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Can personalised prosocial ads be harnessed for brand equity enhancement?

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Abstract: Brands from various industries are partnering on social initiatives, using social media to speak out on social challenges. A prosocial ad needs to attract the audience's attention before it can have the intended impact. Since standing out in the digital environment is a constant issue for brands seeking to improve equity, marketers have employed a personalisation strategy. The highlights are: 1) this study developed and validated a comprehensive model to examine the mechanism of personalised ad impact on brand equity; 2) personalised ads were found to be a significant antecedent of brand self-expressiveness and perceived ad value; 3) brand engagement is boosted by a favourable attitude toward the ad and a high level of brand self-expressiveness; 4) customers' engagement with brand-related content on Instagram leads to higher brand equity; 5) theoretical and practical implications for how brand managers can improve brand equity employing the research model are offered.

Keywords: personalised advertising; prosocial advertising; brand equity; cause-related marketing; CRM; brand engagement; brand self-expressiveness; perceived ad value; attitude toward the ad.

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1 Introduction

In the Marketing 5.0 era, customers expect businesses to provide unique experiences according to their conditions (Kotler et al., 2021). To elaborate, the modern marketing strategy is characterised by tailored content and engagement (Tsai et al., 2021). One major challenge for many businesses has been creating an engaging and relevant channel rather than presenting brand-related messages (He et al., 2021). In order to engage with current and potential customer's firms often create personalised content on social media (Bae, 2020). A personalised ad (PAD) is a tailored message targeted at specific consumers based on their previous behavioural patterns (Hayes et al., 2021). PAD creates desirable brand associations by offering personalised recommendations for each customer (Varsha et al., 2021). Personalisation allows businesses to target customers more precisely, have a better impact on perceptions, increase engagement, and have more intimate interactions with them (Kotler et al., 2021).

As the market changes, so will advertising, both in content and structure. Environmental elements, which incorporate changes that occur outside the advertising industry, have the potential to influence our knowledge of how advertising functions (Gangadharbatla, 2021). In effect, consumers are more socially sensitive and expect brands to contribute to prosocial issues (Huang and Yoon, 2022). A host of consumer reports support the urge for businesses to take an active role in resolving societal issues. Compared to the product (62%) and customer experience (55%), a brand's societal impact (69%) had a significant influence on trust (LaVoi and Haley, 2021). Additionally, a CSR strategy is implemented for various reasons, including ensuring the brand's long-term viability, achieving market leadership, and cultivating brand loyalty (Brønn and Vrioni, 2001). Prosocial ads are essential means of fostering empathy, community cohesion, and eco-friendly behaviour (Bartsch and Kloß, 2018). Opportunities to achieve a competitive edge, economic benefits, and social responsibility are reasons to embrace prosocial ads (Ha and Trinh, 2021). Thus, prosocial ads are becoming a prominent marketing tool.

As mentioned, the personalisation of communications is also considered a strategic marketing tool that empowers businesses to achieve a unique position in the customer's mind, resulting in improved brand equity (Tran et al., 2020a), i.e., "the differential effect that a brand has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand" [Keller, (2013), p.69]. Significant brand equity allows firms to earn a high marginal profit, have higher pricing, boost client demands, and benefit from effective promotional campaigns, higher business impact, and lower vulnerability to competitors (Ahmad and Guzmán, 2020).

It is well-acknowledged that CSR impacts brand equity (Keller, 2001). In particular, consumer impression of CSR initiatives leads to favourable brand awareness, brand association, and brand perceptions. As a result, many companies aim to strengthen brand equity through various CSR programs. To build brand equity, consumers must perceive brand differentiation in a category, and real brand differentiation cannot happen unless consumer expectations are fulfilled (Hur et al., 2014). Hence, managers must be equipped with an in-depth understanding of how to promote their practices to convey a brand's societal goals, and the topic is of interest to academic fields across the board (LaVoi and Haley, 2021).

Applying a personalisation strategy to promote a brand's CSR initiatives brings about several positive repercussions for marketers. In addition to helping them reach the target audience, it enhances their grasp of social structure, helps them remedy inequalities, develops explicit social goals, and forges a competitive advantage for their brands (LaVoi and Haley, 2021). Therefore, it is imperative to consider new advertising paradigms in light of the core market developments (Gangadharbatla, 2021). Research is urgently required to answer how to promote prosocial ideas and advertise socially responsible brands on social media in order to increase brand value (Huang and Yoon, 2022; Bernritter et al., 2016).

According to a review of the literature on PAD, prosocial advertising, and brand equity, no study has been conducted that examines the process of PPA influence on brand equity, the most vital outcome of marketing activities. Previous research indicates that PAD affects aspects of brand equity, i.e., brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality (Indrabrata and Balqiah, 2020; Shanahan et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2020a, 2020b). Given the rising popularity of PADs and calls for prosocial engagement (Kouchaki and Jami, 2018), this study proposes and validates a model to determine how personalised prosocial ads (PPA) can boost brand equity through brand perceptions and engagement, as crucial factors in the online environment. Thus, it is necessary to assess the mechanism by which PPA affects brand equity and enhances a company's intangible assets. This study is the first that bridges this gap.

