

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING AND PURCHASE INTENTION AMONG FAST-FOOD CONSUMERS IN SAUDI ARABIA: THE MODERATING ROLE OF CULTURAL VALUES

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—Abstract—

This research investigates whether and to what extent social media advertising shapes consumers' purchase intentions within the Saudi Arabian fast-food sector, while further examining collectivism and uncertainty avoidance as moderating cultural factors. Guided by the Stimulus-Response perspective, the study adopts a three-wave time-lagged survey methodology and draws on responses from 442 consumers across Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam. Structural equation modelling was employed to evaluate the proposed relationships. The findings demonstrate a significant positive association between social media advertising and purchase intention. Moreover, both collectivism and uncertainty avoidance significantly amplify this effect, indicating that culturally rooted consumer orientations influence the extent to which advertising stimuli translate into intended purchasing behaviour. The measurement properties and structural model were also supported by satisfactory levels of reliability, validity, and overall model fit. By situating the investigation within Saudi Arabia's fast-food market and using a multi-wave research design, the study extends digital marketing scholarship by demonstrating the importance of culturally embedded values in shaping consumers' reactions to social media advertising within a Gulf-market setting. From a managerial perspective, the results emphasise the need for marketers to incorporate culturally congruent elements into social media campaigns to more effectively stimulate consumers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: Social Media Advertising, Purchase Intention, Culture, S-O-R Model

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the fast-food sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has

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expanded substantially, supported by rapid urban development and rising household incomes (Binsawad, 2020). This expansion has been further reinforced by changing consumer lifestyles, particularly the growing preference for convenience and broader food choices. The Saudi food-service market is valued at more than USD 30 billion, with quick-service restaurants (QSRs) accounting for a substantial share of this growth (Ponnaiyan et al., 2021). QSRs and fast-food establishments have strengthened their market position through the adoption of digital technologies designed to enhance customer experiences while improving operational efficiency (Ponnaiyan et al., 2021). In KSA, for example, QSR operators increasingly employ self-service kiosks, mobile ordering applications, and artificial intelligence-based systems for inventory management.

The transformation of the sector has occurred alongside a rapid expansion in digital advertising expenditure, particularly across online and social media channels. In Saudi Arabia, expenditure on social media advertising exceeded USD 1.5 billion in 2024, reflecting the increasing integration of engagement and shopping functions into major social platforms (Mir & Kulibi, 2023). Across the region, online advertising expenditure reached USD 1.22 billion in 2024 and is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.51% through 2033 (Saied, 2024). Platforms such as Instagram have become particularly influential because consumers increasingly use them not only to discover products and brands but also as channels facilitating purchase-related activities (Alnasser & Abaalkhail, 2024).

The scale of social media adoption in KSA further reinforces the strategic importance of these platforms for fast-food marketers. By January 2025, Saudi Arabia recorded approximately 30 million social media user identities, equivalent to 99.6% of the country's population (Semb site internal insights article, 2024). Among Generation Z users, 98% access the internet through smartphones, while 91% reportedly spend more than three hours per day on social media (Alhawshabi, 2024). Such extensive and sustained platform engagement provides fast-food businesses with considerable opportunities to influence purchase intention through advertisements tailored to the cultural characteristics and expectations of their target consumers (Alhawshabi, 2024). Nevertheless, empirical evidence concerning the influence of social media advertising on purchase intention remains relatively limited in the KSA context, particularly with respect to the role of cultural characteristics as moderators.

Although existing research indicates that digital marketing can positively shape online consumer buying behaviour in Saudi Arabia, comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining whether distinct cultural dimensions alter the effectiveness of marketing activities within the Saudi fast-food sector (Alanmi & Alharthi, 2023). Cultural characteristics can condition advertising effectiveness and consequently alter purchase intention, particularly through dimensions such as collectivism and uncertainty avoidance (Alnasser & Abaalkhail, 2024). Given the emphasis of Saudi

Vision 2030 on economic diversification and digital transformation, investigating these relationships is relevant to both researchers and businesses seeking a deeper understanding of consumer purchasing behaviour. Accordingly, this study examines the influence of social media advertising on purchase intention among Saudi consumers and evaluates whether collectivism and uncertainty avoidance moderate this association. The findings are also intended to provide fast-food businesses in KSA with practical insights for developing more effective approaches to consumer targeting.

The importance of cultural characteristics stems from their capacity to shape how consumers interpret and respond to marketing stimuli. Consequently, culture can serve as an important boundary condition linking social media advertising to purchase intention. The degree to which advertising content corresponds with consumers' cultural orientations can materially influence their evaluations of and responses to advertisements. Evidence from a recent meta-analysis indicates that culturally adapted advertisements generate significantly stronger persuasion and advertising-liking effects than advertisements that are not culturally adapted ([Hornikx et al., 2023](#)). Given the collectivist orientation associated with KSA, advertising content emphasising interpersonal connection, social participation, and shared experiences—for example, family members enjoying fast food together—may enhance consumers' favourable evaluations of advertisements and, in turn, strengthen the influence of social media advertising on purchase intention ([Hornikx & Groot, 2017](#)). Uncertainty avoidance represents another relevant cultural dimension. Consumers in high uncertainty-avoidance environments generally exhibit lower tolerance for ambiguity and favour greater consistency and predictability in communication, characteristics that can reduce perceived risk and potentially strengthen the conversion of advertising exposure into purchase-related intentions ([Sartono et al., 2022](#)).

Power distance may likewise affect consumer responses to authoritative figures and celebrity endorsements. When endorsement messages correspond with prevailing cultural values, they can strengthen consumer trust and subsequently contribute to stronger purchase intentions following exposure to advertising ([Lau-Gesk, 2003](#)). Nevertheless, the present study concentrates specifically on collectivism and uncertainty avoidance because these dimensions have particular relevance to consumer behaviour associated with conformity to social groups, avoidance of potential risks, and acceptance of advertising content disseminated through Saudi social media environments. Omitting such value orientations from advertising-effectiveness models may result in either an overestimation or underestimation of the actual relationship between social media advertising and purchase intention ([Hornikx et al., 2023](#)). Incorporating collectivism and uncertainty avoidance as moderators therefore provides a more precise explanation of the circumstances under which social media advertising is translated into purchase intention. It also enables fast-food marketers in KSA to develop campaigns that are more closely aligned with the cultural values of their intended audiences.

