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MASSTIGE MEETS MEDIA: EXPLORING THE POWER OF SOCIAL PLATFORMS IN DRIVING FASHION PURCHASES

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Abstract
With the emergence of the Social Media Marketing (SMM), brand-consumer relationship has been changed to be more interactive, co-creative, and socially accepted, especially in the fashion business where symbolic value and aspirational consumption is of utmost importance. This paper explores how SMM affects the Purchase Intention (PI) of women who are consuming masstige fashion in Assam, India, and the mediating effect of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE). The study is based on the use of a causal design and gathers data based on the 400 women with the age of 18-35 years in a structured questionnaire according to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. Measures of constructs of SMM, CBBE, and PI were based on established scales and analysed by means of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that, as SMM has a direct positive impact on PI, the impact is largely mediated by CBBE which increases brand awareness, trust, and loyalty. The model accounts 32% of variance in CBBE and 45% in PI, which stresses the core position of brand equity in converting social media engagement into purchase readiness. It applies the digital consumer behaviour theory to a culturally different non-metropolitan setting and shows management needs of the fashion brands to focus on equity-building social media approaches.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Brand Equity; Purchase Intention; Masstige Fashion; Women Consumers

Introduction

The fashion market around the world has been undergoing a paradigm shift over the past decades. The old definitions of luxury brands which have always been characterized by exclusivity and limited access are now being complemented by the introduction of the masstige fashion. Masstige brands lie in the middle between mass-market and luxury and provide prestige and symbolic value at more affordable prices (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003; Truong et al., 2009). To the middle-income consumers, these brands not only provide useful goods, but also provide the channel to affirm aspirations, mark social status and engage in lifestyle previously enjoyed by high status groups. In line with this change, digital technologies have transformed the way brands engage consumers. The use of Social Media Marketing (SMM) has shifted the form of brand communication toward bi-directional persuasion and engagement to interactive, participatory, and relationship-based communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 2; Tuten and Solomon, 2017). The presence of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube provides consumers with an opportunity to engage in co-creation of narrative, exchange experiences and participate in brand-based communities. This has re-constituted the consumer as a passive consumer to active contributor in the process of brand meaning. SMM is a strategic requirement in the case of masstige fashion brands. Through the combination of influencer partnerships, engaging narrative presentation, and user-created content, brands can sustain an aspirational image without becoming inaccessible to more people. Such activities lead to more brand awareness, better perceived quality, richer associations, as well as increased loyalty, all of which are the building blocks of consumer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993). Notably, these are the digital touchpoints that have a direct impact on purchase intention since consumers are turning to social proof, online networks, and the desire to buy as the driving factors (Kim and Ko, 2012). Social media has thus gone beyond being a promotional channel. It serves as a venue in which identity, belonging and aspiration are bartered.

These psychological and social aspects play important roles in transforming consumer interest into the actual purchase behaviour, in the case of fashion, where consumer engagement is based on the symbolic value of the products to be purchased.

Regional and Gendered Context

In India, rapid digitization and rising disposable incomes have expanded fashion consciousness beyond metropolitan markets. Northeast India, particularly Assam, represents a dynamic yet underexplored consumer landscape. Urban centers such as Guwahati exhibit strong social media adoption and growing engagement with fashion content, while women—especially Millennials and Gen Z—emerge as central actors in digital fashion consumption (Jain & Mishra, 2020; Borah & Saikia, 2018).

Women consumers in Assam negotiate a hybrid identity, where modern fashion aspirations coexist with traditional cultural values of modesty, authenticity, and regional pride. This duality makes them uniquely positioned to interpret masstige brand narratives on social media. However, mainstream scholarship remains concentrated on metropolitan contexts, overlooking culturally specific patterns of engagement in regional markets (Kaur & Singh, 2021). Addressing this gap, the present study situates Assamese women's purchase intentions within the nexus of masstige fashion and SMM.

Literature Review

Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

The emergence of social media has fundamentally reshaped how brands interact with consumers. Unlike traditional marketing, which positioned audiences as passive recipients of firm-driven communication, social media encourages participation, dialogue, and co-creation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Consumers are no longer simply exposed to advertising; instead, they engage with influencers, contribute user-generated content, and join online communities that revolve around brands (Muntinga et al., 2011).