This study has been conducted in the context of Instagram, a visual social media platform with interactivity at its heart and one billion active users (Lim and Childs, 2020). According to Mendini et al. (2022), Instagram is the most effective social networking platform, generating more sales and consumer engagement than any other platform. Instagram serves as a crucial tool for advertising, loyalty programs, and managing brand-customer relationships. In addition, Instagram has grown to be especially relevant for marketers and businesses looking to interact with customers directly by giving them real-time updates and showcasing their new goods or services. It is also the most popular social media app in Iran, and 89.36% of the entire population are active users on Instagram (Statcounter Global Stats, 2022). The study experiment focused on the context of health-related products, which is an obvious example of prosocial advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following is a breakdown of how this paper is organised: Theoretical foundations and hypothesis development are presented first. After that, the research methodology and results are examined. A conclusion and implications for researchers and brand managers are included in the final section.

2 Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1 Personalised advertising

Personalised promotions enable marketers to create more effective relationships with their audience by presenting relevant offers according to customers' needs (Shanahan et al., 2019). A PAD is defined as an ad that includes individual information such as demographics, identity information, purchase-related information, and online user behaviour data on social media (Tran, 2017). Personalisation aims to provide the right content and show it to the proper individual at the appropriate time to maximise business opportunities (Tran et al., 2020a).

The marketing realm has undergone a major shift from banner advertising to personalised marketing in the past decades. To elaborate, traditional advertising and one-way mass communication have turned into two-way interaction through improved relationships between consumers and brands. Advances in interactive multimedia allow marketers to engage individuals at a suitable time by tracking and adjusting the environment (Flavián et al., 2019; Wang, 2021).

Previous research shows that personalisation brings various advantages for consumers and marketers (Jung and Heo, 2021). Benefits of personalisation for marketers include increasing brand awareness, access to loyal customers, offering higher prices, differentiation relative to competitors, higher response rate, attracting customer retention by presenting more attractive messages (Strycharz et al., 2019), and increasing promotion returns (Liu-Thompkins, 2019). Customers perceive personalised messages as more relevant, more loveable, more attractive, and more persuasive (Tran et al., 2020a). There is a growing trend of using personalised features for prosocial advertising (Bartsch and Kloß, 2018). In the following section, the concept of CSR and the advantages of prosocial advertising will be addressed.

2.2 Prosocial advertising

Corporate social responsibility refers to social initiatives taken by businesses to meet social desires. The concept of CSR refers to the level of alignment firms have with social values. Customers' societal expectations have pushed marketers to develop 'cause-related marketing (CRM)' to make marketing more socially relevant and engaging. Promoting CSR through marketing efforts is known as CRM. Among consumers, CRM is considered a helpful solution to social issues, and they feel a brand's image is better if it does something good for the world (Brønn and Vrioni, 2001).

In this regard, by putting customers' sentiments at top priority, marketers have put effort into making cause-related messages, i.e., prosocial advertising. Prosocial advertising is "the communication of socially beneficial programs or concerns to influence an individual's behaviours which will improve their well-being and that of society" (Sciulli and Bebko, 2005). With the shift towards prosocial behaviour in business environments, corporate social marketing communication takes on a new meaning. Businesses promote their prosocial efforts through advertising, putting social benefit at the heart of the matter (Mueller et al., 2018). According to studies, ads with a prosocial context are more effective than ads lacking social cues in altering consumers'

perception, brand engagement, a better attitude toward the ad, and positive brand image (Diehl et al., 2016; Minton and Cornwell, 2016; Mattila et al., 2010). Due to the importance of perceptions and engagement in the effectiveness of PPA, in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, these concepts will be discussed.

2.3 Customers perceptions and attitudes

Within the business world, brands constantly seek strategies to have a profound impact on perceptions. The brand needs to be coordinated with customers' expectations and perceptions to retain its equity and be preserved as customers' ideal option (Farjam and Hongyi, 2015). In many cases, understanding customers perceptions is challenging due to the disparate subjective characteristics and individuals' differences. Thus, the experience a brand provides to customers must be exceptional and the connection with customers must be strong enough if it is to create and maintain positive perceptions. Furthermore, effective advertising produces a desirable perception exchange between advertisers and consumers via content. Past studies in the field of personalisation focused on the advertising value either directly (Dehghani et al., 2016; Dodoo and Wu, 2019) or indirectly and through perceived informativeness, credibility, creativity, and entertainment (Setyani et al., 2019; Aydin, 2018; Kim and Han, 2014). Customers find advertising valuable when the message is pertinent to their needs. Therefore, within the advertising literature, perceived ad value can be expressed as a representation of customers' perceptions (Dehghani et al., 2016).

In addition, in customer perception literature, brand self-expressiveness is significantly crucial for firms. Self-concept is concerned with 'self-expressive brand' and referred to a set of self-schemes showing the structures of sustainable knowledge of customers' identity, organising their incoming information regarding themselves, and helping them understand themselves in the surrounded environment. Therefore, in the field of PAD, brand self-expressiveness reflects the level of consumers' perception of a brand's compatibility with their self-concept. Past research revealed brand self-expressiveness as one of the important indicators of perceptions (Tran et al., 2021, 2021). As a result, it is essential to assess how PPA can improve brand self-expressiveness.

In line with the above discussion, the attitude toward the ad concept has always been under consideration by marketers and researchers in this area. This notion has gotten a lot of attention as attitudes drive customer actions and behaviours (Li and Ali, 2021). Firms have attempted to improve the perceptions of their brands and influence customers' attitudes by communicating with them in ways that resonate better. Previous studies have shown that customer attitude is a major factor in advertising effectiveness (Wiese et al., 2020; Gaber et al., 2019; Aydin, 2018). In this light, it is essential to understand customers' attitudes towards PPA since they have an effect on their behavioural intentions and engagement. Next, in 2.4, the concept of brand engagement will be explained.

