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Social Media Marketing and the Indian Economy:

A Brief Research Review

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Abstract

This paper offers a comprehensive review of the growing role of Social Media Marketing (SMM) in the Indian economy. In the past decade, the rapid proliferation of internet access and mobile usage has revolutionized how businesses engage with consumers, with social media emerging as a pivotal marketing platform. The study traces the evolution of social media in India and conceptualizes the framework of SMM, emphasizing its hybrid nature that blends traditional company-to-customer interactions with amplified consumer word-of-mouth (WOM) exchanges. Particular attention is given to the opportunities SMM offers for Indian businesses, especially Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), by enhancing brand visibility, facilitating customer engagement, enabling market research, driving sales growth, and providing cost-effective promotional avenues. Government initiatives like "Digital India" and "Startup India" have further reinforced this digital marketing ecosystem. However, the paper also identifies significant challenges associated with SMM adoption in India, including content control limitations, risks of negative electronic word-of-mouth, data privacy concerns, content saturation, infrastructural constraints, and a shortage of skilled professionals. The limitations in current academic research, such as a lack of longitudinal studies and comprehensive measurement frameworks, are also acknowledged. The study concludes by recommending future research directions focusing on emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in SMM, ethical data practices, influencer marketing, and culturally localized content strategies. Practical recommendations for businesses and policymakers are provided to optimize the benefits of SMM while addressing its challenges. This review highlights that Social Media Marketing is a transformative force in India's digital economy, with continued innovation and strategic adaptation essential for sustained growth.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing (SMM), Indian Economy, SMEs, Digital Marketing, Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Consumer Engagement, Data Privacy, Artificial Intelligence.

1. Introduction:

The early 21st century has brought massive changes in how we talk and trade. Much of these changes come from the introduction of digital tools and the internet. Social media, in particular, has changed how people contact, share ideas, and even deal with their workplaces [Bhanot, (2009); Dwivedi et al., (2021); Kapoor et al., (2018)]. It covers many online arenas like blogs, discussion boards, rating sites, and popular networks like Facebook,

LinkedIn, and Twitter [Mangold & Faulds, (2009); Bhanot, (2009)]. These online sites run on posts made by users, not just companies. A single post can reach thousands, sometimes millions. This power has made everyday communications far more important in shaping markets [Mangold & Faulds, (2009); Kapoor et al., (2018)].

In India, the digital move has been fast, almost amazing, over the last decade [Srivastava & Sharma, (2024)]. The availability of internet and smart-phone has increased the use of social media at a striking rate. By January 2023, India had 692 million users online, nearly half the population [Mahida, (2024)]. Social media is no longer an optional but it has become part of everyday of everybody's life. In 2019, there were 2.95 billion users worldwide [Vargas, (2025)]. At that time it was predicted to touch 3.43 billion by 2023. These numbers illustrate how extremely digital life now shapes society, for better and worse.

This pervasive presence has compelled organizations to integrate social media into their core marketing strategies [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. Social Media Marketing (SMM) is the strategic use of these platforms by businesses to communicate, engage, and influence their target audiences [Srivastava & Sharma, (2024)]. SMM offers significant opportunities for organizations, including lower costs, improved brand awareness, and increased sales [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. It is considered a hybrid element of the promotion mix because it combines traditional company-to-customer communication with a highly magnified form of customer-to-customer word-of-mouth, the content and frequency of which are outside managers' direct control [Mangold & Faulds, (2009)].

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive review of the impact of social media marketing on the Indian economy, drawing insights from recent academic literature. Beginning with an introduction (*Section-1*) it examines the growth and evolution of social media in India (*Section-2*), conceptualizes social media marketing (*Section-3*), explores the opportunities and benefits it presents for Indian businesses and economy (*Section-4*), particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs in *Section-5*), discusses the associated challenges and limitations (*Section-6*), and finally, sketches the future directions for research and practice (*Section-7*). A conclusion section (*Section-8*) is also given at the end of the paper to discuss the overall findings and assessment.