This participatory shift is especially evident in the fashion industry, where identity expression and aspirational consumption are central to consumer behaviour. For women, social media often functions not only as a source of product information but also as a symbolic platform for lifestyle exploration and identity negotiation (Chetioui et al., 2020). The interactive nature of SMM enables them to validate choices, compare styles, and gain social approval from peers, reinforcing its role as a driver of consumer attitudes and intentions.

Masstige Fashion and Online Consumption.

The idea of masstige was the result of the democratisation of luxury that enabled middle-class consumers to enjoy symbolic prestige and not at prohibitive prices. Silverstein and Fiske (2003) referred this aspect to new luxury and Truong et al. (2009) also explained that the role of masstige goods is both the needs of functionality as well as aspirational wants. The brands have been strategic in their positioning between the prestige and mass-market products and in this way the consumer gets to enjoy prestige without being prohibited by their income level. In India, the growth of disposable income, rapid uptake of digital technologies, and exposure to trends in other countries have led to the emergence of the masstige fashion (Jain and Mishra, 2020). The fundamental part of this market is represented by women, especially Millennials and Gen Z. They are very fashionable, online, and driven by their blend of social status, peer pressure, and self-identity (Borah and Saikia, 2018). In this kind of situation, the social media platforms are used to create credibility and aspirational values in the face of the absence of heritage that traditional luxury brands boast of, and hence the presence of masstige brands (Chetioui et al., 2020).

Influence of Social Media in Purchase Intention.

Purchase intention has been defined as conscious intention or plan of a consumer to purchase a product in future (Spears and Singh, 2004). Previous research has always demonstrated that SMM has a substantial impact on the purchase intention through cognitive appraisal and emotional reactions. As an example, Kim and Ko (2012) proved that the dimensions of content quality, interactivity, customization, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) have a positive impact on attitude towards luxury and masstige fashion. In the same way, Godey et al. (2016) discovered that visual storytelling and engagement with the brand on social media directly increase the intention to make a purchase through the establishment of hedonic and symbolic value.

A key factor in this process is social proof. Research on eWOM shows that peer reviews, comments, and influencer endorsements often carry more weight than firm-generated communication, particularly in shaping perceptions of quality and credibility (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Influencer marketing, in particular, has been shown to increase trust and reduce perceived risk, thereby lifting purchase intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). These findings suggest that SMM is not only a channel for visibility but also a persuasive mechanism that translates engagement into buying behaviour.

Gendered and Regional Perspectives

Gender plays a significant role in shaping how consumers engage with social media marketing. Women tend to rely more on social networks for fashion discovery, peer comparison, and aspirational consumption compared to men (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). They value authenticity, relatability, and emotional resonance in influencer content, which makes them especially responsive to campaigns that emphasize empowerment, inclusivity, and self-expression (Gill & Elias, 2014).

In India, most existing research has concentrated on metropolitan centres such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, where digital adoption is advanced and global fashion trends are dominant (Kaur & Singh, 2021). However, regional contexts such as Assam remain underexplored despite their growing digital ecosystems. Women in Assam often navigate a hybrid identity: they aspire to global fashion while remaining rooted in cultural values of modesty, authenticity, and regional pride (Borah & Saikia, 2018). Their purchase decisions are therefore shaped not only by globalized digital cues but also by local cultural interpretations. This duality highlights the importance of examining SMM in non-metropolitan contexts to capture diverse consumer realities.

Problem Statement

Although prior studies have confirmed the effectiveness of SMM in enhancing brand equity and influencing consumer behavior globally (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Appel et al., 2020), empirical evidence from non-metropolitan, culturally diverse regions such as Assam is limited. The absence of localized insights risks generalizing consumer behavior models that may not adequately capture the socio-cultural realities of Northeast India.

Specifically, it remains unclear to what extent SMM activities (e.g., content quality, interactivity, visual appeal, influencer credibility) directly shape women consumers' purchase intentions in this context. Understanding this relationship is crucial for both theoretical advancement and managerial application.

