



Social Media Marketing Activities and Consumer Outcomes: An Integrative Systematic Review

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Abstract- Background: Firms increasingly invest in social media marketing activities (SMMAs), yet published studies differ in the activities measured, mechanisms proposed, and outcomes reported. Objective: To identify the dominant SMMA dimensions, explain how they influence consumer and brand outcomes, evaluate the quality of the evidence, and define a focused future research agenda. Methods: A publisher-bounded systematic review was reported according to PRISMA 2020 and PRISMA-S. Emerald Insight, Springer Nature Link, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis Online, and SAGE Journals were searched for English-language, peer-reviewed empirical studies published from 2015 to 14 March 2026. Two-stage screening was applied to a register of 66 records. Thirty studies met the eligibility criteria. Data were extracted on context, design, SMMA dimensions, mechanisms, outcomes, and findings. Study quality was assessed with design-appropriate Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool criteria. Because constructs and effect measures were heterogeneous, results were synthesised narratively rather than meta-analytically. Results: The final evidence base contained six studies from each publisher group. Twenty-five studies used cross-sectional surveys, most commonly with structural equation modelling. Entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, informativeness, electronic word-of-mouth support, and promotions were the main SMMA dimensions. The most consistent pattern was indirect: SMMAs shaped cognitive mechanisms such as brand awareness, image, credibility, value, and equity; relational mechanisms such as trust, experience, love, satisfaction, and self-brand connection; and engagement mechanisms. These mechanisms then influenced loyalty, purchase or visit intention, repurchase, electronic word of mouth, customer equity, and, in one study, financial performance. Longitudinal evidence was rare and did not always confirm the positive cross-sectional pattern. Limitations: The review was intentionally limited to five publisher platforms, English-language journal articles, and studies published from 2015 onward. Most included studies relied on self-reported, single-country, cross-sectional data. Formal publication-bias tests and certainty grading were not appropriate without a pooled effect estimate. Conclusion: SMMAs generally create outcomes through trust, brand experience or equity, satisfaction, and engagement rather than through stable direct effects. Future research should use longitudinal, experimental, multi-source, and objective-performance designs. Registration and funding: The review was not registered and no separate protocol was published. No specific funding was received.

Keywords- Social media marketing activities; brand equity; customer engagement; brand loyalty; purchase intention; PRISMA 2020; systematic review.



I. Introduction

Social media has changed marketing from one-way promotion into an environment in which firms publish content, respond to customers, personalise messages, support electronic word of mouth, and build ongoing brand relationships. Social media marketing activities are therefore broader than advertising. They include the set of firm-designed experiences and interactions that customers perceive on social platforms. Foundational studies commonly describe entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and electronic word of mouth as central dimensions, while later research adds informativeness, relevance, promotional value, and sustainability orientation (Kim & Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016; Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

The rapid growth of this literature has produced many positive findings, but it has also created conceptual and methodological fragmentation. Some studies treat SMMA as a single higher-order construct, whereas others test separate platform features. Some focus on immediate outcomes such as engagement or attitude, while others examine brand equity, trust, loyalty, purchase intention, destination choice, well-being, or financial performance. A direct effect is often assumed, even though relationship-marketing and stimulus-organism-response explanations suggest that social media first changes what consumers know, feel, or do with the brand before distal outcomes occur. Existing broad reviews explain the expanding role of social media in marketing and identify future priorities (Alalwan et al., 2017; Appel et al., 2020).

However, a focused synthesis of firm-designed SMMA across major management and social-science publishers is useful for three reasons. First, the field needs a clear distinction between SMMA, influencer marketing, user-generated content, native advertising, and general digital engagement. Second, the repeated use of cross-sectional structural models requires a critical assessment of causal claims. Third, the accumulation of mediators and moderators needs to be reorganised into a small number of theoretically meaningful mechanisms.

This review therefore addresses four questions: (1) Which SMMA dimensions are most frequently examined? (2) Through which cognitive, relational, affective, and engagement mechanisms do SMMA influence consumer and brand outcomes? (3) Which outcomes, sectors, contexts, and research designs dominate the evidence? and (4) What methodological and theoretical gaps should guide future research? The review follows PRISMA 2020, uses a transparent five-publisher search boundary, and synthesises 30 empirical studies.

