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Impact of Advertisement Informativeness and eWOM on Brand Advocacy: Self-Brand Connection as a Mediator

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Abstract:

Advancements in social media technologies have empowered consumers with instant information about anything they wish for. The implications of such power are quite profound on brands, as any word circulating on social media about them can make or break within no time. Brand advocacy can be a ray of hope for brands in helping to set some direction favorable to their image. To understand how brand advocacy works and how consumers convert into brand advocates, it is very important first to understand how relationships between brands and consumers are formed. Nothing better than the concept of self-brand connection explains how a sustainable relationship is formed between brands and consumers. However, how self-brand connection itself is formed and how it leads to brand advocacy is poorly understood in the literature. Informative advertising and electronic word of mouth are among the ways through which self-brand connection is formed. Scant attention has been given in the literature on the relationship of electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection, even if electronic word of mouth today is seen as shaping consumer decisions. More importantly, the negligible attention of scholars has gone on to establish the mediational role of self-brand connection in relationships between advertisement informativeness and, electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy. This study thus provides a two-fold contribution to the literature by not only examining the relationship of electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection alongside advertisement informativeness. But also uncovers mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy. The population for this study was car owners of all auto brands plying in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A snowball sampling method was employed, through which 338 responses from car owners were collected from two regions of Saudi Arabia. Structural equation modeling was used to test all hypotheses of the study simultaneously. Results of the study reported that both advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth exhibited a statistically significant positive relationship with the self-brand connection. Self-brand connection was also reported to exhibit a significant positive relationship with brand advocacy in this study. Self-brand connection is fully mediated in both relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy. The key to converting consumers into brand advocates and sustainable enjoyment of growing market share lies in the understanding of the self-brand connection. However, to achieve a self-brand connection, both advertisement informativeness and favorable electronic word of mouth are indispensable. Future research directions and some limitations are also outlined in this study.

Keywords: Advertisement Informativeness, Electronic word of mouth, Brand Advocacy, and Self-Brand Connection

1. Introduction

The commonness of smartphones equipped with advanced social media technologies across the globe has brought new challenges for car brands worldwide (Ritonga et al., 2023; Abbasi et al., 2023). Any word on social media can make or break a car brand within no time (Sharma et al., 2022; Armawan et al., 2023). One such example can be taken from a successful Indian supercar manufacturer brand, "DC", which filed for bankruptcy within no time after allegations of fraud went viral on social media (Krishnan, 2022).

The advancement of social media has empowered consumers with instant information about anything that consumers search for (Sharma et al., 2022; Armawan et al., 2023). In one report on social media usage in the Middle East region by Global Media Insight (2022), it was estimated that more than 80% of consumers in Saudi Arabia watch videos of different car brands on social media before making a purchase. Let alone for car brands, almost every product and service review, opinion, comment, and consumer experience is easily available and accessible on social media (Armawan et al., 2023).

Social media has also opened new doors for advertising car brands with wider reach to audiences at a lesser cost (Umashankar et al., 2023). Consumers can scrutinize the information of advertisements on social media with social media itself by gauging the opinions of consumers (Umashankar et al., 2023). Car reviews of different auto brands in terms of

time performance, maintenance, and service costs are easily available on social media platforms like YouTube (Ritonga et al., 2023). All this information presented on social media broadly refers to electronic word of mouth in marketing terminology (Ritonga et al., 2023).

In the Middle East region, especially Saudi Arabia, consumer reports by Ebrahim (2022) and Saleh (2022) have observed that Chinese car brands are quickly eating the market share of Toyota, which is a dominant car brand in the Saudi Arabian automobile market. Changan Motors, one of the Chinese car brands operating in Saudi Arabia, was known for its sluggish sales before rising 3 positions in market share in 2022 in the Saudi car market (Gasnier, 2022).

Changan Motors Saudi credited the increase in market share and interest among Saudi consumers to informative advertisements and advocacy of their car brand by Saudi consumers on social media (Mcginley et al., 2021). Informative advertising refers to true, relevantly, timely, and reliable advertising of information free of any deceitfulness (Hussain et al., 2023).

Several studies (Nandy et al., 2023; Wong, 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2023) have suggested that social media is an uncontrollable entity as any word about car brands on it can take any direction but brand advocacy can prove helpful in setting some direction in brand's favor. Scholars (Nandy et al., 2023; Wong, 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2023) have suggested brand advocacy to be effective in projecting a positive brand image on social media because consumers advocate for the brand rather than the brands themselves.

However, to understand what makes consumers convert into brand advocates, it is very important to first understand how the relationship between brands and consumers is cemented (Shimul, 2022; Wong, 2023). Nothing better than the concept of self-brand connection best explains how sustainable relationships can be formed between brands and consumers (Hemsley-Brown, 2022; McManus et al., 2022; Wong, 2023).

Numerous scholars (Shimul, 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023; Wong, 2023) have suggested that brand advocacy is only best understood through the lens of self-brand connection. Studies (Al-Abdallah et al., 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023; Wong, 2023) have also reported a close association of self-brand connection with brand advocacy. However, how self-brand connection is formed and how it leads to brand advocacy is poorly understood in the literature. Several scholars (Keller, 2020; Grigsby & Skiba, 2022; Ferreira et al., 2021; De Keyzer et al., 2022) have suggested that informative advertising and electronic word of mouth are among the various ways through which self-brand connections can be formed. However, the literature on the relationship of electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection has received much less attention (Hemsley-Brown, 2022; Seminari et al., 2022).

Numerous scholars (Keller, 2020; Hemsley-Brown, 2022; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023; Wong, 2023) have given calls for examining the mediation role of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy. Scant studies are seen in the literature that highlight the mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy.

This study will thus provide a twofold contribution to the body of literature by not only examining the relationship of electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection alongside advertisement informativeness but also proving self-brand connection as a mediator in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy.

1.1. Research Problem

Various ways have been suggested by scholars (Seminari et al., 2022; Grigsby & Skiba, 2022; Wong, 2023) through which self-brand connections can be formed, such as informative advertising, electronic word of mouth, etc. Most of the studies (Tran et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021; De Keyzer et al., 2022) are seen to be concentrated on the examination of the relationship between advertisement informativeness and self-brand connection. Fewer studies (Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Grigsby & Skiba, 2022) are seen dedicated to the examination of the relationship between electronic word of mouth and the self-brand connection.

More importantly, the explicit possibility of mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy has received little attention in the literature. For example, studies (Eelen et al., 2017; Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Moisescu et al., 2022) have reported a positive relationship between electronic word of mouth with the self-brand connection. Several studies (Giakoumaki & Krepapa, 2020; Wong, 2023) have also reported a positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy. The possible mediation self-brand connection is explicitly inferred from the above studies, which minister to a research gap that this study seeks to cover.

1.2. Research Questions

This study seeks to get answers to three main research questions of the study which are as follows:

- Q1. How do advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth impact self-brand connections?
- Q2. How does self-brand connection impact brand advocacy?
- Q3. How does self-brand connection mediate in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy?

