

# The influence mechanism of branded short dramas on consumer purchase decisions: a moderated mediation model based on plot attractiveness, advertising attitude, and endorser identification

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**Abstract.** Against the backdrop of the rapid development of short video content, branded short dramas—an emerging marketing approach that blends entertainment with advertising—are increasingly becoming a key tool for companies to convey brand value and attract consumer attention. This study aims to construct and validate an integrated model incorporating both mediating and moderating paths to investigate how endorser identification and plot attractiveness influence consumer purchase intentions via advertising attitude. Drawing on Social Identity Theory and Narrative Transportation Theory, the paper explores the role of endorsers and storytelling in eliciting psychological resonance and brand connection among consumers. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey and analyzed using SPSS to examine the path relationships, with a focus on the mediating role of advertising attitude. The results confirmed the significance of the proposed paths: advertising attitude plays a crucial mediating role between plot attractiveness and purchase intention, and endorser identification moderates the effect of plot attractiveness on advertising attitude, forming a moderated mediation effect. This research not only enriches theoretical understandings of brand communication and consumer psychology but also offers practical guidance for designing effective storytelling and endorsement strategies in the short video marketing context.

**Keywords:** plot attractiveness, endorser identification, advertising attitude, purchase intention

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of mobile internet technologies and shifts in user media consumption habits, short video platforms have become a vital arena for brand communication, driving innovation and transformation in advertising formats [1]. In this context, branded short dramas—an emerging form that merges advertising with storytelling—have become a core strategy in content marketing for businesses. Characterized by strong narrative structure, high entertainment value, and immersive experience, branded short dramas achieve a dual fusion of “content-based advertising” and “branded storytelling.” By naturally embedding brand information into engaging storylines, they allow consumers to absorb brand values subconsciously during their entertainment experience, thereby optimizing the effectiveness of advertising communication. Within the dissemination mechanism of short-form advertising videos, plot attractiveness plays a crucial role [2]. Based on Narrative Transportation Theory, well-constructed plots significantly enhance viewers’ emotional involvement and cognitive resonance, enabling deeper immersion in the narrative world. This, in turn, fosters more favorable brand attitudes and stronger purchase intentions [3]. Simultaneously, endorsers featured in short dramas, as key narrative agents, can influence brand communication through the psychological connection they establish with the audience—referred to as “endorser identification.” According to Social Identity Theory, when consumers identify with endorsers or experience emotional resonance with them, they are more likely to accept the brand messages conveyed, resulting in more stable and positive brand attitudes [4].

While existing research has explored brand communication mechanisms from either the perspective of narrative immersion or endorser influence, there is a lack of systematic inquiry into how these two elements interact within the context of branded short dramas. Moreover, the potential moderating role of endorser identification in the pathway from “plot attractiveness → advertising attitude → purchase intention” remains underexplored—specifically, whether varying levels of endorser identification may enhance or weaken the influence of plot attractiveness on advertising attitude. To address these gaps, this study proposes a moderated mediation model to investigate the interactive effects of plot attractiveness and endorser identification in branded short

dramas, and the mediating role of advertising attitude. The findings aim to not only expand the theoretical boundaries of brand communication under new media environments but also provide practical guidance for optimizing advertising strategies in the short video era.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1. Attractiveness

Plot attractiveness is one of the core factors driving the effectiveness of branded short dramas. It is primarily reflected in the audience's cognitive and emotional engagement with aspects such as story structure, plot development, and emotional pacing. According to Narrative Transportation Theory, when audiences are successfully drawn into the plot and experience psychological immersion, their resistance to external stimuli is reduced, making them more receptive to the brand messages embedded in the narrative [5]. In this process, plot attractiveness not only enhances the viewing experience but also subtly influences audience attitudes and behavioral responses toward the brand. Ahmed found that narrative-style advertising can effectively trigger emotional resonance in viewers, deepening brand impressions through character identification and plot involvement, thereby improving overall brand evaluations [6]. This has also been confirmed by other scholars: the immersive experience generated by compelling storylines contributes to more positive perceptions of the advertisement and a higher level of acceptance [5].

