Revisiting the Affect Transfer Hypothesis (ATH) in the context of Green Advertising

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Abstract **Impact of advertising as a medium of communication has been investigated on brand awareness and the indicators of advertising effectiveness, viz., attitude toward the ad, brand attitude and purchase intention in the context of advertisement of green products. Brand attitudes model suggested by [33] was the foundation of the conceptual model developed for investigation which was tested by structural equation modelling to find out the validity of the path proposed in the model. Two hundred and seventy eight valid questionnaires were used for data analysis collected through on-line mode. Results suggests the validity of Affect Transfer Hypothesis (ATH) which suggest the direct one-way impact of attitude-toward-the-ad and brand attitude leading to purchase intention. It can be inferred that elements of advertisements play an important role in influencing the intention to purchase in the case of green products which are at a nascent stage in India.**

Keywords — Affect Transfer Hypothesis, attitude, brand awareness, green advertising, purchase intention, structural equation modelling (SEM)

I. INTRODUCTION

Advertising as a form of communication has been an attraction for researchers to explore the process through which it influences the consumer behaviour. In addition to the interest in investigating cognitive reactions to advertisements, advertising and marketing researchers have investigated the affective reactions to a great extent [33], [37]. An important and well-researched affective construct is the attitude-toward-the-ad (A_{ad}) which exhibits the consumers' feeling of favourability/unfavorability towards the advertisement [33].

The aim of this research is to re-investigate the validity of one of the causal model of the brand attitude suggested by [33] in the context of advertising of green product. The four alternative models were based on the linkages between brand related cognitions, C_b (brand attitude and purchase intention) and ad-related cognition, C_{ad} (attitude-toward-the-ad) elucidating the mediating role played by attitude-toward-the-ad between brand attitude and purchase intention. The Affect Transfer Hypothesis (ATH) postulates the direct one-way impact of attitude-toward-the-ad and brand attitude and has been reported valid in the literature [11], [31], [33], [37], [43]. Hence, this study is an attempt to explore the relationship between brand awareness, attitude-toward-the-ad, brand attitude and purchase

intention to test the validity of Affect Transfer Hypothesis (ATH) in context of advertising of green products.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been validated in literature that the main aim of advertising is to create awareness and enforce strong attitudes towards brands and the advertiser [2]. Brand awareness has been reported as an important element of the communication process to occur as it is considered to be an antecedent to the other steps of the process. A consumer should be aware of the brand first in order to buy it. Thus, brand attitude and intention to buy cannot be formed until consumers are aware of the brand [34], [41]. Many researchers have described awareness as an important step which allows the brand association to be formed in memory [21], [27]. Brand awareness has an influential role to play in determining the consideration set - *a small set of brands selected by consumers which they refer while making purchase* [22]. The strength of awareness of brands within the consideration set has also been researched and found significant. Top-of-mind awareness is crucial brands under the condition of unaided recall will have higher probability of purchase as compared to other brands [44]. Another set of studies has confirmed the influential role played by brand awareness within the consideration set. It has been reported that consumers tend to buy only familiar and well-established brands guided by awareness posing as a

heuristic [23], [25], [27], [40]. In addition, brand awareness has also been cited in prior studies to influence the choice within consideration by perceived quality. Study by [23] reported that the consumers selected the known brand among the choice-set despite of the presence of a better quality brand. Dynamic Recursive Model suggested by [1] exhibited relationships among measures – brand awareness, brand attitude, advertising exposure and purchase behaviour. The study reported a direct influence of advertising on purchase behaviour through awareness. Hence, it is proposed in the present study that brand awareness can have an influential impact on purchase intention in the case of green products as the marketers thrive to push their green offering among the choice set of customers by adopting different marketing strategies.

