

Mediating Role of Brand Attitude and Trust in Social Media Advertising

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63345/ijrhrs.net.v12.i1.1>

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ABSTRACT

Social media advertising has emerged as a dominant force in shaping consumer behavior and brand engagement. However, the effectiveness of such advertising does not solely depend on exposure or frequency. Psychological factors, such as brand attitude and brand trust, act as powerful mediators in determining how consumers interpret and respond to advertising stimuli on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This study explores the mediating roles of brand attitude and brand trust between social media advertising and consumer purchase intention. Drawing on theoretical models like the Hierarchy of Effects and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the paper synthesizes prior literature to build a conceptual framework that underscores these mediating constructs. Empirical data from structured surveys reveal that favorable brand attitudes and strong trust significantly enhance the impact of social media advertising on consumer behavior. The study concludes with strategic insights for marketers aiming to optimize advertising effectiveness through trust-building and attitude-enhancement strategies.

KEYWORDS

Social media advertising, brand attitude, brand trust, consumer behavior, purchase intention, mediation effect

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has revolutionized the dynamics of marketing communication. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter (now X), and YouTube have become not only channels for interpersonal interactions but also powerful vehicles for digital advertising. Social media advertising (SMA) allows brands to target consumers more precisely than traditional media, with personalized messages, engaging formats, and interactive elements. Yet, despite its vast potential, the effectiveness of SMA varies significantly based on psychological and behavioral variables. One of the most critical areas of academic and professional inquiry lies in understanding the **mediating variables** that bridge advertising exposure and consumer response.

