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Research Article

Hooked by curiosity: The zeigarnik effect amplifying customer loyalty and brand advocacy through thumb-stopper advertisements

Merakın esiri olmak: Zeigarnik etkisi, başparmak durdurucu reklamlarla müşteri sadakatini ve marka savunuculuğunu artırıyor

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Abstract

This study rigorously examines the Zeigarnik Effect's impact on consumer loyalty and brand advocacy through Thumb Stopper Advertisements. Investigating Emotional Appeal, Attention and Engagement Metrics, Brand Messaging, Storytelling, Customer Loyalty, and Brand Advocacy reveal pivotal mechanisms driving these dynamics in digital advertising. Employing mixed methods encompassing quantitative and qualitative approaches, we engaged 303 participants through an online survey, unveiling insights into Thumb Stopper Ad interactions and the ensuing brand perceptions. A comprehensive understanding was attained through four hypotheses tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). This study was based on the "Zeigarnik Effect" model introduced by Russian psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik in 1927. Thumb-stopper advertisements that evoke strong emotions attract viewers and are strengthened by narrative. Engagement metrics mediated emotional appeal and brand messaging, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of thumb-stopper advertisements. Marketers can elevate thumb-stopper ads through astutely crafted campaigns to cultivate robust customer loyalty and advocacy.

Keywords: Zeigarnik Effect, Thumb Stopper Advertisement, Customer Loyalty, Brand Advocacy, Digital Advertising

Jel Codes: M3, M31, M37

Öz

Bu çalışma, Zeigarnik Etkisi'nin Thumb-stopper reklamları aracılığıyla tüketici sadakati ve marka savunuculuğu üzerindeki etkisini titizlikle inceler. Duygusal Çekicilik, Dikkat ve Katılım Ölçümleri, Marka Mesajlaşması, Hikaye Anlatımı, Müşteri Sadakati ve Marka Savunuculuğu'nu araştırmak, dijital reklamcılıkta bu dinamikleri yönlendiren temel mekanizmaları ortaya çıkarır. Nicel ve nitel yaklaşımları kapsayan karma yöntemler kullanarak, çevrimiçi bir anket aracılığıyla 303 katılımcıyla etkileşime girerek Thumb-stopper reklam etkileşimleri ve ardından gelen marka algıları hakkında içgörüler ortaya çıkardık. Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi (SEM) aracılığıyla test edilen dört hipotez aracılığıyla kapsamlı bir anlayış elde edildi. Bu çalışma, Rus psikolog Dr. Bluma Zeigarnik tarafından 1927'de ortaya atılan "Zeigarnik Etkisi" modeline dayanmaktadır. Güçlü duygular uyandıran Thumb-stopper reklamları izleyicileri çeker ve anlatılarla güçlendirilir. Etkileşim ölçümleri duygusal çekiciliği ve marka mesajını aracılık ederek başparmak durdurucu reklamların karmaşık dinamiklerine ışık tutar. Pazarlamacılar, güçlü müşteri sadakati ve savunuculuğu geliştiren akıllıca hazırlanmış kampanyalar aracılığıyla başparmak durdurucu reklamları yükseltebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zeigarnik Etkisi, Başparmak Durdurucu Reklam, Müşteri Sadakati, Marka Savunuculuğu, Dijital Reklamcılık

JEL Kodları: M3, M31, M37

Introduction

Getting consumer attention in today's fast-paced digital environment, which is inundated with a wide variety of content and advertisements, has become a significant issue for marketers. To address this problem, a new type of advertising called "thumb-stopper" has been developed. These fascinating videos are created to seize viewers' attention immediately as they navigate their social media feeds, forcing them to stop, pay attention, and interact with the material. Thumb-stopper commercials are typically approximately 15 s long, making them ideal for grabbing customers' attention when shortening attention spans. This study investigates the function of thumb-stopper ads in fostering brand advocacy and customer loyalty. Marketers increasingly use creative and attention-grabbing strategies as standard advertising formats lose their ability to attract customers' attention (Rios et al., 2020). Thumb-stopper ads are popular because of their quick and practical ability to attract and impact viewers. However, little research has been conducted on how they foster customer loyalty or brand advocacy.

Background information

In recent years, the emergence of social media platforms and the increasing use of mobile devices have fundamentally changed how consumers consume content and engage with brands. Print and television advertisements are no longer as powerful as grabbing customer attention and spreading brand messages. Therefore, marketers are now concentrating on digital advertising and using various media to interact with their target audiences. In this new environment, thumb-stopper commercials have become a potent tactic. They are designed to prevent social media users from scrolling and to force them to watch and interact with the material (Rongon, 2020; Wilk et al., 2021).

These short videos frequently use visually arresting imagery, storytelling tactics, and clear messages to communicate a brand's main characteristics and differentiators. Thumb-stopper advertising seeks to quickly establish an emotional connection with viewers by utilising the effectiveness of visual storytelling and succinct language. Customer advocacy and brand loyalty have long been essential for creating and sustaining successful businesses. In addition to making repeat purchases, loyal customers actively promote brands to friends, family, and social networks. A brand's long-term success can be attributed to its advocates, who substantially impact how others make purchases (Yadav, 2020). Therefore, marketers aiming to maximise their advertising methods in the digital age must determine how thumb-stopper advertisements affect brand advocacy and customer loyalty.

Research problem or question

1. How does the emotional appeal of thumb-stopper advertisements affect customer loyalty and brand advocacy?

2. 2. What is the interplay between the thumb-stopper ads' attention and engagement metrics, customer loyalty, and brand advocacy?