2. Evolution and Growth of Social Media in India:

India has experienced a profound digital revolution, characterized by an accelerating adoption of digital technologies and a rapid expansion of internet access. The growth in the number of social networking users in India is largely attributed to increasing internet penetration, driven by affordable smart-phones and mobile internet usage. According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India, multiple quarters of internet users in India are engaged in social networking. In 2013, 60% of Indian social media users were under 25, with projections indicating that by 2018, over half would be above 25. Rural users were expected to increase from 29% in 2013 to about 50% in 2016, and the number of women users was anticipated to rise from 28% in 2013 to 35% by 2018 [Butt, (2020)].

This surge in digital connectivity has transformed India into a "small spot to live in and share information, ideas, and ignoring significant culture to the people to come" through social networking and media [Butt, (2020)]. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Skype, and YouTube are deeply embedded in daily life, serving various needs from news and entertainment to connecting with family and friends,

and seeking product recommendations [Kapoor et al., (2018), Das & Subudhi, (2016)]. As of April 2017, Facebook alone had 1.97 billion monthly users globally, while Snapchat recorded 400 million snaps a day, with about 9000 photos shared every second [Kapoor et al., (2018)]. The ubiquity of these platforms underscores their critical role in shaping consumer behavior and influencing purchase decisions in India [Sampath, (2024)].

The rapid growth of the Indian digital marketing market is projected to reach \$160 billion by 2025, with approximately 666 million active Indian web users by 2023 [Mahida, (2024)]. This expansion is not limited to social interaction but permeates various sectors, including content management, online banking, payment systems, shopping, and order tracking. The digital ecosystem in India is supported by government initiatives like "Startup India" and "Digital India," which aim to foster innovation and provide support for digital marketing to startups [Mahida, (2024)]. This strong digital infrastructure and user base form the foundation upon which social media marketing strategies are built in the Indian economy.

3. Social Media Marketing (SMM): Concepts and Definitions:

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a dynamic and evolving field that leverages internet-based social media platforms to achieve marketing objectives [Sriovastava & Sharma, (2024)]. Mangold and Faulds, (2009) define social media as a hybrid element of the promotion mix. This "hybrid" nature arises because it allows companies to communicate directly with their customers, much like traditional marketing tools, while simultaneously enabling customers to communicate directly with one another on a magnified scale through word-of-mouth (WOM). The significant difference from traditional integrated marketing communications (IMC) is that the content, timing, and frequency of these customer-to-customer conversations are largely beyond managers' direct control. Therefore, a key challenge for marketers is to learn how to shape these consumer discussions to align with organizational goals.

SMM encompasses a wide array of online word-of-mouth forums, including blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards, chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer email, product or service rating websites, internet discussion boards, moblogs, and social networking websites. These platforms, driven by user-generated content, have a substantial influence on various aspects of consumer behavior, including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation [Mangold & Faulds, (2009)]. The ability to reach vast audiences at relatively low cost makes SMM a significant opportunity for organizations [Dwivedi et al., (2021)].

Organizations globally and in India increasingly recognize the necessity of integrating social media into their overall marketing strategies [Sampath, (2024)]. Small businesses with tight budgets consider social media marketing as a smart and affordable option [Kumar & Mirchandani, (2012)]. It helps them to gain attention, attract new buyers and keep loyal ones. Many firms also report better returns from these efforts. Online communities, built through social media, create value beyond simple company-customer ties [Kapoor et al., (2018)]. They involve partners, workers, and even critics. This wider network reminds us that social media marketing needs a broad, thoughtful plan. Its influence reaches deep into business life and shapes how people and firms connect.

4. SMM in Indian Businesses: Opportunities and Benefits:

Social Media Marketing (SMM) has opened many doors and given real advantages to Indian businesses. It has played a massive role in shaping the nation's growing economy. Using social platforms in marketing is not a small step. For many firms, it has changed the way they work [Bhanot, (2009)].

