The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Electric Vehicle Purchase Intention in Henan: An SOR Perspective

Jing Li[1*], and Atiporn Gerdruang[2]

Stamford International University, Thailand

[*]*Corresponding author.* E-mail: 2207200002@students.stamford.edu[1*]

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on private electric vehicle (PEV) purchase intentions in Henan Province, China, using the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model as the theoretical foundation. The research objectives were to: (1) examine the direct effect of SMM on purchase intention; (2) assess the mediating role of perceived value; and (3) evaluate the moderating effect of government policies. A quantitative methodology was employed, using a structured questionnaire distributed to 426 private PEV owners in Henan, selected via snowball sampling. Data analysis included reliability tests, correlation and regression analyses, and mediation/moderation tests. The results demonstrate that SMM has a significant positive direct effect on purchase intention (β = 0.872, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, perceived value partially mediates this relationship, and government policies positively moderate it (interaction β=0.082, $p<0.001$). This study enriches the SOR framework by integrating SMM and policy dimensions, offering theoretical contributions to PEV adoption literature and practical insights for marketers and policymakers in emerging regional markets.

Keywords: social media marketing; perceived value; government policies; purchase intention; private electric vehicles; SOR

Introduction

The global automotive industry is undergoing a pivotal shift toward New Energy Vehicles (NEVs), driven by concerns about energy security and environmental sustainability. As a cornerstone of national economies, the sector's transformation is critical. China leads this transition, having recorded the highest global NEV sales for nine consecutive years. In 2023, NEV production and sales reached 9.587 million and 9.495 million units, respectively, accounting for 31.6% of the domestic market share.

While government subsidies spurred early growth, the NEV market is increasingly entering a mature, market-driven phase. Nevertheless, challenges such as insufficient charging infrastructure and lingering consumer skepticism persist. In response, NEV manufacturers are actively adopting social media marketing (SMM) to strengthen brand awareness and engagement. Brands such as NIO and Xiaopeng use platforms such as Weibo and Douyin to disseminate content and foster communities—strategies identified as crucial in shaping consumer perceptions. Kurniawan and Tanujaya (2024) further affirm SMM's role in reinforcing brand loyalty.

Despite these developments, a significant research gap remains. Most studies on SMM and plug-in electric vehicle (PEV) adoption focus on China's tier-one cities or lack an integrated theoretical approach combining marketing and policy influences. The mechanisms by which SMM affects purchase intention in key provincial markets, such as Henan—a significant region with over 99 million residents and distinct socio-economic characteristics—are underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how SMM influences PEV purchase intention in Henan and the roles of perceived value and government policy.

Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, this quantitative research aims to provide actionable insights for NEV manufacturers to enhance brand influence and stimulate demand through effective social media strategies, while also informing regional policy formulation.

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the impact of social media marketing on private new energy vehicle purchase intention in Henan, China. Specifically, our research objectives include the following:

1. To examine the direct effect of social media marketing on consumers' purchase intention for private electric vehicles.

2. To investigate the mediating role of perceived value in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

3. To assess the moderating effect of government policies on the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

Scope of Research

Content Scope: This study examines the influence of social media marketing on the purchase intention for private electric vehicles (pure electric and hybrid models) in Henan Province, China. The core constructs under investigation are social media marketing, perceived value, government policies, and purchase intention, framed within the SOR model.

Population and Sample Scope: The study sample comprises residents of Henan Province who have purchased privately owned new energy vehicles. The sampling frame was derived from registered PEV owner databases within the province. With a target population estimated at approximately 800,000 eligible individuals, a minimum sample size of 400 was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula. A snowball sampling method was employed, yielding 426 valid questionnaires. The sample is characterized by a young demographic (87.32% aged 18–25) and a middle–income profile (70.89% with a monthly income < 5,000 yuan), reflecting a key consumer segment in this regional market.

Geographic Scope: The study is confined to Henan Province, a key transportation junction and significant NEV market in China, with a population of over 99 million. The research focuses on urban and peri–urban centers within the province, excluding rural areas and tier–one cities to maintain contextual specificity.

Time Scope: The research was initiated in July 2024. Following pilot testing, formal data collection was conducted over two months from October to December 2024. The study employs a cross–sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation: SOR Model

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), posits that external stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal cognitive and affective states (O), which, in turn, drive behavioral responses (R). This theory is highly applicable

In marketing, SMM elements act as stimuli that shape consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Research consistently validates the SOR model in digital contexts, demonstrating its efficacy in explaining phenomena ranging from impulsive buying to planned purchases (Aji et al., 2020; Anjarani. et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). This study positions SMM as the Stimulus, perceived value as the Organism, and purchase intention as the Response, while integrating government policy as a contextual moderator.