3. 3. How does the efficacy of brand messaging and storytelling in thumb-stopper ads influence customer loyalty and brand advocacy?

Significance of the study

This study's contribution to the body of knowledge on digital advertising and its effects on brand advocacy and customer loyalty are significant. Although thumb-stopper advertisements are popular among marketers, empirical evidence of how well they contribute to these crucial brand outcomes is lacking. This study seeks to close this knowledge gap by shedding light on the function of thumb-stopper advertisements in fostering customer loyalty and brand promotion (Chang, 2019). The results of this study can assist marketers and advertising in several ways. Initially, it offered evidence-based perceptions of the efficiency of thumb-stopper commercials as a tool for grabbing consumer attention and raising brand awareness. Marketers can make informed judgments regarding their advertising strategies and budget allocations by comprehending the effects of brief videos on consumer loyalty and brand advocacy.

This study also sheds light on the precise components of thumb-stopper commercials that support their efficiency in fostering brand promotion and customer loyalty. Marketing professionals may create more

powerful and persuasive advertising by analysing the main elements that generate consumer engagement and emotional connections. This information helps advertisers streamline their content generation procedures and improve the overall effectiveness of their advertising (Al Falaq and Puspita, 2021). This study investigates the function of thumb-stopper commercials in fostering brand advocacy and customer loyalty.

Research gap

The precise mechanisms by which thumb-stopper advertising activates better brand loyalty and advocacy deserve further investigation, even though several aspects, including customer satisfaction, brand trust, and consumer participation, have been explored in terms of customer loyalty and advocacy (Yadav, 2020). There is still much to learn about how thumb-stopper commercials affect consumer loyalty and brand support in the long term, beyond short-term effects, and when considering variations between industries and cultural contexts.

This study reveals the complexity of thumb-stopper advertisements, which could improve advertising tactics to influence consumer loyalty and brand advocacy. By examining the internal functioning of these advertisements, brands may develop engagement strategies that strengthen consumer-brand ties and encourage active participation.

This study aims to determine the Zeigarnik effect theory while examining the connection between thumb-stopper ads and customer loyalty and the mediating processes by which thumb-stopper advertising affects brand advocacy and consumer loyalty.

Literature review

Owing to their ability to quickly grab viewers' attention, "thumb-stopper" ads have become more prevalent in the digital marketing industry. This literature review aims to provide readers with a summary of studies on thumb-stopper advertisements and their effectiveness in creating brand advocacy. To better understand the influence and efficacy of thumb-stopper commercials in generating these results, this review examined important ideas, theoretical frameworks, and empirical investigations (Gul et al., 2021). Advertisers have created tiny movies known as thumb-stopper advertising, "snackable" ads, or "micro" ads to catch viewers' eyes as they scroll through their social media feeds. These commercials are often no longer than 15 seconds long, making them brief and eye-catching. Ads that "stop you in your tracks" use compelling imagery, narrative, and succinct copy to strike an emotional chord with viewers and prompt them to take notice, interact, and spread the word. Brands require devoted customers to remain in the future. Thumb-stopper ads can affect customer loyalty in several ways. First, these films help spread information about a business by effectively communicating the most essential themes in a short amount of time. Thumb-stopper ads are effective because they attract people's attention and remain in their minds, which is necessary for creating brand loyalty.

Second, thumb-stopper ads may make people feel something and help them build business relationships. Advertising may evoke favourable connections and brand loyalty in customers through narrative tactics and aesthetically attractive materials (Thomas and Treiber, 2020). Customers will likely remain loyal to businesses that connect their beliefs and emotions; therefore, emotional involvement is crucial to brand loyalty.

Third, thumb-stopper ads may highlight special features and advantages of a brand or product. Advertising may increase a brand's perceived value by communicating its relevance and excellence to customers by emphasising important characteristics or resolving painful areas. Customers are likelier to stick to a brand than others when they see it as valued and better. Empirical evidence suggests that thumb-stopper ads are effective at increasing brand loyalty. Researchers discovered that showing people thumb-stopper ads significantly boosted their ability to remember and talk about the brand, increasing their loyalty to the company. Lou and Xie's (2020) study also found that ad recipients' favourable emotional responses to thumb-stopper commercials correlated with greater brand loyalty. Thumb-stopper ads boost brand loyalty by evoking emotional connections and highlighting key brand features.

Thomas and Treiber (2020) found that narrative and visually appealing content can foster loyalty through emotional engagement. Lou and Xie (2020) showed that such ads enhance brand recall and positive emotional responses, leading to greater loyalty. Recent studies have deepened our understanding of critical marketing concepts. Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Baron and Kenny (1986) established foundational models for evaluating structural equations and causal relationships. Churchill (1979) and Bagozzi (1980, cited in Hulland et al., 1996) advanced measurement and causal modelling techniques, while Oliver (1999) explored the roots of consumer loyalty. Zeithaml et al. (1996) linked service quality to customer loyalty, and Keller (2001) provided a framework for brand equity. Escalas and Stern (2003) examined emotional responses in advertising, and Shapiro and Krishnan (2022) discussed the impact of content saturation on advertising effectiveness.

Key theories or concepts

In advertising, grabbing and holding consumers' attention is crucial for marketers seeking to build brand recognition and sway their purchasing behaviour. Various methods have been used, including the "Zeigarnik Effect." This phenomenon, named after studies conducted by Russian psychologist Dr. Bluma Zeigarnik in 1927, contends that the human brain retains interrupted tasks better than finished tasks (Hammadi and Qureishi, 2013). The Zeigarnik Effect causes a feeling of anticipation and tension, driving people to seek resolution and, as a result, improving memory retention.