An empirical study by Muadzin and Lenggogeni showed that plot attractiveness significantly improves the overall effectiveness of advertisements and elevates brand awareness [7]. Within the emerging context of short drama advertisements, engaging narratives not only enhance viewer enjoyment but also positively influence brand attitudes and strengthen purchase intentions. These findings suggest that plot attractiveness serves not only as a means to improve the quality of brand communication but also as a psychological mechanism that shapes consumer attitudes and behaviors.

In summary, as a critical content feature of branded short dramas, plot attractiveness plays a central role in shaping brand attitudes and purchase intentions. By deepening viewers' immersion in the advertisement, it fosters emotional bonds with the brand and facilitates the transition from cognitive recognition to behavioral intention. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The plot attractiveness of branded short dramas has a significant positive effect on consumers' purchase intention.

H2: The plot attractiveness of branded short dramas has a significant positive effect on consumers' advertising attitude.

### 2.2. Attitude towards advertising

As the media ecosystem continues to evolve, advertising attitude has garnered increasing attention in brand communication research. Advertising attitude generally refers to an individual's overall evaluation and psychological disposition toward advertising content after exposure. It encompasses both cognitive judgments and emotional responses [8]. Especially in new advertising formats that integrate entertainment and promotion—such as branded short dramas—advertising attitude influences not only the audience's acceptance of the content but also serves as a key link between the advertisement and brand perception within the cognitive process.

According to the attitude-behavior model of advertising, advertising attitude forms consumers' first impressions when they encounter an advertisement. These impressions then influence their brand attitudes and ultimately predict their purchase intentions [9]. The more attractive and vivid the advertising content, the more positive the audience's attitude toward it tends to be, which in turn strengthens brand attitudes. This path mechanism has been validated across various advertising formats, and is particularly relevant for emotional and narrative-based advertising.

In the context of branded short dramas, the role of advertising attitude is especially salient. On the one hand, the attractiveness and value of the plot significantly enhance the audience's overall positive evaluation of the short drama, thereby improving advertising attitude. On the other hand, advertising attitude itself acts as a bridge between brand attitude and purchase intention. Chang noted that emotional responses to narrative advertisements are first reflected in advertising attitudes, which subsequently influence brand attitudes and guide behavioral intentions [10]. Muadzin and Lenggogeni further confirmed that positive advertising attitudes not only enhance the audience's acceptance of the content but also aid in information processing and brand recall [7].

Moreover, the formation of advertising attitude is shaped by multiple factors such as endorser characteristics, plot design, advertising aesthetics, and platform interactivity. These variables collectively shape consumers' subjective judgments about the value of the advertisement. In branded short dramas, the synergy between plot entertainment and endorser appeal often strengthens consumers' overall evaluation of the ad. Therefore, advertising attitude is not only a reflection of consumers' initial reactions but also a key variable influencing both brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Enhancing the attractiveness and emotional appeal of advertising content can significantly improve advertising attitude, thereby maximizing brand communication effectiveness. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Consumers' attitude toward branded short dramas has a significant positive effect on their purchase intention.

H4: Consumers' advertising attitude mediates the relationship between plot attractiveness and purchase intention in branded short dramas.