2.4 Brand engagement

Over the recent years, the brand engagement concept has grown further in the world of social media (Utami et al., 2022). Researchers who created a comprehensive perspective in this respect know consumer-brand engagement as a tridimensional concept, namely

behavioural, affective, and cognitive (Loureiro et al., 2020). They defined consumer-brand engagement as “a consumer’s positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during, or related to, specific consumer-brand interactions” [Hollebeek et al., (2014), p.3]. van Doorn et al. (2010, p.254) described consumer engagement with the brand as “a customer’s behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers”. The behavioural aspect has been considered in various research (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010; Machado et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Yang and Jiang, 2021; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022; Chu et al., 2013), particularly in social media-related research. Hence, the current study focuses on the behavioural aspect of brand engagement.

Additionally, engaging audiences on social media is critical since engaged customers account for a 30% boost in revenue, while disengaged customers result in a 14% revenue loss. The main focus of digital marketers’ approach is on social media users, for they spend 30% of their online activities on social media interactions. Customers’ engagement with a company’s marketing initiatives can help the company develop customer-brand relationships, enhance brand loyalty, an aspect of brand equity, and improve overall profitability (Hamzah et al., 2021). With regards to the importance of brand equity, in 2.5 this concept will be described.

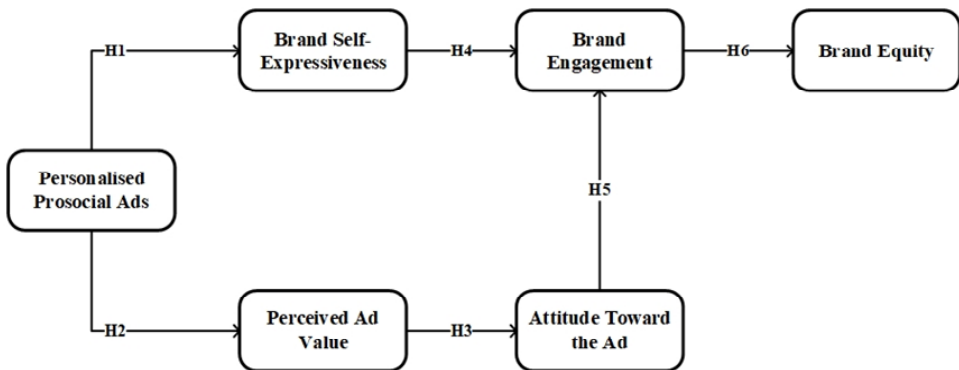
2.5 *Brand equity*

Generally, managers should use promotional activities such as advertising to retain brand equity, keep effective relationships with customers, and reduce the risk of losing the market share (Farjam and Hongyi, 2015).

There are two main perspectives in the brand equity literature (Chacraborty and Bhat, 2018), the customer-based perspective (Aaker, 1991) and the firm-based perspective (Simon and Sullivan, 1993). According to firm-based brand equity, the brand financial value is estimated (Lim et al., 2020). In the 1980s, brand equity had been considered, from the firm-based perspective, as approach helping managers understand methods to improve brand equity (Farjam and Hongyi, 2015). Nowadays, the customer-based perspective is accepted by most researchers as the dominant view because if the brand lacks value, it has no profit for investors (Cobb-Walgren et al., 2013). One of the most prominent models in this scope is Aaker’s (1991) four-dimensional model, which includes brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality (Tran et al., 2020a). Brand equity is “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” [Aaker, (1991), p.27]. Brand awareness is recognised as “the ability of a potential buyer to recognise or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category” [Aaker, (1991), p.61]. Perceived quality reflects “the customer’s perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service concerning its intended purpose, relative to alternatives” [Aaker, (1991), p.80]. Brand associations are “anything associated with the brand in the minds of customers” [Aaker, (1991), p.101]. Brand loyalty is a measure of “how likely a customer will be to switch to another brand, especially when that brand makes a change, either in price or in product features” [Aaker, (1991), p.44]. Generally, customer-based brand equity is known as what customers see, hear, or feel over time and through social media (Tran et al., 2020a).

As mentioned earlier, brands have long attempted to create positive perceptions and engage with customers through interactive platforms (Izogo and Mpinganjira, 2020). As fulfilling consumer expectations generates substantial brand equity, firms invest in PPAs (Hur et al., 2014). Some relevant studies on the effect of PAD on brand equity aspects have been conducted. Tran et al. (2020b) addressed the influence of PAD on customers' brand perception on social networks. In their model, PAD affects brand loyalty through consumer-brand identification, consumer-brand engagement, and brand relationship. Shanahan et al. (2019) examined the impact of PAD in social media on perceived quality and brand loyalty. In their model, perceived personalisation affects the two mentioned dimensions, brand attachment and consumer-brand engagement. Tran et al. (2020a) assessed the impact of PAD on brand equity on Facebook. In their model, perceived personalisation affects brand loyalty, brand association and awareness, and perceived quality through the mediating role of self-brand connection and consumer-brand identification. Finally, Indrabrata and Balqiah (2020) investigated the effect of PAD and self-expressive brand on brand loyalty and perceived quality for sports shoes advertised on Instagram. According to their model, perceived personalisation affects perceived quality by mediating consumer-brand engagement and brand attachment.

