






Branded Content Value and Online Newspaper Readers' Purchase Intention: The Mediating Roles of Attitude and Brand Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

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Understanding how branded content creates consumer value is increasingly important in digital news environments, where persuasive messages are embedded within information-oriented media contexts. This study examines how informational, entertainment, and utilitarian values shape purchase intention (PI) through attitude (ATT) and brand loyalty (BL). Data from 295 online newspaper readers in Vietnam were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal asymmetric mediation pathways: informational value (IV) influences PI indirectly through BL; entertainment value (EV) operates through ATT; and utilitarian value (UV) works through both ATT and BL. These results demonstrate that branded content value is not a uniform persuasive mechanism but a set of distinct value cues activating different evaluative and relational routes. The study advances sustainable digital communication planning by showing how value-oriented branded content can support lower-pressure, more relevant, and relationship-based consumer communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

In rapidly evolving digital media environments, consumers have become increasingly cautious toward overtly persuasive advertising messages. In response, firms have invested more heavily in branded content as a less intrusive and more value-oriented communication format that is integrated into editorial and media experiences rather than presented as conventional advertising. In this respect, branded content is increasingly relevant to sustainable communication planning because it prioritizes relevance, usefulness, and relationship quality over interruption-based persuasion, which is broadly consistent with calls for more sustainable marketing and communication systems [1, 2]. In online newspaper environments, this issue is particularly salient because audiences approach content with an information-seeking orientation and often expect higher levels of credibility, relevance, and editorial coherence than in purely entertainment-based social media settings.

Although prior studies have confirmed that branded content can influence consumer responses, the underlying mechanism remains insufficiently differentiated. Existing research often emphasizes short-term outcomes such as attention, engagement, or purchase intention (PI), while providing limited evidence on longer-term relational mechanisms such as brand loyalty (BL) and the specific pathways through which different dimensions of content value shape behavioral intention. This limitation is important because branded content in online newspapers is processed in a hybrid context: it is

persuasive in purpose but embedded in a media environment associated with information, credibility, and public relevance.

Another limitation in the literature is that branded content value is frequently treated as a relatively uniform construct. However, informational, entertainment, and utilitarian values (UV) may not exert equivalent effects, particularly in information-oriented digital news environments where audiences may process content through different evaluative and relational routes. Informational value (IV) is expected to reduce uncertainty and reinforce confidence in the promoted brand; entertainment value (EV) is more likely to generate immediate affective evaluations; and UV may support both practical evaluation and relationship reinforcement because it helps consumers make more useful purchase-related judgments. Consequently, the field still lacks clear evidence on whether these value dimensions operate through the same or through distinct mediating mechanisms, which limits both theoretical precision and the design of more sustainable value-oriented communication strategies.

Addressing these gaps, the present study proposes and tests a model explaining how branded content value influences PI through the mediating roles of attitude (ATT) and BL. Using survey data from 295 online newspaper readers in Vietnam and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study examines whether informational, entertainment, and UV dimensions activate different psychological pathways. The central contribution of the study lies in identifying an asymmetric mediation pattern: IV

operates mainly through BL, EV through ATT, and UV through both mechanisms. By foregrounding this differentiated pathway at the outset, the study responds to the need for a more precise explanation of how branded content works in credible digital media settings. In doing so, it advances theoretical precision in value-based persuasion research and contributes to lower-pressure, higher-relevance, and more sustainable communication planning grounded in usefulness, relational continuity, and long-term consumer value.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Advertising Value Theory

According to Advertising Value Theory, consumers evaluate advertising content based on the perceived value it offers, including informational, entertainment, and UV [3]. When content is perceived as valuable, consumers tend to form more positive attitudes and exhibit reduced resistance toward persuasive messages. In digital media environments, branded content is considered a less “resistible” form of communication than traditional advertising because it is often naturally embedded within informational or entertainment contexts. Previous studies indicate that branded content can decrease consumers’ activation of persuasive knowledge, thereby enhancing persuasion effectiveness [4, 5]. Ashley and Tuten [6] suggest that successful branded content harmoniously combines information provision, entertainment, and UV, which subsequently fosters greater consumer engagement and positive responses. Recent research further confirms the central role of message value and source credibility in building trust in branded content, thereby influencing ATT and PI [7]. These findings suggest that Advertising Value Theory remains a useful explanatory framework for modern branded content, especially when deployed on platforms with relatively high credibility.

