



INFLUENCING SMARTPHONE CHOICES: THE INTERPLAY OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND BRAND IMAGE ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *This research study endeavors to shed light on intricate dynamics between Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, and Purchase Intention within unique socio-cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia. The primary aim of this investigation is to explore and analyze how social media marketing strategies deployed by businesses operating in Saudi Arabia impact brand image and, in turn, influence consumers' purchase intentions. While extensive research has explored these relationships in various global settings, a significant research gap exists regarding their specific manifestation in the Saudi Arabian context. In order to address this gap, we conducted a quantitative study employing PLS-SEM Smart PLS software as our data processing tool. We focused on Millennial Smartphone Consumers in Saudi Arabia, a crucial demographic known for its active engagement on social media platforms. Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed to 234 Millennial Smartphone Consumers in Saudi Arabia. The research design addresses several key objectives: first, the exploration of direct relationship between SMM and BRI; second, the examination of the relationship between SMM and PIN; third, the analysis of the relationship between BRI and PIN; and fourth, the assessment of the relationship between SMM and PRI, with BRI serving as a mediator. However, it is vital to recognize certain limitations in our research. This study's focus on a specific demographic, namely Millennial Smartphone Consumers, may not fully represent the broader consumer population. The implications of our findings are significant for businesses operating in Saudi Arabia. By tailoring social media marketing strategies to resonate with local consumer base and considering influence of culture and societal norms, marketers can enhance brand image and influence purchase intentions effectively. Our study has practical implications for businesses and provides a valuable reference for future research and the development of targeted marketing strategies in this region.*

KEY WORDS: Social media marketing (SMM), e-marketing, purchased intention (PIN), brand image (BRI)



INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of Saudi Arabia, characterized by its tech-savvy population and dynamic smartphone market, understanding the factors influencing consumers' smartphone choices is imperative for businesses. This study, conducted for Saudi Arabian customers, aims to investigate the intricate interplay between two pivotal variables: social media marketing (SMM) and brand image (BRI), as they relate to purchase intentions in the realm of smartphones.

The rapid advancement of communication technology in Saudi Arabia has created unparalleled prospects for telecommunications firms (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014). A standout illustration of this progress is the widespread adoption of cell phones, embraced across diverse age groups, encompassing both the younger and older demographics. The emergence of cell phones has facilitated effortless communication for everyone, enabling connectivity at any moment and from any location (Andika et al., 2021). What began as a device for telephone calls and short messages has matured into a multifaceted tool, complete with vibrant screens and ever-improving camera features. The integration of internet technology has further expanded the capabilities of cell phones, with consumers' increasing demands necessitating the amalgamation of various functions into one device. Consequently, mobile phone products have evolved into what is now commonly referred to as a Smartphone.

Saudi Arabian consumers are finding it more convenient to seek information about products and brands through online channels. Therefore, understanding how SMM and BRI influence consumers' PIN in this evolving context is essential for businesses looking to thrive in the burgeoning Saudi Arabian smartphone market. Electronic commerce (e-commerce) has also played a pivotal role in reshaping consumer behaviors in Saudi Arabia. Electronic commerce involves buying, selling, and marketing goods or services through electronic systems like radio, television, computer networks, or the internet has gained significant traction in the region (Ebrahim, 2020). This is largely due to the vast and diverse market landscape in Saudi Arabia, where e-marketing can reach consumers across the nation simultaneously, operating around the clock without interruption. Social media platforms dominate the Saudi Arabian internet landscape, leading to the growing prominence of e-marketing practices, where social media is harnessed as a powerful tool for promoting brands and products (Sanny et al., 2020).

Extensive adoption of social media as an information and communication platform has rendered the purchasing process increasingly digital, eliminating the need for face-to-face interactions (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013). This study aimed to explore the correlation among Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, and Purchase Intention with a specific focus on the context of Saudi Arabia. While numerous studies have explored these connections in various global contexts, there is a noticeable scarcity of research dedicated to understanding how these dynamics play out within the unique cultural and consumer landscape of Saudi Arabia. This study sought to bridge this gap by investigating the interplay between social media marketing strategies employed by businesses in Saudi Arabia, their impact on brand image, and subsequently, their influence on purchase intention among Saudi consumers. By doing so, it aimed to offer insights and practical implications for businesses operating in this market.

