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The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Intention with the Mediating Role of Brand Awareness and Consumer Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effects of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on purchase intention (PI), with the mediating roles of brand awareness (BA) and consumer motivation (CM). Data from 379 participants who used social media were analyzed using structural equation modeling. Results revealed that SMMA had a significant positive effect on BA, CM, and PI. The effect of CM on PI was also significant. However, the effect of BA on PI was not statistically significant. In addition, CM had a mediating role in the relationship between SMMA and PI, but BA did not mediate the relationship between SMMA and PI. This research indicates that marketing managers should acknowledge the main characteristics of online consumers and customize their content to meet customers' specific needs. The results of this study may be utilized in the development of SMMA strategies.

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1. Introduction

Social networks have not only changed many aspects of human life, but the benefits of these networks in improving individual and social life have also been proven (Agnihotri, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Increasingly, people are using these networks for a variety of purposes, including making friends, obtaining and sharing information and ideas, commenting on and recommending places and activities, sharing experiences related to the use of products, creating and enhancing brand personality, and even searching to find out more about the advantages and disadvantages of certain brands and products (Ganesh, 2018; Majeed et al., 2021; Zomorodian & Lu, 2019).

Among the major benefits of using social media is that it allows consumers to obtain information and communicate about brands; interact with other users; generate content; and be influential (Najafipour Moghadam et al., 2021). About 80% of Instagram users follow a business page, and 25% of them visit a business page every day (Kircova et al., 2018). With recent developments in technology and changes in purchase processes, attention has increasingly been paid to social media marketing activities (SMMAs). Social media marketing is a multifaceted concept that requires knowledge from various fields. Based on this, companies are considering how to use social networks for advertising and enhancing profits. As a result, according to Zomorodian and Lu (2019), most companies place SMMAs at the top of their marketing strategy, and brands have started allocating a significant portion of their marketing budgets to SMMAs (Sharma & Verma, 2018).

Studies have shown that companies must use appropriate marketing methods when using social networks (Chuang, 2020; Liu et al., 2019; Ogilvie et al., 2018). As a result, the application of social media technologies should be considered (Agnihotri, 2020). Social media is a new source for improving competitive advantage and increasing marketing performance (Yasa et al., 2020). Many companies use social media for marketing and selling their goods and services. Given the widespread use of social media, as a marketing communication medium, there is a need to examine social media marketing empirically (Pandey et al., 2018).

To be successful in sales, companies must first introduce their products and brands to potential buyers. After potential buyers become aware of a company's brand (brand awareness; BA), they may have an incentive (consumer motivation; CM) to purchase that company's products (purchase intention; PI). Marketing in social media might help companies to achieve these goals. Furthermore, social media research is still in its nascent stage and is yet to evolve as a separate marketing subdiscipline (Sharma & Verma, 2018).

With the advent of social media and the growing prevalence of its use in business, a number of studies have been conducted in the field of social media marketing. However, the existence of inconsistencies among the findings of these studies reveals the need for further research. For example, different elements have been considered to measure SMMAs (see, e.g., Bilgin, 2018; Ebrahim, 2019; Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Sano, 2015; Seo & Park, 2018). In addition, the findings regarding the direct and indirect effects of SMMAs on BA (see, e.g., Azzari & Pelissari, 2020; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Emini & Zeqiri, 2021; Febriyantoro, 2020), and CM (see, e.g., Alalwan, 2018; Anderson et al., 2014; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Fernandes et al., 2020; Guido, 2006; Indrawati et al., 2022; Li et al., 2020; Soebandhi & Sukoco, 2018; To et al., 2007), as well as the effect of BA on PI (see, e.g., Alnsour & Tayeh 2019; Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021; Azzari & Pelissari, 2020; Bilgin, 2018; Cleo & Sopiah, 2021; Ehsan Malik et al., 2013; Emini & Zeqiri, 2021; Febriyantoro, 2020; Hutter et al., 2013; Lutfie & Marcelino; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016) were inconsistent. In this regard, the present research aims to answer the following question: Do SMMAs have a significant effect on PI through the indirect (mediating) effects of BA and CM?

Studies have shown that Iran, as a developing country, is in the early stages of using social networks for marketing (Ebrahimi et al., 2020). Instagram is highly popular among Iranian businesses. More than 53% of Iranian population and over 75% of individuals aged 18 to 29 have used Instagram (Rahbar & Safari, 2022), which indicates the prospective influence of this social network among Iranians. This research is therefore situated in Iran.

2. Literature review and development of hypotheses

2.1. Social media marketing activities

Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the use of social media (e.g., social networks, online communities, and blogs) for marketing activities such as advertising, sales, and customer service (Baines et al., 2021). This form of marketing allows consumers to obtain information and communicate about brands; interact with other users; and generate content (Najafipour Moghadam et al., 2021). With recent technological developments and changes in purchasing processes, attention has increasingly been paid to SMM. Companies use social media for advertising and enhancing profits. As a result, according to Zomorodian and Lu (2019), most companies prioritize SMM in their marketing strategies and many devote a significant amount of their marketing budgets to SMMAAs (Alalwan, 2018; Sharma & Verma, 2018).