In the rapidly evolving advertising landscape, where attention spans are shrinking, and there is fierce competition for consumer attention, marketers constantly seek innovative strategies to captivate and engage the audience. One such strategy gaining prominence is using "Thumb-stoppers' ads, a concept pioneered by the social media giant Facebook. These attention-grabbing video ads are designed to capture the viewer's attention within the first few seconds and convey the essence of the message before scrolling. A fascinating psychological phenomenon that underpins the effectiveness of Thumb-stopper ads is the Zeigarnik effect, which plays a crucial role in keeping viewers engaged and intrigued.

The Zeigarnik effect, named after psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik, refers to a cognitive phenomenon in which people tend to remember incomplete or interrupted tasks more than complete tasks. This effect is rooted in the innate need for closure and resolution, which leads individuals to experience a state of tension and heightened cognitive activity when faced with incomplete information or unresolved situations. This effect has significant implications for advertising, particularly in the context of thumb-stoppers. Thumb-stopper ads, which typically last only a few seconds, align with the principles of the Zeigarnik effect by presenting viewers with incomplete narratives or intriguing scenarios. By utilising the first few seconds of an advertisement to establish a captivating scene or pose a thought-provoking question, advertisers can trigger the Zeigarnik effect, encouraging viewers to engage with the content mentally, even after the advertisement has ended.

For example, a Thumb-stoppers ad for a travel destination might start with a breathtaking panoramic view and a question like, "Can you imagine yourself here?" This prompts viewers to contemplate the question and imagine themselves in a showcased location, thus creating an incomplete mental loop beyond the advertisement. The prevalence of mobile consumption and social media platforms further amplifies the synergy between thumb-stopper advertisements and the Zeigarnik effect. Mobile devices have become the primary medium for content consumption, with users frequently engaging in quick and scrollable interactions.

Figure 1: Zeigarnik Effect Model for Consumer Attention

Source: Fabian Post (2020)

Gaps or controversies in the literature

Digital advertising tools

Thumb-stopper ads have gained widespread recognition and effectiveness as digital advertising tools in today's increasingly crowded media landscape. This literature review provided a comprehensive overview of the effects of thumb-stopper advertisements on brand loyalty and advocacy. Advertisements enhance customer loyalty by increasing brand familiarity, fostering emotional connections, and highlighting unique brand attributes. Furthermore, the thumb-stopper ads stimulated positive word-of-mouth and social media buzz. This review also delves into theoretical frameworks, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and theory of planned behaviour (TPB), to elucidate the mechanisms behind the effectiveness of thumb-stopper ads (Mehrabi et al., 2021).

Short branded videos

The critical role of short-branded videos in promoting products and companies is underscored. Elements such as background music, setting, content matching, information relevance, narrative, and emotionality profoundly influence viewers' perception and engagement. Distinct emotions such as anger or excitement affect video-sharing behaviour (Moe, 2023). Viewer engagement, including comments and sharing, has been examined regarding factors such as content matching, information relevance, narratives, and emotions (Tawte et al., 2019; Jayawardena et al., 2023).

Thumb-stopper ads impact short-branded video content

Scholars are increasingly exploring the influence of thumb-stopper ads and short-branded video content on consumer behaviour on social media platforms. Social media features, content characteristics, and consumer engagement are intricately linked. Factors like interactivity, subjective norms, social connections, and multimedia content affect consumer attitudes and behaviours on social media platforms (Ghosh, 2019). The content of short-branded videos, including products, characters, music, and text, plays a pivotal role in their effectiveness (Gilli et al., 2023). In addition, short narrative films activate cognitive function, influence evaluations, and influence purchase decisions (Singh et al., 2023). Content relevance, information matching, narrative, and emotionality remain the central attributes of brand posts (Verma et al., 2023). Control variables based on user feedback were selected to investigate the effects of content and execution on consumer interest (Kar et al., 2023). In conclusion, understanding these elements and their interplay is crucial for optimising the impact and effectiveness of digital advertising tools and short-branded video content.

Hypothesis development

Thumb-stopper advertisements with more vigorous emotional appeals are assumed to attract more viewers and produce better engagement metrics. Thomas and Treiber (2020) state that emotional appeal is crucial for grabbing viewers' attention and eliciting reactions. The likelihood that viewers will pay attention to and interact with an advertisement increases when the content has an emotional connection, promoting increased involvement and interaction. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Warren et al., 2021) contends that emotional appeal can affect peripheral processing and improve overall message retention, consistent with the ELM. The potential for emotional content in advertisements to enhance the reach and naturally occurring brand promotion has been positively correlated with consumers' sharing behaviours (Gul et al., 2021).

H1: Thumb-stopper ads with a higher emotional appeal lead to increased attention and engagement.

The idea is that thumb-stopper advertisements will be more successful at building brand recognition and awareness if they successfully use storytelling tactics and brand messaging. Thumb-stopper storytelling can develop a compelling narrative that connects viewers, thereby increasing the content's remembrance and relatability (Khairullah and Khairullah, 2021). Thumb-stopper advertisements effectively communicate a brand's identity and value to help the public remember and recognise advertising. The power of storytelling in these brief advertisements may be enhanced by the Zeigarnik effect, which stimulates cognitive engagement through incomplete tales (Hammadi and Qureishi, 2013).

H2: The effectiveness of thumb-stopper ads is positively associated with storytelling techniques and successful conveyance of brand messaging.