However, it's crucial to recognize limitations within this research. Firstly, the quantitative approach via questionnaires might not encompass all consumer perceptions and behaviors comprehensively. Secondly, the study's confinement to a specific demographic—Millennial



Smartphone Consumers in Saudi Arabia—might limit its applicability to a broader consumer base. Another constraint is the snowball sampling method's potential introduction of selection bias. Moreover, the research primarily centered on brand image as a mediator, neglecting other potential variables impacting purchase intention in the Saudi Arabian context. Future research in Saudi Arabia could explore these limitations further and employ more diverse research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in this market.

In light of the limited research in this specific context, the implications of this study are significant. Businesses operating in Saudi Arabia can utilize the findings to tailor their social media marketing strategies to better resonate with the local consumer base, ultimately enhancing their brand image and influencing purchase intentions. Moreover, by acknowledging the influence of culture and societal norms in Saudi Arabia, marketers can design culturally sensitive campaigns, thus avoiding potential pitfalls. This research offers a starting point for further exploration and contributes to body of knowledge on consumer behavior in Saudi Arabian market, which is invaluable for both academic research and the development of effective marketing strategies in this region.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

Examining synergy between social media marketing and brand image in influencing purchase intentions stands as a pivotal research domain within the marketing and consumer behavior landscape. This exploration holds the potential to empower businesses in devising more potent marketing strategies with the ultimate goal of bolstering sales. The theoretical underpinnings and pertinent studies and models related to these are social influence theory (Kelman, H. C. 1958), brand identity prism (Kapferer, J. N. 2008), brand equity models (Aaker, D. A. 1996) and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, I. 1991). Table 1 shows the summaries of applicability of these theory

Theory	Applicability	Reference
Social Influence Theory	Social influence theory is relevant in the Saudi Arabian context as it helps explain how individuals in this culture are influenced by opinions and actions of others, especially in context of social media. Social media users in Saudi Arabia often look to their peers, influencers, and social networks for guidance and recommendations.	Alalwan, A. A., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Rana, N. P. (2017).
Brand Identity Prism	The concept of brand identity is crucial in Saudi Arabia, as it can reflect cultural values and resonate with the local population. Understanding how brand identity is perceived in the Saudi context is essential for crafting marketing strategies.	Al-Bolushi, D. N., & Almazari, A. A. (2016)
	Brand equity models like the Aaker Model and the Keller Model are widely applicable in the context of Saudi Arabia to assess the strength of brands and their influence on	Al-Sulaiti, L., Baker, A.,



Brand Equity Models	purchase intentions. The Saudi market hosts numerous international and local brands, and understanding brand equity is crucial for market positioning.	& Basu, S. (2018).
Theory of Planned Behavior	Theory of Planned Behavior offers insight into purchase intentions for products or services in Saudi Arabia, especially concerning social media marketing. Examining how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape purchase intentions in this market context is crucial.	Algharabat, R., Rana, N. P., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Alalwan, A. A. (2018).

Social Media Marketing (SMM):

The term "social media" refers to the creation of online content accessible to the general public. Borgan (2010) portrayed social media as a transformative shift in how people interact with online platforms, fostering exploration, sharing, and information access. According to Storey et al. (2014), the concept's origins date back to 1986, initially starting with search marketing and a broader commercial push for companies to establish an online presence driven by global IT innovations.

This marketing approach has significantly impacted the corporate landscape, emerging as a catalyst for business growth. Social Media Marketing (SMM) techniques have fundamentally altered business strategies, evident in sectors like fashion, healthcare, construction, groceries, and utility providers, all experiencing substantial growth through digital and SMM strategies (Zhang & Wang, 2019).

Social media stands as an omnipresent marketing platform, offering diverse tools and channels for companies to connect with their audience, enhance brand visibility, and engage potential customers. Utilizing social media for product marketing and information dissemination has grown notably significant over the last decade. Popular platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have witnessed increased popularity across various demographics.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia boasts a substantial and digitally engaged population, making social media an essential part of everyday life. This aligns with the observations of Yuliantoro et al. (2019), who emphasize that social media, in essence, is a readily accessible tool for communication and the sharing of information.

