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Social media marketing, brand experience, and masstige brands in an emerging market: navigating engagement

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a vital tool for masstige brands in the rapidly changing world of digital marketing. We examine how social media marketing (SMM) affects customer involvement based on the sensory, emotive, behavioral, and intellectual aspects of brand experience. Using a mixed-method approach, critical engagement dimensions unique to masstige companies were identified through a netnography. A conceptual model that connected SMM to different types of engagement – purchase, influential value, co-creational, social media, and knowledge – was then tested through a survey. The results show that brand experiences highly influence these engagement outcomes, underscoring the significance of experiential techniques in improving consumer-brand interactions. In addition to providing helpful information for marketers looking to maximize their social media tactics for a range of engagement outcomes, this research advances the theoretical understanding of masstige branding.

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1. Introduction

Social media has transformed consumer interactions with brands (Oliveira & Fernandes, 2022; Park et al., 2020). This shift has led to the democratization of luxury which. has resulted in the emergence of masstige brands, a hybrid category that combines mass-market appeal with prestige (Bilro et al., 2022; Paul, 2018b, Shahid et al., 2024). While luxury is traditionally associated with categories such as fashion, jewelry, and automobiles, recent scholarship highlights the rise of masstige brands, which 'provide a premium feel at a price above the middle-income range but sufficiently below the traditional luxury brands' (Das et al., & Roy, 2021, p. 1). Masstige strategies have been adopted across diverse industries, from Apple and Louis Vuitton to Starbucks and Victoria's Secret, enabling brands to deliver prestige while remaining accessible to middle-class consumers (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2019; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Masstige brands' consumers seek prestige and quality (Shahid et al., 2024). However, maintaining dual positioning requires masstige brands to craft their social media strategies carefully. These strategies must

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foster broad engagement while preserving the brand's aspirational allure (Bilro et al., 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2024a).

Social media marketing has a significant influence on consumer brand experiences and engagement behaviors. Brands' visual content significantly influences customers' perception and purchase intent, thereby contributing to business profitability, innovation, and effective information dissemination (Kumar & Hsieh, 2024; Park et al., 2020). Masstige brands must balance mass positioning and luxury while engaging customers on social media (e.g. Bilro et al., 2022; Moorlock et al., 2023). However, there is a critical research gap in the experiential dimensions of social media marketing activities (Das et al., 2022), especially for mass-oriented and prestige-preserving masstige brands.

To address this gap, we examined how social media marketing (SMM) shapes the brand experience – encompassing affective, behavioral, sensory, and cognitive aspects – and how these experiences drive engagement. Our research questions are: RQ1: How does SMM influence sensorial, affective, behavioral, and intellectual brand experience? RQ2: How do these dimensions of brand experience interact with engagement? In Phase 1, we used a netnographic approach to identify engagement dimensions unique to the masstige context. In Phase 2, we conducted a survey to test a model linking SMM activities, brand experience, and engagement.

2. Conceptual background and literature review

2.1. The masstige context

Masstige was first advanced by Silverstein and Fiske (2003), in their *Harvard Business Review* article and subsequent book. Since then, the idea has shifted to highlight more accessible and reasonably priced brands over expensive ones, signaling a prestige status (Moorlock et al., 2023). A new class of luxury brands, known as 'new luxury', 'mass luxury', or 'masstige' brands, use premium pricing at recognized levels (Rodrigues et al., 2024a). Companies like Apple, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany, Starbucks, Mercedes, and Victoria's Secret have created strategies to appeal to middle-class consumers who value prestige but are willing to pay fair prices (Kumar et al., 2020; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Masstige marketing, based on brand equity theory, aims to preserve prestige while making brands accessible to a wider range of consumers (Paul, 2018b, 2019).

The growing interest of the middle class has prompted brands to adopt masstige strategies. Unlike luxury brands that rely on exclusivity, masstige brands combine prestige with affordability to reach mass consumers (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2018a). Their promotions aim to project a premium image while offering accessible products, thereby helping them expand their market share without compromising their status (Das et al., 2022). However, this balance pressures managers to use social media marketing (SMM) effectively (Bilro et al., 2022). Platforms like Facebook and Instagram enable strong brand – consumer interactions, with engagement shaped by consumers' social media brand experiences (Farhat et al., 2021). Since engagement can vary by context (Brodie et al., 2013), it is essential to investigate how SMM-driven brand experiences impact engagement in mass-market brands.

From a psychosocial perspective, engagement on social media is not solely a behavioral outcome of platform exposure but reflects consumers' intrinsic

motivations for identity expression, social connection, and emotional involvement with brands (Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019). These motivations shape how consumers attend to, interpret, and navigate brand-related content, suggesting a dynamic interplay between brand experience, navigational interaction, and engagement.

However, the precise impact of brand experience on social media in building engagement is unexplored (Hepola et al., 2017). The extant literature lacks insights into the interplay between sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual experience and brand engagement.