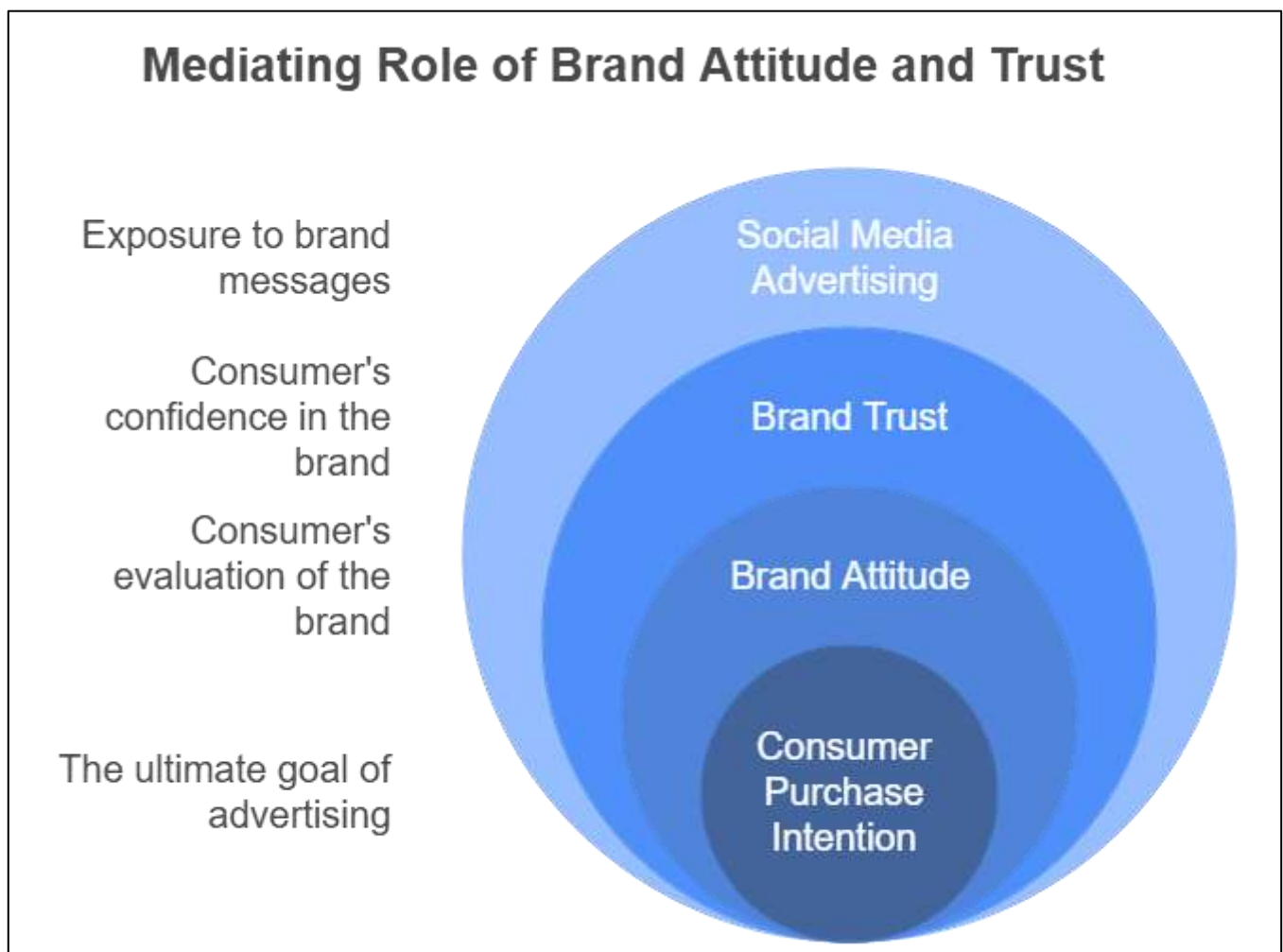


Figure 1: Mediating Role of Brand Attitude and Trust

Among these variables, **brand attitude** and **brand trust** have emerged as crucial psychological states that influence how individuals internalize and act upon advertising content. Brand attitude refers to a consumer's overall evaluative judgment of a brand, shaped by cognitive beliefs and emotional feelings. Trust, on the other hand, represents the consumer's willingness to rely on the brand's integrity, competence, and goodwill in uncertain conditions.

This research focuses on examining the **mediating roles of brand attitude and trust** in the context of social media advertising. Specifically, it investigates whether favorable brand attitudes and heightened trust levels translate into stronger purchase intentions and positive behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, this study bridges the gap between academic theory and practical marketing strategies by identifying which dimensions of SMA most effectively foster trust and favorable attitudes.

The study's significance lies in its relevance to a rapidly digitizing world where traditional advertising models are losing their edge. Understanding the psychological pathways through which SMA influences consumer behavior can inform the development of more persuasive and credible brand communication strategies. By exploring mediation effects, the research contributes to a nuanced understanding of consumer-brand relationships in digital spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of research on social media advertising has expanded considerably in the past decade, yet much of it has focused on surface-level metrics such as engagement rates, impressions, and click-throughs. This section delves into more nuanced psychological constructs and the theoretical frameworks that underpin the mediation process involving brand attitude and trust.

2.1 Social Media Advertising and Consumer Behavior

Social media advertising has evolved from static banner ads to dynamic, algorithm-driven content tailored to individual users. Research by Voorveld et al. emphasized the **interactive nature of SMA**, highlighting that such interactivity increases consumer engagement. However, engagement alone does not guarantee consumer conversion or loyalty. Several studies have suggested that **consumer behavioral outcomes are contingent upon psychological mediators**, rather than direct exposure to advertisements.

2.2 Brand Attitude: Definition and Determinants

Brand attitude is defined as a learned predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to a brand (Mitchell & Olson). It comprises **cognitive (belief-based)** and **affective (emotion-based)** components. In the digital environment, brand attitude is shaped by several factors, including ad content quality, visual aesthetics, message credibility, and interactivity. According to MacKenzie et al., a positive brand attitude enhances consumer willingness to consider or try the brand, even in the absence of strong product features.

Social media offers a unique canvas for shaping brand attitudes due to its multimedia capabilities and interactive feedback mechanisms. Studies have shown that **brands that adopt a more human-like tone** and actively respond to consumer queries are perceived more favorably, fostering stronger emotional connections.

2.3 Brand Trust as a Mediator

Brand trust is central to enduring consumer-brand relationships. It encompasses beliefs that the brand will act in the consumer's best interest and that it is competent, reliable, and ethical. Research by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán suggested that brand trust enhances both **perceived value** and **consumer loyalty**. In the context of social media, trust becomes even more critical due to the **digital anonymity and information overload** consumers face.

Interactive advertising on social media platforms allows consumers to see real-time reviews, testimonials, and influencer endorsements. These elements contribute to **building trust** if the communication is perceived as authentic. According to Pavlou and Gefen, the transparency and responsiveness of brands on social platforms are key trust-building mechanisms.

2.4 Mediation Effects in Advertising

A mediator explains how or why an independent variable affects a dependent variable. In SMA, the advertising message (independent variable) may not directly influence purchase intention (dependent variable) but may do so via **intermediate psychological states** like attitude and trust. Baron and Kenny's classic mediation model has often been used in this context.

Several empirical studies have employed **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)** and **path analysis** to establish that brand attitude and trust significantly mediate the relationship between SMA and behavioral outcomes. For instance, a study by Ha and Im found that the **entertainment and informativeness of social media ads** improved brand attitude, which in turn positively influenced purchase intention.

2.5 Interplay Between Brand Attitude and Trust

While both constructs act as mediators, they are not independent of each other. Trust can influence attitude and vice versa. Some scholars argue that trust acts as a precursor to attitude in digital contexts, especially when product information is limited. Others maintain that a favorable brand attitude enhances the consumer's readiness to trust the brand, especially in high-involvement purchases.

