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# Investigating Consumer Purchase Intention of Athleisure Products: A Study of Lululemon's SNS Ad

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## Abstract

This study investigated how SNS advertising by Lululemon affected consumer purchase intention from the brand. The influence of specific ad traits such as informativeness, creativity, and emotional appeal, on attitude towards the advertisement, the influence of attitude towards the advertisement on willingness to engage with the brand and the influence of willingness to engage with the brand on purchase intention. A moderating effect of a sedentary or active lifestyle is tested. Also, the influence of perceived behavior of others on subjective norm, and the influence of subjective norm on willingness to engage with the brand were investigated. This study contributes to the breadth of knowledge that exists in the area of digital advertising and its impact on consumer purchase intention. The findings of this study lend further understanding in the digital advertising field by providing quality research and conclusions. These results will also provide insights to brands wanting to effectively create or continue digital and social media marketing campaigns, in a way that will drive consumer purchase intention.

**Keywords:** Social media marketing; Advertising; Purchase intention; Emotional appeal; Informativeness; Creativeness; Attitude; SNS

## Introduction

Advertising is an age-old form of communication utilized by businesses and brands to connect with their consumers. Advertisers have begun to increasingly utilize social media to drive digital engagement between brands and consumers [1]. Kaplan, et al. [2] propose that social media can be described as "Internet-based applications that help consumers share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives". The development of social media platforms has made it possible for a consumer to communicate with hundreds, or potentially thousands, of other consumers about products and the companies that provide them [3]. For this research, I will be focusing on the Instagram platform which has just surpassed 1 billion users as of December 2020 [4].

According to the U.S. Census Bureau February 2021 data, Americans spent \$791.7 billion during the year 2020 on

e-commerce, up 32.4% from the previous year [5]. Now more than ever, companies are given the opportunity to dive into digital marketing and take advantage of the exponential growth of social media. Social media is viewed by consumers as a more trustworthy source of information on products and services when compared with advertising efforts transmitted through the traditional elements of advertising [6]. Organizations can leverage SNS advertising for marketing purposes, such as brand awareness, attracting new customers [7], managing customer relationships [8], and increasing purchase intention [9].

Social media and e-commerce are both emerging trends in the industry. As a result, brands must optimize their ability to reach consumer markets via digital platforms. There is prevalent growth in retail and consumer usage of digital platforms, though knowledge about social media as a communication tool in relation

to its perceived value for consumers and the role it plays within brand advertising, is minimal [10]. Research of how consumers experience various social media platforms and the advertising embedded on these platforms proves to be scarce. There are little findings on what features of advertisements invoke interest, appeal, and engagement from the consumer. Insight into user experiences relating to engagement can further drive decisions about which messages to advertise on social media and which social media platform brands may utilize [1]. This study investigates the factors influencing consumer purchase intention for a brand that utilizes SNS advertising using a video advertisement created by Lululemon Athletica [11]. Lululemon consistently utilizes Instagram stories and posts to encourage consumer feedback, which is then used toward product improvement. Instagram is a great platform where users can send each other stories and posts, allowing those who may not even follow Lululemon to still view their content and potentially increase the brand's user-base. Through Instagram, the brand is able to reach young adults and college students as well as older generations who are active on the platform [12]. This study contributes to the field by analyzing an SNS video ad created by Lululemon and what factors of the advertisement drives consumers to engage with the brand as well as motivate purchase intention.

### Lululemon and Social Media

According to a January 2021 Statista report, there were 4.6 billion users on the internet, and these users spent an average of 145 minutes a day on social media. This makes social media the perfect outlet for brands to push their messages to consumers. The major social media outlets for Lululemon are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter [12]. Between all platforms, Lululemon is consistent with their images and overall message. The brand is always interacting with their consumers by sharing a wide variety of content from new product releases to daily empowerment and inspiration. Focusing specifically on Instagram, the brand's page is dedicated to promoting products, connecting with consumers, and showcasing their company values. Lululemon consistently utilizes Instagram stories and posts to encourage consumer feedback, which is then used toward product improvement. Instagram is a great platform where users can send each other stories and posts, allowing those who may not even follow Lululemon to still view their content and potentially increase the brand's user-base. Through Instagram, the brand is able to reach young adults and college students as well as older generations who are active on the platform [12].