1.3. Research Objectives

This study seeks to achieve three research objectives.

- To examine the relationships between advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection.
- To examine the relationship of self-brand connection with brand advocacy.

- To examine the mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy.

1.4. Research Scope

This study presents a wide research scope as it can be applicable to all brands that hold the potential to form self-brand connections with consumers. Car brands are considered to be an important and major source of a consumer's self-identity (Casidy et al., 2021). In one of the studies conducted on BMW car owners in the United States by Urban et al. (2017), it was found that owners did not even like to think of any other brand except BMW to express their self-identity. Brand advocacy is considered quite more common in automobile brands than in other product brands (Al Fakhri et al., 2022).

Previous studies (Nemati et al., 2018; Ibrhaim & Aljarah, 2023) on self-brand connections have mostly focused on service brands like banking and restaurant brands. Automobile brands that form a suitable representation of a product brand have been scantily chosen for an understanding of self-brand connection. This study thus seeks to present a far-reaching scope by employing auto brands to examine the mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy.

1.5. Research Importance

This study is of great research importance as it will help uncover the mediatory role of self-brand connection in relationships, advertisement informativeness, and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy. However, it will also provide a clear understanding of how brand advocacy is best understood through the concept of self-brand connection.

2. Literature Review and Research Model

2.1. Self-Brand Connection

Self-brand connection is referred to as the extent to which the brand becomes a part of a consumer's self-identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). The concept of self-brand connection was first given by Escalas & Bettman (2005), which basically entails how consumers create their identities with the help of brands. However, the concept of building self-identities by consumers is not new (Seminari et al., 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023).

In the past, consumers formed their self-identities by holding material possessions like cars, houses, etc., and the number of these possessions also mattered in the creation of self-identities (McCarthy, 1984; Belk, 1988; Hemsley - Brown, 2022). For example, McCarthy (1984), in his study, reported that consumers defined their self-identities in terms of the number of possessions they held. Belk (1988) concluded in his study that the identity of a consumer resides more in his material possessions than himself.

With the advent of time, consumers transitioned from holding different material possessions to holding different brands to create their self-identities (Seminari et al., 2022; Hemsley - Brown, 2022). The concept of self-brand connection provides an excellent understanding of how brands are used by consumers in defining their self-identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Seminari et al., 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023).

Self-brand connection is a fusion of McCracken's model of meaning transfer and Sirgy's self-congruency theory (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Seminari et al., 2022). McCracken's model of meaning transfer helps in the explanation of how meaning travels from informative advertisements, word of mouth, etc., and forms an image of a brand consumer's mind (McCracken, 1986; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Seminari et al., 2022). Sirgy's self-congruency theory postulates that as soon as the brand image is formed, the consumer actively starts comparing his self-image with the brand image until congruency is not achieved (Sirgy, 1982; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Seminari et al., 2022). Once self-image and brand image are congruent, the brand becomes a part of the consumer's self-identity, forming a self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Seminari et al., 2022).

Self-brand connection has been found to be closely associated with brand advocacy (Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023). A number of studies (Shimul, 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023; Wong, 2023) have reported that consumers who exhibit self-brand connections also engage actively in brand advocacy for their cherished brands.

Understanding the underlying mechanism of how consumers convert into brand advocates is very important for understanding the formation of self-brand connections (Goswami & Balasubramanian, 2022). Once consumers develop a self-brand connection, advocating for the brand means advocating for the consumer's self-identity (Rubiyanti & Hariandja, 2020; Wilk et al., 2021).

However, understanding of the formation of self-brand connections is lagging in the literature as most of the studies are concentrated on examining the relationship of advertisements with self-brand connections (Keller, 2020; Seminari et al., 2022; Hemsley - Brown, 2022).

Informative advertisements are one of the ways through which self-brand connections can form (Seminari et al., 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023). Numerous scholars (Dwivedi et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2020; De Keyzer et al., 2022) critically argue that advertisements alone are not enough for a complete understanding of self-brand connection, especially in this social media-related age.

Numerous studies (Dwivedi et al., 2016; Reimann et al., 2018; De Keyzer et al., 2022; Basar, 2022) have reported that the insignificant relationship of advertisements with self-brand connection with the core reason for consumer's general mistrust in advertisements. A number of scholars (Shen & Sengupta, 2018; De Keyzer et al., 2022; Keller, 2020;

Moisescu et al., 2022) have given calls for research on examining other constructs, such as electronic word of mouth, which hold strong potential in leading to the formation of self-brand connection.

Some studies (Eelen et al., 2017; Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Moisescu et al., 2022; Grigsby & Skiba, 2022) lately have reported electronic word of mouth to be positively related to both self-brand connection and brand advocacy. Also, the possible manifestation of self-brand connection as a mediator in the relationship of electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy has been unnoticed in the literature (Keller, 2020; Seminari et al., 2022).

Rarely studies are seen examining together the relationship between advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection and uncovering mediation of self-brand connection in relationships leading to brand advocacy. This study will thus examine both advertisement informativeness and electronic word of the mouth simultaneously and will test the mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of these two constructs with brand advocacy. The study proceeds first by presenting a literature overview of the constructs of this study, starting with advertisement informativeness and its relationship with self-brand connection.

2.2. Advertisement Informativeness and Self-Brand Connection

Advertisement is the basic tool used by organizations for communicating their brands to consumers (Xiao et al., 2023). With the advancement of social media technologies, new platforms have opened for brand advertising (Zhu & Choi, 2022; Hussain et al., 2023). The wide reach of the audience and cheaper cost than traditional print advertisements have worked in making a dramatic shift from traditional advertising to social media advertising of brands (Zhu & Choi, 2022).

Brand advertising on social media has been found effective in a number of studies (Zhu & Choi, 2022; Putra & Arimbawa, 2023) for the projection of desired brand image. However, numerous scholars (Taylor & Carlson, 2021; Niu et al., 2021; Alqaysi & Zahari, 2022; McManus et al., 2022) have suggested that advertisements on social media are not always reliable in the effectiveness of projecting brand images because of general mistrust in advertisements of consumers (Li & Shen, 2023).

The major reason for this mistrust is the general bad name given to advertisements because of deceptive advertisements (Taylor & Carlson, 2021; McManus et al., 2022). Once a consumer gets picked upon by deceptive advertisements, he loses trust in all kinds of advertisements thereafter and views it as a way of fooling consumers for selfish motives (Niu et al., 2021; Alqaysi & Zahari, 2022; Sands et al., 2022).

However, when advertisements are advertised in a true, timely, relevant, and reliable manner to consumers, they are seen to be effective in producing a brand image (Li & Shen, 2023). Advertisement informativeness refers to the advertised information being truthful, timely, relevant, and reliable (Li & Shen, 2023). Advertisement informativeness in many studies (Rehman & Zeb, 2022; Hanaysha, 2022; Li & Shen, 2023) has been seen as helpful in influencing brand image for both new and old products.