Although previous studies have established a direct relationship between social media advertising and purchase intention, evidence specifically addressing this relationship within Saudi Arabia's fast-food sector remains scarce (Balroo, 2023). (Hanaysha, 2022b), for instance, investigated social media marketing features in the Saudi fast-food industry but did not undertake an extensive examination of culturally embedded moderators. Such cultural factors can shape consumers' behavioural intentions when they encounter social media advertising in fast-food contexts, including through collectivism and uncertainty avoidance (Phan et al., 2024). Similarly, (Balroo, 2023) examined perceived usefulness, perceived entertainment, and irritation associated with social media advertising but did not assess the moderating influence of national culture within the fast-food industry (Balroo, 2023). The present research addresses these limitations through several complementary contributions. First, it adopts the Stimulus-Response perspective to conceptualise social media advertising as the stimulus and purchase intention as the corresponding consumer response within the fast-food sector (Kusawat & Teerakapibal, 2021). Second, prior studies have frequently treated culture as a broad construct or relied on proxy measures, thereby restricting the precision with which its moderating effects can be examined (Shastri, 2021). In contrast, this study assesses moderation through individual-level measures derived from Hofstede's cultural dimensions, enabling a more direct examination of culturally grounded differences (Storhannus, 2021). Third, despite the central role of digital transformation in Saudi Vision 2030, relatively few studies have explicitly situated social media advertising research within this broader policy and market environment. Consequently, changes in consumer expectations and corporate strategies arising from the country's digitalisation agenda have not been adequately incorporated into existing research (Almatrudi et al., 2023). This study responds to that omission by examining advertising outcomes among fast-food brands within the wider context of Saudi Arabia's digital transformation.

A further limitation concerns research design. Much of the existing literature relies on cross-sectional surveys, which restrict the temporal separation of predictors and outcomes and therefore provide weaker grounds for temporal inference (Alalwan, 2018). To strengthen the methodological design, the present study employs a three-wave time-lagged data-collection approach and uses structural equation modelling to evaluate the proposed hypotheses. Accordingly, the study represents one of the relatively few investigations to apply a time-lagged design to the relationship between social media advertising and purchase intention in Saudi Arabia's fast-food industry. In addition, although social media environments are inherently dependent on the platforms through which advertising is delivered, comparatively limited evidence explains how advertising operates within the digital environments most extensively used by consumers in KSA under Saudi-specific market conditions (Alalwan, 2018).

Taken together, the study extends the existing literature across four interconnected dimensions. Empirically, it concentrates on Saudi Arabia's fast-food industry;

contextually, it incorporates the country's Vision 2030 agenda and the characteristics of digital consumption in the Gulf; theoretically, it positions culture as a boundary condition that can alter advertising effectiveness; and methodologically, it advances the literature through the use of a three-wave time-lagged research design. The remainder of the paper proceeds by reviewing the relevant literature and developing the study hypotheses, followed by an explanation of the research methodology. The subsequent sections report the empirical findings and conclude by discussing their theoretical and practical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study draws its theoretical assumptions from the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. Originating in environmental psychology, S-O-R theory proposes that external stimuli can alter individuals' internal cognitive and affective states, which subsequently shape their behavioural responses (Hochreiter et al., 2022; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). From this perspective, environmental stimuli (S) influence the organism (O) by modifying psychological conditions such as arousal, pleasure, and attitudes, which subsequently determine the resulting response (R), including an individual's tendency to approach or avoid a particular stimulus (Eroglu et al., 2003). Over the past several decades, the S-O-R framework has become well established in consumer behaviour research and has been extensively employed to explain how marketing stimuli influence consumers' purchase-related decisions (Pandita et al., 2021). Its application has subsequently extended to digital and social media environments, where advertising characteristics such as interactivity and vividness have been found to influence consumers' cognitive and emotional states in online settings (Coyle & Thorson, 2001). Related research indicates that organismic states, commonly reflected through pleasure, arousal, and perceived informativeness, can explain the mechanisms through which SM advertising affects consumers' behavioural intentions (Lee & Hong, 2016). Within this framework, the response component can be represented by consumers' willingness to purchase products promoted through advertising exposure, which is commonly operationalised as PI (Li & Gu, 2022).

Within KSA's fast-food industry, specific attributes of SM advertising, including personalised communication, message clarity, credibility, and interactivity, can be interpreted as salient stimuli under the S-O-R framework. Exposure to these stimuli is consequently expected to generate PI as a behavioural response (Hagen et al., 2017). Although prior S-O-R research has frequently incorporated organismic reactions to explain the processes connecting stimuli with responses, the present study concentrates more specifically on the association between SM advertising and PI and investigates whether individual cultural value orientations alter the strength of this association. Thus, S-O-R serves as the theoretical basis for explaining how marketing stimuli can produce consumer responses, whereas culture is conceptualised as a boundary condition that may strengthen or weaken this relationship. More specifically, individualism-

collectivism and uncertainty avoidance are examined as distinct cultural dimensions that may influence how Saudi consumers respond to SM advertising in the fast-food context.

This theoretical proposition is particularly relevant to the Saudi context. Collectivism is especially pertinent in environments where family attachment, social acceptance, and conformity with group expectations exert considerable influence on purchasing behaviour and communal consumption practices, including shared meals ([Hornikx & Groot, 2017](#)). Uncertainty avoidance may also be important in digital advertising environments because consumers with limited tolerance for ambiguity may respond more positively to messages that reduce perceived uncertainty and enhance confidence in purchasing decisions by providing information that is transparent, credible, and consistent ([Sartono et al., 2022](#)). Fast-food purchasing decisions, for instance, can be influenced by convenience, familiarity, trust, and social approval. Accordingly, examining collectivism and uncertainty avoidance as separate cultural dimensions may provide a more precise explanation of consumer differences than relying on culture as a single aggregated construct. On this theoretical basis, the study develops hypotheses addressing both the direct effect of SM advertising on PI and the conditional effects arising from cultural dimensions that moderate this relationship within KSA's fast-food sector.