Lululemon made their official debut on Instagram in the year 2011. As shown in appendix images C.3 and C.4, the brand has evolved seamlessly with maturation of social media. Beginning with an average of about 100 likes per photo, @lululemon now receives anywhere from 5,000 likes to 30,000 and above per Instagram post. This growth directly correlates with the expansion of the company as a whole, and this platform allows the brand to connect with consumers they may not be able to reach face to face. Instagram continues to create technological advancements beneficial to both businesses and consumers, including offering the option for retail companies to link products on images through which consumers can make quick and easy purchases. With the growth of social

media creation and consumption, businesses need to utilize these platforms to elevate their brands. Therefore, this study focuses on the factors that influence consumer purchase intention inspired by an Instagram advertisement.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is based upon the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

#### Theory of reasoned action

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was developed to better understand relationships between intentions, behaviors, and attitudes [13]. TRA states that consumers' beliefs will affect the attitude influencing the intention to engage in a behavior. If a consumer believes performing a behavior will result in a desirable outcome they have developed a positive attitude for a behavior, while if they believe performing a behavior will result in an undesirable outcome, they have developed a negative attitude [14]. Fishbein, et al. [13] define attitude as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object". The consumer will develop attitudes depending on the outcome of performing a behavior. Attitudes are the best way of predicting behavior to measure an individual's intention to purchase a product because attitudes impact on a consumer's decision-making [15].

According to Olson, et al. (1981), brand attitude is defined as a "consumer's overall evaluation of a brand". The strength of consumer brand attitude predicts behaviors of interest to firms, including brand consideration, purchase intention, purchase behavior and brand choice [16]. Substantial observation and experimentation indicate that brand attitude influences customer evaluations of brands [17]. Consumer experience of brand awareness and positive associations should generate greater revenues and savings in marketing costs and should then lead to higher profits when compared to brands with a less positive association [18]. Previous research found that market share increased when brand attitude became more positive [19].

Subjective norm is the perceived social influence on either perform or not perform a behavior and may influence behavioral intention [20]. This revolves around what an individual believes their referents expect them to do. If the individual believes their family, friends, or other important referents expect the individual to behave a certain way, this may encourage them to engage in the behavior. On the other hand, if the individual believes their referents expect them not to behave a certain way, they may be influenced to avoid the behavior [14]. With the increased participation and activity on social media, it has become another outlet for social norm as many users tend to engage in digital behaviors largely based around the expectations of friends and followers.

#### Elaboration likelihood model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model was established by John T. Cacioppo and Richard E. Petty in 1984. The ELM explains an individual's attitude change in terms of the central route and peripheral route, based on the amounts of thoughtful information

processing. Findings of advertising effects using ELM provide insight into how persuasive message contents affect an individual's perception toward information acceptance [21]. The ELM theorizes that peripheral messages appealing to a given peripheral cue can enable powerful influence especially when message receivers are either uninterested in, or unable to process, the content [22]. Given this peripheral route processing, emotional appeals may make a positive impact and therefore, the ELM will provide theoretical guidelines hypothesizing the relationship between emotional appeal and attitude toward empathy expression [23]. In the case of Lee, et al. [23] attitude toward empathy expression refers to the consumer's attitude toward the idea of expressing empathy toward the advertisement via SNS platform, through engagement with the ad. For the purpose of this study, attitude toward empathy expression divides into two factors: attitude towards the advertisement and willingness to engage with the brand.

## Research Model and Hypotheses

The conceptual model is developed to investigate the influence of specific ad traits such as informativeness, creativity, and emotional appeal, on attitude towards the advertisement, the influence of attitude towards the advertisement on willingness to engage with the brand, and the influence of willingness to engage with the brand on purchase intention (Figure 1). Also, to be investigated is the influence of perceived behavior of others on subjective norm, and the influence of subjective norm on willingness to engage with the brand. A moderating variable of possession of a sedentary or active lifestyle is also investigated for its effect on the relationship between willingness to engage with the brand and purchase intention. The model encompasses the Elaboration Likelihood Model by investigating the influence of emotion on attitude change or formation.