2.6 Theoretical Foundations

The **Hierarchy of Effects Model** proposes a sequential model of advertising effectiveness—starting from awareness, to attitude formation, and finally to behavioral intention. This model supports the role of attitude and trust as essential steps in consumer decision-making. Similarly, the **Theory of Reasoned Action** and

Theory of Planned Behavior posit that attitudes and subjective norms are predictive of behavioral intentions, thus reinforcing their role as mediators.

2.7 Research Gap

While existing studies have established the importance of brand attitude and trust, there is limited research that simultaneously investigates **both constructs as mediators** in the SMA context. Moreover, previous studies have focused predominantly on one platform or one demographic, limiting the generalizability of findings. This study aims to fill these gaps by analyzing how both attitude and trust mediate the effect of SMA on purchase intention across diverse user groups and platforms.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a **quantitative cross-sectional research design**, focusing on the mediating roles of brand attitude and trust in the relationship between social media advertising and purchase intention. The primary objective was to examine causal relationships using validated scales and structural equation modeling (SEM).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of **active social media users aged 18–45 years**, who had been exposed to branded content or advertisements within the past 3 months. The study adopted a **non-probability purposive sampling method**, ensuring the participants were familiar with social media advertising and had some form of interaction with brands on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube.

A total of **450 survey responses** were collected. After eliminating incomplete or inconsistent responses, a final sample size of **410 valid responses** was used for analysis.

3.3 Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was developed comprising **five-point Likert scale items**. The instrument was divided into the following sections:

- **Social Media Advertising Experience (SMAE):** Adapted from existing advertising perception scales focusing on informativeness, entertainment, and credibility.
- **Brand Attitude (BA):** Items adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz's scale measuring cognitive and affective brand perception.

- **Brand Trust (BT):** Derived from Delgado-Ballester's trust scale, measuring reliability, integrity, and brand predictability.
- **Purchase Intention (PI):** Based on Dodds et al.'s scale capturing intention to buy, willingness to recommend, and repeat purchase behavior.

Each construct demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$) and composite reliability (> 0.85), ensuring internal consistency.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a period of four weeks through **online surveys** using platforms such as Google Forms and SurveyMonkey. Links were distributed via WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram communities with informed consent obtained digitally.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data was analyzed using **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)** via SmartPLS software. The analysis followed two stages:

1. **Measurement model validation** (to assess reliability and validity of constructs).
2. **Structural model evaluation** (to test direct and mediated relationships).

Bootstrapping with 5000 samples was used to assess the **significance of path coefficients**, and the mediation analysis followed Baron and Kenny's procedure as well as bootstrapping methods for indirect effects.

RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Among 410 participants, 58% were female and 42% male. The majority (67%) were in the age group of 21–30 years. Around 85% of respondents reported interacting with brand pages or ads on Instagram and Facebook at least once a week.

4.2 Measurement Model Results

The **Convergent Validity** was confirmed as all item loadings were above 0.70. **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)** values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media Ad Exp	0.843	0.882	0.582

Brand Attitude	0.864	0.900	0.608
Brand Trust	0.872	0.910	0.624
Purchase Intention	0.853	0.891	0.593