In Saudi Arabia, where the preference for remote interactions is on the rise, social media bridges the gap between consumers and businesses. Face-to-face interactions, while not obsolete, are complemented and sometimes even replaced by digital connections. This shift is well-aligned with the Saudi culture, where privacy and modesty are valued, making online platforms an attractive choice for consumers seeking product information.

Moreover, the insights from Haudi et al. (2021) have significant implications in the Saudi context. The observation that the frequency of product discussions is heightened by social media visibility underlines the effectiveness of WOM marketing. In Saudi Arabia, where personal recommendations and trust in social networks play a pivotal role in purchase decisions, this phenomenon is even more pronounced. Products gaining visibility on social



media platforms can significantly influence consumers, even those who do not directly encounter the products online.

Numerous studies have delved into understanding the growing importance of social media marketing and its dynamic trends aligning with consumer preferences (Muniesa & Gimenez, 2020). Positioned as a primary marketing strategy for businesses, social media marketing involves leveraging digital, information, and communication technologies to promote products or services through multiple channels like mobile phones, apps, display advertising, and various digital platforms (Deepak, 2018).

In line with this, Jin & Cedoral's (2017) survey unveiled a substantial consumer preference for online shopping over traditional methods. Furthermore, Laksamana (2018) shed light on how the structure of social media marketing campaigns, often denoted as SMM, can be shaped by factors such as gender, age, and the cultural values specific to a region. Additionally, Goel (2016) emphasized how marketing firms evaluate the use of social media marketing based on considerations like target market, technological implementation, content strategy, social media integration, expertise of employees, and budget allocation for advertising expenses. Companies have recognized digital media as a highly cost-effective approach in this realm.

Brand Image:

Brand image encapsulates a customer's perception of a brand, shaped through a complex interplay of affective, cognitive, and evaluative processes within the customer's mind. This perception encompasses product information and knowledge that profoundly influences the overall brand perception (Wijaya, 2013). Foster (2016) emphasizes how brand image intricately ties into the beliefs and perceptions consumers hold about a brand. Kotler and Keller (2016) assert that brand image acts as a mirror reflecting how consumers perceive a brand, originating from associations deeply embedded in their minds. It represents a blend of consumers' emotions toward a product and its indirect associations. Essentially, brand image forms a composite depiction constructed by consumers through their sensory experiences (Seo & Park, 2018).

This mental construct of brand image exists as a tangible entity within consumers' minds, comprising the collective brand associations stored in memory, thereby shaping the overall brand perception. Sangadji and Sopiah (2016) underscore that brand image can assume positive or negative attributes based on individual perceptions, tastes, and perspectives. Going beyond a mere brand name or symbol, Kotler and Armstrong (2016) emphasize that brand image is a pivotal element in a company's relationship with its customers. Moreover, Kotler and Keller (2016) suggest that brand image serves as an extrinsic characteristic embedded in products or services, reflecting the brand's efforts to cater to customers' psychological or social needs. In essence, brand image represents a multifaceted construct intertwining consumer perceptions, brand associations, and the brand's endeavors to fulfill customer needs.

Social media marketing and Brand image:

Social Media Marketing (SMM) acts as a cornerstone in nurturing effective communication channels between customers and brands (Kim & Ko, 2012). Its significance lies in crafting memorable, supportive, and meaningful interactions, directly shaping customers' perceptions of a brand (Chang & Fan, 2017). Numerous empirical studies consistently highlight that the quality of a brand's social media marketing experience serves as a robust predictor of the overall



brand image and customer perception (Barreda et al., 2020; Bilgin, 2018; Cheung et al., 2019; Kim & Ko, 2012; Mandagi & Aseng, 2021). These findings underscore the pivotal role of SMM in influencing how customers perceive and engage with a brand, emphasizing the importance of delivering a compelling and enriching social media experience.