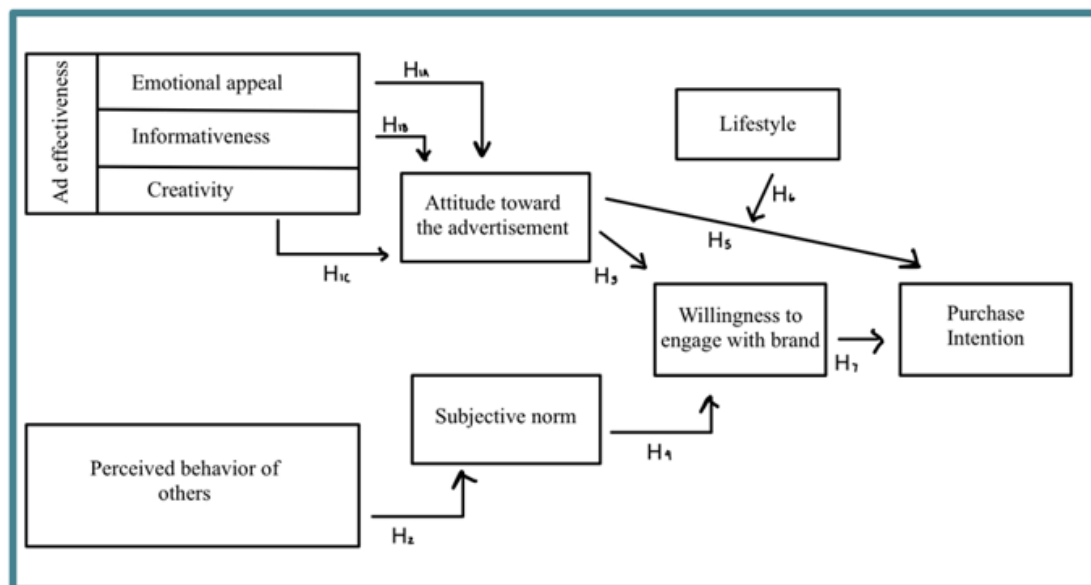


Figure 1: Research model.

## Ad Effectiveness

As social network services become more persistent in daily life, social media advertising emerges as a desirable vehicle for increasing advertising effectiveness. To leverage this means of marketing, brands must understand what motivates users to engage in favorable online behavior (i.e., indicating support or personal interest in the advertised message by clicking the Like or Comment button), thereby resulting in an effective advertising campaign [23]. Lee, et al. [23] conceptualize SNS ad effectiveness as a concept encompassing emotional appeal, informativeness and creativity, that are believed to have the potential to contribute to a consumer's positive online behavior. SNS users are more interested in advertising that has informative value and creative content

[24,25]. Existing studies widely focus on entertainment as a large determinant of attitude toward the ad, users on digital platforms tend to react more favorably to a message or advertisement if there is an emphasis on emotional appeal [26].

## Emotional appeal, informativeness, and creativity

Emotional appeal is a method of persuasion designed to create an emotional response to a message by using emotional content such as a sad story, calming music, or scary movies [23]. Emotional appeal deals with the ways in which emotional responses are triggered as an effect of the stimulus' motivational relevance to individuals, and messages with strong emotional appeals are mainly shared via online platforms [26]. Related studies suggest that the stronger emotional appeal a social media ad possesses, the

more likely a consumer is to develop a positive attitude toward the advertisement.

Informativeness is defined as the “ability to inform users about product alternatives that enable them to make choices yielding the highest value” [27]. Informativeness encompasses rational appeal due to its ability to allow a consumer to utilize this information in judging whether or not to accept the message and is therefore conceptually separate from ‘emotional appeal’ [23]. Studies have found informativeness to be important in the formation of consumer attitudes to social site advertising [25]. An informative advertisement provides consumers with the tools to make more intelligent buying decisions, as well as allowing consumers to have portrayals of products that are higher in accuracy. These factors motivate a consumer to find an advertisement more valuable.

