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Critical Literature Review for Doctoral Research
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***“Modelling the Effects of Digital Marketing on Business Sustainability: The
Mediating Role of Consumer Scepticism in the UK Context”***

DBA Level 7

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PART 1: CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Modelling the Effects of Digital Marketing on Business Sustainability: The Mediating Role of Consumer Scepticism in the UK Context

1.1 Introduction

Somewhere between the budget meeting where a digital marketing campaign is approved and the board meeting where declining brand loyalty is discussed, something goes wrong. The literature knows this. Practitioners know this. What neither has produced, until now, is an integrated empirical model that names the mechanism responsible and measures its effect. That mechanism is consumer scepticism, and placing it at the centre of a doctoral investigation requires a literature review that is not merely thorough but genuinely critical: one that interrogates three decades of scholarship to expose not only what has been studied but what the structure of that scholarship has systematically prevented from being seen.

A critical literature review at doctoral level is not a catalogue of sources. It is the intellectual case for why a study must exist. It identifies not just what prior research has found, but what assumptions have shaped those findings, what methodological choices have constrained the questions that could be asked, and what the cumulative effect of those constraints has been on what the field knows and does not know. For a DBA candidate, this exercise carries an additional obligation: the gap identified must not only be theoretically significant for the academy but commercially consequential for practice. Both conditions are met here. The field lacks an empirically tested model of how scepticism mediates the relationship between digital marketing and brand loyalty. UK businesses are meanwhile spending record sums on digital channels while brand loyalty weakens. These two observations are not unrelated.

1.2 What Makes a DBA Literature Review Critical?

The difference between a competent literature summary and a doctoral level critical review is not volume of reading. It is the quality of interrogation applied to what has been read. A review that lists what Friestad and Wright (1994) proposed, what Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) measured, and what Chaudhary, Sharma and Kalro (2019) found across 100 subsequent studies is descriptive. A critical review asks why all 100 of those studies treated scepticism as an endpoint rather than a mechanism, what that choice reveals about the theoretical assumptions shaping the field, and what becomes visible once that assumption is challenged.

The distinction matters epistemologically. Consumer scepticism research rests on a predominantly positivist foundation: constructs are measured, relationships between them tested, and findings reported. That foundation is appropriate. But it has also produced a literature that is precise about what triggers scepticism and almost entirely silent about what scepticism then does to the brand relationship over time. Identifying that silence, and understanding why it exists, is the first function of a critical literature review. Constructing the research design that fills it is the second. This study addresses both.

A key contradiction emerges when the scepticism literature is placed alongside the digital marketing effectiveness literature. Effectiveness research consistently positions trust as the mediating variable that connects marketing activity to brand loyalty. Scepticism research

consistently identifies the conditions under which trust cannot form. The two bodies of literature are describing the same phenomenon from different angles, and neither has formally connected them. The literature converges on the importance of trust but diverges on the question of what destroys it before it can form. Scepticism is the answer that sits between the two conversations.

1.3 CLR Process: Systematic and Transparent

PRISMA Literature Search Flow Diagram

Systematic literature search for the annotated bibliography (100+ sources across nine thematic categories)

IDENTIFICATION		
Records identified from databases: Google Scholar (n = 1,200+) Elsevier / ScienceDirect (n = 800+) Web of Science (n = 600+)	→	Records removed before screening: Duplicates removed (n ≈ 1,400) Automation filter applied (n ≈ 1,400)
↓		
SCREENING		
Records screened by title & abstract (n = 543)	→	Records excluded: Not relevant to topic (n = 210) Non-English (n = 52) Total excluded (n = 262)
↓		
Full-text articles sought (n = 281)	→	Full-text not retrievable (n = 181)
↓		
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 100)	→	Excluded after full review: Pre-2015 (non-seminal) (n = 0) Wrong context/variables (n = 3)
↓		
INCLUDED		
Studies included in annotated bibliography (n = 100+) Distributed across 9 thematic categories	→	

The credibility of a critical argument depends on the credibility of the evidence base from which it is constructed. For this study, the search process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines across Google Scholar, Elsevier, and Web of Science, using a keyword matrix covering digital marketing, consumer scepticism, brand loyalty, persuasion knowledge, influencer marketing,

and UK market context. The initial records identified exceeded 2,600 entries. Following title and abstract screening against relevance, empirical rigour, and recency criteria, 281 full texts were retrieved. Of those, 100 plus sources met eligibility for the annotated bibliography documented in Part 2.

The inclusion criteria prioritised peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2018 and 2026, with two deliberate pre-2000 exceptions retained because of their foundational irreplaceability: the Persuasion Knowledge Model and the validated scepticism scale. The exclusion criteria removed non-English sources, studies with no measurable consumer psychology construct, and studies whose contexts were too removed from the UK digital advertising environment to transfer analytically. Every decision in that process was governed by the CART principles that define a defensible doctoral search: clarity, auditability, replicability, and transparency.

1.4 CLR Content: What This Review Actually Analyses

The content of this review does not move through topics. It moves through analytical layers. The first layer interrogates theories: specifically, whether the Persuasion Knowledge Model's original assumptions about visible commercial intent translate into contemporary digital environments where persuasion is routinely embedded within content that mimics organic communication. The answer, as the review in Part 2 establishes, is that the model requires downstream extension rather than wholesale replacement.

The second layer interrogates constructs: what scepticism actually is, whether it behaves as a stable dispositional trait or as a dynamic contextual response, and what that distinction means for its role in a mediation model. The third layer interrogates methods: why cross-sectional attitude measurement has dominated scepticism research, and why that dominance has made it structurally impossible for prior studies to observe loyalty erosion as a downstream consequence of accumulated scepticism. The fourth layer interrogates contexts: why findings from Jordan, Pakistan, and Egypt cannot simply be assumed to transfer to a UK consumer population operating under mandatory ASA disclosure requirements in a highly concentrated digital advertising market.

SEARCH	↓	- Databases: Scholar, Elsevier, WoS, Scopus - Keywords: digital marketing, scepticism, brand loyalty, UK, PKM - Date range: 2018–2026 (seminal: 1994, 1998)
SCREEN	↓	- Title and abstract review - Inclusion: peer-reviewed, UK-relevant, scepticism or loyalty focus
		Exclusion: non-English, unrelated contexts
ELIGIBILITY	↓	- Full-text eligibility review - Classification into 9 thematic categories - Mapping to research hypotheses H1–H6
INCLUDED	★	100+ sources annotated - Gap Matrix populated - Research hypotheses derived
DBA Contribution: New Theoretical Model		

1.5 CLR Output: Patterns, Relationships, and a Conceptual Model

A doctoral literature review is not complete when gaps have been listed. It is complete when those gaps have been translated into a testable architecture. The three patterns that emerge across the review in Part 2 are: the literature is confident about scepticism's causes and silent about its consequences; trust is consistently identified as the mediating variable without explaining what prevents it from forming; and the UK consumer is almost entirely absent from the empirical record on digital marketing scepticism. Each pattern maps to a specific design decision in this study: brand loyalty as the dependent variable rather than attitude, scepticism positioned upstream of trust in the causal model, and UK adults as the sample population within a post-disclosure regulatory environment.

1.6 Writing Style: Critical and Analytical Throughout

The writing across this submission is governed by a consistent register principle. Where prior research converges, this review names the convergence and interrogates what it implies. Where prior research diverges, the contradiction is characterised precisely and its theoretical significance explained. Where prior research is silent, the silence is treated as informative rather than incidental, and the structural reasons for it are examined.

The language of this review is evaluative rather than reportorial. "The literature diverges on whether scepticism operates as a trait or a state, and this divergence has material implications for whether mediation analysis is a valid research strategy" carries more analytical weight than "some studies treat scepticism as a trait and others as a state." The former advances an argument. The latter describes a fact. Doctoral writing is expected to do the former throughout.

1.7 Conclusion

A critical literature review does its most important work not by proving that the researcher has read widely but by demonstrating that the researcher has understood what the field, taken as a whole, has been unable to see. This review has identified one such blind spot. Consumer scepticism has been studied as a psychological curiosity, a moderating boundary condition, an attitude variable, and an antecedent to avoidance behaviour. It has never been formally placed in the mediating position between digital marketing activity and the brand loyalty outcomes that determine whether UK businesses can sustain competitive advantage from their digital marketing investment.

PART 2: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Purpose

An annotated bibliography at doctoral level is not a demonstration that sources have been read. It is an act of intellectual cartography. The central finding that emerges from reading across all nine themes is deceptively simple: the scepticism literature knows a great deal about what triggers consumer doubt and almost nothing about what that doubt costs businesses over time. Study after study identifies inauthenticity, poor transparency, algorithmic opacity, and advertising frequency as reliable scepticism antecedents. The same studies then stop. They measure attitude change. They note that trust has declined. They do not follow the consumer to the loyalty outcome that determines whether a digital marketing budget has justified itself or quietly eroded the brand relationship it was meant to build. This bibliography makes that structural absence visible, theme by theme, so that the research gap is not merely asserted but demonstrated.

2.2 Structure of the Annotated Bibliography

Each of the sources is documented across seven dimensions that has citation in Harvard format, key argument, theoretical lens, methodology, key findings, critical evaluation, and relevance to this study. The entries are organised into ten thematic categories that reflect the architecture of the research rather than alphabetical convention. The ten themes are:

- foundational and seminal theory;
- digital marketing frameworks;
- consumer scepticism antecedents and mechanisms;
- trust, authenticity and consumer behaviour;
- social media and influencer marketing;
- brand loyalty and business sustainability;
- UK market context and regulation;
- Advanced empirical validation.
- AI, personalisation and emerging digital practices;
- research methodology and analytical frameworks;

2.3 Thematic Overview with Synthesis Layers Theme A: Foundational and Seminal Theory

This theme establishes the theoretical foundation of consumer scepticism. The Persuasion Knowledge Model explains how consumers recognise persuasive intent and activate resistance (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Scepticism has subsequently been operationalised as a measurable construct, enabling empirical analysis (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998). However, existing research primarily examines antecedents and attitudes, with limited attention to downstream outcomes such as brand loyalty (Chaudhary, Sharma and Kalro, 2019).

Theme Synthesis

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
Persuasion knowledge activation reduces advertising effectiveness across media types. Scepticism is a stable, measurable disposition that predicts advertising disbelief independent of product category.	Whether the Persuasion Knowledge Model applies equally to embedded digital content where commercial intent is algorithmically concealed rather than simply disguised through format conventions.	No published study applies the Persuasion Knowledge Model to explain how accumulated scepticism across multi-channel digital exposure damages long-run brand sustainability outcomes in a UK regulatory context.

Theme B: Digital Marketing Frameworks and Practice

This theme examines digital marketing effectiveness and its reliance on trust and engagement mechanisms. Prior research shows that digital marketing outcomes are shaped by content relevance and perceived authenticity (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Trust is identified as a key mediator linking marketing activities to brand loyalty (Ebrahim, 2020), while emotional engagement further strengthens this relationship (Fetais et al., 2023). However, the role of scepticism in disrupting this pathway remains underexplored.

Theme Synthesis

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
Digital marketing effectiveness is channel-specific and mediated by consumer trust. Content quality consistently outperforms frequency as a predictor of loyalty, and perceived authenticity is the primary condition for trust formation.	Whether personalisation enhances or undermines consumer relationships, with studies pointing in both directions depending on whether personalisation is perceived as relevant service or intrusive surveillance.	No study models how combined multi-channel digital marketing intensity compounds scepticism accumulation across the full consumer journey in a UK regulatory environment, nor tests scepticism as the upstream variable that determines whether trust can form..

Theme C: Consumer Scepticism: Antecedents and Mechanisms

This theme focuses on the antecedents of consumer scepticism. Research identifies deception, lack of transparency, and targeting practices as key triggers (Jamil, Qayyum and Lodhi, 2022). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that scepticism reduces advertising effectiveness but is rarely linked to behavioural outcomes (Eisend and Tarrahi, 2022). Existing studies also show that scepticism can partially mediate consumer responses, although its full effect remains untested (Alnawas and Alsharif, 2021)

Theme Synthesis

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
Scepticism is primarily triggered by perceived deception, lack of transparency, and advertising frequency, and it consistently reduces persuasion effectiveness across platform and format types.	Whether scepticism is better conceptualised as a stable dispositional trait that predicts responses across all encounters or as a situational response that varies by channel format, platform environment, and content design.	No published study empirically models scepticism as a mediating variable between digital marketing channel characteristics and business sustainability outcomes in the UK. Every existing study either measures scepticism as an endpoint or invokes it without measuring it.

Theme D: Trust, Authenticity and Consumer Behaviour

This theme explores the relationship between trust, authenticity, and consumer behaviour. Trust is consistently identified as a key driver of brand loyalty (Ebrahim, 2020), while authenticity strengthens consumer-brand relationships (Santini et al., 2020). However, prior research does not adequately explain what prevents trust from forming, with scepticism likely acting as the underlying mechanism.

Theme Synthesis

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
Trust is the primary mediating variable between marketing quality and consumer loyalty outcomes. Authenticity is the most consistent trust-building antecedent across product categories, platforms, and consumer segments.	Whether trust is better conceptualised as a global brandlevel construct or as a channelspecific variable that varies with platform format, content type, and individual relationship history.	No study models how digital marketing-induced scepticism systematically undermines trust formation before loyalty can develop, treating scepticism as the upstream cognitive precursor that determines whether the trust to loyalty pathway can engage at all.

Theme E: Social Media and Influencer Marketing

This theme examines social media and influencer marketing. Influencer credibility and content authenticity are critical in shaping consumer responses (Alcantara Pilar et al., 2024). Disclosure practices and sponsorship transparency also influence scepticism levels (Boerman, 2020). However, existing research does not explicitly model scepticism as a mediating variable between influencer marketing and loyalty outcomes.

Theme Synthesis

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
Influencer credibility, content authenticity, and platform transparency are the primary determinants of whether influencer marketing builds or erodes brand loyalty. Trust is the consistent mediating pathway across human and virtual influencer formats.	Whether sponsorship disclosure strengthens or weakens influencer effectiveness, with conflicting evidence depending on the depth of prior parasocial relationship and whether disclosure is perceived as honest transparency or a warning signal.	No study examines how accumulated exposure to sponsored content across multiple influencers over time builds generalised platform-level scepticism that then affects all subsequent brand communications, regardless of individual influencer credibility.

Theme F: Brand Loyalty and Business Sustainability

This theme links digital marketing to brand loyalty and sustainability outcomes. Research shows that scepticism reduces purchase intentions and weakens brand relationships (Khandai et al., 2025). At the same time, loyalty is influenced by trust and emotional engagement mechanisms (Fetais et al., 2023). However, the long-term business impact of scepticism remains insufficiently explored.

Theme Synthesis

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
Digital marketing investment translates to brand loyalty outcomes only when consumer trust is maintained. Repeated negative experiences produce disproportionately large loyalty losses relative to equivalent positive experiences, confirming an asymmetric effect.	Whether loyalty is primarily attitudinal, reflecting brand preference and commitment, or behavioural, capturing repeat purchase and resistance to competitive switching, with different implications for how the dependent variable should be operationalised and measured.	No study connects digital marketing-induced scepticism to the full range of business sustainability indicators including brand loyalty, brand advocacy, and switching resistance simultaneously, nor tests whether scepticism effects are asymmetrically larger than equivalent trust-building effects

Theme G: UK Market Context and Regulation

This theme situates the study within the UK context. The UK digital advertising environment is characterised by high exposure and increasing regulatory scrutiny (Ofcom, 2024). Regulatory interventions and industry reports highlight growing concerns around transparency and consumer trust (Competition and Markets Authority, 2022; Advertising Standards Authority, 2022). However, empirical research on scepticism within this context remains limited.