Figure 1 Research model



Regarding the interactive effects of personalised communication and the importance of prosocial ads and brand equity in the marketing 5.0 era, various studies are in the PAD literature, as mentioned. However, the lack of research on the effect of PPA on brand equity is felt. Furthermore, a host of studies examined the personalisation impact in traditional media; yet, there is still a scarcity of research investigating how PPA can improve brand equity in modern interactive media such as Instagram (Shanahan et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2020a). To fill out the gap, the current study intends to propose a model that delineates PPA as a determinant of brand equity, taking into account brand engagement and consumers' perceptions, i.e., perceived ad value, brand self-expressiveness, and attitudes. Building on the literature of PAD, brand equity, prosocial advertising, and a review of concepts and correlations concentrating on consumers' perceptions and brand engagement, the research model is depicted in Figure 1. In the following sections, research hypotheses are presented.

2.6 *PPA and brand self-expressiveness*

Brand self-expressiveness determines “the consumer’s perception of the degree to which the specific brand enhances one’s social self and/or reflects one’s inner self” [Carroll and Ahuvia, (2006), p.82]. Personalisation in social media shapes a feeling of ‘me-ness’ and creates an environment in which consumers enrich their social identity (Tran et al., 2020a). The primary concept behind ad personalisation is to fit the message to a facet of one’s self. Consumers have a limited demand for stating self-concepts, and they often use brands to express themselves (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Since consumers often opt for socially responsible brands, a firm’s CSR plans, such as PPAs, help improve consumers’ perception of congruency between themselves and the brand (Hur et al., 2014). Hence, the first hypothesis is supposed as stated below:

H1 PPA positively affects brand self-expressiveness.

2.7 *PPA and perceived ad value*

Advertisement value, a suitable tool to evaluate advertising effectiveness, is “a subjective evaluation of the relative worth or utility of advertising to consumers” [Setyani et al., (2019), p.97]. Intuitively, it is expected that content corresponding to users’ demographic information, interests, and web browsing behaviour leads to increased ad value (Kim and Han, 2014). Therefore, advertising is valuable for consumers when it presents the content according to their value (Dehghani et al., 2016), such as social trends. Moreover, the findings of recent studies (e.g., Aydin, 2018; Dodoo and Wu, 2019) state that personalisation by enhancing perceived entertainment, informativeness, creativity, and credibility, is an effective ad value driver. According to these discussions, the second hypothesis is presented as follows:

H2 PPA positively affects perceived ad value.

2.8 *Perceived ad value and attitude toward the ad*

Attitude toward the ad is “a predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion” [MacKenzie and Lutz, (1989), p.49]. Several studies point to the impact of perceived ad value on attitudes towards ads (Ha et al., 2014; Hamzah et al., 2021). Indeed, values form the basis of attitudes, behaviours, and actions in promotions (Gaber et al., 2019). As stated by Haghirian and Madlberger (2005), the ad value of the website significantly affects attitudes toward the ad. Generally, the research by Odoom et al. (2022), Murillo (2017), Gaber et al. (2019), Wiese et al. (2020), Aydin (2018) and Bao and Wang (2021) imply the positive effect of perceived ad value on attitude toward the ad. Therefore, the third hypothesis is stated as follows:

H3 Perceived ad value positively affects attitudes toward the ad.

2.9 *Brand self-expressiveness and brand engagement*

Previous research indicates that consumers tend to see a brand reflecting their identity and helping them to declare their personality through the brand’s symbolic features

(Wallace et al., 2021). In the online social media environment, individuals can express their selves via sharing posts and building connections. Through following the brand on social media platforms such as Instagram, that brand content shows up in the newsfeed section of individuals and shapes part of their online ‘virtual self’ (Wallace et al., 2021). The relevant literature also indicates the significant impact of brand self-expressiveness on brand engagement (e.g., France et al., 2016; Indrabrata and Balqiah, 2020). Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis is developed as stated below:

H4 Brand self-expressiveness affects brand engagement positively.

2.10 Attitude toward the ad and brand engagement

Customer actions are driven by attitudes toward ads, which have gotten a lot of attention (Gaber et al., 2019). Thus, it is vital to understand customers’ attitudes as they impact their behavioural intentions. Customers’ responses are formed by thoughts while reading or seeing PPA. Their thoughts and views about the message content establish attitudes toward the ad and brand (Zimand Sheiner et al., 2021). Zimand Sheiner et al. (2021) measured the effect of personal content appeal on engagement. Their findings reveal that attitude toward the sponsored post on Facebook impacts behavioural engagement. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is suggested, as mentioned below:

H5 Attitude toward the ad has a positive effect on brand engagement.

2.11 Brand engagement and brand equity

Brand engagement is an efficient factor in branding strategy priorities for marketers, including improving brand equity (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Customer engagement with a company’s marketing initiatives improves overall profitability, strengthens relationships with the brand, and enhances brand loyalty and brand association, i.e., aspects of brand equity (Hamzah et al., 2021; Chahal and Rani, 2017). In this regard, the results of studies by Souki et al. (2021), Machado et al. (2019), Supoththamjaree and Srinaruewan (2021), and Mishra (2019) signify a positive relationship between these two concepts. Consequently, the following hypothesis may be proposed.

H6 Brand engagement affects brand equity positively.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data collection and procedure

The primary goal of the present study is to consider the links between conceptual model variables (see Figure 1). Advertisers create personalised Instagram ads using a variety of users’ relevant attributes, such as social activities and connections, gender, attractions, location, age, web browsing history, purchase information, and recent engagement patterns (Shanahan et al., 2019; Yang and Jiang, 2021). One of those characteristics, i.e., an individual previous internet interaction, was employed in this research.