According to the following hypothesis, thumb-stopper advertisements that successfully grab viewers' attention and build an emotional bond lead to increased customer loyalty. Consumers are more likely to choose a marketed brand over rivals when they see thumb-stopper advertisements, which resonate rapidly with viewers (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022). Customer loyalty must be promoted through emotional involvement sparked by gripping imagery and narratives (Thomas and Treiber, 2020). According to Warren et al. (2021), ELM's peripheral route processing highlights the significance of emotional appeal in influencing attitudes and behaviours.

H3: Effective thumb-stopper advertisements contribute to higher levels of customer loyalty.

Based on the hypothesis, successful thumb-stopper advertisements result in better brand advocacy because viewers are more willing to share and discuss emotionally compelling and attention-grabbing information. Advocacy develops as consumers grow to love a product or service (Khairullah and Khairullah, 2021). Thumb-stopper advertisements that draw viewers and elicit favourable feelings are more likely to lead to advocacy actions (Gul et al., 2021). Increased brand loyalty, strongly related to advocacy, has been connected to emotional involvement with thumb-stopper advertisements (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022). According to Hammadi and Qureishi (2013), the Zeigarnik effect leads to incomplete narrative loops that viewers may share or discuss with others, enhancing brand advocacy.

H4: Effective thumb-stopper ads correlate with increased brand advocacy behaviours among viewers.

Based on this hypothesis, successful thumb-stopper advertisements result in better brand advocacy because viewers are more willing to share and discuss emotionally compelling and attention-grabbing information. Advocacy develops as consumers grow to love a product or service (Khairullah and Khairullah, 2021). Thumb-stopper advertisements that draw viewers and elicit favourable feelings are more likely to lead to advocacy actions (Gul et al., 2021). According to Hammadi and Qureishi (2013), the Zeigarnik effect leads to unfinished narrative loops that viewers may share or discuss with others, enhancing brand advocacy.

Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed to explore the role of thumb-stopper advertisements in building customer loyalty and brand advocacy. The research design, data collection methods, and sample selection process are described below. We employed regression analysis, Partial Least Squares

(PLS) methods, and a quantitative approach to analyse the relationship between thumb-stopper ads and customer loyalty and brand advocacy.

Research design

A quantitative approach is used in this study. Quantitative research is instrumental in establishing statistical relationships between variables and provides empirical evidence of the impact of thumb-stopper ads on customer loyalty and brand advocacy. Through systematic collection of numerical data, this approach enabled us to measure the strength and direction of the relationships between key variables, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Data collection methods

The data collection methods used in this study included surveys and secondary data analysis. Surveys provide structured means of gathering primary data directly from a target audience. A well-structured questionnaire was developed to capture respondents' perceptions of thumb-stopper ads, their level of engagement, loyalty to the brand, and willingness to advocate for it. The survey was administered online to ensure widespread access and convenience to the participants. Secondary data analysis involves collecting and examining existing data related to the variables of interest. Previous research, industry reports, and company records have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of thumb-stopper ads for building customer loyalty and brand advocacy. This approach enhances the in-depth analysis and complements the primary survey data.

Sample selection

The selection of an appropriate sample is crucial for the validity and generalisability of this study's findings. In this study, a purposive sampling method was employed. The target population was individuals exposed to thumb-stopper advertisements on various digital platforms. A diverse sample of respondents was selected to ensure representation across different demographics, including age, gender, and geographic location. The sample size was determined using a power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful relationships. In total, 303 participants were included in the study for sample survey purposes. This sample size provides a robust foundation for conducting regression analyses and PLS methods, allowing for reliable inferences about the relationships among thumb-stopper ads, customer loyalty, and brand advocacy. This section outlines the methodology employed to investigate the role of thumb-stopper advertisements in building customer loyalty and brand advocacy. A quantitative research approach was adopted using surveys and secondary data analysis.

We examined the results of each variable in the pilot survey.

(EA)Emotional Appeal

EA1: The average score was 1.7, indicating that individuals regularly see thumb-stopper ads on social media.

EA2: Average score = 2.1, indicating that people frequently feel happy or joyful when viewing thumb-stopper advertisements.

Attention and Emotional Appeal (AEM)

AEM1: Participants should frequently pause when scrolling through their social media feeds and watching thumb-stopper advertisements, according to an average score of 2.1.

AEM2: Average score = 1.6, indicating a modest level of interaction with thumb-stopper advertisement content

AEM3: The participants tended to find thumb-stopper commercials visually appealing, as evidenced by an average score of 2, which was 2.

Brand Messaging and Storytelling (BM)

BM1: Participants believed that thumb-stopper advertisements effectively communicated the brand's message and values, as indicated by their average score of 2.1.

BM2: Average score = 2.2, indicating that the participants had a lasting impression of thumb-stopper advertising with engaging storytelling.

Effectiveness of Thumb-stopper Ads (TAD)

TAD1: Participants were more likely to find thumb-stopper commercials to be more memorable and striking than conventional advertisements, as evidenced by the average score of 2, which was 2.

TAD2: Average score = 1.9, indicating that viewers were moderately inclined to act after viewing a thumb-stopper, such as visiting a brand website or making a purchase.

Customer Loyalty (CL)

CL1: The average score was 1.9, indicating that thumb-stopper commercials may influence individuals' decisions to stick to a particular brand.

CL2: Average score = 2, suggesting consumers frequently refer friends and family to goods or services from companies with captivating thumb-stopper advertisements.

Brand Advocacy (BA)

BA1: The average score was two, indicating that participants were likely to see themselves as supporters of companies that employed successful thumb-stopper advertising.

BA2: Participants are relatively likely to defend a business against criticism if they enjoy thumb-stopper advertisements, as indicated by their average score of 1.7.