Research findings emphasize that a positive SMM experience correlates with a more favorable brand image (Cheung et al., 2019). This positive correlation has been observed in various studies, reinforcing the idea that customers are more likely to form a positive image of a brand when their SMM encounters are positive and engaging (Kim & Ko, 2012; Bilgin, 2018). The dynamic nature of social media platforms allows brands to connect with their audience in real-time, creating opportunities for meaningful interactions that go beyond traditional marketing channels.

Furthermore, the evolving landscape of SMM calls for a comprehensive understanding of its impact on brand perception. Barreda et al. (2020) delve into the intricacies of how SMM strategies can shape customer attitudes and contribute to the overall brand image. Bilgin (2018) explores role of SMM in building brand equity, highlighting the long-term effects of positive social media interactions on brand value.

Cheung et al. (2019) provide insights into the psychological aspects of customer engagement on social media platforms, shedding light on how positive experiences can lead to stronger emotional connections with a brand. This emotional resonance is a crucial factor in influencing customers' overall perceptions and attitudes towards a brand.

Mandagi & Aseng (2021) contribute to the body of knowledge by examining the impact of SMM on customer loyalty. Their research underscores the importance of sustained positive experiences on social media platforms in cultivating a loyal customer base. Therefore, based on the aforementioned notion and the robust empirical evidence, the formulation of the following hypotheses:

H1: *There is a positive relationship between Social Media Marketing (SCM) and Brand Image (BRI)*

PURCHASE INTENTION:

Purchase intention is cognitive process through which a consumer evaluates the prospect of acquiring a product and service. Consumer behavior, perceptions, as well as attitudes collectively influence this pivotal aspect of consumer decision making journey (Hermanda et al., 2019). In realm of purchasing dynamics, various factors play a role in shaping purchase intentions, with brand image being identified as a significant influencer (Foster, 2016). Researchers have expounded that purchase intention involves a consumer's potential inclination or desire to make a future purchase, emphasizing that consumers may not have made a definitive decision to buy but rather harbor the intent to engage in a transaction (Rahmaningtyas et al., 2017).

Hosein (2012) categorizes purchase intention as cognitive attitude, representing customers' contemplation in what way they intend to procure a specific brand or product. This multi-faceted process is influenced by personal customer experiences, contributing to the development of product knowledge on a particular item. Purchase intention, as defined by Kotler and Keller (2012), is a responsive element to consumer behavior, reflecting an



individual's inclination to acquire objects indicative of their desire to make a purchase. Priansa (2012) characterizes it as a mental statement or expression, emanating from consumers' considerations of a plan to acquire various products with specific brands in mind.

Furthermore, the evolution of PIN is delineated as a multistep progression that hinges on personal experiences and the accumulation of knowledge about a particular product (Kotler & Keller, 2012). It represents a mental disposition or appearance derived from consumers contemplating plans to purchase specific products with particular brands in focus (Priansa, 2012; 2017).

To delve into the intricacies of this intention, it is vital to recognize that it naturally develops after being stimulated by a product observed in the market, where interest is piqued, and a genuine desire to purchase emerges (Febriani & Dewi, 2018).

Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Purchase Intention (PIN).

Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the comprehensive range of activities aimed at promoting products or services through various social media platforms (Ninan et al., 2020). Operating as dynamic digital spaces facilitating user interactions, social media platforms offer an ideal channel for promotional efforts. Research conducted by Ramadhan & Simanjuntak (2018) suggests that frequent exposure to audiovisual media advertisements can positively influence purchase behavior across different customer segments. Specifically, the study indicates that consumers are more likely to be motivated to make purchases when advertisements feature celebrities and exhibit creativity that reinforces the perceived need for the product.

Social media offers an expansive platform for audiovisual advertising, with personal accounts of celebrities and influencers amplifying the reach of promotional content. Kaihatu's (2020) research emphasizes impact of SMM on PIN, revealing that deeper understanding of a product and active engagement in seeking additional information positively correlate with an increased likelihood of immediate product purchases. Influencers play a crucial role in this process by delivering informative and memorable content, significantly enhancing consumer engagement. Interactions on social media, such as likes, comments, and responses from business owners, further contribute to increased consumer engagement, ultimately influencing purchase intentions either immediately or in the future. These findings align with research on various products, highlighting the significant influence of social media marketing activities, such as reviews and ratings, on consumers' decisions to purchase advertised products. The pivotal factor in determining purchase intentions is identified as business interactions with customers.

