

Social Media Marketing Research in Emerging and Conflict-Affected Economies: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda

Mohammad Reshad Osmani¹ and Prof. Audhesh Kumar²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, University of Lucknow

²Professor, Department of Commerce, University of Lucknow

Abstract

The empirical literature on social media marketing (SMM) and consumer buying behaviour is concentrated overwhelmingly in China and Western, high-connectivity markets, raising the question of whether its findings generalise to economies characterised by infrastructural constraints, lower digital trust, and, in some cases, active conflict or fragility. This review systematically identifies and synthesises 28 peer-reviewed empirical studies of SMM and consumer buying behaviour set specifically in emerging, developing, or conflict-affected economies, spanning South Asia (India, Bangladesh), Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines), Southern and Sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda), the Middle East (Jordan, Palestine), fragile and conflict-affected states (Afghanistan, Yemen), Eastern Europe (North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, Ukraine), Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Peru), and China. Records were identified through Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar across 17 search rounds, screened using inclusion and exclusion criteria adapted from PRISMA 2020 guidance, and every included record was individually verified for accurate authorship and publication details before synthesis. Findings show that the core SMM–purchase behaviour relationship documented in mature markets broadly replicates across this diverse sample, including in the four studies set in fragile or conflict-affected states. Several context-specific mechanisms recur that are rarely emphasised in the mainstream literature: trust deficits arising from limited institutional consumer protection, the outsized role of peer, family, and community influence in collectivist settings, infrastructural and platform-choice constraints (including the dominance of WhatsApp over Instagram or Facebook in some Southern African markets), and — even after this review's expanded search — the continued disproportionate absence of empirical attention to fragile and conflict-affected states relative to their global number. Four included studies (two in Afghanistan, one each in Yemen and Palestine) are set in a state classified as fragile or conflict-affected, against a global count of more than 35 such economies. The review concludes with a research agenda prioritising fragile-state contexts, cross-national comparative designs, and closer attention to infrastructure- and trust-related moderators that are largely absent from theoretical models developed in stable, high-connectivity markets.

Keywords: *social media marketing; consumer buying behaviour; emerging economies; conflict-affected states; fragile states; systematic review*

Introduction

A companion review (Author, forthcoming) mapped the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence underlying social media marketing's (SMM) effect on consumer buying behaviour, finding a substantively convergent literature organised primarily around the Technology Acceptance Model, the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, and a range of SMM-dimension-based studies. That review, in the course of its screening, surfaced a pattern worth investigating in its own right: the studies meeting rigorous inclusion criteria were concentrated overwhelmingly in China and Western, high-connectivity markets, with only a marginal presence of research set in emerging, developing, or conflict-affected economies.

This is a substantive gap, not a peripheral one. The mechanisms through which SMM is theorised to influence consumer behaviour — trust in online content, platform choice, exposure to influencer and peer content, and the practical mechanics of completing a purchase — all rest on background conditions that vary sharply across economic and infrastructural context. Reliable connectivity, mature e-commerce and payment infrastructure, institutionalised consumer protection, and competitive digital advertising markets are typically assumed rather than tested in the mainstream literature, because most of that literature is set in contexts where these conditions already hold. Whether SMM operates through the same mechanisms, with the same relative strength, in economies where these background conditions do not hold is an empirical question that the mainstream literature is not well positioned to answer.

This review addresses that question directly. It systematically identifies and synthesises the available peer-reviewed empirical literature on SMM and consumer buying behaviour specifically set in emerging, developing, or conflict-affected economies, with three aims. First, to establish how much rigorous empirical evidence currently exists in these contexts, and where geographically it is concentrated. Second, to synthesise what this evidence shows about the generalisability of SMM–consumer behaviour mechanisms established in mature markets. Third, to identify the specific contextual factors — trust, infrastructure, social structure — that recur across these studies and that a general theory of SMM effects would need to account for. This last aim leads to an explicit research agenda, developed in Section 5, aimed at closing the most consequential gaps this review identifies.