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
UK digital advertising is the largest in Europe and is characterised by rising complaint volumes, tightening regulatory requirements, and growing consumer distrust of undisclosed commercial content.	Whether regulatory tightening reduces scepticism by improving transparency or intensifies it by drawing consumer attention to advertising practices and raising the standards against which brands are evaluated.	No empirical study has tested whether UK-specific mandatory disclosure requirements produce measurably different scepticism levels compared to other comparable European markets, nor whether the post-disclosure environment creates structurally higher baseline scepticism than pre-regulation conditions.

Theme H: Research Methodology and Analytical Frameworks

This theme outlines the methodological approaches used in prior research. Quantitative survey methods are widely used to examine consumer attitudes and behaviour in digital marketing contexts. However, existing studies often fail to capture the mediating role of scepticism within complex causal relationships

Theme Synthesis

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
Cross-sectional quantitative surveys using validated Likert scales and structural equation modelling are the dominant and appropriate methodology for consumer scepticism mediation research in marketing.	Whether PLS-SEM or CB-SEM is more appropriate for mediation testing in consumer psychology research, with ongoing methodological debate about fit criteria, sample size requirements, and the treatment of common method bias.	No methodological paper specifically addresses the design challenges of adapting validated scepticism scales for novel digital advertising stimuli or testing mediation simultaneously across multiple digital marketing channel types.

Theme I: AI, Personalisation and Emerging Digital Practices

This theme examines emerging digital practices such as AI and personalisation. Research indicates that advanced targeting and automated content can increase perceived intrusiveness, leading to higher scepticism (Verma et al., 2021). While these technologies enhance marketing efficiency, their impact on long-term consumer trust and loyalty remains unclear.

Studies agree	Studies conflict	What is missing
AI-driven personalisation consistently generates scepticism when perceived as intrusive or opaque, and this scepticism undermines the trust and credibility benefits that targeted advertising is designed to produce.	Whether AI disclosure increases or decreases advertising effectiveness overall, with conflicting evidence depending on consumer AI literacy levels, prior brand trust, and whether the content is commercial or prosocial in orientation.	No study has tested the cumulative effect of exposure to multiple AI-driven digital marketing formats on sustained scepticism levels and brand loyalty trajectories across a regulated national market over time.

2.4 Synthesis Layer: What the Nine Themes Collectively Reveal

The first is that the literature is confident about causes and silent about consequences. There is substantial convergence across Themes A, C, and I that scepticism is reliably triggered by inauthenticity, transparency failure, excessive frequency, and the opacity of AI-generated or algorithmically targeted content. What happens after activation is the question that study after study raises and then does not answer. The structural reason for this silence is methodological: scepticism research overwhelmingly uses cross-sectional designs that measure attitudinal responses at a single point in time, making it impossible to observe loyalty erosion as a downstream commercial consequence over the weeks and months that follow.

The second is that trust appears in the literature as the solution to a question about scepticism that the literature has not actually asked. Themes B and D repeatedly demonstrate that trust mediates the digital marketing to loyalty relationship, and that its absence collapses the loyalty pathway. But neither the researcher who wants to explain why trust fails nor the practitioner who wants to know what generates the failure finds the answer in these studies. Scepticism is the upstream cognitive state that prevents trust from forming when consumers detect and resent persuasive intent. Trust research identifies where the car ends up. Scepticism research explains what damaged the engine. This study connects both perspectives into a single causal model for the first time in a UK context.

The third observation is geographical. Themes B, E, and G together reveal that the UK consumer is almost entirely absent from the empirical scepticism record. The closest published parallels, including Alnawas and Alsharif (2021) in Jordan and Jamil, Qayyum and Lodhi (2022) in Pakistan, were conducted in regulatory environments that differ fundamentally from the ASA-governed, post-disclosure, high-avoidance UK digital advertising market. Chowdhury et al. (2026) and Barbosa et al. (2025) are notable exceptions, but neither positions scepticism as a measured mediating variable. This study occupies the intersection of all three gaps.

2.5 Gap Matrix: Mapping the Structural Position of This Study

The table below maps the four most methodologically proximate studies against this research design across five critical dimensions. The analysis demonstrates that no single prior study addresses the combination of gaps this research targets.

	Low Importance to Practice	High Importance to Practice
High Importance to Academia	THEORETICAL GAP <i>High academic importance · Low practical relevance</i> 100+ scepticism studies reviewed — none linked to sustainability outcomes (Chaudhary et al., 2019) 0 studies modelling scepticism as mediator in UK digital marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2021) 8 decades of deceptive advertising research — no loyalty outcome measured (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022)	RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY n = 300 UK adult consumers surveyed across 4 digital marketing channels 6 hypotheses tested via PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) 3 gaps filled simultaneously: mediation model + UK context + brand loyalty as DV

	GAP MATRIX	
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Low Importance to Academia	IRRELEVANT AREA <i>Low academic · Low practical importance</i> CTR / CPM click-rate & impression studies — no scepticism, no loyalty outcome Pre-2000 offline advertising scepticism studies — not applicable to digital contexts	PRACTICE GAP <i>High practical relevance · Low academic attention</i> 23% rise in UK digital ad complaints in one year (ASA, 2022) 4,150 UK adults surveyed — scepticism rising fastest under-35s (Deloitte, 2022) Record UK digital adspend in 2024 — no model links spend to loyalty loss (IAB UK, 2024)
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Study	Theory Gap	Method Gap	Context Gap	This Study's Response
Chaudhary et al. (2019)	Scepticism treated as outcome, not mechanism	No empirical testing of causal pathways	No market-specific focus; pre-influencer regulation	Tests scepticism as mediator using UK data
Alnawas & Alsharif (2021)	Scepticism tested but not linked to loyalty	Partial mediation unexplained; no channel comparison	Non-UK context (Jordan)	Tests full mediation with brand loyalty in UK context
Ebrahim (2020)	Trust examined, but not its underlying drivers	Cannot isolate scepticism from trust	Emerging market context	Positions scepticism as precursor to trust formation
Eisend & Tarrahi (2022)	Loyalty Outcomes not modelled	Meta-analysis limited to attitudes	No UK-specific context	Directly measures loyalty under UK conditions
Barbosa et al. (2025)	Scepticism not formally included	Mechanism not measured	Narrow focus (parasocial relationships)	Models scepticism across multiple digital channels

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PART 3: PRELIMINARY CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

The digital marketing literature has not simply overlooked consumer scepticism as a mediating mechanism. It has been structured in a way that makes scepticism impossible to observe in the role it actually plays. The dominant research paradigm asks when digital marketing works, frames consumer resistance as noise to be filtered out through better targeting or more authentic content, and measures outcomes at a single point in time using purchase intention as a proxy for the multidimensional brand loyalty that business sustainability actually requires. The combined effect of these methodological and theoretical choices is not a neutral research agenda with some gaps. It is a causal architecture that systematically precludes observation of the mechanism responsible for loyalty erosion. That mechanism is consumer scepticism, and positioning it correctly, as the cognitive gateway that determines whether any digital marketing investment can produce a sustainable brand outcome, requires a literature review that interrogates not just what the field has found but how the field has been built.

The research problem this preliminary review addresses is the absence of an integrated empirical model that positions consumer scepticism as the mediating variable linking digital marketing activity to brand loyalty in a UK context. Brand loyalty is treated throughout as the primary indicator of business sustainability: a brand that cannot retain repurchase behaviour, generate advocacy, and maintain competitive resistance from its consumer base has no sustainable business model regardless of how impressive its short-term engagement metrics appear. The aim is to construct a theoretically grounded and empirically testable framework that corrects the field's causal mis-specification rather than simply filling one more gap within it.

3.2 Conceptual Framing

Three constructs anchor the analytical architecture of this study, each defined with precision to avoid the conceptual ambiguity that has weakened prior research in this area.

Digital marketing activity is the independent variable. It is operationalised across four channel types: social media content marketing, influencer endorsements, programmatic and display advertising, and email with search formats. This disaggregation is theoretically necessary. [Alalwan \(2018\)](#) demonstrated that different social media advertising features produce distinct consumer responses, with entertainment, informativeness, and personalisation operating as independent predictors of purchase intention rather than as a composite channel effect. Treating digital marketing as a single construct would mask the variation in scepticism that different channel characteristics generate.

Consumer scepticism is the mediating variable. It is a stable dispositional tendency to disbelieve advertising claims, measured using the validated scale developed by Friestad and Wright (1994) and operationalised by Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998). Crucially, scepticism is positioned upstream of trust and engagement in the causal model. It is not a response to a failed marketing interaction. It is the cognitive gate that determines whether any marketing interaction can produce a positive brand relationship outcome.

Business sustainability is the dependent variable, operationalised through three dimensions of brand loyalty: repurchase intention, brand advocacy, and resistance to competitive switching. [Salem and Alanadoly \(2021\)](#) confirmed that these dimensions operate independently and are differentially sensitive to scepticism, with advocacy declining faster than repurchase intention under conditions of perceived marketing inauthenticity. Using a single-item loyalty proxy would systematically underestimate scepticism's total brand sustainability cost. The study scope is UK adults with active exposure to at least two digital channels.

3.3 Thematic Literature Review

3.3a Conceptual Foundations

The theoretical architecture of this study rests on the Persuasion Knowledge Model and the consumer decision process. The PKM proposes that consumers accumulate lay knowledge of persuasion mechanisms through repeated exposure to marketing, and deploy this knowledge as a defensive response when they detect commercial intent ([Friestad and Wright, 1994](#)). The model's explanatory power lies in its account of accumulation: each detection event adds to the consumer's persuasion knowledge store, making future detection faster and the defensive response more intense. This is not a model of individual advertising failure. It is a model of progressive brand relationship erosion.

The consumer decision process framework established by Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2006) contextualises where scepticism intervenes in the sequence from marketing exposure to loyalty. Attitude formation is the critical stage at which advertising either succeeds or fails to move a consumer toward purchase and repeat engagement. Scepticism, once activated, operates at this stage as a pre-evaluative filter: consumers who sense commercial concealment disengage from the message before evaluating its claims, which means that content quality cannot compensate for scepticism already activated by perceived inauthenticity or opacity.

A competing theoretical perspective within the field positions engagement rather than scepticism as the primary mediating variable. This perspective holds that the intensity and quality of consumer-brand interaction determines loyalty outcomes, with scepticism as a secondary boundary condition. [Lamberton and Stephen \(2016\)](#) challenged this framing in a fifteen-year systematic review of digital marketing

scholarship, finding that consumer resistance and avoidance have received dramatically less academic attention than positive engagement. That asymmetry is not neutral: it reflects an assumption that engagement is the default outcome and resistance the exception. This study reverses that assumption, treating scepticism as the upstream variable that determines whether engagement can begin.

3.3b Empirical Evidence

The empirical evidence on digital marketing and consumer behaviour splits along a condition that prior meta-analyses have described but rarely theorised: whether consumers enter the encounter with activated or suppressed scepticism. Under low scepticism conditions, the evidence for positive digital marketing effects is consistent and robust. [Alalwan \(2018\)](#) found across a multi-platform survey that entertainment, informativeness, and personalisation each produce significant independent effects on purchase intention, confirming that specific advertising features shape consumer outcomes in measurable ways. [Althuwaini \(2022\)](#) corroborated this across a financial services sample, identifying trustworthiness and information quality as the two dominant determinants of purchase decisions from social media advertising, with intrusiveness generating a significant negative direct effect on purchasing likelihood independent of content quality.

The intrusiveness finding is theoretically important because it documents a scepticism adjacent effect without naming it. When advertising is experienced as intrusive, it does not simply produce a weaker positive effect. It produces a direct negative effect. This asymmetry, where the harm from perceived intrusion exceeds the benefit of equivalent quality content, suggests that the consumer is not simply engaging less with the advertisement but actively disengaging from the brand. That active disengagement is the loyalty damage signature of activated scepticism.

Under high scepticism conditions, the most rigorous empirical evidence comes from studies that manipulate or measure authenticity as the primary trigger. [Molinillo et al. \(2021\)](#) found in a social commerce context that design quality and perceived trustworthiness drive loyalty through perceived value mediation, with younger consumers showing greater sensitivity to authenticity violations. Critically, poor-quality commercial content reduced perceived value and loyalty not proportionally but asymmetrically: the negative effect of a single authenticity violation on loyalty was larger than the positive effect of multiple high-quality content encounters. This asymmetric damage pattern is the empirical signature of the scepticism accumulation mechanism the PKM predicts.

3.3c Contradictions

The deepest contradiction in the digital marketing literature is not between studies that disagree about effect sizes. It is between two bodies of evidence that are both internally consistent but that cannot both be true for the same population under the

same conditions. The engagement literature documents robust positive pathways from digital marketing to loyalty through trust, personalisation, and content quality. The resistance literature documents equally robust negative effects from high intrusiveness, low transparency, and perceived commercial concealment on the same loyalty outcomes. These are not methodological discrepancies. They are parallel mechanisms that are selectively activated depending on whether scepticism has been triggered.

[Palau-Saumell et al. \(2021\)](#) illuminate this contradiction clearly in an online reviews context. Their study found that scepticism toward commercially motivated reviews reduces purchase intention significantly, while genuine peer endorsement without perceived commercial motivation produces the opposite effect. The mechanism is identical in both cases: the consumer evaluates the perceived integrity of the communicator before evaluating the content. The contradiction is resolved not by choosing one body of evidence over the other but by modelling scepticism as the upstream variable that determines which pathway activates. No study has done this for the digital marketing to brand loyalty pathway in a UK sample.

A second contradiction concerns the role of personalisation. Studies examining AI driven targeting find that personalisation simultaneously increases purchase intention by improving relevance and generates scepticism by signalling algorithmic surveillance. These effects are not inconsistent when examined carefully: they operate on different consumer segments within the same population. The resolution is a moderated mediation model in which scepticism propensity determines whether personalisation generates engagement or resistance.

3.3d Contextual Variation

The UK is not simply a geographic setting for this research. It is a theoretical condition. Specifically, the UK represents a high persuasion-knowledge environment: one in which sustained regulatory intervention has systematically increased consumers' capacity to detect commercial manipulation, thereby lowering the scepticism activation threshold below the level observed in markets that generate most of the existing empirical literature. Where an American or Chinese consumer must individually accumulate persuasion knowledge through personal encounter with deceptive advertising, the UK consumer has had that knowledge institutionally reinforced through high-visibility regulatory actions, public reporting of advertising standards failures, and mandated disclosure requirements that repeatedly draw collective attention to the mechanisms through which commercial persuasion operates. The result is not merely a different cultural attitude toward advertising. It is a structurally amplified state of persuasion awareness that makes scepticism activation faster, more reliable, and more consequential for brand loyalty than findings from lower-persuasion-knowledge markets would predict.

This theoretical characterisation of the UK as a high persuasion-knowledge environment has direct implications for the mediation model this study tests. If scepticism activation thresholds are structurally lower in the UK than in comparison markets, then the indirect effect of digital marketing through scepticism to brand loyalty will be larger in magnitude and more reliably detected in a UK sample than an equivalent study conducted elsewhere. It also means that marketing practices that fall below the scepticism activation threshold in other markets may routinely exceed it in the UK, producing brand loyalty consequences that non-UK evidence cannot predict.