Advertising creativity is the extent to which an ad is original and unexpected [28]. Advertising creativity encompasses elements that are novel, different or unusual, as well as elements that are meaningful, appropriate, or valuable to the audience, being incorporated into the advertisement. Advertisements that encompass creative messages grab more attention and lead to positive attitudes about products that are featured [24]. Thus, consumers are more willing to process a creative ad, leading to an increase in the effectiveness of the advertisement. Thus, based on these three measures of ad effectiveness, the following three hypotheses are made.

H1A: Emotional appeal of advertisement is positively related to attitude towards advertisement.

H1B: Informativeness of advertisement is positively related to attitude towards advertisement.

H1C: Creativity of the advertisement is positively related to attitude towards advertisement.

### Attitude towards advertisement

Attitude towards advertisement has been defined as a predisposition to respond in a positive or negative manner to a certain advertising stimulus during a specific exposure situation [29]. Chae, et al. [30] state that attitude toward a brand is considered favorable or unfavorable feelings and beliefs about said brand. Brand beliefs and feelings are formed through the processing of ads, and these beliefs consequently affect attitude toward the brand being advertised. Many studies have considered attitude towards advertisement as the main input of attitude towards brand, with both factors hypothesized to have an effect on consumers’ purchase intention [31]. A positive consumer attitude towards the advertisement leads to a higher willingness to purchase, while a negative consumer attitude decreases willingness to purchase.

### Willingness to engage with brand

Consumer engagement behavior is defined as “a behavioral manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions” [32]. In the era of social media, customers are no longer passive recipients of advertisements but rather are active participants in the value-creation process and can now directly

engage in marketing communications [33]. Due to this growth, customer engagement has become an integral part of marketing practices associated with social media. Social media users who have been exposed to an ad typically experience an evaluative phase where an effective evaluation response (good, angry, bad, sad, etc) is developed. Most social media platforms provide an outlet whereby the user can express their internal response in the form of certain digital reactions, for example Instagram provides users the opportunity to “Like” and “Comment” on a posted photo or video. Studies have shown that active engagement exerts a greater influence on the formation of favorable attitudes toward a specific brand [34] and therefore, if a consumer is highly willing to actively engage with the brand via social media, it is likely that they have formed a positive and favorable attitude towards the brand, which is predicted to lead to purchase intention. Thus, the following hypothesis is created.

H3: Attitude towards advertisement is positively related to willingness to engage with brand.

### Subjective norm concerning brand engagement

Subjective norm is the viewpoint or opinion about what important referents believe an individual should do [20]. Similar studies on information acceptance have found that subjective norm plays an important role in a user’s decision whether or not to accept a new information system. For example, according to Crespo, et al. [35], it positively affects the behavioral intention to adopt B2C e-commerce.

Subjective norm is expected to play an even larger role in determining the intention to use a social media platform, since a user’s digital behaviors (posting a comment or clicking the “Like” or “Share” button) is commonly very visible to other users on that platform. Particularly, the user often gets rewarded for compliance of expectations of these referents through maintenance of favorable relationships [23]. By this nature, an individual who observes that many acquaintances have already clicked Like on a given Instagram ad may feel more motivated to click “Like” for the ad as well, complying with the expectation of the important referent group who clicked “Like” for the ad. Thus, the following two hypotheses are written.

H2: Perceived behavior of others is positively related to subjective norm concerning brand engagement.

H4: Subjective norm concerning brand engagement is positively related to willingness to engage with brand.

### Purchase intention

The Theory of Reasoned Action states that the intention to engage in a behavior precedes that specific behavior. In this context intention then refers to the willingness to engage in the behavior that is under consideration. Purchase intention refers to the likelihood that consumers would be willing to purchase from a certain brand, or a product in particular (Hsiao, Wi, & Yeh, 2011). For this study, purchase intention refers to purchase intention of products from the advertised brand, Lululemon Athletica. Therefore, the following hypotheses are written.