Many studies (Rehman & Zeb, 2022; Cabigting et al., 2022; Hanaysha, 2022; Li & Shen, 2023) lately have reported that when advertisements are free of deceit, i.e. informatively advertised on social media, the quick formation of the brand image takes place in consumer's minds. Once the brand image is formed in the consumer's mind, the consumer then engages in the self-brand image congruency process (Li et al., 2022; Kwon & Ha, 2023). When the consumer's self and brand image are congruent, the brand becomes a part of the consumer's self-identity, forming a self-brand connection (Li et al., 2022; Kwon & Ha, 2023).

Several studies (Tran et al., 2020; Burnasheva & Suh, 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023) have reported advertisement informativeness to be very effective in the formation of self-brand connections. For example, in a study conducted in Spain by Rosendo-Rios & Shukla (2023) on advertisements of luxury car brands on social media. The authors observed that informative advertising of luxury car brands on social media is profoundly effective in leading to the formation of self-brand connections in consumers. The authors reported a significant positive relationship between advertisement informativeness and the self-brand connection.

Another study was conducted in South Korea by Burnasheva & Suh (2022) on advertising of sporting brands on social media. The authors found that when informative advertisements of various sporting brands were advertised through famous celebrities of South Korea on social media, it had a positive effect on the formation of self-brand connections among consumers. The authors commented that truthful, timely, relevant, and reliable advertisements greatly help lead to a self-brand connection.

In the context of auto brands advertised on social media, Tran et al. (2020) conducted a study in the United States. The authors examined the relationship between the advertisement informativeness of auto brands advertised on Facebook and the self-brand connection. The authors reported a significant positive relationship between informative advertisements of auto brands and self-brand connections. They concluded that when consumers find social media informative advertisements about auto brands, they engage in the self-brand image congruency process and, upon achieving congruency, form a self-brand connection.

In the study context, it can be said that when consumers come across informative advertisements on social media about various car brands. They will then engage in a self-brand image congruency process and, upon achievement of congruency, will form a self-brand connection. It is, thus, hypothesized:

- *H1: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between advertisement informativeness and self-brand connection*

2.3. *Electronic Word-Of-Mouth and Self-Brand Connection*

Word of mouth generally refers to the opinions, thoughts, and experiences that consumers share with other consumers for no commercial interest (Berger et al., 2022; Aditi et al., 2023). The advancement of social media technologies worldwide, coupled with increasing access to the internet through cheaper smartphones, has made word of mouth more pronounced than ever before (Zhu & Choi, 2022; Hussain et al., 2023).

Reviews, opinions, experiences, and comments from consumers about products and brands are easily found at the click of a button on social media platforms like YouTube (Filiari et al., 2023). When this word of mouth of consumers takes place on social media or on the internet in general, it is referred to as electronic word of mouth in marketing terminology (Pandjaitan & Ambarwati, 2022; Filiari et al., 2023).

Any positive or negative reviews, opinions, experiences, and statements posted on the internet for a product, brand, service, or an organization by former, new, or would-be consumers is referred to as electronic word of mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Filiari et al., 2023). In the context of automobile brands, performance reviews, price and feature comparisons with competitors and maintenance costs of cars directly from consumers about various auto brands are easily available on social media (Pandjaitan & Ambarwati, 2022; Liu et al., 2022).

Even the performance of cars with time from different auto brands is also easily available on social media platforms like YouTube, collectively presenting itself as electronic word of mouth about auto brands (Ali et al., 2022; Filiari et al., 2023). Several studies (Ali et al., 2022; Mahar et al., 2022; Pandjaitan & Ambarwati, 2022; Indahsari et al., 2023) have reported that electronic word of mouth plays an important role in the formation of good or brand image depending upon positive or negative word of mouth held by consumers.

Numerous studies (Ali et al., 2022; Pandjaitan & Ambarwati, 2022; Indahsari et al., 2023) have reported that electronic word of mouth is far more influential than advertisements when it comes to brand image formation in consumers' minds. However, several scholars (Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Keller, 2020; Grigsby & Skiba, 2022) have argued that examining the relationship of electronic word of mouth with brand image only limits understanding of self-brand connection.

When a brand image is formed, the consumer sees if it suits his self-image and engages in a self-brand image congruency process (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Seminari et al., 2022). Once the brand image is congruent with the consumer's self-image, the brand becomes a part of his identity, and a self-brand connection is formed (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Seminari et al., 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023).

The increased presence of social media in consumers' daily lives has made it imperative for researchers to understand how electronic word of mouth plays a role in forming self-brand connections (Keller, 2020). Numerous scholars (Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Keller, 2020; Grigsby & Skiba, 2022) have suggested that it is more fruitful to examine the relationship of electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection. You and He (2023) suggest that a better understanding of self-brand connection is paramount in reaching a better understanding of brand advocacy.

However, despite it being fruitful to study the relationship of electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection, very slow progress has been seen in terms of studies dedicated to examining this relationship (Keller, 2020; Seminari et al., 2022; You & He, 2023). One of the reasons for the slow progress is overlooking the importance of electronic word of mouth and the one-sided focus of studies on only examining relationships of advertisements with self-brand connection (You & He, 2023).

Although several scholars (Keller, 2020; Seminari et al., 2022) have given repeated calls from time to time, researchers to examine the important relationship of electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection very few studies (Eelen et al., 2017; Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Moiescu et al., 2022) are seen in the literature. For example, Eelen et al. (2017) conducted a study in the United States on detergent, coffee, toothpaste, and soft drinks brands. The authors examined the relationship of both traditional word of mouth and electronic word of mouth with self-brand connections and reported significant positive relationships for both. The authors interestingly found that the strength of the relationship between electronic word of mouth and the self-brand connection was stronger than the word of mouth with the self-brand connection.

Similarly, interesting reports were found in a study conducted by Shen and Sengupta (2018) in Hong Kong on the self-brand connection of consumers to the Apple brand. The authors examined the relationship between offline word of mouth and electronic word of mouth with the self-brand connection. They reported significant positive relationships for both and found favorable word of mouth, whether offline or online, and shared positive relationships with the self-brand connection among consumers of their study.

Moiescu et al. (2022) conducted a study in Romania on the relationship of electronic word of mouth with the self-brand connection of apparel brands advertised on Facebook. Moiescu et al. (2022) reported a significant positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and the self-brand connection. The authors reported that when consumers received favorable electronic word of mouth on social media about apparel brands, they started to engage in the self-brand image congruency process. Once congruency was attained, the consumers formed a self-brand connection.

In the study context, it can be said that when consumers find favorable electronic word of mouth about car brands on social media, they will engage in a self-brand image congruency process. Depending on the car brand choices, once the self-brand image is congruent, they will form a self-brand connection. It is, thus, hypothesized:

- *H2: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and self-brand connection*

2.4. Self-Brand Connection and Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy refers to the engagement of consumers in actively promoting and favorably communicating about brands to other potential consumers (Wong & Hung, 2023). Several studies (Wilk et al., 2021; Goswami & Balasubramanian, 2022; Wong & Hung, 2023) have reported a profound effect of brand advocacy on other consumers because the brand being advocated by consumers themselves who usually have no hidden commercial interests.

