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The Impact of Social Media Advertising on Brand Loyalty Among Online Shoppers in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed how consumers engage with brands and arrive at purchasing decisions, particularly within digital commerce environments. This study examines the impact of social media advertising exposure on purchase intention and brand loyalty among online shoppers in Saudi Arabia, while also investigating the direct relationship between purchase intention and brand loyalty within an e-commerce behavioural framework. A positivist research philosophy and quantitative cross-sectional research design were adopted. Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed to 400 participants in Saudi Arabia and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and simple linear regression. Results indicated a statistically significant and positive influence of social media advertising exposure on both purchase intention ($\beta = 0.882$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.778$) and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.831$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.69$). Purchase intention also significantly and positively predicted brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.863$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.745$). The study extends the empirical applicability of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to social media advertising contexts in an emerging Middle-Eastern market. Findings provide practical implications for marketers seeking to design social media advertising strategies that effectively cultivate consumer engagement and sustain long-term brand loyalty.

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Keywords: Social media advertising; purchase intention; brand loyalty; Saudi Arabia; online shopping; consumer behaviour.

أثر إعلانات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على ولاء العلامة التجارية لدى المتسوقين عبر الإنترنت في المملكة العربية السعودية

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الملخص:

أفرزَ الانتشار المتسارع لمنصات التواصل الاجتماعي تحولاً جذرياً في أنماط تفاعل المستهلكين مع العلامات التجارية وفي طبيعة قراراتهم الشرائية، ولا سيما في بيئات التجارة الإلكترونية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء أثر التعرض لإعلانات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في نية الشراء وولاء العلامة التجارية لدى المتسوقين عبر الإنترنت في المملكة العربية السعودية، إلى جانب فحص العلاقة المباشرة بين نية الشراء وولاء العلامة التجارية في إطار سلوك المستهلك الرقمي. اعتمدت الدراسة فلسفةً بحثيةً وضعانية ومنهجاً كمياً مقطعياً، إذ جُمعت البيانات عبر استبانة إلكترونية ذاتية التطبيق وُزِّعت على 400 مشارك في المملكة العربية السعودية. خضعت البيانات للتحليل بالإحصاء الوصفي وتحليل الارتباط وتحليل الانحدار الخطي البسيط. كشفت النتائج عن تأثير إيجابي دال إحصائياً للتعرض لإعلانات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في كل من نية الشراء ($\beta = 0.882$، $p < 0.001$، $R^2 = 0.778$) وولاء العلامة التجارية ($\beta = 0.831$، $p < 0.001$، $R^2 = 0.690$)، فضلاً عن تأثير إيجابي دال لنية الشراء في ولاء العلامة التجارية ($\beta = 0.863$، $p < 0.001$، $R^2 = 0.745$). تُسهم الدراسة في توسيع التطبيق التجريبي

في سياقات إعلانات (TPB) ونظرية السلوك المخطط (SOR) لإطار الاستجابة التحفيزية للكائن الحي التواصل الاجتماعي بالأسواق الناشئة في منطقة الشرق الأوسط. كما تقدم الدراسة توصيات عملية للمسوّقين الساعين إلى صياغة استراتيجيات إعلانية رقمية فاعلة تعزز ولاء المستهلك على المدى البعيد

الكلمات المفتاحية: إعلانات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي؛ نية الشراء؛ ولاء العلامة التجارية؛ المملكة العربية السعودية؛ التسوق الإلكتروني؛ سلوك المستهلك

I. INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of consumer marketing has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past decade, driven primarily by the exponential growth of social media platforms. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat have evolved from simple networking tools into sophisticated marketing ecosystems where brands actively compete for consumer attention through targeted advertising. This shift is especially pronounced in Saudi Arabia, a country characterised by one of the highest rates of social media penetration globally, where digital commerce is expanding rapidly alongside rising smartphone ownership and internet accessibility (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Mabkhot et al., 2022).

Against this backdrop, social media advertising has emerged as one of the most influential forms of digital marketing communication. Brands increasingly rely on sponsored posts, influencer endorsements, video advertisements, and interactive content to reach potential customers, shape brand perceptions, and stimulate purchasing behaviour. However, despite the growing investment in social media advertising, the theoretical and empirical understanding of how such advertising shapes long-term consumer outcomes—particularly purchase intention and brand loyalty—remains an evolving area of scholarly inquiry (Godey et al., 2016; Laksamana, 2018).

