CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING CAMPAIGNS: HOW CAN CUSTOMERS' TRUST, BRAND ADVOCACY, AND PURCHASE INTENTION BE FORMED?

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate factors affecting customers' trust, brand advocacy, and purchase intention in the context of cause-related marketing (CM) campaigns. Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the study examines how central route factor, namely product knowledge and brand awareness, and peripheral route factors including media richness, content aesthetic quality, and brand-cause fit, shape customer trust in product and CM advertisements. Using data collected from 297 experienced e-commerce consumers and employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the findings reveal that central route factors positively enhance trust in the product, whereas peripheral route factors significantly strengthen trust in CM advertisements. Furthermore, both trust in CM advertisements and trust in the product exert strong positive effects on brand advocacy and purchase intention.

Keywords: *brand advocacy, cause-related marketing, purchase intention, elaboration likelihood model, trust transfer.*

CHIẾN DỊCH TIẾP THỊ NGUYÊN NHÂN: NIỀM TIN CỦA KHÁCH HÀNG, SỰ ỦNG HỘ THƯƠNG HIỆU VÀ Ý ĐỊNH MUA HÀNG ĐƯỢC HÌNH THÀNH NHƯ THẾ NÀO?

Tóm tắt

Nghiên cứu này điều tra các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến lòng tin của khách hàng, sự ủng hộ thương hiệu và ý định mua hàng trong bối cảnh các chiến dịch tiếp thị liên quan đến mục đích xã hội (CM). Dựa trên Mô hình Khả năng Xử lý Thông tin (ELM), nghiên cứu này xem xét các yếu tố tuyến đường trung tâm, cụ thể là kiến thức về sản phẩm và nhận thức về thương hiệu, và các yếu tố tuyến đường ngoại vi bao gồm độ phong phú của phương tiện truyền thông, chất lượng thẩm mỹ của nội dung và sự phù hợp giữa thương hiệu và mục đích xã hội, định hình lòng tin của khách hàng vào sản phẩm và quảng cáo tiếp thị liên quan đến mục đích xã hội. Sử dụng dữ liệu thu thập từ 297 người tiêu dùng thương mại điện tử có kinh nghiệm và áp dụng mô hình phương trình cấu trúc bình phương tối thiểu từng phần (PLS-SEM), kết quả cho thấy các yếu tố tuyến xử lý trung tâm làm tăng tích cực lòng tin vào sản phẩm, trong khi các yếu tố tuyến xử lý ngoại vi củng cố đáng kể lòng tin vào quảng cáo tiếp thị liên quan đến mục đích xã hội. Hơn nữa, cả lòng tin vào quảng cáo tiếp thị liên quan đến mục đích xã hội và lòng tin vào sản phẩm đều có tác động tích cực mạnh mẽ đến sự ủng hộ thương hiệu và ý định mua hàng.

Từ khóa: *ủng hộ thương hiệu, tiếp thị liên quan đến mục đích xã hội, ý định mua hàng, mô hình xác suất xử lý thông tin, chuyển giao niềm tin.*

JEL classification: M31, M14, D91.

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1. Introduction

In the era of e-commerce, trust plays a decisive role in facilitating customers' brand attitudes and purchase intention (Quaye et al., 2022). However, insufficient physical interaction with products and sellers in e-commerce shopping might cause low trust problems, i.e., reducing consumer trust, increasing risk perceptions, and promoting uncertain transactions (Liu et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2020). Additionally, information overload in online shopping also fuels the problem of uncertainty, raising the time costs of purchase decisions under limited rational conditions. In this situation, the trend toward responsible consumption has offered a marketing initiative, so-called cause-related marketing (CM), helping customers prioritize meaningful choices by shifting focus from product attributes to a company's social responsibility values (Chang & Chu, 2020). Notably, when the quality and price of a product are equivalent, 88% of customers prefer products advertised by prosocial campaigns to others with social-isolated campaigns (Townsend, 2021). Another problem is that customers are increasingly skeptical about the true motives behind these campaigns (Chang & Cheng, 2015). The literature on CM has not investigated how trust can be developed, especially, how trust can be transferred from the advertisement to product and brand. Especially in the digital era, where customer interactions and responses mainly occur online and without physical presence, building customer trust becomes increasingly challenging.

Focusing on customers' trust in the context of CM advertisements, this study sets two key objectives. *First*, this study identifies how different factors, including brand, product, and advertisement factors, influence customer trust (i.e., trust in CM advertisement and trust in product) in online shopping. *Second*, this study examines how different dimensions of trust affect purchase intention and brand advocacy.