Brand advocacy is an indispensable asset enjoyed by brands when it comes to defending the brand from potential consumers (Ahmadi & Ataei, 2022). In one study conducted by Wilk et al. (2018), it was found that even negative word of mouth about a brand does not deter consumers from engaging in brand advocacy. The authors reported that consumers not only worked in defending the brand from negative criticisms but also became stronger brand advocates than before upon receiving negative information about their cherished brand.

In today's world surrounded by social media, where brands and products operate in fierce competition, any word on social media can make or break a brand and work for the benefit of the competitor (Aljarah et al., 2022; Wong, 2023). Social media is an uncontrollable entity; however, brand advocacy helps in setting positive direction and warding off the negative sentiments of consumers (Aljarah et al., 2022; Wong & Hung, 2023). Brand advocacy is also a boon for organizations as it helps save advertising expenses because of the netting of new consumers through brand advocates (Ahmadi & Ataei, 2022).

Several scholars (Wilk et al., 2018; Rubiyanti & Hariandja, 2020; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023; Wong, 2023) have suggested that it is paramount to first understand the process of forming a self-brand connection in order to understand how brand advocacy works. When a consumer forms a self-brand connection, then defending and promoting the brand means defending and promoting his own self-identity (Wong, 2023).

A number of studies (Rubiyanti & Hariandja, 2020; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023; Wong, 2023) have reported brand advocacy to be an outcome of self-brand connection. The reason for this outcome suggested by scholars of these studies is that any attack or criticism about the brands is considered by consumers as an attack on their self-identity. Therefore, advocating for brands essentially becomes an advocacy of their self-identities.

For example, Wong (2023), in his study on luxury branded watches in Singapore, reported a significant positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy. In his study, the author found that consumers who had a self-brand connection with a luxury brand watch engaged actively in promoting that luxury brand watch to other consumers. The author found consumers' ardor for being brand advocates for showcasing their self-identities to others. Another study on halal cosmetic brands was conducted in Indonesia by Rubiyanti and Hariandja (2020). The authors found that consumers who held self-brand connections for halal cosmetic brands also engaged in brand advocacy for those halal cosmetic brands. The authors reported a significant positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy.

In the context of auto brands, Rosendo-Rios and Shukla (2023) examined the relationship of self-brand connection with brand advocacy of luxury car brands in Spain. A significant positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy was reported in their study. The authors found that consumers who had self-brand connections to luxury car brands were also found to be strong brand advocates for those luxury car brands. In the study context, it can be said that once consumers form a self-brand connection with a car brand, they are also expected to engage in brand advocacy for that car brand thereafter. It is, thus, hypothesized:

- *H3: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy*

Despite the explicit possibility of mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy inferred from overview of different studies. Examining self-brand connection as a mediator has majorly gone unnoticed in the marketing literature (Keller, 2020; Seminari et al., 2022). For example, studies (Tran et al., 2020; Burnasheva & Suh, 2022; Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Moisescu et al., 2022) have reported a positive relationship between advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with self-brand connection. Several studies (Rubiyanti & Hariandja, 2020; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023; Wong, 2023) have also reported a positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy. The open possibility of mediation by self-brand connection in relationships leading to brand advocacy can be clearly inferred from the overview of the above-mentioned studies.

Numerous marketing scholars (Keller, 2020; Seminari et al., 2022) have called on other researchers to examine the mediation of self-brand connections in relationships leading to brand advocacy. However, only a few studies (Wong, 2023; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023) in literature are seen dedicated to examining the mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship between advertisement informativeness and brand advocacy.

For example, Wong (2023) examined the mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship between advertisement informativeness and brand advocacy in Singapore for luxury branded watches. The authors observed that informative advertising of luxury watch brands on social media led to the formation of self-brand connections among consumers. When consumers formed a self-brand connection with luxury brand watches, they also engaged actively in brand advocacy for that luxury brand watch with other consumers. The authors reported full mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship between advertisement informativeness and brand advocacy.

In the context of car brands, Rosendo-Rios and Shukla (2023) examined the mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship of advertisement informativeness with brand advocacy for luxury car brands in Spain. The authors found that informative advertising of luxury car brands helped in the formation of self-brand connections among consumers. The self-brand connection for luxury car brands of consumers converted consumers into strong brand advocates for those luxury car brands. Full mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship of advertisement informativeness with brand advocacy was reported in their study.

Based on the above body of literature in the study context, it can be said that when consumers find advertisements of car brands on social media as informative, it would help in the formation of a self-brand connection. Once the self-brand connection is formed, the consumers are highly likely to engage in brand advocacy for those car brands. Mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship between advertisement informativeness and brand advocacy is expected in this study. It is, thus, hypothesized:

- *H4: Self-brand connection mediates the relationship between advertisement informativeness and brand advocacy*

In the context of electronic word-of-mouth mediation of self-brand connection in relationships leading to brand advocacy, this has largely gone unnoticed in the literature. However, some studies (e.g. Wilk et al., 2018; Aljarah et al., 2022) are seen reporting a positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy.

For example, Wilk et al. (2018) conducted a study in Australia examining the relationship of electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy of family car brands. The authors reported a positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy. The authors commented that favorable electronic word of mouth propagated further through brand advocate consumers in their study.

Similarly, another study was conducted by Aljarah et al. (2022) in Spain on electronic word of mouth of various restaurant brands on social media. The authors found in their study that favorable electronic word of mouth for restaurant brands formed a positive relationship with brand advocacy. The authors commented that favorable electronic word of mouth helps legitimize brands in the eyes of the consumers and helps sustainably achieve brand advocacy.

Although on the one hand, studies (Eelen et al., 2017; Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Moisesescu et al., 2022) have reported a positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and the self-brand connection. On the other hand, studies by Rubiyanti & Hariandja (2020), Rosendo-Rios & Shukla (2023) and Wong (2023) have also reported a positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy. Although the explicit possibility of mediation of self-brand connection is observed from the above studies, the self-evident suspicion of mediation self-brand connection has gone unnoticed in the literature.