3. Study 1

3.1. Study 1: methodology

This study employs netnography to analyze consumer engagement with online brands (Brodie et al., 2013; Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2017), specifically examining customer comments on the Facebook and Instagram pages of coffee chain brands. This study examines masstige brands, which embody luxury but are affordable and accessible to middle-class consumers (Das et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2020). Coffee provides a useful illustrative example of this dynamic, although not as exclusive as traditional luxury sectors. Starbucks, a prime example, utilizes scarcity cues, premium design, and curated experiences to evoke a sense of exclusivity.

The theoretical foundations of consumer engagement and behavior guide the study. Thus, the online engagement behavior of customers (Schivinski et al., 2016) was observed passively (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018) by mapping the comments available on the social media page.

This study views Indian coffee chains (Starbucks, Barista, Café Coffee Day) as masstige brands – affordable luxuries built on customer ties and social media. Starbucks demonstrates how routine products can be both aspirational and accessible, as seen in the airline and hospitality industries (Das et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020; Purohit et al., 2023; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). With India's rising middle class seeking quality and taste, masstige brands are gaining ground (Bilro et al., 2022; Purohit & Radia, 2022; Paul, 2018b; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003).

Following Back (2011), 234 customer comments on coffee chain brands' social media content were collected between February and April 2022. Although 234 comments may appear modest, qualitative netnography emphasizes depth over breadth (Kozinets, 2015). Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, that is, no new engagement themes emerged from additional comments (Guest et al., 2006). Beyond this point, further coding produced redundancy rather than novel insights.

A deductive thematic analysis was conducted to identify social media engagement behaviors, guided by consumer engagement literature (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). Two independent coders analyzed comments, resolving discrepancies through discussion, and codes were independently validated. Emphasis on inter-coder agreement ensured external validity (Mitchell, 1985), with researchers reaching 95% consensus.

3.2. Study 1: findings

Five engagement behaviors were observed: *purchase engagement*, *influence value engagement*, *social media engagement*, *co-creation engagement*, and *knowledge engagement*.

The first engagement behavior, purchase engagement (also known as customer lifetime value), focuses on the consumer's interest in purchasing from the firm (see Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Purchase engagement resonates with the attitudinal and behavioral aspects outlined by scholars (refer to Hollebeek et al., 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010) that express the customer's existing and future intention toward brand purchase (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). The artifacts or contexts firms provide create unique brand experiences among customers that lead to their intentions to purchase or repeat purchases (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Thus, the consumer's extant and future interests in purchasing a brand are reflected in the purchase engagement dimension (Pansari & Kumar, 2016). This was manifested in the following comment posted by kushal_221:

> I am already a fan of caramel cloud macchiato, Can't wait to have this one.

Another comment was posted by manish.singh:

> Keep the cup ready! I'm coming to see my name written on it.

Influence value engagement reflects how customers use social media to shape others' brand perceptions (Kumar & Pansari, 2015; Prentice et al., 2019). Through sharing product- and brand-related information, often inspired by firms' communication strategies, customers create experiences that influence peers (Purohit et al., 2023). On social media, such ripple effects manifest in influence value engagement (Trusov et al., 2009), which is critical for building brand communities. Study 1 highlighted this dynamic for masstige brands, as seen in comments from users such as space_walker_06 and Carl_06.

> End your coffee cravings now, and visit Starbucks.

> Recently tried this cake and it's delicious, if you like berries it's a must-try.

Social media engagement arises from consumer interactions with brand content, such as liking, sharing, and commenting on posts (Schivinski et al., 2016). Prior studies highlight these behaviors as key forms of engagement (Belk, 2014; Shi et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2014). Study 1 confirmed this, showing that customers engaged with masstige brands by responding to marketer-generated posts and sharing user-generated content. For example, surbhigrill2356 commented:

> Shared on my story. @Sayit with Starbucks.

Study 1 revealed the co-creational engagement of customers with the brand. Prior researchers have reported engagement behaviors that involve value-creation activities by customers (e.g. Alexander & Jaakkola, 2015; Brodie et al., 2013). Co-creational engagement involves consumers actively contributing to a brand's meaning, narratives, and value propositions (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). This higher-order interaction allows consumers to become 'co-producers' of brand value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). For example, Lego's highly active consumer base is a valuable source of new product ideas (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum 2013). Brand-loyal iPhone customers can enhance the phone's usability and utility, helping the company grow its clientele (Arruda-Filho et al., 2010). This

higher-order interaction is crucial for shaping brand value and fostering brand loyalty. Companies such as *Lego* and *Starbucks* have benefitted from the co-creational value generated from such engagement behaviors (Alexander & Jaakkola, 2015). Social media platforms enable brand co-creation through user-generated content, remixing campaigns, and crowdsourcing initiatives. Vargo and Lusch (2010) highlight this service-dominant marketing logic, where value is co-created through interactions between firms and consumers, promoting an experiential and relational orientation.