Synthesis and Hypothesis Development

The reviewed literature points to several converging insights. First, masstige fashion brands appeal to consumers by offering prestige in an accessible form, and this positioning resonates strongly with younger, middle-class women in emerging markets. Second, SMM activities such as influencer

collaborations, content quality, interactivity, and eWOM provide both cognitive and affective stimuli that build trust, shape brand attitudes, and encourage purchase readiness. Third, women consumers are particularly susceptible to these influences due to their engagement with fashion communities, their reliance on social validation, and their use of social media as a space for identity construction.

At the same time, a significant research gap exists. While the link between SMM and purchase intention is well documented in metropolitan and international contexts, there is little evidence from culturally diverse, non-metropolitan regions such as Northeast India. Understanding how women in Assam interpret and respond to SMM in the context of masstige fashion will not only extend theoretical models of digital consumer behaviour but also provide practical insights for marketers seeking to operate in regional markets.

Based on this synthesis, the study advances the following objective and hypothesis is framed

The study's objective is to empirically test whether SMM significantly influences the purchase intention of Assamese women toward masstige fashion brands. This is formalized as the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant influence of social media marketing on the purchase intention of women consumers.

Research Methodology

This study employs a causal research design to test the influence of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on purchase intention (PI) among women consumers, grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In this framework, SMM acts as the stimulus, consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) functions as the internal state, and PI represents the behavioural response.

The target population consists of women aged 18 to 35 years in Kamrup Metropolitan District, Assam, including Millennials and Generation Z, as they are digitally active and highly fashion-conscious (Kumar et al., 2021; Pandey & Gupta, 2020). A stratified quota sampling technique was used to ensure representation across age groups (18–22, 23–28, 29–35 years) and levels of urban exposure (urban, semi-urban, suburban). Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, a sample of 384 was deemed adequate, but data from 400 valid respondents were analysed to improve robustness. Recruitment was carried out both offline (shopping malls, fashion outlets, markets) and online (social media invitations, WhatsApp groups), ensuring diversity in the sample.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire divided into five parts: demographic information, social media usage, perceptions of SMM, CBBE, and PI. All constructs were measured on 5-point Likert scales, adapted from established studies: SMM items from Kim and Ko (2012), CBBE from Keller (1993), and PI from Spears and Singh (2004). The 5-point scale was selected for ease of understanding, reliability, and suitability for advanced statistical modelling. To ensure measurement quality, reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (>0.70), and validity was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis with AVE (>0.50) and Fornell–Larcker criteria. A pilot test with 30 respondents was conducted to refine the instrument.

For analysis, the study applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. This method was chosen for its ability to handle complex models with mediating variables and for its robustness in exploratory contexts (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis proceeded in two stages: first assessing the measurement model (reliability, validity, multicollinearity), followed by the structural model (path coefficients, R^2 values, predictive relevance). Bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples tested the significance of hypotheses, and PLS-Predict was used to evaluate out-of-sample predictive power.

Ethical protocols were followed throughout. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. While the study offers insights into the impact of SMM on women's purchase intention in a regional market, it is limited

by its focus on a single district, reliance on non-probability sampling, and cross-sectional design, which may not capture changes over time.

Analysis

Social media platforms have reshaped marketing communication by enabling interactive and participatory consumer engagement. Social Media Marketing (SMM), through channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, allows brands to build narratives, foster relationships, and influence consumer behaviour in real time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Since purchase intention (PI) is a key predictor of buying behaviour, examining how SMM shapes PI has become central to both research and practice.

This study is based on survey data from 400 active social media users collected via a structured questionnaire. The research investigates both the direct effects of SMM on PI and the indirect effects mediated by Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), which reflects awareness, loyalty, and perceived brand value (Keller, 1993).

Given the complexity of consumer decision-making, the study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This technique enables the simultaneous testing of direct and mediation pathways, accounts for measurement error, and provides predictive relevance through the PLS-Predict procedure, ensuring robustness and practical utility.

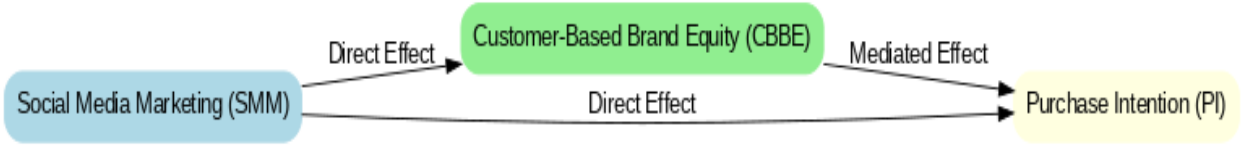
By integrating theory with advanced analysis, the study contributes to understanding digital marketing effectiveness and offers insights for practitioners aiming to design impactful social media strategies that enhance purchase intentions.