This study addresses this gap by empirically investigating the causal pathways through which social media advertising exposure influences purchase intention and brand loyalty among online shoppers in Saudi Arabia. Drawing upon the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the research develops and tests three hypotheses: (H1) that social media advertising exposure positively affects brand loyalty, (H2) that social media advertising exposure positively affects purchase intention, and (H3) that purchase intention positively affects brand loyalty. By examining these relationships within a Middle-Eastern cultural context, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and cross-cultural consumer behaviour.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1 Social Media Advertising

Social media advertising refers to promotional content disseminated through social networking platforms with the objective of influencing

consumer attitudes, intentions, and behaviours (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Unlike traditional advertising, social media advertising possesses unique characteristics that include interactivity, personalization, virality, and the capacity for user-generated engagement (Voorveld, 2019; Wu, 2016). These attributes collectively enhance the potential of social media platforms to create sustained consumer–brand relationships. Research by Appel et al. (2020) highlights how social media advertising has shifted from simple awareness campaigns to sophisticated relationship-building strategies, leveraging data-driven targeting and creative storytelling to engage consumers at various stages of the purchase funnel.

In the Saudi Arabian context, social media platforms occupy a central role in everyday consumer life. Studies confirm that platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat dominate usage patterns among Saudi consumers, who actively engage with brand content, product reviews, and promotional offers through these channels (Mabkhot et al., 2022). This high level of exposure makes Saudi Arabia a particularly relevant context for examining the downstream consequences of social media advertising on consumer behaviour.

2 Brand Loyalty in Digital Environments

Brand loyalty is conceptualised as a consumer's consistent preference for a brand, manifested through repeated purchase behaviour, positive word-of-mouth, and long-term brand commitment (Oliver, 1999; Srinivasan et al., 2002). In the context of online shopping, brand loyalty is influenced by a broader set of antecedents than in physical retail, encompassing perceptions of service quality, personalisation, trust, and the cumulative impact of digital marketing communications (Ong et al., 2018; Tran & Chang, 2024).

The relationship between social media advertising and brand loyalty has attracted growing scholarly attention. Laksamana (2018) provides evidence from the Indonesian banking sector demonstrating that social media marketing activities significantly enhance brand loyalty through mechanisms of increased brand familiarity and consumer engagement. Zeqiri et al. (2025) further show that social media marketing drives brand awareness and loyalty in emerging economies, confirming the relevance of these findings across diverse market contexts.

3 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention represents a consumer's expressed willingness to acquire a product or service in the near future and serves as one of the most reliable cognitive antecedents of actual buying behaviour (Spears & Singh, 2004; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). In digital commerce settings, purchase intention is shaped by factors such as advertising informativeness, entertainment value, perceived credibility, and social influence (Leong et al., 2023; Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Social media advertising has consistently been found to positively influence purchase intention by reducing perceived risk, enhancing product awareness, and increasing consumer confidence in brands (Pavlou, 2003; Pappas, 2018). Leong et al. (2023) specifically demonstrate that social media advertising formats, including sponsored posts and video content, are effective drivers of online purchase intention across various consumer segments. Similarly, Morimoto (2017) highlights the personalised and targeted nature of social media advertising as a key mechanism through which purchase intentions are strengthened.

4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks. The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Eroglu et al., 2001) posits that environmental stimuli—in this case, social media advertising—trigger cognitive and affective responses within the consumer organism, which in turn manifest as behavioural outcomes such as purchase intention and brand loyalty. Within the SOR framework, social media advertising exposure serves as the primary stimulus, while consumer cognition and affect mediate the pathway to loyalty and behavioural intention.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) complements the SOR framework by emphasizing the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping intentions and subsequent behaviour. Applied to the present study, exposure to social media advertising shapes consumer attitudes toward brands, which in turn influence purchase intentions and, ultimately, loyalty behaviours. Together, these frameworks provide a coherent theoretical basis for the three hypotheses tested in this study.

5 Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and the review of empirical literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Exposure to social media advertising has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty among online shoppers in Saudi Arabia.

H2: Exposure to social media advertising has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among online shoppers in Saudi Arabia.

H3: Purchase intention has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty among online shoppers in Saudi Arabia.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1 Research Design and Philosophy

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy, which assumes that social phenomena are objectively observable and measurable through empirical methods (Hair et al., 2010). A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, enabling the examination of statistical relationships between variables at a single point in time. This approach is consistent with prior research in the domain of social media marketing and consumer behaviour (Laksamana, 2018; Leong et al., 2023).

2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprised adult online shoppers in Saudi Arabia who actively use at least one social media platform. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for determining sample size in large populations, a minimum sample of 384 respondents was estimated as sufficient at a 95% confidence level. A final sample of 400 valid responses was achieved through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via social media channels including Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. Non-probability convenience sampling was employed, a method widely accepted in online consumer research (Leong et al., 2023). All questionnaires that were incomplete or unusable were excluded prior to analysis.