Digikala is an Iranian compartment of Amazon and the Middle East’s largest online retailer. The *Economist Journal* evaluated this retailer as the most valuable Iranian

startup, valuing it at 150 million dollars (Bagheri et al., 2020). This company believes economic success is tied to ethical codes and sustainable development issues. Its CSR activities encompass online education in deprived areas, an afforestation campaign, COVID-19 pandemic campaigns, and various donations. In 2020–2021, this group had over 3.6 million followers on Instagram. Its user interaction grew by 160%, achieving 15 million counts, demonstrating that the brand maintains an interactive relationship with its customers. The firm improved its ‘intelligent recommendation system’ by 30% to suggest products relevant to consumers (Digikala Annual Report, 2021).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics (n = 473)

<i>Demographic variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Age		
Less than 20	10	2.1
20–30	250	52.9
31–40	168	35.5
41–50	40	8.4
More than 50	5	1.06
Gender		
Female	299	63.2
Male	174	36.8
Student or non-student		
Student	90	19
Non-student	383	81
Education level		
High school or lower	103	21.8
Bachelor	220	46.5
Master	124	26
PhD	24	5
Postdoc	2	0.42
Instagram usage		
Less than 1 h	53	11.2
1–3	174	36.8
3–5	154	32.6
5–7	57	12
More than 7 h	35	7.4

The sample was determined to be Iranian consumers of the mentioned brand, which is currently invested on delivering PPAs on Instagram. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Digikala posted an ad for a Rossmax digital non-contact thermometer that alarms for fever on Instagram. The ad explained that a portion of the sale will be donated to benefit Corona sufferers living in poverty. The ad was posted on March 13, 2021. The total number of ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ were 7,300 and 191, respectively. The questionnaire’s link was sent online within the high-visit hours, 11 AM until 3 PM (Digikala Annual Report, 2021), to those who ‘liked’ the post through direct message. At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were provided a brief overview of the survey. The following questions were developed to ascertain participants considered the ad as a PPA:

“Have you recently searched for a digital non-contact thermometer online?” and “Do you think the ad is personalised?”. Only those who replied “Yes” could proceed with the rest of the survey. Afterward, participants were asked to fill out the demographic and main questions.

The survey lasted for almost two months, initiating on June 22, 2021. Data were collected from 600 respondents, with 127 being incomplete or ineligible. In total, 473 data points were adopted in our research. The respondents’ demographic characteristics, i.e., gender, age, the number of hours using Instagram during a day, and education level, along with their frequency and percentage, are presented in Table 1. According to the data collected, most respondents are relatively young and aged from 20 to 30 years (52.9%), non-student (81%), female (63.2%), most have a bachelor’s degree (46.5%), and most use Instagram 1–3 hours a day (36.8%).

3.2 Measurement scale

The questionnaire was prepared based on a five-point Likert scale from ‘strongly disagree (1)’ to ‘strongly agree (5)’. The scale in Kim and Han (2014) was adopted for items assessing PPA, the scale in Ducoffe (1996), Kim and Han (2014) and Kim et al. (2010) for items assessing perceived ad value, the scale in Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) for items assessing brand self-expressiveness, the scale in Mehta (2000) for items assessing attitude toward the ad, the scale in Schivinski et al. (2016) for items assessing brand engagement, and finally the scale in Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Keller (2001) for items evaluating brand equity.

3.3 PLS-SEM approach

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is based on data analysis, used to evaluate the determined parameters in relatively complex multivariate models. This approach shows hypothetical relationships between observed and latent variables (Ringle et al., 2014). The PLS-SEM approach has been extensively applied in the marketing literature (Hair et al., 2012). Methods that can be taken to examine PLS-SEM are classified into two groups: covariance-based approach and variance-based approach (Tran et al., 2020a).

PLS-SEM sensitivity to the normality assumption of data distribution is less than the covariance-based approach. Furthermore, this approach is more suitable to assess parameter estimates in multivariate relationships between endogenous and exogenous variables. Since the variance-based approach does not depend on the normality assumption, this technique was adopted using SmartPLS3 software (Ringle et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2019).

4 Results

4.1 Measurement model

The conceptual model was measured using the measurement model and the structural model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The measurement model was tested via reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Chin and Newsted, 1999). Reliability was

estimated by three criteria, i.e., composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, and factor loadings. After excluding two items with low-level loadings, Q32 'Viewing this ad is a good idea' (factor loading: 0.350) and Q67 'Digikala gives me a sense of security' (factor loading: 0.173), the results from the remaining measurement items indicated that all three criteria were met. The results showed that the CR index for research constructs lies in the range 0.825–0.946, showing satisfactory reliability since the benchmark level for reliability is 0.7. Cronbach's alpha for all the constructs, except for attitude toward the ad, is within the range 0.887–0.928, and the associated value for attitude toward the ad is 0.578. Since Cronbach's alpha is based on the average pairwise correlation between the items, it provides an accurate reliability estimate when all the items measure a unique construct. Since in constructs with more than one independent dimension, the items all do not measure a unique construct, CR provides a more accurate value than Cronbach's alpha (Geldhof et al., 2014). According to this discussion, the low reliability of attitude toward the ad can be ignored because CR confirms all the constructs. The factor loadings for the questionnaire items are in the range of 0.704–0.930. Since the *t*-value and *p*-value for items having a factor loading less than 0.7 were more significant than 1.96 and less than 0.05, respectively, these items were not removed.