The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for businesses to understand the process underlying customers' trust formation and transfer, thereby increasing purchase intention and promoting brand advocacy. In other words, our findings can assist brands in their CM campaign design to enhance customers' trust and engagement. Additionally, this study also contributes to advancing the body of knowledge in sustainable and responsible business, which integrates business issues (profitability, users' engagement, and purchase facilitation) and ESG issues (i.e., Environmental, Social, and Governance).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cause-related Marketing Overview

Cause-related marketing (CM) refers to a program/campaign/process driven by a commitment from the company to donate or sponsor a target for a designated cause when customers contribute to the revenues that meet the company's goals (Sindhu, 2022). This approach involves partnerships between businesses and social organizations, allowing consumers to contribute to the cause simply by purchasing the product (Sindhu, 2022).

Through CM campaigns, various stakeholders, such as the company/brand, customers, partners, and even authorities, can contribute value. Over the past thirty years, CM has steadily grown as a significant aspect of marketing due to the increasing interest of customers in brands that support social values (Thomas, 2023). CM campaigns are mutually beneficial to the company, the charity, and the customer. For companies, CM can enhance the brand image, foster a more favorable attitude toward the brand and promote purchase intention (Barone et al., 2007). For customers, CM provides the opportunity to express personal identities aligned with social values (Berger et al., 2006; Yoon et al., 2006). By purchasing products through CM campaigns, customers not only demonstrate altruism but also receive satisfaction and happiness (Chang & Chu, 2020). For non-profit organizations (NPOs) - the third parties in CM campaigns - the most obvious benefit is achieving financial returns, along with additional marketing benefits in increasing brand awareness, public attitudes, social causes awareness, and customer support intentions. In short, a successful CM campaign can achieve multiple objectives for different stakeholders: the company can facilitate customer engagement in its brand and strengthen its image and reputation, individual customers can make social contributions within their limited resources, and the target can receive physical benefits from the company's commitment. In other words, a CM campaign can generate mutual benefits for all stakeholders.

The literature review of CM highlights important gaps in understanding how consumer trust is formed and sustained within CM initiatives. While prior studies often examine general attitudes toward CM, limited attention has been given to the roles of trust, especially trust in the product and trust in CM advertising, in shaping consumer responses. Little is known about how product, brand, and advertisement features can jointly build trust and subsequent behaviors. Addressing these gaps would deepen understanding of trust development in CM and offer clearer guidance for designing effective, credible campaigns.

2.2. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by R. Petty and Cacioppo in 1981, analyzes how the persuasion process affects individual attitude change through two information processing pathways: central and peripheral. The theory suggests that the quality of the source's argument represents the central route, while credibility corresponds to the peripheral route. Individuals with high reasoning ability invest more cognitive effort in processing the message and carefully evaluate the arguments and relevant information through the central route to form an opinion. In contrast, because of limited ability, motivation, or time to engage deeply with the message, individuals with lower capacity often rely on peripheral cues, such as credibility or appeal.

ELM has been adopted widely in different contexts of e-commerce and advertising. For example, ELM helps investigate the impacts of visual features of social media ads on customer engagement (Shin et al., 2020), the impacts of live-streaming features on customers' trust, purchase intention, and willingness to pay (Chen et al., 2022), and the impacts of e-commerce advertising features on attitudes toward products (Deng et al., 2022). These applications show that ELM can provide an effective framework to identify the effectiveness of persuasive communication in a marketing campaign. Specifically, in the central route, common factors are product- and brand-relevant, e.g., product quality and brand awareness (Chen et al., 2022). However, peripheral factors are more diverse and dependent on context. This study, based on the literature review, suggests the roles of media richness (de Amorim et al., 2022), ad social relevance (Geng et al., 2021), content aesthetic quality (Bazi et al., 2020), and brand-cause fit (Choi, 2022). The detailed arguments are presented in the hypothesis development.

Customer trust in e-commerce is more complex and multidimensional than face-to-face shopping because it often faces information asymmetry. The desynchronization of time and space between customers and sellers (and other relevant partners such as banks, platforms, and delivery) can cause some transactional risks and reduce trust (Lu et al., 2011). Consequently, customers tend to rely on more credible references such as reviews from other customers, experts, and/or other trustworthy sources. In the context of CM, customers can be persuaded by and form trust from their perception and interpretation of the meaning conveyed by advertisements related to a trustworthy subject, which is considered an alternative form of trust transfer. Trust transfer in the context of e-commerce is crucial, as gaining trust can reduce fear, anxiety, and hesitation (Lu et al., 2011). This study extends these insights, proposing a framework with two components: *trust in product*, which refers to customers' belief that the product will meet their expectations, will appear and perform as advertised (Yang et al., 2022); and *trust in CM advertisement*, or an individual's strong belief in a company's promises regarding its CSR efforts (Kim, 2019).