According to a commonly accepted perspective, companies use SMM to motivate customers to buy their products. Examples of this perspective may be found in research by Alalwan (2018), Angelyn and Kodrat (2021), Cleo and Sopiah (2021), Fernandes et al. (2020), Kim and Ko (2012), Koivulehto (2017), and Lutfie and Marcelino (2020).

Social marketing is a general term for marketing participation in social and behavioral change (Dann, 2010). The strength of social media is derived from its capabilities to facilitate user involvement and enhance the creation and distribution of content (Berthon et al., 2012). Social media marketing refers to the use of social media (e.g., social networks, online communities, blogs) for marketing activities such as sales, customer service, and advertising (Baines et al., 2021).

Social media is no longer a platform constrained to social interactions. It is a new way for conducting business, and marketing is deeply influenced by adoption of social media (Sheth, 2018). Social media marketing has been widely used to refer to the use of online social media platforms for marketing (Sharma & Verma, 2018, p. 22). It has been characterized as having various elements that represent different focuses, purposes, and targets. For example, Kim and Ko (2012), Godey et al. (2016), Bilgin (2018), and Ebrahim (2019) conceived of SMMAAs as having five elements: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth (WOM). Sano (2015) and Seo and Park (2018) included perceived risk as an element of SMMAA in their studies about insurance services and the airline industry, respectively.

2.2. Brand awareness

Many companies use social media as platform to promote their products and make customers aware of their brands (Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). Brand awareness refers to whether consumers can recognize or recall a brand, or whether or not consumers know about a brand (Keller, 2008). According to Keller et al. (2011), as brand awareness increases, consumers can identify brands among competing options. They quickly recognize the brand symbol and logo, understand what a brand looks like, and quickly recall impressions about a brand's features. In addition, Alnsour and Tayeh (2019) defined brand awareness as brand recognition, brand recall, brand top of mind, and brand dominance.

Brand awareness also refers to how consumers associate a brand with a product they might consider purchasing (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Whenever customers want to purchase goods or services, the first brand name that comes to mind indicates that the product has a higher BA than other brands. Therefore, BA will likely increase a brand's market performance (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012). More specifically, a higher level of BA can influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Ehsan Malik et al., 2013).

Brand awareness is affected by communication channels such as a company's website, commercials on TV and in magazines, online advertising, and SMMAAs, and it can facilitate evaluation and selection of products (Buil et al., 2013; Rubio et al., 2014).

2.3. Consumer motivation

A seller's marketing activities influence consumers' motivation to purchase, creating a need to evoke positive emotional and cognitive responses from consumers. As a result, sellers should use effective sales approaches to increase CM (Mallalieu & Nakamoto, 2008).

Consumer motivation refers to underlying thoughts and feelings related to consumer behavior (Stephens, 2017, p. 60). This kind of motivation is one of the key concepts in research about consumer purchase behavior. When describing consumer motivation concerning SMM, some researchers have

used general categories such as communication (Barker, 2009; Bazi et al., 2020; Haferkamp et al., 2012), personal (i.e., self-gratification), and social values (Tajeddini et al., 2022) as well as social interaction or socializing (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Brell et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2016; Sook Kwon et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2018). Studies have demonstrated that consumers are motivated within two broad categories: hedonic and utilitarian (Anderson et al., 2014; Indrawati et al., 2022; O'Brien, 2010; To et al., 2007). These motivations are comprehensive goals pursued through purchasing behaviors. They are stable meta-traits associated with shopping motives (Guido, 2006). The characteristics of these two types of motivation are explained below.

2.3.1. Hedonic motivation

Hedonic motivation (HM) has been described in several ways. At a general level, Martínez-López et al. (2006) described this form of motivation as intrinsic, nonfunctional, and emotional. O'Brien (2010) stated that the intention of consumers with hedonic motivation is having fun. According to Le et al. (2020), HM is derived from aesthetic or emotional feelings such as love, hate, and joy.

In addition to the above broad descriptions of HM, specific types of HM have been identified. One of these relates to pleasure associated with online browsing and shopping (Indrawati et al., 2022), as evidenced by research conducted by Barta et al. (2021) and Kim (2006), and characterized by terms such as adventure, enjoyment, fun, entertainment, and arousal. Another specific description is associated with owning or using a product, or experiencing a service, that had previously been sought out, acquired, or accessed. For example, Venkatesh et al. (2012) referred to HM as the pleasure derived from using a digital product- in their case, mobile internet. Lin et al. (2018) framed hedonic motivation in terms of factors such as the status implied by staying at a particular location, driving a particular car, or consuming certain products. More specifically, Godey et al. (2016) indicated that consumers buy luxury products for two main reasons: their pleasure and as a symbol of success.

