

BEYOND TRANSPORTATION: BRAND-MEANING TRANSFER IN
DIGITAL STORYTELLING ADVERTISING
AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA FOR FMCG
DAIRY MARKETING IN PAKISTAN

Mumal Mirza^{*1}, Dr. Sobia Usman²

^{1*}PhD Scholar, Department of Media Sciences, Iqra University, Pakistan

²Associate Professor, Department of Media Sciences, Iqra University, Pakistan

^{1*}mumal.mirza@iqra.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23358513>

Keywords

Narrative advertising, creative storytelling, narrative transportation, brand-meaning, brand storytelling, FMCG, dairy advertising, consumer perception, digital advertising; Pakistan.

Article History

Received: 25 June 2026

Accepted: 16 September 2026

Published: 14 October 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *
Mumal Mirza

Abstract

Purpose – Narrative transportation is a central explanation for the persuasive effects of storytelling, yet transportation alone cannot explain why some involving stories strengthen brands while others generate attention, emotion and entertainment with weak brand consequences. This article addresses that problem by distinguishing immersion in a narrative from the subsequent transfer of narrative meaning to the advertised brand.

Approach – The article develops a theory-building integrative review of research on narrative advertising, narrative transportation, brand storytelling, advertising creativity, consumer-brand evaluation, digital advertising, food marketing, and FMCG consumption. Evidence is synthesized around a sequential mechanism comprising narrative design, narrative transportation, brand-meaning transfer, consumer evaluation, and growth-relevant consumer outcomes. FMCG dairy advertising and Pakistan are used as theoretically informative boundary contexts rather than as geographic gaps.

Findings – The literature supports transportation as an important psychological mechanism, but it does not warrant treating transportation as sufficient for brand effectiveness. The review therefore introduces brand-meaning transfer as the process through which values, emotions, identities, and causal meanings activated by a story become associated with the focal brand. Narrative brand fit, authenticity, cultural resonance, platform affordances, and category characteristics are proposed as conditions shaping this process.

Originality/value – The article separates story effectiveness from advertising effectiveness. It explains how a narrative may succeed as content while failing as advertising and offers a conditional process architecture linking narrative design to transportation, brand-meaning transfer, consumer evaluation, and growth-relevant consumer outcomes. The framework generates testable propositions for digital FMCG advertising and a context-sensitive research agenda for Pakistan's dairy sector.

INTRODUCTION

Digital advertising has enlarged the pallet of tools and mediums by which brands can communicate their stories as it has grown. All at the same time pushing attention competition. Short form video, social feeds, creator content, Brands can build more sophisticated and immersive experiences using interactive formats, and mobile-first advertising. However, the messages are experienced in situations where there are gaps in the "participatory narratives. Attention, a rapid scroll, repeated exposure, and a visible social feedback. The resulting managerial It is not just about drawing attention, it is about making meaning that consumers relate to the advertised. Brand.

This is particularly significant in the case of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) where purchasing cycles are common and functional differentiation may be limited; competing brands may offer similar. Assurance statements about quality, health, convenience, safety, family care and value. Storytelling has strategic appeal in such categories, since narratives allow the otherwise disorganized information to be organized in terms of characters, Motives, events, conflicts, and consequences that consumers can handle as a coherent whole (Escalas, 2004; de Oliveira Junior et al., 2023; Pfannes et al., 2021). Narrative has thus become an important subject of advertising and consumer research. The cognitive, affective and imagine absorption of an audience into a story world (Green) & Brock, 2000).

Transportation can focus attention, stimulate imagery and emotion, and be a focus of reduction, counter arguing, and influence future assessments. Recent studies still show that: The relevance of transportation in the context of visual, interactive and participatory advertising (Grigsby et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2024; Thomas & Grigsby, 2024; Martínez-Navarro & Bigné, 2025). But there is an important theoretical question that has not been addressed yet. Not all stories are made successful advertisement. Consumers can become absorbed in characters, conflict, humor, cultural symbolism, emotional resolution

while forming only a weak connection between those experiences and the focal brand. They may remember and share the narrative while forgetting the advertiser. Conversely, a comparatively modest story may generate a stronger brand response when the brand is causally and symbolically integrated into the narrative. The core issue is therefore not only whether a story transports an audience, but whether the meaning produced by that transportation becomes attached to the advertised brand.

This distinction is particularly important because current narrative research often moves quickly from storytelling and transportation to brand attitude, purchase intention, electronic word of mouth, and engagement. Such models are valuable, but they can compress two different advertising tasks into one process: first, creating an involving narrative experience; and second, converting that experience into brand-relevant meaning. The first task concerns story effectiveness. The second concerns advertising effectiveness.

This article addresses that theoretical compression by introducing brand-meaning transfer as a distinct mechanism between narrative transportation and consumer evaluation. Brand-meaning transfer is defined here as the degree to which consumers associate the values, emotions, identities, causal relationships, and symbolic meanings activated by a narrative with the focal brand. Transportation concerns immersion in the story; brand-meaning transfer concerns whether the consequences of that immersion become brand-relevant.

The article develops a conditional process framework in which narrative design influences transportation, transportation enables but does not guarantee brand-meaning transfer, meaning transfer shapes consumer evaluation, and consumer evaluation contributes to growth-relevant outcomes such as purchase intention, repurchase intention, recommendation, loyalty intention, and meaningful engagement.

The brand congruence, perceived authenticity, cultural relevance, platform affordances, and

category. Characteristics are set as "boundary conditions". FMCG dairy advertising offers a theoretically informative context for this framework as it is a dairy product. A combination of regular shopping, limited and differentiated usage and high symbolic and trust element. Related content. Milk and related products may have connotations of family care, childhood, nourishment, hospitability, freshness, purity, local identity, and health. In addition, Pakistan offers the multi-lingual context, family consumption and cultural approach are all features that make up their boundary context. Embedded food practices and a growing platform mediated advertising context.