2.3. Hypothesis development

2.3.1. The central route to trust formation: product knowledge and brand awareness

Product knowledge refers to the knowledge that customers have acquired about a product, including terminology, features/formula/ingredients, characteristics, and usage (Brucks, 1985). Product knowledge can be considered a component of customer knowledge, which refers to the total actual or perceived

information about a product category that customers retain in their memory. Accordingly, product knowledge affects customer purchasing behavior and can be used to determine the value of the product and the likelihood of risks occurring during the purchase process. In other words, product knowledge can help customers evaluate the product (its features, usage, and suitability) and affect product trust. Past studies (e.g., Roh et al., 2022) affirmed that customers with high product knowledge tend to have more positive attitudes, confidence, and more favorable evaluations of the product. In contrast, if customers have little knowledge of a product, their trust in the product will be decreased. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is represented as follows:

H1: Product knowledge is positively correlated with trust in product.

Brand awareness refers to customers' familiarity and recognition of the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Most of the textbooks in brand management advocate an association between brand awareness and product trust (Kotler & Keller, 2016). More specifically, a reputable brand can be a signal of the product quality and the commitment from the manufacturers. Brand awareness helps customers recognize brand identity and its products in different situations. In practice, consumers prefer to choose products with familiar brands over unfamiliar brands. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is represented as follows:

H2: Brand awareness is positively correlated with trust in product.

2.3.2 The peripheral route to trust formation: media richness, ad social relevance, content aesthetic quality, and brand-cause fit

Media richness refers to objective characteristics that affect the ability of a medium to communicate rich information, including feedback and communication skills, language variation, and individual focus (de Amorim et al., 2022). According to the media richness theory, richer information can affect product trust, especially in situations where customers are unable to evaluate products based on physical interactions and need more comprehensive, clear, and multiple-view information about the product. In practice, customers have to rely on descriptions of the website or advertisements to evaluate these products, and more information from others' reviews and interactions. Thus, we expect that CM advertisements with richer media, which offer quick, clear, and varied information, can build consumers' trust in them. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is represented as follows:

H3: Media richness is positively correlated with trust in CM advertisement.

Ad social relevance refers to the degree of customers' perception of the relevance of the advertisement to their friends, reflected in the reactions of these friends to this advertisement on social media (such as likes or comments), though it indicates these friends' attention or response to the advertisement (Geng et al., 2021). Specifically, individuals will have a positive attitude toward advertisements if they perceive the relevance of these advertisements to be high. Additionally, previous studies (Chen et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2021) also indicated that ad social relevance positively influences customers' attitudes. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is represented as follows:

H4: Ad social relevance is positively correlated with trust in CM advertisement.

Content aesthetic quality is defined as the perceived aesthetic quality and appeal of the visual content (images or videos) posted on social media (Bazi et al., 2020). In fact, the necessary requirement to create an attractive CM advertisement is a coherent integration of content and various aesthetic elements. At the cognitive level, customers' attention can be quickly attracted by entertainment aesthetic content, making the information conveyed through posts easier to process (Akpinar & Berger, 2017). At the emotional level, customers' senses are enhanced by content that integrates high-quality images, inspiring colors, graphic design, icons, and sounds. At the activation level, the aesthetically pleasing content is more likely to be liked, shared, and commented on by customers if it is entertaining. Accordingly, more companies decided to emphasise social purpose information (content) and images in CM advertisements to attract and gain customers' trust in the advertisement. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is represented as follows:

H5: Content aesthetic quality is positively correlated with trust in CM advertisement.

Brand cause-fit refers to the customer's perception of the connection or linkage (Lafferty & Edmondson, 2009) between a cause and a brand in a specific CM campaign. A "good fit" is measured by the level of customers' perception of the alliance as reasonable, complementary, and appropriate. The better fit between the brand and the cause, the more customers have positive evaluations of CM strategies (Jublee et al., 2023). According to Rifon et al. (2004), if the CM campaign is consistent with the company's goals, the customers' evaluations of this campaign and the brand's motivation will be more positive, leading to enhanced customer trust and favorable attitudes toward the sponsoring company. However, if the level of brand cause-fit is perceived as low, it may lead to customer skepticism about motivation, which drives the brand to create CM campaigns. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is represented as follows:

H6: Brand-cause fit is positively correlated with trust in CM advertisement.

Based on the trust transfer theory, Stewart (2003) suggested that trust in a familiar entity or context can be transferred to an unknown target when the two entities are related. For example, Yang et al. (2022) discovered that customers' trust in familiar broadcasters can be transferred to unknown agricultural products through the recommendations made by these broadcasters, establishing a connection between them. In the context of CM advertisements, social causes or community benefits that customers trust or feel positive about are important factors. These

ads usually create emotional and cognitive connections with customers by associating with meaningful social causes. If these advertisements are associated with a trusted social cause, customers will trust the CM ads, and then this positive evaluation can be transferred to the advertised product. Regarding the relationship between trust in product and purchasing intention, some prior research indicated that the more customers trust in the quality and attributes of a product, the more they intend to purchase it (Sung et al., 2023; Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). Similarly, trust in CM advertisements also has a positive influence on purchasing behavior. When comparing ads for the same type of product, customers tend to purchase the product that is introduced by the advertisements they trust. Besides, customers who have been exposed to CM advertisements tend to have higher purchase intentions compared to those who have not been exposed (Jublee et al., 2023). Therefore, the proposed hypotheses are represented as follows:

H7: Trust in CM advertisement is positively correlated with trust in the product.