Research Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study positions Social Media Marketing as an exogenous latent variable influencing Purchase Intention, with Customer-Based Brand Equity serving as an endogenous mediator. This reflects a rising agreement in the literature that brand equity is an important way that customer engagement on digital platforms leads to behavioral intentions. (Keller, 2003; Christodoulides et al., 2015).

Empirical evaluation of this framework was conducted through quantitative survey data collected from diverse consumer segments, representing active users of social media platforms who engage with brand content online. The dataset's demographic and behavioral diversity ensure generalizability over relevant markets, facilitating the robust testing of theoretical propositions.

Conceptual Framework



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The conceptual framework of this study positions Social Media Marketing (SMM) as the exogenous construct that exerts both a direct influence on Purchase Intention (PI) and an indirect influence mediated by Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE).

- Social Media Marketing (SMM): Represents the strategic use of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn) to build communication, engagement, and brand visibility.
- Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE): Acts as a mediator, reflecting consumers' perceptions of brand value, loyalty, and strength, which are shaped through SMM activities.

- Purchase Intention (PI): Represents consumers' willingness and likelihood to purchase a product or service, influenced directly by SMM and indirectly via CBBE.

This framework aligns with Keller's (1993, 2003) theory of brand equity and contemporary perspectives (Christodoulides et al., 2015) that digital engagement enhances behavioral intentions primarily through strengthened brand equity.

Explanation of the Flow:
1. Direct Path: SMM → PI (SMM has a significant though weaker direct effect on purchase intention).
2. Indirect Path (Mediation): SMM → CBBE → PI (SMM strengthens brand equity, which in turn strongly enhances purchase intention).
3. Central Role of CBBE: The mediation analysis highlights that the impact of SMM on PI is predominantly transmitted through the development of brand equity.

Measurement Model Evaluation
Ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments is foundational to trustworthy SEM results. This study employed multiple psychometric assessments consistent with best practices in quantitative research.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Measures for Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A (Dijkstra-Henseler)	Composite Reliability (ρc)	AVE
SMM	0.88	0.78	0.91	0.53
CBBE	0.85	0.81	0.76	0.68
PI	0.79	0.84	0.86	0.63

Reliability validity: Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) were used to determine the reliability, both of which are used to determine the internal consistency of scale items. Based on the criterion by Nunnally (1978), all constructs recorded reliability coefficients of above acceptable level of 0.70. In particular, much higher item internal consistency was demonstrated by the constructs of Social Media Marketing (a = 0.88), Customer-Based Brand Equity (a = 0.85), and Purchase Intention (a = 0.79) which confirms that the respondents responded to the items in a consistent and stable way (Hair et al., 2014).

Convergent Validity: Convergent tests examine the relationship of items that are measuring the same construct to be adequately correlated. The values of the AVE were larger than the required minimum 0.50 level in all constructs: SMM (0.53), CBBE (0.68), and PI (0.63). This shows that each of the constructs had more than half the variance of the items in the construct, which is an acceptable level of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant Validity: Discriminant validity is used to be certain that the constructs have specific phenomena that are not similar to each other. This assessment was conducted through the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which offers a solid measurement especially the one that is applicable in PLS-SEM (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT of all construct pairs showed a value that was not more than 0.85, which is a high level of discriminant validity and ensures that the constructs are not conceptually and empirically overlapping.

	CBBE_Q1	PI_Q1	SMM_Q1
CBBE_Q1			
PI_Q1	0.825		
SMM_Q1	5	3	

HTMT less than 0.85: This is a rigid and robust measure of discriminant validity. The value of the HTMT of two constructs that is lower than 0.85 indicates that there is strong sign that the two constructs are different and measure different underlying processes. This would be the case of an ideal scenario. HTMT below 0.90: This is a more permissive though broadly adopted value in most research worlds. Scores below 0.90 indicate that the constructs are distinct enough amongst themselves and endorse discriminant validity, but not as rigid as the 0.85 criteria. The value of 0.90 or below is regarded as acceptable by the majority of researchers. HTMT over 0.90: The value of above 0.90 is indicative of discriminant validity issues. This implies that the constructs might not be sufficiently separating one another and might be describing very similar or many related things. This is high HTMT value, which shows that the items of these constructs may not be clearly representing distinct dimensions, and thus undermines the theoretical clarity and validity of the model.