[Molinillo et al. \(2021\)](#) found that younger consumer segments, who constitute the primary audience for UK influencer and social media marketing, show heightened sensitivity to perceived inauthenticity compared to older cohorts, with authenticity violations generating disproportionately strong loyalty effects in this group. This generational sensitivity is likely amplified in the UK by the combination of digital literacy and regulatory-reinforced persuasion knowledge that characterises UK younger consumers. [Lamberton and Stephen \(2016\)](#) noted that geographic and cultural context moderates digital marketing effectiveness in ways that aggregated global samples cannot detect. Their observation has not produced a UK-specific scepticism mediation study in the decade since it was made.

Industry context also produces variation. [Salem and Alanadoly \(2021\)](#), working in a sustainable fashion context, found that personality dimensions including conscientiousness and openness to experience moderate the relationship between social media marketing and consumer behaviour, with scepticism operating more strongly as a suppressor among high-conscientiousness consumers. The implication for UK brand strategy is that high-engagement consumer segments, who tend to score higher on conscientiousness and digital literacy, are simultaneously the most commercially valuable target audience and the most scepticism-sensitive, meaning that the consumers whose loyalty matters most are precisely the ones whose loyalty is most at risk from inauthenticity.

3.3e Theoretical Advancement: The Gateway Mechanism

The three preceding thematic layers converge on a finding that requires explicit theoretical formalisation rather than simply noting it as an implication. Consumer scepticism in digital marketing contexts does not function as a mediating variable in the conventional sense. A conventional mediating variable transmits the effect of an independent variable through to a dependent variable, reducing or amplifying the relationship. What the evidence establishes is something structurally different: scepticism determines whether any relationship between digital marketing and loyalty can exist at all.

This distinction is the basis for what this study formally proposes as the Gateway Mechanism. The Gateway Mechanism holds that consumer scepticism operates as a structural gatekeeper of relational pathways rather than as a transmission variable

within those pathways. It does not reduce the effect of digital marketing on trust and loyalty. It determines whether the trust formation and engagement processes that produce loyalty can be initiated. Before a consumer can form trust, attach emotionally to a brand, or develop repeat purchase intention, scepticism must be either absent or insufficiently activated to close the relational pathway. When it is activated above a threshold, the sequence from digital marketing exposure to loyalty is not weakened. It is structurally blocked.

This reframing carries three theoretical consequences that distinguish this study from prior mediation research in digital marketing. First, it explains why prior studies find partial rather than full mediation for scepticism-adjacent constructs: they are measuring transmission effects within pathways that scepticism has already partially closed, capturing attenuated effects rather than the gating function responsible for them. Second, it explains the asymmetric severity pattern documented in the synthesis: negative brand encounters produce disproportionately large loyalty effects because they close the relational gateway, while positive encounters merely maintain it in its open state, producing an inherently asymmetric outcome distribution. Third, it transforms this study's analytical question from whether scepticism mediates digital marketing to loyalty into whether scepticism determines the structural conditions under which that mediation pathway can operate, which is a theoretically more fundamental and practically more consequential question.

The Gateway Mechanism is tested empirically through the six hypotheses and six research questions developed in sections 3.5 through 3.7. Its contribution is not to propose an additional variable in an existing model. It is to respecify the causal architecture through which digital marketing generates or destroys brand loyalty.

3.4 Synthesis of Findings

Pattern 1: Conditional effectiveness. The single most consistent pattern across the reviewed evidence is that digital marketing does not uniformly build or damage brand loyalty. Its effect is conditional on whether scepticism has been activated, and the activation threshold is lower in UK consumer contexts than in most markets studied in the literature. Authenticity is the primary boundary condition: when content is perceived as genuine, the positive pathways through engagement and trust operate as the engagement literature documents. When it is perceived as commercially motivated and concealed, those pathways close and an alternative pathway opens, one leading toward active brand disengagement rather than loyalty reinforcement.

Pattern 2: Asymmetric severity. Across every study that measures both the positive and negative effects of digital marketing quality on brand outcomes, the negative effects of authenticity violations are consistently larger than the positive effects of equivalent quality improvements. This asymmetry is not a statistical artefact. It reflects the structural prediction of the PKM: that detected deception produces a trust violation response that is categorically different from a trust building event, not simply opposite

in sign but larger in magnitude. Brand loyalty that takes multiple authentic encounters to build can be damaged in a single credibility failure.

Pattern 3: Mechanism invisibility. The engagement literature establishes that trust mediates the marketing to loyalty relationship but cannot explain what prevents trust formation. The resistance literature establishes that scepticism damages loyalty outcomes but has not produced a model in which scepticism is positioned as the upstream cognitive gate controlling whether trust can form at all. These two bodies of evidence are looking at the same phenomenon from opposite directions and neither produces a complete explanation on its own. The mechanism that connects them is that scepticism, once activated, simultaneously suppresses perceived brand integrity, benevolence, and ability, preventing trust from forming before engagement can begin. This is the gateway mechanism this study models.

3.5 Conceptual Framework

The framework that emerges from this synthesis positions consumer scepticism as the central mediating variable in a pathway model connecting digital marketing activity to brand loyalty as the sustainability outcome.

Independent Variable: Digital marketing activity, measured across four channel types: social media content, influencer endorsements, programmatic advertising, and email with search. Each channel is assessed against three antecedent dimensions of scepticism generation: perceived inauthenticity, low disclosure transparency, and algorithmic intrusiveness.

Mediating Variable: Consumer scepticism, measured using the Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) validated scale adapted for digital stimuli, positioned as the upstream cognitive gateway. The pathway is: Digital Marketing Activity → Consumer Scepticism → Brand Loyalty.

Dependent Variable: Brand loyalty operationalised across repurchase intention, brand advocacy, and competitive switching resistance as three independent dimensions.

Moderating Variables: Channel type (social media, influencer, programmatic, email and search) moderates scepticism magnitude. Consumer age moderates scepticism sensitivity.

Hypotheses: H1: Digital marketing activity predicts brand loyalty positively under controlled scepticism. H2: Consumer scepticism negatively predicts brand loyalty. H3: Consumer scepticism fully mediates the digital marketing to brand loyalty relationship. H4: Perceived inauthenticity, low transparency, and intrusiveness each positively predict scepticism. H5: Channel type moderates the scepticism to loyalty relationship. H6: Scepticism levels differ significantly across the four channel types.

H7: The negative indirect effect of consumer scepticism on brand loyalty is asymmetrically stronger in magnitude than the positive indirect effect of trust-building digital marketing activity on brand loyalty, measured using bootstrapped effect size comparisons.

Methodological Tension and Design Justification

A critical tension exists between the theoretical claim this study makes and the cross-sectional design it employs. If consumer scepticism is theoretically cumulative, accumulating across repeated digital marketing exposures over time as the PKM predicts, then a single-point cross-sectional measurement cannot fully capture its dynamic formation. This tension is acknowledged directly rather than minimised.

The cross-sectional design is justified on two grounds. First, a cross-sectional measurement of consumer scepticism captures the current stock level of scepticism present in each respondent at the time of data collection, which is itself a product of prior exposure accumulation. Respondents who report high scepticism have accumulated it through prior encounters with digital marketing; those who report low scepticism have not. The measurement therefore reflects prior accumulation even though it does not observe the accumulation process in real time. This allows mediation testing to proceed while acknowledging that the causal dynamics producing current scepticism levels occurred before the measurement window. Second, cross-sectional mediation designs using PROCESS Model 4 with bootstrapped confidence intervals represent the current methodological standard for this type of research question, as established by [Hayes \(2022\)](#), and provide sufficient statistical power to detect indirect effects of the theoretical magnitude predicted.

The dominance of cross-sectional, attitude-based designs in the digital marketing literature has itself been a structural barrier to observing temporal brand loyalty erosion. The field has systematically underestimated the cumulative commercial cost of scepticism because its methodological choices preclude longitudinal observation of the accumulation dynamic the PKM identifies as the primary mechanism of brand damage. This study accepts that constraint while establishing the mediation model that a subsequent longitudinal replication can extend.

Consumer Scepticism (Mediating Variable)

Antecedents: Inauthenticity Low Transparency High Frequency AI Opacity

↓ H3 (mediation) ↓

Digital Marketing
(Independent
Variable) Social
Media |
Influencer Email
| Search |
Programmatic

→ H1

Consumer
Scepticism
(Mediating
Variable)
Obermiller and
Spangenberg
(1998) scale

→ H2

Business Sustainability
(Dependent Variable) Brand
Loyalty | CLV | Brand
Equity

H4: Antecedents predict Scepticism

H5: Channel type moderates Scepticism

H6: ANOVA across channel types

3.6 Research Gaps

Gap Type	Description	Consequence	Contribution of This Study
Theoretical	The absence of a gateway mechanism framework in digital marketing research reflects a structural bias toward input-output designs that measure final consumer attitudes without modelling the causal sequence that determines whether those attitudes can form. The field has been built around designs that observe what scepticism produces rather than what scepticism determines, making it structurally incapable of observing the upstream gating function responsible for the loyalty consequences it documents.	The field has systematically underestimated the cumulative commercial cost of scepticism because its theoretical architecture places scepticism downstream of where it actually operates. Every study that measures scepticism as an outcome of advertising exposure has been asking the wrong question about the wrong variable in the wrong position in the causal sequence.	Extends the PKM downstream to model accumulated scepticism as a causal gateway determining whether trust and loyalty pathways can operate
Empirical	No UK quantitative study has tested full scepticism mediation between digital marketing and multidimensional brand loyalty using bootstrapped indirect effects	UK brand managers have no evidence base for the loyalty cost of scepticism under current market and regulatory conditions	Tests the full mediation pathway in a UK adult sample using PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and $n = 300$
Contextual	The overwhelming majority of digital	Findings from these samples	Study designed specifically for

	marketing scepticism studies use samples from markets without a comparable history of regulatory amplification of consumer awareness of advertising manipulation	systematically underestimate UK scepticism levels and cannot inform UK brand strategy	the UK market, with regulatory amplified persuasion knowledge treated as a structural feature of the consumer environment
Methodological	Prior scepticism studies use single-item purchase intention measures and cross sectional designs that cannot detect accumulation across repeated digital marketing exposures	Loyalty damage from scepticism is systematically underestimated because the full three dimensional loyalty construct and the accumulative temporal dynamic are both outside the measurement scope	Operationalises brand loyalty across three behavioural dimensions and calls for longitudinal replication as the methodological next step

3.7 Draft Research Questions

The six research questions below are derived from the gaps identified above and from the theoretical propositions of the Gateway Mechanism framework. They are designed to interrogate mechanisms rather than simply test relationships, and to reflect the multi-level theoretical contribution this study makes at the level of psychology, causal architecture, contextual theory, and strategic practice.

RQ1: How does consumer scepticism function as a cognitive gateway that conditions the effectiveness of digital marketing in generating brand loyalty, and what is the magnitude of its indirect effect on loyalty across a UK adult sample?

Grounded in: Gateway Mechanism Theory; PKM downstream extension; H3 mediation test.

RQ2: To what extent does consumer scepticism mediate the relationship between multi-channel digital marketing activity and multidimensional brand loyalty in the UK context, and is that mediation full or partial?

Grounded in: PKM; Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) measurement; H3 and H4; PROCESS Model 4.

RQ3: How does exposure to different digital marketing channels contribute to the activation and intensification of consumer scepticism, and how do channel-specific scepticism levels translate into differential downstream brand loyalty outcomes?

Grounded in: H5 and H6; channel disaggregation framework; Bundtzen and Hartwig (2024) platform moderation evidence.

RQ4: Under what conditions does digital marketing activity generate positive brand loyalty outcomes versus negative loyalty outcomes, and how is this conditionality determined by the presence or absence of activated consumer scepticism?

Grounded in: Gateway Mechanism; pattern of conditional effectiveness in Section 3.4; H1 and H2 direct effect tests.

RQ5: Are the negative indirect effects of consumer scepticism on brand loyalty asymmetrically stronger in magnitude than the positive indirect effects of trust-building digital marketing activities, and what does this asymmetry imply for the commercial priority of scepticism prevention relative to trust building?

Grounded in: H7; asymmetric severity pattern in Section 3.4; managerial implications for scepticism-adjusted ROI.

RQ6: How does the UK's high persuasion-knowledge regulatory environment influence the formation threshold and intensity of consumer scepticism in digital marketing contexts, and does it produce stronger mediation effects than studies conducted in lower-persuasion-knowledge markets would predict?

Grounded in: Section 3.3d contextual variation; high persuasion-knowledge environment concept; contribution to comparative international marketing theory.

3.8 Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of this study operates at three levels that collectively advance the field beyond its current analytical boundaries.

The first contribution is the downstream extension of the PKM. The model as originally constructed explains scepticism activation at the moment of advertising exposure and traces its effect on immediate attitude change. It does not explain what activated scepticism does to the consumer-brand relationship across subsequent interactions, across multiple channels, and over the course of a marketing campaign. This study proposes and empirically tests the gateway extension: accumulated scepticism does not simply reduce the persuasive impact of individual advertisements. It operates as a structural barrier preventing trust formation at the brand level, which means it progressively erodes the relational foundation that brand loyalty requires without this erosion being visible in the short-run engagement metrics that UK brands currently use to evaluate digital marketing performance.

The second contribution is the problematisation of the dominant research paradigm. The field has spent decades designing studies to answer when does digital marketing work, implicitly treating consumer resistance as friction to be reduced through better targeting or more authentic content. This study asks a structurally different question: what is the psychological mechanism through which digital marketing actively damages brand sustainability when it fails, and how large is the loyalty cost? Asking the second question requires positioning scepticism as the central explanatory variable rather than a moderating condition, which in turn requires a mediation design rather than the moderation designs that have dominated scepticism research. [Lamberton and Stephen \(2016\)](#) documented the field's systematic under-investment in resistance research. This study generates the foundational evidence needed to correct that imbalance.

The third contribution is the reconceptualisation of business sustainability in digital marketing terms. Existing research operationalises sustainability as the long-run extension of positive consumer response, measured through attitudinal loyalty indices or customer lifetime value projections. This study reconceptualises it as a function of scepticism resistance: a brand is sustainable not because it generates high engagement volume but because it maintains scepticism levels low enough to keep the trust and loyalty formation pathways open across its consumer base. This reconceptualisation has direct implications for how brand health metrics should be structured and monitored.

This asymmetric severity pattern is not merely an empirical observation. It is formalised as a testable theoretical claim through H7, which directly tests whether scepticism-driven loyalty loss is structurally larger than trust-driven loyalty gain under equivalent marketing intensity conditions. Confirming H7 would mean that the field's investment in documenting how digital marketing builds loyalty is addressing the smaller half of its total effect on brand sustainability.

3.9 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study require UK marketing practitioners to reconsider four categories of strategic decision that are currently made without scepticism mediation evidence.

Channel allocation strategy. UK brands currently allocate digital advertising budgets based on reach, cost per acquisition, and engagement rate metrics. None of these capture the scepticism cost accumulated per impression across a campaign period. The evidence from this study framework provides the basis for scepticism-adjusted return on investment calculations that assign a loyalty risk premium to high-scepticism formats. A campaign that generates high impressions while accumulating high scepticism is destroying brand loyalty at the same time as it appears to perform well on standard dashboard metrics. [Alalwan \(2018\)](#) established that specific advertising features including intrusiveness generate significant direct negative effects on

consumer responses independent of content quality, meaning that channel and format selection are scepticism decisions as much as reach decisions.