H8: Trust in the product is positively correlated with purchase intention.

H9: Trust in CM advertisement is positively correlated with purchase intention.

Brand advocacy is defined as the act of customers promoting or defending an organization, brand, or product to others, which represents the highest level of endorsement in the customer-brand relationship (Quaye et al., 2022). In fact, trust can foster collaborative behaviors (e.g., sharing information and recommending products to other customers) (Yeh & Choi, 2011). Thus, this trust-based advocacy can be considered as the most important regulator for the effectiveness of relationship marketing, especially in today's competitive market. Regarding trust in product, it also plays an important part in influencing customer behavior, especially in brand advocacy, as customers typically advocate for brands they really trust and believe meet their expectations (Fatma & Khan, 2023). In the context of social media consumers, trust in brand-generated CM advertisement posts significantly influences the intention to share this content (Bigné et al., 2023), and sharing it is also a way for consumers to express their brand advocacy. Therefore, the proposed hypotheses are represented as follows:

H10: Trust in product is positively correlated with brand advocacy.

H11: Trust in CM advertisement is positively correlated with brand advocacy.

2.3.3. Proposed research model

All hypotheses are summarized and presented in the research model below (Figure 1).

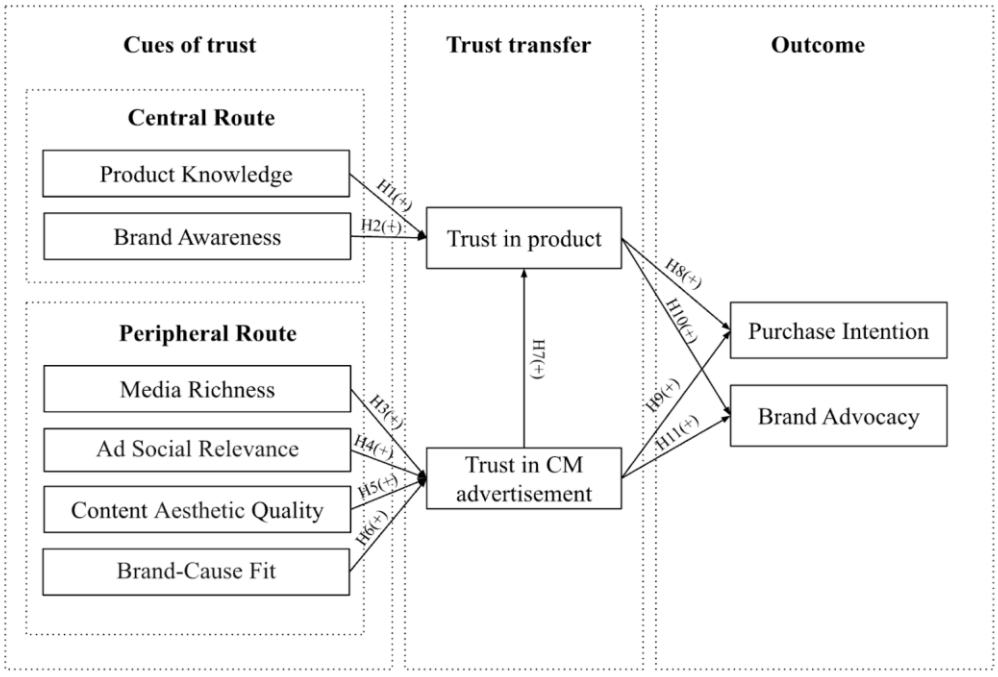


Figure 1. Proposed research model

3. Research methodology

This study adopted a two-stage research approach. In the first stage, a pilot survey of 30 respondents was conducted to refine the questionnaire. In the second stage of the main survey, data were collected from 359 respondents and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

3.1. Measurements

The questionnaire consists of 10 constructs and 45 measurement items in total, adapted from previous studies to suit the e-commerce context (see Table 1). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