The convergent reliability was measured by the average variance extracted (AVE) index, whose satisfactory level is 0.5. The results indicate that AVE for all the constructs lies within the range 0.532–0.789. Therefore, the reliability of the variables is confirmed. The questionnaire items related to each variable, along with the results of CR, AVE, Cronbach's alpha, factor loadings, mean, SD, and *t*-values, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Factor loadings, validity, and reliability (n = 473)

<i>Scale items</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	α	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
<i>Personalised prosocial advertisement</i>	0.937	0.789	0.911				
I perceive that this ad is designed for me.				0.880	0.880	0.014	64.217
I perceive that the context of this ad is personalised.				0.887	0.887	0.013	70.922
I perceive that this ad is personalised for my usage.				0.909	0.909	0.010	89.333
I perceive that this ad is delivered on time.				0.876	0.875	0.011	76.165
<i>Perceived ad value</i>	0.938	0.687	0.921				
This ad is useful.				0.879	0.879	0.012	71.416
This ad is valuable.				0.956	0.956	0.004	227.363
This ad is important.				0.854	0.854	0.018	48.692
This ad on my social media prepares precise product information.				0.846	0.846	0.016	52.224
I perceive that this ad on my social media is pleasurable.				0.732	0.732	0.026	27.918
I perceive that this ad on my social media is credible.				0.874	0.874	0.013	69.628
This ad is innovative.				0.617	0.617	0.042	14.754

Table 2 Factor loadings, validity, and reliability (n = 473) (continued)

<i>Scale items</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	α	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
<i>Brand self-expressiveness</i>	0.946	0.779	0.928				
Brand X symbolises the kind of person I really am inside.				0.863	0.862	0.019	45.579
Brand X reflects my personality.				0.930	0.930	0.009	105.919
Brand X is an extension of my inner self.				0.904	0.905	0.011	79.005
Brand X mirrors the real me.				0.921	0.921	0.008	110.878
Brand X contributes to my image.				0.787	0.786	0.022	35.999
<i>Attitude toward the ad</i>	0.825	0.702	0.578				
I like the idea of this ad.				0.862	0.864	0.013	66.348
Viewing this ad is a worthy idea.				0.813	0.813	0.020	41.405
<i>Brand engagement</i>	0.935	0.566	0.923				
<i>Consumption</i>							
I 'read' posts relevant to brand X on social media.				0.714	0.716	0.024	30.332
I 'read' fan page(s) relevant to brand X on social media.				0.755	0.764	0.023	33.173
I 'watch' pictures/graphics relevant to brand X.				0.697	0.765	0.025	31.216
I 'follow' blogs relevant to brand X.				0.684	0.756	0.022	35.077
I 'follow' brand X on social media.				0.784	0.697	0.026	26.574
<i>Brand engagement</i>	0.935	0.566	0.923				
<i>Contribution</i>							
I 'comment' videos relevant to brand X.				0.786	0.685	0.030	22.533
I 'comment' posts relevant to brand X.				0.827	0.784	0.019	40.315
I 'comment' on pictures/graphics relevant to brand X.				0.790	0.787	0.023	33.806
I 'share' brand X relevant posts.				0.693	0.827	0.019	42.584
I 'Like' pictures and graphics relevant to brand X.				0.764	0.789	0.023	34.824
I 'Like' posts relevant to brand X.				0.768	0.692	0.029	23.834
<i>Brand equity</i>	0.909	0.532	0.887				
It makes sense to purchase from brand X instead of other e-commerce platforms, even if they are the same.				0.767	0.766	0.018	42.817
If another brand has the same characteristic as brand X, I would desire to purchase from brand X.				0.824	0.823	0.018	45.847

Table 2 Factor loadings, validity, and reliability (n = 473) (continued)

<i>Scale items</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	α	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
<i>Brand equity</i>	0.909	0.532	0.887				
If there is another brand as worthy as brand X, I desire to purchase from brand X.				0.789	0.790	0.020	38.514
If another brand is not different from brand X, buying brand X seems smarter.				0.891	0.889	0.012	74.720
If brand X is not available, I do not care what brand I use.				0.889	0.532	0.036	14.633
'Successful' best describes brand X.				0.533	0.555	0.058	9.583
Brand X is reliable.				0.558	0.714	0.035	20.228
Brand X is unique.				0.716	0.714	0.033	21.410
I really love brand X.				0.704	0.703	0.042	17.139

Table 3 Discriminant validity

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>ATA</i>	<i>BEN</i>	<i>BE</i>	<i>BSE</i>	<i>PAV</i>	<i>PPA</i>
ATA	0.838					
BEN	0.701	0.752				
BE	0.392	0.521	0.730			
BSE	0.495	0.541	0.456	0.882		
PAV	0.140	0.051	0.198	0.165	0.888	
PPA	0.177	0.138	0.209	0.175	0.717	0.829

Notes: PPA: personalised prosocial ad, BSE: brand self-expressiveness, PAV: perceived ad value, ATA: attitude toward the ad, BEN: brand engagement, BE: brand equity.

Discriminant validity was examined by evaluating the relationship between a construct and its factors compared with its relationship with other constructs. In the PLS-SEM method, discriminant validity is assessed through a matrix in which entries include the correlation coefficient between the constructs and the square root of AVE indices for the constructs. Discriminant validity is desirable when the square root of the AVE index for each construct is larger than the correlation coefficient between the constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 2018). According to Table 3, where the mentioned matrix is shown, discriminant validity is confirmed.