The purpose is not that Pakistan is different but the context to signify the circumstances on which there are three types of general narrative mechanisms: strengthening, weakening, and change of form. The article has three contributions. The first benefit is that it distinguishes between the effectiveness of a story and advertising. Discrimination between transportation and brand-meaning transfer was important for the effectiveness. Second, it extends in narrative persuasion in Transportation, the architecture of conditional processes is included to explain why high transportation outcomes can occur when both the content and the narrative structure are the same. Can work alongside low levels of brand response. Thirdly, it establishes category and cultural boundary conditions that the framework is testable in the FMCG dairy advertising context and is relevant beyond just a single context, country and product category. The question that comes out of this is not 'does it work to tell stories', but 'when does it work to tell stories?' When someone is carried by a brand, is he/she persuaded about the brand?

2. Review Approach And Evidence Logic

The present article is an integrative review with a theory building approach. The goals are to build clarity, to develop a mechanism, and to find boundary conditions, not to estimate a pooled effect size. The approach is suitable because the

focal problem spans across the disciplines of advertising, consumer psychology, brand management, digital communication, food marketing and consumer behavior, and the studies that are used are of a heterogeneous nature and outcomes. The evidence base emphasizes peer-reviewed papers published from 2021 to 2025 and seminal papers needed to develop foundational concepts, such as narrative transportation and narrative processing. The synthesis is presented under five evidence domains: (1) narrative advertising and brand story telling; (2) narrative transportation and immersion; (3) authenticity, trust, brand attitude and other evaluative responses; (4) digital and social-media engagement and purchase-related outcomes; and (5) food, dairy, and emerging-market consumer behavior. The studies are used if they provide information for one or more links in the proposed mechanism and a theoretically relevant boundary condition. The review does not present itself as a systematic review or statistical meta-analysis as per PRISMA guidelines. The evidence provided here is not a standardized effect-size corpus, but rather encompasses different sectors, platforms, methods and outcome definitions. The article does not therefore claim to be an exhaustive retrieval nor does it claim to be pooled precision quantitatively. The review focuses on consumer-facing digital narrative advertising in branded FMCG contexts, with dairy advertising in Pakistan used as a theoretically informative boundary setting. The focal unit is the branded narrative encounter rather than the platform as a whole. The review examines narrative design, transportation, brand-meaning transfer, consumer evaluation, and consumer-level outcomes; it does not estimate objective sales growth, claim exhaustive coverage of all food-marketing research, treat non-narrative promotional exposure as equivalent to storytelling. Evidence from food marketing, social media, and adjacent product categories is included only when it clarifies a proposed mechanism, construct boundary, or moderator. This scope keeps the paper centered on the

theoretical question of when narrative immersion becomes brand-relevant meaning.

The synthesis will be structured in the order of the mechanism, not by the authors. Evidence first distinguishes narrative design from emotional advertising, then delineates transportation, then submits to brand-meaning transfer, and finally separates consumer evaluation from outcomes further downstream which are related to growth. The conditions of trust, perceived quality, sustainability, and habitual consumption are identified through food and dairy research for the conditions of contextual transfer and culturally embedded interpretation, which is assessed through Pakistan-related research.

2.1 Scope and Boundaries of the Review

Review addresses the consumer oriented digital narrative advertising in branded FMCG contexts, dairy advertising in Pakistan set as boundary setting theoretically informative. The focus is on the branded narrative encounter and not the platform itself. Does not attempt to provide an estimate of objective sales growth, nor claim exhaustive coverage of all food-marketing research, nor consider non-narrative promotional exposure to be the same as storytelling. Evidence is included in the food marketing, social media, and adjacent product categories only if it clarifies a proposed mechanism, construct boundary and/or moderator. This scope focuses on the theoretical issue of brand-relevant meaning when narrative immersion actually occurs.

3. Creative Storytelling as Narrative Advertising Design

Creative storytelling is not emotional advertising, branded entertainment or a scripted story. Narrative transportation. A typical structure of a narrative includes actors, sequence of events in time, motives, causes, relationships, tension and consequences. Creative Storytelling in advertising: it is a strategy in which the image is designed in a creative way. The development and delivery of these story elements to share brand-relevant meaning. Conceptual discipline is needed for the adjective creative. It should not be used as a way to say "good job". Storytelling. In general, advertising creativity requires novelty and appropriateness. In the context of narrative advertising, creativity then is about how to create a unique narrative. Maintaining relevance to the brand, audience, category and communication objective. A highly It can be creative as entertainment, but a narrative which is only slightly connected to the focal brand can be an original one. Lacking the characteristic of advertising. Not strategic in ability to advertise. There are some elements that have been suggested in the literature over the past few years that are prominent in the stories behind the design of narrative systems: coherence, reliability, and It is essential to have emotional and sensory vividness, authenticity cues, cultural relevance, originality, and narrative brand. Integration, and platform fit (Pfannes et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2023; Waqas et al., 2021). These are Antecedent properties of communication, not consumer outcomes. A brand has the ability to create authenticity. For instance, perceived authenticity, which is an audience assessment, is one of the cues.

Retaining this level it is essential to make a distinction to prevent using the same term in design feature and outcome. Narrative design is also complicated by the digital platforms, as users can react, comment, imitate, etc., Tell brand stories, and share stories from the brand. It's possible to transport audiences from story to interactive and virtual environments. The ratio of observation to story participation (de Regt et al., 2021; Vega & Camarero, 2024). However, It is not to be taken as a given that interaction is good. Participation can be distracting, periodic, critical meanings. Narrative effectiveness therefore depends on alignment among story form, brand identity, audience interpretation, and platform behavior.

P1. Narrative design quality is positively associated with narrative transportation when the story provides coherent, vivid, relevant, and psychologically accessible structures for audience involvement.

4. Narrative Transportation: A Necessary but Insufficient Mechanism

Narrative transportation describes cognitive, emotional, and imaginable absorption into a story world (Green & Brock, 2000). Transportation can focus attention, stimulate imagery, reduce active counter arguing, and create affective responses that influence subsequent judgments. It is therefore one of the strongest available mechanisms for explaining why narratives can persuade.