2.2 Brand relationship formation in credible media contexts

Brand relationship formation has long been linked to the perceived credibility, consistency, and usefulness of brand-related communication. In digital media contexts, consumers are more likely to respond favorably when branded messages are embedded in credible and information-oriented environments, because such settings can reduce skepticism and support more stable brand evaluations over time [8-10]. Rather than functioning only as a short-term persuasive cue, credible communication can foster attachment, trust, and preference formation, which are closely associated with BL. Accordingly, BL is conceptualized in this study as a relational outcome shaped by repeated exposure to value-rich branded communication in credible media environments. In this sense, branded content in online newspapers may contribute not only to immediate evaluations but also to the development of more enduring brand relationships.

2.3 Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a widely validated framework for explaining behavioral intention and behavior. Ajzen [11] emphasized that attitude is a key proximal determinant of intention, reflecting an individual’s

favorable or unfavorable evaluation of performing a given behavior. In consumer research, attitude has consistently been shown to shape PI, particularly when consumers evaluate products based on expected benefits, perceived suitability, and prior cognitive assessments. In consumer purchase settings characterized by product comparison and consequence evaluation, attitude is especially relevant because purchase decisions are often influenced by judgments about expected performance, fit, and anticipated outcomes. Recent empirical evidence also indicates that quality perceptions and brand-related evaluations are significantly associated with PI in personal care contexts [12]. In this study, TPB is used primarily to support the role of ATT as an immediate antecedent of PI.

In summary, this study integrates Advertising Value Theory, relationship-based perspectives on brand formation in credible media contexts, and the TPB to explain how branded content value is translated into PI. Advertising Value Theory clarifies how audiences assess informational, entertainment, and utilitarian content value; relationship-based perspectives explain how valuable communication can strengthen BL; and TPB provides the logic linking favorable ATT to PI. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that branded content value may influence PI through more than one psychological route.

3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Brand informational value

IV reflects the extent to which branded content provides clear, relevant, and useful information that helps readers understand a promoted offering. In online newspapers, where audiences typically expect informative and credible content, IV is especially important because it can reduce uncertainty, increase perceived relevance, and support a more reasoned evaluation of a brand [3, 7]. In this setting, IV is theoretically more likely to strengthen BL than to generate immediate attitude change because readers may use useful and credible information to build confidence, trust, and preference stability toward the brand over time. Although IV may also improve ATT, its stronger expected role lies in reinforcing the relational foundation that supports future PI.

H1a: *The IV of branded content positively affects BL.*

H1b: *The IV of branded content positively affects ATT.*

3.2 Entertainment value of branded content

EV reflects the degree to which branded content elicits enjoyment, interest, and positive experiential responses. Content that is visually appealing, engaging, and pleasant to consume can create immediate positive reactions, making audiences more receptive to the promoted message [3, 6, 7]. In online newspaper settings, EV is theoretically more likely to influence ATT because it activates affective and evaluative responses during content exposure. However, such enjoyment may not automatically develop into BL unless it is accompanied by repeated credibility, usefulness, and brand-related reassurance. Thus, EV is expected to operate primarily through an evaluative route rather than a durable relational route.

H2a: *The EV of branded content positively affects BL.*

H2b: *The EV of branded content positively affects ATT.*

3.3 Utilitarian value of branded content

UV reflects the extent to which branded content is practically useful in helping consumers learn, compare, and make better purchase-related decisions. Compared with purely IV, UV emphasizes application and decision support. In online newspaper environments, branded content that helps readers interpret alternatives, assess relevance, or solve consumption-related problems may improve both immediate evaluations and more durable relational responses toward the brand [3, 7, 13]. Theoretically, UV may affect ATT because consumers evaluate useful content more favorably; at the same time, it may strengthen BL because repeated practical usefulness reinforces trust, preference, and perceived brand relevance. Therefore, UV is expected to activate both evaluative and relational pathways.