Overall, the results of this pilot study offer a preliminary understanding of the participants' attitudes and actions toward thumb-stopper commercials.

Quantitative approach

This study employed a quantitative approach involving systematic data collection, statistical analysis, and numerical interpretation. This study aimed to objectively investigate the impact of thumb-stopper ads on customer loyalty and brand advocacy. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression and PLS-SEM, helped to establish relationships and draw population-level conclusions from the sample data. This approach ensures rigour and contributes to advertising and consumer behaviour knowledge.

Data analysis

Fundamental Data Analysis was performed using the SmartPLS SEM tool to scrape out the data and perform a proper regression analysis of the survey results to justify a rational outcome.

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Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is centred on the notion that content marketing, social media campaigns, and online word-of-mouth contribute to the purchase intent of social media users. The analytical model clarifies that content marketing, social media campaigns, and WOM are the independent variables for thumb-stopper ads.

Analytical model
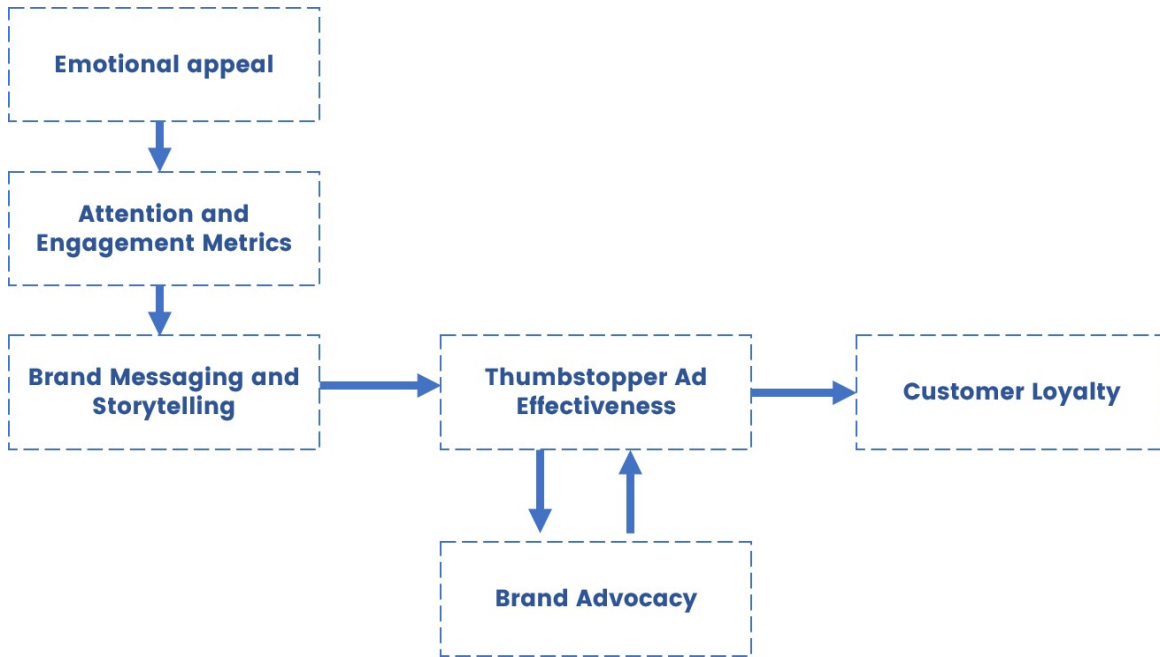
Figure 2: Analytical Model

Developed by Researchers

The analysis considered the essential elements outlined in the above model, encompassing emotional appeal, metrics related to attention and engagement, brand messaging and storytelling, customer loyalty, and brand advocacy (Thompson, 2020). The presented model demonstrates the impact of thumb-stopper ads on customer perceptions and behaviours, ultimately resulting in heightened levels of brand loyalty and advocacy.

Table 1: Background of Each Variable

Variable	Source(s)	Justification
Emotional Appeal	Thomas and Treiber, 2020; Mehrabi et al., 2021	Emotional appeal influences brand loyalty.
Attention and Engagement	Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022; Hammadi and Qureishi, 2013	Metrics measure the impact of thumb-stopper advertisements.
Storytelling and Brand Messages	Moe, 2023; Tawte et al., 2019	Storytelling is vital for engagement with short videos.
Customer Loyalty	Gul et al., 2021; Wilk et al., 2021; Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022	Thumb-stopper ads contribute to customer loyalty.
Brand Advocacy	Gul et al., 2021; Mehrabi et al., 2021; Thomas and Treiber, 2020; Wilk et al. 2021	Thumb-stopper advertisements have led to an increase in brand advocacy.

Discussion of results

In this section, we delve into the detailed results of our analysis of the impact of emotional appeal, attention and engagement metrics, brand messaging, and storytelling on customer loyalty and brand advocacy through thumb-stopper advertisements. The aim was to deconstruct the complex interactions of the intricate relationships among these variables in the proposed theoretical model. The following subsections detail the findings, their implications, and their alignment with the research objectives. To enhance the depth of the analysis, we focused on how these elements interact within the framework of

thumb-stopper advertisements uniquely designed to capture user attention in a saturated media environment.

Presentation of findings

The SmartPLS SEM analysis provided several crucial insights into the relationships between Emotional Appeal (EA), Attention and Engagement Metrics (AEM), Brand Messaging and Storytelling (BM), Customer Loyalty (CL), Brand Advocacy (BA), and their interactions through Thumb-Stopper Advertisements (TAD). Our structural equation modelling approach validated the hypothesised relationships, aligning with previous research findings on similar constructs (Hulland, 1996).