II. Methods

Protocol and reporting standard

The review was reported using the PRISMA 2020 statement and its explanation and elaboration document (Page et al., 2021a, 2021b). Search reporting was additionally guided by PRISMA-S (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). The review was not registered, and no separate protocol was published before the search. This is reported as a methodological limitation rather than concealed as completed protocol work.



Eligibility criteria

Studies were included when they met all of the following conditions: (a) a peer-reviewed journal article published in English from 1 January 2015 to 14 July 2026; (b) published through Emerald, Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, or SAGE; (c) an original empirical design using quantitative, qualitative, mixed, experimental, longitudinal, content-analytic, or configurational data; (d) firm-designed social media marketing activities or efforts were the central exposure; and (e) the study reported consumer, customer, brand, tourism, professional-practice, organisational, or financial outcomes. Social media marketing could be modelled as a higher-order construct or as named dimensions such as interaction, entertainment, informativeness, trendiness, customisation, electronic word-of-mouth support, or promotion.

Studies were excluded when they were reviews, meta-analyses, conceptual papers, bibliometric studies, book chapters, conference items, editorials, or non-peer-reviewed outputs. Empirical studies were also excluded when they examined influencer endorsement, user-generated content, social media addiction, political communication, employee communication, native advertising, or platform use without firm-designed SMMA as the main explanatory construct. Studies outside the five specified publisher groups were not included in the final evidence base, even when they were relevant, because the review question deliberately imposed a publisher-platform boundary.

Information sources and search date

Five publisher platforms were searched: Emerald Insight, Springer Nature Link, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis Online, and SAGE Journals. The last search was completed on 14 July 2026. Reference lists of included and closely related articles were checked to identify possible missing studies and to verify terminology. Citation checking did not expand the final evidence base beyond the five specified publisher groups. No general bibliographic database, preprint server, trial register, dissertation database, or grey-literature source was searched. This boundary improves reproducibility for the requested publisher set but reduces comprehensiveness relative to a database-wide review.

Search strategy

The core search combined exact and broad expressions for the exposure with common consumer and brand outcomes: ("social media marketing activities" OR "social media marketing efforts" OR "social media marketing") AND (brand OR consumer OR customer OR purchase OR loyalty OR engagement OR equity OR tourism). Search syntax was adapted to each publisher interface. Filters were applied for journal articles, English language where available, and the 2015-2026 date range. Publisher interfaces can return unstable raw result totals because of relevance ranking, online-first duplicates, and changing index coverage. Therefore, the PRISMA counts refer to unique records saved in the screening register rather than unverifiable raw hit totals.

Selection process

Records were managed in a structured spreadsheet. Duplicate titles and duplicate DOI records, including online-first and later issue versions, were removed before screening. Screening occurred in two stages. In stage one, titles and abstracts were assessed against the topic, publication-type, date, language, and publisher criteria. In stage two, full texts



or sufficiently detailed extended reports were assessed against all eligibility criteria. One primary reviewer completed both stages and repeated all exclusion decisions in a second pass. Borderline records were discussed against written rules before a final decision. No machine-learning or automated exclusion tool was used. The lack of two fully independent reviewers is a limitation and increases the importance of the disclosed screening register and reasons for exclusion.

Data collection process and data items

A piloted extraction form captured author, year, publisher, journal, setting, country, sector, sample, design, platform, SMMA definition or dimensions, theory, mediators, moderators, outcomes, analytical method, direction of reported relationships, and principal limitations. Extraction was completed study by study and then checked against the source report. Missing information was recorded as not reported rather than inferred. No study authors were contacted because the synthesis did not require unpublished numerical estimates.

Quality appraisal

Methodological quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool 2018 framework (Hong et al., 2018). The two MMAT screening questions were applied first, followed by design-appropriate criteria. Ratings are Yes, No, or Cannot tell. Consistent with MMAT guidance, the criteria were not converted into a single numerical score, and no study was excluded solely because of quality concerns.

Effect measures and synthesis methods

The review did not define one pooled effect measure because the studies reported different constructs, scales, models, and outcomes. Where comparable, the synthesis recorded the direction and statistical significance of standardised paths, indirect effects, group differences, and longitudinal cross-lagged relationships. The planned synthesis grouped evidence in four steps: (a) describe study characteristics and quality; (b) code the SMMA dimensions; (c) group mediators into cognitive, relational-affective, and engagement mechanisms; and (d) group outcomes into loyalty and retention, behavioural intention, brand value, advocacy, and organisational performance. Findings were compared across design strength and context. A meta-analysis was not conducted because the necessary construct equivalence and common effect metrics were absent. No transformation or imputation of effect sizes was performed.

