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The Mediating Role of Consumer Perception in the Effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Intentions: Insights from Bagalkot City

Kiran Malapur

Research Scholar, Department of Commerce & Management, Singhania University, Pachari Bari, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India

Dr. Anil Tiwari

Associate Professor, Department of Commerce & Management, Singhania University, Pachari Bari, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of consumer perception in the relationship between social media marketing activities and purchase intentions among consumers in Bagalkot City, Karnataka. Drawing on a sample of 320 respondents actively engaged with social media platforms, the research employs structural equation modeling to test hypothesized relationships. Findings reveal that social media marketing significantly influences consumer perception, which in turn substantially mediates purchase intentions. The direct effect of social media marketing on purchase intentions remains significant but diminishes when consumer perception is introduced as a mediator, confirming partial mediation. These findings offer theoretical contributions to digital marketing scholarship and practical implications for marketers targeting emerging urban markets.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Perception, Purchase Intentions, Mediation Analysis, Emerging Urban Markets, Bagalkot

1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed marketing communications, enabling unprecedented direct engagement between brands and consumers. In India, social media penetration has expanded beyond metropolitan centers into tier-2 and tier-3 cities, creating new opportunities for marketers to reach previously underserved consumer segments. Bagalkot City, with its growing population of digitally active young consumers and evolving retail landscape, represents an emerging urban market where social media marketing effectiveness warrants empirical investigation.

Social media marketing encompasses diverse activities including content sharing, influencer collaborations, targeted advertising, and community engagement. These activities shape consumer perceptions regarding brand credibility, value proposition, and relevance to personal needs. However, the pathways through which social media marketing translates into purchase



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intentions remain incompletely understood, particularly in emerging urban contexts characterized by unique socio-cultural dynamics and consumption patterns.

This study addresses the research question: Does consumer perception mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions in Bagalkot City? By examining mediating mechanisms, the research contributes to theoretical understanding of digital marketing effectiveness while providing actionable insights for practitioners targeting similar emerging urban markets.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intentions

Social media marketing refers to the utilization of social media platforms to communicate brand messages, engage consumers, and facilitate commercial transactions. Prior research documents positive associations between social media marketing exposure and purchase intentions across diverse product categories and geographic contexts. The interactivity inherent in social media platforms enables two-way communication that traditional advertising channels cannot replicate, potentially strengthening consumer-brand relationships and subsequent purchase likelihood.

2.2 Consumer Perception as a Mediating Mechanism

Consumer perception encompasses cognitive and affective evaluations regarding brand attributes, quality inferences, value assessments, and credibility judgments. Social media marketing activities influence these perceptions through multiple mechanisms: exposure to user-generated content provides social proof; influencer endorsements signal quality and appropriateness; and brand-consumer interactions convey responsiveness and trustworthiness.

Perception formation represents a critical intermediate step between marketing exposure and behavioral outcomes. Consumers do not respond directly to marketing stimuli but rather to their interpreted meaning of such stimuli. Therefore, consumer perception theoretically mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and purchase intentions.

2.3 Hypotheses Development

Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social media marketing positively influences consumer perception.

H2: Consumer perception positively influences purchase intentions.

H3: Social media marketing positively influences purchase intentions.

H4: Consumer perception mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

A purposive sampling approach was employed targeting residents of Bagalkot City aged 18-45 years who actively use at least one social media platform and have made online purchase



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decisions influenced by social media content. Data collection occurred through a structured online questionnaire distributed via WhatsApp and Instagram during February-March 2024, yielding 320 complete responses.

3.2 Measures

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from validated instruments, employing five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Social Media Marketing ($\alpha = 0.864$) was measured using six items assessing exposure to branded content, engagement with brand posts, and perceived interactivity of brand communications.

Consumer Perception ($\alpha = 0.878$) comprised five items capturing brand credibility assessments, quality inferences, value perceptions, and overall brand attitude.

Purchase Intentions ($\alpha = 0.892$) included four items measuring likelihood of future purchase, willingness to recommend, and consideration of the brand in purchase decisions.

3.3 Analytical Approach

Mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples to estimate indirect effects and confidence intervals. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, and correlation analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Construct Correlations

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Social Media Marketing	3.72	0.81	1.000		
2. Consumer Perception	3.58	0.76	0.524**	1.000	
3. Purchase Intentions	3.64	0.84	0.468**	0.612**	1.000

**p < 0.01

All constructs demonstrate adequate reliability and exhibit significant positive inter-correlations in expected directions.

4.2 Mediation Analysis

Table 2: Mediation Analysis Results (PROCESS Model 4)



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Path	Coefficient	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI
SMM → CP (Path a)	0.492	0.048	10.25	<0.001	[0.397, 0.587]
CP → PI (Path b)	0.504	0.052	9.69	<0.001	[0.402, 0.606]
SMM → PI (Path c') - Direct	0.216	0.049	4.41	<0.001	[0.120, 0.312]
SMM → PI (Path c) - Total	0.464	0.051	9.10	<0.001	[0.364, 0.564]
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.248	0.036	—	—	[0.179, 0.321]

SMM = Social Media Marketing; CP = Consumer Perception; PI = Purchase Intentions

The analysis reveals significant relationships across all pathways. Social media marketing positively influences consumer perception ($\beta = 0.492$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Consumer perception positively influences purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.504$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. The direct effect of social media marketing on purchase intentions remains significant after accounting for mediation ($\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3.