A. Brand Attitude Model

There exist three principal outcome variables of advertising effectiveness, viz., attitude-toward-the-ad, brand attitude and purchase intention [26], [32]. [33] suggested four alternative structural specifications of mediating role of attitude-toward-the-ad derived from the general hierarchy-of-effects framework which suggests the path starting from cognition, affect and finally to conation (purchase intention) as depicted in Figure 1. Ad-related cognitions frame the attitude-toward-the-ad and brand-related cognitions prompted by ad exposure are suggested to be the causal antecedent of brand attitude. The *affect transfer hypothesis* (ATH) suggests a one-way causal flow from attitude-toward-the-ad to brand attitude and has been an area of interest in literature [11], [37], [43]. The *dual mediation hypothesis* (DMH) portrays the indirect causal flow from attitude-toward-the-ad through brand cognitions to brand attitude. Attitude toward the source is formed by the perception of the source which in turn influence the cognitive and affective reactions to the content of the advertisement. The *reciprocal mediation hypothesis* (RMH) suggests a reciprocal relationship between attitude-toward-the-ad and brand attitude with the causal flow in both directions and is considered to be a balanced theory account of the causal relation between attitude-toward-the-ad and brand attitude. Lastly, the *independent influences hypothesis* (IIH) suggests attitude-toward-the-ad and brand attitude as independent determinants of purchase intention while having no causal relationship between them.

B. Relationship between Attitude-toward-the-ad, Brand attitude and Purchase Intention

The causal relationship suggested by [33] leading to purchase intention has been considered to be an important measure of ad effectiveness [10]. Few studies have reported a direct relationship between attitude-toward-the-ad (Aad) and purchase intention (PI) under conditions of low involvement when affective responses are evoked [4], [6], [14], [39].

Figure 1: Alternative Structural Specifications of Mediating Role of Attitude-toward-the-ad
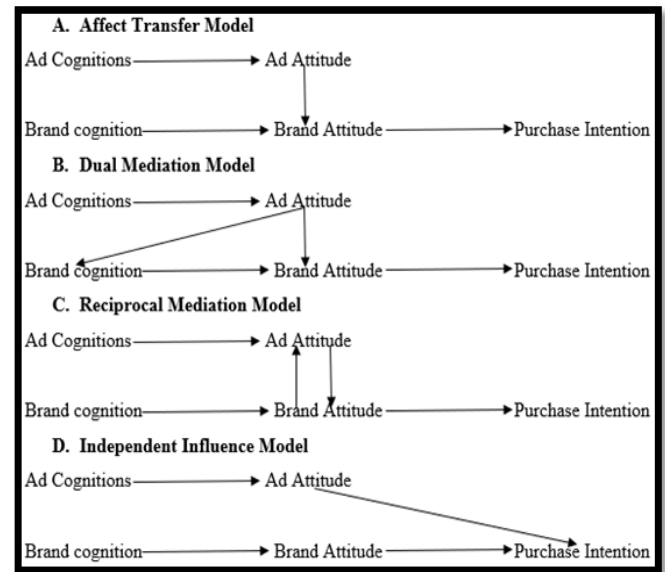
Source: [33]

Other studies showing a model of advertising effects have also stated a direct link between attitude-toward-the-ad (A_{ad}) and purchase intention (PI) [8], [35]. A Research paper examined the consumers' response to green advertising for high and low involvement products by measuring its effect on consumers' intention to purchase green brands [38]. Results indicated positive attitudes towards green ad, brand image and attitude toward brand influence consumers' purchase intention.

C. Conceptual Framework

A model has been proposed to understand the impact of advertising exposure on brand awareness, attitude-toward-the-ad, brand attitude and purchase intention broadly based on the brand attitude model [33]. Prior studies have also corroborated the linkages among attitude-toward-the-ad, brand attitude and purchase intention. The present study attempts to find out the validity of the causal relationship among attitude-toward-the-ad, brand attitude and purchase intention portrayed in literature in the context of advertising of green products. Hence, the following conceptual model has been proposed (Figure 2):
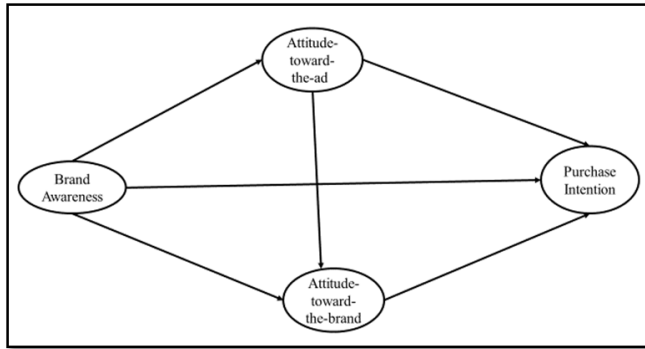
Proposed Hypothesis:

H_1 *Brand Awareness has an impact on attitude-toward-the-brand.*

H_2 *Brand Awareness has an impact on purchase intention.*

H_3 *Brand Awareness has an impact on attitude-toward-the-ad.*

Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Model

H_4 *Attitude-toward-the-ad has an impact on attitude-toward-the-brand.*

H_5 *Attitude-toward-the-ad has an impact on purchase intention.*

H_6 *Attitude-toward-the-brand has an impact on purchase intention.*

III. METHOD

A. Design of Stimulus

Advertisement of a fictitious brand name was created to avoid the impact of participants' prior brand preference and brand liking. The relevant and acknowledged measures of the constructs selected for the research were obtained from earlier researches in the field. The initial item in the questionnaire was a screening question directed at establishing the viability of the respondents to the study. The opening question was to ascertain how often they purchased skin care products. The respondents who replied affirmatively were only proceeded for further questions; else the negative response terminated the questionnaire. This helped the researcher to select those respondents for the present study who were thinking of buying a skin care product in near future.

A total of 278 participants were interviewed from the state of Maharashtra through sharing on-line questionnaire. The participants were exposed randomly to the questionnaire. Only the respondents who were intending to purchase skin care product within three months were used for data analysis. The final sample comprised of around 70 percent male and around 30 percent female respondents.

B. Measurement

After the exposure to the advertisement of an anonymous green skin care product, participants were asked to give their responses to brand awareness, attitude-toward-the-ad, brand attitude and purchase intention. Measures of brand awareness was assessed using 5 items 7-point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree. The items adopted have been utilized in previous studies [46]. The items were, *I can recognize the advertised Skin care product among other competing brands*, *I am aware of advertised Skin care product, some characteristics of advertised Skin care product come to my*

mind quickly, *I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of advertised Skin care product, I have difficulty in imagining advertised Skin care product in my mind*. Attitude-toward-the-ad was assessed with the measures using 7-point semantic differential items adopted from [32]. Respondents were asked – the advertisement of the skin care product you saw was *Bad: good, Unpleasant: pleasant, Unfavourable: favourable, Unconvincing: convincing, Unbelievable: believable* [9], [29], [42]. Brand attitude was assessed by 4-item using 7-point semantic differential scale. The items were *Unfavourable: favourable, Bad: good, Poor quality: good quality, Negative: positive* [20], [24], [29]. Purchase intention was assessed by 3-item using 7-point semantic differential scale. The scale used was *Very unlikely: very likely, Impossible: possible, Improbable: probable* [3], [24], [29], [45].

IV. RESULTS

The aim of the study was to test the validity of the causal relationships of the four alternative brand attitude models [33] in the context of green products. In addition, the effect of attitude-toward-the-ad was investigated as a potential mediator. The data was analysed using Structural Equation Modelling. The dependent variables were attitude-toward-the-ad, brand attitude and purchase intention and independent variable as brand awareness.

In order to test the causal relationships specified in the proposed model, various assumptions of structural equation modelling were validated with respect to normality, sampling adequacy and no extreme multicollinearity [17]. The skewness and kurtosis values for all the variables were within acceptable range thus stating the normality of the data. Recommendations from previous studies states that at least five participants per construct and not less than 100 individuals per data analysis should be employed [15]. Other studies have suggested to have at least 200 sample size for reliable SEM results [19], or have a sample size of 200 or larger for a complicated path model [28] or a sample size of at least 200 and not exceeding 400 [16]. Hence, the final sample size used was 278 which is in the acceptable boundary.

A. Measurement Model

The measurement model was then tested using confirmatory factor analysis. Convergent validity was established by assessing - standardized factor loadings (Figure 3) which were in the acceptable range –above 0.7 [18], average variance extracted (AVE) which was above the recommended cut-off level of 0.5 [18] and composite reliability (CR) which was above the threshold level of 0.7 [17], [18]. Discriminant validity was also established as the average of AVE was found to be greater than R square between two constructs Table 1 illustrates the values of all constructs and AVE value are the highlighted diagonal values. All the model fit indices were found to be in

acceptable range (*CMIN/Df: 2.349, GFI: 0.867, CFI: 0.939, RMSEA: 0.058, PNFI: 0.734*). The *Chi-square* value was 460.499 with 196 *degrees of freedom* (p<0.05).