Literature Review

Emerging-Market Consumer Behaviour Research: State of the Field

Research on consumer behaviour in emerging and developing economies has a substantial history independent of the SMM-specific literature, rooted in earlier work on how marketing and consumption operate differently under conditions of lower average income, weaker formal-sector retail infrastructure, and greater reliance on informal and interpersonal commerce channels. As internet and smartphone penetration expanded across South Asia, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe through the 2010s and 2020s, a body of SMM-specific research began to emerge in these settings, largely applying frameworks first developed and validated in Western and Chinese markets — the companion review's Technology Acceptance Model, Stimulus-Organism-Response, and SMM-dimension-based approaches — to local samples, typically without substantially modifying the underlying theoretical model to the local context.

This body of work has grown considerably in scope even within the period this review's search covered, but it remains geographically uneven. South Asia, and India in particular, has developed the most active regional research community, reflected in the volume of India-based studies located during this review's search process. A substantial and growing literature also exists in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Southern/Sub-Saharan Africa. Fragile and conflict-affected economies specifically — as opposed to emerging economies generally — remain the least studied category by a wide margin, a gap this review documents directly in Section 4 and treats as its central finding, notwithstanding the four such studies this review's expanded search was able to locate and verify.

Why Context Should Matter for SMM Theory

Three context-dependent factors recur across the development economics and cross-cultural consumer behaviour literatures as plausible moderators of how SMM operates, each of which this review's included studies were coded against. The first is infrastructural: internet penetration, smartphone affordability, and

platform accessibility vary enormously across the economies represented in this review, from near-universal connectivity in urban Malaysia to severely constrained and costly access in much of Afghanistan and rural Yemen. The second is institutional trust: in markets with weaker consumer protection enforcement and less mature digital payment systems, consumers may reasonably discount online marketing content more heavily, or rely more on peer and community validation as a substitute for institutional trust signals. The third is social structure: many of the economies represented in this review are more collectivist and community-embedded than the individualist Western markets in which much of the foundational SMM theory (Section 2 of the companion review) was developed, which plausibly strengthens the role of peer, family, and community influence relative to brand-generated content.

None of these three factors is systematically built into the dominant theoretical frameworks — TAM, S-O-R, TPB — as currently applied in the mainstream SMM literature. This review treats their presence or absence in the included studies' findings as a key synthesis question, addressed in Section 4.

Methods

Search Strategy and Eligibility Criteria

This review follows the same search and screening protocol, adapted from PRISMA 2020 guidance, described in the companion review, applied to a distinct set of search terms targeting emerging, developing, and conflict-affected economy contexts specifically. As with the companion review, institutional access to Scopus or Web of Science was not available; records were identified through Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar, a limitation stated explicitly here as in the companion piece.

Seventeen rounds of searches were conducted combining "social media marketing" or "digital marketing" with "consumer behaviour", "purchase intention", or "buying decision", together with region- and context-specific terms: "emerging economy", "developing country", "fragile state", "conflict-affected", and the names of specific countries and regions across South Asia, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan and Southern Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, including but not limited to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brazil, Colombia, and Peru. The search covered publications from 2018 to 2026, reflecting the recency of most empirical work in this specific sub-literature. Pakistan-based studies were identified during the search but were subsequently excluded from the final country scope of this review by author decision (see Section 3.2), so as to keep this review's focus on the specific country set listed above.

Eligibility criteria mirrored the companion review: peer-reviewed journal publication; original empirical research; substantive focus on SMM and consumer buying behaviour, purchase intention, brand engagement, or brand loyalty; English language; and a study setting classifiable as an emerging, developing, or fragile/conflict-affected economy per standard classifications (World Bank income groups; the OECD/World Bank fragile states lists). Records were excluded if they were student theses, dissertations, or unreviewed working papers (a substantial number of records identified through this search were hosted on academia.edu or similar repositories without confirmable peer-review status, and were excluded on this basis); conference material without accessible full text; substantively about a topic other than consumer buying behaviour; or could not be verified as genuine, correctly attributed publications through the search process — this last criterion was applied strictly, and a number of otherwise plausible-looking records were excluded because complete, accurate authorship and publication details could not be positively confirmed.