Table 1: *Measurement Items*

Measurement items
Product knowledge (Tzeng & Ho, 2022)
"I feel very knowledgeable about this product."
"If a friend asked me about products from CM campaigns, I could give them advice about different brands."
"I feel very confident about my ability to tell the difference in quality between products from CM campaigns and those from other brands."
"The level what I actually stored in my memory about information about products from CM campaigns."
"The level what I can discriminate the difference of product from CM campaigns and brand of different product firms."
Brand awareness (Ke et al., 2016)
"I know this brand."
"I am familiar with this brand."
"I can recognize this particular brand in comparison with the other competing brand."
"Some characteristics of the particular brand come to my mind quickly."
"I can quickly recall symbol or logo of the particular brand."
Ad social relevance (Celsi & Olson, 1988)
"CM advertisement is related to my social network."
"CM advertisement is related to my friends."
"CM advertisement is related to my social relationships."
"CM advertisement is related to my colleagues and people I know about."
Media richness (Lai & Chang, 2011)
"Media enables me to get information/content about CM advertisements quickly."
"Media enables me to get reliable information/content about CM advertisements."
"Media enables me to get rich information/content about CM advertisements."
"Media provides diverse types of information/content about CM advertisements such as voice and image."
Content aesthetic quality (Bazi et al., 2023)
"Components of the advertisements (text, graphics, audio, etc.) are well harmonized."
"The CM advertisements are artistic."
"The CM advertisements are intriguing."
"The CM advertisements are charming."
"The CM advertisements are fascinating."
Brand-cause fit (Myers et al., 2012)
"The brand and the cause are consistent with each other."
"The brand and the cause represent each other well."
"The brand and the cause complement each other."
"The brand and the cause fit together well."
"The brand and the cause together make sense."
Trust in product (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020)
"I consider the quality of the products sold through CM advertisement to be reliable."
"I believe I will be very happy when I receive the product I ordered from the CM advertisement."
"I think the products I order from the CM advertisement will be as I imagined."
"I trust that the products I receive will be the same as those shown in the CM advertisement."
Trust in CM ad (Soh et al., 2009)
"I perceive CM advertisements to be meaningful."
"Information conveyed in CM advertisements is credible/reliable."
"Information conveyed in CM advertisements is honest."
"Information conveyed in CM advertisements is truthful."
Purchase intention (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999)

"I will try to purchase a product associated with a CM campaign."
"I am likely to participate in a CM campaign by purchasing the product."
"I would be willing to influence others to purchase this cause-related product."
"I would be willing to purchase this cause- related product."
Brand advocacy (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2022; Fatma & Khan, 2023)
"I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others good things about the CM-implementing business."
"I would defend CM-implementing business to others if I heard someone speaking poorly about the business."
"I would like to try new products/services introduced by the CM-implementing [brand]."
"I talk favorably about the CM-implementing [brand] to friends and family."
"If the CM-implementing [brand] did something I didn't like, I would be willing to give it another chance."

Source: Authors adapted from the literature review

3.2. Data collection

Survey data were collected from customers in Vietnam via an online questionnaire between September 3 and 11, 2024. The sample size should be 225 respondents based on the five-time rule for minimum sample size requirements (Hair et al., 2019). There are a total of 359 participants. We provided illustrations and examples of CM campaigns from around the world and Vietnam, such as TOM' "One Day Without Shoes" and the "Sua KUN Cho Em" campaign. After the filtering process (e.g., in your opinion, why are the above campaigns considered Cause-related Marketing campaigns), 297 responses remained. 62 responses were excluded because of the screening question (i.e., "whether you have experienced a cause marketing campaign or not?") and a reversed question. Table 2 presents the descriptive data analysis results. The descriptive data show some imbalance across groups of gender, age, and income. The results are reasonable when representing the key characteristics of online shopping users in Vietnam, i.e., young females with low-middle income are the main customers of e-commerce.

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics*

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Males	96	32.3%
	Females	201	67.7%
Age	18 - 25	250	84.2%
	26 - 35	34	11.4%
	36 - 45	13	4.4%
Income	Under 5 million VND	144	48.5%
	5 - under 10 million VND	105	35.4%
	10 - under 20 million VND	30	10.1%
	20 - under 40 million VND	15	5.0%
	Over 40 million VND	3	1.0%

Source: Authors' survey and analysis

4. Data analysis and results

In this study, PLS-SEM is applied to identify the path coefficients between the variables and validate the research model. The PLS-SEM results can be evaluated in two steps: measurement model and structural model assessments.

4.1. Measurement model

Table 3 shows the results of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), representing the reliability of each construct. The initial analysis of the outer model revealed that loadings from observed variables with 44 of 45 indicators have values higher than the recommended threshold of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019). Only TA3 ("Information conveyed in CM advertisements is honest") reaches 0.478, thus we decided to remove TA3. Subsequently, all Cronbach's alpha values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019), confirming the reliability of the measurement instruments. Furthermore, Table 4 shows that the maximum HTMT value is 0.882, lower than the recommended threshold of 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015), providing evidence of sufficient discriminant validity.