2.3.2. Utilitarian motivation

Similar to HM, utilitarian motivation (UM) has been described in both general and specific terms. At a general level, Martínez-López et al. (2006) stated that UM is driven by functional, economic, rational, and practical considerations. Paralleling one of the more specific forms of HM, some researchers focus on the utility and effectiveness of the *processes* involved in locating and acquiring products and services, including convenience, accessibility, and time saving (Kim, 2006; Martinez-Lopez et al., 2006). Other researchers have focused UM on customers' perceptions of the usefulness, value, and wisdom associated with purchases (Nam et al., 2016). More specifically, Venkatesh et al. (2012) referred to the performance of a product rather than to the effectiveness of the processes used to acquire it. Ahmed and Sathish (2015) referred to the benefits of products, and Dwivedi et al. (2021) referred to the usefulness of a product that had already been purchased.

2.4. Purchase intention

Purchase intention (PI) has been defined in different ways, including the likelihood of buying a product or brand (Keller, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009) and a combination of customer interests in, and probability of buying, a product (Kim & Ko, 2012).

PI is often chosen as the basis for studying online purchase behavior (Gan & Wang, 2017; Peña-García et al., 2020; Rehman et al., 2019). Peña-García et al. (2020) have suggested that intention may be the primary predictor of behavior.

Some researchers define PI in a general sense, for example, a willingness to purchase items on social media sites (Alalwan, 2018). Other researchers define PI in relation to intention to purchase specific products. For example, Yeon Kim and Chung (2011) and Cleo and Sopiah (2021) investigated intention to purchase organic personal-care products.

2.5. Conceptual model and development of hypotheses

2.5.1. The effect of SMMAs on BA

One of the most common communication channels that companies have recently used in their marketing activities is social media. By using SMMAs, companies can engage in a variety of strategies such as online customer services (Bilgin, 2018), adaptive selling (Itani et al., 2017),

enhancing salespeople's performance (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020), and improving customer satisfaction (Agnihotri et al., 2016).

Although the primary goals of marketing communications — to inform, persuade, remind, or reinforce a purchase decision (Kotler, 2003) — remain unchanged, the nature and tools of marketing communications have changed dramatically in the era of social media. Companies can use social media to create and enhance BA (Shareef et al., 2019; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). Research has shown that SMMAs affect BA (Alnsour & Tayeh, 2019; Bilgin, 2018; Emini & Zeqiri, 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₁: SMMAs have a positive effect on BA.

2.5.2. The effect of SMMAs on CM

Exposing customers to brand information and engaging them on social media will likely increase the effectiveness of SMM and CM (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). Because customers voluntarily participate in social media (Kim & Drumwright, 2016), they are assumed to actively contribute to marketing content (Heinonen, 2011) and, most likely, their motivation is influenced by companies' SMMAs.

Social media marketing has a significant positive impact on customer engagement (Chi, 2011; Parayil Iqbal et al., 2023). According to Baird and Parasnis (2011), social media can serve as an ideal channel for engaging consumers. Based on previous studies (Bazi et al., 2020; Enginkaya & Yılmaz, 2014; Heinonen, 2011; Kim & Drumwright, 2016), SMMAs have a positive effect on CM. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H₂: SMMAs have a positive effect on HM.

H₃: SMMAs have a positive effect on UM.

2.5.3. The effect of SMMAs on PI

Consumers need to gather information to make purchase decisions, and if they have limited capacity or ability to process information (Hoyer et al., 2023), social media can play a vital role. According to Zhang et al. (2017), increased activity on social media is positively associated with shopping activity. The findings of Li et al. (2020) show that consumers use social media when searching for hedonic products, whereas other online information sources (search engines and third-party reviews) are more useful for utilitarian products.

Many studies have investigated the effect of SMMAs on purchase intention. Some of these studies (Armawan et al., 2023; Meliawati et al., 2023; Moslehpour et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022) indicate the direct effect of SMMAs on PI. However, most studies (Aggarwal & Mittal, 2022; Anas et al., 2023; Ellitan et al., 2022; Hamidah & Maulani, 2023; Jasin, 2022; Raees et al., 2023; Sağtaş, 2022; Winarno & Indrawati, 2022) show a significant indirect effect of SMMAs (through mediating variables) on PI. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₄: SMMAs have a positive effect on PI.

2.5.4. The effect of BA on PI

Despite the familiarity and desire of consumers to purchase a product, another factor that continues to influence the purchasing decision is BA. Whenever a customer wants to purchase a product or service, the first brand name that comes to mind indicates that the product has a higher level of BA. A higher level of BA can influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Ehsan Malik et al., 2013). Previous studies have suggested that BA has a positive and direct effect on PI (Alnsour & Tayeh, 2019; Bilgin, 2018; Ehsan Malik et al., 2013; Hutter et al., 2013). In addition, positive consumer relationships with the brand, such as perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations, generate PI (Azzari & Pelissari, 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₅: BA has a positive effect on PI.