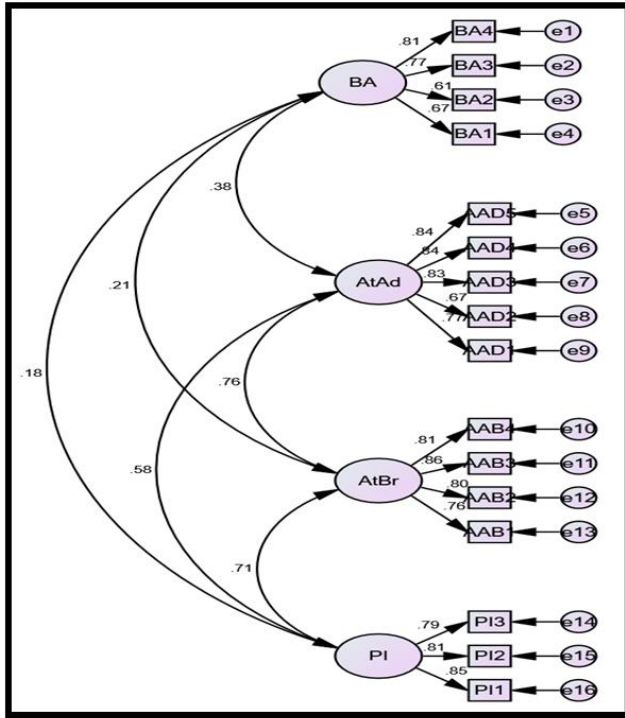**Figure 3: Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Table 1: Validity Analysis

	CR	AVE	MSV	Max R(H)	BA	AtAd	AtBr	PI
BA	0.808	0.516	0.142	0.825	0.718			
AtAd	0.893	0.626	0.573	0.901	0.377***	0.791		
AtBr	0.883	0.654	0.573	0.887	0.210**	0.757***	0.809	
PI	0.859	0.670	0.502	0.862	0.178*	0.577***	0.708***	0.819

(Source: Gaskin & Lim, 2016)

B. Structural Model

All the multivariate assumptions were checked before proceeding to test the model, namely, *normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity/homogeneity of variance* [12], [17]. The present study had one *exogenous variable*, brand awareness and three *endogenous variables*, viz. attitude-toward-the-ad, attitude-toward-the-brand and purchase intention. Furthermore, the model was recursive in nature which states that paths between constructs originated only from the predictor constructs to the dependent constructs [17].

C. Model Fit

The structural model was assessed in AMOS 24 to find out the fit between the data and the proposed conceptual model. Model fit indices have to be reported for structural model as

it was done in measurement model. The Chi-square value was 460.499 with 196 degrees of freedom (p<0.05). The other model fit indices demonstrated a good fit for the proposed model, viz. *Cmin/df = 2.349; CFI = 0.939; AGFI = 0.816; RMSEA = 0.058.*

D. Path Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Path estimates were calculated by using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) which is considered to be tolerant to violations of normality assumptions in most of the psycho-behavioural studies [7], [36]. Results of path analysis have been presented in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 4.

It was hypothesized that brand awareness is a positive predictor of attitude-toward-the-brand, purchase intention and attitude-toward-the-ad for advertisements of green and non-green products. Table 2 shows that there is insignificant relationship between the constructs brand awareness and attitude-toward-the-brand (C.R. = -1.482; sig>0.05), insignificant relationship between the constructs brand awareness and purchase intention (C.R. = 0.172; sig>0.05) and significant relationship between brand awareness and attitude-toward-the-ad (C.R. = 4.982; sig<0.05) for advertisements of green products. There is significant relationship between the constructs attitude-toward-the-brand and purchase intention (C.R. = 6.030; sig<0.05) for advertisements of green products.

Table 2: Summary of SEM Results

	CR	AVE	MSV	Max R(H)	BA	AtAd	AtBr	PI
BA	0.808	0.516	0.142	0.825	0.718			
AtAd	0.893	0.626	0.573	0.901	0.377***	0.791		
AtBr	0.883	0.654	0.573	0.887	0.210**	0.757***	0.809	
PI	0.859	0.670	0.502	0.862	0.178*	0.577***	0.708***	0.819

E. Mediating Influence of Attitude-toward-the-ad on Relationship between Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention

It was hypothesized that attitude-toward-the-ad mediates the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention for advertisements of green products. Table 3 reveals that indirect effect of attitude-toward-the-ad on the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention is stronger than the direct effect for advertisements of green products. Further, indirect effect is significant and