4.1. *Enhanced Brand Visibility and Awareness:* One major benefit of SMM in India is its power to raise brand awareness fast. Millions use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter every day. This lets businesses speak to a huge crowd at once. The cost is far lower than old-style ads, which makes it even more appealing.

This increased exposure is crucial for establishing and reinforcing brand recognition [Sampath, (2024)]. Companies, including Indian ones, are in a better position to enhance their brand image through social media. Majority of companies are using a combination of traditional and social media to reach out to their customers, which has enhanced brand awareness and brand image [Bhanot, (2009)]. Marketers consider social media a "gold mine for brand building" [Bhanot, (2009)].

4.2. *Customer Engagement and Relationship Building:* Social media enables companies to connect with their customers, improve brand awareness, influence consumer attitudes, receive feedback, and ultimately increase sales [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. It facilitates faster, more frequent, and richer interactions among large groups of people [Sashi, (2012)]. By creating engaging content, businesses can build loyal and trusting bonds with their customer base. Surveys in India indicate that a significant percentage of respondents believe social media helps build strong relationships between consumers and companies [Madhumithaa et al., (2023)]. This direct engagement allows businesses to understand and adapt to the changing needs and preferences of their customers [Srivastoa & Kiran, (2016)].

4.3. *Market Research and Consumer Insights:* Social media is a helpful tool for market research, letting firms see what people like [Bhanot, (2009)]. Watching brand and talks online gives companies clues about buyers choice and key voices [Kumar & Mirchandani, (2012)]. They can find the useful chats, track interest and even find critics also. This immediate feedback lets firms fix products and services [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. They can shape posts in local language, culture and taste, reaching people better [Sampath, (2024)]. These insights also show what customers want and even spark ideas among workers [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)].

4.4. *Sales and Revenue Growth:* The effect of social media marketing on sales and revenue is clearly seen in many studies. Research shows that using social media platforms helps businesses by increasing sell more and earn more [Madhumithaa et al., (2023); Sampath, (2024)]. Even a simple Facebook like can uplift sales and make shopping more social. Posts and shares about a brand often push buyers to try it [Kapoor et al., (2018)]. In India, 84% of small and micro firms now use social media to reach customers. This move has boosted sales and improved profit margins [Madhumithaa et al., (2023)].

4.5. *Cost-Effectiveness:* For many firms, especially those with small budgets, SMM is a cheaper option than old-style ads. It lets them talk to customers without spending much. Social media's low cost and easy access make it appealing to growing firms. They can reach more people without paying for costly TV or print ads. This is a big help for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that work with tight funds [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)].

4.6. *Co-creation and Innovation*: Social media supports co-creation, letting firms include customers in shaping new products and services. By reading feedback on social sites, SMEs can design better offers that fit real needs. This teamwork sparks fresh ideas and drives useful innovation in the wider economy [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)].

4.7. *Government Initiatives*: The Indian government has noticed how powerful social media can be. Campaigns like “Make in India” used these tools widely and with success. They reached global audiences and built strong public support online. This shows how social media can drive big public participation and promote national goals [Das & Subudhi, (2016)].

5. SMM in Indian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are key to India’s growth, driving exports, jobs, and productivity [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)]. For these firms, social media marketing is a powerful choice. Traditional ads cost too much for them. SMM gives a cheaper, smarter way to reach customers and compete with bigger brands [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020); Madhumitha et al., (2023)].

5.1. *Definition and Importance of SMEs in India*: In India, SMEs are classified by how much they invest in equipment and machines. For manufacturing, the range is INR 25 Lakhs to 10 Crores. In the service sector, it is INR 10 Lakhs to 5 Crores [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)]. These limits come from the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006, which guides policy and support for such firms. These enterprises are crucial for poverty alleviation and regional development, offering low-cost employment generation and fostering invention and innovation [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)].