4.2 Structural model

Structural model analysis was accompanied by evaluating all hypotheses in the conceptual model (Shanahan et al., 2019). An initial step in structural model testing is to determine the model's predictive accuracy. The amount of explained variation of the endogenous variables contained in the structural model is represented by the model's prediction accuracy, which is estimated by the determination coefficient R^2 (Tran et al., 2020a). In line with existing literature guidelines, values 0.25, 0.5, and 0.75 for R^2 indicate weak, medium, and strong predictive accuracy, respectively (Hair et al., 2012;

Henseler et al., 2009). Data analysis shows that the values of R² for brand self-expressiveness, perceived ad value, brand engagement, attitude toward the ad, and brand equity are 0.027, 0.515, 0.541, 0.031, and 0.272, respectively. Thus, brand self-expressiveness, attitude toward the ad, and brand equity have a weak explanation power, and other factors possess a medium explanation power.

The path coefficients from the model were tested on bootstrap resampling using 5,000 samples (Sellin and John, 1997). The t-values related to hypotheses and standardised factor loadings for associated paths imply that all the relationships in the conceptual model are positive and meaningful (see Table 4). More specifically, the results indicate a positive and significant influence of PPA on brand self-expressiveness ($\beta = 0.165$, $p < 0.05$) and perceived ad value ($\beta = 0.717$, $p < 0.05$), perceived ad value on attitude toward the ad ($\beta = 0.177$, $p < 0.05$), brand self-expressiveness on brand engagement ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < 0.05$), attitude toward the ad on brand engagement ($\beta = 0.574$, $p < 0.05$), and finally brand engagement on brand equity ($\beta = 0.521$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, all hypotheses are supported.

Table 4 Hypothesis testing

	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-values</i>	<i>p-values</i>	<i>Hypotheses</i>
PPA – BSE	0.165	0.165	0.050	3.324	0.001	H1: Supported
PPA – PAV	0.717	0.719	0.028	25.575	0.000	H2: Supported
PAV – ATA	0.177	0.178	0.051	3.467	0.001	H3: Supported
BSE – BEN	0.257	0.260	0.040	6.402	0.000	H4: Supported
ATA – BEN	0.574	0.573	0.033	17.286	0.000	H5: Supported
BEN – BE	0.521	0.525	0.039	13.209	0.000	H6: Supported

Notes: PPA: personalised prosocial ad, BSE: brand self-expressiveness, PAV: perceived ad value, ATA: attitude toward the ad, BEN: brand engagement, BE: brand equity.

5 General discussion

In Marketing 5.0, each customer ought to have desirable experiences while interacting with brands (Kotler et al., 2021). In particular, consumers’ expectations toward brands have altered. They expect brands to have a set of social values as well as personalised relationships. In response to this shift in the market, brands’ advertising strategies have changed by adopting interactive marketing strategies such as personalisation. With loads of consumer personas and profiles, brands must have the capability to provide personalised solutions to meet individuals’ personal and societal demands, as customer expectation fulfilment contributes significantly to brand equity. However, in the face of an abundance of social networking sites, prosocial messages encounter fierce competition for valuable resources, such as customers’ attention (Bartsch and Kloß, 2018). Therefore, this research is centred on PPA and brand equity. This study extends the literature on advertising by proposing and validating a new model, demonstrating how brand equity is affected by PPA through consumer perceptions and engagement. The findings provided support for H1-6 by utilising PLS-SEM approach. The research suggests various theoretical and managerial implications.

5.1 *Theoretical implications*

There are several considerable theoretical implications of this research. First, the paper presents a novel conceptual framework for explaining how brand equity is influenced by PPA. In the modern marketing landscape, there has been a shift in consumers' views of themselves, brands, and social issues. They appreciate relevant content on social media. As social media use has become ubiquitous, many businesses have responded to this change by developing online personalised campaigns. Thus, PADs are a better fit for customers and resonate with them more as these ads speak directly to their pain points. Furthermore, CSR advertising is a relatively new field. Consumers' social sensitivity has increased dramatically. Therefore, companies can acquire strategic advantages when their CSR practices are well-publicised. However, little study has been carried out to investigate how PPA leads to a growth in brand equity. The present research adds value to the current literature on personalisation, CSR advertising, and brand equity, which are crucial to practitioners and academics.

Second, it sees online users as dual-benefit customers (individual and social). It emphasises the significance of PPA as an effective strategy that conforms to the values that customers demand in their daily lives. Businesses must cater to individuals' preferences by harnessing personalisation strategy since not every purchase decision is rational, and perceptions also play an influential role. Perceptions are subjective, and intelligent brands leverage this personalised link through contextual marketing to foster brand equity. Personalisation is therefore relevant not only for customers but also for social commerce businesses.

Research findings indicate that PPA positively affects brand self-expressiveness. When individuals' perception of their character is consistent with a brand perceived personality, it leads to brand self-expression. Therefore, businesses should consider both social issues and aspects of customers' personalities to meet this need. Without a clear understanding of what a brand shows symbolically, marketers cannot hold personal relationships with audiences. For this purpose, companies can use one of the marketing tools, i.e., personalisation, to develop effective prosocial ads. PPA enables customers to be aware of the association between their needs and the advantages provided by the brand.

According to the results, PPA significantly affects perceived ad value. The results presented by Dodoo and Wu (2019), Aydin (2018) showed that a personalised post on social media increase the value of the ad. This research proved that personalised CSR messages on Instagram positively influence perceived ad value. If PPA is imposed and messages are sent to the appropriate audience, they create value and attract more attention. Therefore, to meet customers' expectations, improve the prosocial advertising value, and enhance the return on investment (ROI) of their cause-related advertising campaigns, online retailers should leverage PPA on social networks.