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

SMM is defined as the use of social media platforms to create, communicate, and deliver value for consumers (Kotler et al., 2021). It is often operationalized through dimensions like brand awareness, promotional activities, and user interaction (Li et al., 2021; Koay et al., 2020). Empirical studies confirm that the quality of corporate social media content and user engagement positively influence consumer satisfaction, brand perception, and ultimately, purchase intentions (Hsu et al., 2020; Haudi et al., 2022). In the competitive NEV market, SMM serves as a critical channel for information dissemination and trust–building.

Perceived Value

Perceived value is a multi–dimensional construct representing a consumer's overall assessment of a product's utility based on a trade–off between 'get' and 'give' components. It acts as a critical mediator between external stimuli and behavioral responses. Research shows that both hedonic and utilitarian values boost satisfaction and purchase intentions (Winarko, 2022). In the context of EVs, perceived benefits such as environmental friendliness and cost savings significantly shape attitudes and purchase intentions (Yang et al., 2020). This study examines perceived value as a core internal psychological mechanism translating SMM efforts into behavioral intention.

Government Policy

In China, government policies have been a major driver of NEV adoption, including direct purchase subsidies, tax exemptions, and infrastructure investment (e.g., charging stations). Hua et al. (2021) demonstrated that a policy mix can significantly increase EV adoption rates. With the gradual phase–out of direct subsidies, research has shifted to analyzing the effects of non–financial incentives and the interaction between policy and market forces (Kong et al., 2020; Xie. et al., 2022). This study investigates how such policies moderate the effectiveness of commercial marketing activities.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention, defined as a consumer's willingness to buy a product, is a key predictor of actual behavior (Dodds et al., 1991). In the context of NEVs, purchase intention may be hindered by concerns regarding range anxiety, battery life, and safety (She et al., 2017). The SOR theory is frequently used to model how external marketing and policy stimuli influence these intentions through internal organismic states such as perceived value and risk (Huang et al., 2022).

Research Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

Based on the above synthesis, this study proposes and will test the following hypotheses within the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1:

H1: Social media marketing has a positive impact on purchase intention.

H2: Social media marketing has a positive impact on perceived value.

H3: Perceived value has a positive impact on purchase intention.

H4: Perceived value mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

H5: Government policies moderate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

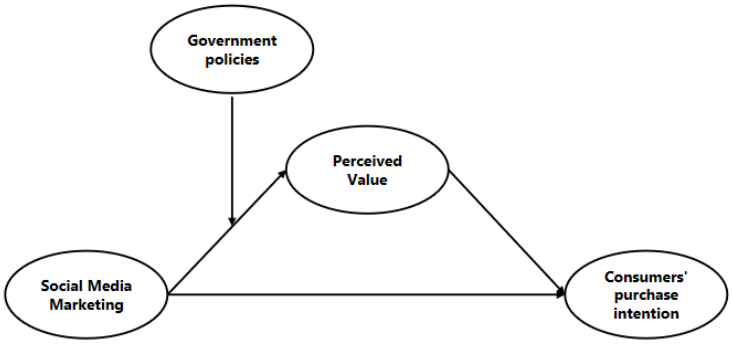

Figure 1: Conceptual framework diagram showing SMM–>PV–>PI, a direct path SMM–>PI, and GP moderating the path SMM–>PI

Research Methodology

Research Philosophy and Design

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy, emphasizing objective observation and measurement to test pre–defined hypotheses. A deductive approach is employed, moving from general theory (the SOR model) to specific hypotheses. A mono–method quantitative design was chosen, employing a cross–sectional survey with a time horizon appropriate for examining relationships between variables at a single point in time.

Population and Sample

The target population was private PEV owners in Henan Province. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, which indicated a requirement of at least 400 respondents for a population of~800,000 at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. The final sample comprised 426 valid responses collected via snowball sampling.

Data Collection and Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered online via the Question Star platform. The instrument used validated five-point Likert scales (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) to measure the constructs:

SMM (5 items, e.g., brand awareness, promotions).

Perceived Value (4 items, e.g., environmental and economic benefits).

Government Policy (4 items, e.g., perception of subsidies and infrastructure).

Purchase Intention (3 items, e.g., plan to purchase a PEV).

The scales were adapted from established literature (e.g., Utami et al., 2020; Wang. et al., 2024) and refined through expert review and a pilot test (n=48). Ethical compliance was maintained through informed consent and anonymity.

Data Analysis Method

Data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0. The following statistical methods were employed:

Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's α was used to assess the internal consistency of the scales.

Validity Analysis: Factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation) was conducted to confirm the construct validity of the measurement items.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation was used to examine the bivariate relationships between the key variables.