5.2. *Impact of SMM on SMEs*: The adoption of SMM by SMEs has a considerable positive impact on their business outcomes. Studies indicate that SMM enhances business performance, sales, connection with customers, ability to identify customer needs, and employee creativity [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)]. The use of social media has helped Indian companies enhance their brand image and reach out more effectively to their customer. A significant observation from secondary data is that 83% of Indian firms agree that marketing strategies cannot succeed without social media activity [Bhanot, (2009)]. Furthermore, 84% of surveyed companies felt able to reach more customers via social media, and 80% felt customers liked to be approached through social media [Bhanot, (2009)]. This has led to an enhancement in brand awareness and brand image for companies utilizing social media.

5.3. *Factors Influencing SMM Adoption by SMEs*: Research of Chatterjee and Kar, (2020) identifies several key factors that influence Indian SMEs to adopt SMM mechanisms:

- *Perceived Usefulness*: If SME authorities believe that SMM will significantly enhance productivity and overall performance, they are more likely to use it. It includes aspects like performance, effectiveness, risks, and trust in SMM.
- *Perceived Ease of Use*: SMEs are motivated to use SMM if they perceive it as simple, user-friendly, and not associated with complexity. It includes self-efficacy and simplicity.
- *Compatibility*: SMEs are more likely to adopt SMM if employees feel it fits with their previous experience and practices. Compatibility has a positive and significant impact on SMM adoption.

- *Cost*: Cost has a significant negative impact on SMM adoption by SMEs. Indian businesses are particularly sensitive to expenditure. While SMM is generally cost-effective, high initial setup costs can deter adoption. SMEs are motivated to use SMM if it is cheaper than traditional practices.
- *Facilitating Conditions*: This factor, which includes proper employee training, adequate internet facilities, and lack of resistance to change, was hypothesized to have a positive impact on SMM adoption. However, empirical studies have found its impact to be insignificant in the Indian context, possibly due to poor training, low bandwidth in semi-urban locations, and employee resistance to new systems.

Despite the challenges with facilitating conditions, the study by *Chatterjee and Kar, (2020)* revealed that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, compatibility, and cost collectively explain 52% of SMM adoption by SMEs, with cost having the highest (negative) influence. Moreover, SMM's impact on business outcomes for SMEs was explained to the tune of 76%. This highlights the crucial role of SMM for SMEs in India, offering a lucrative tool for business development due to its cost-effectiveness and network externalities, especially for those unable to incur huge expenditures on traditional advertisements.

6. Challenges and Limitations of SMM in India:

Despite the immense opportunities, the adoption and effective utilization of Social Media Marketing (SMM) in India face several challenges and limitations. These are the natural characteristics of social media as per the country specific, socio economic and infrastructural factors.

6.1. Content Control and Negative Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM): One of the major problem in social media marketing is losing control [*Mangold & Faulds, (2009)*]. Unlike traditional marketing, a company can not fully decide what is said or when. People post at their own time and pace, which can frustrate brands. The real danger comes when negative comments spread faster than positive ones [*Dwivedi et al., (2021)*]. A single complaint can reach millions in minutes and hurt a business badly. Studies show bad posts often have more impact than good ones [*Kapoor et al., (2018); Dwivedi et al., (2021)*]. These “online firestorms” can quickly damage a brand’s image and trust. Fake reviews make things worse, creating doubt about what is real [*Kiran & Srivastava, (2020); Dwivedi et al., (2021)*]. Manipulated content is growing too, making trust even harder to earn online. Still, many buyers keep relying on online reviews before to buy.

6.2. Cybercrime, Fraud, and Data Privacy: Small businesses, including SMEs in India, frequently face cyber-attacks and scams [*Madhumithaa et al., (2023)*]. These attacks can cause heavy financial losses and harm a firm’s reputation. Social media marketing collects more and more personal data today [*Dwivedi et al., (2021)*]. This raises serious ethical questions and makes some consumers lose trust. Following privacy rules like India’s Personal Data Protection Bill is not easy [*Sampath, (2024)*]. Companies must also follow platform rules on ads, which can get complicated. Many users still share personal details without thinking of the risks [*Kapoor et al., (2018)*]. Some even think they are too small to be targets of scams. This shows we need better data literacy for both users and marketers [*Dwivedi et al., (2021)*]. Only then can trust grow in the digital space.