Reporting bias and certainty

Formal funnel-plot or statistical publication-bias tests were not performed because there was no pooled effect estimate and fewer than ten sufficiently comparable studies for any single relationship. Selective reporting remains possible because most articles emphasised significant structural paths. Certainty was not graded with GRADE or a similar formal system because the review combined observational marketing designs, content analysis, experiments, longitudinal models, and configurational studies. Instead, confidence was judged narratively by considering design, measurement, consistency, directness, and risk of bias. Confidence is moderate for the general conclusion that SMMA operate through mediating mechanisms, but low for strong causal claims about long-term loyalty or financial performance.



III. Results

Study selection

The screening register contained 66 records: 14 from Emerald and 13 from each of Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, and SAGE. Four duplicate online-first or issue records were removed. Sixty-two unique titles and abstracts were screened, and 10 were excluded. Fifty-two reports were sought; two could not be retrieved in sufficient detail. Fifty reports were assessed for eligibility. Twenty were excluded with documented reasons, leaving 30 included studies. Figure 1 presents the study-selection process and the category counts for the 20 full-text reports excluded.

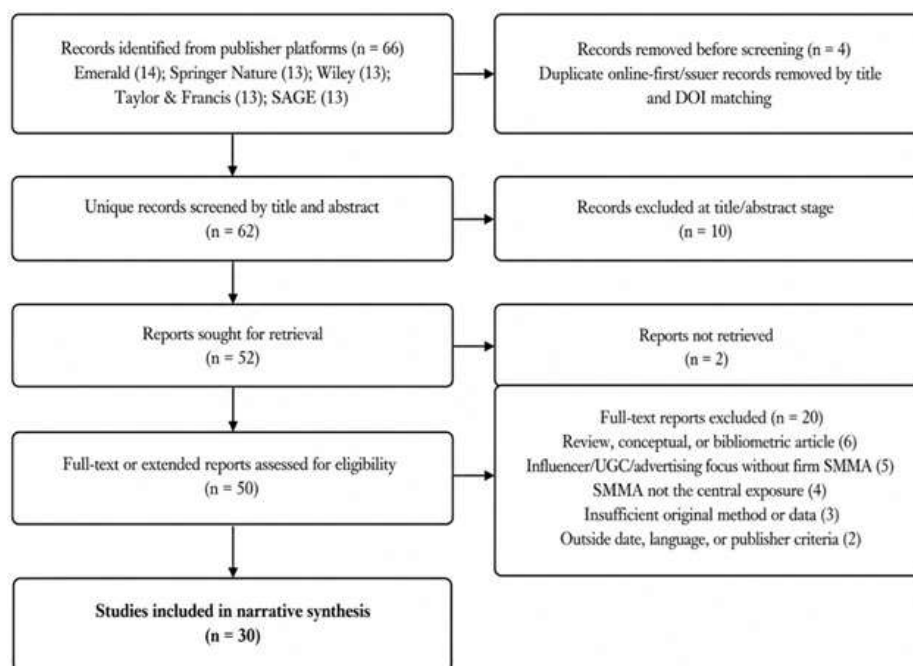


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram

Note. Counts represent unique records entered into the screening register rather than the total results displayed by the publisher platforms. The search was completed on 14 March 2026. Reference-list checking was used only to verify eligibility and did not extend the review beyond the five selected publisher platforms.

Publication and contextual profile

The 30 studies were evenly distributed across the five requested publisher groups, with six studies from each. Publication increased sharply after 2020: 27 of the 30 studies appeared from 2020 onward, and 20 appeared from 2023 onward. Most studies were conducted in Asia, the Middle East, or other emerging-market settings. The strongest sector clusters were tourism and hospitality, consumer brands and retail, services such as banking and telecommunications, and travel or transportation. Smaller clusters



concerned higher education, healthcare, orthodontic practice, cinema, and bottom-of-the-pyramid markets. This breadth shows the portability of the SMMA idea, but it also creates heterogeneity in constructs and outcomes.