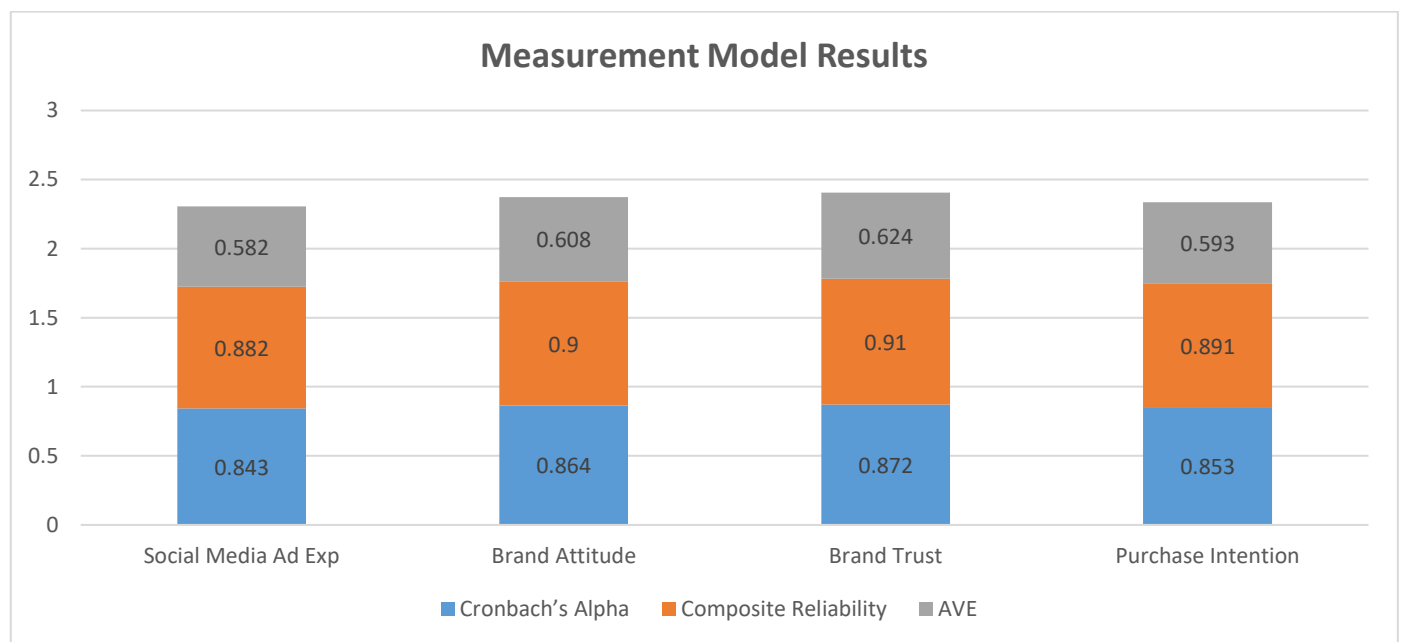


Chart: Measurement Model Results

Discriminant Validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio, where all HTMT values were below the 0.85 threshold.

4.3 Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

The structural model revealed the following path coefficients:

- **SMA → Brand Attitude:** $\beta = 0.51, p < 0.001$
- **SMA → Brand Trust:** $\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$
- **Brand Attitude → Purchase Intention:** $\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$
- **Brand Trust → Purchase Intention:** $\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$
- **SMA → Purchase Intention (direct):** $\beta = 0.23, p < 0.01$

The **direct effect of SMA on PI** was weaker compared to the **indirect paths via Brand Attitude and Trust**, suggesting partial mediation.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Using **bootstrapped indirect effects**, the following mediation effects were confirmed:

- SMA → Brand Attitude → Purchase Intention: $\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$
- SMA → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention: $\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$

Both **brand attitude and brand trust significantly mediated** the relationship between social media advertising and purchase intention. Together, these constructs explained **68.4% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.684$)**.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the **central mediating role of brand attitude and trust** in the effectiveness of social media advertising. While the mere exposure to ads can have a direct influence on purchase intentions, the magnitude of this effect is considerably **amplified** when consumers develop a **favorable attitude and trust** toward the brand.

Brand attitude acts as an emotional and cognitive evaluation of the brand, shaped by the creativity, relevance, and informativeness of social media content. Trust, meanwhile, emerges through consistent messaging, transparency, peer reviews, and responsiveness to customer queries. Together, these constructs convert passive exposure into active intent.

This research contributes to theory by validating **dual mediation** within the context of digital advertising and aligns with models such as the **Hierarchy of Effects** and the **Theory of Planned Behavior**. From a managerial standpoint, it provides a roadmap for advertisers to move beyond vanity metrics and focus on building relational capital with consumers.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 Scope of the Study

This study is grounded in the intersection of **consumer psychology** and **digital marketing**, particularly focusing on the behavioral mechanisms influenced by social media advertising. It explores two key mediating constructs—brand attitude and brand trust—that explain how consumers progress from **ad exposure** to **purchase intention**. The research:

- Covers a wide demographic of **social media users aged 18–45**, with active exposure to platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.
- Employs **validated scales and SEM-based analysis**, allowing precise measurement of latent constructs and their interrelationships.

- Contributes to **marketing theory** by reinforcing the dual mediation model in digital contexts, and to **practice** by guiding brand managers on optimizing advertising content.
- Encourages advertisers to focus on **psychological value-building metrics** (attitude and trust), not just click-based or engagement-based indicators.

Additionally, the research bridges gaps in existing literature by combining both **brand attitude and brand trust** as mediators—rather than analyzing them in isolation—as is often done in fragmented studies.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Despite its comprehensive framework, the study has certain limitations:

- **Cross-sectional nature:** The research captures perceptions at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into evolving brand attitudes and trust.
- **Self-reported bias:** The study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability or recall bias.
- **Platform focus:** While the study covers major platforms like Instagram and Facebook, it does not differentiate the impact of specific platform features (e.g., Stories vs. Reels vs. Posts).
- **Cultural and geographical context:** The data is limited to respondents from a single geographic region, and hence generalizability to global contexts is constrained.
- **Omission of influencer role:** Though social media influencers contribute significantly to trust-building, the current model does not isolate their specific impact as a variable.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating **longitudinal designs**, **platform-specific variables**, and **cultural dimensions**, and by exploring the **moderating role of influencers** and **user-generated content**.

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