Minkiewicz et al. (2014) supported this notion by showing co-creation and engagement as outcomes of brand experience. For example, *Patagonia* Clothing uses an interactive multimedia-supported experience that fosters customer engagement in co-creation activities (Merrilees, 2016). Co-creation engagement behaviors can be explained through customer suggestions, product development ideas, and helping other customers (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). These were observed in several comments by customers on social media posts. For instance, the comment posted by mehakarora_23 related to product development:

> *I would love to see you come up with a chocolate cherry iced frappe.*

Knowledge engagement happens when consumers actively seek, share, and exchange information or knowledge about the brand, its products, or its broader ecosystem. Knowledge engagement refers to the customers' involvement in providing suggestions or feedback meant for product or service improvement that is used by the firms for product improvisation and development (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Prentice et al., 2019). Knowledge engagement, thus refers to consumers' informational and cognitive involvement with a brand, characterized by the seeking, processing, and sharing of brand-related knowledge. Rather than emphasizing creative contribution, knowledge engagement reflects the consumer's intellectual curiosity and desire for understanding, evaluation, and problem-solving. A customer's experience with a brand generates emotional connections, showcased in the customer's participation in suggestions or feedback that reflect knowledge engagement (Prentice et al., 2019). Conceptually, knowledge engagement builds on the perspective of consumer engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive dimensions alongside emotional and behavioral ones. It reflects the consumer's investment of mental effort and attentional resources toward the brand, often triggered by brand experiences that are novel, complex, or information-rich. A meaningful brand experience may stimulate consumers to seek out deeper knowledge about product attributes, brand heritage, or usage practices, and in turn to share that knowledge with peers. Thus, consumers' social media experience with the brand-related content may increase their likelihood of providing feedback and suggestions, as also manifested in study 1. This kind of engagement was observed in the comment posted by varuntaneja09:

> *It's nice but don't change its original we eat desi menu at so many places. Starbucks we come to enjoy some delicacies like plain croissants proper French ones or chocolate croissants or we don't want chhole in Starbucks.*

Additionally @techchaska wrote

> *When will a cold mocha be available on your menu?*

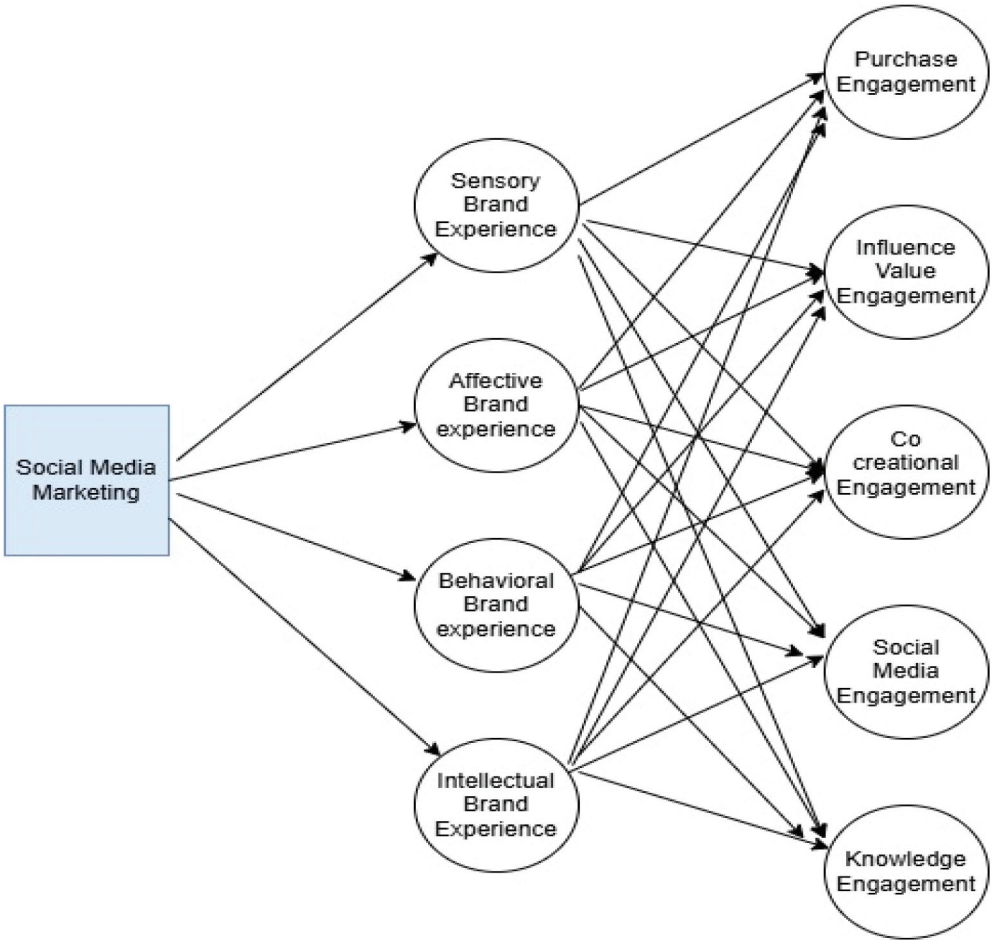


Figure 1. Conceptual model. Source: Author's work.