Table 1. Distribution of included studies by publisher

Publisher group	Records identified	Final included studies
Emerald	14	6
Springer Nature	13	6
Wiley	13	6
Taylor & Francis	13	6
SAGE	13	6
Total	66	30

Methodological profile

Twenty-five studies used cross-sectional surveys, commonly analysed with covariance-based or partial least squares structural equation modelling. One study used systematic content analysis, one used an experimental design, one used fuzzy cognitive mapping, one used a three-wave longitudinal panel, and one combined survey, social media, and financial data. The heavy concentration of cross-sectional self-report models allowed detailed mediation testing but limited temporal and causal inference. Many studies used convenience or platform-follower samples, and handling of non-response and common-method bias was often incompletely reported.

Table 2. Methodological composition of the evidence base

Design category	Number	Main strength	Main limitation
Cross-sectional survey and SEM/regression	25	Tests complex mediation and moderation models	Temporal order and common-method bias remain uncertain
Content analysis	1	Observes actual branded content	Engagement effects may be platform- and period-specific
Experiment	1	Stronger causal identification of content effects	Narrow exposure and short-term attitude outcome
Fuzzy cognitive mapping	1	Captures interdependence and stakeholder knowledge	Does not estimate population-level causal effects
Longitudinal panel	1	Tests temporal ordering and reciprocal effects	Attrition and observational confounding remain possible
Multi-source/financial design	1	Links marketing perceptions to objective performance	Single sector and context limit generalisation



Dimensions of social media marketing activities

The reviewed instruments converged around seven recurring activity families. Interaction and entertainment were the most common. Trendiness and customisation or personalisation were also frequent, especially in luxury, retail, and service contexts. Informativeness and relevance were prominent in fast food, tourism, healthcare, and professional services. Electronic word-of-mouth support appeared both as an activity and as an outcome. Promotions were present less consistently. Sustainability-oriented SMMA formed an emerging extension that combined conventional engagement with social or environmental value communication.

Table 3. Recurring SMMA dimensions coded across included studies

SMMA dimension	Studies coding the dimension or close equivalent	Plain interpretation
Interaction/interactivity	22	Two-way response, participation, conversation, and connection with the firm or community.
Entertainment	20	Enjoyable, interesting, emotionally appealing, or playful content.
Trendiness	17	Current, fashionable, timely, or socially relevant information.
Customisation/personalisation	15	Content or response adapted to customer needs, preferences, or segments.
Informativeness/relevance	11	Useful, credible, clear, and decision-relevant information.
Electronic word-of-mouth facilitation	9	Encouraging sharing, recommendations, reviews, and peer communication.
Promotions/economic value	5	Offers, incentives, campaigns, or direct purchase value.
Sustainability orientation	2	Social or environmental value embedded in brand social media activities.

Mechanisms linking SMMA to outcomes

The strongest cross-study pattern was mediation rather than a uniform direct effect. Cognitive mechanisms included brand awareness, destination or brand image, credibility, perceived value, customer-based brand equity, and e-reputation. These mechanisms explain how social media helps customers recognise, understand, and evaluate a brand. Relational and affective mechanisms included trust, brand experience, brand love, satisfaction, self-brand connection, attitude, and lovemark. These constructs explain how repeated platform experiences create confidence and emotional attachment. Engagement mechanisms included attention, interaction, participation, community engagement, and ongoing customer-brand engagement.



Trust was especially important in banking, telecommunications, online travel, and consumer brands. Brand experience and brand equity were common bridges to loyalty and purchase behaviour. Satisfaction was important in travel, tourism, cinema, and sustainable marketing. Engagement frequently predicted loyalty or stickiness, but the longitudinal study by So et al. (2024) challenged the assumption that favourable SMMA evaluations automatically produce later stickiness. Instead, engagement predicted later stickiness, and existing stickiness also shaped later evaluations of SMMA. This reciprocal pattern suggests that positive cross-sectional paths may partly reflect already committed customers rating brand activities more favourably.

Consumer, brand, and organisational outcomes

Loyalty and retention outcomes were the most common distal results, followed by purchase, repurchase, visit, travel, continued-use, or willingness-to-pay intentions. Brand equity was both a direct outcome and a mediator. Engagement was sometimes treated as an outcome and sometimes as a mechanism. Electronic word of mouth appeared as a marketing activity, a social mechanism, and a final advocacy outcome. Only one study linked SMMA through brand equity to financial performance using multi-source evidence. The literature therefore strongly supports attitudinal and intentional outcomes but provides little evidence on verified purchasing, customer lifetime value, profitability, or long-term market performance.