### 2.3. Endorser identification

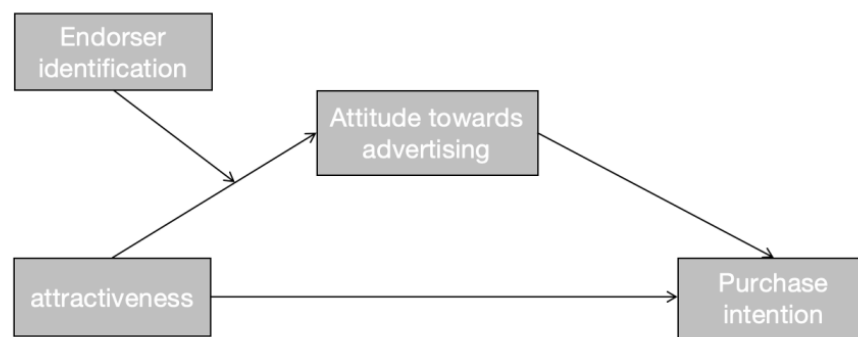
In integrated advertising formats such as branded short dramas, endorser identification represents a crucial psychological mechanism influencing audience attitudes and behavior. Endorser identification refers to the process in which viewers establish a psychological connection with the endorser—through self-comparison or emotional projection. When individuals perceive similarity with endorsers in terms of values, lifestyle, or social roles, they are more likely to form emotional bonds and a sense of identification [11]. This mechanism is systematically explained within the framework of Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals tend to form identification with others who resemble themselves in order to maintain social identity and enhance self-worth [12]. In the context of brand communication, when consumers perceive endorsers as “people like me,” they are more likely to develop a positive brand attitude [13].

This is especially true in filmic or dramatized advertising formats such as branded short dramas, where endorsers are often deeply embedded in the storyline as characters, playing dual roles as both participants in the plot and conveyors of brand messages [14]. The values, behavior patterns, and social images they portray often become triggers for audience identification. Once viewers emotionally accept the endorser, the persuasiveness of the narrative is enhanced, further reinforcing the formation of a positive brand attitude. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed to explore the moderating and moderated mediation effects of endorser identification within the relationship pathways of plot attractiveness and brand communication:

H5: Endorser identification moderates the relationship between plot attractiveness and advertising attitude. That is, the stronger the consumer’s identification with the endorser, the stronger the positive effect of plot attractiveness on advertising attitude.

H6: Endorser identification moderates the mediating effect of advertising attitude between plot attractiveness and purchase intention, indicating a moderated mediation effect.

The conceptual research model is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual research model

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants and procedure

This study targeted individuals who had previously viewed at least one form of branded short drama. The sample encompassed respondents from both China and South Korea—two culturally similar yet distinct markets. Formal data collection was conducted with assistance from a professional Chinese market research agency specializing in quantitative analysis of internet user behavior and media engagement. The agency brought extensive experience in large-scale data collection.

A total of 288 questionnaires were collected. After removing incomplete responses or those exhibiting clear patterns of careless answering, 271 valid responses were retained for data analysis. To ensure the relevance and validity of the sample, respondents were required to confirm that they had previously watched at least one form of branded short drama (e.g., plot-based advertisements or dramatized endorsement videos). Only those meeting this criterion were allowed to complete the full questionnaire.

The questionnaire included the following sections: Demographics: Gender, age, education level, occupation type, etc. Core research variables: Advertising attitude, endorser identification, plot attractiveness, and purchase intention. All were measured using validated scales with demonstrated reliability and validity.

After data collection, the research team conducted descriptive statistical analysis of the demographic characteristics of the 271 valid samples to understand the basic structure and prepare for subsequent analysis. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Respondents' sample statistics

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	147	50.55
Female	137	49.45
Age		
18-25	41	15.13
26-30	83	30.63
31-40	82	30.26
41-50	45	16.61
51-60	20	7.38
Education		
High school	18	14.02
Undergraduate	185	68.26
Post-graduate	48	17.71
Profession		
student	45	16.61
Marketing/Sales	36	13.28
General management	45	16.61
research and development	63	23.25
Production technician	43	15.31
Service staff	35	12.92
Finance/Accounting	17	6.27
Total	271	100

Note. \*\*\*p < 0.001, \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05.