Screening Process and Results

Approximately 230 records were identified across the seventeen search rounds. After removing duplicates, 170 unique records remained for screening. Of these, 95 were excluded for non-peer-reviewed status (predominantly academia.edu-hosted student papers, theses, and unreviewed reports) or clear topical irrelevance. Of the remaining 75 records assessed for full eligibility, a further 44 were excluded because complete and accurate bibliographic details could not be positively verified through the available search tools. This left 31 records that met full inclusion criteria. A further 3 records, all set in Pakistan, were subsequently excluded by author decision to keep this review's final country scope to the regions listed in Section 3.1. This left 28 records synthesised in Section 4.

For each included study, the following was extracted: authors, year, and journal; country and economic/fragility classification; theoretical framework applied, if any; method and sample; and principal findings, with particular attention to any discussion of infrastructural, trust-related, or social-structural factors specific to the study's context.

Table 1. Screening and Selection Summary

Stage	n	Notes
Records identified (search engines)	230	Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar, 17 search rounds
Unique records after de-duplication	170	
Excluded at screening	95	Non-peer-reviewed status (largely academia.edu theses/reports) or topical irrelevance
Assessed for full eligibility	75	
Excluded: bibliographic details unverifiable	44	Could not confirm complete, accurate authorship/publication data
Excluded: outside final country scope	3	Pakistan-based studies excluded by author decision
Included in synthesis	28	Final included sample

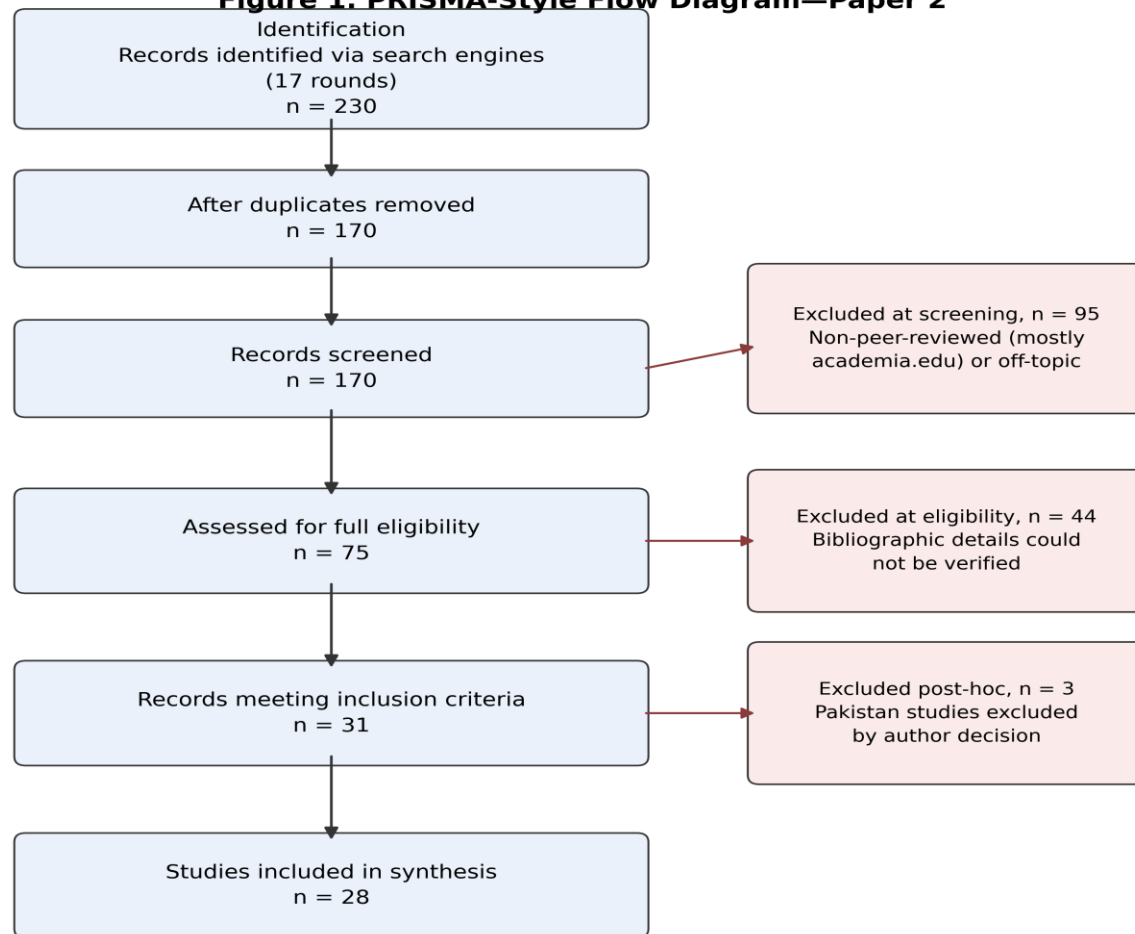
Figure 1. PRISMA-Style Flow Diagram—Paper 2