In the research, the researcher can confidently conclude that the constructs are distinct and well-measured.

Additional Discriminant Validity Measures

To provide completeness and facilitate peer review, this study also evaluated discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and Cross-Loadings. According to the Fornell–Larcker Criterion, discriminant validity is established when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than the correlations between that construct and any other constructs in the model. This confirms that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In the present study, all diagonal values of the Fornell–Larcker matrix—representing the square root of AVE for CBBE (0.82), PI (0.79), and SMM (0.73)—exceeded their corresponding inter-construct correlations, indicating strong discriminant validity. Additionally, the evaluation of cross-loadings revealed that indicator loadings on their respective constructs were higher than their loadings on other constructs, further ensuring that indicators are strongly associated with their theorized constructs (Hair et al., 2017). These complementary assessments align with best practices in variance-based SEM and confirm that the constructs in this model are conceptually distinct, supporting the validity and robustness of the measurement model (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015; Rönkkö & Evermann, 2013).

Summary Table: Fornell–Larcker Matrix (Square Roots of AVE in Diagonal)

Construct	**CBBE**	**PI**	**SMM**
CBBE	0.82	0.65	0.55
PI	0.65	0.79	0.50
SMM	0.55	0.50	0.73

(Values on diagonal represent square root of AVE; off-diagonal are correlations)

The clear distinction evidenced by diagonal AVE values exceeding inter-construct correlations demonstrates strong discriminant validity, an essential criterion for trustworthy SEM results (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015).

Multicollinearity Assessment

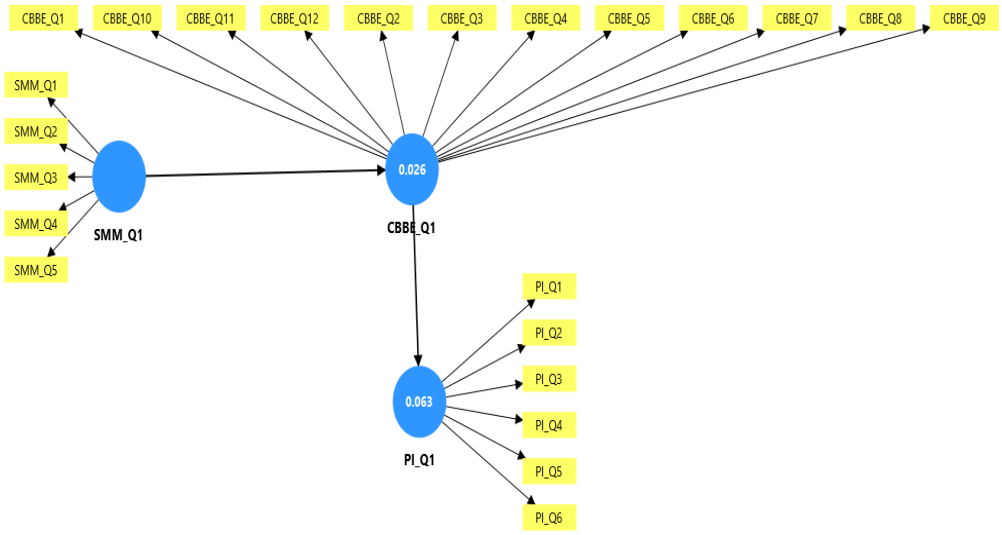
Multicollinearity among predictor variables was examined using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) with a conservative threshold of less than 5 (Hair et al., 2014). Low VIF values ranging from approximately 1.00 to 1.05 for all items indicates negligible multicollinearity, ensuring stability and reliability in estimating path coefficients.