2.5.5. The effect of HM on PI

The nature of HM concerning social media has been examined in several studies. Some researchers examined specific types of HM, for example, entertainment (see, e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Barker,

2009; Bazi et al., 2020; de Vries et al., 2017; Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014; Florenthal, 2019; Haferkamp et al., 2012; Hwang & Choi, 2016; Lau, 2016; Rohm et al., 2013; Yilmaz & Enginkaya, 2015); enjoyment (Lin & Lu, 2011); self-related motivations such as self-documentation, self-presentation, and self-expression (see, e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Brell et al., 2016; de Vries et al., 2017; Haferkamp et al., 2012; Hwang & Choi, 2016; Krasnova et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018); and social interaction/connection (see, e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Brell et al., 2016; Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014; Hwang & Choi, 2016; Krasnova et al., 2017; Shi et al., 2016; Sook Kwon et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2018).

Other researchers focused on the general descriptions of HM. For example, Ashraf et al. (2019), Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014), Shi et al. (2016), and Yen (2013) found that hedonic motivation positively impacts the intention to use social media. According to Won and Kim (2020), HM is a strong predictor of online purchase intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₆: HM has a positive effect on PI.

2.5.6. The effect of UM on PI

As is the case for HM, the nature of UM about using social media has been examined in research. Some researchers examined the specific types of UM, for example, gaining information (see, e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Brell et al., 2016; Bazi et al., 2020; Biernatowska *et al.*, 2017; de Vries et al., 2017; Florenthal, 2019; Haferkamp et al., 2012; Hwang & Choi, 2016; Rohm *et al.*, 2013; Karatsoli and Nathanail, 2020; Krasnova et al., 2017; Lau, 2016; Sook Kwon et al., 2014; Yen, 2013), remuneration/incentive (see, e.g., de Vries et al., 2017; Sook Kwon et al., 2014; Rohm et al., 2013), opportunity seeking (Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014; Yilmaz & Enginkaya, 2015), and functionality/usefulness (Lin & Lu, 2011; Shi et al., 2016).

Other researchers have focused on the general descriptions of UM. For example, Ashraf et al. (2019), Irshad and Shail Ahmad (2019), Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014), and Shi et al. (2016) confirmed that utilitarian motivation has a significant direct effect on using social media and PI. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₇: UM has a positive effect on PI.

2.5.7. The mediating role of BA

During the formation of PI, consumers are motivated to assess the claims and statements made on social networks and check their merits. At this stage, consumers tend to conduct brand evaluations and make their own decisions (Colicev et al., 2018). Based on previous studies (Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021; Cleo & Sopiah, 2021; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Emini & Zeqiri, 2021; Lutfie & Marcelino, 2020), BA mediates the relationship between SMMA and PI. As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₈: BA mediates the relationship between SMMA and PI.

2.5.8. The mediating role of CM

The mediating roles of consumer motivation (in the form of HM and UM) have been examined in several studies. Alalwan (2018) found a mediating role of HM between social media advertising and PI. Dabbous and Barakat (2020) illustrated that HM and UM mediate the relationship between marketing activities on social networks and PI. According to Fernandes et al. (2020), UM does not mediate the effect of Instagram advertising on PI; However, there is a mediating role of HM on PI. Soebandhi and Sukoco (2018) demonstrated that UM mediates social media shopping. As a result, we propose the following two hypotheses:

H₉: HM mediates the relationship between SMMA and PI.

H₁₀: UM mediates the relationship between SMMA and PI.

The model shown in Figure 1 represents the proposed relationship between SMMA and PI, as well as the mediating roles of BA and CM, with CM categorized into HM and UM.