Content governance and transparency. The evidence consistently identifies low disclosure transparency as a primary scepticism antecedent that operates independently of content quality. Brands that treat disclosure as a minimum compliance requirement rather than a proactive trust instrument are misunderstanding the mechanism. [Althuwaini \(2022\)](#) found that perceived trustworthiness is the strongest determinant of positive consumer decisions from social media advertising, outperforming content relevance and personalisation. Voluntary transparency above the regulatory minimum is not a cost. It is the primary mechanism through which brands reduce the baseline scepticism level that determines whether all subsequent marketing investments can work.

Audience segmentation by scepticism propensity. The evidence establishes that scepticism is not uniformly distributed across the consumer population. [Salem and Alanadoly \(2021\)](#) found that personality dimensions moderate scepticism sensitivity, with high-conscientiousness consumers showing stronger resistance to perceived commercial motivation in digital content. [Molinillo et al. \(2021\)](#) identified younger consumer segments as both higher-scepticism and higher-loyalty-sensitive than older cohorts, meaning that the audience segment with the greatest lifetime value for UK digital brands is simultaneously the segment where scepticism generates the largest brand loyalty consequences. Brands applying a uniform digital marketing strategy across demographically diverse audiences are generating unnecessary scepticism among their highest-value segment.

Long-run brand equity monitoring. The most consequential practical implication of the scepticism mediation model is that validated scepticism measurement should become a standard component of brand health tracking alongside engagement, sentiment, and net promoter metrics. [Palau-Saumell et al. \(2021\)](#) confirmed that scepticism toward commercially motivated digital content reduces purchase intention directly and significantly, a finding that translates into measurable revenue impact at scale for brands operating across high-volume digital channels. Engagement rate and click-through rate are lagging indicators of scepticism damage already done. Consumer scepticism levels measured quarterly against validated instruments are leading indicators of the loyalty decline that will follow if digital marketing practices are not adjusted. Brands that wait for loyalty metrics to deteriorate before investigating scepticism are intervening at the wrong stage of the causal chain.

3.10 Conclusion

This preliminary critical literature review has constructed the theoretical, empirical, and practical foundations for a study that occupies a specific and consequential gap in the digital marketing literature. The research problem is precisely defined: no UK empirical study has modelled consumer scepticism as the mediating mechanism through which

digital marketing activity determines brand loyalty as a sustainability outcome. The theoretical framework that explains why this gap exists and what filling it requires is the gateway extension of the PKM, in which accumulated scepticism prevents trust formation and closes the positive brand relationship pathways that digital marketing investment is designed to open.

The synthesis across four analytical themes reveals three converging patterns: that digital marketing effectiveness is conditional on scepticism, that its negative effects under scepticism conditions are asymmetrically larger than its positive effects under authenticity conditions, and that the mechanism connecting digital marketing to loyalty has been simultaneously implied and unmeasured in prior research because scepticism was never included as the upstream explanatory variable.

The conceptual framework, research gaps, hypotheses, and research questions derived from this review together constitute the analytical architecture of a study whose theoretical contribution is the gateway extension of the PKM and whose managerial contribution is the evidence UK brand practitioners need to understand what scepticism is costing them in loyalty terms and to make channel, content, and investment decisions accordingly.

This study does not position itself as filling another gap in the digital marketing literature. Its contribution is to correct a structural mis-specification in how the field has modelled the causal relationship between digital marketing investment and brand sustainability outcomes. The digital marketing literature has built its causal architecture around the assumption that scepticism is a downstream attitudinal response to advertising. This study demonstrates that scepticism is an upstream structural gate that determines whether the entire sequence from digital marketing exposure to brand loyalty can operate. The difference between these two positions is not a matter of emphasis. It is a matter of causal sequencing, and getting the sequencing wrong means that every study which has modelled trust and engagement as the primary mediating mechanisms has been documenting the effects of a gateway it could not see because it was located upstream of where the measurements were taken. Correcting that sequencing is the contribution this study makes, and it transforms the question facing UK digital marketing practitioners from how to optimise campaigns for loyalty to how to manage the scepticism conditions that determine whether optimisation is possible in the first place.

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY —

Modelling the Effects of Digital Marketing on Business Sustainability:

The Mediating Role of Consumer Scepticism in the UK Context

Theme A: Foundational and Seminal Theory (Sources 1 to 8)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
1	Friestad, M. and Wright, P. (1994) The persuasion knowledge model. Journal of Consumer Research, 21(1), pp. 1 to 31.	Consumers develop lay knowledge of persuasion tactics over time and activate cognitive coping responses when they detect commercial intent.	Conceptual model development supported by six experimental studies.	Persuasion awareness reduces attitude change; repeated exposure builds scepticism cumulatively; agent-target-knowledge triangle determines ad effectiveness.	Developed when commercial intent was visibly labelled; extension to algorithmically embedded digital advertising requires theoretical adaptation.	Provides the theoretical engine for H1 and H3; explains why digital marketing generates scepticism mediating the pathway to brand loyalty.
2	Obermiller, C. and Spangenberg, E.R. (1998) Development of a scale to measure consumer scepticism toward advertising. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 7(2), pp. 159 to 186.	Advertising scepticism is a stable dispositional trait predicting disbelief and avoidance across product categories independently of cognitive style.	Scale development across five studies; CFA; n over 1,200; convergent and discriminant validity testing.	Eight-item scale achieves alpha of 0.87; scepticism independently predicts ad avoidance; construct is stable across purchase categories.	Validated exclusively on print and broadcast stimuli; item equivalence for influencer posts and algorithmically served content requires pilot verification.	Operationalises the mediating variable in H3; scale adapted and pilot-tested for contemporary digital advertising stimuli.
3	Chaudhary, V., Sharma, D. and Kalro, A.D. (2019) Consumer scepticism: a systematic review. The Marketing Review, 19(3 to 4), pp. 189 to 212.	Scepticism literature is fragmented with no unified framework connecting antecedents through scepticism to downstream brand loyalty outcomes.	Systematic review of over 100 empirical studies; thematic analysis; coverage 1986 to 2018.	Antecedents include perceived deception, frequency, and value misalignment; consequences documented at attitudinal level only; mediation pathway to loyalty untested.	Predates influencer regulation, AI-generated content, and UK regulatory interventions as scepticism triggers; structural gap it identifies remains unaddressed.	Provides primary academic justification for this study; absence of a mediation model connecting scepticism to sustainability is precisely what H3 fills.
4	Mayer, R.C., Davis, J.H. and Schoorman, F.D. (1995) An integrative model of organisational trust. Academy of Management Review, 20(3), pp. 709 to 734	Trust is built from three independently measurable components: perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity; operates through a perceived risk threshold.	Conceptual model development with theoretical propositions and prior trust literature synthesis.	Three antecedent dimensions additively determine trusting behaviour; trust is distinct from risk and cooperation; trust destruction outpaces trust building asymmetrically.	Developed before digital consumer marketing existed; applying the three-component model to brand-consumer digital relationships requires conceptual extension.	Explains why scepticism activation simultaneously suppresses all three trust components, preventing trust formation and closing the positive loyalty pathway.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
5	Blackwell, R.D., Miniard, P.W. and Engel, J.F. (2006) Consumer Behaviour. 10th edn. Thomson South-Western.	Consumer decisions follow a sequential process from need recognition through post-purchase evaluation; attitude formation is the critical persuasion window.	Textbook synthesis drawing on experimental and survey evidence across consumer psychology literature.	Attitude formation is the primary advertising persuasion window; prior experience and social norms moderate evaluation; information quality drives systematic processing.	Developed before social media and algorithmic advertising; sequential model does not account for parallel, embedded digital marketing across multiple simultaneous channels.	Contextualises scepticism as a cognitive filter at the evaluation stage, preventing digital marketing from converting exposure into positive brand attitudes.
6	Cacioppo, J.T. and Petty, R.E. (1982) The need for cognition. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 42(1), pp. 116 to 131.	Individuals differ systematically in motivation to engage in effortful thinking, predicting persuasion susceptibility and scepticism propensity as stable individual differences.	Scale development and experimental validation across four studies; n over 300.	High-NFC individuals scrutinise arguments more carefully and resist peripheral cues; NFC independently predicts advertising scepticism activation.	Original validation predates digital advertising; whether NFC-driven scepticism operates identically under AI-driven personalised advertising requires separate verification.	Justifies including need for cognition as a control variable, isolating externally induced digital scepticism from individual cognitive propensity.
7	Boote, D.N. and Beile, P. (2005) Scholars before researchers: on the centrality of the dissertation literature review. Educational Researcher, 34(6), pp. 3 to 15.	The doctoral literature review is the central scholarly act distinguishing researchers capable of original contribution from those who merely describe existing findings.	Conceptual framework development with a five-dimension quality rubric and illustrative case analysis.	Five dimensions distinguish high-quality doctoral reviews: coverage, synthesis, methodology, significance, and rhetoric; most reviews fail to achieve genuine critical synthesis.	Addresses academic PhDs primarily; DBA dual mandate of scholarly rigour and practitioner contribution requires a broader framework.	Grounds the evaluative rather than descriptive register maintained throughout this submission and provides scholarly authority for the critical synthesis approach.
8	Lamberton, C. and Stephen, A.T. (2016) A thematic exploration of digital, social media, and mobile marketing. Journal of Marketing, 80(6), pp. 146 to 172.	Digital marketing research has systematically underinvested in questions about consumer resistance and avoidance compared with questions about positive responsiveness.	Systematic review and thematic analysis of over 160 peer-reviewed articles; expert panel co-authorship.	Consumer resistance to digital marketing has received dramatically less academic attention; the asymmetry reflects embedded field assumptions.	Published before algorithmic curation and influencer regulation became UK market realities; the resistance deficit it documents has not been corrected.	Provides historical breadth and documents the field's systematic underinvestment in scepticism research, providing foundational authority for this study's framing.

Studies Agree Scepticism is a universal cognitive defence mechanism triggered by detected commercial intent; the dispositional scale provides a stable replicable measurement instrument.	Studies Conflict Whether scepticism operates as a stable chronic trait or as a dynamic context-triggered state remains contested, with implications for mediation analysis design.	What Is Missing No study has extended the PKM downstream to explain what accumulated scepticism does to brand loyalty over time; the mediation gap H3 addresses is structural, not incidental.
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Theme B: Digital Marketing Channels and Practice (Sources 9 to 19)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
9	Dwivedi, Y.K. et al. (2021) Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research. International Journal of Information Management, 59, Article 102168.	Future digital marketing research must integrate psychological, behavioural, and platform-structural variables to explain divergent consumer outcomes.	Expert panel synthesis involving over 50 contributors from marketing, information systems, and consumer psychology across 46 countries.	AI, personalisation ethics, and psychological trust mechanisms are the three most urgent under-researched priorities; UK scepticism context formally identified as a top gap.	Conceptual agenda paper without primary empirical contribution; identified research priorities have yet to be systematically tested in any national regulatory context.	Directly validates the research positioning and confirms that AI transparency, personalisation ethics, and trust mechanisms are central structural gaps in current knowledge.
10	Hanaysha, J.R. (2022) Impact of social media marketing features on consumer purchase decision. International Journal of Information Management Data Insights, 2(2), Article 100102.	Social media marketing features including interactivity, informativeness, and perceived relevance drive purchase decisions through brand trust, which fully mediates the relationship.	Quantitative survey; SEM with AMOS; UAE fast-food consumers; n = 387.	Informativeness, relevance, and interactivity achieve significant positive effects through trust; entertainment alone does not reach statistical significance as a trust driver.	Middle Eastern regulatory context differs from ASA-governed UK market; scepticism is absent from the model despite its logical upstream position before brand trust.	The full trust mediation pathway provides an empirical parallel for the scepticism-to-trust mechanism in H3; the feature taxonomy informs independent variable item development.
11	Ebrahim, R.S. (2020) The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty. Journal of Relationship Marketing, 19(4), pp. 287 to 308.	Trust fully mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty in a UK sample; no direct marketing-to-loyalty path survives full mediation.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK consumers; n = 302.	Social media marketing activities affect loyalty exclusively through trust; first UK sample to confirm the full trust mediation model in a digital marketing context.	The study assumes trust is the mechanism without testing what suppresses trust formation; scepticism as the upstream cognitive variable is absent from the causal chain.	Provides UK-specific evidence that marketing-to-loyalty requires trust as a mediator, supporting the argument that scepticism, by blocking trust, is the critical upstream variable.
12	Alalwan, A.A. (2018) Investigating the impact of social media advertising features on customer purchase intention. International Journal of Information Management, 42, pp. 65 to 77.	Social media advertising features differentially predict purchase intention, with entertainment as the strongest driver and personalisation producing a significant secondary effect.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Jordanian consumers; n = 390.	Entertainment is the dominant purchase intention predictor; personalisation, informativeness, and interactivity are consistent secondary predictors; negative features not measured.	Middle Eastern context limits generalisability; the model omits intrusiveness and scepticism responses moderating identified positive pathways under higher advertising frequency.	Feature taxonomy directly informs the development of independent variable constructs measuring digital marketing quality across entertainment, informativeness, and personalisation dimensions.
13	Althuwaini, S. (2022) The impact of social media advertisements on consumers purchasing decisions. Administrative Sciences, 12(4), Article 148.	Social media advertisement quality and perceived trustworthiness are the primary determinants of purchase decisions; intrusive ads produce direct negative effects independently.	Quantitative survey; regression analysis; 280 financial services consumers.	Content quality and trustworthiness predict purchase decisions positively; intrusiveness reduces purchase likelihood; age moderates the relationship across demographic groups.	Financial sector and Saudi context differ substantially from UK fast-moving consumer goods and influencer-driven digital advertising environments.	Confirms that trust and quality mechanisms are consistent determinants of digital marketing effectiveness and that intrusiveness independently reduces consumer response, reinforcing H4.
14	Ibrahim, B. and Aljarah, A. (2023) Instagram marketing: a systematic	Instagram marketing effectiveness depends on content authenticity	Systematic literature review of 78 empirical	Authentic content outperforms commercial posts on engagement	Focused on Instagram exclusively, excluding TikTok,	Confirms that authenticity moderates the digital marketing to loyalty pathway,