H3a: *The UV of branded content positively affects BL.*

H3b: *The UV of branded content positively affects ATT.*

3.4 Brand loyalty and purchase intention

BL reflects consumers' enduring commitment to a brand, manifested in their tendency to continue preferring, choosing, and recommending it over time. When branded content consistently delivers value in credible digital environments, it can reinforce consumers' confidence in the brand and reduce switching intentions [10, 14, 15]. As loyalty reflects a more stable relational outcome than ATT alone, it is expected to play an important role in translating value perceptions into PI, especially when informational and UV help consumers develop confidence in the brand beyond a single content exposure.

When consumers perceive repeated value from branded content in credible digital environments, they are more likely to maintain their preference for the promoted brand and to reduce their switching intentions. BL therefore provides a plausible mechanism through which branded content value can shape future purchase-related decisions across product categories promoted in online news contexts.

H4: *BL positively affects PI.*

3.5 Attitude and purchase intention

According to Ajzen [11], ATT is one of the closest predictors of behavioral intention. When consumers develop favorable evaluations of an object or behavior, the likelihood of intending to perform that behavior increases. In branded content contexts, positive attitudes may stem from content that delivers informational, entertainment, and UV. This evaluative route is especially relevant for EV because enjoyable branded content can create immediate affective approval, and for UV because practical usefulness can make the promoted offering appear more beneficial and appropriate. This reasoning is supported by recent digital-media research. Handranata et al. [16] identified brand ATT and PI as integral constructs in explaining purchase behaviors influenced by digital communication, and related evidence also shows that positive consumer evaluations are closely associated with purchase-related intentions [17]. Therefore, this study expects consumer ATT toward branded content and the brand to positively influence PI.

H5: *ATT positively affects PI.*

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework.

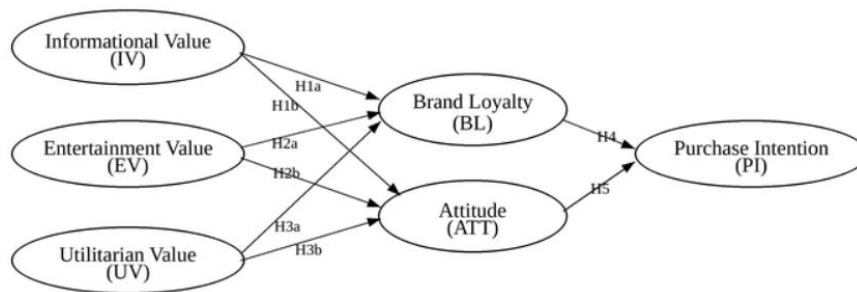


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Measurement of constructs

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from prior studies and assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

IV and EV were measured using items adapted from Lou and Yuan [7]. IV captures the extent to which branded content provides useful, relevant, and meaningful information, whereas EV reflects the degree to which the content is enjoyable, interesting, and pleasant to engage with. UV was measured using indicators representing the practical usefulness of branded content in helping consumers evaluate products and make decisions [7, 13]. ATT was measured using items reflecting respondents' overall favorable or unfavorable

evaluation of purchasing products promoted through branded content in online newspapers, adapted from Ramadhana and Hussein [18], Shanbhag et al. [19], and Thị Hồng Nghĩa and Tô [20]. BL was measured using items capturing consumers' commitment and preference toward the promoted brand, based on Chaudhuri and Holbrook [14], Lou and Xie [15], and Bui et al. [13].

4.2 Data collection and sample

This study collected data from individuals living and working in Vietnam who regularly read online newspapers and had been exposed to branded content on such platforms. The questionnaire link was distributed via message boxes on social media platforms, enabling respondents to voluntarily participate in the study. The data collection process was conducted over a six-month period, from July 2025 to

December 2025. To reduce common method bias, the questionnaire assured anonymity, avoided right-or-wrong wording, separated predictor and outcome constructs across sections, and used concise measurement items adapted from validated scales. A total of 318 responses were obtained. After screening for eligibility and eliminating incomplete or invalid responses, 295 valid observations were retained, accounting for 92.77% of the total responses.