This show cases knowledge engagement because the consumer is cognitively interacting with the brand by seeking specific product-related information rather than merely expressing emotion or creating content. These engagement dimensions were deployed in the hypotheses framework developed in Study 2. We integrated these findings into the current literature to develop a hypothesis and framework for a quantitative study (Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007) (Please refer to Figure 1 for the conceptual framework).

4. Study 2

4.1. Study 2: Model and hypothesis development

4.1.1. SMM on brand experience

Social media refers to online platforms enabling interactivity, information sharing, and content creation among users (Kumar et al., 2022). These channels allow brands and consumers to exchange ideas, images, videos, and text (Zollo et al., 2020), and marketers increasingly use them to shape brand experiences (Rodrigues et al., 2024a). Brand

experience, defined as 'subjective consumer responses evoked by specific brand-related experiential attributes' (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 65), can be shared through engagement and co-creation activities on social media (Zollo et al., 2020). The construct comprises sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions (Brakus et al., 2009), all of which can be stimulated by social media marketing (Hamzah et al., 2014). Prior work shows social media affects sensorial experiences (e.g. Berthon et al., 2009; Zollo et al., 2020). Luxury brands, for instance, employ sensory appeals to project charisma (Berthon et al., 2009), while coffee brands' visual content evokes responses through colors, shapes, and designs. Such interactive content enhances masstige brands' sensory experiences. We therefore propose that

H1: SMM activities for masstige brands influence the consumer's sensorial brand experience.

Affective experience, derived from Schmitt's (1999) 'feel' dimension, reflects emotions toward brands. Brakus et al. (2009) define it as feelings or sentiments evoked by branding, while Zollo et al. (2020) show that professional product images or celebrity endorsers can stimulate such responses. Visual elements like colors, shapes, designs, slogans, or characters also influence customer moods (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand-related posts on social media – pictures, videos, or messages – can therefore shape emotions (Moedeen et al., 2024). For masstige brands, professional imagery, engaging characters, and aesthetic content in social media marketing (SMM) evoke strong affective brand experiences. It is therefore proposed that:

H2: SMM activities for masstige brands influence the consumer's affective brand experience.

Behavioral experience (Brakus et al., 2009) is associated with the act experience proposed by Schmitt (1999). Several authors established that SMM activities affect the behavioral brand experience of customers (e.g. Khan, 2022; Zollo et al., 2020). According to Schmitt (1999), behavioral experience happens when a brand triggers behavioral actions such as lifestyle and habits. The audio-visual content on social media pages may stimulate behavioral actions (Brakus et al., 2009). The social media channels post customized digital content that is trendy and attractive (Khan, 2022). Such content in pictures, videos, and messages triggers some behavioral action among the customers (Zollo et al., 2020). We propose that if the consumers of masstige brands find that the promotional content on social media pages is trendy or attractive, they are induced for some behavioral responses or bodily experiences. Thus, we propose that.

H3: SMM activities for masstige brands influence the consumer's behavioral brand experience.

'Intellectual experience' evokes the thinking process of customers intending to generate problem-solving or cognitive experiences. These include the analytical or imaginative thoughts triggered by the experience (Schmitt, 1999). As such, intellectual experiences arouse the curiosity or thoughts of customers while interacting with the brand (Hamzah

et al., 2014). SMM activities include sharing content that evokes customers' thought processes. When customers consume brand information through promotions or events, their thought processes and memorability are aroused (Khan, 2022; Zollo et al., 2020). Prior authors have suggested that SMM activities influence the intellectual brand experiences of customers (Khan, 2022; Zollo et al., 2020). Through the discussion, it is evident that SMM activities affect the intellectual brand experience of customers. Applying this to the masstige brands, we propose that:

H4: SMM activities for masstige brands influence the intellectual brand experience.

4.1.2. Sensorial brand experience on engagement

Sensory brand experiences on social media arise from stimulated senses while consuming content (Rodrigues et al., 2024b) and can shape purchase engagement (Prentice et al., 2019). Visual, auditory, and tactile elements influence purchase decisions (Iglesias et al., 2019), with heightened sensory interaction increasing intentions to recommend brands (Trusov et al., 2009). For masstige brands, such experiences drive influential activities tied to self-expression and social standing (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Appealing and immersive content also inspires co-creational engagement, where consumers contribute ideas (Hepola et al., 2016; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014), and fosters social media interaction through commenting, liking, and sharing. Visually compelling content further stimulates curiosity, encouraging knowledge engagement by prompting consumers to explore brand offerings and heritage (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Thus, sensory brand experiences foster purchase, influential, co-creational, social media, and knowledge engagement, yet this relationship remains underexplored. Therefore, we propose that:

H5: Sensory Brand experience of masstige consumers affects their purchase engagement.

H6: Sensory Brand experience of masstige consumers affects their influential value engagement.

H7: Sensory Brand experience of masstige consumers affects their co-creational engagement.

