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Introduction to the special issue on new developments in digital promotion

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Introduction to the special issue on new developments in digital promotion

Marketing communications are undergoing profound transformations due to disruptive technological and digital advances, including augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) (Yuan et al. 2021), artificial intelligence (AI) (Ryoo et al. 2025; Taylor 2019), big data (Kim, Yoon, and Choi 2019), influencers (Rialti et al. 2024), advergames and gamified advertising (An and Kang, 2014; Rialti et al. 2022), and the metaverse (Taylor 2022). Brands are leveraging these emerging technologies and ‘parallel’ virtual worlds to create new digital touchpoints, deliver immersive customer experiences, and build competitive advantage—for example, Balenciaga’s collaboration with *Fortnite* and Gucci’s presence on *Roblox* (Vogue 2021a, 2021b). While these advances open exciting opportunities, they also generate tension and paradox. Advertisers are under pressure to adopt modern technologies, social platforms, and digital interactions to acquire and retain consumers (Zollo et al. 2020). At the same time, consumers—particularly younger generations—expect companies to embrace sustainability, demonstrate ethical responsibility, project ‘green’ brand images, and promote environmentally friendly advertising (Yoon, Kim, and Baek 2016).

Interactions with technologically advanced advertising can also evoke negative emotions (Poels and Dewitte 2019). Consumers may feel irritation from excessive mobile advertising (Sharma et al. 2022), experience cognitive dissonance when navigating multichannel promotions and cross-channel free riding (Nosi et al. 2022) or worry about privacy risks on social platforms (Morimoto 2021; Taylor 2019; Youn, Pittman, and Haley 2024). This creates a dilemma for advertisers: they must appear sustainable, ethical, and socially responsible while also being technologically innovative and digitally active (Jacobson and Harrison 2022; Kim et al. 2021). Any mismatch between brand image and identity risks damaging brand equity. Consequently, scholars have called for new theoretical and applied research to examine the implications, challenges, and sustainability of digital advertising (Lee and Cho 2020).

This special issue responds to that call by introducing readers of the *International Journal of Advertising* to diverse, cutting-edge research on digital communications, advertising, and promotion. It comprises six original empirical articles, four selected from among the best papers presented at the 2023 Global Marketing Conference in Seoul and two submitted independently, each of which underwent the full IJA peer review process. We thank presenters and attendees of the 2023 GMC for stimulating discussions that informed this special issue. Collectively, these studies advance advertising theory, research, and practice in three important ways. First, they enrich our understanding of how consumers process persuasion in social media contexts, providing guidance for practitioners on affiliate disclosures, gifting strategies, and sentiment-based targeting (Baek and Ki 2024; Han, Yoo, and Sung 2025; Wang, Kim, and Li 2025). Second, they advance frameworks of consumer experience and brand exclusivity, cautioning luxury and fashion brands against overreliance on scarcity cues while highlighting the potential of immersive technologies to

stimulate word-of-mouth (Cho, Ko, and Jung 2024; Nechaeva et al. 2024). Third, they extend language expectancy theory into the realm of AI-mediated persuasion, offering new blueprints for the design of public safety campaigns (Ryoo, Halfacre, et al. 2025).

The six studies also showcase methodological diversity. Three employ big data and social media mining by analyzing nearly 100,000 cryptocurrency-related tweets with topic modeling and sentiment analysis (Baek and Ki 2024), leveraging Instagram dataset analysis (Wang, Kim, and Li 2025), and examining YouTube affiliate marketing practices (Han, Yoo, and Sung 2025). The other three rely on controlled experiments and surveys, assessing consumer perceptions of VR fashion shows (Cho, Ko, and Jung 2024), testing responses to scarcity-based digital communication strategies (Nechaeva et al. 2024), and evaluating AI chatbot persuasion in a public safety context (Ryoo, Halfacre, et al. 2025).

Conceptually, the first two papers focus on perceptions of value, risk, and exclusivity. Cho, Ko, and Jung (2024) identify four experiential dimensions of virtual fashion shows—immersion, interaction, presence, and agency—and demonstrate their impact on word-of-mouth *via* perceived benefits and risks. Nechaeva et al. (2024) show that scarcity strategies can negatively affect perceived exclusivity, though brand familiarity mitigates these effects.

The next two papers address persuasion mechanisms in social media. Wang, Kim, and Li (2025) find that influencer gifting amplifies social media engagement, moderated by influencer size, with communal intent serving as a key mediator across beauty and food categories. Han, Yoo, and Sung (2025) reveal that disclosure strategies on YouTube can enhance credibility when aligned with channel-product congruence, challenging the assumption that disclosures are uniformly detrimental.

The final two papers examine sentiment and behavior shaping through technology. Baek and Ki (2024) demonstrate that cryptocurrency-related social media conversations cluster into four topical categories, with overall positive sentiment, extending the diffusion of innovation paradigm to digital finance marketing. Ryoo, Halfacre, et al. (2025) show that AI chatbots employing hypocrisy induction are particularly effective when persona (male vs. female) and linguistic style (formal vs. casual) align, with guilt driving persuasion in anti-impaired driving campaigns. These findings highlight the potency of AI chatbots in leveraging public safety advertising and provide guidance on optimizing their design to match persona and language with campaign objectives.

As guest editors, we thank the contributing authors for their perseverance through multiple rounds of revision and the reviewers for their constructive feedback. We are also grateful to Charles 'Ray' Taylor, Editor of *IJA*, for his encouragement in developing this special issue and for entrusting us with its editorial responsibilities.

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