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Among the 295 valid responses, females accounted for the majority with 61.7%, while males represented 38.3%.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Grouping Factors	Criteria	Percentage	Frequency	Total
Gender	Male	38.3%	113	295
	Female	61.7%	182	
Age	Under 18	3.4%	10	295
	18-25	44.1%	130	
	26-35	42.4%	125	
	36-45	10.2%	30	
Education Level	High school	4.7%	14	295
	College/University	80.7%	238	
	Postgraduate	14.6%	43	
Occupation	Student	14.9%	44	295
	Office employee	47.5%	140	
	Business	18.6%	55	
	Others	19.0%	56	
Monthly Income	Below 5 million VND	17.6%	52	295
	5-10 million VND	18.3%	54	
	10-20 million VND	35.3%	104	
	20-30 million VND	19.0%	56	
	Above 30 million VND	9.8%	29	

Source: Compiled by the authors from survey data.

Regarding age distribution, most participants were aged 18-25 years (44.1%), followed closely by those aged 26-35 years (42.4%). Smaller proportions were reported for respondents aged 36-45 years (10.2%) and those under 18 years (3.4%).

Regarding educational background, the majority of respondents held a college or university degree (80.7%), while 14.6% had postgraduate qualifications and 4.7% reported a high school level of education.

With respect to occupation, office employees constituted the largest group (47.5%), followed by individuals working in business-related activities (18.6%). Other occupations represented 19.0% of the sample, while students accounted for 14.9%.

In terms of monthly income, the largest proportion of respondents reported earnings between 10 and 20 million VND (35.3%). This was followed by those earning between 20 and 30 million VND (19.0%), between 5 and 10 million VND (18.3%), and below 5 million VND (17.6%). A smaller proportion of respondents reported monthly incomes above 30 million VND (9.8%).

4.3 Data analysis

PLS-SEM was selected as the analytical approach because the study aims to explain and predict the relationships among multiple latent constructs and indirect effects within a relatively complex mediation model. Given these objectives, together with the sample size of 295 valid responses, PLS-SEM is appropriate for estimating the measurement model and testing the structural relationships simultaneously [21, 22]. Following reviewer recommendations, common method bias was addressed through both procedural remedies and a full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) assessment. The full collinearity approach was considered appropriate because the study employs PLS-SEM and uses latent-variable scores to diagnose whether common method variance may inflate the relationships among constructs [23, 24]. The proposed PLS-SEM structural model is illustrated in Figure 2.

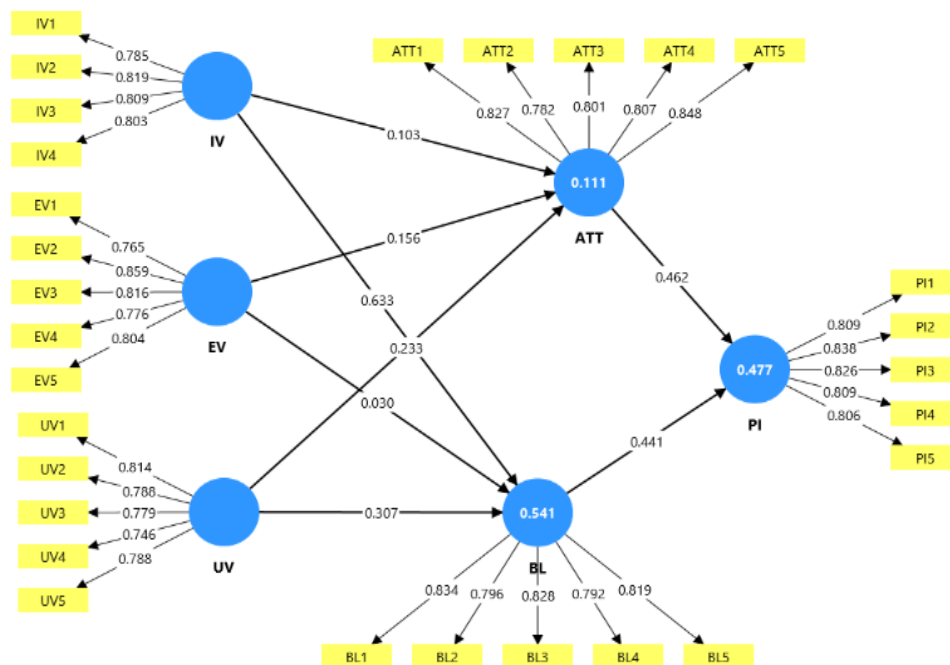


Figure 2. Structural model results

Note: ATT = Attitude; BL = Brand Loyalty; EV = Entertainment Value; IV = Informational Value; PI = Purchase Intention; UV = Utilitarian Value.