Hypotheses Development

Existing evidence indicates that SM advertising can play an important role in shaping consumers' PI. A recent meta-analysis, for example, demonstrates that influencer marketing generates favourable advertising attitudes, which subsequently contribute to stronger PI across multiple industries ([Barari et al., 2026](#)). From the S-O-R perspective, SM advertisements constitute the stimulus (S) because they can modify consumers' cognitive evaluations and affective responses, ultimately influencing their PI ([Hussain et al., 2023](#)). Empirical research further shows that advertising characteristics such as interactivity and vividness can stimulate greater pleasure and consumer involvement within SM environments, thereby producing stronger PI as the resulting response ([Yim et al., 2017](#)). Evidence from QSR advertising is consistent with this argument. ([Hanaysha, 2022a](#)) reported that advertising characteristics, particularly message clarity and personal relevance, significantly predicted the PI of consumers purchasing food from QSRs. Similarly, [Hanaysha \(2022b\)](#) established that interactivity, credibility, and informativeness of SM advertising jointly explained 45.06 percent of the variance in consumers' intentions to purchase fast food.

The effectiveness of SM advertising may also be enhanced through personalisation. Personalised advertising, defined as promotional content specifically tailored to consumers' preferences, can encourage more extensive cognitive processing and generate stronger favourable emotional responses, consequently increasing PI ([Huo et al., 2023](#)). Evidence from a two-wave study conducted in the furniture retail sector

further showed that greater vividness in short-video advertising enhanced consumers' perceptions of social presence, which subsequently contributed to PI (Yu et al., 2024). Such mechanisms may be particularly relevant in KSA because of the exceptionally high level of SM adoption. More than 90 percent of the population reportedly uses SM, with Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat identified among the leading communication platforms (Dania Albakri, 2021).

Research in comparable service settings also provides evidence for indirect pathways through which SM advertising can influence PI. For example, Salhab et al. (2023) found that advertising interactivity and emotional engagement mediated the relationship between short-video advertising and PI for beauty services in Jordan. From an S-O-R perspective, therefore, SM advertising can be understood as an external stimulus capable of activating psychological and behavioural processes that ultimately generate PI as the consumer response. Based on this theoretical rationale and the supporting empirical evidence, the study proposes that:

H1: *Social media advertising has a positive effect on purchase intention among Saudi fast-food consumers.*

Culture provides an important interpretive lens through which consumers assign meaning to marketing information according to their underlying beliefs and value systems. Nevertheless, within advertising scholarship, culture has often occupied a secondary position, being used primarily to explain contextual variation and boundary conditions rather than being treated as an independent determinant of PI. Empirical evidence nevertheless indicates that culturally grounded factors can directly shape purchase-related outcomes. For instance, Liu and Zhao (2024) reported that cultural identity significantly influenced PI for intangible cultural heritage products, suggesting that consumers may seek to reinforce beliefs and meanings that correspond with their cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Zong et al. (2023) found support for a direct relationship between perceived culture and consumers' PI for cultural products, with culture operationalised through consumers' familiarity with traditional symbols and values. In the context of green consumption, collectivism has also demonstrated a positive association with PI, indicating that this cultural orientation may predispose consumers towards particular consumption patterns (Chan, 2001). Individualism has likewise been linked to PI, with evidence showing that consumers exhibiting stronger individualistic orientations are more likely to favour products that correspond closely with personal values (Franke et al., 2010). Research involving traditional Chinese symbols further demonstrated that cultural identity and emotional value significantly predicted PI before the introduction of mediation effects (Zong et al., 2023).

Hofstede's cultural framework provides further theoretical justification for considering culture in consumer behaviour research. Its dimensions, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation, among others, indicate that culturally

derived characteristics can function as antecedents of consumer behaviour (Pratesi et al., 2021). Earlier conceptual work has similarly argued that international marketers should assess culture through distinct dimensions because different cultural constructs may be operationalised in different ways and can consequently produce different purchase-related outcomes (Soares et al., 2007). However, in the specific domain of SM advertising, culture may be more informative when conceptualised as a source of variation in persuasive effectiveness rather than as a universal direct determinant of consumers' PI. In the Saudi context, social norms, family orientation, trust, and risk reduction are particularly relevant considerations in consumers' responses to digital advertising for fast-food products. Accordingly, collectivism and uncertainty avoidance are considered appropriate cultural dimensions for examining these value-based differences. On this basis, the present study conceptualises culture as a moderating condition that determines the strength of the relationship between SM advertising and PI, rather than modelling culture as a direct antecedent of PI.

H2: *Cultural values, particularly collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, are important contextual factors in understanding purchase intention among Saudi fast-food consumers.*

Empirical evidence indicates that culture can alter the strength of the relationship between marketing stimuli, such as SM advertising, and consumer responses, including PI. Within the S-O-R framework, cultural orientations can influence how consumers interpret persuasive messages and consequently determine the extent to which an external stimulus is translated into a behavioural response. Support for this moderating role was reported in research involving three fast-fashion brands operating across Jordan, Morocco, and Spain, where cultural differences altered the effects of customisation, entertainment, and interactivity on PI (Omeish et al., 2024).

Similarly, a content analysis of TikTok advertisements demonstrated that exposure to culturally congruent advertising significantly enhanced consumers' PI, indicating that cultural compatibility can strengthen the influence of advertising stimuli on consumer responses (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Further evidence from an S-O-R-based investigation showed that cultural distance negatively moderated the relationship between informational SM use and consumers' cultural intelligence, which subsequently contributed to PI (Hu & Zhu, 2022). This finding suggests that greater cultural distance can weaken the pathway through which a stimulus influences the organismic process. In another digital heritage consumption study, social influence—a characteristic particularly salient in collectivistic societies—was found to positively moderate the association between perceived value and PI (Shaari, 2021).