Table 3: *Reliability and convergent validity analysis*

Construct	Indicators	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Product Knowledge	PK1	0.821	0.870	0.905	0.657
	PK2	0.823			
	PK3	0.769			
	PK4	0.816			
	PK5	0.821			
Brand Awareness	BA1	0.742	0.825	0.877	0.588
	BA2	0.786			
	BA3	0.782			
	BA4	0.728			
	BA5	0.794			

Construct	Indicators	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Media Richness	MR1	0.792	0.758	0.844	0.576
	MR2	0.727			
	MR3	0.784			
	MR4	0.730			
Ad Social Relevance	ASR1	0.855	0.882	0.919	0.738
	ASR2	0.876			
	ASR3	0.878			
	ASR4	0.828			
Content Aesthetic Quality	CAQ1	0.786	0.863	0.901	0.647
	CAQ2	0.815			
	CAQ3	0.845			
	CAQ4	0.783			
	CAQ5	0.790			
Brand-Cause Fit	BCF1	0.818	0.870	0.906	0.657
	BCF2	0.814			
	BCF3	0.783			
	BCF4	0.823			
	BCF5	0.815			
Trust in Product	TP1	0.832	0.872	0.912	0.722
	TP2	0.861			
	TP3	0.869			
	TP4	0.836			
Trust in Advertisement	TA1	0.782	0.771	0.868	0.687
	TA2	0.873			
	TA4	0.829			
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.848	0.859	0.904	0.703
	PI2	0.837			
	PI3	0.831			
	PI4	0.836			
Brand Advocacy	BAC1	0.736	0.865	0.903	0.650
	BAC2	0.870			
	BAC3	0.788			
	BAC4	0.823			
	BAC5	0.810			

Source: Authors' survey and analysis

Table 4: *Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)*

	PK	BA	MR	ASR	CAQ	BCF	TP	TA	PI	BAC
PK										
BA	0.681									
MR	0.596	0.797								
ASR	0.501	0.494	0.532							
CAQ	0.594	0.665	0.657	0.553						
BCF	0.605	0.687	0.818	0.512	0.756					
TP	0.623	0.638	0.601	0.439	0.688	0.680				
TA	0.575	0.650	0.736	0.500	0.742	0.815	0.882			
PI	0.619	0.621	0.592	0.396	0.705	0.709	0.820	0.749		
BAC	0.683	0.540	0.429	0.430	0.662	0.552	0.736	0.657	0.854	

Source: Authors' survey and analysis

4.2. Structural Model

We evaluated the structural model through multicollinearity, R2, and the statistical significance of the structural relationships (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the data shown in Table 5, all VIF values ranged from 1.405 to 2.342, below the threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating no multicollinearity issue. The adjusted R-squared values were obtained for the four endogenous variables: trust in product (0.593), trust in advertisement (0.513), purchase intention (0.526), and brand advocacy (0.426). In behavioral research, these values are moderate and acceptable (Hair et al., 2019).

The path coefficients (Table 5) show that all the main effects, except the direct path from ad social relevance to trust in advertisement, were statistically significant at a level of 5% or above. Additionally, the directions of the path coefficients aligned with our expectations, confirming support for all hypotheses except H4. For the size effect, f^2 value below 0.02 indicates a negligible or trivial effect, values between 0.02 and 0.15 represent small effects, those between 0.15 and 0.35 denote medium effects, and values equal to or greater than 0.35 signify large effects.

Table 5: *Structural model assessment*

Hypothesis	VIF	Beta	P Values	Supported	f square	Effect
H1: Product Knowledge → Trust in Product	1.636	0.204	0.001	Yes	0.063	Small
H2: Brand Awareness → Trust in Product	1.717	0.139	0.009	Yes	0.028	Small
H3: Media Richness → Trust in Ad.	1.949	0.170	0.008	Yes	0.030	Small
H4: Ad Social Relevance → Trust in Ad.	1.405	0.057	0.237	No	0.005	Neg.
H5: Content Aesthetic Quality → Trust in Ad.	1.968	0.250	0.000	Yes	0.065	Small
H6: Brand-Cause Fit → Trust in Ad.	2.342	0.360	0.000	Yes	0.113	Small
H7: Trust in Advertisement → Trust in Product	1.473	0.555	0.000	Yes	0.514	Large
H8: Trust in Product → Purchase Intention	2.119	0.563	0.000	Yes	0.316	Medium
H9: Trust in Ad. → Purchase Intention	2.119	0.204	0.002	Yes	0.042	Small
H10: Trust in Product → Brand Advocacy	2.119	0.520	0.000	Yes	0.222	Medium
H11: Trust in CM ad → Brand Advocacy	2.119	0.168	0.033	Yes	0.023	Small

Note: ", **, and *** indicate significance levels of 5%, 1%, and 0.1%, respectively; ns: "not significant"*