6.3. Content Saturation and Audience Fatigue: The space of social media in India is overcrowded, with many brands which are fighting for attention. This creates content

overload and leaves users feeling tired [Sampath, (2024)]. It has become harder for any one brand to stand out online. Firms now work harder just to get seen or heard by users. Organic reach on platforms like Facebook has dropped sharply [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. As a result, brands are forced to rethink how they engage their audience.

6.4. Infrastructural and Skill Gaps: Even with rising internet use, MSEs in India still face many hurdles [Madhumithaa et al., (2023)]. Limited finance and tough rules remain a constant challenge for small firms. Poor internet speed in semi-urban areas slows down social media marketing efforts. Low bandwidth means many SMEs cannot fully use online tools to grow. A lack of trained staff also holds back smooth technology adoption. Some workers resist leaving old systems and learning new ones. Interestingly, research shows "Facilitating Conditions" have little impact on SMM use [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)]. This finding highlights how training and infrastructure issues go deeper than expected.

6.5. Research Limitations: Current research on SMM still faces many limits. Few reliable tools exist to measure its complex effects on consumer behavior. Social media platforms change often, staying in "perpetual beta" mode [Dwivedi et al., (2021); Srivastava & Sharma, (2024)]. This makes studies harder to conduct, as results may soon be outdated. Many researchers still focus on just a few platforms, like Twitter or Facebook [Kapoor et al., (2018); Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. Most work uses cross-sectional data or small sample sizes. These limits make results hard to apply to other regions or over time. Scholars now argue for stronger, data-driven research methods [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. Better evidence is needed to truly judge SMM's impact and effectiveness.

These challenges require a strategic and adaptive approach from trades and officials alike to fully connect the potential of SMM in the dynamic Indian market.

7. Future Directions and Recommendations:

The evolving landscape of social media marketing in India presents continuous opportunities for both academic research and practical application. Addressing the identified challenges and leveraging emerging trends will be key to maximizing SMM's contribution to the Indian economy.

7.1. Directions for Future Research: Future research should aim to fill existing gaps and provide deeper, more nuanced insights into SMM in the Indian context:

- **Developing Robust Measurement Scales:** There is a critical need for appropriate constructs and validated scales specifically relevant to social media to accurately measure its impact on consumer behavior, brand connectedness, and other relevant outcomes [Dwivedi et al., (2021)].
- **Longitudinal and Comparative Studies:** Researchers should conduct more longitudinal studies to understand the long-term impacts of SMM strategies and consumer behavior shifts over time [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. Comparative studies across different social media platforms (beyond Facebook and Twitter), diverse industries (Non-profit and Public Sector), and various cultural contexts within India are also essential to enhance generalizability and provide nuanced insights [Sampath, (2024), Dwivedi et al., (2021), Kapoor et al., (2018)].
- **Investigating the "Dark Side":** More research is needed on the negative aspects of social media, including the spread of negative eWOM, fake reviews, information overload, user misbehavior, addiction, and their impact on consumer trust and brand reputation

- [Dwivedi et al., (2021), Kapoor et al., (2018)]. Understanding how negative v/s positive eWOM travels through social networks is a mostly exciting path [Dwivedi et al., (2021)].
- *Role of Emerging Technologies: Bringing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) into SMM* offers rich research potential. Future studies could show how AI helps to optimize campaigns and improve customer experience [Mahida, (2024); Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. AI can also boost data quality and reshape digital marketing strategies for firms. Work on “explainable AI” is especially important to build trust with users [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. Understanding its link to firm market returns could guide smarter business decisions.
 - *Consumer Privacy and Data Literacy:* Future research should look closer at how people think about social media data use. It must study how data literacy shapes their comfort with targeted marketing. Work on ways to reduce privacy worries is equally important. Studies on AI governance can show how firms recover after privacy breaches [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. Such research can guide businesses to build trust and protect consumers better.
 - *Objective Data and Mixed Methods:* Using more objective data, like sales frequency and website traffic, can improve SMM study. Traditional surveys alone often overlooks the full picture [Dwivedi et al., (2021); Srivastava & Sharma, (2024)]. Combining both with mixed-method approaches gives a richer, more practical view. This helps researchers and firms understand what truly works in SMM campaigns.