4.4 Common method bias assessment

Because independent, mediating, and dependent variables were collected from the same respondents, common method bias was addressed explicitly. Procedurally, respondents were assured that their answers were anonymous and used only for academic purposes; item wording was kept neutral; and measurement blocks were organized to reduce response-pattern effects. Statistically, a full collinearity VIF assessment was conducted as a supplementary diagnostic test. All full collinearity VIF values were below the conservative threshold of 3.3, suggesting that common method bias is unlikely to be a serious threat to the validity of the findings [23, 24].

5. RESULTS

5.1 Measurement model

The measurement model was assessed based on examining indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, all indicators displayed outer loadings exceeding the 0.70 threshold recommended by Hair et al. [21], confirming satisfactory indicator reliability.

Internal consistency was established as composite reliability (CR) and rho_A values for all constructs surpassed the accepted cutoff of 0.70. Convergent validity was verified through average variance extracted (AVE) values ranging between 0.614 and 0.693, all above the minimum acceptable value of 0.50 as advised by Fornell and Larcker [25]. As presented in Table 3, this criterion was met for all constructs, confirming adequate discriminant validity.

5.2 Assessment of the structural model and common method bias

Multicollinearity was assessed using the VIF. The results indicate that all VIF values were below the recommended threshold of 5, ranging from 1.030 to 1.056, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the structural model [22, 26]. The VIF values reported in Table 4 refer to structural collinearity among predictors, whereas common method bias was additionally assessed using the full collinearity VIF procedure. The full collinearity VIF values for all latent constructs were below 3.3, indicating that common method bias is unlikely to seriously inflate the estimated relationships [23, 24]. The model fit indices also indicated an acceptable fit, with SRMR = 0.053, d_ULS = 1.203, and NFI = 0.851 [21].

Table 2. Convergent validity assessment

Constructs	Items	Outer Loadings	CR	rho_A	AVE
ATT	Purchasing products promoted through branded content in online newspapers makes me feel positive	0.827	0.872	0.877	0.662
	Purchasing such products makes me feel excited	0.782			
	Purchasing such products is a wise decision	0.801			
	Purchasing such products makes me feel pleasant	0.807			
	Purchasing such products is beneficial to me	0.848			
BL	I am loyal to brands promoted through branded content in online newspapers	0.834	0.872	0.873	0.662
	Brands promoted through branded content are my first choice when purchasing products in the same category	0.796			
	I would not choose other brands if brands promoted through branded content are available	0.828			
	I often recommend brands promoted through branded content to others	0.792			
	I often say positive things about brands promoted through branded content	0.819			
EV	Branded content in online newspapers makes me feel relaxed	0.765	0.864	0.877	0.648
	Branded content in online newspapers makes me feel entertained	0.859			
	Branded content in online newspapers presents diverse images and videos	0.816			
	Branded content in online newspapers offers interactive and engaging entertainment	0.776			
	Branded content in online newspapers features visually appealing design	0.804			
IV	Branded content in online newspapers provides detailed product information	0.785	0.818	0.818	0.647
	Branded content in online newspapers offers useful and beneficial information.	0.819			
	Branded content in online newspapers is visually appealing and well-designed.	0.809			
	Images and videos in branded content enhance my understanding of the products	0.803			
	I intend to purchase products promoted through branded content in online newspapers	0.809			
PI	I intend to purchase products I have previously seen in branded content	0.838	0.876	0.877	0.669
	I am willing to try products promoted through branded content	0.826			
	I will try to purchase products promoted through branded content in the future	0.809			
	I plan to purchase such products next year	0.806			
	Branded content in online newspapers is a trustworthy communication channel	0.814			
UV	Branded content in online newspapers is an effective channel that creates positive impressions	0.788	0.843	0.847	0.614
	Branded content in online newspapers makes me feel satisfied with the information received	0.779			
	Branded content in online newspapers provides timely and relevant information.	0.746			
	Branded content in online newspapers meets my information and experience needs.	0.788			

Source: Estimated by the authors using SmartPLS 4 from survey data.