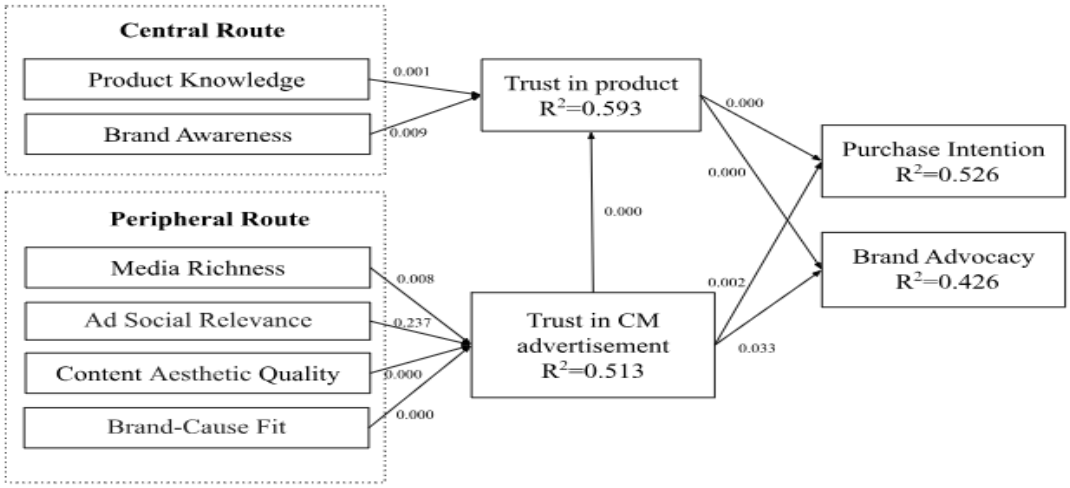


Figure 2: Results of path analysis

Source: Developed by the authors

4.3. Discussion of findings

This study found that the central route factors (product knowledge, brand awareness) have significant impacts on trust in product, which is consistent with previous studies (Chen et al., 2022). Although their effects are small, both factors are important in building trust in product. This is because when customers have more information and product knowledge, they can process information more comprehensively and thereby they build trust based on their perceived quality and value. Simultaneously, when customers have higher brand awareness, they can link new information to their existing brand knowledge, thereby processing information in detail and increasing their trust in product. Thus, both product knowledge and brand awareness are significant in central route processing, indicating the need for additional strategies to enhance customer trust in a competitive online context.

In the peripheral route, media richness, content aesthetic quality, and brand-cause fit positively contribute to building trust in CM advertisement. These results suggest that rich and interactive media platforms, as well as content aesthetic quality, contribute to enhancing customers' trust (Bazi et al., 2023). Additionally, several other studies, such as Jublee et al. (2023) indicate that the higher the brand-cause fit, the more positively the CM strategy is evaluated. However, ad social relevance shows no significant effect on trust due to weak, statistically insignificant results with a negligible effect size.

There are a few possible reasons why H4 was not supported in this study. First, respondents may not perceive a strong connection between their social networks and the advertised cause. Trust may depend more on personal or cause-specific factors than on social relationships. Secondly, cultural or demographic differences may shift the focus from social to personal judgment. Finally, with current CM ads, respondents may perceive attempts to appeal to social connections as insincere or manipulative, further reducing the variable's effect.

In addition, both trust in product and trust in CM advertisement also influence purchase intention and brand advocacy. However, trust in product has a stronger impact than trust in CM advertisement, thus trust in product plays a more direct role in enhancing customers' purchase intention. Therefore, ensuring and communicating product quality remains a top priority in a business's trust-building strategy. Simultaneously, cause-related marketing is also important in promoting purchase intention and encouraging brand advocacy behavior.

Notably, a key finding is the transfer effect, which is statistically significant across all relationships tested, emphasizing its importance in e-commerce. The

findings demonstrate a strong correlation between trust in CM advertisements and trust in products. CM advertisement not only builds trust in itself but also transfers that trust to the promoted product, especially in e-commerce. As customers' trust in CM advertisements increases, so does their trust in products promoted through these campaigns on e-commerce platforms. By exploring this trust transfer effect, this study provides a new perspective in CM research, applies trust transfer theory in a new context (CM), and suggests potential directions for future research in the marketing field.

5. Contributions

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Numerous prior studies have examined factors shaping customer attitudes toward CM, such as brand-related factors (e.g., brand familiarity, brand importance, brand association), brand motivation, cause-related factors (e.g., cause-brand fit, cause familiarity) and product-related factors (e.g., type of product, product fit) (Jublee et al., 2023). In addition, media-related elements such as aesthetics and media richness have also been assessed (Bazi et al., 2023). Overall, in-depth research in customer behavior toward CM not only helps us comprehend how these behaviors are created but also makes a substantial contribution to the creation of an open and sustainable market. Despite the growing interest in CM, there is still a lack of research that comprehensively integrates these variables to provide a comprehensive understanding. This study fills that gap by offering a holistic perspective on CM, and furthermore seeks to enrich the knowledge of customers behavior toward CM by examining aspects like cause, product and brand.