This study will thus examine the mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy. It can be said in the study context that when consumers find favorable electronic word of mouth about car brands on social media, they will engage in a self-brand image congruency process and eventually form a self-brand connection. Upon forming self-brand connections with consumers, they are highly expected to engage in brand advocacy. Self-brand connection is thus expected to mediate the relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy in this study. It is, thus, hypothesized:

- *H5: Self-brand connection mediates the relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy*

2.5. Conceptual Model

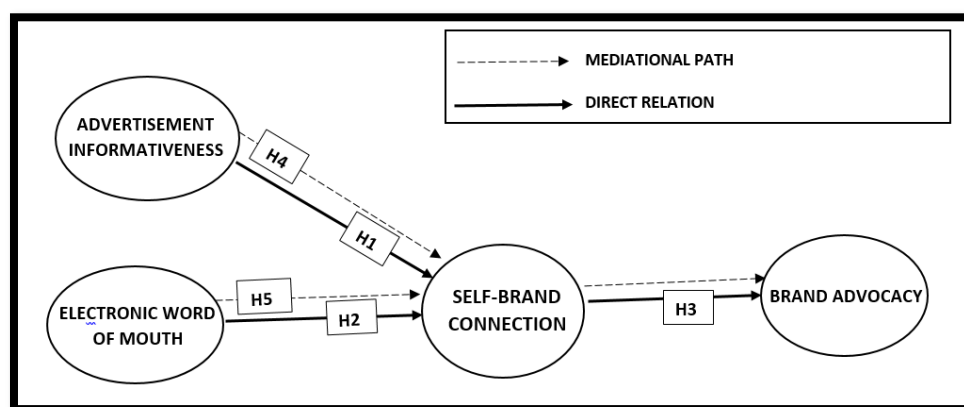


Figure 1: Conceptual Representation of the Research Model

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Measures

To best meet the study purpose, a number of automobile brands available in Saudi Arabia were selected for sampling. The structure of the research questionnaire is outlined as follows. The questionnaire begins first by asking respondents whether they own a car or not. This question is used for filtering purposes, and respondents are only allowed to proceed if they own a car.

After affirmation of the respondent owning a car, he then is asked to select his car brand from a list of twenty-one auto brands provided in the questionnaire. The car brands listed range from popular brands like Toyota, Ford, Hyundai, Lexus, BMW, etc., to less popular brands like SsangYong, Renault, Geely, and Changan Motors. An option of "Others" is also provided and kept open for response in case the respondent fails to find his auto brand in the provided list.

After marking the auto brand currently owned by the respondent, the respondent is next prompted to respond to the set of questions related to the main constructs of the study in light of the car brand which the respondent owns.

All the measures for the major constructs of the study are adopted from previous studies and adapted to the auto brand context. For example, the scales for the construct of electronic word of mouth are adopted from Bambauer-Sachse &

Mangold (2011). Scales for advertisement informativeness are adopted from Lee et al. (2020). Lastly, scales for self-brand connection and brand advocacy are adopted from studies of Escalas & Bettman (2005) and Moliner et al. (2018).

All items for the study are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. In the end, the respondent is asked to respond to demographic variables. The actual research questionnaire used in this study can be seen in the appendix.

3.2. Sampling Method

The snowball sampling method was used to gather samples for this study. The snowball sampling method is a type of non-probability sampling method in which respondents, after responding to the questionnaire, keep on forwarding it to other respondents (Parker et al., 2019).

The population for this study is defined as all auto brand users residing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The sample for this study is taken from car owners of two cities: Riyadh and Dammam. The responses were collected through both printed and online versions of the research questionnaire. Google Forms were majorly used for the recording of responses online. All of the respondents were encouraged to forward questionnaires to other auto brand owners they knew after giving their responses. 338 samples were obtained in this study with the help of snowball sampling method.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

Structural equation modeling is mainly employed for the statistical analysis of this study. Structural equation modeling helps in robust analysis by simultaneously measuring the relationships of all latent constructs of the study (Dimitrov, 2008). Both SPSS and Mplus software are used to complete the statistical analysis of the study.

The statistical analysis of this study begins first by reporting sample and descriptive statistics using SPSS statistical software. After reporting descriptive statistics of the study, the reliability and validity of the constructs of the study are thoroughly examined. The validity of the constructs is ensured by concrete assurance of content, convergent, and discriminant validity.

The reliability of the items is assured by comparing computed Cronbach alpha values for each construct of the study with the acceptable threshold values. Only constructs with a value of Cronbach alpha of more than .7 are accepted, i.e. above the acceptable threshold limit suggested by DeVillis (2003) and Kline (2005). The content validity is assured with the help of inspection and approval of the questionnaire from two expert marketing professors.

Construct validity of this study is ensured with the help of assurance of both convergent and discriminant validity. The values of average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) are above .5 and .6, as suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981), to ensure the presence of convergent validity. Similarly, the square root of average variance extracted (AVE), being greater than the individual correlations of constructs, ensures discriminant validity (John & Benet-Martinez, 2014).

Since the scales are adopted from previous studies, confirmatory factor analysis needs to be mandatorily pursued using Mplus software after assurance of reliability and validity. Confirmatory factor analysis ensures the measures are measuring expected dimensions by the appearance of item loadings above ".3" for all items used in the study (Dimitrov, 2008).

After ensuring confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling begins by checking the first overall fit of the study model, which is checked by inspecting the goodness of fit indices like Chi-square, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Upon achieving a model fit, structural equation modeling is pursued using Mplus software to examine all hypothesized relationships of the study and then report the study's results.

4. Findings

4.1. Sample Characteristics

338 samples were collected of car owners owning different car brands from different regions of Saudi Arabia for the study. Table 1 presents the complete sample characteristics of the study. As seen in table 1, the percentage composition of different auto brands in the study sample was: Toyota (19.5%), Ford (10.1%), Honda (8.6%), Nissan (4.4%), Hyundai (13.0%), Lexus (0.6%), BMW (16.3%), Changan Motors (22.8%) and Haval (4.7%).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The Car Brand of the Vehicle Owned				
Toyota	66	19.5	19.5	19.5
Ford	34	10.1	10.1	29.6
Honda	29	8.6	8.6	38.2
Nissan	15	4.4	4.4	42.6
Hyundai	44	13.0	13.0	55.6
Lexus	2	.6	.6	56.2
BMW	55	16.3	16.3	72.5
Changan Motors	77	22.8	22.8	95.3
Haval	16	4.7	4.7	100.0
Age				
21-30	144	42.6	42.6	42.6

	31-40	154	45.6	45.6	88.2
	41-50	40	11.8	11.8	100.0
Gender					
	Male	275	81.4	81.4	81.4
	Female	63	18.6	18.6	100.0
Marital Status					
	Single	203	60.1	60.1	60.1
	Married	135	39.9	39.9	100.0
Do You Use Social Media?					
	Yes	338	100	100	100.0
Which Social Media Platform You Use the Most?					
	Facebook	21	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Twitter	40	11.8	11.8	18.0
	Instagram	90	26.6	26.6	44.5
	YouTube	187	55.3	55.3	100.0
How Much Time Do You Spend on Social Media?					
	Less than 1 hour	50	14.8	14.8	14.8
	1-2 hours	191	56.5	56.5	71.3
	3-4 hours	93	27.5	27.5	98.8
	5-6 hours	4	1.2	1.2	100.0
Income (SAR-Monthly)					
	3000-5000 SAR	12	3.6	3.6	3.6
	5001-8000 SAR	22	6.5	6.5	10.1
	8001-12000 SAR	95	28.1	28.1	38.2
	12001-35000 SAR	178	52.7	52.7	90.8
	35001- ABOVE SAR	31	9.2	9.2	100.0

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

The majority of respondents in the sample are seen owning cars from Toyota, BMW, and Changan Motors auto brands. A minority of respondents in the sample are formed of car owners from Nissan, Haval, and Lexus auto brands.