H5: Attitude towards advertisement is positively related to purchase intention.

H7: Willingness to engage with the brand is positively related to purchase intention.

## Lifestyle

Through recent years, society has been creating a perfect vision of a “health-conscious” consumer. We are seeing a rise in commercial gyms, different and creative ways to exercise, new diets, organic produce campaigns, and more. A healthy lifestyle orientation is the extent to which consumers tend to do something that is good for their health such as sports, exercise, and/or having a balanced diet (Tan et al., 2017). For the purpose of this study, consumer lifestyle orientation will be defined through the level of activity the consumer participates in throughout the week, as well as if they consider themselves a health-conscious consumer. Lifestyle will be viewed as a moderating variable on the relationship between attitude towards advertisement and purchase intention. Therefore, it is predicted that for active “health-conscious” consumers there will be a stronger relationship between attitude toward advertisement and purchase intention. In this case, the following hypothesis is written.

H6: Lifestyle has a moderating effect on the relationship between attitude towards advertisement and purchase intention.

## Methods

### Survey development and data collection

Measurement items were adopted from previous research. Emotional appeal measurements were adapted from Escales JE, et al. [36] who stated that emotional appeal refers to the extent to which emotional responses, such as attraction and likeability, are triggered when exposed to a digital ad. Informativeness measurements were adapted from Pavlou PA, et al. [37] who wrote that informativeness denotes the degree to which an advertisement offers information users perceive as useful and adds to the users existing knowledge. Creativity measurements were adopted from Haberland GS, et al. [28] who stated that advertising creativity refers to the extent to which an advertisement is original and unexpected. Attitude toward the advertisement measurements were adapted from Hrubes, et al. (2001) who measured attitude using two scales with endpoints labeled extremely bad–extremely good and extremely unpleasant–extremely pleasant. Perceived behavior of others was measured through items adapted from Huang, et al. [30] who examined how consumer herd behavior influences consumer online behavior choices and stated that individuals often follow the majority. Subjective norm measurements were adapted from Venkatesh, et al. (2000) who stated that subjective norm is the degree of a person’s perception that people who are important to him or her find it reasonable to perform the behavior in question, and Sin SS, et al. [38] [35] (2012) who stated a person can be influenced by someone who is important to them having expectations that they should or

should not perform a behavior. Lifestyle orientation measurements were adapted from Watts L, et al. [39] [40] (2019) who stated that individuals who possess strong health values place a higher level of importance on exercise and therefore are more willing to accept exercise behavior. Individuals who have higher regard for a wellness-based lifestyle are more likely to wear activewear in daily life than consumers lacking this lifestyle regard [40]. Willingness to engage with brand measurements were adapted from Lutfeali, S, et al. [40]. These authors defined social media brand engagement as ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ on an advertisement as well as website visits. Non-digital brand engagement is measured through willingness to visit the brick and mortar store. Lastly, purchase intention measurements were adapted from MacKenzie SB, et al. [41]. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data was collected in the form of an online survey. Survey invitations included a link to the survey and were distributed via social media platforms as well as email. This survey had items measuring effectiveness of the advertisement, attitude toward the advertisement, subjective norm, lifestyle orientation, willingness to engage with the brand, and purchase intention of athleisure wear products from Lululemon Athletica. Items are adopted from previous research. Overall, 135 valid questionnaires were completed.

The statistical program R was used to conduct statistical analysis for this research. The majority (75.6%) of respondents were female (n=102), and the highest percentage of respondents (21.5%) were 21 years old (n=29) with the percentage of respondents at 44.4% for the age range 17 to 21 years old.

Reliability references the quality of the measurement, which showcases overall consistency of measurements. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were taken to summarize the data, as well as Cronbach’s alpha and number of items were measurements used to calculate the internal consistency of each item. The reliability tests were performed on each of the 25 items within the 9 constructs. This reliability analysis shows that all measurements in this study are reliable or acceptable, with each Cronbach’s Alpha over .6.