Furthermore, Ninan et al. (2020) assert that consumers prefer advertisement through social media over traditional methods. Social media promotion is found to contribute to increased brand awareness, enhanced product perception, meaningful business interactions, and higher purchase intentions. Essentially, the awareness of brands and the alteration of product perception through social media interactions foster loyalty to the brand, ensuring a continuous sense of connection.

The choice of social media platforms is crucial in influencing purchasing behavior. Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook emerge as the most widely used platforms. Instagram, in particular, has a significant impact on impulse purchases in fashion industry (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2017). The reduction in users on certain platforms, especially among younger age groups, is noted.



Instagram's dominance is corroborated by studies where ad recall on Instagram significantly influences the decision to buy. The hypotheses derived from these findings are as follows:

H2: There is a positive relationship between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Purchase Intention (PIN).

Brand Image (BRI) and Purchase Intention (PIN)

The significance of brand image has long been acknowledged as per a cornerstone in marketing strategies. **Keller and Brexendorf (2019)** highlight that this relationship often stems from customers' cumulative experiences and information derived from various sources. Brand image holds a pivotal role in establishing brand knowledge during the product branding process. In simpler terms, it encapsulates how customers perceive a brand and emotions it evokes (**Keller & Lehmann, 2006**). Consequently, fostering a favorable brand image can provide businesses with a distinct competitive advantage in marketplace.

Extensive research in marketing literature has extensively explored intricate relationship between BRI and PIN. Scholars such as Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), Toding and Mandagi (2022), and Wang and Tsai (2014) have consistently demonstrated that BRI is a critical determinant influencing a customer's intention to purchase a product or service. A positive or robust BI effectively communicates value proposition associated with a particular product or service.

Furthermore, dynamic interplay between brand image and consumer behavior goes beyond the point of purchase. Notably, a compelling brand image contributes to brand loyalty, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth marketing. As asserted by Keller and Lehmann (2006), a strong brand image not only influences initial purchase decisions but also establishes a foundation for enduring customer relationships.

Considering the multifaceted impact of brand image on consumer behavior, formulation of following hypotheses is prompted by the existing literature and empirical evidence:

H3: There is a positive relationship between **Brand Image (BRI)** and **Purchase Intention (PIN)**

Given hypothesis that Social Media Marketing (SMM) directly impacts brand image while also possessing potential to influence purchase intention, it is logical to propose that brand image acts as a mediator in relationship between SMM and purchase intention. Consequently, following hypothesis is formulated.

H4: The relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention is mediated through Brand Image

Conceptual framework depicted in **Figure 1** summarizes the interconnections among three variables investigated in this study SMM, brand image, and purchase intention along with associated hypotheses.