Contemporary advertising evidence confirms that transportation is not limited to long textual narratives. Depicted movement in picture-based advertising can increase transportation (Grigsby et al., 2023), interactive advertising can incorporate narratively as a persuasive design characteristic (Sun et al., 2024), and systematic review evidence shows that transportation research now spans multiple media and communication contexts while retaining the need for precision regarding antecedents, moderators, and outcomes (Thomas & Grigsby, 2024). Recent work in the International Journal of Advertising likewise demonstrates that transportation can

contribute to positive affect, advertising and brand attitudes, electronic word of mouth, and purchase intentions in co-created story advertising (Martínez-Navarro & Bigné, 2025). Recent experimental work also shows that narrative transportation can mediate the effect of storytelling-ad formats on brand attitudes (Deb et al., 2025).

Transportation should nevertheless be distinguished from engagement. Engagement can refer to cognitive investment, emotional connection, and observable interaction with a brand platform. Transportation refers specifically to immersion in a narrative experience. A consumer may like, comment, or share content without being transported, and may be deeply transported without taking any public engagement action.

More importantly, transportation is a story-experience construct. It indicates whether the audience psychologically entered the narrative; it does not necessarily establish that the audience connected the resulting meaning to the advertiser. Narrative advertising therefore contains at least two persuasion tasks: creating an involving story and ensuring that the story becomes brand-relevant. Failure in the first task produces weak involvement. Failure in the second produces narrative brand decoupling: the story succeeds while the advertising objective does not.

P2. Narrative transportation is not sufficient for favorable brand evaluation because consumers can experience high narrative absorption without strongly associating the story's central meaning with the focal brand.

5. Brand-meaning Transfer: The Missing Advertising Mechanism

Brand-meaning transfer is defined as the degree to which consumers associate the values, emotions, identities, causal relationships, and symbolic meanings activated by a narrative with the focal brand. The construct addresses a question that transportation does not: what happens to narrative meaning after the consumer becomes immersed in the story? The construct is

conceptually adjacent to established meaning-transfer logic in consumer research, but it is narrower in locus and mechanism: rather than tracing cultural meaning from an endorser to a product and then to a consumer, it specifies whether meaning generated inside a narrative episode becomes associated with the focal brand (cf. McCracken, 1989).

Consider a narrative involving parental care, childhood memory, achievement, national identity, community, responsible production. Transportation may cause consumers to experience these meanings intensely. The advertiser benefits only when the narrative provides enough structural, causal, or symbolic linkage for those meanings to become associated with the brand. In this sense, transportation creates the psychological conditions for meaning formation, whereas brand-meaning transfer determines whether that meaning becomes strategically useful.

Brand-meaning transfer can vary independently of transportation. High transportation and high meaning transfer represent the desired condition: the audience is immersed and understands the brand as integral to the story. High transportation with low meaning transfer represents the theoretically critical failure condition: the consumer enjoys and remembers the story but forms weak brand associations. Low transportation with high brand recognition is possible when the brand is salient but the story is uninvolved. Low transportation and low meaning transfer represents failure on both dimensions. Narrative brand integration should be a principal antecedent of meaning transfer. Transfer should be stronger when the brand enables the story outcome, embodies the narrative value, resolves a tension, naturally belongs to the depicted consumption experience. Transfer should weaken when the brand is interchangeable with another advertiser, enters only at the end, or appears as a detached logo after an otherwise self-contained emotional narrative. This mechanism also clarifies why advertising effectiveness should not be inferred from content popularity. Views, completion rates,

likes, comments, shares, and even emotional responses can indicate that a story attracted attention or social interaction. They do not establish that its meaning was transferred to the advertiser.

P4. Narrative brand integration strengthens the relationship between narrative transportation and brand-meaning transfer.

P5. When narrative transportation is high but narrative brand integration is weak, audiences may show strong story response without correspondingly strong brand response.

6. From Brand-meaning to Consumer Evaluation

Brand-meaning transfer should be distinguished from consumer evaluation. Meaning transfer concerns what consumers associate with a brand; evaluation concerns how consumers judge the brand after those associations become accessible. The distinction prevents a second form of construct contamination.

Relevant evaluations include brand attitude, trust, perceived quality, authenticity, and credibility. These constructs should not automatically be modeled as interchangeable indicators of a single broad variable. Brand attitude is a global evaluative response; trust concerns willingness to rely on the brand; perceived quality concerns judgments of excellence; perceived authenticity concerns sincerity and consistency. Their relative importance depends on the narrative claim and product category.

Authenticity is particularly important because it can operate at two analytical levels. A communication can contain authenticity cues realistic characters, provenance claims, brand history, local language, culturally familiar practices while perceived authenticity is the consumer's evaluation of whether those cues appear sincere and consistent with the brand. Research demonstrates that authenticity can strengthen engagement and downstream relationships but is conditional on fit, self-congruence, and execution (Eigenraam et al.,

2021; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Murshed et al., 2023).

In dairy categories, trust and perceived quality are especially consequential because consumers cannot directly verify every aspect of safety, production quality, provenance, freshness, or supply-chain integrity. Dairy research shows that trust, packaging, sensory cues, and sustainability meanings can influence evaluation (Li et al., 2021; Liem et al., 2022; Cardello et al., 2024). Storytelling can therefore create a context for quality and trust inference, but positive evaluation should not be assumed merely because the narrative is emotionally appealing.

P6. Successful brand-meaning transfer increases the accessibility of narrative derived brand associations, while the valence of subsequent evaluation depends on the credibility and appropriateness of those associations.

P7. Perceived authenticity and brand credibility strengthen the positive relationship between brand-meaning transfer and favorable brand evaluation.

7. Growth-Relevant Consumer Outcomes

A central measurement problem in advertising research is the tendency to describe consumer-level intentions as direct evidence of brand growth. Purchase intention, repurchase intention, recommendation, advocacy, loyalty intention, and meaningful digital engagement can contribute to future brand development, but they do not by themselves establish growth in revenue, sales, market share, household penetration.

This article therefore uses the bounded term growth-relevant consumer outcomes. The term recognizes their strategic relevance without equating survey responses with objective firm performance. Purchase intention is a proximal behavioral outcome of evaluation; repurchase and loyalty-related intentions are particularly relevant in recurrent FMCG categories; recommendation and advocacy indicate relational strength; and meaningful engagement can extend brand visibility and community participation when it represents substantive consumer-brand

interaction rather than passive exposure (Halloran & Lutz, 2021; Santos et al., 2022).