Additional evidence concerning advertising relevance further reinforces the potential moderating role of culture. Chen et al. (2023) found that the relevance of SM advertising strengthened the association between advertising credibility and PI, providing further

evidence that contextual conditions can modify advertising effectiveness. Research specifically involving fast-food purchasers in Saudi Arabia likewise provides relevant support. Using a mixed-method research design, [VanDyke et al. \(2023\)](#) demonstrated that sociocultural factors positively moderated the relationship between influencer effectiveness and PI, suggesting that culturally grounded conditions can enhance both consumer trust and the persuasive strength of advertising messages. Similarly, research examining European consumers' perceptions of SM advertising relevance found that the relationship between advertising credibility and PI became stronger when advertising exhibited a high degree of cultural congruency ([Rui Alexandre Castanho, 2023](#)).

Collectively, these findings indicate that culture can condition the extent to which SM advertising translates into PI, with collectivism and uncertainty avoidance being particularly relevant dimensions in the present context. Consumers with stronger collectivistic orientations may respond more favourably to advertising that communicates social acceptance, family connectedness, group affiliation, and shared consumption meanings. Conversely, consumers characterised by higher uncertainty avoidance may be more responsive to advertising that minimises ambiguity, provides clear information, and conveys greater credibility and trustworthiness. Accordingly, these cultural orientations are expected to influence the strength of the SM advertising–PI relationship. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: *Culture moderates the link between social media advertising and purchase intention, such that this relationship is stronger among Saudi consumers with higher collectivism and uncertainty avoidance.*

[Figure 1](#) illustrates the hypothesised associations among SM advertising, PI, and culture within the Saudi consumer context.

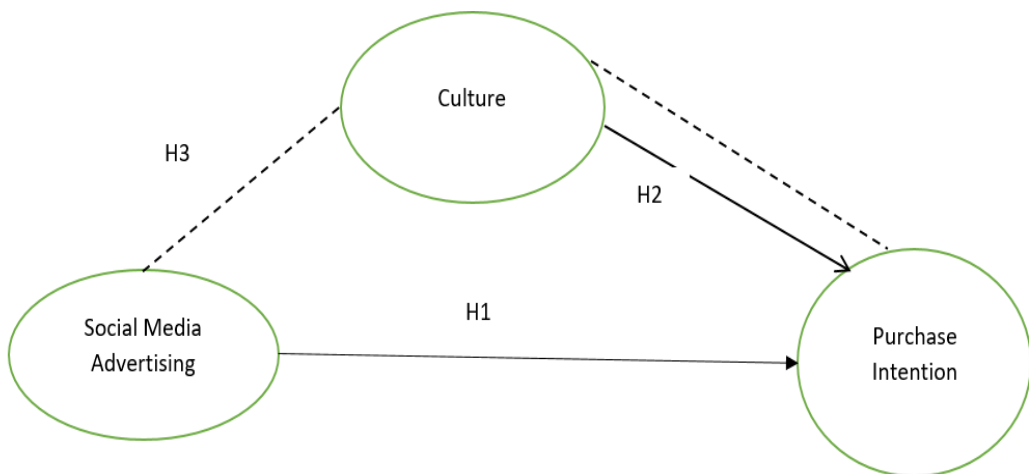


Figure 1: Hypothesized Research Model Conceived by Researchers

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face intercept surveys involving fast-food customers in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, three major metropolitan markets representing important locations within Saudi Arabia's QSR industry. The selection of these cities was intended to achieve geographic coverage and an appropriate distribution of respondents across the country's principal urban markets, with populations of approximately 4.21 million in Riyadh, 2.87 million in Jeddah, and 0.77 million in Dammam (Review, 2025). The cities were selected on the basis of their urban population size, connectivity and digital infrastructure, concentration of QSR activity, and exposure to SM marketing. Respondents were approached at local QSR outlets and in nearby high-traffic commercial districts where fast-food consumers were likely to be present. A non-probability convenience intercept sampling approach was adopted, and all potential participants were screened before inclusion in the study.

Eligibility required respondents to be at least 18 years old, reside in Saudi Arabia, actively use SM, and have encountered fast-food advertising through SM during the preceding month. Participants were additionally required to indicate that they had either purchased food from a fast-food/QSR brand or had seriously considered making such a purchase during the same one-month period. To minimise differences in how respondents interpreted the focal construct, the survey instructions explicitly defined SM advertising as promotional content encountered on widely used SM platforms, including Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and X/Twitter. This operational explanation was provided to establish a consistent understanding of SM advertising among participants before they completed the questionnaire. The investigation employed a three-wave data-collection procedure, with a two-week interval separating successive waves. This temporal separation was implemented to reduce the potential influence of common method bias and to create an appropriate time interval between the measurement of predictor and outcome variables (Mehmood et al., 2024). Each participant received a unique anonymous identification code, enabling individual responses to be linked across the three waves without compromising respondent confidentiality. At Wave 1, demographic information and SM advertising were measured.

Wave 2 captured the intermediate consumer evaluations associated with the extended S-O-R logic, while PI, the dependent variable, was assessed during Wave 3. This sequencing established temporal separation among the focal constructs and maintained the expected temporal ordering of the variables, thereby supporting a time-lagged research design consistent with established practices in consumer behaviour research (Hewei & Youngsook, 2022). From the 600 questionnaires initially distributed across the three locations, 463 usable response sets were returned. During the subsequent data-

screening process, 21 questionnaires were excluded because of substantial missing information or problematic response patterns. The final dataset consequently comprised 442 valid respondents for subsequent analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Before participation, respondents received clear information regarding the study's purpose, the procedures involved in data collection, the measures adopted to protect confidentiality, and their right to discontinue participation at any stage (Miller & Williams, 2011). Questionnaire administration commenced only after informed consent had been obtained from each participant. No personally identifiable information was requested or recorded during the data-collection process. To safeguard participant privacy, all collected data were retained on password-protected servers, with access restricted exclusively to the principal investigators. These procedures ensured the confidentiality of the respondents' information while preserving the voluntary nature of their participation.