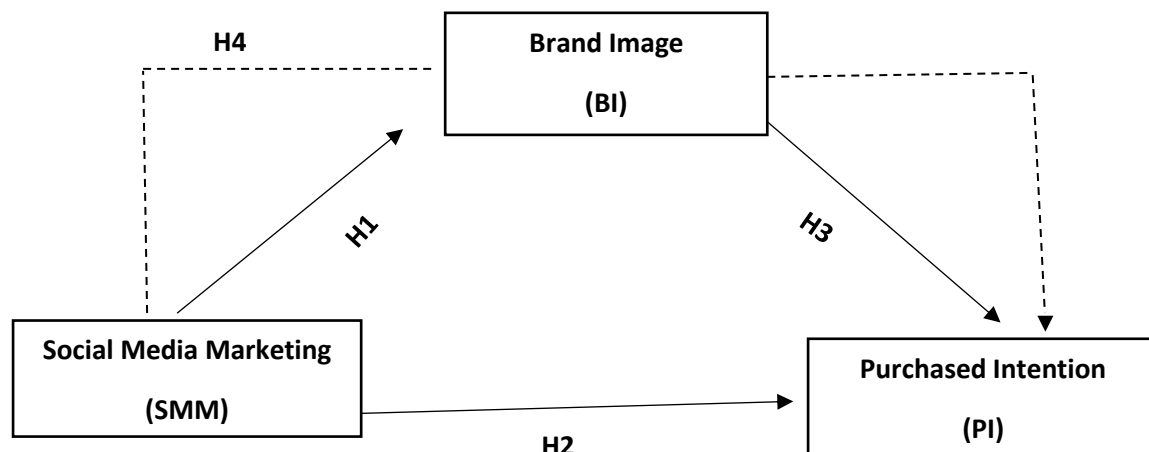


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework Model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research approach, collecting numerical data for analysis. The data, in numerical format, undergoes processing and analysis to derive scientific insights (Purwanto et al., 2021). Employing SEM-PLS Software, the collected data undergoes testing, with PLS-SEM chosen due to its suitability for testing the evolved research model. The analysis involves two dimensions: Measurement Model (Outer Model) and Structural Model (Inner Model). This research adopts a causal associative method, focusing on uncovering the hypothesized relationships between the variables under investigation. Data collection involves utilizing a questionnaire, distributed online to 234 consumers of smartphone in KSA who make purchases online. The sampling method employed is a purposive sampling technique.

Reliability Test

Construct reliability is deemed satisfactory when a variable exhibits a composite reliability value exceeding 0.7 (Purwanto et al., 2019). Additionally, a Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7 indicates high level of reliability for a given variable. Table 1 presents the outcomes of reliability test analysis conducted by using SmartPLS tool. The results indicate that altogether composite reliability values surpass 0.7, confirming the reliability of all variables and meeting the test criteria. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha values, shown in the table, exceed 0.6, affirming the reliability of the variables based on this criterion as well.

Having established the reliability of the data, the subsequent step involves testing the validity, encompassing the loading factor, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Fornell Larcker Criterion, and cross loading. To do so, navigate to the outer loading menu to examine the

loading factor test results and proceed to the discriminant validity menu for insights into Fornell Larcker criterion and cross loading tests.

Reliability Testing Result

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BRI	0.928	0.93	0.945	0.775
PIN	0.866	0.892	0.905	0.66
SCM	0.901	0.91	0.927	0.719

Table 1: Measurement Model Results

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity measures relationship between item scores and construct scores, aiming for a stronger correlation to ensure data validity (Purwanto et al., 2021). Typically, measurements are deemed to possess convergent validity when loading factor value exceeds 0.7. Blow Fig 1 shows loading factor value **BRI** items scores 0.87, 0.89, 0.89, 0.87 and 0.86 respectable **PIN** items scores 0.79, 0.88, 0.83, 0.90 and 0.77 whereas **SCM** is having 0.88, 0.89, 0.87, 0.86 and 0.71 which indicates that these factors possess convergent validity (See Fig 2) given below. Moreover, the AVE results also indicates that convergent validity is established as it cut off value is 0.5. Table 1 results show all values are above 0.5 confirming the convergent validity.

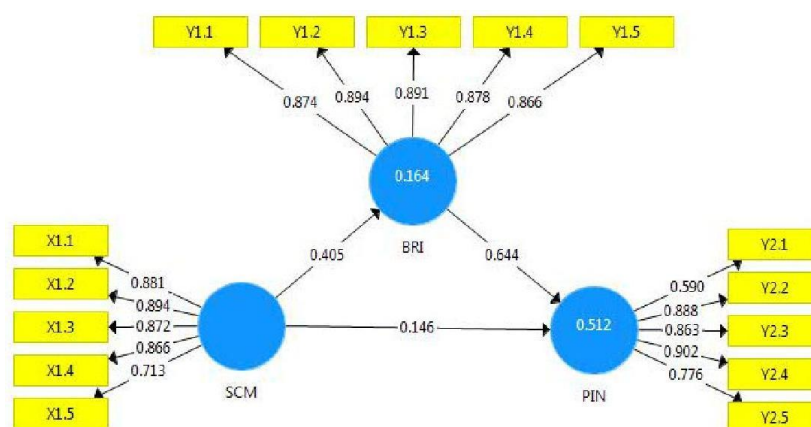


Fig 2: Validity Testing



Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was measured by using Fornell-Larcker Criterion, which measures the correlations between constructs on each indicator. When the correlation of a construct with its respective indicators surpasses the correlations of other constructs with those same indicators, it suggests that these specific latent constructs excel in predicting their associated indicators compared to other constructs (Purwanto et al., 2020). Table 2 clearly indicates that each statement exhibits highest loading factor value within its associated latent construct when compared to other latent constructs. This strong correlation suggests that each statement indicator can be accurately projected by its corresponding latent construct, thereby confirming the validity of discriminant validity.