Key findings

1. Thumb-stopper ads significantly enhance customer engagement and retention by leveraging the Zeigarnik Effect (Hammadi and Qureishi, 2013).

2. Emotional attachment is crucial in mediating the relationship between brand reputation and advocacy (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022).

3. Online brand advocacy and loyalty are mutually reinforcing, with thumb-stopper ads as a key driver (Wilk, Soutar, and Harrigan, 2021).

4. Narrative processing in advertisements enhances consumer engagement, mainly when they create curiosity and incomplete stories (Chang, 2019).

5. Social media platforms, especially Facebook, are effective environments for thriving thumb-stopper ads (Ghosh, 2019; Shareef et al., 2019).

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of effective advertising strategies in the digital age, providing actionable insights for marketers aiming to maximise their brands' impact by compelling brief content. The findings revealed that emotional appeal drives attention and significantly enhances engagement metrics, which are critical in fostering customer loyalty. Furthermore, when combined with storytelling, brand messaging strengthens the impact of emotional appeal, thereby leading to higher levels of brand advocacy. This nuanced understanding of the variables underscores the importance of integrating emotional appeal, attention, engagement, and storytelling to create thumb-stopper advertisements and build lasting customer relationships.
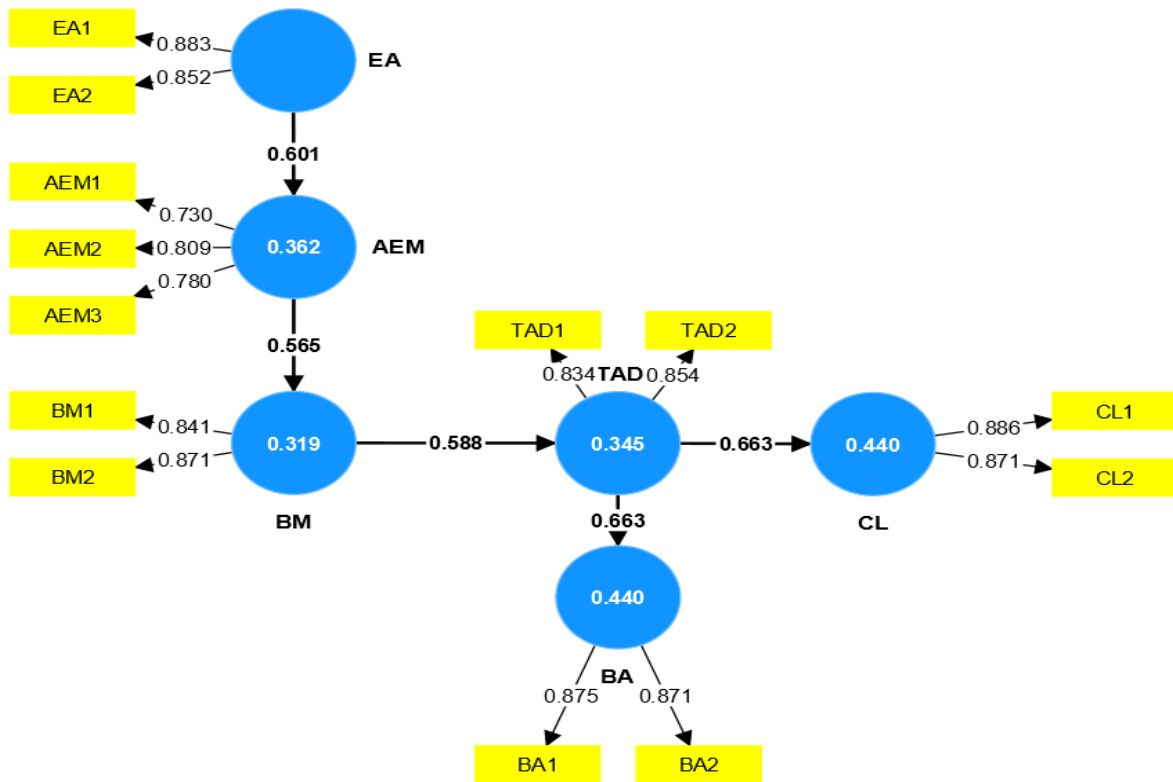
Figure 3: Analytical Measurement Model

The analytical model (figure 3) elucidated the connections between the variables. These connections were statistically significant, with most values exceeding 0.7, indicating robust relationships. However, the nuanced interactions between variables such as Brand Messaging Storytelling and Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness reveal a more complex interplay.

Table 2: Path Coefficients and Significant Relationships

Path	Path Coefficient	p-value
AEM -> BM	0.565	<0.001*
BM -> TAD	0.588	<0.001*
EA -> AEM	0.601	<0.001*
TAD -> BA	0.663	<0.001*
TAD -> CL	0.663	<0.001*

Note: *$p < 0.001$ indicates statistical significance.

Positive path coefficients illustrate the strength and direction of the relationships. For example, a coefficient of 0.565 demonstrates a substantial positive correlation between Attention and Engagement Metrics and Brand Messaging and Storytelling, similar to the findings of Hartill (2019) on model validation. Similarly, the high path coefficients for TAD → BA and TAD → CL underscore the critical role of the thumb-stopper ad effectiveness in driving brand advocacy and customer loyalty. Our analysis also unearthed unexpected insights into these mediating effects. For instance, the coefficient of 0.390 signifies the indirect effect of Brand Messaging and Storytelling on Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness through Brand Advocacy. This highlights the pivotal role of compelling narratives in enhancing advertising effectiveness and underscores the necessity of solid storytelling in fostering customer loyalty. This finding is supported by Chang (2019), who discussed the impact of narrative advertisements on consumer processing and engagement, emphasising that compelling storytelling can significantly enhance advertisement outcomes. Dowling (2020) explored how deep storytelling creates

alternative economies of journalism, paralleling its importance in advertising by engaging audiences more deeply.