Note: ATT = Attitude; BL = Brand Loyalty; EV = Entertainment Value; IV = Informational Value; PI = Purchase Intention; UV = Utilitarian Value; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3. Discriminant validity assessment

	ATT	BL	EV	IV	PI	UV
ATT	0.814					
BL	0.171	0.814				
EV	0.214	0.187	0.805			
IV	0.149	0.666	0.162	0.804		
PI	0.537	0.520	0.274	0.429	0.818	
UV	0.270	0.370	0.177	0.090	0.587	0.783

Source: Estimated by the authors using SmartPLS 4 from survey data.

Note: ATT = Attitude; BL = Brand Loyalty; EV = Entertainment Value; IV = Informational Value; PI = Purchase Intention; UV = Utilitarian Value.

Table 4. Structural model results

Hyp.	Relationship	Path Coeff.	SD	T-Value	P	Decision	R ²	F ²	VIF
H1a	IV -> BL	0.633	0.034	18.576	< 0.001	Accept	0.541	0.847	1.031
H1b	IV -> ATT	0.103	0.062	1.662	0.097	Reject	0.111	0.012	1.031
H2a	EV -> BL	0.030	0.039	0.757	0.449	Reject		0.002	1.056
H2b	EV -> ATT	0.156	0.058	2.703	0.007	Accept		0.026	1.056
H3a	UV -> BL	0.307	0.038	8.193	< 0.001	Accept		0.199	1.037
H3b	UV -> ATT	0.233	0.060	3.894	< 0.001	Accept		0.059	1.037
H4	BL -> PI	0.441	0.044	9.995	< 0.001	Accept	0.477	0.360	1.030
H5	ATT -> PI	0.462	0.041	11.189	< 0.001	Accept		0.396	1.030

Source: Estimated by the authors using SmartPLS 4 from survey data.

Note: ATT = Attitude; BL = Brand Loyalty; EV = Entertainment Value; IV = Informational Value; PI = Purchase Intention; UV = Utilitarian Value; SD = Standard Deviation; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

Subsequently, the results show that IV had a positive and statistically significant effect on BL ($\beta = 0.633$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1a, whereas its effect on ATT was positive but not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.103$, $p = 0.097$), leading to the rejection of H1b.

Regarding EV, the results indicate that its effect on BL was not significant ($\beta = 0.030$, $p = 0.449$), whereas its effect on ATT was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.156$, $p = 0.007$). Therefore, H2a was not supported, but H2b was supported.

For UV, the findings reveal significant positive effects on both mediating variables. Specifically, UV positively affected BL ($\beta = 0.307$, $p < 0.001$) and ATT ($\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater UV was associated with stronger BL and more favorable ATT. Accordingly, H3a and H3b were supported.

Finally, both mediating variables had positive and statistically significant effects on PI. In particular, BL positively influenced PI ($\beta = 0.441$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4, whereas ATT also had a positive and significant effect on PI ($\beta = 0.462$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is commonly used to evaluate how independent variables explain the variance in the

dependent constructs. The R^2 results indicate that the model explains 11.1% of the variance in ATT ($R^2 = 0.111$), 54.1% of the variance in BL ($R^2 = 0.541$), and 47.7% of the variance in PI ($R^2 = 0.477$). This indicates modest explanatory power for ATT and substantially stronger explanatory power for BL and PI.

The effect size (f^2) analysis provides further insights into the relative importance of each predictor. As shown in Table 4, both ATT ($f^2 = 0.396$) and BL ($f^2 = 0.360$) exhibited strong effects on PI. Among the value dimensions, IV showed a moderate effect on BL, EV a weak effect on ATT, and UV moderate effects on both mediators, further reinforcing the differentiated mechanism identified in the structural model.

5.3 Mediation analysis

This study applies PLS-SEM to examine how ATT and BL mediate the effects of IV, EV, and UV on PI (Table 5). The mediation results reveal the study's core insight: branded content value dimensions do not converge into PI through a single mechanism. Instead, they follow asymmetric pathways that reflect the distinct nature of value processing in online newspaper environments.