Hypothesis Testing: Regression analysis was used to test the direct effects (H1, H2, H3). Mediation (H4) and moderation (H5) effects were tested using hierarchical regression and the PROCESS macro (Model 4 and Model 1, respectively).

Research Results

This chapter presents the study's empirical findings on the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on the purchase intention (PI) of private electric vehicles (PEVs) in Henan Province, China, with perceived value (PV) as a mediator and government policy (GP) as a moderator. The results are presented as follows: First, preliminary analyses, such as demographic characteristics and data screening procedures, are detailed. Second, the assessment of the measurement model, including reliability and validity tests, is provided. Finally, the hypothesis testing results are systematically reported.

Preliminary Analyses

The final sample consisted of 426 valid responses. Data screening was conducted on an initial dataset of 490 submissions. Responses were removed due to incompleteness (n=52), failure of embedded attention checks (n=9), and straight–line or contradictory response patterns (n=3), yielding a final sample of 426. The handling of minimal missing data (<0.1%) was addressed through mean substitution. Normality assessments indicated that the skewness (range: –0.89 to –0.32) and kurtosis (range: –0.71 to 0.58) values for all primary constructs fell within the acceptable thresholds of ±2, supporting the assumption of univariate normality. A Mahalanobis distance analysis identified 12 multivariate outliers ($p < .001$); however, excluding them did not alter the significance of the primary results, so they were retained in the final analysis to preserve statistical power.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) and Corrected Item–Total Correlation (CITC). As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's α coefficients for all constructs were well above the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating excellent internal consistency: SMM (α = 0.952), PV (α = 0.964), GP (α = 0.958), and PI (α = 0.922). All CITC values exceeded 0.4, confirming strong inter–item correlations. Deletion of any item would not have significantly improved the α values; therefore, all items were retained.

Table 1 Cronbach

Cronbach

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach α
Social Media Marketing	7	0.952
Perceived value	7	0.964
government policy	4	0.958
purchase intention	4	0.922

Validity was assessed through convergent and discriminant validity. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed. The model demonstrated a good fit with the data: $\chi^2/df = 2.15$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.971, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.965, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.052, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.035.

Convergent Validity: All factor loadings were significant and exceeded 0.7. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was above 0.5 (SMM: 0.75, PV: 0.78, GP: 0.82, PI: 0.74), confirming convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity: As shown in Table 2, the square root of the AVE for each construct (diagonal values) was greater than its correlations with other constructs, establishing discriminant validity.

Furthermore, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.968, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 12925.903$, $p < .001$), indicating that the data were highly suitable for factor analysis.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett inspection

KMO and Bartlett inspection

KMO sampling suitability quantity		**0.968**
Bartlett's sphericity test	Chi–square	12925.903
	Degree of Freedom	231
	Sig	0.000

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between purchase intention and SMM (r=.830, p<.01), perceived value (r=.832, p<.01), and government policy (r=.793, p<.01). These results provide initial support for the hypothesized relationships.

Table 3 Correlation analysis

Pearson

	Social media marketing	Perceived value	Government policy	Purchase intention
Social media marketing	1			
Perceived value	0.868***	1		
Government policy	0.817***	0.890***	1	
Purchase intention	0.830***	0.832***	0.793***	1

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Hypotheses Testing

Direct and Mediation Effects: Regression analysis supported H1, H2, and H3. SMM significantly predicted purchase intention (B=.872, p<.001) and perceived value (B=.868, p<.001). Perceived value also significantly predicted purchase intention (B=.492, p<.001). The mediation test (H4) confirmed that perceived value is a partial mediator, as the indirect effect was significant (indirect effect = 0.412, 95% CI [0.362, 0.465]) and the direct effect of SMM remained significant (B = 0.460, p < .001).

Table 4: Mediation effect test

Analysis results of intermediary role (*n* = 426)

	Purchase intention					Perceived value					Purchase intention				
	B	SE	*t*	*p*	***β***	*B*	SE	*t*	*p*	***β***	*B*	SE	*t*	*p*	***β***
Constant	0.320**	0.104	3.09	0.002	–	0.621***	0.085	7.336	0	–	0.015	0.101	0.149	0.882	–
Social media marketing	0.872***	0.028	30.635	0	0.83	0.837***	0.023	36.043	0	0.868	0.460***	0.053	8.746	0	0.438
Perceived value											0.492***	0.055	9.014	0	0.451
R 2	0.689					0.754					0.739				
Adjust R 2	0.688					0.753					0.738				
F	*F* (1,424) = 938.518, *p*=0.000					*F* (1,424) = 1299.133, *p*=0.000					*F* (2,423) = 598.707, *p*=0.000				

* *p*<0.05 ** *p*<0.01 *** *p*<0.001

Moderation Effect: A hierarchical regression was conducted to test H5. Model 1 included SMM as a predictor of purchase intention (B = 0.872, p < .001, Adj. R^2 = 0.689). Model 2 added government policy, which also showed a significant effect. Model 3 introduced the SMM × Government Policy interaction term, which was statistically significant (B=0.082, p<.001),

confirming that government policy positively moderates the SMM–purchase intention relationship, thus supporting H5.