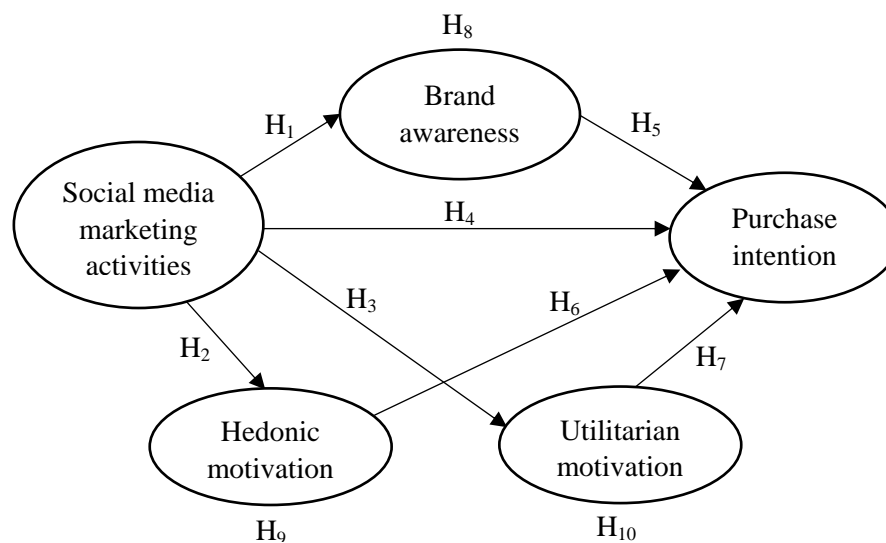


Fig. 1. Conceptual model for the research

3. Method

3.1. Participant recruitment

Due to the absence of a sampling framework, we employed convenience and snowball sampling techniques to approach customers of Mashad Leather. Approximately 750 invitations to participate in this research were sent to people who had followed and liked the Instagram page of Mashad Leather, a manufacturer of high-end leather goods headquartered in Tehran. These invitations were sent via email, SMS, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, and private chat rooms, as well as through direct messaging associated with the Mashad Leather website. All invitations contained brief information about the research and a hyperlink to a questionnaire. As a limited form of exponential non-discriminative purposive snowball sampling, the invitations also included a request for recipients to invite others to participate in the research.

3.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first of which contained standard demographic questions and inquiries regarding the duration and frequency of social media usage, as well as contact with Mashad Leather. The second section comprised 35 items adopted or adapted from relevant literature. Twelve items intended to represent SMMA elements of entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and WOM, based on the publications by Ebrahim (2019) and Seo and Park (2018). Five items representing BA were derived from the works of Sasmita and Suki (2015). Three items representing HM were based on the publication by Alalwan (2018). Eight items representing UM were based on publications by Kim (2006) and Alalwan (2018), and seven items representing PI were sourced from the publications by Alalwan (2018) and Wang and Yu (2015). Five response options were offered, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). All 35 items were translated from English to Persian by the second and third authors. In this process, the original wording of some items was slightly modified to ensure that all items were suitable for the specific context of this research. Back translation was conducted by the first author and reviewed by a native English speaker to conform with common English vernacular.

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Data collection and software for analyses

Data were collected via Google Forms, and completed questionnaires were obtained from 414 invitees. Because participants were required to answer all items, there were no missing data. Analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26[®] and SmartPLS 3.0.

3.3.2. Preliminary analyses

As an initial step in data cleaning, we removed 21 participant records due to identical responses across all or nearly all items within the second section of the questionnaire. An additional 11 records were removed after a Mahalanobis d^2 analysis across all 35 items indicated the presence of multivariate outliers. We then subjected the items to close inspection. As a result, we discarded one item (*I can readily recognize the logo of this company on social media*) because all participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with it. Four additional items were discarded because, after translation, they had similar wording to at least one other item and an interitem correlation $\geq .80$ with at least one of those other items.

Because some of the remaining 30 items might have conceptually overlapped in the minds of respondents despite differences in wording, or conversely, because some items might have had similar wording but have been regarded as conceptually different by respondents, we conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) to ensure that the most distinctive and appropriate items were selected for inclusion in the substantive analyses of this research. These EFAs commenced with the retained 30 items and the 382 records that remained after the prior data cleaning. In all of these analyses, we used principal axis factoring as the method of extraction, parallel analysis to determine the number of factors in the data, and promax rotations. Items with loadings $< .40$ and items with the lowest loading when the difference in cross loadings was $< .15$ were discarded. As a result, 21 items were retained, with at least three items within each of the five constructs featured in the conceptual model. These items and constructs (latent variables), along with factor loadings and communalities, are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Items, factor loadings, and communalities in the final exploratory factor analysis

Item #	Constructs and items	Factor loadings					h^2
		1	2	3	4	5	
SMM1	Social media marketing activities	.987					.839
	Use of social media by this company is based on recent trends						
SMM2	Social network sites of this company have the information that I need.	.973					.798
SMM3	Social media sites of this company provide customized services.	.853					.744
SMM4	Sharing information on this company's social media sites is possible.	.733					.646
SMM5	I share the social media content of this company on my social pages.	.669					.449
SMM6	I share information related to the services of this company with my friends.	.652					.576
SMM7	I can find the information I need on this company's social media sites.	.620					.641
SMM8	Commenting on this company's social media sites is easy.	.549					.542
	Purchase intention		.933				.823
PI1	I buy products that are advertised on social media sites.						
PI2	I intend to buy products that are offered on social media at a discount.		.931				.745
PI3	I am likely to buy products that are advertised on social media sites.		.562				.672
PI4	I would like to buy products that are offered on social media sites at a discount.		.533				.467
	Hedonic motivation			.981			.898
HM1	Using advertising on social media sites is enjoyable.						
HM2	Using advertising on social media sites is entertaining.			.954			.834
HM3	Using advertising on social media sites is interesting and exciting.			.717			.641
	Utilitarian motivation				.922		.763
UM1	I want to feel that I purchase wisely.					.878	.773
UM2	It is good when my purchases are conducted quickly.					.542	.466
UM3	I feel good if I know my purchases are successful.						
	Brand awareness					.864	.802
BA1	I can quickly recall some features of this company presented on social media sites.						
BA2	On social media sites, I can distinguish the products of this company from those of rival companies.					.614	.571
BA3	I am aware of the products advertised by this company on social media sites.					.412	.563

A Mahalanobis d^2 analysis across the five constructs resulted in three participants having multivariate outlying data. These participants were removed from the data set, resulting in data from 379 participants for subsequent analyses.