Sample Size Estimation and Data Screening

The required sample size was established through an inferential power analysis conducted in G*Power for structural equation modelling (Faul et al., 2007). The analysis indicated that at least 400 observations would provide 0.80 statistical power for detecting small-to-medium effects, assuming an effect size of $f^2 = .05$ and a significance level of $\alpha = .05$. To accommodate the anticipated response rate reported in field-based survey research, 600 questionnaires were subsequently distributed. Of these, 463 were returned, corresponding to a response rate of 77.2%. Data screening resulted in the exclusion of 21 questionnaires because they contained more than 20% missing responses and/or exhibited straight-lining, whereby respondents repeatedly selected the same response category across consecutive scale items. After these exclusions, the final analytical sample consisted of 442 respondents, their details are shown in Table 1.

Measures

The measurement instruments employed in this study were derived from established scales reported in previous research. SM advertising was operationalised using items adapted from Ducoffe (1996), whose original instrument comprised 18 items designed to capture key aspects of advertising value and message effectiveness. PI was assessed using the three-item scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004). Culture served as the moderating construct and was measured using the instrument proposed by Hofstede and Hofstede (2013), from which 12 items were adopted.

Table 1: Participant Socio-Demographic Characteristics (N = 442)

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	265	60.0
	Female	177	40.0
Age (Years)	18–25	132	29.9
	26–35	163	36.9
	36–45	89	20.1
	46+	58	13.1
Education	High School or Below	79	17.9
	Undergraduate Degree	249	56.3
	Postgraduate Degree	114	25.8
Monthly Income (SAR)	< 5,000	98	22.2
	5,000–10,000	177	40.0
	> 10,000	167	37.8

Note: SAR = Saudi Riyal

To achieve greater conceptual precision in measuring culture, the construct was operationalised at the first-order dimensional level through two cultural dimensions considered particularly relevant to the Saudi sample: collectivism and uncertainty avoidance. Rather than combining these dimensions into a single composite culture score, each dimension was treated as a distinct value orientation. The measurement items were retained in a manner that preserved the original conceptual meaning of the respective constructs while ensuring their contextual relevance to fast-food consumption and SM advertising. All constructs were measured reflectively using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The complete measurement items, their respective sources, and any wording modifications are provided in the Appendix. Consistent with the modified conceptual framework, SM advertising was specified as the predictor variable, PI as the criterion variable, and collectivism and uncertainty avoidance as separate cultural dimensions for assessing moderation effects. Any items removed from the original 18-item SM advertising scale during confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) must be explicitly reported in the measurement-model analysis. Such exclusions should be justified on the basis of relevant empirical criteria, including factor loadings, construct reliability, or overall model fit. This reporting is necessary to ensure consistency between the originally specified measurement instrument and the items ultimately retained for the final validity and reliability assessments, thereby allowing the reported measurement results to correspond precisely with the final measurement model.

FINDINGS

Common Method Bias (CMB)

Because the study relies on self-reported survey responses, common method bias (CMB) was assessed as an initial diagnostic procedure. Following the recommendation of [Harman \(1976\)](#), Harman's single-factor test was conducted in SPSS version 28 by loading all measurement items onto a single factor without applying rotation. Under the conventional criterion associated with this procedure, CMB may be considered a potential concern when a single factor accounts for 50% or more of the total variance, as indicated by its Eigenvalue-based contribution. The analysis showed that no single factor reached this threshold. The largest factor accounted for only 32.27% of the total variance, substantially below the 50% criterion. Accordingly, the results provide no indication that CMB represents a substantial threat to the validity of the present dataset.

Convergent Validity and Reliability Test

The analysis subsequently assessed the measurement model for convergent validity and internal reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated using item factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). All retained items demonstrated factor loadings exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergence between the observed indicators and their respective constructs. Following the assessment of item loadings, AVE was determined for each construct by summing the squared standardised loadings and dividing the resulting value by the number of retained indicators. Since the AVE values obtained for all constructs exceeded the minimum criterion of 0.50, the measurement model demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

The convergent validity and reliability results are presented in [Table 2](#). As shown in the table, the AVE values for SMA, PI, and C were all above the recommended threshold of 0.50. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (C.R.). For both measures, values of 0.70 or higher are generally considered acceptable. The results reported in Table 2 show that all constructs achieved values exceeding 0.70 on both reliability measures. Collectively, these findings indicate that the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. For the final version of the manuscript, the reported number of retained indicators for SMA should be made consistent throughout the measurement-model analysis. Specifically, the manuscript currently states on page 11 that all 18 SMA items were retained, whereas the subsequent AVE calculation is based on 16 retained items. If two indicators were eliminated during CFA, this item deletion should be explicitly reported in the measurement-model section, together with the relevant justification based on factor loadings, reliability, or model-fit considerations. The final number of retained SMA items must correspond directly with the indicators used in the reported AVE and other measurement-model calculations.

Table 2: Results of Convergent Validity and Reliability

	AVE	A	C.R
SMA	0.72	0.87	0.91
PI	0.70	0.92	0.92
C	0.71	0.91	0.93

Notes: A = Cronbach Alpha, C.R = Composite Reliability

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was subsequently performed to evaluate the adequacy of the proposed measurement structure. Model fit was examined against established threshold criteria for the relevant fit indices. Specifically, a χ^2/df ratio below 3.00, RMSEA below 0.08, and GFI, CFI, and NFI values exceeding 0.90 were considered indicative of an acceptable model fit (Table 3). The results show that the measurement model achieved the specified criteria across the assessed indices, thereby providing support for the adequacy of the proposed factor structure and indicating that the observed data were consistent with the hypothesised measurement solution. The analysis then proceeded to examine the inter-construct correlations and discriminant validity. The correlation coefficients among the constructs were positive and statistically significant. In particular, the correlation between SMA and PI was 0.573, indicating a positive association between social media advertising and purchase intention. Discriminant validity was subsequently assessed according to the [Fornell and Larcker \(1981\)](#) criterion, which requires the square root of the AVE for each construct to exceed its correlations with the other constructs. As reported in [Table 3](#), all diagonal values were greater than the corresponding off-diagonal correlation coefficients, confirming adequate discriminant validity. In addition, all VIF values were below 3.00, indicating that multicollinearity did not constitute a significant concern in the present study ([Hair, 2006](#)).