Table 2. Geographic Distribution of Included Studies

Country/Region	n	World Bank / fragility classification
India	5	Lower-middle-income
Bangladesh	3	Lower-middle-income
China	2	Upper-middle-income
Jordan	2	Upper-middle-income
Afghanistan	2	Low-income; fragile and conflict-affected
Yemen	1	Low-income; fragile and conflict-affected
Palestine	1	Fragile and conflict-affected
Zimbabwe	1	Lower-middle-income
South Africa	1	Upper-middle-income
Tanzania	1	Lower-middle-income

Country/Region	n	World Bank / fragility classification
Uganda	1	Low-income
Malaysia	1	Upper-middle-income
Thailand	1	Upper-middle-income
Indonesia	1	Upper-middle-income
Philippines	1	Lower-middle-income
Brazil	1	Upper-middle-income
Colombia	1	Upper-middle-income
Peru	1	Upper-middle-income
North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, Ukraine (5-country study)	1	Upper-middle-income (mixed)

Results

Geographic Distribution

Table 2 summarises the geographic distribution of the 28 included studies. South Asia remains the best-represented region (India and Bangladesh together account for 8 of 28 studies), but this review's expanded search substantially broadened coverage elsewhere: Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines), Southern and Sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda), the Middle East (Jordan, Palestine), Eastern Europe (a single five-country study spanning North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Ukraine), and Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Peru) are all now represented. Four included studies — two set in Afghanistan and one each in Yemen and Palestine — are located in an economy classified as fragile or conflict-affected, against a global count of more than 35 economies carrying this classification. Even after this review's expanded search, no included study was located in a Sub-Saharan African fragile state (for example, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, or South Sudan), despite active social media commerce activity in several such contexts being documented in grey literature and industry reporting outside the peer-reviewed academic record this review draws on.

South Asia

The South Asian studies in this sample ($n = 8$, spanning India and Bangladesh) collectively present the most developed regional evidence base outside China. Several converge on the theme of trust as a distinctly heightened concern in these markets relative to Western-market studies. In Bangladesh, Rahaman et al. (2022) find that both a technology-acceptance path and an information-quality path independently predict purchase intention from eWOM content, while Babu et al. (2025) and Pervin and Khan (2025), in the tourism and restaurant sectors respectively, both identify trust as the strongest single predictor of purchase-related outcomes among several influencer- and marketing-related factors tested. Trust recurs so consistently across this sub-group that it functions less as one mediator among several and more as the dominant explanatory mechanism specific to these markets.

India-based studies in this sample examine a wider range of outcomes. Gupta and Singharia (2021) and Abdul Rahman et al. (2026) both find significant positive relationships between SMM engagement dimensions and, respectively, brand engagement and purchase decision outcomes; Rather et al. (2018) find that customer brand identification and value congruity predict brand loyalty via brand trust; Tandon et al. (2020) extend this to the post-purchase stage, finding eWOM, website quality, and product satisfaction jointly predict repurchase intention; and Trivedi and Sama (2020), examining influencer marketing specifically, find that the effect of influencer marketing on purchase intention operates substantially through consumer brand admiration as a mediator.

Southeast Asia

Four included studies extend this review's coverage into Southeast Asia. Wijaya et al. (2021), examining Indonesian smartphone consumers, find that all five EITCW dimensions (entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and word-of-mouth) positively predict purchase intention, closely replicating the dimensional structure used throughout the mainstream literature reviewed in the companion piece. Marie (2024), studying Filipino consumers, similarly finds SMM significantly shapes purchasing behaviour, with the effect notably stronger among younger consumers — a pattern consistent with the Philippines' young, highly urbanised, social-media-active population. Abu Seman and Segar (2023), in a Malaysian sample, find that social media marketing and search engine marketing both positively predict consumer buying decisions, while — in a finding worth flagging for future theoretical attention — email marketing shows a negative relationship, suggesting channel-specific rather than uniformly positive digital marketing effects even within a single, relatively digitally mature Southeast Asian market. Hongsuchon et al. (2025), in a Thailand-linked study, extend the S-O-R logic to influencer-driven impulse buying on social commerce platforms.