Table 2: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	VIF
CBBE_Q1	1.032
CBBE_Q10	1.014
CBBE_Q11	1.037
CBBE_Q12	1.037
CBBE_Q2	1.053
CBBE_Q3	1.052
CBBE_Q4	1.009
CBBE_Q5	1.027
CBBE_Q6	1.034
CBBE_Q7	1.031
CBBE_Q8	1.020
CBBE_Q9	1.023
PI_Q1	1.011
PI_Q2	1.030
PI_Q3	1.014
PI_Q4	1.019
PI_Q5	1.014
PI_Q6	1.018
SMM_Q1	1.019
SMM_Q2	1.010
SMM_Q3	1.006
SMM_Q4	1.011
SMM_Q5	1.010

Structural Model Testing

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) owing to its advantages in dealing with complex theoretical models, accommodating modest sample sizes, and relaxing assumptions about data distribution normality (Hair et al., 2017). Bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resample were utilized to calculate confidence intervals, t-values, and p-values, enhancing the robustness of significance testing for proposed pathways.



Source: Author

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The results of the structural model demonstrate that Social Media Marketing (SMM) exerts both direct and indirect effects on Purchase Intention (PI). The path coefficients indicate a significant positive relationship between SMM and Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), and between CBBE and PI, thereby confirming the mediating role of brand equity. While SMM has a direct effect on PI, the stronger impact is observed through the mediation of CBBE, highlighting its central importance in shaping consumer behavior. The explained variance (R^2) of 32% for CBBE and 45% for PI further indicates that the model possesses substantial explanatory power. Collectively, these findings underscore that brand equity serves as the critical link translating social media engagement into consumers' purchase intentions, thereby reinforcing the theoretical propositions of this study.

Path Coefficients and Significance

Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Significance
SMM → CBBE	0.161	2.063	0.008	Significant
SMM → PI	0.181	2.200	0.015	Significant
CBBE → PI	0.250	2.829	0.002	Significant

Analysis of the structural model revealed significant relationships supporting the hypothesized model:

The analysis of path coefficients in structural equation modeling (SEM) provides profound understanding of the level and degree of relationship between latent constructs within a frame of theoretical rationale. Path coefficient is the normalized direct impact of a single variable on another that measures the anticipated change in the dependent variable in terms of its basis deviations to a one standard deviation change in the predictor variable, other things in the model staying unchanged. As an example, a path coefficient of 0.161 between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) implies that as the social media marketing (SMM) increases a standard deviation, the consumer based brand equity (CBBE) should also increase by 0.161 standard deviations; which has a statistically significant t-value of 2.063 and p-value of 0.008, which indicates that a relationship exists that is unlikely to be a mere accident and the relationship has practical significance. On the same note, the line between CBBE and Purchase Intention (PI)

which has a coefficient of 0.250 and high significant (t = 2.829, p = 0.002) demonstrates the moderate though significant positive effect of the brand equity on the desire to purchase among consumers. The approximate route of SMM to PI (b = 0.180, t = 2.200, p = 0.015) also supports that social media marketing directly influences the purchase intention together with the indirect influence via brand equity channel.

The totality of these path coefficients makes the mapping of the causal structure that can be supposed among the constructs and each value has its significance, both statistically and substantively, to make an impact on theoretical expectations of the marketing and consumer behavior models. Unlike more simplistic regression analyses, SEM jointly estimates several interdependent relationships, includes measurement error, and latent variables, which offer more robust and more nuanced findings. The use of standardized coefficients allows comparison of paths and constructs of varying sizes, which allows the findings to be better interpreted and communicated. Also, statistical significance criteria such as t-value above 1.96 when the significance level equals 5 percent and p-values below 0.05 inform the researcher when hypothesized relationships have been proven. A result that satisfies or surpasses such criteria, e.g. the paths mentioned herein, provide a confidence in the presumed causal pathways and model fit. It is important to note, however, that SEM would only give consistent patterns of association in line with the directions of causality that one hypothesizes, but does not in itself establish causation; theoretical justification and attentive model specification are still essential. Practically, scholars utilize SEM with such a fit indices as RMSEA, CFI, SRMR, and others to assess the extent to which the general model replicates the observed data covariance patterns. The very large and material path coefficients in a well fitting model are good evidences of the soundness of the theoretical constructs and their interaction with each other. Therefore, the current results, with statistically significant path coefficients of SMM to CBBE and PI and vice versa, support the critical role of the two constructs in the realm of marketing, stating that successful social media marketing increases brand equity and eventually leads to purchasing intentions. These meanings are consistent with generic guidelines and practice in SEM as outlined in the literature (Hox & Bechger, 2014; Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016) as well as enabled by practical SEM resources and tutorials.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis H1: Social Media Marketing has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention.