Stronger growth claims require behavioral, panel, retail sell-out, penetration, conversion, accounting data. The conceptual model therefore ends at growth-relevant consumer response while treating objective brand growth as a subsequent empirical domain rather than an outcome that can be inferred from cross-sectional consumer surveys.

P8. Favorable consumer evaluation is positively associated with growth-relevant consumer outcomes, including purchase and repurchase intention, recommendation, loyalty intention, and meaningful brand engagement.

P9. Narrative design has a sequential indirect relationship with growth-relevant consumer outcomes through narrative transportation, brand-meaning transfer, and consumer evaluation.

8. Boundary Conditions: When Transportation Becomes Brand Value

8.1 Narrative brand fit

Narrative brand fit concerns to which the main theme of the story's central meaning is naturally connected to the focal brand and product category. Authentic storytelling research shows that effectiveness depends on alignment conditions, including product type and price (Yin et al., 2023). Influencer research similarly demonstrates this study shows that there is congruence between source, product, and consumer that has an impact on persuasion (Belanche et al., 2021). In the proposed framework, fit should influence the ease with which transported meaning becomes brand-relevant rather than merely determining whether a story is liked.

8.2 Cultural resonance and authenticity

To deepen cultural resonances and fostering authenticity Cultural resonance is the issue of whether the language, roles, values, rituals, symbols, and situations are congruent with the audience's interpretive world. Resonance can enhance self-relevance and accessibility, thus

enhancing transportation. But the cues familiar to any culture are not necessarily persuasive. The same representation is able to when executed, it can be interpreted as being authentic, stereotypical, exclusionary opportunistic. Audience identity. The role of cultural resonance should thus be considered a conditional pathway, one that must be felt by the audience. The perceived authenticity and brand congruence are the two factors that are important in on brand evaluation.

8.3 Platform affordances

Digital platforms differ in pacing, visualization, interaction, repeated exposure, creator presence, comment visibility, and opportunities for participation. Branded content experience and social-media context influence engagement and downstream response (Cao et al., 2021; Waqas et al., 2021). Platform should therefore be treated as an affordance environment or moderator rather than as a single latent construct labeled the digital ecosystem. A story optimized for short-form video may require different narrative compression and brand integration than a longer-form video and interactive experience.

8.4 Category familiarity and habitual purchase

FMCG decisions tend to be taken on a routine basis and are not thoroughly considered. Familiarity can facilitate the impact is on comprehension, but can decrease active consideration of advertising. Theoretically, this forms a category State of condition where narratives have to evoke enough involvement to disrupt normal processing. Ensuring quick brand association. Frequently bought categories are symbolically rich, therefore providing A particularly helpful context for determining if transportation and meaning transfer in different ways. From high-involvement categories.

P10. When culturally embedded cues are used, they aid in narrative transportation, which increases the likelihood of resonance. Felt as belonging and of the heart.

P11. The strong cultural resonance of brand-meaning transfer requires culturally meaningful

cues are congruent with the focal brand and consumption context.

P12. If there is perceived cultural stereotyping opportunistic localization, the positive effect of is weak. Cultural resonance in brand evaluation, even when it attracts attention of culturally salient cues.

9. The theoretical value of FMCG Dairy advertising.

Dairy is not just a simple application of general storytelling theory. It combines routine, occurring often and having high symbolic and trust-related content. This is the combination that makes the conditions. In which the persuading narrative differs from narratives of either high or low persuasion. They take part in matters deliberately or simply because they have been used as a symbol of enjoyment.

First of all, dairy products are often bought on the spot and consumed on a regular basis. Consumers may as a result, they invest a small amount of conscious effort in each purchase. Second, many dairy the categories are very similar to each other, and the competing brands have similar functional differentiations. Claims pertaining to taste, freshness, purity, health/medical, nutrition, quality, family care, and convenience. Third, Even though dairy products are consumed regularly, they can have culturally embedded meanings in them: The themes of childhood, parenting, nourishment, hospitality, local identity, daily ritual, and responsible production.

The category is thus a blend of behavioral routine and symbolic richness. Storytelling can activate some emotionally and culturally relevant connections even though there is a limited functional claim differentiation. However, this is also a category that is sensitive to trust. Health and cleanliness, and morality. When consumers value the concept of sustainability, animal welfare, provenance responsible sourcing, that is when it creates value. Consider them credible. This boundary logic is backed up by food and dairy evidence. The acceptance of dairy is influenced by consumer reactions to: trust, packaging, sensory cues, sustainability and differentiated values related to animal welfare and environmental impact (Li et al., 2021; Liem et al., 2022; Cardello et al., 2024; Ammann et al., 2024; Richter et al., 2025). Food consumption is also highly intertwined in social-media research. Digital exposure environments (Rini et al., 2024; Whitton et al., 2024; Elliott et al., 2025).

P13. Narrative advertising is particularly influenced through the brand-meaning transfer. The FMCG categories include those that are bought regularly, with limited product differentiation. and symbolic meaning, high and medium.

10. Pakistan as a Theoretical Boundary Context

The contribution of a research program geared to Pakistan should not be dependent on the claim that it is limited. Research has been carried out in Pakistan. There exists no theoretical contribution that is merely a geographic gap. Pakistan can be an analytical use only when its cultural and market nature allow it to be examined. Advertising conditions under given advertising mechanisms. One of these conditions is family oriented consumption.

Dairy stories can be based on parents and children, Intergenerational relationships, hospitality, nourishment and family habits. These scripts can be used to create. Narrative structures that are accessible, but that can only be effective if audiences have access to them. Credible, not idealized stereotyped. The other theoretically relevant execution variable is language. Urdu,

English, regional languages and code switching may affect access, identity relevance, authenticity and social positioning. Language should therefore be analyzed as a component of the structure of the narrative, not just as a choice of language.