Table 3: Correlation, Discriminant Validity, and Model Fit Indices Results

Construct	Mean	S.D.	SMA	C	PI
SMA	5.34	0.77	0.77	0.656**	0.573**
C	4.95	0.73		0.79	0.585**
PI	4.69	0.75			0.72
Model Fit Indices			Range		Obtained
χ^2/df			3.00		2.96
RMSEA			0.08		0.077
NFI			0.90		0.956
CFI			0.90		0.953
GFI			0.90		0.955

Notes: S.D. = Standard Deviation, ** = Significant Values of Correlation, Bold Diagonal = Discriminant Validity Results

Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied to evaluate the hypothesised associations among the latent constructs. This analytical technique was considered appropriate because it permits the simultaneous assessment of measurement and structural relationships involving latent variables and has been extensively applied in contemporary behavioural and marketing research (Bollen & Pearl, 2013; Cheah et al., 2020; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021; Thakkar, 2020). The structural model was estimated using AMOS. The results indicated an acceptable level of overall model fit. Specifically, the structural model produced a χ^2/df value of 2.87, RMSEA of 0.065, CFI of 0.961, GFI of 0.967, and NFI of 0.957. All reported indices satisfied conventional model-fit benchmarks, providing evidence that the proposed structural specification represented the observed data adequately. The path coefficients reported in the analysis are standardised estimates.

The findings provide support for H1, which proposes that SMA positively influences PI. The estimated path from SMA to PI was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that stronger consumer perceptions of SMA are associated with greater intentions to purchase fast food among Saudi consumers. As established in the preceding theoretical discussion, the revised conceptualisation of culture treats it primarily as a contextual condition and a moderator of the relationship between SMA and PI. Accordingly, the structural analysis places primary emphasis on the direct effect of SMA and its interaction with the cultural variable. For completeness, the direct association between culture and PI is also reported in Table 4 as a secondary estimate. This relationship was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that cultural orientation is positively associated with PI at the overall level. Nevertheless, in view of the revised theoretical rationale and hypothesis development, this direct effect should not be interpreted as the principal theoretical contribution of the study.

The interaction effect specified in H3 was also positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that the positive association between SMA and PI becomes stronger as the level of the cultural variable incorporated into the model increases. Thus, the findings provide empirical support for H3. The interaction was operationalised as $SMA \times Culture$. For greater interpretive precision in the final manuscript, the interaction effect should ideally be estimated and reported independently for collectivism and uncertainty avoidance if separate outputs for these dimensions are available. Conversely, if the analysis used a composite culture score, this specification should be explicitly stated at this point and reported consistently throughout the hypotheses, conceptual framework, methodology, figure, and results.

A further statistical issue requires verification before the manuscript is submitted. Several reported lower- and upper-bound confidence intervals associated with positive

path coefficients contain negative values, which appears inconsistent with the direction of the corresponding estimated effects. This discrepancy may indicate that the confidence intervals were transcribed incorrectly or originated from a different model or output specification. The confidence intervals reported in [Table 4](#) should therefore be cross-checked against the original AMOS output or the relevant bootstrapping results, and any incorrect values should be replaced in the final manuscript.

Table 4: Findings of Hypotheses H1, H2, and H3

Path	Estimates	S.E	CR	P-Value	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
SMA → PI	(β_1) 0.72**	0.067	10.69	0.001	-0.836	-0.497	Approved
C → PI	(β_2) 0.53**	0.078	5.63	0.001	-0.962	-0.278	Reported for Completeness*
SMA × C → PI	(β_3) 0.46**	0.065	6.44	0.001	0.059	0.319	Approved
Model Fit Indices				Range		Obtained	
χ^2/df				3.00		2.87	
RMSEA				0.08		0.065	
NFI				0.90		0.957	
CFI				0.90		0.961	
GFI				0.90		0.967	

Notes: LLCI = Lower-Limit Confidence Interval, ULCI = Upper-Limit Confidence Interval. *, *** = Significant Values.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate a statistically significant and positive association between SMA and PI among Saudi fast-food consumers. The positive path coefficient linking SMA with PI ($\beta = .72$, $p < .001$) indicates that consumers who encounter stronger and more credible advertising messages through social media tend to report greater intentions to purchase fast-food products. This elevated PI specifically concerns fast-food brands and is consistent with previous research portraying social media platforms as interactive environments in which consumers communicate with others while simultaneously encountering and evaluating new products. Such platforms also facilitate consumer–brand interactions in Saudi Arabia and comparable markets ([Alalwan, 2018](#); [V et al., 2021](#)). Importantly, the finding should not be interpreted as evidence that respondents actually purchased more fast food. Rather, it reflects the degree to which SMA is associated with consumers' stated willingness or likelihood to purchase within an increasingly digitised consumption environment such as the Saudi QSR sector.

The observed relationship may partly be explained by the characteristic communication properties of SMA, particularly interactivity, message clarity, informativeness, and credibility. Saudi consumers frequently use platforms such as Instagram and other social networking applications to follow brands, compare available offerings, and examine product-related information before making purchase decisions. These characteristics of

digital advertising may consequently contribute to stronger PI (Alalwan, 2018; V et al., 2021). This interpretation is also consistent with previous evidence showing that consumers tend to respond more positively when digital advertising facilitates direct interaction with brands, including the ability to ask questions and obtain timely responses. Research in related market settings further indicates that interactivity and credibility can enhance consumer evaluations and strengthen brand-related outcomes (Chen et al., 2023; Kim, 2021). Accordingly, the present findings reinforce the view that SMA can function as an effective marketing stimulus among consumers who are highly engaged with digital media.