4. Results

4.1. Participant characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the 379 participants are shown in Table 2. There were similar percentages of males and females; half of the participants were ≤ 30 years of age, while only 12.5% were > 40 years old. Two-thirds had a bachelor's or master's degree. Most had used social media for > 4 years, and nearly all participants used social media every day.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants

Group	Indicator	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	204	53.8
	Female	175	46.2
Age	≤ 30	193	50.9
	31 – 40	139	36.6
	41 – 50	37	9.7
	> 50	10	2.8
Education	Up to diploma	65	17.2
	College	30	7.9
	Bachelor's or master's	256	67.6
	PhD	28	7.4
Duration of presence on social media (years)	< 1	21	5.5
	1 – 3	48	12.7
	4 – 7	136	35.9
	> 7	174	45.9
Frequency of using social media	Every day	371	97.9
	Two/three times a week	8	2.1

4.2. Structural equation modeling

We tested the research model using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS (Version 3.2.8) software (Ringle et al., 2015). The data were analyzed in two stages, starting with the measurement model, followed by the structural model.

4.3. Measurement model

As a sequel to our use of exploratory factor analysis conducted using SPSS to assess the unidimensionality of the constructs, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using SmartPLS software. One item (SM3) with a variance inflation factor (VIF) > 5 was removed to avoid collinearity (Hair et al., 2019).

To test item loadings, reliability, and validity, a measurement model was evaluated. As shown in Table 3, factor loadings, coefficient alpha, composite reliability (CR), Dijkstra-Henseler's indicator (ρ_A), and average variance extracted (AVE) were satisfactory given that the minimum threshold value of factor loadings is 0.70 (Hair et al., 2016), the minimum acceptable value for coefficient alpha and CR is 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011), and the minimum acceptable value for ρ_A is also 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The AVE of all factors exceeded 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity (see Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Henseler et al. (2015) recommend using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio to assess discriminant validity in variance-based SEM. The entries in Table 4 demonstrate that the discriminant validity values were all below 0.85, indicating discriminant validity among the constructs.

4.4. Structural results

After ensuring that the data met the reliability and validity criteria, we evaluated the structural model by examining its explanatory power and the t value of the path coefficients. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the model's explanatory power. Table 5 shows that the exogenous constructs account for 38% of the variance in the dependent variable (PI), which can be considered moderate explanatory power.

Table 3. Results of the measurement model analysis

Construct	Factor loading	Coefficient alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Brand awareness		0.806	0.809	0.885	0.721
BA1	0.874				
BA2	0.829				
BA3	0.843				
Social media marketing activities		0.904	0.910	0.924	0.637
SMM1	0.778				
SMM2	0.729				
SMM4	0.803				
SMM5	0.882				
SMM6	0.875				
SMM7	0.802				
SMM8	0.698				
Purchase intention		0.867	0.903	0.908	0.712
PI1	0.789				
PI2	0.881				
PI3	0.878				
PI4	0.823				
Utilitarian motivation		0.802	0.813	0.882	0.714
UM1	0.813				
UM2	0.844				
UM3	0.877				
Hedonic motivation		0.906	0.906	0.941	0.842
HM1	0.894				
HM2	0.931				
HM3	0.926				

Table 4. Discriminant validity: heterotrait–monotrait ratios

Construct	BA	HM	PI	SMMAs	UM
Brand awareness (BA)					
Hedonic motivation (HM)	0.495				
Purchase intention (PI)	0.394	0.568			
Social media marketing activities (SMMAs)	0.830	0.524	0.454		
Utilitarian motivation (UM)	0.274	0.397	0.493	0.317	

Table 5. Coefficient of determination (R^2) values

Construct	R^2	R^2 adjusted
Brand awareness	0.507	0.506
Hedonic motivation	0.228	0.226
Utilitarian motivation	0.078	0.075
Purchase intention	0.376	0.369

A full bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples was used to obtain the standardized path coefficients' statistical significance. Figure 2 shows the results of the structural model analysis.