Regression was conducted for hypotheses testing (Table 1). All hypotheses were supported with the exception of H6. Results show that emotional appeal, informativeness, and creativity had a significant influence on the attitude toward the advertisement ( $\beta = .51, .30, \text{ and } .46, p < .001$ ). These support the hypotheses that the characteristics of the advertisement predict attitude towards advertisement. Perceived behavior of others influences subjective norms ( $\beta = .40, p < .001$ ). Willingness to engage with brand can be predicted by the attitude toward advertisement ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ) as well as the subjective norms ( $\beta = .68, p < .001$ ). Attitude turns out to be a precursor of purchase intention ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ). So does willingness to engage with the brand ( $\beta = .71, p < .001$ ).

**Table 1:** Hypothesis Testing Results and Standard Coefficients.

Hypothesis	IV	DV	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	p	Supported
H1A	Emotional Appeal	Attitude Toward Advertisement	0.26	0.51	< .001	Yes
H1B	Informativeness	Attitude Toward Advertisement	0.09	0.3	< .001	Yes
H1C	Creativity	Attitude Toward Advertisement	0.21	0.46	< .001	Yes
H2	Perceived Behavior of Others	Subjective Norms	0.16	0.4	< .001	Yes
H3	Attitude Toward Advertisement	Willingness to Engage with Brand	0.26	0.51	< .001	Yes
H4	Subjective Norms	Willingness to Engage with Brand	0.46	0.68	< .001	Yes
H5	Attitude Toward Advertisement	Purchase Intention	0.24	0.49	< .001	Yes
H6	Attitude Toward Advertisement *Lifestyle Orientation (Moderation)	Purchase Intention	0	0.04	0.557	No
H7	Willingness to Engage with Brand	Purchase Intention	0.5	0.71	< .001	Yes

As for a hypothesis involving a moderating effect of lifestyle orientation. The result did not show any significance to help explain variability in purchase intention ( $\beta = .04, p > .5$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis that lifestyle orientation has a moderating effect on purchase intention was not supported. This may indicate that for the subjects of this current study, the lifestyle variance wouldn't matter, the brand, Lululemon, may have equivalent success advertising to both health and activity-oriented lifestyle consumers, as well as consumers with a more sedentary lifestyle.

## Discussion and Implications

The major findings of this study were that attitudes toward the advertisement significantly influenced purchase intention of the advertised brand. Eight out of nine hypotheses were supported by responses, the outlier being the moderating variable. This provides evidence that consumers are responsive to the effectiveness of the advertisement, reflected in their attitude towards the advertisement. With digital marketing at an all-time high, consumers now have many platforms to absorb brand information which influences their purchase intention. Thus, retailers should invest more time in creating and distributing impactful and effective ads in order to reach more consumers in a positive way. Having a positive attitude towards viewed advertisements significantly impacts consumer purchase intention. Brands who do not utilize creativity, informativeness, and emotional appeal in their digital advertisements may decrease the level of purchase intention expressed by consumers. It is wise for brands to focus on their digital marketing strategies. This study concentrates on psychological factors that influence purchase intention of athleisure wear as well as digital advertisement factors. The combination of these factors and their influence on consumer purchase intention has been scarcely researched in this context. This unique study lends evidence for motivations to purchase athleisure wear and may be used to facilitate future studies in this area. Brands selling athleisure wear should be aware of how they can angle their digital advertisements to motivate consumers, and by knowing this information, marketers can strategically create social media campaigns that drive consumer purchase intention.

## Limitations

This study contributes to the theoretical research on the factors that influence purchase of athleisure wear products, specifically relating to digital advertisements. However, the present study has a few limitations that are necessary to discuss in order to clarify generalizations. This study has some skewed demographics, with the majority (75.6%) of respondents identifying as female ( $n=102$ ), and the highest percentage of respondents (21.5%) were 21 years old ( $n=29$ ) with the percentage of respondents at 44.4% for the age range 17 to 21 years old. Respondents close in age and gender may have similar thoughts and values, again impacting the chance of biases. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies use a broad range of respondents.

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## Conflicts of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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