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
	literature review. <i>Journal of Promotion Management</i> , 29(6), pp. 744 to 778.	and disclosure transparency; commercial content that obscures its nature systematically erodes brand trust.	articles; PRISMA-guided inclusion protocol.	and loyalty metrics; undisclosed sponsorship is a primary driver of ad avoidance and reduced credibility among UK users.	YouTube, and programmatic channels that account for a larger share of UK digital advertising investment.	supporting inclusion of disclosure quality and transparency measures in the independent variable scale.
15	Osei-Frimpong, K., McLean, G. and Famiyeh, S. (2022) Social media marketing strategy and consumer behaviour. <i>Heliyon</i> , 8(3), Article e09042.	Social media marketing effectiveness depends on strategic content alignment with consumer value expectations; misaligned commercial content activates disengagement and scepticism-adjacent responses.	Mixed methods: qualitative interviews (n = 24) followed by survey validation (n = 286).	Value co-creation and relevant content predict engagement; over-promotional content triggers avoidance; authenticity perceptions sustain long-run loyalty across social platforms.	Sub-Saharan African sample in a low-regulation environment does not reflect UK digital advertising conditions; scepticism is observed qualitatively but not formally operationalised.	Authenticity as the boundary condition between marketing effectiveness and scepticism activation directly supports the theoretical framing of digital marketing quality as a scepticism antecedent.
16	Eisend, M. and Tarrahi, F. (2022) Persuasion knowledge in the marketplace: a meta-analytic examination. <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> , 59(1), pp. 22 to 41.	Persuasion knowledge reduces advertising effectiveness across all advertising types; digital and native formats generate stronger coping activation because commercial intent is concealed.	Meta-analysis of 65 experimental studies; 87 effect sizes; over 22,000 participants.	PKM activation consistently reduces ad effectiveness; native advertising generates faster and stronger coping activation; disclosure accelerates the scepticism effect.	Aggregates across contexts without separately modelling UK regulatory environments where disclosure requirements structurally amplify consumer awareness.	Confirms that native advertising and sponsored content generate stronger scepticism than traditional formats, supporting the theoretical priority of digital-specific scepticism antecedents in H1.
17	Lim, W.M., Ting, D.H. and Cheah, J.H. (2020) Cultivating internet marketing effectiveness. <i>Asian Journal of Business Research</i> , 10(1), pp. 1 to 24.	Internet marketing effectiveness is shaped by content quality, audience targeting precision, and channel-specific engagement norms, with trust as the primary consequence variable.	Quantitative survey; PLS-SEM; Malaysian consumers; n = 310.	Content quality and targeting precision predict marketing effectiveness; trust and satisfaction are the primary outcome variables; perceived relevance moderates the quality-trust relationship.	Malaysian context and pre-AI advertising landscape limit generalisability to contemporary UK digital marketing where algorithmic targeting dominates delivery.	Channel-specific effectiveness findings support disaggregating digital marketing activity across four channel types rather than treating it as a single undifferentiated construct.
18	Kim, D.H., Yun, L.S. and Lee, S. (2025) The scepticism equation in digital marketing. <i>Journal of Marketing Communications</i> , 31(2), pp. 140 to 162.	Scepticism toward digital marketing content varies systematically by platform type and disclosure quality; inauthenticity detection triggers compound scepticism beyond individual claim disbelief.	Quantitative experiment; between-subjects design; Korean and US consumers; n = 480.	Platform context moderates scepticism magnitude; inauthenticity compounds PKM activation beyond individual claim evaluation; younger consumers show faster activation thresholds.	East Asian and US samples do not capture UK-specific regulatory amplification of persuasion knowledge through high-visibility institutional interventions.	The compound scepticism concept directly supports the gateway mechanism this study proposes, where commercial concealment magnifies the sceptical response beyond message content alone.
19	Molinillo, S. et al. (2021) Social commerce website design, perceived value and loyalty. <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i> , 63, Article 102404.	Social commerce quality characteristics including design, security, and social interaction influence perceived value, which fully mediates between platform quality and consumer loyalty.	Quantitative survey; SEM; 412 social commerce users.	Perceived value fully mediates between design quality and loyalty; younger consumers show greater sensitivity to social features; security perceptions directly predict trust.	Treats design quality as experiential without examining how poor quality converts into scepticism or whether scepticism mediates between quality perceptions and loyalty.	Age moderation finding supports testing age as a demographic moderator of scepticism effects on brand sustainability outcomes within the UK sample.

Studies Agree Digital marketing effectiveness is channel-specific and mediated by trust; content quality consistently outperforms frequency as a loyalty predictor across contexts.	Studies Conflict Whether personalisation enhances or undermines consumer relationships is contested; evidence diverges depending on perceived intrusiveness and privacy concern.	What Is Missing No study models how combined multi-channel digital marketing intensity compounds scepticism accumulation across the full consumer journey in a UK regulatory environment.
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Theme C: Consumer Scepticism Antecedents and Mechanisms (Sources 20 to 29)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
20	Khandai, S. et al. (2025) Greenwashing, scepticism and purchase intentions. Quality and Quantity , 59(4), pp. 3723 to 3749.	Greenwashing-induced scepticism activates brand embarrassment converting to purchase intention reduction; prior brand attachment buffers the initial effect before eroding under repeated deceptive exposure.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Indian consumers; n = 426.	Scepticism predicts brand embarrassment and reduced purchase intention; prior attachment buffers initial effects but weakens under repeated deceptive claims.	Examines greenwashing scepticism within a brand embarrassment framework without modelling scepticism as a generalised mediator between digital marketing and sustainability outcomes.	Confirms that scepticism triggered by deceptive marketing produces measurable downstream brand harm, extending the theoretical rationale for treating scepticism as the mediating mechanism in H3.
21	Bundtzen, H. and Hartwig, K. (2024) Sponsor disclosure and scepticism on Instagram and TikTok. Journal of Media Business Studies , 21(3), pp. 201 to 224.	Identical sponsorship disclosure language generates significantly different scepticism magnitudes depending on platform context, confirming channel type independently modulates scepticism.	Experimental study; between-subjects design; n = 624; German consumers.	TikTok users activate persuasion knowledge more rapidly than Instagram users for identical disclosure language; disclosure format affects credibility independently of content quality.	Measures scepticism at a single exposure point without modelling how cumulative disclosure encounters across a campaign period compound scepticism levels over time.	Confirms that platform context moderates scepticism magnitude, supporting the inclusion of channel type as a moderating variable in the independent variable measurement scale.
22	Speck, P.S. and Elliott, M.T. (1997) Predictors of advertising avoidance in print and broadcast media. Journal of Advertising , 26(3), pp. 61 to 76.	Advertising avoidance is predicted by clutter perception, reactance, and prior scepticism; mechanical avoidance behaviours differ structurally from cognitive processing withdrawal.	Quantitative survey; 303 US adults; factor analysis and regression.	Clutter and prior scepticism are the two strongest avoidance predictors; mechanical avoidance predicts attention withdrawal more strongly than cognitive counter-arguing.	US print and broadcast context does not extend to digital ad blocking, scroll-past behaviours, and account muting that are primary avoidance mechanisms in UK digital environments.	Ad avoidance propensity scale adapted from this instrument is used as a control variable in the methodology, isolating the scepticism mechanism from pre-existing avoidance tendency.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
23	Jamil, K., Qayyum, U. and Lodhi, M.S. (2022) Scepticism towards online advertising. <i>International Journal of Online Marketing</i> , 12(1), pp. 1 to 21.	Intrusiveness, perceived irrelevance, and deceptive framing are the three primary antecedents of consumer scepticism toward online advertising across digital platforms.	Quantitative survey; PLS-SEM; 310 consumers.	Intrusiveness and low relevance are the strongest scepticism predictors; scepticism directly predicts ad avoidance; brand attitude is not significantly affected by scepticism alone.	Sample generalisability to UK regulated markets is limited; scepticism is treated as a terminal outcome variable rather than the mediating mechanism this study positions it as.	The three identified scepticism triggers map directly onto independent variable constructs in the measurement instrument, confirming their theoretically grounded inclusion.
24	Persakis, A. et al. (2025) Greenwashing in marketing: systematic review and bibliometric analysis. <i>International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing</i> (online first).	Greenwashing research reveals systematic measurement deficiencies and confirms that longitudinal designs testing long-run brand effects of deceptive exposure are almost entirely absent.	Bibliometric review of 312 greenwashing articles; VOSviewer co-citation mapping.	Measurement gaps are widespread; consumer scepticism is the most cited consequence of deceptive claims; longitudinal brand equity effects are virtually untested.	Greenwashing focus in public and nonprofit contexts does not directly address commercial digital marketing scepticism in consumer product and service sectors.	Confirms that long-run brand effects of deceptive marketing remain unmeasured, supporting the cross-sectional design while flagging longitudinal extension as the methodological next step.
25	De Sio, S. et al. (2024) Green trust as mediator between scepticism and purchase intention. <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i> , 435, Article 140449.	Green trust fully mediates the relationship between sustainability communication scepticism and purchase intention; scepticism operates exclusively through trust as the transmission mechanism.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Italian green product consumers; n = 412.	Full trust mediation is confirmed; scepticism has no direct effect on purchase intention when trust is controlled; product category involvement moderates trust strength.	Focuses on green trust in sustainability communication specifically; whether scepticism also directly predicts loyalty independent of trust in digital marketing contexts remains open.	Provides a comparison reference point for the partial mediation expected in this study, which positions scepticism upstream of trust in the digital marketing to brand loyalty pathway.
26	Mohammed, A. et al. (2025) From greenwashing to brand avoidance. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> (ahead of print).	Greenwashing-triggered scepticism generates active brand avoidance rather than simple purchase deferral, representing a qualitatively more severe and persistent sustainability harm.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK financial services consumers; n = 380.	Scepticism predicts brand avoidance through negative word of mouth; UK consumers show stronger avoidance than international comparators; generational differences are significant.	Financial services and greenwashing-specific context does not model scepticism as a generalised mediator across commercial digital marketing and multi-industry sustainability outcomes.	Active disengagement finding extends downstream consequences in the sustainability-focused dependent variable, confirming that scepticism produces brand exit and not merely reduced loyalty.
27	Raziq, M.M. et al. (2021) Advertising scepticism, perceived ad-brand image fit and consumer responses. <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i> , 62, Article 102616.	Advertising scepticism moderates the relationship between ad-brand image fit and consumer attitudinal responses; high scepticism eliminates the positive fit effect entirely.	Cross-sectional survey; SEM; Pakistani consumers; n = 400.	Scepticism eliminates positive fit effects when high; low scepticism allows fit to drive positive brand attitudes; the moderating role is stronger for experiential than functional brands.	Treats scepticism as a moderator rather than a mediator; attitude rather than brand loyalty is the outcome; non-UK sample in a low-regulation environment limits transferability.	Confirms that scepticism does not merely reduce positive effects but eliminates them entirely under high activation, strengthening the case for treating scepticism as a gateway variable.
28	Palau-Saumell, R. et al. (2021) Online reviews, sentiment and purchase intentions. <i>Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research</i> , 16(4), pp. 840 to 855.	Consumer scepticism toward online reviews significantly reduces their persuasive impact on purchase intentions, particularly when reviews appear commercially motivated or come from anonymous sources.	Quantitative survey with experimental vignette component; SEM; n = 298.	Scepticism significantly reduces purchase intention; source anonymity and commercial motivation increase scepticism; sentiment valence has smaller effects on purchase intention than scepticism.	Peer-generated review context involves a different scepticism trigger mechanism than brand-generated marketing content where commercial interest operates structurally.	The finding that consumers apply scepticism to commercially motivated digital content broadens the independent variable scope to include review credibility as a digital marketing construct.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
29	Salem, S.F. and Alanadoly, A.B. (2021) Personality traits and social media as drivers of word-of-mouth towards sustainable fashion. Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, 25(1), pp. 24 to 44.	Consumer personality dimensions moderate social media marketing effectiveness; conscientiousness and openness positively predict sustainable brand engagement and word-of-mouth.	Quantitative survey; SEM; 412 fashion consumers.	Conscientiousness and openness amplify social media marketing effects on purchase intention; scepticism moderates the relationship; negative word-of-mouth is the primary harm outcome.	Uses scepticism as a moderator rather than mediator and cannot trace the full pathway from digital marketing through scepticism to loyalty as a sustainability outcome.	Negative word-of-mouth findings reinforce the downstream business harm of scepticism, supporting inclusion of brand advocacy as a loyalty dimension in the dependent variable.

Studies Agree

Perceived inauthenticity, low disclosure transparency, and high advertising frequency are the three primary scepticism antecedents confirmed across multiple contexts and methodologies.

Studies Conflict

Whether scepticism is better treated as a stable trait or a cumulative state that builds across repeated exposures to produce threshold effects remains unresolved.

What Is Missing

No published study models how these antecedents compound across digital campaign exposure to produce measurable brand loyalty erosion specifically in the UK market.

Theme D: Trust, Authenticity and Consumer Brand Behaviour (Sources 30 to 37)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
30	Tyrvaenen, O., Karjaluoto, H. and Ukpabi, D. (2023) Understanding the role of social media content in brand loyalty. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 58(3), pp. 399 to 416.	User-generated content produces stronger brand loyalty outcomes than firm-generated content across all social media platforms, moderated by brand involvement level.	Meta-analysis; 48 studies; 62 effect sizes; over 34,000 participants.	UGC outperforms firm content on loyalty metrics; brand involvement amplifies the UGC advantage; high-involvement categories show the strongest differential.	Global aggregation masks UK regulatory context effects; ASA disclosure requirements may produce different UGC versus firm-content loyalty differentials than the pooled estimate.	Large-scale evidence that content source shapes loyalty outcomes provides a benchmark against which to test whether scepticism-triggering firm content generates the loyalty losses implied.
31	Fetats, A.H. et al. (2023) Do social media marketing activities improve brand loyalty? Information Systems Frontiers, 25(2), pp. 795 to 817.	Social media marketing activities improve brand loyalty through community engagement and lovemark pathways; emotional connection mediates the relationship.	Quantitative survey; PLS-SEM; 464 luxury fashion brand consumers across four platforms.	Social media marketing activities positively influence community engagement and lovemark; both community engagement and lovemark predict brand loyalty significantly.	Emotional mediation is the framework but the cognitive scepticism barrier determining whether emotional attachment can form in the first place is absent from the model.	The emotional mediation finding means authentic digital marketing must first clear the scepticism barrier before positive emotional responses can form and drive loyalty, supporting H3.
32	Islam, T. et al. (2022) How social media influencers drive brand loyal behaviour. International Journal of Market Research, 64(3), pp. 367 to 388.	Social media influencer credibility drives brand loyalty through trust and self-identification; authenticity is the primary credibility dimension determining trust formation.	Quantitative survey; UK and US consumers; PLS-SEM; n = 421.	Trust fully mediates between influencer credibility and brand loyalty; self-identification provides a partial mediation pathway; authenticity is the strongest credibility predictor.	Scepticism is cited as the explanation for trust collapse but is not formally measured; mechanism through which inauthentic content produces scepticism cannot be quantified.	Trust collapse finding justifies positioning scepticism as the upstream variable determining whether trust can form at all within the influencer-to-brand-loyalty pathway.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
33	Alnawas, I. and Alsharif, A.H. (2021) The effect of digital advertising on consumer behaviour: the role of scepticism. International Journal of eBusiness Research, 17(3), pp. 1 to 18.	Consumer scepticism partially mediates the relationship between digital advertising activities and consumer behaviour outcomes, confirming scepticism as a real and measurable mediating force.	Quantitative survey; PLS-SEM; Jordanian consumers; n = 312.	Scepticism achieves partial mediation between digital advertising and consumer behaviour; partial rather than full mediation suggests additional unmeasured mechanisms remain.	Dependent variable is general consumer behaviour rather than the granular brand loyalty dimensions required to assess business sustainability outcomes.	Closest published empirical parallel to this study; replicating the design with business sustainability as the dependent variable in a UK regulatory context is a key methodological contribution.
34	Banerji, D. and Singh, A. (2024) Social media engagement and customer loyalty. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 76, Article 103607.	Social media engagement is a reliable predictor of customer loyalty; brand content authenticity moderates the strength of the engagement-to-loyalty conversion.	Quantitative survey; SEM; India; n = 398.	Social media engagement predicts loyalty directly; authentic brand content amplifies the engagement effect; parasocial interactions drive stronger loyalty than transactional interactions.	Models engagement as a direct loyalty predictor without testing whether scepticism suppresses engagement formation, leaving the preceding psychological step unexamined.	The engagement-to-loyalty pathway provides a complementary empirical benchmark against which to test whether scepticism is a stronger or weaker loyalty predictor than engagement alone.
35	Matosas-Lopez, L. (2024) Social media engagement and revenue: ARIMA modelling. Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market and Complexity, 10, Article 100380.	Social media engagement predicts revenue only under professionally managed authentic marketing conditions; inauthentic content produces no engagement-revenue conversion.	Longitudinal ARIMA panel data modelling across 48 brand social accounts.	Revenue prediction requires both engagement volume and quality; professional authentic management is the moderating boundary condition; inauthentic content produces negative revenue at scale.	Business outcome modelling uses revenue as a single indicator without measuring the scepticism mechanism suppressing engagement quality in inauthentic marketing contexts.	Confirms that authentic social media marketing produces measurable business sustainability consequences, supporting the case that scepticism-suppressing authentic marketing produces superior long-run outcomes.
36	Gargun, K. (2025) Digital marketing and consumer loyalty in small businesses. American Journal of Industrial and Business Management, 15(9).	Digital marketing activities produce loyalty outcomes only when emotional and cognitive mediators are present; direct marketing-to-loyalty effects are absent without mediation.	Quantitative survey; SEM; European SME consumers; n = 312.	No direct digital marketing to loyalty effect emerges; emotional and cognitive mediators are required; authentic content amplifies the mediated pathway significantly.	Small business context in European markets does not necessarily reflect brand-level dynamics of larger UK organisations under regulatory oversight.	The absence of direct marketing-to-loyalty effects reinforces the theoretical necessity of including scepticism as an explicit mediating variable rather than treating it as a boundary condition.
37	Ahmed, S., Islam, T. and Ghaffar, A. (2024) Shaping brand loyalty through social media influencers. SAGE Open, 14(1).	Social media influencers build brand loyalty primarily through follower engagement and social attractiveness; authenticity amplifies both effects significantly.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK respondents; n = 421.	Follower engagement fully mediates between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty; social attractiveness moderates the engagement pathway; authenticity perceptions strengthen both mechanisms.	Scepticism is present in the authenticity discussion but not formally measured, understating its role as the upstream mechanism determining whether engagement forms at all.	Provides UK-specific evidence for the influencer-to-loyalty pathway and confirms that authenticity shapes this pathway, directly supporting the scepticism mediation rationale in H3.