3 Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section A collected demographic information including gender, age group, education level, employment status, monthly online purchase frequency, and primary social media platform used for shopping content. Section B included 18 Likert-scale

items (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) measuring the three main constructs: exposure to social media advertising (6 items, adapted from Leong et al., 2023), brand loyalty (6 items, adapted from Laksamana, 2018 and Bobâlcă et al., 2012), and purchase intention (6 items, adapted from Spears & Singh, 2004). Item examples include: 'I frequently encounter ads from online shopping platforms on social media' (SMA), 'I prefer buying from the same online store when I am satisfied with its service' (BL), and 'I will definitely consider purchasing products from brands I see advertised on social media' (PI).

4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Preliminary screening confirmed data completeness and verified the statistical assumptions underlying correlation and regression analyses. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables. Simple linear regression analyses were performed to test the three research hypotheses, with standardised beta coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and coefficients of determination (R^2) reported.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1 Sample Profile

The final sample consisted of 400 Saudi Arabian online shoppers. Females constituted 52.0% of respondents and males 48.0%. The dominant age group was 18–24 years (29.2%), followed by 25–34 years (27.5%), reflecting the predominantly younger demographic of active social media users. Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (33.2%) or a master's degree (25.2%). In terms of employment, 50.7% were self-employed and 26.5% employed. Regarding online purchase frequency, 33.8% reported purchasing online 3–5 times per month. Instagram was the most frequently used platform for shopping content (28.2%), followed by TikTok (20.8%) and YouTube (17.2%).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	%
Gender	Male / Female	192 / 208	48.0 / 52.0
Age (dominant)	18–24 yrs / 25–34 yrs	117 / 110	29.2 / 27.5
Education (top 2)	Bachelor's / Master's	133 / 101	33.2 / 25.2
Employment (top 2)	Self-employed / Employed	203 / 106	50.7 / 26.5
Purchase Freq. (top)	3–5 times/month	135	33.8
Top Platform	Instagram / TikTok	113 / 83	28.2 / 20.8

Source: Author's own analysis (2026)

2 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all three constructs yielding values well above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Specifically, social media advertising exposure recorded $\alpha = 0.982$, while both brand loyalty and purchase intention recorded $\alpha = 0.979$, confirming excellent internal consistency across all scales. Descriptive statistics indicated moderate-to-positive mean scores for all constructs: social media advertising exposure ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.86$), brand loyalty ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.81$), and purchase intention ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.80$), consistent with favourable but not extreme orientations.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability (N = 400)

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Social Media Advertising Exposure	6	3.6	0.86	0.982
Brand Loyalty	6	3.6	0.81	0.979
Purchase Intention	6	3.4	0.80	0.979

Source: Author's own analysis (2026)

3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong and statistically significant positive relationships among all study variables (Table 3). Social media advertising exposure was strongly correlated with both purchase intention ($r = 0.882$, $p < .001$) and brand loyalty ($r = 0.831$, $p < .001$). Purchase intention demonstrated a similarly strong positive correlation with brand loyalty ($r = 0.863$, $p < .001$). These findings confirm theoretically consistent relationships among the constructs and provide initial support for all three hypotheses.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 400)

Construct	1. SMA Exposure	2. Purchase Intention	3. Brand Loyalty
1. SMA Exposure	1	0.882**	0.831**
2. Purchase Intention	0.882**	1	0.863**
3. Brand Loyalty	0.831**	0.863**	1

*** p < .001. Source: Author's own analysis (2026)*

4 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Simple linear regression analyses were performed to test the three hypotheses. Results are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Simple Regression Results (N = 400)

Model	Std. β	t-value	p-value	R^2	Decision
Brand Loyalty ← SMA Exposure (H1)	0.831	29.75	<.001	0.690	Supported
Purchase Intention ← SMA Exposure (H2)	0.882	37.37	<.001	0.778	Supported
Brand Loyalty ← Purchase Intention (H3)	0.863	34.10	<.001	0.745	Supported

Source: Author's own analysis (2026)

H1 was supported: social media advertising exposure exerted a significant positive effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.831$, $t = 29.75$, $p < .001$), explaining 69.0% of the variance in brand loyalty. This finding is consistent with Laksamana (2018) and Zeqiri et al. (2025), who document similar positive effects in diverse cultural contexts. The mechanisms underlying this relationship include the mere exposure effect, increased brand familiarity, and the community-building potential of social media platforms, all of which contribute to the formation of loyalty behaviours.