The strength of this relationship may be particularly relevant within the Saudi market. The continuing importance of interpersonal relationships, trust, and socially embedded communication in domestic commercial exchanges may influence how consumers evaluate brands and interpret advertising claims (Sreejesh et al., 2020). Where these relational dynamics are prominent, social media-based advertising may exert greater influence when its communication style reflects broader expectations concerning relationship development and trust. This interpretation is consistent with evidence from Saudi Arabia and the wider region suggesting that advertising effectiveness depends not simply on exposure, but also on whether consumers perceive the communication as trustworthy, responsive, and attentive to social considerations (Alalwan, 2018). Thus, the findings should not be taken to imply that every form of digital advertising has an equivalent capacity to generate PI. Instead, they suggest that credible, relevant, and compelling advertising is more likely to strengthen PI within the fast-food sector.

The analysis also identified a positive direct association between culture and PI ($\beta = 0.53, p < .001$). This result requires careful interpretation because the revised conceptual framework positions culture primarily as a contextual and conditioning factor rather than as the principal explanatory mechanism. Nevertheless, considered as a direct statistical association, the positive coefficient indicates that cultural orientation remains relevant to understanding food-related PI among Saudi consumers. This observation is compatible with prior research demonstrating that cultural values and identity-related meanings can shape consumer preferences, evaluations, and interpretations of symbolic consumption (Liu & Zhao, 2024; Nam et al., 2021). In the Saudi setting, food consumption may be particularly connected with family relationships, hospitality, social approval, and routine forms of collective interaction. Culture may therefore provide a broader evaluative context within which consumers form purchase intentions.

The more substantial contribution of the present study, however, lies not in establishing a universal direct relationship between culture and PI, but in demonstrating that cultural orientation conditions the effectiveness of SMA. The significant moderation effect ($\beta = 0.46, p < .001$) indicates that the positive association between SMA and PI becomes stronger as the relevant cultural orientation increases. This finding is consistent with Hofstede's cultural dimensions' framework (1980, 2001) and with more recent research

identifying culture as an important factor in the persuasive effectiveness of digital advertising, particularly through its influence on trust, message receptiveness, and sensitivity to socially meaningful cues (Rehman, 2022; de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). The results therefore indicate that SMA does not operate in a culturally neutral manner within Saudi Arabia. Rather, its capacity to influence PI depends partly on the value orientations through which consumers interpret and evaluate promotional content in digital environments.

The moderation finding also has important implications for collectivism and shared-value orientations within Saudi consumption contexts. Saudi consumers may demonstrate considerable sensitivity to relational norms, family expectations, and socially constructed meanings surrounding consumption (Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023). Accordingly, advertising content incorporating cues of connectedness, inclusiveness, and interpersonal relevance may receive greater consumer engagement. From this perspective, the effectiveness of SMA may depend less on mere exposure or entertainment value and more on the extent to which advertising content corresponds with the relational environment in which Saudi consumers make consumption decisions. Consistent with previous research in Arab consumer markets, the findings suggest that SMA initiatives may be more effective when advertising messages acknowledge social obligations and communal expectations (Agag et al., 2024). Digital advertising may therefore become more persuasive when consumers interpret promotional messages through a socially oriented framework.

A comparable interpretation can be applied to the trust-related dimension of the moderation relationship. Research involving Arab consumers indicates that message credibility, social validation, and perceptions of brand trustworthiness can be particularly influential in determining responses to online marketing communications (Muthuswamy & Basri, 2023). Within the Saudi fast-food context, these mechanisms may mean that consumers who place greater importance on reputation, social appropriateness, and the avoidance of potentially negative social outcomes are more receptive to advertising that reduces uncertainty. Such advertising can lessen perceived ambiguity and consequently increase confidence during purchase-related decision-making. Hence, the findings extend beyond the general assertion that culture “makes a difference”; they indicate that the association between SMA and PI is stronger when advertising communication corresponds with culturally relevant expectations concerning trust, social appropriateness, and relational fit.

Overall, the findings support three principal conclusions. First, SMA represents a significant predictor of PI within the Saudi fast-food industry. Second, cultural orientation is relevant to how consumers interpret and evaluate fast-food advertising in this context. Third, the influence of SMA on PI is conditional rather than universally uniform, with its strength varying according to consumers’ cultural orientations. Collectively, these findings move the discussion beyond the broad proposition that

digital advertising is simply “effective” by identifying conditions under which its influence may become stronger within a Gulf consumer-market context. Nevertheless, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a complete S-O-R mediation process. Although organismic mechanisms were incorporated at the conceptual level, the corresponding mediating variables were not included in the final structural model. The empirical evidence therefore demonstrates a stimulus–response relationship whose strength varies according to cultural conditions, rather than establishing a full S-O-R mediation pathway.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The theoretical contributions of this study to consumer behaviour and digital marketing can be articulated across three main dimensions. First, the study extends the literature on SMA by examining its role within the Saudi fast-food and QSR sector. Despite the sector’s rapid adoption of digital technologies and the extensive penetration of social media in Saudi Arabia, this particular market setting has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. By positioning PI as the principal outcome, the study generates context-specific evidence from a Gulf economy in which patterns of digital consumption are shaped jointly by technological development and culturally embedded market practices.

Second, the findings contribute to the literature on culturally contingent advertising by highlighting the relevance of individual-level cultural values in determining the effectiveness of digital advertising. Rather than treating culture merely as a background characteristic of the market, the study conceptualises cultural orientation as a meaningful boundary condition that helps explain why an identical advertising stimulus may generate stronger PI among some consumers than among others. In doing so, the study responds to recent calls for greater cultural sensitivity in theorising digital persuasion and consumer responses (Duong, 2023; Liu et al., 2022).