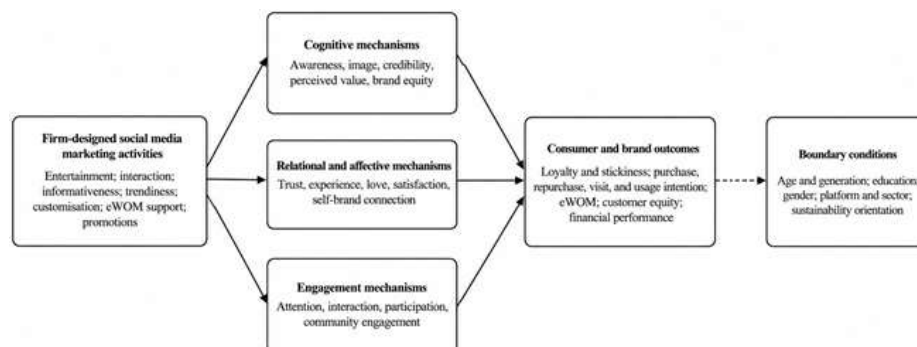


Figure 2. Integrated evidence model derived from the 30 studies

Moderators and contextual conditions

Moderation was less developed than mediation. Age changed the social media marketing-loyalty relationship in hospitality, education changed some brand-equity and continued-use paths, and gender differences appeared in Generation Z travel responses. Other studies suggested that platform, sector, country, hedonic motivation, and sustainability orientation may alter effects. However, moderator findings were dispersed and rarely replicated. The evidence does not yet support a universal claim that one demographic group is more responsive to SMMA.

Quality appraisal

All 30 studies had identifiable research questions and data relevant to those questions. Analysis was generally appropriate to the stated design. The most common concerns were non-probability sampling, insufficient description of non-response, same-source self-report measurement, and causal wording that exceeded the cross-sectional design.



The content-analysis and experimental studies provided stronger evidence about actual content and short-term attitudinal effects. The longitudinal and multi-source studies improved temporal or outcome validity, although they did not remove all confounding. Quality concerns were used to qualify interpretation, not to remove studies.

Strength of Evidence Across Research Designs

Across studies, positive paths were common, but their meaning depended on design. Cross-sectional indirect effects support theoretical plausibility and association, not definitive causation. The longitudinal result, the experimental result, the content analysis, and the multi-source financial study are therefore especially important because they test different parts of the evidence chain.

IV. Discussion

Main interpretation

The review shows that social media marketing activities rarely create durable consumer outcomes simply because a firm posts frequently or offers entertaining content. Their effects depend on what customers learn, feel, and do after exposure. Cognitive mechanisms reduce uncertainty and strengthen brand meaning. Relational and affective mechanisms create trust, experience, satisfaction, and attachment. Engagement mechanisms convert exposure into participation and repeated interaction. These three mechanism families explain why studies using the same broad SMMA label can report different outcomes.

The evidence also supports a distinction between proximal and distal outcomes. Awareness, image, trust, experience, equity, and engagement are proximal changes. Loyalty, repurchase, visit, advocacy, well-being, and financial performance are more distant. Direct SMMA-to-loyalty or SMMA-to-purchase paths are therefore theoretically fragile because many intervening processes and competing influences exist. The review's integrated model places these mechanisms between activities and outcomes and treats demographic or contextual factors as boundary conditions rather than as a long list of unrelated moderators.

Theoretical implications

First, SMMA research should move from activity lists to mechanism-based theory. Entertainment and trendiness may first create attention and affect; informativeness may strengthen credibility and value; interaction may build engagement and trust; customisation may improve relevance and self-brand connection; and electronic word-of-mouth support may amplify social proof. Treating all dimensions as interchangeable indicators of one construct can hide these different causal functions.

Second, the field should distinguish customer perception of SMMA from objective firm activity. Most studies ask customers to rate the brand's social media efforts. Such ratings may reflect prior loyalty or current satisfaction. So et al. (2024) show why reciprocal effects matter. Future work should combine platform data, coded content, response speed, campaign exposure, customer panels, and behavioural outcomes.



Third, brand equity is best understood as an organising cognitive and relational asset rather than only a final outcome. It repeatedly transmits SMMA effects to purchase intention, continued usage, loyalty, and financial performance. Trust and experience are similarly central but context-sensitive. Trust is especially important where perceived risk is high, while entertainment and experience may matter more in hedonic or luxury settings.