Table 1 reports that most of the respondents in the study sample were between 21 and 50 years of age. As alone, two age groups, 21-30 (42.6%) and 31-40 (45.6%), are seen together, forming more than 80% of the age group. The age group of 41-50 constituted 11.8% of the sample, and no response was captured from respondents above 50 years of age. Males comprised the majority of the respondents (81.4%), compared to females, who comprised 18.6% of the respondents in the sample. More single respondents are seen in the sample (60.1%) than married respondents (39.9%).

All 338 respondents actively used social media. As can be seen from table 1, YouTube (55.3%) is seen as the most used social media platform among the respondents, followed by Instagram (26.6%), Twitter (11.8%), and Facebook (6.2%). Table 1 also reports that among the social media users, 15% of the respondents spent less than 1 hour, 56.3% spent 1-2 hours, 27.4% spent 3-4 hours, and 1.2% spent less than 1 hour daily using social media.

From table 1, it is also seen that the monthly income in Saudi Arabian riyals of the majority of respondents fell in the income range of 12001-35000 (52.7%) followed by 8001-12000 (28.1%), 35001- ABOVE (9.2%), 5001-8000 (6.5%) and 3000-5000 (3.6%).

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Advertisement Informativeness	338	1.00	5.00	3.56	.77
Electronic Word of Mouth	338	2.25	5.00	3.96	.60
Self-Brand Connection	338	2.00	5.00	4.18	.63
Brand Advocacy	338	1.25	5.00	3.62	.91

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 above reports the descriptive statistics of the main constructs of the study. The responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, coded as "1" for "Strongly Disagree", "2" for "Disagree", "3" for "Neutral", "4" for "Agree" and "5" for "Strongly Agree".

Therefore, the mean value of all the constructs of the study as seen from table 2 being above the value of "3" indicates the majority of the respondents are leaning toward the Agree side of the scale. This further implies that most of the respondents found advertisements informative of the auto brands and paid heed to the electronic word-mouth of auto brands on social media.

Similarly, the mean value of "4.18" of self-brand connection points out that consumers are using auto brands to project their self-identity. Also, the mean value of "3.62" for brand advocacy is a reflection of consumers engaging in brand advocacy of their auto brands.

4.3. Reliability

	Scale Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Advertisement Informativeness	4	.83
Electronic Word of Mouth	4	.75
Self-Brand Connection	4	.84
Brand Advocacy	4	.90

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Table 3 reports reliability statistics in terms of Cronbach alpha of the scale items of the measures of latent constructs of this study. The reliability of scale items basically indicates how consistently the scale items are measuring the latent construct (Devellis, 1991).

Devellis (1991) in his book suggests that any value of Cronbach alpha above “.70” is considered well acceptable for assurance of the reliability of measures. From table 3, it can be clearly seen that all values of the Cronbach alpha are well above the acceptable value of “.70” for all constructs of the study. Thus, the reliability of the measures of this study is said to be assured.

4.4. Validity

The validity of the constructs of this study is examined and assured through assurance of both content and construct validity. Both the content and construct validity of this study are discussed as follows:

4.4.1. Content Validity

Content validity, also widely known as face validity, refers to the inspection of measures at face value by an expert to ensure whether items reflect their theoretical definitions or not (Hair et al., 2010). The content validity for the items of the constructs was ensured through a rigorous review by two marketing professors and faculty members at the College of Business Administration at King Saud University.

4.4.2. Construct Validity

Construct validity broadly refers to the measures measuring the latent constructs of a study in accordance with what they are supposed to measure theoretically (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). Construct validity is assured through assurance of both convergent and discriminant validity (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). Convergent validity refers to the ascertainment of constructs relating to each other if, by theory, they are supposed to be relating to each other, while discriminant validity refers to the ascertainment of constructs not relating to each other if theoretically they are not supposed to be related (Westen, & Rosenthal, 2003).

Convergent validity is inspected through the examination of average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). Standardized factor loadings for each item are required to calculate the average variance extracted and composite reliability (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). To obtain standardized factor loadings for items, the study data needs to pass KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity first, which basically indicates whether the data reflects the underlying targeted latent factors (Dimitrov, 2008).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.801
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3841.291
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Table 4 above reports the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity of the study. KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity indicates whether the data is suitable for factor analysis or not (Kaiser, 1974). The threshold acceptable value suggested by Kaiser (1974) that reflects that the study sample is adequate for factor analysis is “.70”. Table 4 reports the overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) as “.80”, which is above the needed acceptable value with a significant P-value of Bartlett's test of sphericity ($00 < .05$). Moreover, the KMO value for all constructs individually was also observed to be above “.70”. Thus, the data of this study is suitable for factor analysis.

Since the measures of this study are adopted from other previous studies, confirmatory factor analysis is warranted. Mplus software was employed to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis of this study. The standardized factor loadings for all four constructs are reported in table 5. Standardized Factor loadings above the value of “.30” indicate that items are loading onto their respective latent constructs very well (Dimitrov, 2008). As inferred from table 5, all standardized factor loadings of items for each of the four constructs of the study are seen well above “.30”.

For assurance of convergent validity, Fornell & Larcker (1981) have suggested that threshold acceptable values for average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) are “.50” and “.60”. The AVE and CR values for all constructs of this study are reported under table 5 and are clearly seen well above “.50” and “.60” for all of the individual constructs of this study. Thus, this confirms the presence of convergent validity in this study.

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	AVE	CR
Advertisement Informativeness	Advertisements on social media about my car's brand are a good source of authentic information	.896	.64	.87
	Advertisements on social media about my car's brand provide relevant information	.787		
	Advertisements on social media about my car's brand provide timely information	.598		
	Advertisements on social media about my car's brand supply complete product information	.883		
Electronic Word of Mouth	I often read or watch other consumers' online car reviews to know what car brands make good impressions on others	.704	.52	.80
	To make sure I buy the right car brand, I often read or watch other consumers' online car brand reviews	.698		
	I often consult other consumers' online car brand reviews to help choose the right car brand	.774		
	I frequently gather information from online consumers' car brand reviews before I buy a certain car brand	.664		
Self-Brand Connection	My car's brand reflects who I am	.836	.59	.85
	I can identify with my car's brand	.827		
	I feel a personal connection to my car's brand	.863		
	I use my car's brand to communicate who I am to other people	.517		
Brand Advocacy	I recommend my car's brand to my friends and family	.912	.64	.87
	When the occasion arises, I explain the positive aspects of my car's brand	.566		
	When I hear people speaking badly about my car's brand, I try to defend it	.792		
	I would like my family and friends to purchase a car of the same brand which I use	.888		

Table 5: Standardized Factor Loadings AVE & CR

For confirmation of the presence of construct validity, discriminant validity also needs to be assured side-by-side with convergent validity (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). Discriminant validity is inspected by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of constructs with individual correlations of all constructs of the study (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003).

For concrete assurance of discriminant validity, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of individual constructs should be greater than individual correlations of constructs in rows and columns (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). Table 6 clearly shows that the square roots of AVE presented in bold letters are greater than individual correlations of constructs in both rows and columns, thus confirming discriminant validity. Thus, construct validity is said to be valid for this study.