A demographic characteristic. Religious and national events, family events, hospitality and local food habits. Provide narrative resources. They are of value only if their cultural symbolism is organically embedded. With the brand and category. A cue could be more salient while being less trustworthy if it appears to be a superficial commercialization to audiences. The evidence suggests that social media activity can be linked to purchasing intentions in Pakistan. And that digital advertising response is shaped by culturally and self-related factors (Fatima et al., 2022; Raza & Zaman, 2021).

In addition, cognitive and affective factors have been identified from the dairy research findings in Pakistan. However, a negative correlation was found between the taste of various dairy products and purchase intentions (Zahid et al., 2024). The results suggest that it is appropriate to test culturally using the context. Incorporated internationally acknowledged advertising methods as in-situ boundary conditions while theoretical foundation.

11. Integrated Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework breaks down the effectiveness of the narrative advertising into five steps. The communication stimulus is provided in narrative design. Narrative transportation is a form of being immersed in the story. Brand-meaning transfer is about how much the values and associations that the narrative induces are transferred onto the advertiser. Consumer evaluation includes the assessments of attitude, trust, authenticity, credibility, and perceived quality.

Growth-relevant outcomes of consumers include downstream purchase, repurchase, recommendation, loyalty, and meaningful engagement responses. The main innovation is the introduction of brand meaning transfer

between transportation and evaluation. This separation yields a diagnostic model which can be used to understand why an advertising campaign could be effective at one point but not at another. It also yields a unique empirical

prediction: high transportation does not necessarily lead to a positive brand response in the absence of meaning transfer and/or brand integration.

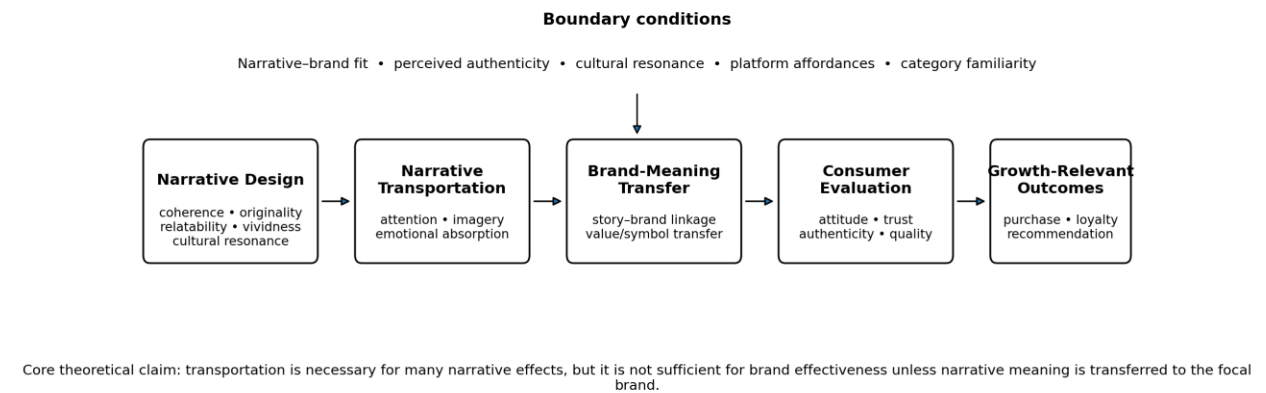


Figure 1. Conditional process model of narrative advertising effectiveness

Table 1. Construct boundaries and empirical roles

Construct	Definition	Indicative dimensions	Role
Creative storytelling / narrative design	Strategic design of narrative structure to communicate brand-relevant meaning	coherence; originality; reliability; vividness; cultural relevance; authenticity cues; brand integration	Communication stimulus
Narrative transportation	Psychological absorption into the story experience	attention; imagery; emotional involvement; reduced detachment	Mediator 1: story experience
Brand-meaning transfer	Association of narrative values, emotions, identities, and causal meanings with the focal brand	story-brand linkage; symbolic transfer; causal integration; value association	Mediator 2: advertising conversion mechanism
Consumer evaluation	Judgment of the focal brand after narrative meaning is processed	brand attitude; trust; authenticity; credibility; perceived quality	Evaluative mechanism
Growth-relevant consumer outcomes	Consumer-level responses associated with future brand development	purchase/repurchase intention; recommendation; loyalty intention; meaningful engagement	Downstream outcome domain

Construct	Definition	Indicative dimensions	Role
Context and boundary conditions	Conditions shaping interpretation and transfer	brand fit; culture; language; platform; familiarity; prior brand knowledge	Moderators / controls

12. Evidence Synthesis and What It Supports

New evidence suggests that there is a word-processing benefit to storytelling, but not for everyone. Storytelling can affect consumers' purchasing behavior and their relationship experience with the brand (de Oliveira Junior et al., while there are some, such as (Crespo et al. 2023) and (McIntosh. 2023); to be effective, the narrative must be of the required form, authentic, aligned, and of the required nature. The concept of way meaning is related to the brand (Pfannes et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2023).

Transportation is a well-supported psychological mechanism. Visual movement can be amplified. In interactive settings, narrativity can help enhance the effectiveness of services and transportation. Systematic reviews indicate that narrative transportation has several antecedents and outcomes (Grigsby et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2024; Thomas & Grigsby, 2024). Recent research on co-created storytelling further illustrates the relationships among transportation, affect, advertising and brand attitudes, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and purchase intentions (Martínez-Navarro & Bigné, 2025).

These findings support the mediating role of transportation; however, it remains unclear whether all transported meaning translates into

brand meaning. Research on authenticity, trust, and engagement suggests that perceived authenticity can increase engagement and relational outcomes, although these effects depend on factors such as fit. Other important factors include self-congruence, source characteristics, and execution (Andonopoulos et al., 2023; Eigenraam et al., 2021; Kaushik, 2022; Kumar & Thirupathi, 2023; Murshed et al., 2023). This evidence can be used to model authenticity as an evaluative or moderating construct and not assuming that an authentic looking execution equates to a good execution. Favorable response.

The Food and dairy studies give category level boundary evidence. Trust is first in dairy Packaging, sensory cues and sustainability claims influence quality and product perceptions; animal welfare and environmental meanings are not treated as inseparable "sustainability. The animal welfare and environmental meanings are not understood as an undifferentiated sustainability. value (Li et al., 2021; Liem et al., 2022; Cardello et al., 2024; Ammann et al., 2024; Richter et al., 2025). These findings strengthen the case for testing whether story meaning must be both transferred and judged credible before it contributes to brand response.