Fourth, the literature is becoming more socially consequential. Sustainable SMMA and subjective well-being extend the field beyond sales and loyalty. However, ethical, privacy, misinformation, exclusion, and over-personalisation risks remain underexamined. A complete theory of effective SMMA should include both consumer value and responsible platform practice.

Managerial implications

Managers should begin with the desired mechanism, not the platform feature. When the problem is low awareness, timely and informative content is appropriate. When the problem is weak trust, transparent information, reliable responses, credible evidence, and consistent service are more important than entertainment alone. When loyalty is the goal, engagement should be designed as meaningful participation rather than superficial reaction counts. Customisation should improve relevance without creating privacy concerns.

Performance dashboards should separate activity, mechanism, and outcome measures. Activity measures include content volume, response speed, interaction rate, and personalisation. Mechanism measures include trust, experience, brand equity, satisfaction, and engagement. Distal measures include verified purchase, retention, advocacy, customer equity, and profit. Without this separation, managers may mistake high visibility for commercial effectiveness.

The evidence also cautions against one universal content formula. Tourism, healthcare, banking, airlines, education, and luxury products differ in risk, involvement, regulation, and emotional value. Managers should preserve the core principles of relevance, interaction, credibility, and responsiveness while adapting the content mix to sector and audience.

Limitations of the evidence and the review

The evidence base has four major limitations. First, cross-sectional, single-source surveys dominate, so reverse causality and common-method bias are plausible. Second, intentions and self-reported loyalty are much more common than verified behaviour. Third, convenience samples and emerging-market settings limit population generalisation. Fourth, instruments use overlapping but non-identical SMMA dimensions, making effect sizes difficult to compare.

The review also has limitations. It was deliberately restricted to Emerald, Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, and SAGE; therefore, relevant articles from Elsevier, MDPI, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and other publishers were excluded. Only English-language journal articles from 2015 onward were eligible. One primary reviewer performed screening with a repeated verification pass rather than



two independent reviewers. The review was not registered and did not have a prospectively published protocol. Publisher-platform searching can be less stable than searching bibliographic databases. These choices make the review bounded and reproducible for the requested source set, but not exhaustive of the global literature.

Future research agenda

Future research should prioritise six improvements. First, use longitudinal panels and experiments to establish temporal and causal order. Second, combine customer surveys with actual posts, platform analytics, service records, transactions, and financial data. Third, test reciprocal relationships because loyal or engaged customers may evaluate brand activities more positively. Fourth, compare the causal functions of separate SMMA dimensions instead of assuming a single uniform construct. Fifth, replicate moderators across countries and sectors before making demographic claims. Sixth, examine responsible SMMA, including privacy, transparency, inclusion, platform dependency, and the well-being consequences of persistent engagement.

A useful empirical sequence is: objective or customer-perceived SMMA exposure at Time 1; awareness, credibility, trust, experience, or engagement at Time 2; verified behaviour at Time 3; and customer or financial value at Time 4. Such designs would test whether the strong mediation pattern observed in cross-sectional studies survives temporal separation and objective measurement.

V. Conclusion

This PRISMA 2020 systematic review synthesised 30 empirical studies from Emerald, Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, and SAGE. The evidence shows that entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, informativeness, electronic word-of-mouth support, and promotions are the main forms of social media marketing activity. Their effects are mainly indirect. Cognitive mechanisms build awareness, image, credibility, value, and brand equity; relational and affective mechanisms build trust, experience, love, satisfaction, and self-brand connection; and engagement mechanisms create participation and continuing brand interaction. These mechanisms then influence loyalty, purchase or visit intention, repurchase, advocacy, customer equity, well-being, and, more rarely, financial performance.

The field has strong evidence of association but limited evidence of durable causation. A small number of longitudinal, experimental, content-analytic, and multi-source studies show the value of stronger designs and also warn that cross-sectional effects may reflect reciprocal relationships. The next stage of SMMA research should therefore explain not only whether activities appear effective, but which activity creates which mechanism, for whom, over what period, and with what verified consumer and organisational outcome.

Declarations

Ethics approval: Not applicable. The review analysed published literature and involved no human participants, animals, or confidential organisational data.

Consent to participate and publish: Not applicable.

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