Constructs	1	2	3	4
Advertisement Informativeness	.80			
Electronic word of mouth	.32	.72		
Self-Brand Connection	.30	.43	.79	
Brand Advocacy	.24	.27	.44	.86

Table 6: Discriminant Validity

4.5. Hypotheses Testing

All hypotheses of this study, including mediational hypotheses, are tested by the employment of structural equation modeling (SEM) using Mplus software. For proceeding with SEM, the first necessary prerequisite is having a model fit, which basically tells how well the data fits the model (Dimitrov, 2008). The model fit is assured through inspection of the goodness of fit indices. For the attainment of model fit, the goodness of fit indices, namely, the chi-square, should be insignificant, CFI >.9, RMSEA <.08 and SRMR <.05 (Dimitrov, 2008).

CFA model	Chi-square χ^2	Df	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	90% CI for RMSEA	
	(p value = .19)					LL	UL
Model	419.617 (p value = .19)	100	.92	.045	.070	.065	.091

Table 7: Goodness of Fit Indices

Table 7 above reports the goodness of fit indices for the study’s model. From table 7, it is clearly observed that there is an excellent model fit, as the $\chi^2 = 420.618$ (p-value >.05) is insignificant, CFI >.9 (.92 >.9), RMSEA <.08 (.070 <.08) and SRMR is <.05 (.045 <.05). Therefore, presence of model fit for the study model provides a green signal for proceeding to SEM for hypotheses testing.

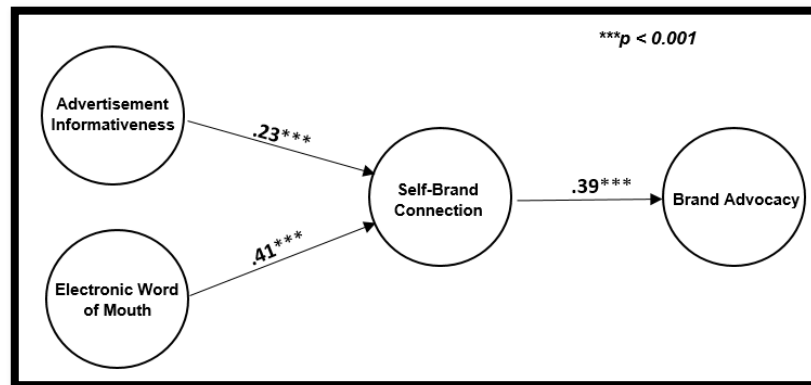


Figure 2: Structural Model Results

Figure 2 presents the structural model results of the study. The standardized point estimates of the constructs are shown in bold figures with significance at a 99% confidence level. As seen in figure 2, the point estimate of “.23”, which is significant at a 99% confidence level, signifies a statistically significant positive relationship between advertisement informativeness and the self-brand connection. Hence, hypothesis H1 is supported.

Similarly, the point estimate of “.41”, which is significant at a 99% confidence level in figure 2, represents a statistically significant positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and self-brand connection. Thus, hypothesis H2 is supported.

In figure 2, the “.39” point estimate at a 99% confidence level indicates that a statistically significant positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy is upheld. Thus, hypothesis H3 is supported.

Examining mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy was conducted with the help of Mplus software through the bootstrapping method.

Table 8 reports the direct effect of advertisement informativeness on brand advocacy as insignificant (.342 > .05), while the indirect effect, i.e. via self-brand connection, is statistically significant (p < .01). The total effect is also reported to be significant (p < .01). Thus, full mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship between advertisement informativeness and brand advocacy is confirmed. Therefore, hypothesis H4 is supported.

Effect	Path	Estimate	S.E.	P-Value	Mediation Effect
Direct effect	Advertisement Informativeness → Brand Advocacy	.057	.060	0.342	FULL MEDIATION
Indirect effect	Advertisement Informativeness → SBC → Brand Advocacy	.119	.028	0.000	
Total effect		.175	.065	0.007	

Table 8: Mediation Analysis of Self-Brand Connection in Relationship of Advertisement Informativeness with Brand Advocacy
*Self-Brand Connection (SBC)

Similarly, under table 9, it is clearly seen that the direct effect of electronic word of mouth on brand advocacy is reported as statistically insignificant (.126 > .05), while the indirect effect via self-brand connection is reported as statistically significant (p < .01). The total effect is also reported significant (p < .01) confirming full mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship of electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy. Thus, hypothesis H5 is also supported.

Effect	Path	Estimate	S.E.	P-Value	Mediation Effect
Direct effect	Electronic word of mouth → Brand Advocacy	.126	.082	0.126	FULL MEDIATION
Indirect effect	Electronic word of mouth → SBC → Brand Advocacy	.156	.041	0.000	
Total effect		.283	.065	0.000	

Table 9: Mediation Analysis of Self-Brand Connection in Relationship of Electronic Word of Mouth with Brand Advocacy
*Self-Brand Connection (SBC)

5. Discussion

The discussion of this study proceeds by highlighting comparisons of research objectives with the research findings of the study. The study had three main research objectives, and a comparison of each of the three research objectives with the research findings is as follows:

5.1. First Research Objective and Research Findings

The first research objective examined the relationship between advertisement informativeness, electronic word of mouth and the self-brand connection. This objective was accomplished successfully; both advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth exhibited a statistically significant positive relationship with the self-brand connection.

The study reported a significant positive relationship of advertisement informativeness with the self-brand connection. The results are in agreement with prior studies (Tran et al., 2020; Burnasheva & Suh, 2022; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023) that have reported a significant positive relationship between advertisement informativeness and self-brand connection.

Informative advertising is seen as effective in advertising car brands. In this study, when consumers found advertisements informative on social media, it triggered a self-brand image congruency process in them. Once this self-brand image was congruent in them based on their car brand choices, the consumer formed a self-brand connection with the car brands. Therefore, it can be said that truthful, timely, relevant, and reliable advertisements of car brands on social media play a part in the formation of self-brand connections.

This study also reported a significant positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and self-brand connection. The results contradict previous studies (Eelen et al., 2017; Shen & Sengupta, 2018; Moisescu et al., 2022) that reported a significant positive relationship between electronic word of mouth and self-brand connection.

Electronic word of mouth is gaining consideration in consumers in shaping their self-identities with the help of brands. In the study, favorable electronic word of mouth about car brands effectively formed a brand image in the consumer's mind and triggered the self-brand image congruency process in them. Depending on the car brand, the self-brand image becomes congruent, and the self-brand connection is formed in consumers. Electronic word of mouth is thus seen as effective in the formation of self-brand connections, as inferred from the results of this study.

5.2. Second Research Objective and Research Findings

The second research objective was to examine the relationship of self-brand connection with brand advocacy. This research objective was accomplished, and a significant positive relationship between self-brand connection and brand advocacy is reported in this study. The results are in agreement with studies (Rubiyanti & Hariandja, 2020; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023; Wong, 2023) that have also reported a significant positive relationship of self-brand connection with brand advocacy.