Table 5. Indirect effects and mediation results

	Path Coefficients	SD (STDEV)	T-Value	P	Decision
EV -> BL -> PI	0.013	0.017	0.751	0.453	Not significant
EV -> ATT -> PI	0.072	0.029	2.524	0.012	Significant
IV -> BL -> PI	0.279	0.030	9.155	< 0.001	Significant
IV -> ATT -> PI	0.048	0.029	1.638	0.101	Not significant
UV -> BL -> PI	0.135	0.023	5.895	< 0.001	Significant
UV -> ATT -> PI	0.108	0.033	3.229	0.001	Significant

Source: Estimated by the authors using SmartPLS 4 from survey data.

Note: ATT = Attitude; BL = Brand Loyalty; EV = Entertainment Value; IV = Informational Value; PI = Purchase Intention; UV = Utilitarian Value.

The results indicate that EV has a significant indirect effect on PI through ATT ($\beta = 0.072$, $p = 0.012$), whereas its indirect effect via BL is not significant ($\beta = 0.013$, $p = 0.453$). In contrast, IV has a significant indirect effect through BL ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.001$), but not through ATT ($\beta = 0.048$, $p = 0.101$).

UV shows significant indirect effects through both ATT ($\beta = 0.108$, $p = 0.001$) and BL ($\beta = 0.135$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that IV works primarily through a relational route, EV through an evaluative route, and UV through both evaluative and relational routes. This asymmetric mediation

pattern is the main contribution of the study and is therefore further discussed as the basis for both theoretical and sustainable communication-planning implications.

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Discussion

This study investigates the impact of branded content value on PI through the mediating roles of ATT and BL. The findings confirm an asymmetric mediation pattern: IV primarily strengthens BL, EV mainly influences ATT, and UV positively affects both ATT and loyalty. This pattern responds directly to the key theoretical issue in branded content research by showing that value dimensions are not behaviorally equivalent and should not be treated as interchangeable persuasive cues in online newspaper environments.

First, IV influences PI through BL, but not through ATT. This suggests that in information-oriented digital news environments, branded content that is useful, credible, and relevant may be more effective in reinforcing confidence in the brand than in generating immediate affective responses. Rather than triggering short-term liking alone, IV appears to work by strengthening the relational foundation that supports PI over time. This finding is consistent with earlier studies emphasizing the roles of credibility and reassurance in shaping consumer responses [8, 7, 10, 13]. It refines advertising-value research by indicating that IV may be more consequential for relational stabilization than for immediate evaluative change in editorial-like media settings.

Second, EV affects PI through ATT, but not through BL. This result indicates that entertaining branded content mainly works by creating favorable evaluations and positive affective responses. Such content may improve the immediate attractiveness of the brand experience; however, this effect does not automatically translate into deeper relational commitment. This result is aligned with previous findings showing that engaging content enhances consumer appeal and fosters positive ATT toward branded communication, which in turn influence PI [3, 6, 18, 16]. Theoretically, the finding suggests that affective appeal alone may be sufficient for evaluative activation, but insufficient for consolidating a more durable brand relationship in online news-based branded content.

Third, UV influences PI through both ATT and BL. This suggests that functionally useful branded content not only improves consumers' evaluations but also strengthens their attachment to the brand, consistent with prior research [6, 13, 15]. The findings indicate that UV is strategically versatile because it supports both short-term evaluative responses and longer-term relational outcomes. From a sustainability perspective, content that helps consumers make better-informed decisions may encourage more responsible and enduring consumption choices compared to purely attention-driven communication. In this sense, UV provides an important link between persuasive effectiveness and more sustainable communication approaches in digital news environments.

6.2 Implications

The findings provide both theoretical and managerial implications for branded content strategies in digital news

environments. From a theoretical perspective, the study shows that branded content value is multidimensional and that informational, entertainment, and UV should not be treated as behaviorally equivalent drivers of PI. The main theoretical contribution lies in identifying asymmetric mediation pathways: IV operates through BL, EV through ATT, and UV through both mechanisms. This contributes to a more sustainability-oriented understanding of branded communication, in which relevance, usefulness, and relationship quality matter alongside persuasive effectiveness and support less intrusive and more responsible communication planning [1, 2].