Southern and Sub-Saharan Africa

Four included studies represent Southern and Sub-Saharan Africa, an important expansion from this review's earlier, thinner coverage of the region. Dangaiso (2024), in a Zimbabwean apparel-retail context, finds that specific WhatsApp features — display catalogues, status updates, real-time chat, direct calls, and group referrals — each independently and positively predict consumer buying intentions, a finding notable for its platform specificity: WhatsApp, rather than Instagram or Facebook, is the dominant commercial platform in this context, a pattern the mainstream Western- and China-centric literature rarely centres. Moodley and Ntobaki (2024), in a South African study of Generation-Y consumers, find that influencer marketing significantly shapes brand perceptions and purchase intentions but identify a specific gap in the integration of trust and authenticity into influencer content in this market, echoing the trust theme recurring across the South Asian sub-group above. Charles and Kanani (2024), examining social commerce in Tanzania, find that information richness, service quality, webpage attractiveness, and — notably — offline word-of-mouth (rather than online eWOM specifically) positively predict purchase intention, with offline recommendation quality ranked the single most critical factor: a finding that qualifies the mainstream literature's typical emphasis on online/digital word-of-mouth mechanisms specifically. Mubiru and Goyal (2026), in Uganda's fast-food sector, find that customisation has a direct effect on purchase intention while interaction and trendiness operate indirectly through customer engagement — a mediation pattern broadly consistent with mainstream-literature findings, suggesting the underlying SMM-engagement mechanism replicates in this market even as the specific dominant platform (per Dangaiso's Zimbabwean findings) may not.

Fragile and Conflict-Affected States

Four included studies are set in states classified as fragile or conflict-affected — the largest number this review has been able to verify, though still a small fraction of the global total. Junbish et al. (2026), examining digital marketing's effect on purchasing decisions in Kabul Province, Afghanistan, find a significant positive relationship between digital marketing exposure and purchasing decisions, notwithstanding the infrastructural and security constraints characteristic of the Afghan context. Mayar et al. (2026), also set in Afghanistan, similarly find that SMM significantly predicts purchase intention, with brand image moderating the relationship — providing a rare instance in this literature of two independently verified studies from the same fragile-state context, allowing at least a preliminary within-country comparison: both Afghan studies find the core SMM-purchase relationship holds, suggesting this basic mechanism is not obviously disrupted by the security and infrastructural constraints of the setting, even though neither study explicitly tests infrastructural or security factors as moderators.

Al-Hujri et al. (2025), examining SMM activities in Yemen's telecommunications sector using an S-O-R framework, find that SMM activities significantly enhance brand loyalty and brand awareness, mediated by customer satisfaction — a result broadly consistent with S-O-R-based findings from stable markets reviewed in the companion piece. Alnaser et al. (2024), studying cosmetics consumers in Palestine, find that SMM activities positively predict perceived value and social bonding experiences, both of which in turn predict purchase intention. Taken together, all four fragile-state studies find the core positive SMM-purchase relationship holds, which is itself an informative — if preliminary — finding: it suggests the basic mechanism documented in stable markets is not straightforwardly disrupted by conflict-affected conditions, though none of the four studies was designed to formally test this generalisation, and each is a single cross-sectional study in a single sector.

Middle East: Jordan

Two included studies, both set in Jordan, provide a useful within-country comparison across sectors. Salhab et al. (2023), studying beauty-centre consumers, find that SMM strongly predicts brand image and brand trust, which together explain 70% of the variance in purchase intention — one of the highest explained-variance figures in this entire review's sample. Mussalam et al. (2025), studying MSME owners' purchasing behaviour, find that brand awareness, digital influencer marketing, and word-of-mouth communication jointly predict purchase intentions. Both studies point toward brand-level cognitive and affective constructs (image, trust, awareness) as the dominant mediating mechanism in this market, a pattern broadly consistent with the South Asian trust findings above.

