendiness, and Personalization—and found that they positively influenced brand equity and purchase intention.

Research by Lin et al. (2024) further supports this, showing that dimensions like interaction, trendiness, customization, entertainment, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and trust affect brand equity and subsequent reuse intention in the service industry. Yang et al. (2022) focused on Chinese consumers, confirming that SMMAs influence brand awareness and brand image, which in turn mediate the relationship with repurchase intention. The findings from Saaylam and Chaknan (2022) align with this, demonstrating that social media marketing significantly influences all dimensions of customer-based brand equity, particularly through e-WOM and trendiness.

- **Impact of SMM on Consumer Behaviors**

The reviewed literature consistently shows that SMMAs have a significant impact on consumer behaviors beyond just brand perception. Godey et al. (2016) found that social media marketing efforts positively affect brand equity, which in turn influences consumer responses such as preference, loyalty, and willingness to pay a premium. Gupta and Syed (2021) examined Indian consumers' attitudes toward green products, finding that consumer attitudes are positively influenced by social media word of mouth, interaction, entertainment, and customization, which then influence their willingness to pay a premium. Lawal and Adejuwon (2022) also identified a positive effect of SMM components—specifically customer engagement, social interaction, customization, branded entertainment, and e-WOM—on brand loyalty.

- **The Critical Gap: The Role of Culture**

Across these studies, there is a strong consensus that SMMAs exert a significant influence on brand-related and behavioral outcomes. However, a major gap becomes apparent: the comprehensive integration of culture. As noted by Godey et al. (2016) and Kim and Ko (2012), the effectiveness of SMM varies significantly across different cultural settings and market environments. Many research papers that examine key SMM dimensions like interaction, trendiness, and customization provide valuable insights but often fail to incorporate the nuances of consumer culture comprehensively.

**Table 1: Summary of Literature**

Thought	Study Citations	Key Findings
Direct Influence of SMM Dimensions on Brand Outcomes	Cheung et al. (2020), Malarvizhi et al. (2022), Godey et al. (2016), Kim and Ko (2012), Yadav and Rahman (2017), Hafez (2022), Lin et al. (2024), Yang et al. (2022), Noorshella Che Nawi et al. (2020)	Specific social media marketing dimensions (interaction, trendiness, customization, entertainment, eWOM, trust) directly influence brand awareness, image, experience, and equity.
Mediating Roles Linking SMM to Enhanced Brand Outcomes	Cheung et al. (2020), Sano (2015), Malarvizhi et al. (2022), Hafez (2022), Rajesh and Priya (2022)	Consumer “brand engagement, customer satisfaction, and brand experience mediate the relationship between social media marketing activities and enhanced brand outcomes.

Impact of SMM on Consumer Behaviors	Sano (2015), Kim and Ko (2012), Yadav and Rahman (2017), Gupta and Syed (2021), Yang et al. (2022), Lawal and Adejuwon (2022)	Social media marketing affects consumer behaviors, enhancing purchase intention, repurchase behavior, willingness to pay a premium, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and commitment.
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### **The Indian Context: A Theoretical Framework**

Culture plays a pivotal and multifaceted role in shaping marketing strategies, particularly in a diverse market like India (Banerjee, 2008). A deep understanding of cultural differences, including values, beliefs, and social norms, can significantly improve the effectiveness of marketing efforts by resonating more authentically with the target audience (Sharon Shavitt, 2020). The integration of cultural variables into SMM endeavors represents a fundamental shift from generalized campaign approaches to meticulously tailored communication strategies.

In the Indian context, cultural beliefs, norms, and social structures profoundly influence how individuals perceive and engage with social media (Prabhakar et al., 2021). The intersection of individualism and collectivism, for example, significantly shapes consumer behavior on social media platforms, affecting adoption, sharing, and purchasing decisions (Jung et al., 2022). The proliferation of social media also precipitates a tangible shift in cultural paradigms, subtly encouraging a move from traditional collectivist values towards more individualistic expressions (Arya, 2024). Marketers who tailor their messages to align with these cultural values can effectively connect with consumers, leading to enhanced brand loyalty and engagement (Carroll et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the digital divide, particularly among rural Indian females as highlighted by Narasimhamurthy (2014), presents a significant barrier to the penetration of social media marketing in certain areas. This suggests that cultural and infrastructural gaps can hinder the reach and effectiveness of digital marketing efforts, requiring marketers to adopt inclusive and context-aware strategies. For instance, Mishra et al. (2021) found that personality types and gender significantly shape online purchasing behavior among young Indian consumers, underscoring the importance of demographic segmentation in social media marketing strategies.

### **Conclusion**

In the Indian context, cultural beliefs, norms, and social structures profoundly influence how individuals perceive and engage with social media (Prabhakar et al., 2021). Understanding these elements is crucial for marketers aiming to create culturally relevant and resonant campaigns (Banerjee, 2008).

Social media marketing has become an essential component of modern business strategy (Chawla & Chodak, 2021). The influence of cultural differences on consumer behavior is well-established, underscoring the importance of developing culture-specific marketing approaches (Naik & Sharma, 2021).

In emerging markets, the use of social media is shaped by various factors, including cultural context, communication preferences, trust, gender, and literacy levels (Olaniran, 2018). Therefore, marketing professionals must consider these elements when formulating effective social media marketing strategies.

The reviewed literature confirms the powerful influence of social media marketing activities on brand outcomes and consumer behavior. However, this paper's analysis reveals a critical gap: the lack of comprehensive research on the role of culture, especially in a market as diverse and dynamic as India. The effectiveness of SMM is not universal; it is inextricably linked to cultural values, communication preferences, and socio-economic realities (Olaniran, 2018).

For marketers operating in India, a nuanced understanding of cultural differences is paramount. Bridging these cultural gaps requires culturally sensitive content, inclusive strategies that consider the rural-urban digital divide, and an awareness of societal norms to enhance engagement and effectiveness. The successful implementation of social media marketing in India hinges on its ability to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and to instead craft campaigns that are deeply resonant with the cultural fabric of its target audience.

Future research should focus on creating a theoretical framework that incorporates cultural variables to provide a more comprehensive and predictive model for social media marketing success especially for Indian Market.

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