7.2. *Practical Implications and Recommendations for Businesses and Policymakers:* The findings from current research propose valuable guidance for business persons and policymakers in India:

- *Strategic SMM Implementation:* Firms should treat SMM as a key part of their overall marketing plan [Dwivedi et al., (2021)]. It is not enough to just be present on social media platforms. Brands must engage actively, listen to users, and respond to their needs. Such efforts can build stronger relationships and long-term trust with stakeholders.
- *Focus on Customer Engagement:* Brands should focus on building real connections with customers through open conversations [Kapoor et al., (2018)]. Quick and thoughtful replies on social media can make users feel valued. Firms can encourage positive eWOM by asking for feedback and fixing issues honestly [Madhumithaa et al., (2023)]. Such efforts often turn complaints into trust-building moments.
- *Localized and Culturally Relevant Content:* India’s many languages and cultures make local content very important [Sampath, (2024)]. Brands must create messages that speak to regional audiences in their own voice. Such efforts build trust and lead to deeper, more lasting engagement.
- *Leverage Influencer Marketing:* Influencers play a major role in shaping consumer choices and promoting brands [Sampath, (2024)]. Firms should choose influencers who match their audience and values [Kumar & Mirchandani, (2012)]. Measuring campaign results is key to knowing if these partnerships really work.
- *Investment in Skills and Infrastructure:* Policymakers and firms must work to improve conditions for SMM use, especially for SMEs [Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)]. This means training staff to manage social media effectively and with confidence. Reliable,

affordable internet access must be ensured, particularly in smaller towns. Organizations should also build a culture open to new tools and technologies.

- *Ethical Data Practices and Transparency:* Businesses must stay open about how they use data and get clear consent from users. AI makes this even more important as systems handle personal details faster than ever. Following privacy laws is not just legal duty, it is basic respect for people. Trust is fragile; firms that act responsibly will likely do better over time [Dwivedi et al., (2021)].
- *Monitoring and Reputation Management:* Firms should watch online talk closely to see how people view them. Quick, fair replies matter whether the comment is praise or complaint. Ignoring criticism can harm trust faster than we think [Sampath, (2024)].

8. Conclusion:

Social Media Marketing has become a major force for shaping today's Indian economy. The spread of cheap internet and smart-phones changed how firms talk to customers. SMM gives small and medium firms rare chances to grow and compete. It boosts brand reach at low cost, encourages real conversations with buyers, and helps build trust. It also offers fresh data that guides product design and market plans. Studies keep showing that SMM raises sales and helps profits. Even the government uses it, with campaigns like 'Make in India,' proving how powerful these tools can be.

Still, the path of SMM in India is far from simple. Controlling user-made content is tough, and negative eWOM spreads fast. Cybercrime threats and data privacy worries are rising, creating real risks for brands. Content saturation is another issue where, users grow tired of endless posts. Many SMEs also lack proper internet tools and skilled staff, slowing their progress. To keep SMM useful for growth, researchers and industry need to work together. Future studies should build better measurement tools and explore effects across cultures and over time. It's also vital to study the "dark side" of social media and its effects. AI and ML can help, but must be paired with ethical and open data use. SMEs especially should spend on staff training, local language content and strong reputation plans. These steps can keep SMM effective and meaningful in the long run.

At the end, Social Media Marketing stands as a key force in India's digital economy. Its future depends on steady innovation and smart responses to its many challenges. If used wisely, it will keep shaping growth and guiding India's economic path in the coming years.

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