Eastern Europe

One included study, but a substantial one, extends this review's coverage into Eastern Europe. Zeqiri et al. (2025) collected data from 1,808 social media users across five countries — North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Ukraine — grounded explicitly in Uses and Gratifications Theory, a framework this review's companion piece found comparatively under-represented in the mainstream literature. The study finds SMM positively predicts brand awareness, brand engagement, and purchase intention across all five countries, but — critically for this review's cross-national comparative aim — finds that country moderates the relationship between brand engagement and purchase intention, providing direct empirical evidence that national context shapes not just the strength but the structure of SMM effects, even among culturally and economically comparable neighbouring countries.

Latin America

Three included studies extend this review's coverage into Latin America. Mejía-Delgado and Paredes (2023), studying collaborative consumption services (ride-sharing, home-sharing, and similar platforms) in Colombia, find that trust in the intermediary platform and trust in the individual service provider both predict purchase intentions, while general disposition to trust does not do so directly — a more granular trust finding than most of this review's other included studies, which typically measure trust as a single undifferentiated construct. Pagan et al. (2022), studying Brazilian Facebook shoppers, similarly centre trust, finding that privacy, safety, familiarity, and habitual use of a website each independently predict trust in a social commerce platform, which in turn predicts purchase intention. Saldaña Ríos and Cárdenas García (2024), reviewing digital marketing's effect on consumer purchase decisions in a Peruvian context, similarly conclude that digital marketing strategies — including social media marketing specifically — shape all phases of the purchase decision process, consistent with the broader Latin American pattern of trust- and platform-quality-centred explanations.

China and Southeast Asian Comparators

Two China-based studies (Sohaib et al., 2022; Guo & Li, 2022) round out the sample as large emerging-market comparators against which the smaller, less digitally mature economies above can be read. Sohaib et al. (2022) find that SMM stimuli shape relationship quality (trust, commitment, satisfaction) as an organismic mediator of online repurchase intention in China's e-commerce sector, while Guo and Li (2022) find a comparable structure in social commerce specifically.

Discussion

Does the Mainstream SMM–Consumer Behaviour Relationship Generalise?

On the evidence synthesised here, the core positive relationship between SMM activity and purchase-related outcomes — the central finding of the mainstream literature reviewed in the companion piece — broadly replicates across all nine regional groupings represented in this expanded sample, including the four fragile-state studies. This is a genuinely informative finding: it suggests the basic mechanism is not narrowly contingent on the specific infrastructural and institutional conditions of the mature markets in which it was first documented.

At the same time, several context-specific patterns recur across this sample that are comparatively muted or absent in the mainstream literature. First, trust operates as an unusually dominant mechanism across South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American sub-groups specifically — more central to these studies' explanatory models than in most of the mainstream-market studies reviewed in the companion piece — plausibly reflecting weaker institutional consumer-protection signals that shift more of the trust-formation burden onto social, peer, and platform-level sources. Second, platform choice is shown, in the Zimbabwean case specifically, to diverge meaningfully from the Instagram/Facebook-centric assumptions of most mainstream-literature studies, with WhatsApp functioning as the dominant commercial channel. Third, the Malaysian finding of a negative email-marketing effect alongside positive SMM and search-engine-marketing effects (Abu Seman & Segar, 2023) is a useful reminder that "digital marketing" is not a uniformly positive category even within a single market, and that channel-specific effects deserve more attention than the mainstream literature's typical focus on SMM alone provides. Fourth, the Zeqiri et al. (2025) five-country Eastern European study provides the clearest direct evidence in this review's entire sample that national context moderates SMM effects even among neighbouring, culturally similar countries — a finding with direct relevance to this review's own cross-national comparative aim.