Figure 4: Structural Model
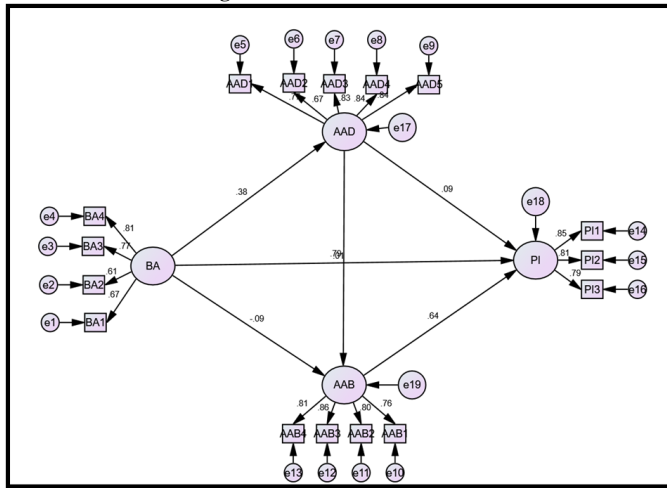
direct effect is insignificant. Hence, attitude-toward-the-ad completely mediates the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention for advertisements of green products.

Table 3: Results of Mediation Analysis

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Result
BA→AAD →PI	β = 0.001	β = 0.254	β = 0.211	Full Mediation
	p = 0.983	p = 0.001	p = 0.021	

V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The linkage between brand awareness and purchase intention was reported via attitude-toward-the-ad and attitude-toward-the-brand and thus supports the Affect Transfer Hypothesis [33]. Findings suggest that consumers' attitude toward the advertisement is guided by the information (ad cognition) that they have gained from the point of contact (advertisement). The same findings have been reported in prior studies also especially in green products [5], [30]. Attitude toward the advertisement helps to form attitude toward the brand which is quite relevant in the case of green products. Based on the information and the structure of the advertisement, consumers form an image about the product which then guides the formation of attitude toward the advertisement. It should be noted from the findings that ad-elements should be selected and designed cautiously keeping the target segment in mind as the consumers look for knowledge and interpret the content in the advertisement to frame the attitude toward the brand. Lastly, attitude toward the brand has been reported to impact the purchase intention. This phenomenon has been supported by many prior studies that possibility of a consumer buying a product depends on the attitude which he/she has framed for the product. If the consumers are attracted and convinced by the attributes of the product, they will make their own efforts to buy that product. Thus,

the stronger the attitude toward the brand, the stronger will be the intent to purchase.

The findings of path analysis suggested possibility of mediation effect of attitude toward the advertisement on brand awareness and purchase intention. It was examined further and results suggested full mediation effect of attitude toward the advertisement in the relationship of brand awareness and purchase intention for green and non-green products. This suggests that consumers' awareness about the product can result in positive intent to purchase if the contents and information of the advertisement provided by advertiser is found to be relevant by consumers based on their awareness level. They should find the information provided in the advertisement worth believing. On the contrary, increasing awareness about the product will also not work if the content in the advertisement are found to be exaggeration of the reality. Interestingly, attitude toward the brand was not found to mediate the relationship of brand awareness and purchase intention. This suggests that increasing awareness of consumers alone will not lead an intent to purchase by just developing strong positive feelings about the characteristics of the product. Consumers search for other sources of information to substantiate what they have gathered information about the product. This finding supports the belief that in case of green products that consumers are in search of information from different sources which helps them to develop an attitude toward the product which in turn will lead to an intention to purchase. Informing consumers through advertising as a medium is well supported by the full mediation effect of attitude toward the advertisement between brand awareness and purchase intention.

VI. FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study selected the respondents on the basis of their intent to make a purchase in the next month. Future researchers are advised to examine the findings by other set of respondents (e.g. footfalls of a cosmetic store, beauty salon, etc) and re-validate the relationships proposed in the study. Findings of the present study focus on Indian consumers that too from 10 cities. Another attempt can be made by researchers in other cultural contexts. Print advertisements have been used in the present study. Future researchers can examine the impact of other media of advertising (audio/video) and replicate the study. The present study is restricted to purchase intention. Future studies can explore the linkage between brand awareness leading to actual purchase behaviour. The present study was a cross-sectional study. Future researchers can design and test a longitudinal study so as to understand the shift in response of consumers over a period of time. Future researchers can replicate this work for other product categories, such as, automobiles, green hotels, organic foods, electronics, etc. Lastly, impact of colour, visual

image and eco-seals used in the advertisement can be examined in future by testing them individually.

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