### 3.2. Measures

The survey questionnaire employed a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "strongly disagree," 2 "disagree," 3 "somewhat disagree," 4 "neutral," 5 "somewhat agree," 6 "agree," and 7 "strongly agree." Attractiveness was measured using Mittal's three-item scale, which has demonstrated good reliability and validity [15] and has been widely adopted in various studies. Attitude towards advertising was assessed using Kim's advertising attractiveness scale [16], purchase intention was measured by Yan's purchase intention scale [17], and endorser identification employed Hoffner and Buchanan's endorser identification scale [18]. The questionnaire design is provided in Appendix 1, and the reliability analysis is shown in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha for each dimension exceeded 0.8, indicating good internal consistency.

In many studies, demographic variables such as gender, age, and occupation are commonly used as control variables to reduce the influence of extraneous factors on the primary research outcomes. Therefore, this study, in its main analyses, controlled for gender, age, and education level. Specifically, gender was coded as a binary variable with 1 representing male and 2 representing female; age was measured in years to reflect the participants' actual age; education was quantified by the total years of schooling completed to more accurately capture the potential impact of different educational levels on the outcome variables. Introducing these control variables helps to more effectively reduce confounding factors in the model.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the model's goodness of fit. The results of the CFA are as follows:  $\chi^2/df = 0.897$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.062$ ,  $CFI = 0.1001$ ,  $NFI = 0.963$ . The model fit indices indicate a good fit. The detailed data analysis results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The results of CFA and reliability

Variable	Items	Estimate	SE	p	AVE	CR	Cronbach's alpha
Attitude towards advertising	Ata1	0.804					
	Ata2	0.816	0.075	***	0.671	0.860	0.819
	Ata3	0.838	0.075	***			
Endorser identification	Ei1	0.786			0.603	0.859	0.897

**Table 2.** Continued

	Ei2	0.774	0.072	***			
	Ei3	0.728	0.071	***			
	Ei4	0.815	0.073	***			
	Pi1	0.737					
Purchase intention	Pi2	0.753	0.096	***	0.635	0.859	0.858
	Pi3	0.832	0.100	***			
	At1	0.804					
	At2	0.802	0.068	***			
attractiveness	At3	0.767	0.068	***	0.635	0.897	0.860
	At4	0.801	0.068	***			
	At5	0.808	0.071	***			
Model fit index		$X^2/df = 0.897$ , $RMSEA = 0.062$ , $CFI = 0.1001$ , $NFI = 0.963$					

\*\*\*p &lt; 0.001, \*\*p &lt; 0.01, \*p &lt; 0.05

### 3.3. Correlation analysis

This study examined the correlations among variables through correlation analysis, with the results presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Correlation analysis

	mean	SD	1	2	3	4
attractiveness	4.737	1.369	1	0.535**	0.429**	0.414**
Endorser identification	4.751	1.326	0.535**	1	0.454**	0.381**
Purchase intention	4.737	1.369	0.495**	0.454**	1	0.394**
Attitude towards advertising	4.605	1.461	0.414**	0.381**	0.491**	1

\*\*\*p &lt; 0.001, \*\*p &lt; 0.01, \*p &lt; 0.05

## 4. Findings of the study

This study employed SPSS to conduct a serial multiple mediation model analysis in order to examine the interactions among the variables used. To test the indirect effects of the mediation and sequential mediation hypotheses, SPSS statistical software was utilized. An effect was considered significant if the 95% Confidence Interval (CI) of the coefficient did not include zero [19]. The path analysis results are shown in Table 4. The path analysis indicated that attractiveness has a direct positive effect on purchase intention ( $\beta=0.499$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1. Attractiveness also has a direct positive effect on attitude towards advertising ( $\beta=0.447$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2. Attitude towards advertising positively and directly influences purchase intention ( $\beta=0.213$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3. Bootstrap results reveal a positive mediating effect of attractiveness on purchase intention via attitude towards advertising ( $\beta=0.096$ , CI: 0.046–0.152), supporting Hypothesis 4. Endorser identification positively moderates the relationship between attractiveness and attitude towards advertising ( $\beta=0.202$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), such that the higher the level of endorser identification, the stronger the effect of attractiveness on attitude towards advertising, supporting Hypothesis 5. The results are detailed in Table 5 and illustrated in Figure 2. Table 6 presents the moderated mediation effect of endorser identification. Hypothesis 6 is confirmed. The moderated mediation model was tested using SPSS with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and a 95% confidence interval. The conditional indirect effects were evaluated at three levels of the moderator:  $-1$  SD, mean (M), and  $+1$  SD. Since the Bootstrap Lower Limit Confidence Interval (Boot LLCI) and Upper Limit Confidence Interval (Boot ULCI) at all three levels did not include zero, the moderated mediation effect is statistically significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is supported. The summary of results is presented in Table 6.