H8: Sensory Brand experience of masstige consumers affects their social media engagement.

H9: Sensory Brand experience of masstige consumers affects their knowledge engagement.

4.1.3. Affective brand experience on engagement

Affective brand experiences, created through emotionally engaging social media content, strengthen customers' loyalty to masstige brands and enhance purchase intentions by fostering trust and personal alignment (Kumar & Hsieh, 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2024a). Such emotional resonance also motivates recommendations and positive sentiment sharing, reflecting influence value engagement. It further drives co-creation by inspiring enthusiasm and a sense of connection

(Oklevik et al., 2024), and encourages active social media participation through liking, commenting, and sharing. Moreover, affective experiences stimulate curiosity, prompting consumers to seek information and deepen their knowledge of brand offerings (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Prentice et al., 2019). Overall, affective brand experience underpins purchase, influence, co-creational, social media, and knowledge engagement, yet its role in masstige branding warrants further exploration. Hence, we propose that:

H10: Affective brand experience of masstige consumers affects their purchase engagement.

H11: Affective brand experience of masstige consumers affects their influential value engagement.

H12: Affective brand experience of masstige consumers affects their co-creational engagement.

H13: Affective brand experience of masstige consumers affects their social media engagement.

H14: Affective brand experience of masstige consumers affects their knowledge engagement.

4.1.4. Behavioral brand experience and engagement

Behavioral brand experience reflects action-oriented activities on social media, such as calls to action and user-generated content, that drive consumer participation with masstige brands (Oklevik et al., 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2024a). These experiences foster purchase engagement and encourage sharing, enhancing value engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Interactive activities further promote co-creation by empowering consumers to contribute ideas and content (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Through games, live events, and participatory offers, behavioral experiences stimulate ongoing interactions – likes, shares, comments, and discussions – that deepen consumer connection (Guttena et al., 2024). They also encourage knowledge engagement as consumers seek to learn more about brand offerings and values. Despite this potential, the relationship between behavioral experience and engagement in masstige branding remains underexplored. We propose that:

H15: Behavioral brand experience of masstige consumers affects their purchase engagement.

H16: Behavioral brand experience of masstige consumers affects their influential value engagement.

H17: Behavioral brand experience of masstige consumers affects their co-creational engagement.

H18: Behavioral brand experience of masstige consumers affects their social media engagement.

H19: Behavioral brand experience of masstige consumers affects their knowledge engagement.

4.1.5. Intellectual brand experience and engagement

Thought-provoking social media content encourages consumers to engage with masstige brands on a deeper cognitive level, creating intellectual brand experiences that build confidence and purchase intent. Such involvement also drives advocacy through recommendations and positive sharing (Prentice et al., 2019), while stimulating co-creation as consumers contribute ideas and insights. Cognitive engagement fosters social media interaction through commenting, sharing, and meaningful conversations, and motivates consumers to seek greater knowledge about brand offerings and values (Hollebeek et al., 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Prentice et al., 2019). Thus, intellectual brand experience promotes purchase, influence, co-creational, social media, and knowledge engagement. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H20: Intellectual brand experience of masstige consumers affects their purchase engagement.

H21: Intellectual brand experience of masstige consumers affects their influential value engagement.

H22: Intellectual brand experience of masstige consumers affects their co-creational engagement.

H23: Intellectual brand experience of masstige consumers affects their social media engagement.

H24: Intellectual brand experience of masstige consumers affects their knowledge engagement.

4.2. Study 2: methodology (quantitative)

Quantitative Study 2 evaluated the model and relationships between constructs, beginning with the masstige mean score (MMS) scale to confirm the prestige of selected coffee brands (Paul, 2015). Subsequent sections used adapted scales: SMM (Godey et al., 2016), brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009), purchase, influence, and knowledge engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2015), co-creation (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014), and social media engagement (Schivinski et al., 2016), all measured on a 7-point Likert scale (Appendix 2). Two academics and two industry professionals reviewed the questionnaire for face validity. Distributed via Google Forms to followers of Starbucks, Barista, or Café Coffee Day in India using snowball sampling, the survey yielded 552 valid responses. The MMS score of a brand should be above 50 to qualify as a masstige

(refer to Paul, 2018b). All the brands were masstige, and Starbucks (52.23) had the highest value, followed by Barista (51.80). Cafe coffee day (49.90) was almost in the category. Hence, we used all the 552 responses for our analysis. Partial least square structural equation modeling was deployed (PLS-SEM) to assess the model due to its suitability for the study's objectives. Descriptions of the study methodology are shown in Appendix 1.