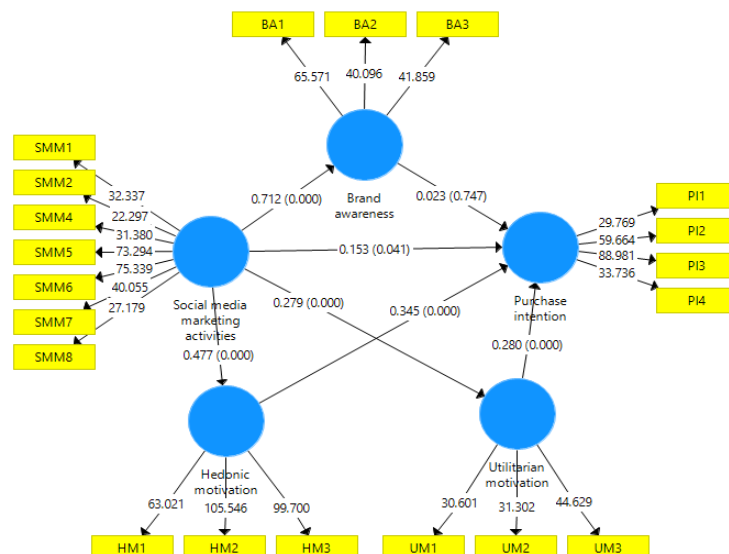


Fig. 2. Structural model output

Table 6 shows that all hypotheses except H₅ and H₈, were supported. The effect of SMMA on BA, HM, and UM is positive and significant at the .001 level (H₁, H₂, and H₃), while the effect of SMMA on PI is positive and significant at the .05 level (H₄). Furthermore, the effects of HM on PI and UM on PI are positive and significant at $P < .001$ (H₆ and H₇), and SMMA has an indirect, significant positive effect on PI via HM and also via UM—both at the .001 level (H₉ and H₁₀). However, BA does not influence PI (H₅), nor does it mediate the effect of SMMA on PI (H₈).

Table 6. Hypotheses results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-value
Direct						
H ₁	SMMA → BA	0.712	0.713	0.025	28.550	0.000
H ₂	SMMA → HM	0.477	0.478	0.042	11.436	0.000
H ₃	SMMA → UM	0.279	0.280	0.048	5.785	0.000
H ₄	SMMA → PI	0.153	0.157	0.075	2.040	0.041
H ₅	BA → PI	0.023	0.018	0.070	0.323	0.747
H ₆	HM → PI	0.345	0.344	0.077	4.485	0.000
H ₇	UM → PI	0.280	0.282	0.055	5.131	0.000
Indirect						
H ₈	SMMA → BA → PI	0.016	0.013	0.050	0.321	0.748
H ₉	SMMA → HM → PI	0.164	0.163	0.036	4.617	0.000
H ₁₀	SMMA → UM → PI	0.078	0.078	0.019	4.026	0.000

5. Discussion and conclusions

The Internet has changed our world in beneficial ways, including a reduction in marketing costs and increased efficiency. However, it is necessary to pay attention to different aspects of marketing that involve the Internet due to the accompanying challenges and opportunities. New tools and mechanisms can create opportunities and facilitate data-based decisions. Social media marketing creates more value through a broader understanding and cultivation of interactive customer behaviors that are critical to SMM (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Notably, more than two-thirds of global Instagram users are 34 years of age or younger (Dixon, 2022). Therefore, due to the high usage of social media by young people, managers might well pay special attention to this age group, including how to customize marketing materials to attract their attention.

The results of this study indicate that marketing on social networks influences BA, CM, and PI. These findings are consistent with previous research (Alnsour & Tayeh 2019; Azzari & Pelissari, 2021; Bilgin, 2018; Colicev et al., 2018; Ehsan Malik et al., 2013; Won & Kim, 2020) which found a significant effect of SMMA on consumer motivation and behaviors. Concerning the effect of SMMA on BA, the results of previous studies indicate inconsistency in the findings. Some studies (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Emini & Zeqiri, 2021; Febriyantoro, 2020) have reported a direct and significant effect of SMMA on the BA, while other studies did not detect a direct effect (Azzari & Pelissari, 2020; Febriyantoro, 2020).

Another finding of the present research is the confirmation of the mediating role of CM (in both hedonic and utilitarian dimensions). The mediating role of HM is consistent with previous results in which SMMA has an indirect significant positive effect on PI via HM (Alalwan, 2018; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Fernandes et al., 2020; Guido, 2006; Indrawati et al., 2002; Li et al., 2020; To et al., 2007). However, this finding is inconsistent with the findings of Anderson et al. (2014), who found that experiential shopping and bargain perception (as hedonic motivations) did not affect PI. The mediating role of UM is also aligned with the results of some previous studies (Anderson et al., 2014; Guido, 2006; Indrawati et al., 2002; Li et al., 2020; Soebandhi & Sukoco, 2018; To et al., 2007). This suggests that part of the influence of SMMA on PI is indirectly transmitted through UM. However, this finding is inconsistent with the findings of Fernandes et al. (2020), who found that UM does not affect the interest in buying beauty-care products.

Another finding of the current research that warrants further discussion pertains to the direct and indirect effects of BA on PI. According to our findings, neither the direct nor the mediating effects of

BA on PI were statistically significant. These findings indicate that people's awareness of a brand does not always result in their intention to purchase that brand's products. These results might be influenced by Mashad Leather products being relatively well known in Iran and having high BA; however, because these products are expensive and regarded as luxury goods, there is limited PI. This suggests that a moderating variable, namely the cost of products, should beneficially be included in models associated with SMMA.