Third, the study adds time-lagged empirical evidence through its three-wave research design within a Gulf-market context. Although this temporal approach does not establish full causal relationships, it introduces greater temporal separation between the study variables than is typically achieved in cross-sectional investigations of the same phenomenon. From a theoretical perspective, the findings consequently refine the application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework by demonstrating the usefulness of stimulus-response reasoning within culturally specific digital-market environments without claiming that a complete organismic mediation mechanism has been empirically established. The principal theoretical contribution is therefore more precisely defined: within Saudi Arabia, the effectiveness of SMA in generating PI varies according to consumers’ cultural orientation.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The practical implications of the findings follow directly from the observed relationships. Given the significant positive association between SMA and PI, fast-food brands operating in Saudi Arabia should strengthen those advertising attributes that are most likely to increase consumers' stated willingness to purchase. Particular managerial attention should be directed towards message clarity, credibility, informativeness, and interactivity, as these characteristics represent important ways through which consumers evaluate SMA. In practical terms, this requires brands to respond promptly to consumer enquiries, communicate product-related information in an accessible and comprehensible form, and design advertising content that facilitates meaningful interaction. These recommendations are consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of effective social media engagement practices and digital brand communication ([Abdulla H. Fetais, 2023](#); [Kwon et al., 2021](#)).

The moderation findings further indicate that marketers should avoid adopting a standardised communication strategy across different cultural markets. In the Saudi context, advertising messages that correspond with socially and family-oriented values may be particularly effective. Appeals emphasising togetherness, shared experiences, community participation, and relationship quality may therefore strengthen advertising effectiveness ([Almarri et al., 2024](#)). Evidence from Saudi and wider Arab consumer markets similarly indicates that consumers tend to respond more favourably when brands employ communication that is congruent with prevailing values and cultural expectations rather than relying exclusively on generic promotional appeals ([Chun et al., 2015](#)). Accordingly, fast-food marketers may enhance the persuasive potential of SMA by incorporating themes that resonate with the cultural environment in which Saudi consumers make consumption decisions.

The findings additionally emphasise the managerial importance of incorporating credible trust signals into advertising content. Since cultural orientation was found to strengthen the SMA–PI relationship and trustworthiness represents an important consideration within this relationship, brands should provide explicit cues of credibility. These may include transparent pricing, accurate product descriptions, authentic customer testimonials, and consistency between claims communicated across different channels and promotional materials. Such practices may be particularly valuable within Saudi and broader Arab consumer contexts, where perceptions of trust, honesty, and reputational reliability can influence consumer decision-making ([Ahmad et al., 2024](#); [Jazil & Firdaus, 2024](#)). Advertising strategies should therefore seek to reduce ambiguity throughout the consumer decision journey, especially for consumers who are more responsive to risk-reducing and confidence-enhancing information. Nevertheless, the practical recommendations should be interpreted in proportion to the evidence obtained. Managers should not assume that the same strategy will produce equivalent outcomes across different social media platforms because platform-specific differences were not

examined in the present study.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, although the adoption of a three-wave time-lagged survey design provides greater temporal separation than a conventional cross-sectional approach, it does not permit definitive causal inference. The study remains correlational in nature and relies on self-reported responses; therefore, the observed associations should not be interpreted as establishing causality. Second, the outcome variable was limited to PI rather than extending to actual purchase behaviour, repurchase behaviour, customer loyalty, or word-of-mouth (WOM). Consequently, the findings should be understood primarily in terms of consumers' reported intentions and responses to SMA rather than demonstrated behavioural outcomes.

Future interpretations should therefore avoid assuming that stronger PI necessarily translates into corresponding changes in actual purchasing or subsequent consumer behaviours. Third, the use of intercept surveys across three major Saudi cities—Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam—provides particularly relevant evidence for the Saudi QSR market but may constrain the broader generalisability of the findings. Consumers living in smaller cities, peripheral communities, and rural areas may differ in their patterns of social media use, fast-food consumption, and expression of national cultural values. The city-focused composition of the sample therefore limits the extent to which the results can be extrapolated to these less represented population groups.

Fourth, the empirical setting is restricted to the fast-food sector, which limits the direct transferability of the findings to other contexts, including service industries, non-QSR retail categories, and B2B environments. Nevertheless, prior evidence indicates that cultural moderation may also influence consumer and technology-related outcomes across different industries in Arab countries (Tarhini et al., 2017). The findings are also geographically bounded by the Saudi context. Although Hofstede (2011) suggests that certain cultural patterns may extend across collectivist societies, Saudi Arabia possesses a distinctive combination of institutional structures, religious influences, and historical conditions that may shape consumer attitudes in ways that differ from those observed elsewhere. Moreover, Arabia (2016) and Al-Saggaf et al. (2024) indicate that social media practices and broader cultural patterns among Saudi consumers, particularly younger users, continue to evolve. The strength and nature of the observed cultural moderation may therefore change as digital practices and consumer orientations develop over time.

Finally, because the study did not examine differences between individual social media platforms, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that all forms of SMA operate equivalently across digital channels. Generational variation in online behaviour may represent an additional source of heterogeneity that warrants attention in future

research (Maria Nascimento Cunha 2024). The present study can be extended in several directions. Future research should incorporate direct measures of purchase behaviour alongside repeat purchasing, brand engagement, loyalty, eWOM, and related behavioural outcomes to establish whether the intention-based relationships identified here extend to broader manifestations of consumer behaviour. Comparative studies across other Gulf Cooperation Council countries would also be valuable for determining whether the observed cultural moderation effects extend to neighbouring Arab markets or whether meaningful country-level differences emerge. In addition, future investigations should examine platform-specific advertising effects more explicitly, potentially through experimental designs comparing the digital platforms most frequently used by Saudi consumers. Finally, research could move beyond the current stimulus-response specification by empirically examining moderated mediation models that incorporate organismic mechanisms, such as trust, perceived informativeness, emotional engagement, and arousal, as mediating variables.

CONCLUSION

The findings provide clear evidence that cultural orientation is relevant to understanding the effectiveness of SMA within the Saudi fast-food market. The results indicate that SMA attributes are positively associated with PI overall, while this relationship becomes stronger among consumers exhibiting greater collectivist tendencies. These findings carry important implications for both marketing theory and managerial practice. The study extends the literature on cross-cultural variation in digital marketing by demonstrating the relevance of cultural orientation to consumer responses to online advertising. It also offers practical guidance for QSR brands seeking to develop and adapt digital marketing strategies for Saudi consumers. More broadly, the findings underscore the importance of cultural adaptability in international marketing and highlight the need for future cross-cultural research to further examine how cultural differences shape consumer behaviour in increasingly digital marketplace environments.

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