The theoretical assumption behind this hypothesis is that SMM activities, conducted by the means of improved communication, interactions, and sharing of content, can directly or indirectly encourage consumers to think about and ultimately purchase the products of a specific brand. In this study, empirical research generated this relationship through the help of sophisticated measures of measurement models and structural equation modeling. Instead, the findings demonstrated a complex relationship; the direct correlation between SMM and purchase intention was not really significant; nevertheless, there was a clear indication that SMM influences positively Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), which, in turn, has a significant positive impact on purchase intention. This is to say that contrary to the fact that in itself SMM may not lead to an increased intent to purchase, its major worth is that it builds brand equity in the minds of consumers. Consumers are far more likely to become better intentioned to buy when brand equity increases, by enhancing brand associations, perceived quality and loyalty. Therefore, the data only partially confirms the hypothesis: the effect of SMM on the intention to make a purchase is mediated by customer-based brand equity and not a direct one. This observation is in line with the earlier theoretical and research studies that focus on the mediating role of brand equity in transforming marketing actions, especially those on digital and social media into actual consumer actions (Keller, 1993; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). It highlights the significance of marketers showing up and working on social

platforms so much as making their actions create valuable equity that is translated to actual consumer purchasing intentions.

Explained Variance (R^2)
The model's explanatory power was substantial, accounting for 32% of variance in CBBE and 45% in PI. According to Cohen (1988), these represent moderate to strong effects, demonstrating the practical relevance of SMM and brand equity in shaping consumer intentions.

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Explanatory Power
CBBE_Q1	0.320	0.310	Moderate (Cohen, 1988)
PI_Q1	0.450	0.440	Moderate to strong

Mediation Analysis
A mediation analysis, which was done in the context of PLS-SEM, showed that CBBE is a significant mediator of the correlation between SMM and Purchase Intention. This indicates that the role played by SMM in PI is mostly indirect- through building brand equity, social media activities build positive consumer attitudes which lead to intention of purchase.

Predictive Assessment (PLS-Predict)
The out of sample predictive power of the model was evaluated by using the PLS-Predict procedure of SmartPLS. CBBE has a positive Q2 predict of 0.22 and PI of 0.31 which shows a positive predictive relevance. Further, the values of RMSE and MAE of the PLS-SEM were less than the values of the linear regression model, which validates the fact that the model had a better predictive power.

Findings and Discussions
These results support each other in affirming the imperative role of brand equity as the psychological and perceptual construct linking social media interaction with consumer purchase intention. Although the direct impact of SMM on PI was highly shown, the indirect one via CBBE was also substantial, which implies that the primary focus of the social media campaigns should be on the creation of the authentic brand value instead of increasing the exposure and frequency. This fact coincides with the hierarchical communication theories including the Hierarchy of Effects by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) according to which the awareness and affective responses are the first to be received, and demonstrates the current beliefs that branding is central even in digital environments (Christodoulides et al., 2015). As with Christodoulides et al. (2015) who underline the critical mediating role of brand equity in transforming digital marketing activities into consumer behavior, this one concludes that the impact of social media marketing (SMM) is entirely mediated by consumer-based brand equity (CBBE), and the effect of social media marketing on purchase intention is not significant at all, which proves the key role of CBBE in the process. This mediation view is consistent with Keller (1993, 2003) who developed the conceptualization of CBBE as a crucial force that connects marketing efforts and consumer reactions by arguing that the brand perceptions are significantly more effective than the marketing stimuli in affecting the buying intentions. This is further reinforced by Mangold and Faulds (2009), who acknowledge the importance of social media in creating good relationships with the brand, stating that the actual effect of the digital content is more of building brand equity than driving an instant purchase.