Being advocate of a brand, in turn, refers to being an advocate of one's own self-identity when consumers hold a self-brand connection for a brand. In this study, when consumers formed self-brand connections for car brands, they were also found actively engaging in brand advocacy for those car brands. The self-brand connection, thus, implies that when the brand is incorporated into the self-identities of consumers, it thereafter becomes paramount for consumers as and when required to engage in brand advocacy to defend and promote their self-identities.

5.3. Third Research Objective and Research Findings

The third research objective of the study was to examine the mediation of self-brand connection in relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy. Full mediation of self-brand connection was reported in both relationships of advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy.

Self-brand connection is fully mediated in the relationship of advertisement informativeness with brand advocacy. Mediation of self-brand connection in this study agrees with recent studies (Wong, 2023; Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023) that reported full mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship of advertisement informativeness with brand advocacy.

When car brands are advertised solely from an informative perspective, they help project a positive brand image and trigger the self-brand image congruency process in consumers' minds. Self-brand connection forms immediately when self and brand image become congruent. With the help of this self-brand connection, consumers then willingly engage in brand advocacy and transform into brand advocates for their cherished brand.

The suspicion of mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship of electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy was confirmed in this study. Full mediation of self-brand connection was reported in the relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy.

In this study, when consumers found favorable electronic word of mouth about car brands on social media, they engaged in the self-brand image congruency process and formed a self-brand connection. Upon forming self-brand connections, consumers were found strongly engaging in brand advocacy as well. This study thus uncovers the role of mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand advocacy.

6. Conclusions and Marketing Implications

The results of this study reflected how advertisement informativeness works indispensably to lead to the formation of self-brand connection first and brand advocacy thereafter through self-brand connection. This partly explains how, in Saudi Arabia, with the help of advertisement informativeness, Changan, a Chinese car brand manufacturer, is quickly eating up the market share of dominant car brands like Toyota in the Saudi Arabian car market.

The marketing expertise of Changan Motor credits its increase in market share and interest among Saudi consumers to informative advertisements and brand advocacy of their car brand by consumers. Truthfulness, reliability, relevance, and timely aspects of brand advertisements thus help make advertisements legitimate and effective in the eyes of consumers.

Results of the study show how electronic word of mouth plays a pivotal role in significantly leading to self-brand connection and brand advocacy. The advancement of social media has given new meaning to word of mouth and brand advocacy. Favorable electronic word of mouth certainly weighs in when it comes to the formation of self-brand connections and achieving brand advocacy in consumers.

Easy availability of product and service reviews, opinions, comments, and experiences of consumers of any brand on social media helps shape brand image in consumers' minds. Once the truth of that brand image is experienced in reality, the process of forming or not forming a self-brand connection becomes fast. Not only does the brand then become a part of consumers' self-identity, but also the consumers get transformed into brand advocates thereafter. After forming a self-brand connection, it becomes advocating one's own self-identity for consumers rather than the brand itself.

Both advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth are important when it comes to the formation of self-brand connections and brand advocacy. Even if the consumers see an advertisement as informative, they gauge the authenticity of the advertised information with the help of electronic word of mouth available from other consumers.

Self-brand connection fully mediated in relationships of both advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth with brand advocacy in this study. In conclusion, an understanding of brand advocacy is incomplete without an understanding of self-brand connection.

Auto brands need to keep in cognizance that social media is an uncontrollable entity, and any word on it can take any direction, both good and bad, for an auto brand. In this world surrounded by social media, brand advocacy provides a ray of hope and helps to set some direction in the auto brand's favor. The key to making consumers engage in brand advocacy sustainably is hidden in the concept of self-brand connection. Once consumers form self-brand connections for the auto brand, advocating for the auto brand becomes advocating for their own self-identity.

In this study, both advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth proved to be key in the formation of self-brand connections. Thus, for auto brands to enjoy brand advocacy from consumers, they need to strictly adhere to informative advertising, especially on social media platforms. When advertising on social media, information about cars should be reliable, truthful, timely, and relevant without any hidden deceit. Today's advancement in social media technologies has made it simple for consumers to verify advertised information at the click of a button. Therefore, no discrepancy whatsoever should be present between the advertised information and the reality, as it can cause a loss of trust and market share to competitors.

Similarly, auto brands need to keep a close eye on electronic word of mouth circulating on social media by regularly performing sentiment analysis through their respective marketing departments. Social media influencers can be hired to advocate car brands and counter any negative information, if any, circulating on social media. Auto brands can also open their own social media handles for constant promotion and in fluxing of consumer experiences, opinions, and reviews who voluntarily wish to share these things. So, the perspective of car brands is presented in the best possible manner to other consumers in the digital space.

Lastly, any genuine grievance or complaints made by consumers both through physical or digital space should be addressed in a reasonable time frame. The grievance-addressed system should act well before it reaches a point where consumers are left with no choice other than to vent their anger and frustration on social media. Whereby then the possibility of getting the negative message viral remains open.

In a nutshell, both advertisement informativeness and favorable electronic word of mouth in tandem are indispensable for auto brands to sustainably enjoy brand advocacy and growing market share.

7. Limitations

This study entails some limitations. One of the limitations of the study is that the model cannot highlight the strength of self-brand connections in consumers. For example, consumers can experience strong or weak self-brand connections for auto brands, so the effect of strong or weak self-brand connections on other constructs of the study remains a limitation.

The other limitation of the study is that it could not include major luxury brands like Mercedes, Range Rover, Lexus, GMC, etc., in the study sample. Only BMW among the luxury auto brands could be available in the study sample. So, the results cannot be generalized for other luxury brands with certainty.

Another limitation of this study was that the non-Saudi sample could not be adequately represented. Arab expatriates from neighboring Arab countries to Saudi Arabia, which form the bulk of Saudi Arabia's expatriate population, could not be sampled. Only Indians and Pakistanis formed the major part of the non-Saudi study sample.

Lastly, the other limitation of this study is that it could not include more females and respondents above 50 years of age in the study. Only 18% of the study sample comprised females and no respondents above 50 years old were found. Generalizing the results on females above 50 years of age should be done with caution.

8. Future Research Directions

Often, it is found that one of the major reasons behind the purchase of cars from high-end luxury auto brands is the flaunting of the consumer's self-identity as one among the elites of society. This identification or association of a brand with a certain social group is referred to as the brand association of reference group.

For example, Rolls-Royce is generally seen as associated with the ultra-rich section of society, which uses this car brand to showcase its high self-worth. Therefore, when a brand is associated with a particular social group, it has the obvious possibility of forming a brand image for consumers who wish to identify with that social group. So, the brand association of the reference group then clearly has the possibility of eventually leading the consumer to the self-brand image congruency process and formation of a self-brand connection.

Thus, future researchers can also examine the relationship of brand association of reference groups with self-brand connection alongside advertisement informativeness and electronic word of mouth. Moreover, research can also be conducted to examine the mediation of self-brand connection in the relationship of brand association of reference groups with brand advocacy, as the self-brand connection is found to mediate in relationships leading to brand advocacy.

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