Discriminant Validity Result

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Result

	BRI	PIN	SCM
BRI	0.88		
PIN	0.703	0.812	
SCM	0.405	0.407	0.848

R Square Value

According to Table 3, R-Square value of 0.155 (15.5%) for Brand Image variable suggests that 15.5% of its variance is described by Social Media Marketing variable. The remaining 85.5% indicates that other unexamined variables contribute to the Brand Image construct.

Furthermore, regarding the Purchase Intention (PIN) variable, its R-Square value of 50.1% signifies that 50.1% of its variance is jointly described by the SMM and BI variables. Meanwhile, 49.9% of variance is attributed to other unspecified variables not addressed within this study.

Table 3: R-Square Value

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
BRI	0.164	0.155
PIN	0.512	0.501

Hypothesis Testing

Hair et al. (2019) suggest that after establishing the fitness of a research model, the subsequent step involves testing the formulated hypotheses. In this research, bootstrapping method is employed on sample to conduct these tests, aiming to mitigate issues arising from abnormal research data. The final phase of hypothesis testing via the SmartPLS application involves examining results of Bootstrapping value.

Utilizing Bootstrapping tasks within SmartPLS 3.0, hypothesis validation occurs. Acceptance of a hypothesis hinges on the significance level, typically set at 0.05, or when t-value surpasses critical value, which, for a 5% significance level, stands at 1.96 (Hair et al., 2014). When



significance level falls below 0.05 or when t-value exceeds critical value, the hypothesis is considered accepted.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

Correlation	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Note
SCM → BRI	0.405	3.914	0.000	Significant
SCM → PIN	0.146	1.44	0.151	Not Significant
BRI → PIN	0.644	7.955	0.000	Significant
SCM → BRI → PIN	0.261	3.476	0.001	Significant

Relationship between Brand Image (BRI) and Purchase Intention (PIN)

The examination of the relationship between Brand Image (BRI) and Purchase Intention (PIN) through hypothesis testing revealed compelling results. The original sample value exhibited a positive correlation of 0.146, with a T-value of 7.955, surpassing the threshold of 1.96. Moreover, the P-value was 0.000, significantly below the 0.050 threshold. Consequently, it was determined that a substantial and positive association exists between BRI and PIN.

Brand image plays a pivotal role in prompting consumer buying decisions. The perception of a brand by public is heavily influenced by the brand's popularity and company's capability to cater to customer desires. Research by Stephen (2016), Wijayaa et al. (2022), and Wanasida (2021) underscores that brands with favorable product images tend to be favored and more readily embraced than those with negative as well as neutral images. In cases where consumers lack prior knowledge or experience with a product, brand image often serves as a key reference for their purchasing decisions.

The brand becomes a distinguishing factor for customers, facilitating assessments related quality, satisfaction, pride, and other attributes associated with the brand. Additionally, as noted by Rudyanto et al. (2020), brand trust significantly shapes brand image, while brand awareness within a product category emerges as a crucial marketing element. Consequently, combining promotion and brand awareness can yield favorable responses in the target market.

Through adept strategies, products have the potential to captivate attention of probable consumers and instill a sense of interest in product, thereby prompting potential buyers to make purchasing decisions.

Relationship between Social Media Marketing (SCM) and Brand Image (BRI):

The results from hypothesis testing revealed a significant positive correlation between Social Media Marketing and Brand Image, supported by an original sample value of 0.405, a T value of 3.914 (exceeding the threshold of 1.96), and a P value of 0.000 (less than 0.050). This deduction indicates a substantive and meaningful relationship between the two variables. Nagoya et al. (2021) and Rudyanto et al. (2020) emphasize a unique attribute of social media, where user-conveyed messages reach multiple recipients simultaneously, accelerating the dissemination of information compared to other media channels. This rapid spread of



information on social media platforms further underlines their influential role in shaping brand image and perception.