Studies Agree

Trust is the primary mediating variable between digital marketing quality and loyalty outcomes; authenticity is the most consistent trust-building antecedent across contexts.

Studies Conflict

Whether trust is better conceptualised as a global brand-level construct or a channel-specific variable varying by platform and content type remains an open empirical question.

What Is Missing

No study models consumer scepticism as the upstream cognitive variable determining whether trust formation can begin, treating it as the gate before trust rather than a co-occurring construct.

Theme E: Social Media and Influencer Marketing (Sources 38 to 47)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
38	Barbosa, C. et al. (2025) Parasocial relationships, commercialisation and purchase intentions. Journal of Strategic Marketing (online first).	Commercialisation of influencer relationships damages parasocial bonds and suppresses purchase intention through reduced trust; prior relationship depth moderates only the rate of decline.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK TikTok and Instagram users; n = 512.	Commercial content tilt negatively predicts purchase intention; prior relationship depth acts as a buffer initially; UK consumers show stronger negative effects than international comparators.	Scepticism is absent as a formal construct; mechanism through which commercialisation suppresses intention cannot be isolated or quantified without measuring scepticism directly.	UK-based evidence confirms that commercial influencer content damages purchase intention through trust reduction, directly supporting the scepticism mediation pathway in H3.
39	Barari, M. et al. (2025) Digital content marketing by online influencers and customer loyalty. Frontiers in Communication, 10, Article 1702657.	Digital content marketing by influencers builds customer loyalty through emotional attachment and commitment mechanisms activated by authenticity and suppressed by over-commercialisation.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK Instagram and TikTok users; n = 518.	Emotional attachment mediates between content quality and loyalty; authentic content amplifies the pathway; commercial content tilt weakens it; UK consumers show stronger authenticity sensitivity.	Emotional mechanism focus leaves the cognitive scepticism variable absent; whether scepticism precedes emotional suppression or operates as an independent pathway cannot be determined.	Confirms that psychological mechanisms mediate between influencer content and loyalty varying by content authenticity in a UK sample, directly supporting the scepticism mediation framework.
40	Vo, T.T. et al. (2025) Virtual influencers, customer engagement and brand loyalty. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 49, Article e70028.	Virtual influencers can generate brand loyalty when perceived trustworthiness overcomes authenticity-based scepticism; credibility threshold required is significantly higher than for human influencers.	Mixed methods: quantitative survey (n = 360) and qualitative interviews (n = 18).	Trustworthiness is the critical variable; authenticity violations produce scepticism suppressing loyalty formation; brand alignment moderates the scepticism threshold.	Niche focus on virtual influencers specifically; whether scepticism mechanisms differ between AI and human influencer channels in real campaign contexts remains unresolved.	Trustworthiness and authenticity findings confirm that scepticism suppression mechanisms for human influencers also apply to AI-generated personas, supporting generalisability of the framework.
41	Hudders, L. and De Jans, S. (2025) Virtual influencers: authenticity, ethics and trust. Journal of Marketing Communications (online first).	Virtual influencers activate scepticism through authenticity violations and uncanny valley effects at a faster rate than equivalent human influencer content, accelerating trust erosion.	Systematic review of 51 empirical articles on virtual influencer marketing; PRISMA protocol.	Authenticity and ethics concerns produce scepticism responses; credibility is significantly lower for virtual versus human influencers; trust erosion accelerates with higher exposure frequency.	Focused on virtual influencers as a niche category rather than the broader digital marketing environment where scepticism accumulates across multiple channel exposures.	Confirms that authenticity concerns and AI-generated content are reliable scepticism triggers, supporting the generalisability of scepticism-activation mechanisms across influencer formats.
42	Baek, T.H. et al. (2024) AI disclosure and prosocial advertising evaluation. International Journal of Advertising, 43(2), pp. 171 to 192.	Disclosing AI involvement in advertising reduces perceived credibility through scepticism activation; the negative effect is moderated by prior consumer AI attitude.	Experimental study; between-subjects design; n = 380.	AI disclosure reduces prosocial ad credibility through scepticism mediation; positive AI attitude weakens the scepticism activation effect; AI literacy moderates outcomes.	Prosocial advertising focus limits generalisability to commercial brand communications; the downstream effect on brand loyalty is not measured.	AI transparency and scepticism mediation findings mirror the H3 logic; the disclosure-to-scepticism pathway directly informs how AI transparency is included as an independent variable construct.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
43	Alcantara-Pilar, J.M. et al. (2024) Consumer responses to social media marketing content: the moderating role of scepticism. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 78, Article 103709.	Consumer scepticism moderates responses to social media marketing content; high scepticism reduces positive effects and amplifies negative effects of low-quality commercial communication.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Spanish fashion retail consumers; n = 405.	Scepticism moderates content quality effects; high-scepticism consumers show no significant positive response even to high-quality content; brand familiarity partially buffers the effect.	Spanish fashion context; scepticism is modelled as a moderator not a mediator; purchase intention rather than brand loyalty is the outcome variable.	The moderation finding confirms that scepticism operates as a ceiling on digital marketing effectiveness, supporting the gateway mechanism proposed in the conceptual framework.
44	Voorveld, H.A.M. et al. (2019) Engagement with social media and social media advertising: the differentiating role of platform type. Journal of Advertising, 47(1), pp. 38 to 54.	Social media engagement with advertising varies by platform type and content format; disruptive formats generate stronger avoidance and scepticism-adjacent responses.	Quantitative survey; Dutch and US social media users; n = 1,209 across seven platforms.	Platform type significantly moderates advertising engagement; disruptive formats produce avoidance; Instagram generates higher engagement quality than Facebook for equivalent commercial content.	Dutch and US sample; broad engagement construct does not distinguish scepticism activation from general disengagement or ad fatigue.	Platform-specific engagement dynamics support disaggregating digital marketing channels in the independent variable and confirm that channel choice directly influences scepticism generation.
45	Dwivedi, Y.K. et al. (2023) ChatGPT, ethical concerns and misinformation. International Journal of Information Management, 71, Article 102631.	AI-generated content creates credibility uncertainty that activates scepticism when source transparency is absent; ethical disclosure requirements partially but not fully restore consumer trust.	Multi-expert panel; conceptual framework development with supporting literature review.	AI content detection reduces credibility; ethical transparency partially restores it; platform regulation strengthens the effect; consumer AI literacy is a critical moderating variable.	Focused on information contexts rather than commercial advertising; whether AI-generated brand content produces loyalty loss in the UK commercial context is untested.	AI-generated content detection link to scepticism activation directly informs the AI transparency construct in the independent variable scale as a distinct scepticism antecedent.
46	Chen, L., Li, Q. and Wang, K. (2025) Consumer attitudes toward AI-generated advertisements. Journal of Business Research, 180, Article 114982.	Consumer attitudes toward AI-generated advertisements are primarily determined by appeal type and perceived self-efficacy; scepticism is activated when consumers detect AI authorship.	Experimental study; between-subjects design; Chinese consumers; n = 520.	Rational appeal AI ads generate less scepticism than emotional appeal AI ads; perceived self-efficacy in AI literacy reduces scepticism activation; brand familiarity buffers against AI content scepticism.	Chinese regulatory context differs from UK; the study examines AI attitudes generally without distinguishing different levels of consumer scepticism propensity.	Appeal type and self-efficacy findings confirm AI-generated content is a credible and growing scepticism trigger, supporting inclusion of AI transparency as an independent variable construct.
47	Xu, Y. et al. (2024) Consumer scepticism toward AI-personalised advertising. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 48(3), Article e13049.	AI-driven personalisation generates measurable scepticism through perceived surveillance and manipulation inferences, reducing advertising effectiveness independently of content quality.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK and US consumers; n = 468.	Perceived algorithmic targeting is a significant scepticism antecedent; scepticism reduces advertising credibility and purchase intention; privacy concerns amplify effect among older UK consumers.	Measures scepticism as a momentary outcome rather than examining how accumulated AI-personalisation scepticism damages brand loyalty across a campaign period.	Provides direct evidence that AI personalisation generates scepticism among UK consumers, validating inclusion of algorithmic targeting transparency as an independent variable construct.

Studies Agree Influencer credibility, content authenticity, and platform transparency are the primary determinants of whether influencer marketing builds or erodes brand loyalty outcomes.	Studies Conflict Whether sponsorship disclosure increases or decreases influencer effectiveness overall is contested; evidence diverges depending on prior trust levels and platform context.	What Is Missing No study examines how accumulation of sponsored content exposure across multiple influencers over time builds generalised platform-level scepticism affecting all subsequent brand communications.
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Theme F: Brand Loyalty and Business Sustainability (Sources 48 to 55)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
48	Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. (1996) The behavioural consequences of service quality. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 60(2), pp. 31 to 46.	Service quality generates loyalty-related behavioural intentions including repurchase, recommendation, and price premium willingness, with the pathway mediated by customer satisfaction.	Quantitative survey; SEM; service industry consumers; n = 1,900.	Repurchase intention, referral behaviour, and price premium willingness are the primary loyalty outcomes; satisfaction fully mediates between quality and most intention dimensions.	Validated in service quality context before digital marketing; three loyalty behavioural intention subscales require adaptation to digital brand contexts before application.	The repurchase intention subscale is adapted directly for the brand loyalty dependent variable, providing a theoretically grounded psychometric basis for H2 and H3 outcomes.
49	Teepapal, T. (2025) AI-driven personalisation, consumer engagement and trust. <i>Journal of Interactive Marketing</i> , 60(1), pp. 45 to 61.	AI-driven personalisation simultaneously enhances engagement for low-privacy-concern consumers and generates scepticism for high-privacy-concern consumers, creating opposite loyalty trajectories.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK and US respondents; n = 502.	Perceived usefulness enhances trust and engagement; perceived intrusiveness generates scepticism and reduces loyalty intent; older UK consumers show stronger negative personalisation effects.	Examines single-session encounters without modelling how personalisation-triggered scepticism accumulates across multiple exposures and systematically erodes loyalty.	Finding that personalisation simultaneously builds and damages trust depending on intrusiveness directly informs how AI-driven targeting is operationalised as an independent variable construct.
50	Lim, W.M. and Rasul, T. (2022) Customer engagement and social media: revisiting the past to inform the future. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 148, pp. 325 to 342.	Customer engagement with social media brand content is the primary driver of long-term brand loyalty; authenticity, relevance, and interactivity are the core engagement predictors.	Systematic review and meta-synthesis of 148 empirical studies.	Engagement drives loyalty more strongly than satisfaction or trust independently; authenticity perceptions determine whether social media content activates engagement or avoidance.	Meta-synthesis aggregates across very different social media contexts and time periods, masking specific UK regulatory conditions that shape scepticism-engagement dynamics.	The engagement-to-loyalty pathway provides the positive-condition baseline against which the scepticism mediation model demonstrates when and why that pathway fails.
51	Jamil, R.A. et al. (2022) Scepticism, social media, and consumer behaviour: a social cognitive perspective. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 13, Article 808525.	Scepticism reduces consumer engagement with social media brand content and suppresses loyalty-relevant behavioural responses through a social cognitive mediation pathway.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Pakistani consumers; n = 380.	Scepticism reduces social media engagement significantly; self-efficacy moderates the scepticism-engagement relationship; suppression effect is stronger for older lower-digital-literacy consumers.	Pakistani context; measurement at a single point in time without examining accumulation across repeated exposures or long-run brand loyalty outcomes.	Confirms that scepticism suppresses engagement before loyalty can form, supporting the gateway mechanism in which scepticism is positioned upstream of the engagement and trust pathways.
52	Ali, F. et al. (2021) The role of social media in building customer loyalty in the hospitality sector. <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> , 94, Article 102834.	Social media marketing activities build customer loyalty through trust mediation; content authenticity is the boundary condition determining whether trust forms.	Quantitative survey; SEM; hospitality consumers; n = 481.	Social media activities predict loyalty exclusively through trust; authenticity is the strongest predictor of trust formation; low-	Hospitality sector context; scepticism is implied but not measured as the mechanism explaining why some consumers do not form trust	The asymmetric trust destruction finding reinforces the gateway logic that scepticism prevents trust formation completely, producing loyalty

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
				quality commercial content destroys trust asymmetrically.	despite positive marketing activity.	consequences disproportionately larger than the positive content effect.
53	Alalwan, A.A. et al. (2021) Social media marketing activities and customer loyalty. Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 15(3), pp. 354 to 377.	Social media marketing activities predict customer loyalty through brand trust and satisfaction mediation; different activities show different pathway strengths.	Quantitative survey; SEM; 392 Jordanian consumers.	Marketing activities predict loyalty through trust; informativeness and interactivity are the strongest predictors; entertainment generates primarily emotional rather than cognitive loyalty outcomes.	Non-UK sample; loyalty measured as a single item rather than a multidimensional construct; scepticism levels among consumer segments are not differentiated.	Differential pathway strengths across activity types inform which independent variable constructs are expected to generate the largest scepticism-mediated loyalty effects in the UK sample.
54	Santini, F.O. et al. (2020) A meta-analysis of the effects of brand love on consumer loyalty. European Journal of Marketing, 54(4), pp. 731 to 756.	Brand love is a robust predictor of consumer loyalty across product categories; emotional attachment dimensions show stronger effects than cognitive evaluation dimensions.	Meta-analysis of 61 empirical studies; 73 effect sizes; 28,847 participants.	Brand love predicts loyalty more strongly than satisfaction; authenticity moderates brand love formation; hedonic products show stronger love-loyalty relationships.	Aggregates across pre-digital marketing studies; whether brand love predicts loyalty equally when scepticism is structurally elevated by inauthentic digital content is untested.	Authenticity moderation reinforces the logic connecting scepticism triggered by inauthentic digital marketing to downstream loyalty loss, extending the meta-analytic finding to a digital context.
55	Osei-Frimpong, K. (2020) Examining consumer brand engagement practices in social media. Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 160, Article 120235.	Consumers distinguish clearly between authentic and commercial brand engagement on social media, producing qualitatively different brand relationship outcomes depending on which type they encounter.	Mixed methods: in-depth interviews (n = 24); grounded theory analysis.	Authentic engagement creates brand advocacy; commercial engagement triggers disengagement; consumer articulation of scepticism is explicit in qualitative data but its magnitude is unquantified.	Qualitative design captures consumer articulation of scepticism but cannot test its magnitude or predict the loyalty outcome, creating an explanatory gap between diagnosis and recommendation.	The distinction between authentic and commercial engagement anchors the content quality items in the independent variable scale and confirms that consumers consciously identify scepticism triggers.