4.3. Study 2: result and discussion

4.3.1. Preliminary statistical checks

The data was first evaluated for multicollinearity issues. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values (between 1.18 and 4.01) were below the cut-off value of 5 and suggested the absence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2014). Since high skewness can result in biases in the results, the data were checked for multivariate normality (Wold et al., 1989). The values for skewness ranged between −0.854 and 0.078, and the kurtosis values were between −0.757 and −0.150, which are within the recommended scores of −2 and +2 and −7 and +7, respectively, thus establishing the normality of the data (Hair et al., 2014). Harman's single-factor test was also used to check for common method bias (CMB). The single factor accounted for a variance of 32.918%, suggesting that CMB is absent in this data. The study found adjusted R2 values of 36.7%, 39.7%, 33.1%, 37.1%, and 3.3% for various engagements, including purchase, influence value, co-creational, social media, and knowledge engagement. The f2 values for sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual experiences were medium to large, while the f2 values for sensory, affective, behavioral, and cognitive experiences were small.

4.3.2. Measurement model

The indicator statements loaded above the value of 0.5 and thus indicated the adequacy of the data (Gefen, 2002), and the indicator loadings were more than the cross-loading. The average variance extracted, composite reliability, and Cronbach alpha values were within the range (AVE > o.5, CR, CA > 0.7) for all the constructs, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014) (Table 2). The Heterotrait-monotrait-ratio (HTMT) ratios were below 0.9 for all the constructs (Henseler et al., 2016), and the inter-construct correlations were below the AVE's square root (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Thus, HTMT andFornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria proved the discriminant validity H3 (Tables 1 and 2).

4.3.3. Structural model assessment

The PLS-SEM algorithm with bootstrap on 5000 samples assessed the structural model. Thus, hypothesis H1 to H8, H11 to H13, H15 to H18 and H22 to H24 were supported but hypotheses H9, H10, H14, H19, H20 and H21 were not supported (Table 3).

5. Discussion

While prior authors have validated the impact of SMM on brand experience (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009; Berthon et al., 2009; Khan, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2024a; Zollo et al., 2020), our findings show that the SMM activities affect the sensorial, affective, behavioral and intellectual brand experience for masstige brands. The Marketing Science Institute (MSI)

Table 1. Construct reliability, validity and HTMT ratios.

'Construct'	'Cronbach's alpha'	*'Composite reliability'*	*Average variance extracted (AVE)*	*Factor loadings*	Aff Exp	Behav exp	CCE	Intel Exp	IVE	KE	PE	SME
Aff Exp	0.829	0.881	0.740	0.807–0.887								
Behav Exp	0.801	0.815	0.715	0.790–0.877	0.400							
CCE	0.923	0.924	0.764	0.841–0.888	0.346	0.536						
Intel Exp	0.704	0.818	0.631	0.529–0.904	0.369	0.503	0.469					
IVE	0.868	0.869	0.792	0.877–0.914	0.329	0.500	0.556	0.378				
KE	0.911	0.919	0.849	0.910–0.939	0.024	0.124	0.110	0.193	0.112			
PE	0.822	0.840	0.738	0.796–0.902	0.232	0.545	0.495	0.349	0.775	0.081		
SME	0.900	0.858	0.582	0.680–0.822	0.365	0.552	0.818	0.451	0.632	0.198	0.597	
SMM	0.900	0.903	0.528	0.664–0.777	0.346	0.488	0.511	0.406	0.582	0.117	0.605	0.657
Sens Exp	0.749	0.747	0.667	0.758–0.850	0.328	0.546	0.537	0.469	0.738	0.104	0.709	0.660

Aff Exp= Affective Brand experience, Behav Exp=Behavioral Brand experience, Sens Exp=Sensorial Brand experience, Intel exp=Intellectual Brand experience, CCE= Co-creational engagement, IVE=Influence value engagement, KE=Knowledge engagement, PE=Purchase engagement, SME=Social media engagement, SMM=Social media marketing.
Source: Author's work.

Table 2. Fornell & Larcker (discriminant validity).

Construct	Aff Exp	Behav Exp	CCE	Intel Exp	IVE	KE	PE	SME	SMM	Sen Exp
Aff Exp	*0.860*									
Behav Exp	0.345	*0.846*								
CCE	0.311	0.467	*0.874*							
Intel Exp	0.277	0.412	0.395	*0.794*						
IVE	0.296	0.419	0.499	0.309	*0.890*					
KE	0.001	0.107	0.105	0.166	0.100	*0.921*				
PE	0.208	0.445	0.435	0.284	0.664	0.064	*0.859*			
SME	0.319	0.460	0.728	0.372	0.542	0.179	0.500	*0.763*		
SMM	0.310	0.419	0.468	0.353	0.518	0.106	0.527	0.575	*0.727*	
Sens Exp	0.277	0.428	0.450	0.370	0.595	0.087	0.562	0.529	0.699	*0.817*

Source: Author's work.

Table 3. Structural model results.

	Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	*T statistics*	*P values*	*Supported*
H1	SMM -> Sens BEX	0.699	24.300	0.000	Yes
H2	SMM -> Affect BEX	0.310	6.610	0.000	Yes
H3	SMM -> Behv BEX	0.419	10.616	0.000	Yes
H4	SMM -> Intel BEX	0.353	8.313	0.000	Yes
H5	Sens BEX -> PE	0.452	9.663	0.000	Yes
H6	Sens BEX -> IVE	0.485	10.585	0.000	Yes
H7	Sens BEX -> CCE	0.250	5.732	0.000	Yes
H8	Sens BEX -> SME	0.361	8.264	0.000	Yes
H9	Sens BEX -> KE	0.025	0.483	0.629	No
H10	Affect BEX -> PE	−0.008	0.166	0.868	No
H11	Affect BEX -> IVE	0.095	1.975	0.048	Yes
H12	Affect BEX -> CCE	0.108	2.188	0.029	Yes
H13	Affect BEX -> SME	0.111	2.349	0.019	Yes
H14	Affect BEX -> KE	−0.067	1.469	0.142	No
H15	Behv BEX -> PE	0.248	5.079	0.000	Yes
H16	Behv BEX -> IVE	0.164	3.362	0.001	Yes
H17	Behv BEX -> CCE	0.254	5.080	0.000	Yes
H18	Behv BEX -> SME	0.219	4.483	0.000	Yes
H19	Behv BEX -> KE	0.057	1.091	0.000	Yes
H20	Intel BEX -> PE	0.017	0.379	0.705	No
H21	Intel BEX -> IVE	0.035	0.805	0.421	No
H22	Intel BEX -> CCE	0.168	3.726	0.000	Yes
H23	Intel BEX -> SME	0.219	4.483	0.000	Yes
H24	Intel BEX -> KE	0.057	1.091	0.275	No

(MSI, 2014) has identified understanding consumer behavior in multi-media environments, social media's role in experiences, and engagement as research priorities. This study examines social media marketing's influence on brand experiences and engagement outcomes, extending existing empirical evidence (Dolan et al., 2016).

According to the results, social media marketing initiatives motivated by digital content in pictures, video, audio, or text messages (Brakus et al., 2009; Park et al., 2020) impact the masstige brand consumers' experience. Thus, our findings offer robust insights into the masstige and branding literature. In the present study, we adopt the relational approach to brands within the exchange paradigm, focusing on engagement that arises from direct consumer brand interactions on social media. This aligns with our aim to evaluate how social media marketing affects brand experience and subsequently brand-related engagement (purchase, influence, co-creational, social media and knowledge).

The study reveals that positive experiences with masstige brands on social media influence purchase engagement, value engagement, co-creational

engagement, and social media engagement. Sensory simulations, visual, auditory, and tactile elements are crucial for influencing purchase decisions, inspiring recommendations, and encouraging content sharing (Bilro et al., 2022; Guttena et al., 2024; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Iglesias et al., 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2024b; Oklevik et al., 2024). Sensorial brand experience does not drive knowledge engagement, showing that sensory appeal alone cannot spark informational interactions on social media. Instead, consumers prioritize cognitive and social aspects like credibility and usefulness. Still, sensorial experiences can encourage co-creation, purchase, and social media engagement, aligning with positive behaviors noted by Dolan et al. (2016). Yet, sensory cues may also trigger negative reactions if consumers reject a brand's aesthetic or symbolic meaning, especially in luxury settings.

Emotionally appealing content strengthens consumers' attachment to masstige brands, influencing value, co-creational, and social media engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Prentice et al., 2019). According to the findings affective brand experience (emotions, moods, feelings evoked by the brand) does not influence purchase value engagement for masstige brands on social media, it suggests that emotional appeal alone is not enough to drive consumers to engage with or justify the value of purchases online.

Action-oriented content such as games, live events, and exclusive offers helps consumers connect with masstige brands. These activities foster engagement. Intellectual brand experience further drives co-creational and social media engagement. Cognitive content builds consumer confidence. It also motivates idea sharing, liking, and content sharing. In masstige contexts, intellectual brand experience does not significantly drive purchase, influence, or knowledge engagement. While intellectual stimulation is part of brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009), social media engagement is shaped more by affective, symbolic, and social factors (Liadeli et al., 2023; Paramita et al., 2021). Masstige consumers prioritize accessible prestige, quality cues, and peer recognition over cognitive elaboration (Paul, 2019), making functional and symbolic appeals more effective on fast-paced platforms.

Findings show social media marketing enhances brand experiences that drive co-creation, purchase, influence, and sharing. However, as Dolan et al. (2016) note, such experiences can also prompt negative engagement in contested luxury contexts. Since affective and entertaining content engages more than informational content (De Vries et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2013), intellectual brand experience had weaker effects. Acknowledging both positive and negative engagement provides a more nuanced view of consumer – brand interactions online.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Our study offers noteworthy contributions that advance the current theoretical understanding. First, this study contributes to the extant literature on masstige, branding, and engagement literature. It takes the understanding of masstige branding further by explaining the involvement of social media in creating consumer experiences and engagements. Our study finds that social media marketing positively influences brand experience in masstige service brands. While Hudson et al.

(2016) focused on entertainment and hedonic services, we extend these insights to the masstige context. Unlike Schivinski et al. (2016), who noted weaker effects of firm-generated content, we show that experiential marketing helps masstige brands balance mass and class. This offers a more nuanced, context-specific view of the SMM – brand experience link.