H2 was supported: exposure to social media advertising significantly and positively predicted purchase intention ($\beta = 0.882$, $t = 37.37$, $p < .001$), accounting for 77.8% of the variance. This finding aligns with Leong et al. (2023), who demonstrate that social media advertising formats effectively drive online purchase intention by reducing uncertainty and enhancing product knowledge. The high R^2 value underscores the particularly strong predictive power of advertising exposure in shaping purchase decisions within the Saudi online shopping context.

H3 was supported: purchase intention significantly and positively predicted brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.863$, $t = 34.10$, $p < .001$), with 74.5% of the

variance in brand loyalty explained by purchase intention. This result confirms purchase intention as a critical psychological antecedent of brand loyalty, consistent with the TPB's assertion that behavioural intentions are strong predictors of subsequent behaviour. Consumers with stronger purchase intentions exhibited correspondingly higher levels of long-term commitment to online brands.

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of social media advertising exposure on purchase intention and brand loyalty among 400 online shoppers in Saudi Arabia, employing a quantitative cross-sectional design. All three research hypotheses were empirically supported. Social media advertising exposure was found to be a significant positive predictor of both purchase intention ($\beta = 0.882$, $R^2 = 0.778$) and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.831$, $R^2 = 0.690$). Additionally, purchase intention significantly and positively predicted brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.863$, $R^2 = 0.745$), confirming its role as a mediating psychological construct linking advertising exposure to loyalty formation.

Theoretically, the study extends the empirical applicability of the SOR framework and the TPB to social media advertising contexts in an emerging Middle-Eastern market, contributing to a growing body of cross-cultural research in digital marketing and consumer behaviour. Practically, the findings suggest that marketers operating in Saudi Arabia's rapidly expanding e-commerce sector should prioritise consistent, high-quality, and culturally relevant social media advertising strategies to stimulate purchase intentions and cultivate sustainable brand loyalty. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok emerge as particularly impactful channels given their dominant usage among the study's respondents.

1 Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the cross-sectional research design, while appropriate for examining statistical associations, does not permit definitive causal inference. The relationships identified between social media advertising exposure, purchase intention, and brand loyalty should therefore be understood as associational patterns rather than confirmed causal effects.

Second, data were collected exclusively through self-administered questionnaires, which are susceptible to response bias. Participants may have provided socially desirable answers or inaccurately recalled their actual level of social media advertising exposure and purchasing behaviour. The simultaneous measurement of all variables using a single instrument also raises the possibility of common-method bias, which may inflate the observed inter-construct correlations.

Third, the sample comprised 400 online shoppers drawn exclusively from Saudi Arabia using convenience sampling, which restricts the generalisability of findings to other national, cultural, or market contexts. Consumer behaviour and responses to advertising stimuli vary substantially across different cultural settings, and the relationships documented here may not replicate in Western or East-Asian contexts where social media usage patterns and consumer values differ markedly.

Fourth, the study examined only three core constructs without accounting for a broader range of psychological and contextual factors that may influence these relationships. Variables such as brand trust, perceived risk, consumer satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth, prior brand experience, and perceived value were not incorporated into the model, potentially limiting its explanatory completeness. Fifth, advertising exposure was measured through consumer self-perception rather than objective indicators, and the study did not differentiate among specific social media advertising formats—such as influencer endorsements, sponsored posts, display advertisements, and video promotions—each of which may exert distinct effects on consumer outcomes.

2 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations identified, several directions for future research are proposed. First, future studies should employ longitudinal or experimental research designs to establish more rigorous causal relationships between social media advertising exposure and consumer behavioural outcomes. Longitudinal data would allow for the tracking of changes in purchase intention and brand loyalty over time, while experimental designs would enable the controlled manipulation of advertising exposure to yield more precise causal evidence.

Second, subsequent research should expand the theoretical model by incorporating additional psychological and relational constructs. Variables

such as brand trust, perceived value, consumer satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth, brand image, perceived risk, and customer engagement may serve as important mediators or moderators within the social media advertising–loyalty relationship, yielding a more comprehensive understanding of how advertising shapes consumer behaviour in digital environments.

Third, future researchers are encouraged to replicate and extend this study across diverse cultural, national, and market contexts. Comparative cross-national studies would examine whether the relationships identified in Saudi Arabia hold consistently across different cultural settings, contributing to the cross-cultural generalisability of digital marketing theory. Fourth, future studies should disaggregate social media advertising exposure into its constituent formats and content strategies, rather than treating it as a single undifferentiated construct. Investigating the differential effectiveness of influencer marketing, sponsored posts, viral content, and user-generated content would provide more targeted insights for digital marketers. Finally, future research could enhance methodological rigour by combining self-reported survey data with objective behavioural measures such as platform analytics, clickstream records, or verified advertising impression data, which would provide more accurate indicators of actual exposure levels and reduce the self-report bias inherent in questionnaire-based designs.

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