In addition, some research has shown that the effect of BA on PI can be significant both directly (Alnsour & Tayeh, 2019; Ehsan Malik et al., 2013; Emini & Zeqiri, 2021; Hutter et al., 2013) and indirectly (Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021; Azzari & Pelissari, 2020; Bilgin, 2018; Cleo & Sopiah, 2021; Lutfie & Marcelino; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). In contrast, a few studies (Febriyantoro, 2020, Emini & Zeqiri, 2021) indicated that BA does not mediate the relationship between SMMA and PI.

6. Research implications

6.1. Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the context of social media marketing in several ways. It indicates that, as mentioned by Godey et al. (2016), difficulties are associated with conceptualizing and measuring SMMA. After data cleaning and EFAs, only eight of the original 12 items intended to represent elements of SMMA remained for use in subsequent analyses. Removing some of these 12 items resulted in entertainment no longer being represented among the SMMA elements. This discrepancy between what we intended to use to represent SMMA and what the data yielded is similar to the finding of Ebrahim (2019), whose data indicated that his five proposed elements of SMMA were reduced to only three: trendiness, customization, and WOM. It would be interesting to know whether, for both our research and Ebrahim's, the initial conceptualization of SMMA elements was misguided or whether the conceptualization of those elements was fitting, but the items used to represent those elements were not appropriately focused or worded. In light of this, careful attention should be paid to the nature of items used to tap the elements believed to comprise SMMA.

Similar issues of conceptualization and item content arise concerning the two types of consumer motivation in the present research. On the one hand, the items used to indicate HM referred specifically to enjoyment derived from exposure to SMM; no reference was made to pleasure derived from purchasing and owning the advertised products. In contrast, the UM items did not refer to the utility of social media concerning purchasing; instead, the items referred to actual purchasing activities. Whether these fundamental differences represent acceptable conceptual differences rather than conceptual problems might be resolved by careful examination and choice of the items used to assess both kinds of motivation.

6.2. Practical implications

The findings of this study have the potential to help companies, SMM experts, and practitioners improve the scope, variety, and their SMMA by rethinking key factors that influence consumers' awareness, motivation, and purchase intention. Although SMMA can increase BA (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Emini & Zeqiri, 2021; Febriyantoro, 2020) and BA acts as a first step in building brand value for consumers, knowing a brand is not enough to generate consumers' PI (Azzari & Pelissari, 2020; Febriyantoro, 2020). Marketing managers should be aware that consumers use social media when searching for hedonic products, but prefer to use search engines and third-party reviews for utilitarian products (Li et al., 2020).

Another point managers should consider when designing SMMA is the customization of content and advertisements according to the type of social network, product type, and demographic characteristics of users. Many researchers have investigated the impact of SMM on the motivational, attitudinal, and behavioral variables of consumers in various social network platforms, including Instagram (Alalwan, 2018; Alhabash et al., 2017; Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021; Fernandes et al., 2020; Kircova et al., 2018; Lutfie & Marcelino, 2020; Zomorodian & Lu, 2019), Facebook (Alalwan, 2018; Alhabash et al., 2017; Alnsour & Tayeh, 2019; Anderson et al., 2014; Hutter et al., 2013; Kircova et al., 2018), Twitter (Alalwan, 2018; Alhabash et al., 2017; Kircova et al., 2018; Sook Kwon et al., 2014), Snapchat (Alhabash et al., 2017), TikTok (Meliawati et al., 2023), and even e-commerce websites (Guido, 2006; Indrawati et al., 2022; To et al., 2007). They have also investigated a wide

range of products, such as books (O'Brien, 2010), apparel and accessories (To et al., 2007), and beauty products (Fernandes et al., 2020). One reason for the difference in research findings is the specific focus on social media or a specific product category. Perhaps demographic characteristics of social network users, such as gender, age, education, and income should also be considered in the planning and design of SMMA.

7. Limitations

This research has some limitations. Notably, there are three ways in which the results might have limited generalizability. First, the focus was on a specific brand of luxury leather products, making it difficult to generalize the results to other products. Second, this research was conducted in Iran, so the results might not apply to other countries. Third, most participants were under 30 years of age, which may limit the applicability of the findings to older age groups.

Apart from limited generalizability, this research might be limited by insufficient construct coverage of BA, both types of motivation, and PI. Each of these constructs emerged from the EFAs with fewer than five items, so none of them satisfies the recommendation by Hair et al. (2014, p. 100) that researchers should aim for at least five items for each factor in EFA.

8. Future research

A number of avenues for future research are suggested by this research. First, demographic variables (such as gender and disposable income) can moderate the effects of SMMA on BA, CM, and PI. Future research could identify which of these demographic variables is most influential and whether some are more or less, influential in relation to BA, UM, HM, and PI.

Another avenue for future research is the identification of the items that most appropriately represent the elements within SMMA, as well as the constructs of BA, HM, UM, and PI.

Future research could also involve assessing whether SMMA might function differently and be represented by different elements concerning services (e.g., insurance products, airlines, or telecommunication services) compared to goods (e.g., personal products, clothes, or vehicles). The prospects of SMMA operating differently for various kinds of services and goods could also be explored in future research.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in relation to this research.

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