Furthermore, in order to guide more effective investigations, a theoretical framework for evaluating the factors impacting customers' attitudes toward CM – particularly trust - must be established. This field has been guided by several theories, such as the functional theory of attitudes (Manuel et al., 2014), self-determination theory, social identity theory and consumer-based brand equity theory (Jublee et al., 2023). ELM has attracted particular attention among these due to its dual-route approach, which explains how customers perceive stimuli via the central and peripheral routes. It is difficult to comprehend customers' behavior in particular context, and a thorough examination of these two distinct routes is necessary to completely understand the psychological processes of the target audience. Although ELM and trust transfer theory have been combined in contexts such as augmented reality (Lee & Cho, 2019) and impulsive buying in e-commerce (Chen et al., 2022), empirical research on its application to CM is still lacking, especially concerning trust in product and CM advertisement.

In general, applying ELM to assess internal factors such as customer awareness and knowledge of products and brands (in the context of high-level information processing) and external factors such as engaging advertising features (in the context of low-level information processing), can extend the theoretical basis for understanding trust in e-commerce. When combining ELM and trust transfer theory, this study can gain a deeper understanding of the trust dynamics that drive brand advocacy and purchase intention and ultimately provide valuable new perspectives to the theoretical framework. This integration enables the study's findings to deepen the understanding of trust, purchase intention as well as brand advocacy, unveiling new insights into the psychological process underlying the effectiveness of CM.

5.2. Practical implications

This study provides meaningful insights for both customers and businesses within the e-commerce context, where customer trust struggles with information overload and uncertainties about the reliability of their purchase.

The findings indicate that trust in CM advertisements positively affects trust in product and are reinforced by the central route factors (product knowledge and brand awareness). For businesses, the results suggest that managers should build trust through central and peripheral routes to increase purchase intention and brand advocacy. To build trust in products, managers should emphasize transparent communication about product quality and brand awareness, as well as prioritize the dissemination of comprehensive and accurate product information through multiple channels. Internally, businesses should invest in staff training and improving customer communication. An important aspect in product development and refinement is collecting customer feedback after purchase because it enables businesses to derive valuable insights to make necessary adjustments to improve product quality. Additionally, it is essential to increase brand presence on social media by creating engaging content, regularly interacting with customers and implementing creative campaigns. Thus, businesses can increase visibility while promoting customer engagement and value co-creation, ultimately strengthening brand equity. These strategies help build a strong foundation of customers' trust in both the product and the brand.

The result of our study indicates that among the factors affecting customer trust in product through the central route (product knowledge and brand awareness), trust in CM advertisement stands out as the most impactful factor. This implies that higher customers' trust in CM advertisement is correlated with higher trust in product. Therefore, managers should prioritize promoting customers' trust in CM advertisement by enhancing peripheral factors such as media richness, content aesthetic quality as well as brand-cause fit. Specifically, managers can enhance media richness by using a variety of media and creating interactive content. For example, cultivating parasocial relationships with social media celebrities to increase advertising effectiveness (S. Chung & Cho, 2017) or analyzing and using different types of media on Facebook for global brands (D.-H. Kim et al., 2015). In terms of improving content aesthetic quality, managers can focus on attractive and emotional design, high-quality aesthetic content. To align social causes with the brand's core values, managers should carefully select social causes that align with the brand's mission and values, clearly

articulate the rationale behind the brand's support for these causes, and detail the specific actions the brand is taking. Managers can enhance the effectiveness of CM advertisement, increase customers' trust in their brands and products, as well as have a positive impact on society by implementing these strategies simultaneously. Additionally, the research results show that although CM is impactful, it is not more important than businesses building trust in products to increase purchase intention and brand advocacy.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study also has certain limitations. Firstly, the data were collected from a particular demographic and cultural setting, which may reduce the ability to detect different cultural contexts and demographic groups. Cross-cultural research could be conducted in future research to examine how CM advertising affects various social groups. On a bigger and global scale, this can provide deeper insights into the effect of CM.

Second, using surveys to collect data may lead to response bias, as participants may respond in a manner that they perceive as socially acceptable rather than reflecting true opinions. This is particularly the case in situations that highlight ethical and social issues, where people may exaggerate their beliefs about CM advertising or the product being promoted. To mitigate this, future research could consider employing laboratory or field experiments to have data on actual consumer behavior. Experimental research methods for example could include comparing CM ads with static images and text to text and animation ads to better understand their impact on consumer responses.

Finally, CM advertisements typically aim to facilitate customers' emotions and empathy (Bigné et al., 2023). Accordingly, more social psychological factors, such as altruism, should be included as independent variables or moderators in future research to elucidate the relationship between purchase intention, brand advocacy, and trust (trust in product and trust in CM advertisement).

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