Table 2. Selected evidence mapped to the proposed mechanism

Study	Context / method	Principal evidence	Model link	Boundary caution /
de Oliveira Junior et al. (2023)	consumer storytelling; empirical	storytelling linked to purchasing behavior	narrative design → response	does not isolate brand-meaning transfer
Grigsby et al. (2023)	advertising; experiments	depicted movement increases transportation	design transportation →	visual mechanism; not brand-transfer test

Study	Context / method	Principal evidence	Model link	Boundary caution /
Yin et al. (2023)	brand storytelling; experiments	authentic storytelling depends on product/price alignment	design/fit evaluation →	supports conditional effectiveness
Thomas & Grigsby (2024)	systematic review	synthesizes transportation antecedents and outcomes	transportation mechanism	reinforces need for mechanism precision
Martínez-Navarro & Bigné (2025)	co-created story advertising; mixed methods	transportation and affect enhance ad/brand attitudes, eWOM, purchase intention	transportation → evaluation/outcomes	shows brand-meaning co-creation but not transfer as distinct mediator
Eigenraam et al. (2021)	online customer engagement	authenticity matters for engagement	authenticity response →	authenticity must be perceived, not assumed
Li et al. (2021)	dairy value chain; consumer study	trust shapes dairy response	category boundary trust	trust-sensitive product context
Rini et al. (2024)	food/social media; systematic review	multiple social-media pathways shape food behavior	digital/category context	campaigns embedded in broader exposure environment
Zahid et al. (2024)	Pakistan dairy; consumer study	cognitive-affective factors predict purchase intention	Pakistan/dairy outcome logic	supports local transfer testing, not causal storytelling effect

13. Research Agenda and Empirical Tests

The framework generates a research program that is more informative than a broad cross-sectional test of “digital marketing effectiveness.” The first requirement is to establish whether brand-meaning transfer is empirically distinguishable from transportation, brand attitude, brand connection, narrative-brand fit, message comprehension, and brand recall. Scale development should therefore begin with qualitative elicitation and item generation, followed by exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis across independent samples.

A second priority is an experiment that directly tests the theoretically critical high-transportation/low-transfer condition. Narrative transportation potential and narrative brand integration can be manipulated orthogonally to create four conditions: high transportation/high integration, high transportation/low integration, low transportation/high integration, and low transportation/low integration. The crucial prediction is that the high-transportation/low-integration condition will produce stronger story responses than brand responses, thereby demonstrating that transportation is insufficient for advertising effectiveness.

A third study could assess the entire sequential mechanism with the same multi-item measures and procedures that were shown to work in the past. Structural equation modeling or Conditional process analysis. Narrative design → narrative transportation → brand-meaning transfer → consumer evaluation → growth-relevant consumer outcomes, The concept of consumer outcomes was used, along with theoretically justified direct paths to test partial mediation, although not Forcing a completely sequential structure.

In the context of Pakistan dairy industry, the preliminary content analysis can highlight the key points from the point of view of major dairy brands. Family roles, cultural symbolism, local events, emotional framing, language, authenticity cues, product role and brand integration on

digital platforms. The content analysis should provide a description of the content. Not make inferences about consumer psychology based on ads. Its role is to characterize stimulus patterns that which can be used to guide experimental manipulations and survey measures.

Cross-platform research should be conducted to determine if short-form video, longer video, social feeds, or a combination of them are effective. And creator-driven ads impact the partnerships between transportation, brand integration, and meaning transfer. Cross-cultural extensions can then look to see if the same description of events leads to the same narrative cues being produced. The effect of the transfer would be different due to the differences in one's cultural resonance, authenticity judgments, and etc. consumption scripts.

Table 3. Empirical roadmap for testing the propositions

Propositions	Primary relationship	Recommended design	Key measures	Critical test
P1-P2	Narrative design → transportation; transportation is insufficient alone	2 × 2 experiment manipulating narrative quality and brand integration	Transportation, story response, brand attitude	Compare high-transportation conditions with different levels of brand integration
P3-P5	Transportation → brand-meaning transfer → evaluation	Experiment with orthogonal transportation potential and brand integration	Transportation, story-brand linkage, meaning association, brand evaluation	Demonstrate high transportation with weak brand response when transfer is low
P6-P7	Meaning transfer → evaluation, moderated by authenticity/credibility	Survey or experiment with validated multi-item measures	Meaning transfer, authenticity, credibility, trust, quality, attitude	Establish discriminant validity and moderated mediation
P8-P9	Evaluation → growth-relevant consumer outcomes; sequential indirect effect	SEM or conditional process analysis	Purchase/repurchase intention, recommendation, loyalty, meaningful engagement	Estimate indirect effects while retaining theoretically justified direct paths

Propositions	Primary relationship	Recommended design	Key measures	Critical test
P10-P12	Cultural resonance and authenticity boundary conditions	Pakistan-based multilingual experiment or multi-group design	Cultural resonance, identity relevance, stereotyping, authenticity	Test whether resonance helps only when cues are congruent and credible
P13	FMCG category boundary condition	Cross-category comparative experiment or replication	Category familiarity, habituality, symbolic meaning, trust sensitivity	Assess whether transfer is more consequential in habitual yet symbolically rich categories

14. Theoretical Contributions

14.1 Separating story effectiveness from advertising effectiveness

The first contribution is of a conceptual nature. Narrative transportation shows good or bad story effectiveness psychologically: brand-meaning transfer refers to whether the experience became strategically relevant to: the advertiser. This separation is responsible for an ad being able to generate a lot of attention and emotion for, sharing, or transportation while having minimal brand impact.

14.2 Extending transportation with a brand-conversion mechanism

Rather than assuming transportation → brand outcome, the framework specifies transportation → brand-meaning transfer → consumer evaluation → growth-relevant response. Brand-meaning transfer therefore provides an explanation for variance in advertising outcomes that transportation alone cannot capture.