Applying the MMS scale (Paul, 2015) shows that the three coffee brands (Starbucks, Cafe-coffee-day, and Barista) are the most popular in India. Second, through this study, we bridge the gap between experiential marketing and consumer engagement literature by demonstrating how different dimensions of brand experience-for example, its sensory, affective, behavioral, or intellectual differentiated types of engagement such as purchasing, influential value, co-creation, social media, and knowledge engagement-are approached about masstige brands. Building on Brakus et al. (2009) and Hollebeek et al. (2017), our study examines masstige service brands in emerging markets. We show how social media marketing shapes affective, sensory, behavioral, and intellectual brand experiences, which in turn drive different forms of engagement (purchase, influence, knowledge, social media, co-creational). This highlights that engagement outcomes vary by experience type, refining the theoretical boundaries of brand experience and engagement in social media contexts.

Our findings validated the theoretical link between brand experience and engagement. It was found that brand experiences are important precursors to consumer engagement across several dimensions. This further reaffirms and broadens the theoretical assumptions about the experiential basis of engagement in marketing. Finally, through the dual-method approach involving netnography and survey methods, a framework is provided for robust, complex consumer behavior studies in digital contexts. Such a methodological contribution guides research exploring experiential marketing and engagement in niche market segments.

5.2. Managerial implications

Our findings evidence a strong effect of SMM activities on customers' sensorial, affective, behavioral, and intellectual brand experience. Managers of masstige brands should design social media campaigns that deliberately strengthen these four brand experience dimensions.

First, since SMM enhances sensorial brand experience, managers should design entertaining, trendy content tailored to local visual culture (Zollo et al., 2020). Using culturally resonant colors, music, and aesthetics can boost emotional impact while maintaining luxury identity (Brakus et al., 2009; Godey et al., 2016). Second, as affective brand experience is strongly influenced by SMM, managers should craft emotionally appealing narratives around aspirational lifestyles and inclusivity, using relatable micro-influencers to strengthen ties (Hollebeek et al., 2014. Third, to stimulate behavioral experience, brands should encourage participation through styling contests, co-creation, and AR try-ons, which can drive trial and advocacy even among price-sensitive consumers (Islam & Rahman, 2017; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Fourth, since SMM also shapes intellectual experience, managers can spark curiosity with educational campaigns on craftsmanship, heritage, or innovation via short videos or live sessions (Hamzah et al., 2014). Finally, positive

brand experiences foster engagement, and tools like AR/VR can enhance luxury perception while educating new buyers in emerging markets (Godey et al., 2016).

Furthermore, our results show that a positive brand experience fosters customer engagement behaviors. Managers should design campaigns that encourage active consumer participation in social media marketing (SMM) activities, such as interactive challenges and educational campaigns, to stimulate behavioral brand experience (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Islam & Rahman, 2017). These activities can generate trial and advocacy, even in emerging markets with high digital engagement but varying purchasing power (Godey et al., 2016). Similarly, AR/VR applications can communicate luxuriousness and elevate brand perception, while also educating first-time buyers in emerging markets about product use and value.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

The study focused on masstige coffee brands, suggesting future research on other brands for greater generalizability. Comparing luxury and non-luxury brands and using netnography and machine learning techniques for a more comprehensive understanding is recommended. Further, the brand engagement dimensions for luxury or non-luxury brands may be explored in future studies utilizing these techniques. Another limitation concerns the representativeness of the sample, as it may not fully capture the diversity of consumers across different demographic and socio-economic groups in emerging markets.

We used Brakus et al.'s (2009) brand experience scale, which limits the scope of this dimension. Future works may consider other brand experience scales, mainly social media, to discern the findings better. Moreover, for detailed insight, a separate consideration of the various dimensions of brand experience (*cognitive, affective, behavioral, intellectual*) to assess their relationship with SMM and brand engagement would be helpful. Beyond the engagement forms studied, prior research highlights the psychosocial dimension, where consumers commit to causes, values, or communities a brand represents (Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019). Future research could integrate this dimension, viewing brands as symbolic representatives of identities or causes. Another limitation is the gap between product appreciation and brand rejection, where consumers value product quality yet disengage from the brand due to cultural or ethical concerns, as seen with Starbucks. Examining this moderating effect could deepen understanding of brand engagement in masstige contexts.

Further, the use of survey methods may limit the responses. Future works employing a qualitative or experimental method may be more helpful. Moreover, the cross-sectional design restricts insights into how customer engagement behaviors may evolve over time, highlighting the need for longitudinal research.

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Appendix 1. Sample characteristics

Particulars		*n = 552*
Gender	Male	309
	Female	236
Year of birth	After 1995	461
	1981–1994	77
	1961 to 1980	9
	1946 to 1960	5
Income (annual)	Below 0.5 million	132
	0.5 million to 1 million	235
	1.1 million to 2 million	109
	above 2 million	65

Source: Author's work.