An analysis of research findings implies the positive relation of perceived ad value with attitude toward the ad. The results obtained are in line with those reported by Odoom et al. (2022), Murillo (2017), Wiese et al. (2020), Gaber et al. (2019) and Bao and Wang (2021). As stated before, ad value is a criterion to assess ad effectiveness. Advertisement value acts as an indicator to investigate customer satisfaction with the firm's communicational products. Indeed, the values are the basis for attitudes (Haghirian and Madlberger, 2005). Therefore, advertisers should design PPA to create favourable

associations. Ads value will improve if customers perceive the personalisation. Consequently, attitudes towards ads will change.

Interpretations of data revealed that brand self-expressiveness positively affects brand engagement. This result is consistent with Indrabrata and Balqiah (2020). According to Sprott et al. (2009), customers are inclined to keep engaging with their favourite brands to express their identity. Therefore, brands can foster users' engagement rates in social networks by providing prosocial content and creating a sense of conformity and congruity between customers' perceptions of their properties and brand features.

Data analysis signifies the positive impact of attitude toward the ad on brand engagement. Previous research has focused on attitudes toward sponsored ads on Facebook (Zimand Sheiner et al., 2021). However, the current study investigated the impact of attitudes toward PPA on brand engagement. Furthermore, Chu et al. (2013) found that attitudes toward CSR campaigns indirectly affect brand engagement. The result of this study revealed that attitudes toward PPA directly influence brand engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that consumers' attitudes toward a tailored CSR advertised by a brand on Instagram positively influence their decision to interact with the ad.

Based on the analyses of the results, brand engagement affects brand equity positively. This implication is in concordance with the results of Machado et al. (2019), Supothamjaree and Srinaruewan (2021) and Mishra (2019). This result shows that brands should encourage customers to engage on social networks and play an active role in these networks by focusing on trend prosocial programs. In addition, since brand engagement is accompanied by customers' support, increasing brand engagement leads to increased brand equity, which is considered a valuable competitive advantage for businesses.

5.2 Managerial implications

From a managerial standpoint, this study recommends practical suggestions. In order to improve consumers' perceptions of a brand as being expressive of their selves, we argue that storytelling could be a practical approach. A narrative-based strategy for branding may have persuasive power and foster consumers' sense of connection with the brand. Furthermore, it is suggested to managers aiming to strengthen their brands' self-expression to measure brand engagement on Instagram as it is an invaluable performance indicator. In addition, advertisers could tailor ads to the audiences' psychographic characteristics and control customer behaviour strategically. They could also ask customers to share their thoughts about the level of product or service congruency with their lifestyles or rate the relevancy degree of the advertised brand post.

Brand managers must consider the motivations behind consumers' involvement with their brands in order to boost engagement. This involvement is brought on by a couple of factors, including developing a socially conscious brand as well as treating users as unique customers through personalisation. When developing their strategies, marketers can employ these components as inputs. Additionally, brand managers could harness followers' enthusiasm for social issues by encouraging them to post trending social challenges content involving the brand. As a result, not only will brand engagement rise but also brand awareness will be increased among netizens, which will positively influence brand equity.

Finally, this work shows that Instagram is an effective venue for advertisers to promote their personalised social consciences. Instagram can be utilised as a cost-effective platform to build brand equity. To elaborate, users can easily access Instagram in the contemporary digital world. There may also be those who have not been able to purchase a brand but have demonstrated brand loyalty by participating in and advocating brands' CSR efforts. Hence, it is imperative for social commerce businesses to capitalise on this platform to acquire higher equity and advertise their brand's CSR activities.

6 Conclusions

In the current highly competitive market, individuals seek blends of specific conditions, including social and personal factors, when opting for brands (Porcelli, 2020). Therefore, brand managers are recommended to examine social trends as well as consumers' priorities. Brand managers searching for an efficient promotional tool for their brands and reinforcing relations with their customers could develop PPA on Instagram. PPA assists social commerce businesses in achieving their promotional purposes, such as building positive brand perceptions, reaching out to target audiences, and improving brand equity. In addition, with a rising number of fake accounts on social media, namely Instagram (Krombholz et al., 2012), the efficiency of social media advertising is being criticised (Tran et al., 2020b). However, this criticism could be dealt with if marketers personalise ads properly. As indicated by the results, if done correctly, PPA could improve users' brand perceptions, eventually leading to brand equity growth. Prosocial ads that are well-targeted and their messages are precisely based on customers' interests create opportunities for brand expansion. Thus, businesses can obtain a strong market position by discovering the target market needs, wants, and demands and enhancing the consumers' perceptions and engagement. In conclusion, brand owners are required to define, explain, and evaluate the variables contributing to the proposed model thoughtfully to create intelligent relationships with consumers.

7 Limitations and future research

Forthcoming investigations are recommended to evaluate the influence of different social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter concerning the unique environment of each one. Future research may collect data according to a particular grouping of the customers of a brand or industry or based on the communication history of customers with the organisation, customers' previous purchases, and their classification by the CLV (customer lifetime value), as well as by considering audience position in the customer journey stages. Furthermore, future studies are recommended to apply text mining approach while developing a PPA. Finally, the present research focused on PPA during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future work can design various scenarios considering the life cycle of prosocial news and assess the impact of PPA on individuals and brands.

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