The second contribution is mechanistic. Instead of taking the route of transportation → brand outcome the framework specifies transportation → brand-meaning transfer → consumer evaluation → growth-relevant response. Brand-meaning transfer therefore provides an explanation for variance in advertising outcomes that transportation alone cannot capture.

14.3 Identifying category and cultural boundary conditions

The third contribution concerns contextualization. FMCG dairy advertising demonstrates how narrative persuasion may operate under habitual purchase, constrained functional differentiation, symbolic consumption, and heightened trust requirements. An environment for testing the extent to which Pakistan provides a setting for testing how Narrative is influenced by family use, cultural significance, language and platform environment Interpretation not as the contribution but as the product of geography.

15. Managerial Implications

The framework is a new way of diagnosing story telling performance by the manager. Views, completion rates, likes, comments, shares, and recall are helpful communication indicators, but not indicators of. Whether consumers were transported, whether the narrative meaning was attached to the brand evaluation changed.

Evaluation of advertising should thus separate five stages: narrative execution, transportation, brand meaning transfer, consumer evaluation and consumer response. A campaign can be unsuccessful because: In the case of consumers, they are never involved in the story as it doesn't connect with the brand, it's just a great story. Due to meaning transfer but the claim seems

inauthentic, due to favorable evaluation doesn't convert to action. Different solutions in the field of creativity and media are needed for these failures.

The implication for FMCG dairy brands is quite clear: the brand must perform meaningfully. To be a part of the story and not a faceless sponsor terminal logo. Family care, Nourishment, freshness, local identity, responsible production, and other narrative territories are strategically relevant only if the advertised brand is clearly associated with the story that is told. Measurement dashboards should therefore separate communication metrics (reach, completion, Cognitive metrics (story-brand), psychological metrics (transportation, emotional involvement), and transfer metrics (story-brand) all contribute to this.

This includes cognitive metrics (story-brand), psychological metrics (transportation, emotional involvement), and transfer metrics (story-brand). Impersonal (linkage and meaning association), evaluative (attitude, trust, authenticity, quality), and behavioral (intention to use, actual use). Metrics (purchase, repeat purchase, recommendation). This is an architecture with stages that enables managers to determine the areas of breakdown in persuasion.

16. Limitations

The structure is theory-building, and is not meant to imply that all of the pathways proposed have been shown to be empirically possible. The theoretical importance of the mechanism of brand-meaning transfer is introduced as a theoretically unique mechanism that must be assessed as discriminating from brand association, narrative-brand fit, message comprehension, and consumer-brand connection, which is why it is important it be tested directly.

The review is integrative not exhaustive. It focuses on more recent peer-reviewed studies which directly inform the proposed mechanism, but it is not meant that it has captured all of the studies of storytelling and the transportation of narrative. This restriction is better than non-

auditable counts of systematic reviews or falsely suggesting evidence-based counts are quantitative. The sequence may also not be as linear as the framework implies.

The process may also be less linear than the framework suggests. Prior brand familiarity, category schemas, and existing attitudes can influence attention and interpretation before transportation occurs. Future research should therefore test reciprocal and moderated relationships rather than assume universal full mediation.

Finally, cultural and category effects should be tested rather than presumed. Pakistan is internally pluralistic and family images, local symbols, language and religious or national events can elicit varying reactions from different audience segments. Growth relevant consumer outcomes should also be considered to be objective firm growth and not just behavioral, retail, panel accounting growth.

17. Conclusion

Narrative advertising research has established that stories can attract attention, generate emotion, create transportation, and influence consumer response. The next theoretical question is more precise: when does the experience of a story become meaning for a brand?

This article argues that narrative transportation is important but insufficient for answering that question. Consumers can become absorbed in a story without transferring its central meaning to the advertiser. Narrative advertising effectiveness therefore depends not only on transportation but also on whether narrative values, identities, emotions, and causal meanings become associated with the focal brand and whether those associations generate favorable evaluation.

The resulting mechanism narrative design → narrative transportation → brand-meaning transfer → consumer evaluation → growth-relevant consumer outcomes—separates story success from advertising success and creates testable boundary conditions involving narrative brand fit, authenticity, culture, platform, and category characteristics.

In FMCG dairy advertising, the difference is more critical in Pakistan because dairy has symbolic, familial, health, quality and trust value for its habitual buying implications. While good story can generate interest and feelings, the establishment of brand value requires that the interpretation of meaning is established by the consumer in a reasonable relationship with the advertiser. A story isn't just good for advertising when consumers experience it but when they take the story with them and hold it in their minds as a brand component.

REFERENCES

- Ammann, J., Mack, G., El Benni, N., Jin, S., Newell-Price, P., Tindale, S., Hunter, E., Vicario-Modroño, V., Gallardo-Cobos, R., Sánchez-Zamora, P., Miškolci, S., & Frewer, L. J. (2024). Consumers across five European countries prioritise animal welfare above environmental sustainability when buying meat and dairy products. *Food Quality and Preference*, 117, Article 105179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2024.105179>
- Andonopoulos, V., Lee, J. J., & Mathies, C. (2023). Authentic isn't always best: When inauthentic social media influencers induce positive consumer purchase intention through inspiration. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 75, Article 103521. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103521>
- Ares, G., Antúnez, L., de León, C., Alcaire, F., Vidal, L., Natero, V., & Otterbring, T. (2022). Even if you don't pay attention to it, you know it's there: A qualitative exploration of adolescents' experiences with digital food marketing. *Appetite*, 176, Article 106128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2022.106128>
- Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2021). Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 186–195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.067>
- Cao, D., Meadows, M., Wong, D., & Xia, S. (2021). Understanding consumers' social media engagement behaviour: An examination of the moderation effect of social media context. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 835–846. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.025>
- Cardello, A. V., Llobell, F., Jin, D., Ryan, G. S., & Jaeger, S. R. (2024). Sensory drivers of liking, emotions, conceptual and sustainability concepts in plant-based and dairy yoghurts. *Food Quality and Preference*, 113, Article 105077. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2023.105077>
- Crespo, C. F., Ferreira, A. G., & Cardoso, R. M. (2023). The influence of storytelling on the consumer–brand relationship experience. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 11, 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-021-00149-0>
- Deb, M., Ghosh, A., & Shukla, Y. (2025). Storytelling ads, narrative transportation, retrospective reflexivity, and attitude towards brands: Role of independent versus interdependence self-construal. *Psychology & Marketing*, 42(7), 1795–1810. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22204>
- de Oliveira Junior, J. R., Limongi, R., Lim, W. M., Eastman, J. K., & Kumar, S. (2023). A story to sell: The influence of storytelling on consumers' purchasing behavior. *Psychology & Marketing*, 40(2), 239–261. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21758>