Consequently, individuals exposed to products on social media possess a higher likelihood of indirectly discussing and advocating these products to non-social media users. Hence, heightened social media usage escalates the prospects of public discourse about a product.

These findings are congruent with prior research by Rudyanto et al. (2020) and Stephen (2016), emphasizing the significant impact of social media marketing on Brand Image (BRI). Additionally, research conducted by Ashari Nurrokhmana and Setyawan (2018) reinforces this by affirming positive and substantial influence of social media marketing on BRI.

Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchased Intention:

Following the outcomes of hypothesis testing, the original sample value indicated a positive 0.146 correlation, with a T value of 1.44 falling below 1.96, and a P value of 0.151 surpassing the 0.050 threshold. Consequently, the analysis concluded an insignificant relationship between Social Media Marketing (SCM) and Brand Image (BRI). SCM involves leveraging social media platforms to promote products, services, brands, or ideas, targeting diverse audiences beyond a company's physical reach, potentially influencing consumer buying behaviors. These findings align with previous studies conducted by Faircloth et al. (2001), Yuliantoro et al. (2019), Park and Oh (2012), and Pramono et al. (2021), which underscore the significant and positive impact of social media marketing on purchasing decisions, contrasting the observed insignificant correlation between SCM and BRI in this particular analysis.

Relationship Between Social Media Marketing And Purchase Intention Mediated Through Brand Image

The analysis of the link between Social Media Marketing (SCM) and Purchase Intention (PIN), mediated through Brand Image (BRI), unveiled an original sample value of 0.261. The T value stood at 3.476, surpassing the critical threshold of 1.96, while the P value recorded was 0.001, significantly below the established level of 0.050. These results robustly establish a significant and noteworthy association between SCM and PIN mediated by BRI, underscoring the pivotal role of brand image as a mediating variable. Both direct and mediated connections among social media marketing, brand image, and purchasing decisions emerged as statistically meaningful. These findings strongly support the notion of Brand Image (BRI) as a mediating factor between social media marketing and purchasing decisions, consolidating previous research findings from various scholars including Nagoya et al. (2021), Ronald et al. (2020), Faircloth et al. (2001), Yuliantoro et al. (2019), Park and Oh (2012) and many other relevant studies.

These studies collectively emphasize that social media can empower consumers to express their opinions on products or services, disseminating these opinions across online social networks, thereby enhancing consumer knowledge and potentially influencing purchasing decisions. The mediating role of Brand Image (BRI) in improving consumer purchasing decisions is highlighted in research by Park and Oh (2012), Pramono et al. (2021), Nagoya et al. (2021), Ronald et al. (2020), and further reinforced by Oktavianto (2013), emphasizing positive influence of WOM and Brand Image in mediating relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions, as outlined in studies by Wijaya et al. (2021), Nagoya et al. (2021), and Ronald et al. (2020).

**CONCLUSION:**

The examination of relationships among Brand Image (BRI), Purchase Intention (PIN), and Social Media Marketing (SCM) yielded intriguing findings. A significant positive correlation emerged between BRI and PIN, indicating that a favorable brand image aligns with increased purchase intent. Surprisingly, while SCM exhibited a notable connection with BRI, this link was found to be insignificant. However, when BRI mediated the relationship between SCM and PIN, a significant association emerged, suggesting that the influence of social media marketing on purchasing decisions is mediated by brand image. Moreover, the analysis highlighted the positive impact of social media marketing on brand image, indicating that increased engagement on social media platforms contributes to an enhanced brand perception. Additionally, an amplified brand image was positively associated with heightened purchasing decisions, emphasizing the crucial role of brand perception in influencing consumer behavior.

The study concluded that brand image acts as a mediator in relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions. As brand image strengthens, the relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions is amplified. However, it's essential to note that the study's scope involved a sample size of only 234 individuals, indicating the limitation in representing the broader population and the multifaceted variables influencing purchasing decisions beyond brand image and social media marketing. Hence, there's recommendation for producers to expand their online communities, engaging a more extensive consumer base to gain deeper insights into influencing factors beyond the variables considered in this study.

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