Specifically, the study reveals how each value dimension uniquely influences PI through different pathways. IV affects PI through BL, EV through ATT, and UV through both ATT and BL. This differentiated mechanism extends prior branded content research by showing that value dimensions activate distinct psychological routes rather than a single persuasive process.

From a managerial perspective, firms should align branded content with specific communication objectives. Informational content should be used to reinforce credibility and loyalty in information-sensitive contexts; entertainment-oriented content should be prioritized when the goal is to generate favorable immediate evaluations; and utilitarian content should be emphasized when firms seek both attitudinal and relational benefits. In planning branded content for online newspapers, managers should therefore match content value dimensions with specific strategic outcomes rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all communication logic. Such alignment may contribute to more sustainable communication practice by reducing message waste, improving consumer relevance, and supporting longer-term brand-consumer relationships within digital media ecosystems.

Overall, the study identifies an asymmetric mediation pattern in which IV operates through BL, EV through ATT, and UV through both mediators. This is the study's main theoretical contribution and offers a more nuanced basis for sustainable and value-oriented branded content planning in credible digital media settings.

7. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that branded content value influences PI through ATT and BL. However, these effects are not uniform across value dimensions. Specifically, IV affects PI through BL, EV through ATT, and UV through both mediators. Therefore, the findings show that branded content value does not operate through a single persuasive mechanism in online newspaper environments. Instead, it works through differentiated evaluative and relational routes that are sensitive to the type of value embedded in the content.

The study also confirms the positive roles of ATT and BL in explaining PI. Overall, the study contributes a more differentiated explanation of how branded content value functions in credible digital media settings by demonstrating that its value dimensions are behaviorally non-equivalent and operate through asymmetric mediating pathways. These insights provide a stronger basis for strategic, value-oriented, and sustainable content planning that emphasizes relevance, utility, and long-term consumer relationships rather than short-lived persuasive pressure. In this respect, the study frames branded content not simply as a persuasive marketing device,

but as a planning problem concerning how digital communication can be structured more responsibly, with less intrusion, less communication waste, and greater consumer usefulness over time.

7.1 Theoretical and practical contributions

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the branded content literature. First, it reinforces the importance of branded content value as a meaningful antecedent of consumer responses and PI, thereby supporting the continued relevance of Advertising Value Theory in digital media settings.

Second, its principal theoretical contribution lies in identifying the asymmetric mediation pattern among the three value dimensions. IV operates through BL, EV through ATT, and UV through both mechanisms. This finding strengthens explanatory precision by demonstrating that value dimensions are behaviorally non-equivalent rather than interchangeable components of a single persuasive process.

Third, the study offers practical guidance for content strategy by showing that different value dimensions should be linked to different communication objectives. Informational content is more suitable for relationship reinforcement, entertainment content for favorable evaluation, and utilitarian content for dual attitudinal-relational outcomes. This distinction is especially relevant for planning more sustainable branded content strategies in digital news environments, where long-term relevance, decision usefulness, and relationship quality are increasingly important.

7.2 Research limitations

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the study focuses on branded content encountered by online newspaper readers in Vietnam, with the empirical context concentrated in consumer product purchase situations. Accordingly, the findings should be generalized cautiously to other digital platforms, media environments, or cultural contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design limits stronger causal inference regarding how evaluative and relational responses develop over time. Third, because the study relies on self-reported data from the same respondents, common method bias cannot be completely eliminated, although the procedural controls and statistical diagnostics reported in this study suggest that it is unlikely to be a serious concern. Finally, some value dimensions may partially overlap conceptually where usefulness, credibility, and presentation cues are jointly processed by audiences. These limitations indicate that sustainable communication effects should be examined across broader contexts before stronger general claims are made.

7.3 Future research directions

Future research should test the model across different industries and digital platforms in order to examine the generalizability of the asymmetric mediation pattern identified in this study. Comparative studies may help clarify whether the differentiated roles of informational, entertainment, and UV remain stable across platform types, product categories, and cultural settings. In addition, future studies could incorporate constructs such as trust, authenticity, engagement, perceived credibility, or sustainability-oriented consumption

values in order to refine the explanatory mechanism through which branded content value affects consumer behavior. Longitudinal or experimental designs would also be valuable for strengthening causal inference and examining how attitudinal and relational effects evolve over time.

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