- de Regt, A., Planger, K., & Barnes, S. J. (2021). Virtual reality marketing and customer advocacy: Transforming experiences from story-telling to story-doing. *Journal of Business Research*, 136, 513–522. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.08.004>
- Eigenraam, A. W., Eelen, J., & Verlegh, P. W. J. (2021). Let me entertain you? The importance of authenticity in online customer engagement. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 54, 53–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.11.001>
- Elliott, C., Truman, E., & Black, J. E. (2025). Food marketing to teenagers: Examining the digital palate of targeted appeals. *Appetite*, 207, Article 107912. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2025.107912>
- Elshazly, A., Yan, J., & Ghaith, A. (2025). Understanding how narrative attributes of sponsored food vlog affect viewers' engagement: Evidence from Egypt. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 84, Article 104178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.104178>
- Escalas, J. E. (2004). Narrative processing: Building consumer connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14(1–2), 168–180. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP1401&2_19
- Fatima, T., Bilal, A. R., & Khan, S. I. (2022). I am more inclined to buy online—novel social media engagement stimulated purchase intentions post-COVID-19: A case of Pakistani market. *American Journal of Business*, 37(4), 173–195. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJB-10-2021-0136>
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701–721. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701>
- Grigsby, J. L., Jewell, R. D., & Zamudio, C. (2023). A picture's worth a thousand words: Using depicted movement in picture-based ads to increase narrative transportation. *Journal of Advertising*, 52(4), 594–612. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2022.2077267>
- Halloran, T. J., & Lutz, R. J. (2021). Let's give them something to talk about: Which social media engagements predict purchase frequency? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 56, 83–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2021.05.003>
- Kumar, V., & Kaushik, A. K. (2022). Engaging customers through brand authenticity perceptions: The moderating role of self-congruence. *Journal of Business Research*, 138, 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.08.065>
- Li, S., Wang, Y., Tacken, G. M. L., & Liu, Y. (2021). Consumer trust in the dairy value chain in China: The role of trustworthiness, the melamine scandal, and the media. *Journal of Dairy Science*, 104(8), 8554–8567. <https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2020-19733>
- Liem, D. G., in 't Groen, A., & van Kleef, E. (2022). Dutch consumers' perception of sustainable packaging for milk products, a qualitative and quantitative study. *Food Quality and Preference*, 102, Article 104658. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2022.104658>

- Martinez-Navarro, J., & Bigné, E. (2025). The power of storytelling in co-created advertising: A narrative transportation theory perspective. *International Journal of Advertising*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2025.2573534>
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310–321. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209217>
- Murshed, F., Dwivedi, A., & Nayeem, T. (2023). Brand authenticity building effect of brand experience and downstream effects. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 32(7), 1032–1045. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-02-2021-3377>
- Pfannes, C., Meyer, C., Orth, U. R., & Rose, G. M. (2021). Brand narratives: Content and consequences among heritage brands. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(11), 1867–1880. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21543>
- Raza, S. H., & Zaman, U. (2021). Effect of cultural distinctiveness and perception of digital advertising appeals on online purchase intention of clothing brands: Moderation of gender egalitarianism. *Information*, 12(2), Article 72. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info12020072>
- Richter, S., Stolz, H., Martinez-Cruz, A. L., & Kachi, A. (2025). Animal welfare has priority: Swiss consumers' preferences for animal welfare, greenhouse gas reductions and other sustainability improvements in dairy products. *Food Quality and Preference*, 123, Article 105350. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2024.105350>
- Rini, L., Schouteten, J. J., Faber, I., Frost, M. B., Perez-Cueto, F. J. A., & De Steur, H. (2024). Social media and food consumer behavior: A systematic review. *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 143, Article 104290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2023.104290>
- Santos, Z. R., Cheung, C. M. K., Coelho, P. S., & Rita, P. (2022). Consumer engagement in social media brand communities: A literature review. *International Journal of Information Management*, 63, Article 102457. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102457>
- Sun, Y., Chen, J., & Sundar, S. S. (2024). Chatbot ads with a human touch: A test of anthropomorphism, interactivity, and narrativity. *Journal of Business Research*, 172, Article 114403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114403>
- Thomas, V. L., & Grigsby, J. L. (2024). Narrative transportation: A systematic literature review and future research agenda. *Psychology & Marketing*, 41(8), 1805–1819. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22011>
- Vega, E., & Camarero, C. (2024). Once upon a game: Boosting brand storytelling through gamification. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 33(6), 717–732. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-10-2023-4796>
- Waqas, M., Salleh, N. A. M., & Hamzah, Z. L. (2021). Branded content experience in social media: Conceptualization, scale development, and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 56, 106–120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2021.07.001>

Whitton, C., Wong, Y. H. M., Lau, J., Chua, X. H., Müller, A. M., Tan, C. S., van Dam, R. M., Müller-Riemenschneider, F., & Rebello, S. A. (2024). Ecological momentary assessment of digital food and beverage marketing exposure and impact in young adults: A feasibility study. *Appetite*, 197, Article 107338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2024.107338>

Yin, C.-C., Tang, Y.-C., Chiu, H.-C., Hsieh, Y.-C., & Lai, Y.-T. (2023). Telling an authentic story by aligning with your product type and price. *Journal of Business Research*, 161, Article 113799. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113799>

Zahid, H., Ali, S., Danish, M., & Sulaiman, M. A. B. A. (2024). Factors affecting consumers' intentions to purchase dairy products in Pakistan: A cognitive affective-attitude approach. *Journal of International Food & Agribusiness Marketing*, 36(3), 347–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974438.2022.2125919>