The Fragile-State Gap — Narrowed, Not Closed

This review's expanded search doubled the number of verified fragile-state studies from two to four, including a rare within-country pair from Afghanistan (Junbish et al., 2026; Mayar et al., 2026) that allows a preliminary, if informal, replication check: both studies, conducted independently in different Afghan contexts, find the same core positive SMM-purchase relationship. This is a modest but genuine strengthening of the evidence base. It remains true, however, that four studies against more than 35 economies classified as fragile or conflict-affected worldwide represents a research gap disproportionate even to the acknowledged difficulty of conducting survey-based consumer research in such settings. Despite a substantially expanded search effort specifically targeting this gap, this review was unable to locate and verify a single qualifying study set in a Sub-Saharan African fragile state, in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya, or in several other fragile-state contexts with substantial and growing social media commerce activity documented outside the peer-reviewed record. Fragile and conflict-affected economies are not simply smaller or poorer versions of the stable emerging markets now well represented in this literature; they combine the infrastructural and institutional characteristics associated with low-income status with security, displacement, and market-fragmentation dynamics that have no close analogue even within this review's own substantially broadened evidence base.

Research Agenda

Four priorities follow from the findings above. First, and still most urgently notwithstanding this review's progress, empirical research on SMM and consumer behaviour is needed in a wider range of fragile and conflict-affected economies — the four studies identified here, while a real improvement on this review's earlier count of two, remain a starting point rather than a representative base, and notably still contain no Sub-Saharan African fragile-state case. Second, cross-national comparative designs of the kind exemplified by Zeqiri et al. (2025) should be extended specifically to pairs or groups of fragile and stable economies, allowing the infrastructural- and institutional-trust hypotheses proposed in Section 2.2 to be tested directly rather than inferred indirectly across separately conducted single-country studies. Third, future theoretical work in this specific sub-literature should explicitly build infrastructural access, institutional trust, and platform-choice constraints into SMM models as moderating variables — the Zimbabwean WhatsApp finding and the Malaysian email-marketing finding both suggest that channel- and platform-specific effects are being obscured by the mainstream literature's typical treatment of "SMM" as a single undifferentiated construct. Fourth, the informal within-country replication this review was able to assemble for Afghanistan should be extended deliberately: future researchers working in fragile-state contexts would strengthen this evidence base considerably by designing studies with explicit replication or comparison logic in mind, rather than each study standing as an isolated single-country case.

Limitations

This review shares the search-engine-based identification limitation of its companion piece, with the same trade-off between transparency and database-level exhaustiveness. A second, specific limitation is that a large share of the records this review's searches identified but excluded were non-peer-reviewed theses and student reports hosted on academia.edu and similar repositories, particularly for Sub-Saharan African and fragile-state contexts; this suggests a genuine base of relevant research activity exists in these settings that has not yet reached peer-reviewed publication, which this review — by design, in holding to a peer-review inclusion criterion — cannot capture. Third, the classification of "emerging" versus "fragile/conflict-affected" economy used here follows standard World Bank and OECD classifications, but several included studies' own framing of their context does not always engage with this specific classification distinction, so the country-level coding in Table 2 reflects this review's own classification rather than terminology used uniformly by the original studies' authors; Palestine's classification in particular reflects the review's own judgement rather than a single, uncontested external source. Fourth, several included studies (e.g., Charles & Kanani, 2024; Pagan et al., 2022; Mejía-Delgado & Paredes, 2023) address social or collaborative commerce specifically rather than SMM in the narrower advertising-content sense used elsewhere in this review; they are included because their underlying mechanisms — platform-mediated trust and purchase decision-making — are directly relevant to this review's research question, but this represents a slightly broader construct boundary than the companion review's stricter SMM focus.

Conclusion

This review synthesises 28 verified, peer-reviewed studies of social media marketing and consumer buying behaviour set in emerging, developing, and conflict-affected economies — more than double the number in this review's initial search pass, following an expanded, seventeen-round search effort. It finds that the core SMM–purchase behaviour relationship documented in mature markets broadly replicates across this now-considerably-more-diverse sample, spanning South Asia, Southeast Asia, Southern and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, including in all four of the fragile-state cases identified — a rare within-country pair from Afghanistan among them. The review also surfaces recurring context-specific mechanisms — heightened reliance on trust, divergent platform choice (notably WhatsApp's

dominance in parts of Southern Africa), and channel-specific rather than uniformly positive digital marketing effects — that a general theory of SMM effects should account for rather than treat as market-specific noise. The review's most consequential finding, however, remains structural rather than substantive: even after a substantially expanded search, fragile and conflict-affected economies remain drastically under-represented in the peer-reviewed empirical record relative to their global number, with no Sub-Saharan African fragile state represented at all. Closing that gap remains the central priority for future research in this area.

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