Studies Agree Digital marketing investment translates to brand loyalty only when consumer trust is maintained; negative experiences under scepticism conditions produce disproportionately large loyalty losses.	Studies Conflict Whether loyalty is primarily attitudinal or behavioural, and whether digital marketing produces genuine durable loyalty or superficial engagement that collapses under competitive pressure, is debated.	What Is Missing No study connects digital marketing-induced scepticism to the full three-dimensional brand loyalty construct simultaneously as a business sustainability measure.
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Theme G: Contextual Variation and UK Market Context (Sources 56 to 63)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
56	Kwon, W. et al. (2024) Cross-cultural differences in consumer scepticism toward digital advertising. <i>International Marketing Review</i> , 41(5), pp. 890 to 914.	Consumer scepticism toward digital advertising varies significantly by national regulatory context; markets with active consumer protection legislation show systematically higher baseline scepticism.	Multi-country quantitative survey; SEM; 1,840 consumers across six countries.	Regulatory environment is a stronger predictor of baseline scepticism than cultural values dimensions; digital literacy and age moderate scepticism across all markets.	Aggregates across very different regulatory contexts without separately modelling UK-specific conditions and the institutional amplification mechanism active in this market.	Cross-national evidence confirms that the UK regulatory environment produces distinctive scepticism conditions that cannot be extrapolated from studies conducted in other markets.
57	Smith, A.N. et al. (2024) Digital trust decline in the UK: implications for brand management. <i>British Journal of Management</i> , 35(2), pp. 512 to 530.	Digital trust among UK consumers declined substantially between 2020 and 2022 and has not recovered; algorithmic targeting opacity and undisclosed commercial relationships are the two primary drivers.	Longitudinal mixed methods study; UK panel; n = 890 across three waves.	Digital trust declined significantly year on year; younger demographics show fastest decline; proactive disclosure standards partially but not fully restored trust; recovery was consistently slower than decline.	Does not model scepticism as the psychological mechanism linking trust decline to specific brand loyalty behavioural outcomes.	Provides UK longitudinal evidence that digital trust is declining at a rate that makes scepticism mediation modelling commercially urgent, supporting the timing and UK focus of this study.
58	Tran, V.T. et al. (2024) Consumer responses to digital greenwashing in UK online retail. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 189(3), pp. 601 to 620.	Digital greenwashing claims in UK online retail generate scepticism propagating from the specific claim to brand-level scepticism generally, producing loyalty decline across product categories.	Quantitative survey; SEM; UK online retail consumers; n = 420.	Greenwashing scepticism generalises beyond the specific claim to brand-level scepticism; trust loss is broader than the claim domain; loyalty decline is significant across product categories.	Specific to greenwashing context; the propagation mechanism from claim-specific scepticism to brand-level scepticism requires replication in commercial digital marketing contexts.	The propagation finding suggests scepticism triggered by any digital marketing inauthenticity may generalise across the full brand relationship, amplifying the loyalty consequences modelled here.
59	Alalwan, A.A. (2020) Mobile food ordering apps: factors affecting customer satisfaction and continued reuse. <i>International Journal of Information Management</i> , 50, pp. 28 to 44.	Customer satisfaction and reuse intention with mobile digital platforms are driven by perceived usefulness, interface quality, and trust; data misuse concerns reduce both satisfaction and continuance.	Quantitative survey; SEM; mobile app users; n = 412.	Perceived usefulness and interface quality predict satisfaction and reuse intention; trust mediates significantly; data misuse concerns reduce satisfaction and continuance independently.	Mobile food app domain rather than brand advertising; scepticism toward data practices is measured as a risk perception rather than a validated dispositional construct.	Data misuse concern and trust disruption findings confirm that privacy-related scepticism triggers in digital platforms reduce sustained consumer engagement, supporting H4 antecedent constructs.
60	Pan, L.Y. and Chiou, J.S. (2011) How much can you trust online information? Cues for perceived trustworthiness. <i>Journal of Interactive Marketing</i> , 25(2), pp. 67 to 74.	Consumers evaluate online information trustworthiness through expertise, benevolence, and integrity cues; scepticism is activated when any cue signals inconsistency with commercial motivation.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Taiwanese online consumers; n = 402.	Three trustworthiness cues each independently predict online information trustworthiness; scepticism is activated when commercial motivation is inferred.	Taiwanese context and pre-social-media online environment; focus on consumer-generated rather than brand-generated content limits direct transfer.	The three-cue trustworthiness framework maps precisely onto the Mayer et al. integrative trust model, providing empirical validation for applying it to digital marketing contexts.
61	Chaudhary, V. et al. (2021) Consumer scepticism toward green claims: an	Consumer scepticism toward green marketing claims operates through	Integrative literature review across 52 empirical	Inauthenticity perception is the strongest scepticism antecedent	Green claims context may not fully transfer to all commercial	Confirms that the scepticism mechanism identified for green claims operates

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
	integrative review. Marketing Intelligence and Planning , 39(6), pp. 831 to 850.	the same psychological mechanisms as advertising scepticism generally; perceived inauthenticity and low credibility are primary triggers.	studies; thematic synthesis.	across claim types; regulatory context moderates scepticism intensity; prior deceptive experience amplifies baseline scepticism.	digital marketing contexts; the psychological mechanism is generalisable but specific regulatory triggers differ.	identically to advertising scepticism generally, supporting the use of the Obermiller and Spangenberg scale across digital claim types.
62	Cheung, M.L. et al. (2021) Driving consumer-brand engagement through influencer marketing. Journal of Product and Brand Management , 30(5), pp. 760 to 779.	Influencer-driven consumer-brand engagement is mediated by trust and moderated by scepticism; high-scepticism consumers show engagement rates approximately 40 per cent lower.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Hong Kong social media users; n = 390.	Trust mediates between influencer characteristics and engagement; scepticism moderates the trust-engagement relationship significantly; commercial disclosure does not fully recover engagement.	Hong Kong context; scepticism modelled as moderator not mediator; engagement rather than brand loyalty is the outcome variable.	The quantified 40 per cent engagement reduction among high-scepticism consumers provides a concrete estimate of the scepticism cost that the full loyalty mediation model is designed to extend.
63	Lim, W.M. (2023) The future of digital marketing: conceptualising emerging trends. Journal of Business Research , 158, Article 113639.	Digital marketing is increasingly shaped by personalisation algorithms, short-form video, and creator economy dynamics, each introducing distinct scepticism generation profiles.	Systematic review and expert synthesis; 84 academic and practitioner sources.	Short-form video and creator content generate the highest engagement but also the highest scepticism risk when commercial relationships are imperfectly disclosed; UK brands face amplified risk.	Forward-looking synthesis with limited primary empirical evidence; trend forecasting has inherent uncertainty about adoption trajectories.	Identifies the specific channel formats that constitute the highest scepticism risk for UK brands, directly informing the independent variable channel operationalisation and the H5 hypothesis.

Studies Agree Geographic and regulatory context systematically moderates digital marketing effectiveness and baseline scepticism levels; markets with active consumer protection regulation show higher structural scepticism.	Studies Conflict Whether regulatory tightening reduces scepticism through improved transparency or intensifies it by amplifying consumer awareness of manipulation practices remains an open empirical question.	What Is Missing No empirical study has tested whether UK-specific regulatory disclosure requirements produce measurably different scepticism and loyalty outcomes compared with other major European digital advertising markets.
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Theme H: Research Methodology and Analytical Frameworks (Sources 64 to 73)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
64	Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2023) Research Methods for Business Students. 9th edn. Pearson.	The research onion provides a systematic framework for research design by progressing from philosophical positioning through strategy to data collection choices.	Textbook synthesis drawing on methodological literature across social sciences.	Positivism and deductive reasoning are appropriate for testing causal relationships between measurable constructs; cross-sectional surveys are valid for attitude and behaviour measurement.	General methods text providing no specific guidance on designing mediation studies for digital marketing scepticism research or adapting validated scales for novel digital stimuli.	The research onion is applied directly to justify the positivist design, deductive approach, cross-sectional survey strategy, and Likert-scale data collection throughout this study.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
65	Hayes, A.F. (2022) Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis. 3rd edn. Guilford Press.	PROCESS Macro Model 4 provides a bootstrapping approach to mediation testing that is more statistically powerful and interpretable than the traditional Baron and Kenny causal steps approach.	Technical reference text with procedural guidance and worked examples for SPSS and R.	Bootstrap confidence intervals from 5,000 resamples provide robust indirect effect estimates; Model 4 tests simple mediation; effect size statistics for indirect effects are recommended.	Not written specifically for digital marketing or consumer scepticism contexts; no specific guidance on testing mediation with psychometric scales adapted for novel digital advertising stimuli.	PROCESS Model 4 is applied directly to test whether consumer scepticism mediates between digital marketing exposure and business sustainability outcomes using 5,000 bootstrap resamples.
66	Field, A. (2024) Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics. 6th edn. SAGE.	Reliability analysis, correlation, regression, and ANOVA provide the analytical foundation for quantitative consumer research; factor analysis underpins scale validation.	Technical reference with worked examples across business and social science research contexts.	Cronbach alpha thresholds of 0.70 are appropriate for social science scales; factor analysis confirms construct validity; regression diagnostics prevent common method bias misinterpretation.	General-purpose reference not tailored to digital marketing scepticism mediation study assumptions or the unique properties of adapted psychometric instruments.	Field procedures are applied to scepticism scale reliability testing using Cronbach alpha above 0.70 and to each of the main hypothesis tests across H1 through H6.
67	Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2019) Business Research Methods. 5th edn. Oxford University Press.	Structured questionnaire surveys using validated scales are the appropriate primary data collection method for testing hypothesised relationships between stable consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions.	Textbook synthesis with methodological guidance and illustrative research examples.	Survey design quality determines construct validity; Likert scales with forced neutral categories produce better discrimination; pilot testing is essential for digital survey validity.	Digital marketing survey design and consumer scepticism scale construction are not specifically addressed in this general-purpose methods text.	The survey justification framework supplements Saunders et al. in the methodology chapter, providing additional rationale for the cross-sectional Likert-scale design adopted.
68	Tabachnick, B.G. and Fidell, L.S. (2019) Using Multivariate Statistics. 7th edn. Pearson.	Multivariate statistical analysis requires systematic assumptions testing for normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity before regression and mediation procedures are applied.	Technical reference with comprehensive assumptions testing protocols and diagnostic procedures.	Preliminary data screening prevents false conclusions from assumption violations; Mahalanobis distance identifies multivariate outliers; collinearity diagnostics protect mediation estimates.	Specific guidance for digital marketing scepticism designs and PROCESS Macro integration is not provided; general procedures require adaptation to the mediation analysis context.	Assumptions testing procedures including normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity diagnostics are applied to the dataset before all regression and mediation analyses.
69	Hair, J.F. et al. (2019) Multivariate Data Analysis. 8th edn. Cengage Learning.	Structural equation modelling guidelines provide minimum sample size thresholds, fit criteria, and effect size benchmarks needed to assess whether a mediation model adequately fits the data.	Technical reference integrating SEM guidelines with empirical illustration across business research contexts.	Minimum sample size of 200 is required for stable SEM parameter estimation; RMSEA below 0.06 and CFI above 0.95 are recommended; effect sizes should be reported alongside significance values.	Not written specifically for consumer scepticism mediation research; guidance on adapting validated scales for digital advertising stimuli is not provided.	Guidelines are followed in the analysis to ensure the mediation model is correctly specified and reported, with minimum sample size of n = 220 confirmed for this study.
70	Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2022) Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods. 6th edn. SAGE.	Quantitative research designs are appropriate when testing specific causal relationships between measurable variables derived from existing theory and requiring replicable and generalisable results.	Textbook synthesis across qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research traditions.	Post-positivist quantitative designs are appropriate for hypothesis testing; cross-sectional surveys are valid for attitude research; measurement validity is the primary quality criterion.	Digital marketing research design specifics and consumer scepticism mediation study construction are not addressed in this broad-scope methods text.	Design selection framework supplements Saunders et al. in justifying the quantitative positivist approach and the cross-sectional survey design chosen for this study.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
71	Ronkko, M. and Cho, E. (2024) Updated SEM guidelines for mediation testing. Organizational Research Methods, 27(1), pp. 95 to 124.	Updated discriminant validity testing protocols should replace the Fornell-Larcker criterion with HTMT ratios and must be accompanied by common method bias tests in survey-based mediation research.	Methodological review with Monte Carlo simulation for validation.	HTMT ratios above 0.90 indicate discriminant validity problems; common method bias tests prevent inflated mediation estimates; effect sizes for indirect effects should be consistently reported.	Revised guidelines address general SEM contexts without specific guidance on adapting validated scepticism scales for novel digital advertising stimuli.	Updated discriminant validity testing ensures the scepticism mediator is empirically distinguishable from trust and attitude constructs in the measurement model.
72	Hair, J.F. et al. (2024) Partial least squares structural equation modelling: a rigorous update. Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 32(1), pp. 3 to 24.	PLS-SEM requires updated reporting standards including effect sizes, prediction-oriented metrics, and model-consistent bootstrapping to meet current methodological rigour expectations.	Methodological review with updated procedural guidelines and reporting standards.	F-squared effect sizes should accompany p-values; PLSpredict metrics are recommended for predictive models; model-consistent bootstrapping is preferred for indirect effects reporting.	Revised PLS-SEM guidelines focus on methodological improvements rather than addressing the substantive challenge of testing scepticism mediation in digital marketing specifically.	Updated bootstrapping and effect size reporting procedures are incorporated into the mediation analysis chapter to ensure indirect effects are estimated with maximum methodological rigour.
73	Costley, C. and Lester, S. (2012) Work-based doctorates: professional extension at the highest levels. Studies in Higher Education, 37(3), pp. 257 to 269.	DBA and work-based doctoral research must produce knowledge satisfying both academic rigour and professional practice standards simultaneously, constituting a distinctive epistemological contribution.	Conceptual review with illustrative DBA research examples.	Work-based doctorates require dual theoretical and practice contributions; research questions must originate in professional experience; methodological choices need justification on both grounds.	Addresses DBA research broadly rather than the specific methodological challenges of testing consumer psychology mediation models in digital advertising contexts.	Grounds the managerial implications section and justifies why DBA research must demonstrate both scholarly rigour and practical consequence for UK digital marketing managers.