Table 3: Indirect Effects

Indirect Effect	Indirect Effect Coefficient
BM -> TAD -> BA	0.390

The total effects provide a holistic view of how constructs influence each other, incorporating both the direct and indirect effects. Emotional Appeal notably influenced Customer Loyalty with a total effect coefficient of 0.132, illustrating the profound impact of emotional resonance on building customer loyalty. This finding reiterates the importance of emotionally engaging content for creating lasting customer relationships. These indirect effects underscore the mediating role of Brand Messaging and Storytelling. The coefficient of 0.390 highlights its significant impact on Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness through Brand Advocacy, which aligns with recent studies on the role of mediation in marketing effectiveness (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

Table 4: Total Effects

Total Effect	Total Effect Coefficient
Emotional Appeal → Customer Loyalty	0.132

Various fit indices were used to assess the alignment of the model with observed data. An RMSEA value of 0.065 and CFI and TLI values of 0.920 and 0.912 indicated a good model fit. The fit indices suggest that the model aligns well with the data and effectively captures the complexities of the relationships between the variables.

The total effect illustrates the overall influence of the constructs, with Emotional Appeal having a substantial impact on Customer Loyalty (0.132). This finding resonates with research highlighting the importance of emotional resonance in customer loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

Table 5: Model Fit

Fit Index	Value
RMSEA	0.065
CFI	0.920
TLI	0.912

Table 6: Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Cronbach's alpha
AEM	0.665
BA	0.689
BM	0.637
CL	0.705
EA	0.673
TAD	0.598

The constructs' internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The attention and engagement metric (AEM) has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.665, indicating moderate reliability. This finding suggests that the items used were reasonably consistent and reliable in measuring this construct. Brand

Advocacy (BA) exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.689, indicating moderate internal consistency and a stable measure of brand Advocacy. Cronbach's alpha values reflect the internal consistency across constructs. AEM's $\alpha = 0.665$ and BA's $\alpha = 0.689$ align with established thresholds for moderate internal consistency (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). BM $\alpha = 0.637$ and TAD $\alpha = 0.598$ indicated acceptable reliability, with slight deviations from ideal values, similar to the findings of related studies (Churchill, 1979).

The Cronbach's alpha for Brand Messaging and Storytelling was 0.637, demonstrating adequate internal consistency. Although this value is slightly lower, it still supports a reasonable degree of reliability for measuring the effectiveness of brand messaging. Customer Loyalty (CL) had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.705, suggesting a high level of internal consistency. This indicates that the metrics used to evaluate customer loyalty were robust and reliable. Emotional Appeal (EA) had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.673, indicating moderate internal consistency and a stable measure of emotional engagement. Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness (TAD) had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.598, suggesting moderate internal consistency. Although lower than the other constructs, this value indicates a reliability in measuring advertising effectiveness.

Data analysis and interpretation

Thomas and Treiber (2020) emphasise how Thumb-stopper ads leverage the Zeigarnik effect to maintain viewer engagement by creating psychological tension and curiosity. The Zeigarnik effect, which accentuates the recall of interrupted or unfinished tasks, underscores the importance of immediate attention capture in advertisements. This psychological tendency leads to increased interaction with content beyond its conclusion (Moe, 2023). The findings validate this by showing that Thumb-stopper advertisements effectively harness the Zeigarnik effect to bolster brand awareness and consumer engagement, corroborating the conclusions of recent research (Shapiro and Krishnan, 2022). The literature review highlighted the significance of thumb-stopper advertisements in the digital advertising domain. These advertisements are renowned for their capacity to capture viewers' attention rapidly and convert them into brand advocates. The Zeigarnik effect, which highlights the human tendency to focus on incomplete tasks, further elucidates why thumb-stopper advertisements are more effective than traditional ones. By leveraging this psychological phenomenon, thumb-stopper ads engage viewers more deeply, prompting them to complete the ad's incomplete narrative.

Implications of the literature (Zeigarnik Effect)

The Zeigarnik effect accentuates the importance of immediately capturing viewers' attention and sparking their interest. This psychological drive to seek a resolution leads to greater engagement with advertisements that leverage incomplete or intriguing narratives. Thumb-stopper advertisements can significantly enhance brand awareness and engagement by harnessing this effect. The SmartPLS SEM study corroborates this hypothesis by demonstrating that emotionally engaging content and compelling storylines in thumb-stopper ads exploit Zeigarnik's effect in boosting customer loyalty and brand advocacy.

Support for the research question or hypothesis

The findings from the SmartPLS SEM analysis robustly support the research question and hypotheses and are consistent with insights from the literature review.

H₁: Emotional Appeal, Attention, and Engagement Metrics

Our initial hypothesis posited a positive correlation between emotional appeal, attention, and engagement metrics. This hypothesis is supported by a significant path coefficient of 0.601 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that emotionally resonant thumb-stopper ads effectively capture and hold viewers' attention. This supports the findings of Oliver (1999) and aligns with research on the impact of emotional engagement on advertising effectiveness (Hulland, 1996).

H₂: The Effectiveness of Thumb-stopper Ads, Storytelling, and Brand Messaging.