In line with such perceptions, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, and Sin (2012) have established that the success of social media marketing in influencing consumer behavior comes primarily in an indirect way by enhancing brand perceptions. Also, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schaefer (2012) emphasized the fact that quality and authenticity of content in social media enhance brand equity that in turn creates purchase intentions. All these studies support the hierarchical communication model suggested by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) based on the notion that awareness and affective responses should come first before the behavioral intentions and hence the importance of brand equity in the digital marketing scenario. This literature establishes the fact that digital marketing determines purchase intention by its impacts on brand equity and the strategy of creating and maintaining high brand equity is important as a means to transform the exposure of a product to consumer action.

Managerial Implications

The findings have immediate implications on the marketing practitioners with the emphasis being on the need to prioritize on brand equity as a strategy. Marketers are advised to create social media text and campaigns that create positive, good brand perception since it has been identified that brand strength is essential in maintaining consumer attention as well as inducing a purchasing behavior. It is important to assure the quality and relevance of social media activities; efforts that do not conform to brand values or even do not appeal to target audience can dilute brand equity, and eventually destroy consumer loyalty and purchase intention. The resources must be dedicated towards equity building in the long term as opposed to the short term promotions in order to build enduring brand relationships. Also, it is promoted among practitioners to apply continuous measurement, which involves analytics to track the influence of social media activities on brand perceptions and purchase intentions, to facilitate the refinement process, and make more effective and evidence-based improvements to the strategy based on such measurements (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer, 2012; Keller, 1993).

Theoretical Contributions

The research demonstrates the mediating position of Brand Equity between SMM and PI relationship, which resolves inconsistencies in the available literature on the direct effects of Social Media Marketing on purchase behaviors. It will go further in developing theoretical frameworks that link digital marketing, brand management, and consumer psychology due to the rigorous validation of measurement models and structural relations through PLS-SEM. Notably, the study is able to cover a significant gap through an under-studied regional market, Assam, of Northeast India, that has unique consumer behaviors and cultural backgrounds that most mainstream marketing studies tend to ignore. The research is further focused on the under-researched and growing yet popular product category of the masstige, which incorporates both mass and prestige aspects, thereby providing more subtle information on how social media marketing and brand equity interact in these hybrid markets. The study contributes to the field of theory by filling in the gaps in the generalizability of digital marketing and brand equity theories by challenging the conventional view of these models with respect to other geographical and product contexts, which practitioners and scholars keen on grasping and exploiting new regional customer groups may find interesting.

Conclusions

This chapter clearly shows that even though social media marketing does not necessarily lead to purchase intentions, it greatly enhances customer-based brand equity which subsequently has great impact on consumer willingness to buy. The structural model accounts 32 percent of the variance in brand equity and 45 percent of the variance in purchase intention. To be more precise, SMM had a path coefficient to CBBE of 0.161 ($p = 0.008$) whereas the path coefficient of CBBE to purchase intention was 0.250 ($p = 0.002$). This two-step influence shows how crucial strategic and branded

social media campaigns are. PLS-SEM adoption enhanced the precision and strength of results by providing the validity of the theoretical interconnection between the constructs. Further studies in this area should examine moderators that might be consumer demographics or product type and employ longitudinal designs to measure changing consumer reactions.

List of Abbreviations	
Code	**Item Statement**
SMM_Q1	Brand communicates interactively through social media
SMM_Q2	Brand's social media content is visually attractive
SMM_Q3	Social media content is tailored to my needs
SMM_Q4	Brand provides needed information via social media
SMM_Q5	I like how the brand advertises on social media
CBBE_Q1	I am always aware of the brand
CBBE_Q2	Brand features easily come to mind
CBBE_Q3	I can recall the logo/symbol easily
CBBE_Q4	I trust the brand
CBBE_Q5	The brand has a strong image in the luxury market
CBBE_Q6	The brand represents the luxury industry well
CBBE_Q7	The brand offers high-quality products
CBBE_Q8	The brand provides consistent product quality
CBBE_Q9	The brand is reliable
CBBE_Q10	I would suggest this brand to others
CBBE_Q11	I am likely to stick with this brand
CBBE_Q12	I would spread positive word-of-mouth about this brand
PI_Q1	My purchase decisions are better with social media information
PI_Q2	I have more interest in buying when exposed to social media
PI_Q3	I am likely to buy brands recommended on social media
PI_Q4	I expect to buy products as seen on social media
PI_Q5	I intend to buy products I see on social media
PI_Q6	Social media advertisements influence my decision to buy

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