Table 5: Moderation effect test

Analysis results of moderation effects (*n*=426)															
	Model 1					Model 2					Model 3				
	B	SE	*t*	*p*	*β*	*B*	SE	*t*	*p*	*β*	*B*	SE	*t*	*p*	*β*
Constant	3.383	0.027	123.672	.000***	–	3.383	0.026	132.269	.000***	–	3.321	0.029	114.048	.000 ***	–
Social media marketing	0.872	0.028	30.635	.000***	0.83	0.575	0.046	12.466	.000***	0.547	0.556	0.045	12.218	.000 ***	0.529
Government policy						0.363	0.046	7.874	.000***	0.346	0.405	0.046	8.75	.000 ***	0.387
Social media marketing * Government policy											0.082	0.02	4.179	.000***	0.108
R 2	0.689					0.729					0.739				
Adjust R 2	0.688					0.727					0.738				
F	*F* (1,424) = 938.518, *p* = 0.000					*F* (2,423) = 567.766, *p* = 0.000					*F* (3,422) = 399.064, *p* = 0.000				
△*R* 2	0.689					0.04					0.011				
△*F*	*F* (1,424) = 938.518, *p* = 0.000					*F* (1,423) = 61.998, *p* = 0.000					*F* (1,422) = 17.463, *p* = 0.000				
PS: Dependent variable = purchase intention															

* *p*<0.05 ** *p*<0.01 *** *p*<0.001

In summary, all five proposed hypotheses were supported by the empirical data.

Discussions

This study confirms that social media marketing (SMM) exerts a substantial direct effect on purchase intention (H1), consistent with existing digital marketing literature. In Henan's PEV market, strategic SMM activities—such as brand promotion and user engagement—prove effective in shaping consumer demand.

Perceived value functions as a partial mediator in this relationship. SMM significantly enhances perceived value (H2), which in turn positively affects purchase intention (H3). The partial mediation (H4) suggests that SMM not only directly influences consumers but also works through multidimensional value perceptions (functional, emotional, and social), indicating that additional psychological mechanisms may also be involved.

A key finding is the positive moderating role of government policy (H5). Supportive policies—such as subsidies and infrastructure development—strengthen the effect of SMM on purchase intention, likely by reducing financial and performance risks, thereby enhancing consumer response to marketing stimuli.

Conclusion

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study: (1) addresses a regional research gap by focusing on Henan; (2) validates the mediating role of perceived value within the SOR framework; and (3) confirms the synergistic moderating effect of government policy, enriching behavior models for sustainable technology adoption.

Practically, it is recommended that:

1. Marketers tailor SMM content to emphasize value dimensions relevant to provincial consumers.

2. Policymakers and marketers integrate clear policy information into SMM campaigns.

3. Platforms develop verified content hubs combining brand information, user reviews, and policy updates.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations include the cross-sectional design and the snowball sampling method. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs, incorporate behavioral data, and test additional mediators (e.g., trust) or moderators (e.g., consumer knowledge). Replication in other provincial markets is also recommended.

Suggestion

For Marketers: Expand and tailor social media marketing content to emphasize the specific value propositions (cost savings, environmental benefits, social status) relevant to Henan's young, price-sensitive demographics. Leverage local influencers and user-generated content on platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu to build authenticity and trust.

For Policymakers and Marketers: Create synergistic campaigns that explicitly integrate government policy information (e.g., subsidy details, charging station maps) into social media marketing efforts. This will leverage the confirmed moderating effect to make marketing more effective and policies more salient.

For Platform Operators and Marketers: Optimize social media platform features for the PEV sector. This could include developing integrated content hubs that combine brand information, user reviews, and verified policy updates. Implementing verification mechanisms for technical claims can further enhance the credibility of content.

New Knowledge

This research establishes an integrated framework linking SMM, perceived value, and government policy, with three main contributions:

1. It extends PEV behavioral research to Henan, demonstrating the generalizability of SMM effects beyond tier–one cities.

2. It empirically validates perceived value as a partial mediator within the SOR model.

3. It confirms policy's moderating role, introducing a "policy–marketing synergy" perspective that bridges marketing and policy studies in sustainable consumption.

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