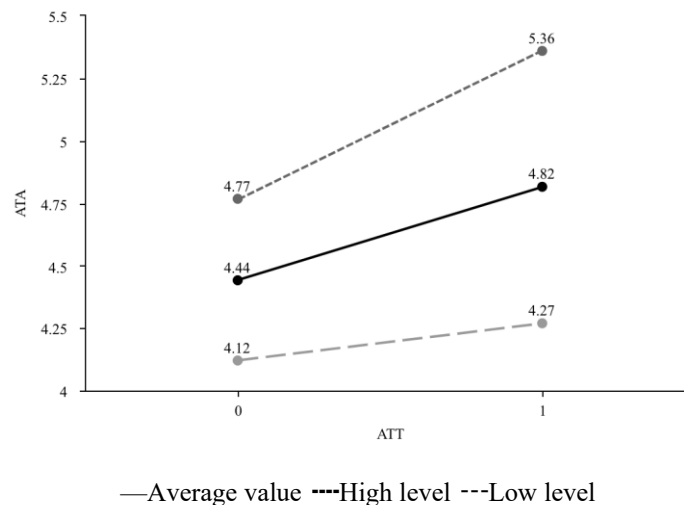
**Table 4.** Path analysis and bootstrap indirect effect test

	Estimate	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
attractiveness → Attitude towards advertising	0.447	0.059	7.463	0.000	0.329	0.565
Attitude towards advertising → Purchase intention	0.213	0.053	4.030	0.000	0.109	0.318
Attractiveness → Purchase intention	0.499	0.054	9.332	0.000	0.394	0.605
Indirect effect(s)						
Indirect Effect	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI	
attractiveness → Attitude towards advertising → Purchase intention	0.096	0.027	0.046		0.152	

**Table 5.** Analysis of moderating effect

Dependent Variable: innovative behavior						
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
attractiveness	0.414***	0.069	0.294***	0.070	0.345***	0.070
Endorser identification		0.071	0.224***	0.069	0.220**	0.069
attractiveness*Endorser identification				0.046	0.202**	0.046
R <sup>2</sup>	0.172		0.207		0.246	
$\Delta R^2$	0.127		0.036		0.038	
F	55.207(1,269) ***		35.044(2,268) ***		28.999(3,267) ***	

\*\*\*p &lt; 0.001, \*\*p &lt; 0.01, \*p &lt; 0.05

**Figure 2.** The moderating effect of spokesperson identification**Table 6.** Moderated mediation analysis

Dependent variable: Purchase intention					
Moderator	Level	Conditional indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Endorser identification	-1SD	0.241	0.073	0.098	0.384
	M	0.328	0.065	0.201	0.455
	+1SD	0.416	0.096	0.228	0.604
Index of moderated mediation					
	Index		Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
	0.096		0.028	0.025	0.126