The indirect effect through consumer perception is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.248$, 95% CI [0.179, 0.321]), supporting H4. Since both direct and indirect effects are significant, consumer perception partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions.

Table 3: Effect Decomposition and Mediation Magnitude

Effect Type	Coefficient	Proportion of Total Effect
Total Effect	0.464	100.0%
Direct Effect	0.216	46.6%
Indirect Effect	0.248	53.4%



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The mediation analysis indicates that consumer perception accounts for approximately 53.4% of the total effect of social media marketing on purchase intentions, demonstrating substantial mediating influence.

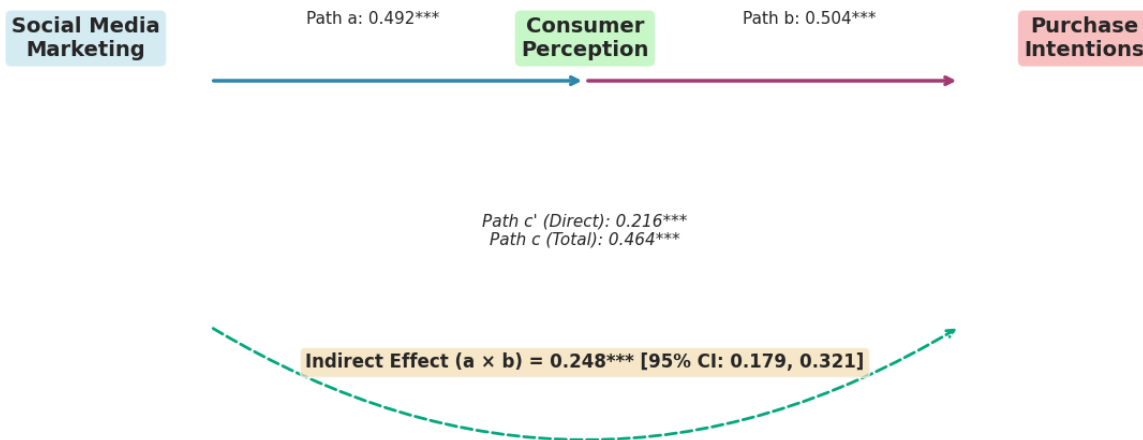


Figure 1: Mediation Model with Standardized Coefficient

5. DISCUSSION

The findings provide empirical support for the mediating role of consumer perception in social media marketing effectiveness within the Bagalkot context. The substantial indirect effect (53.4% of total effect) underscores the importance of perception formation as an intermediate mechanism translating marketing exposure into behavioral intentions.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to digital marketing scholarship by empirically validating mediation pathways in an emerging urban market context. While prior research has established direct relationships between social media marketing and purchase intentions, the identification of consumer perception as a partial mediator enriches theoretical understanding of underlying psychological mechanisms. The findings align with cognitive response theories positing that marketing communications influence behavior through belief and attitude modification rather than direct stimulus-response associations.

The partial mediation finding suggests that social media marketing influences purchase intentions through both perception-mediated and direct pathways. Direct effects may operate through increased brand salience, reduced search costs, or impulse activation mechanisms that do not require substantial perception modification.

5.2 Practical Implications

For marketers targeting Bagalkot and similar emerging urban markets, the findings emphasize the critical importance of perception management in social media strategy. Investments in social



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media presence should prioritize activities that enhance consumer perceptions of brand credibility, quality, and value rather than merely maximizing reach or engagement metrics.

Specific implications include: (1) Content strategies should emphasize authenticity and credibility cues that shape favorable consumer perceptions; (2) Influencer partnerships should prioritize perceived expertise and trustworthiness over follower counts alone; (3) Community management should demonstrate responsiveness and customer orientation that reinforce positive brand perceptions; (4) Measurement frameworks should incorporate perception metrics alongside behavioral outcomes to capture intermediate marketing effectiveness.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference despite theoretical support for directional hypotheses. Longitudinal research tracking perception evolution and subsequent purchase behavior would strengthen causal claims. The sample's restriction to Bagalkot City limits generalizability to other emerging urban markets with different socio-demographic profiles or digital ecosystems. Multi-city comparative studies would enhance external validity. Future research should examine moderating factors that may condition mediation relationships, including product category involvement, consumer social media usage intensity, and individual difference variables such as need for cognition or susceptibility to social influence.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that consumer perception serves as a significant mediating mechanism in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions among consumers in Bagalkot City. The findings highlight that social media marketing effectiveness depends substantially on its capacity to shape favorable consumer perceptions regarding brand credibility, quality, and value. Marketers targeting emerging urban markets should prioritize perception-oriented social media strategies to maximize return on digital marketing investments. As social media continues penetrating tier-2 and tier-3 Indian cities, understanding perception-mediated pathways to purchase becomes increasingly essential for both theoretical advancement and practical marketing effectiveness.

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