The second hypothesis suggests a positive relationship between Brand Messaging and Storytelling and Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness. This finding was supported by a path coefficient of 0.588 ($p < 0.001$), highlighting the critical role of storytelling in amplifying the effectiveness of thumb-stopper

advertisements. This finding corroborates the literature that emphasises the role of narratives in enhancing advertising effectiveness (Escalas and Stern, 2003).

H₃: Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness and Customer Loyalty

The third hypothesis proposes a positive correlation between Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness and Customer Loyalty. The substantial path coefficient of 0.663 ($p < 0.001$) supports this hypothesis, underscoring the ability of thumb-stopper ads to foster emotional connections and enhance customer loyalty. This corroborates the literature that emphasises the role of narrative in enhancing advertising effectiveness (Escalas and Stern, 2003).

H₄: Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness and Brand Advocacy

The fourth hypothesis posits that Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness and Brand Advocacy are positively related. This was supported by a substantial path coefficient of 0.663 ($p = 0.001$), indicating that effective thumb-stopper ads contribute significantly to brand advocacy through positive customer experience and emotional engagement. The fourth hypothesis posits that Thumb-stopper Ad Effectiveness and Brand Advocacy are positively related. This was supported by a substantial path coefficient of 0.663 ($p = 0.001$), indicating that effective thumb-stopper ads significantly contribute to brand advocacy through positive customer experience and emotional engagement. This supports the idea that effective Thumb-stopper ads encourage brand advocacy through enhanced emotional engagement and loyalty, aligning with recent research on the impact of effective advertising on brand advocacy (Keller, 2001).

This study validates the hypotheses regarding the effects of emotional appeal, attention and engagement metrics, brand messaging, and storytelling on customer loyalty and brand advocacy in thumb-stopper advertisements. Empirical evidence and a literature review affirm the complex interplay among these factors, reinforcing the strategic value of thumb-stopper ads in driving brand loyalty and advocacy in today's digital marketing landscape. Our findings align with the existing literature, confirming that thumb-stopper ads effectively enhance brand advocacy and loyalty. This empirical evidence reinforces the value of leveraging psychological principles, such as the Zeigarnik effect, to maximise advertising impact.

Policy implementations and recommendations

Although our study deepens the understanding of the linkages being studied, several directions may still be investigated. Beyond thumb-stopper advertisements, future research could explore the efficacy of emotional appeal in other advertising formats, allowing for a broader assessment of the generalisability of our findings. For instance, Ahmadi and Ataei (2022) highlighted the role of emotional attachment in bridging brand reputation and advocacy, suggesting that emotional appeal could have a broader impact across various advertising formats. Longitudinal studies can be used to identify causal links and elucidate how these dynamics change over time. As Hammadi and Qureishi (2013) illustrate, understanding the Zeigarnik Effect's role in consumer attention over extended periods could provide insights into how advertising impacts evolve. Qualitative research may also explore subtle emotional reactions elicited by diverse advertising components, thus enhancing our understanding of consumers' perspectives.

Dowling (2020) discusses the significance of deep storytelling, which can be further explored through qualitative studies to uncover nuanced consumer responses to various narrative elements. The applicability of our findings to various markets can be further improved by investigating cultural and contextual changes in the connections discovered. Khairullah and Khairullah (2021) emphasised the importance of cultural values in advertising effectiveness, suggesting that cross-cultural studies could enrich our understanding of how different contexts influence advertising reception. Further research into the moderating impacts of elements such as brand authenticity, consumer scepticism, and demographic demographics may yield a more nuanced understanding of the subtleties of brand-customer interactions. Wilk et al. (2021) provided insights into how these moderating factors can influence brand advocacy and loyalty, which could be valuable for future studies. Consequently, our study offers new perspectives on how advertising and brand management have changed. We strive to provide researchers and practitioners with the knowledge necessary to create more compelling and resonant brand communication by shedding light on the underlying mechanisms that fuel consumer loyalty and advocacy.

Conclusion

This section discusses the study's main findings, describes its contributions to the area, and provides suggestions for further research. Insightful results were obtained by analysing how emotional appeal, attention, engagement metrics, brand messaging and storytelling, customer loyalty, and brand advocacy interact with thumb-stopper advertisements. This study revealed that thumb-stopper ads designed to leverage the Zeigarnik Effect significantly enhance customer engagement and retention. A significant positive correlation was found between Emotional Appeal and Attention and Engagement Metrics, suggesting that emotional appeal in commercials effectively captures viewers' attention and retains their interest (Hammadi and Qureishi, 2013).

Attention and Engagement Metrics were found to mediate the effects of Emotional Appeal on Brand Messaging and Storytelling, highlighting the crucial role of viewer engagement in effective brand communication (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022). The impact of brand messaging and storytelling on customer loyalty has been well demonstrated, confirming that these techniques significantly strengthen the relationship between customers and brands (Chang, 2019). The positive relationship between Customer Loyalty and Brand Advocacy underscores that satisfied customers will likely become brand ambassadors and promote business (Wilk et al. 2021).

This study significantly contributes to the body of knowledge in several ways. By scientifically examining the correlations between Emotional Appeal, Attention and Engagement Metrics, Brand Messaging and Storytelling, Customer Loyalty, and Brand Advocacy, we enhance the understanding of brand-customer dynamics (Shareef et al., 2019). These findings support and expand existing hypotheses on how storytelling, engagement, and emotions influence customer perceptions and behaviours (Ghosh, 2019). Marketers and advertisers can gain actionable insights from this study, particularly the importance of emotional resonance and engagement and compelling the role of brand narratives in fostering loyalty and advocacy (Ahmadi and Qureishi, 2013; Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022).

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