## 5. Conclusion

This study focuses on brand short dramas, an emerging form of advertising, by constructing and validating a moderated mediation model that integrates the main pathway of "plot attractiveness → attitude towards advertising → purchase intention" with the moderating effect of endorser identification. Based on empirical analysis of consumer samples from China and South Korea, the study finds that: (1) plot attractiveness not only directly enhances consumers' purchase intention but also indirectly influences their behavioral intentions by improving attitude towards advertising; (2) attitude towards advertising plays a significant mediating role between plot attractiveness and purchase intention, confirming the hierarchical cognitive-affective-behavioral effect in narrative communication; (3) endorser identification significantly moderates the influence of plot attractiveness on attitude towards advertising and further constitutes a moderated mediation pathway, indicating that the psychological congruence between endorsers and audiences is an important enhancer of brand communication effectiveness. Using brand short dramas as the focal point, this research enriches the study of brand communication and content marketing by integrating narrative communication and brand endorsement theories. Compared to traditional advertising research, this study not only highlights the synergistic effect of content attractiveness and endorser identification but also makes three theoretical contributions: First, by introducing Social Identity Theory, it deepens the understanding of the psychological mechanisms of endorser identification in brand effects, moving beyond prior research's sole focus on endorser credibility or likability; second, it extends Narrative Transportation Theory to new media contexts, positioning "plot attractiveness" as the core variable and systematically elucidating its impact mechanism on consumer attitudes and behaviors; third, it innovatively constructs a mediation pathway model of "endorser identification/plot attractiveness → brand attitude → purchase intention," which offers a novel theoretical framework for understanding consumer psychology and establishes a quantifiable and replicable analytical paradigm for future empirical studies, thus possessing significant methodological value.

This study provides systematic practical guidance for brand owners optimizing short video advertising strategies. In the current context where short video platforms have become core battlegrounds for brand marketing, the research reveals the key drivers for successful brand short dramas: First, empirical validation of the synergistic mechanism between "endorser identification" and "plot attractiveness" offers actionable decision-making support for brand owners in content creation (e.g., plot structure design) and endorser selection (e.g., role fit). Second, the study finds that "audience emotional resonance" and "character identity recognition" have stronger conversion effects compared to traditional product displays or celebrity endorsements, providing content creators with scientific directions for content optimization and significantly enhancing the precision of advertising design. From the perspective of platform operations, the findings can empower social media algorithm optimization by identifying user feedback patterns that respond positively to high-quality plot content and endorser identification, thereby improving the recommendation accuracy and dissemination efficiency of brand short dramas. Particularly noteworthy is the analysis of the psychological mechanisms of young user groups, which offers professional psychological evidence for brands to achieve youth-oriented marketing and establish emotional connections, helping significantly enhance the psychological congruence between marketing activities and target audiences.

## 6. Limitations and future research

Despite the theoretical construction and empirical validation achieved in this study, certain limitations remain. First, the sample was drawn from two countries with relatively similar cultural backgrounds, which limits the generalizability across more diverse cultural contexts. Future research could incorporate multicultural variables to conduct cross-cultural comparisons. Second, this study relied on self-reported questionnaires; combining behavioral data (such as platform interaction records) in future studies could further enhance external validity. Moreover, with the rise of AI-Generated Content (AIGC) and virtual endorsers in brand communication, future research may explore the impact pathways of "virtual character endorsement" and "immersive narrative technologies" on consumer attitudes and behaviors.

In summary, this study not only provides theoretical support and empirical evidence for the effectiveness of brand short dramas but also offers practical guidance for enterprises to implement precise content marketing and craft high-impact brand narratives in a digital context.

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## Appendix

Appendix Table. Measurement items

Variable	Items	Sources
attractiveness	I think brand skits are interesting.	[16]
	I think the brand skit advertising is novel.	
	I like brand skits.	
	Brand skits caught my attention.	
Endorser identification	I think the brand skit advertising is very attractive.	[18]
	Skit actors are the kind of people I want to be.	
	Sometimes, I wish I were more like the character of a brand skit.	
	I want to do what skits do.	
Purchase intention	The characters of the brand skits are the people I want to imitate.	[17]
	How likely are you to buy the product from the brand skit?	
	How much do you want to buy this brand?	
	Are you willing to buy this brand?	
Attitude towards advertising	In general, I think advertising in the form of brand skits is a good thing.	[15]
	In general, I like advertising in the form of brand skits.	
	I think advertising in the form of brand skits is very important.	