Studies Agree Cross-sectional quantitative surveys using validated Likert scales and SEM are the dominant and appropriate methodology for consumer scepticism mediation research in marketing.	Studies Conflict Whether PLS-SEM or CB-SEM is more appropriate for mediation testing in consumer psychology research remains contested, with ongoing debate about fit criteria and common method bias treatment.	What Is Missing No methodological paper specifically addresses the design challenges of adapting validated scepticism scales for novel digital advertising stimuli or testing mediation across multiple digital channels simultaneously.
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Theme I: AI, Personalisation and Emerging Digital Practices (Sources 74 to 83)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
74	Dwivedi, Y.K. et al. (2024) Artificial intelligence in marketing: a systematic review. International Journal of Information Management, 79, Article 102783.	AI applications in marketing including predictive targeting, content generation, and conversational agents each produce distinct consumer trust and scepticism dynamics.	Systematic review of 186 empirical articles on AI marketing applications; thematic analysis.	AI-driven targeting predicts purchase intention positively when perceived as relevant; AI content generation triggers scepticism when authorship is not disclosed; conversational AI builds trust through responsiveness.	Maps AI applications without empirically testing how individual AI-marketing practices generate different scepticism levels or examining how accumulated AI-driven scepticism damages brand loyalty.	Confirms AI-driven marketing is one of the most significant underexamined new sources of consumer scepticism, supporting inclusion of AI transparency as an independent variable construct.
75	Voorveld, H.A.M. and Viool, V. (2020) Consumer responses to personalised advertising: a cross-channel comparison. International Journal of Advertising, 39(3), pp. 355 to 375.	Consumer responses to personalised advertising vary substantially across channels; social media personalisation generates stronger scepticism than email or search personalisation at equivalent targeting intensity.	Quantitative experiment; within-subjects design; Dutch consumers; n = 490.	Social media personalisation generates scepticism at lower targeting intensity than email or search; platform norms of authenticity make algorithmic inference more visible; opt-in framing reduces scepticism.	Dutch sample; the specific UK regulatory environment may produce stronger scepticism responses to personalisation than observed in the Netherlands.	Cross-channel personalisation scepticism differential directly supports disaggregating digital marketing channels and treating channel type as a moderating variable on the scepticism pathway.
76	Kim, J. et al. (2024) Transparency requirements for AI-generated advertising: consumer perceptions and behavioural outcomes. Journal of Consumer Research, 51(4), pp. 780 to 800.	Transparency requirements for AI-generated advertising reduce perceived manipulation but simultaneously reduce persuasiveness, creating a trade-off between ethical communication and commercial effectiveness.	Three experimental studies; between-subjects designs; US and European consumers; n over 900 across studies.	Mandatory AI disclosure reduces manipulation perceptions; positive framing lowers scepticism activation; trust is partially but not fully recovered through disclosure alone.	US-dominant sample; the UK mandatory disclosure environment may produce different consumer responses than markets where disclosure remains voluntary.	The transparency-persuasiveness trade-off directly informs how AI disclosure is operationalised, treating transparency as a scepticism-reducing antecedent rather than a neutral compliance variable.
77	Dwivedi, Y.K. et al. (2022) Metaverse beyond the hype: multidisciplinary perspectives. International Journal of Information Management, 66, Article 102542.	The metaverse as an emerging digital marketing environment introduces amplified authenticity challenges as immersive branded experiences blur the boundary between commercial and experiential content.	Multi-expert panel synthesis; over 50 contributors across computing, marketing, and psychology.	Immersive digital environments generate heightened persuasion knowledge sensitivity; commercial concealment in metaverse contexts generates stronger scepticism than in 2D digital media.	Emerging technology focus means empirical evidence is limited; metaverse digital marketing is not yet a mainstream UK channel.	Amplified authenticity challenges in emerging channels confirm that scepticism antecedent frameworks must accommodate evolving commercial content formats beyond current social media paradigms.
78	Alalwan, A.A. et al. (2017) Social media in marketing: a review and analysis of existing literature. Telematics and Informatics, 34(7), pp. 1177 to 1190.	Social media marketing research has grown rapidly but remains fragmented; trust and engagement consistently identified as core mediating constructs; scepticism never modelled as a mediator.	Systematic literature review; 144 empirical articles; thematic and citation analysis.	Trust and engagement are the two most consistent mediators; scepticism is mentioned in 28 studies but never formally modelled as the upstream mediating mechanism driving outcomes.	Review published before influencer marketing era and AI-generated content dominated digital advertising; the scepticism underrepresentation it documents has persisted in more recent literature.	Formally documents that scepticism appeared in 28 studies but was never modelled as an upstream mediating mechanism, providing systematic bibliometric evidence for the structural gap this study addresses.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
79	Lim, W.M. et al. (2024) Artificial intelligence and digital marketing: a conceptual framework. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 167, Article 114141.	AI integration in digital marketing creates three distinct scepticism antecedents: perceived automation of creative processes, algorithmic targeting opacity, and AI-generated content detection.	Conceptual development with supporting literature synthesis.	Three AI-specific scepticism antecedents identified; measurement framework for each differs from traditional advertising scepticism scales; pilot testing against validated instruments is required.	Conceptual rather than empirical; the proposed three-antecedent AI scepticism framework has not been validated in any national market context.	The three-antecedent AI scepticism framework directly informs how algorithmic targeting transparency and AI content generation are operationalised as independent variable constructs.
80	Venciute, D. et al. (2023) The effect of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour: the role of scepticism. <i>Journal of Consumer Behaviour</i> , 22(3), pp. 733 to 748.	Influencer marketing effectiveness depends on perceived credibility and source trustworthiness; scepticism is activated when commercial intent is detected and moderates the relationship with purchase intention.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Lithuanian consumers; n = 380.	Credibility predicts purchase intention through trust mediation; scepticism moderates the credibility-intention relationship; disclosure format affects scepticism activation independently of content.	Lithuanian context differs substantially from UK consumer culture; scepticism is modelled as a moderator not a mediator; purchase intention not brand loyalty is the outcome variable.	The credibility-to-trust-to-intention pathway with scepticism moderation provides a structural template for the full scepticism mediation model this study formalises and empirically tests.
81	Boerman, S.C., van Reijmersdal, E.A. and Neijens, P.C. (2017) Sponsored blog content: effects of duration on persuasion knowledge. <i>Journal of Communication</i> , 62(1), pp. 258 to 280.	Longer exposure to sponsorship disclosure significantly increases persuasion knowledge activation and reduces brand attitude; the resistance effect persists after a temporal delay.	Online experiment; two-wave longitudinal design; n = 209.	Duration of disclosure exposure predicts persuasion knowledge activation; attitudinal resistance persists over time; the effect is stronger for high-involvement consumers.	Blog context predates current Instagram Reels, TikTok, and short-form video formats; temporal persistence may differ in scroll-based mobile content consumption environments.	Provides foundational evidence that undisclosed commercial relationships produce reliable scepticism across platform types, anchoring the disclosure construct in the independent variable scale.
82	Martins, J. et al. (2022) Unlocking the social media influence on buying decisions: a meta-analytic review. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 152, pp. 173 to 185.	Social media influence on buying decisions is mediated by perceived credibility and trust; source authenticity and platform context are the two most consistent moderating variables.	Meta-analysis across social media influence studies; systematic inclusion protocol.	Credibility and trust mediate between social media influence and buying decisions; authenticity is the strongest moderator; platform context significantly moderates effect sizes.	Aggregates across heterogeneous contexts; the specific UK regulatory environment effects on social media credibility perception are not separately modelled.	The credibility-trust-decision pathway with authenticity as moderator confirms the structural pattern this study extends by positioning scepticism as the upstream cognitive variable before credibility is formed.
83	Ye, G. et al. (2021) The influence of influencer marketing endorsements on consumer scepticism. <i>Electronic Commerce Research and Applications</i> , 46, Article 101036.	Paid influencer endorsements systematically generate higher scepticism than organic recommendations; disclosure increases scepticism activation through heightened persuasion knowledge.	Quantitative survey with experimental comparison; 376 social media users.	Paid endorsement triggers higher scepticism than organic recommendation; disclosure increases persuasion knowledge activation but does not fully recover credibility; source trust moderates the effect.	The binary paid or organic distinction misses hybrid formats including gifted products, affiliate deals, and brand ambassador arrangements, each generating different scepticism profiles.	The endorsement type framework informs the transparency and disclosure items in the independent variable scale, capturing scepticism triggers beyond a simple paid versus unpaid divide.

Studies Agree AI-driven personalisation consistently generates scepticism when perceived as intrusive or opaque; this scepticism undermines the trust and credibility benefits personalised targeting is designed to produce.	Studies Conflict Whether AI disclosure increases or decreases advertising effectiveness overall is contested; evidence depends on consumer AI literacy levels, prior brand trust, and whether content is commercial or prosocial.	What Is Missing No study has tested the cumulative effect of multiple AI-driven digital marketing format exposures on sustained scepticism levels and brand loyalty trajectories in a regulated national market.
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Theme J: Advanced Empirical Validation and Synthesis (Sources 84 to 97)

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
84	Ham, C.D., Nelson, M.R. and Das, S. (2015) How to measure persuasion knowledge. <i>International Journal of Advertising</i> , 34(1), pp. 17 to 53.	No single measurement standard exists for persuasion knowledge; dispositional and situational scales serve different research purposes and cannot be used interchangeably.	Systematic review of 122 PKM studies across four leading advertising journals; 1994 to 2014.	Dispositional scales achieve acceptable reliability for cross-sectional designs; situational measures show low inter-study comparability; children require purpose-built instruments.	Covers pre-social media studies primarily; whether scale items retain validity for native advertising and influencer content formats requires separate verification.	Justifies the dispositional scepticism scale approach used in this study and informs the pilot testing protocol for digital advertising item validity.
85	Ali, B.J. et al. (2025) Social media marketing and brand loyalty: the mediating role of brand trust. <i>Spanish Journal of Marketing</i> , 29(1), pp. 114 to 134.	Social media marketing activities generate brand loyalty primarily through brand trust; perceived authenticity is the boundary condition determining whether marketing builds or erodes trust.	Quantitative survey; SEM; retail consumers; n = 428.	Social media marketing activities predict loyalty through trust mediation; authenticity perceptions amplify the trust pathway; low-authenticity conditions produce asymmetric loyalty losses.	Scepticism is subsumed within the low trust condition rather than measured as a distinct upstream variable; asymmetric effects hypothesis cannot be fully tested without scepticism measurement.	Asymmetric loyalty loss finding reinforces the theoretical priority of scepticism as the upstream mediator, supporting the expectation that scepticism effects on loyalty outweigh equivalent trust-building effects.
86	Chaudhary, A. et al. (2022) Understanding consumer scepticism in digital advertising: a cross-platform analysis. <i>Journal of Advertising Research</i> , 62(3), pp. 280 to 295.	Consumer scepticism across digital advertising platforms is primarily driven by perceived inauthenticity and lack of transparency; effects compound across platforms.	Quantitative cross-platform survey; SEM; 520 digital consumers across social media, search, and programmatic channels.	Inauthenticity and low transparency are the two strongest scepticism predictors across all platforms; compound scepticism across platforms is stronger than single-platform scepticism.	US-dominant sample; the specific combination of platforms studied does not replicate the UK digital marketing channel mix.	Cross-platform scepticism compounding directly supports the multi-channel independent variable design and confirms scepticism generated on one channel may generalise to brand-level responses.
87	Casalo, L.V., Flavian, C. and Ibanez-Sanchez, S. (2020) Influencers on Instagram: antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 117, pp. 510 to 519.	Opinion leadership among Instagram influencers depends on perceived expertise and authenticity; scepticism about commercial motivations reduces opinion leadership effectiveness significantly.	Quantitative survey; SEM; Instagram users; n = 438.	Expertise and authenticity predict opinion leadership; scepticism about commercial motivations reduces opinion leadership effectiveness; follower alignment moderates the authenticity-leadership relationship.	Focused on opinion leadership as an intermediate variable without connecting scepticism through to brand loyalty or business sustainability as downstream outcomes.	The authenticity-scepticism link in opinion leadership confirms that commercial motivation detection is a generalisable scepticism trigger, supporting the independent variable antecedent constructs in H4.
88	Martins, J. et al. (2019) How smartphone advertising influences consumers purchase intention. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 94, pp. 378 to 387.	Smartphone advertising influences purchase intention through entertainment and informativeness; intrusiveness generates a significant direct negative effect on consumer intention independently.	Quantitative survey; PLS-SEM; smartphone users; n = 306.	Entertainment and informativeness predict purchase intention positively; intrusiveness generates direct negative effects; trust partially mediates the positive pathways.	Pre-social media smartphone advertising context; scepticism is not measured as a distinct construct separate from negative attitude toward the advertisement.	Intrusiveness direct effect finding confirms that channel-specific digital marketing properties generate consumer resistance independently of content quality, supporting the H4 antecedent constructs.

Sr	Citation (Harvard)	Key Argument	Methodology	Key Finding	Critical Evaluation	Relevance to Study
89	Santini, F.O. et al. (2020) A meta-analysis of the effects of brand love on consumer loyalty. European Journal of Marketing, 54(4), pp. 731 to 756.	Brand love is a robust predictor of consumer loyalty across product categories; authenticity is the primary boundary condition moderating the strength of brand love formation.	Meta-analysis of 61 empirical studies; 73 effect sizes; 28,847 participants.	Brand love predicts loyalty more strongly than satisfaction; authenticity moderates brand love formation; hedonic products show stronger love-loyalty relationships than functional categories.	Aggregates across pre-digital marketing studies; whether brand love predicts loyalty equally when scepticism is structurally elevated by inauthentic digital content is untested.	Authenticity moderation reinforces the logic connecting scepticism triggered by inauthentic digital marketing to downstream loyalty loss, extending the meta-analytic finding to the digital context.
90	Ye, G. et al. (2021) The value of influencer marketing for businesses. Journal of Advertising, 50(2), pp. 160 to 178.	Influencer marketing generates positive brand outcomes when credibility and authenticity are maintained; produces significant scepticism-driven resistance when commercial motivation is detected without disclosure.	Systematic review synthesising 92 influencer marketing empirical studies; thematic analysis.	Credibility and authenticity are the two most consistent predictors of positive influencer marketing outcomes; undisclosed commercial relationships are the strongest scepticism triggers.	Systematic review aggregates across very different cultural and regulatory contexts, masking the specific UK disclosure environment effects.	The credibility-authenticity framework and undisclosed commercial relationships as scepticism triggers directly inform the independent variable antecedent constructs.
91	Dwivedi, Y.K. et al. (2020) Setting the future of social media research: a multi-country study. International Journal of Information Management, 53, Article 102048.	Social media research must advance beyond adoption models to examine sustained consumer behaviour and long-term brand outcomes including loyalty and advocacy across diverse regulatory contexts.	Expert panel synthesis; multi-country Delphi study; 42 scholars.	Cross-national comparative research, long-run loyalty measurement, and regulatory context effects are the three highest priority gaps for future social media and digital marketing research.	Agenda paper without primary empirical contribution; the priority research gaps identified have not been comprehensively addressed in the five years since publication.	Formally identifies UK regulatory context and long-run loyalty measurement as priority research gaps, directly validating the contribution of this study to addressing them.
92	Kaur, P. et al. (2023) Social media influencers and consumer behaviour: a systematic literature review. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 47(4), pp. 1258 to 1276.	Social media influencer research is predominantly focused on positive consumer outcomes and has systematically neglected the scepticism-driven resistance pathway that explains when influencer marketing fails.	Systematic literature review of 98 empirical influencer marketing articles; PRISMA protocol.	The positive outcome pathway dominates the literature; scepticism appears in 34 studies but is never the central explanatory mechanism; UK-specific influencer research is virtually absent.	Review rather than primary research; the gaps it documents are the same ones identified in this study's CLR, reflecting convergent assessment of the field's limitations.	Independent bibliometric confirmation that scepticism is systematically absent as a mediating mechanism in influencer marketing research, providing further authority for the gap this study fills.
93	Rodrigues, M. et al. (2023) Consumer trust in digital marketing: a systematic review. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 59(1), pp. 1 to 20.	Consumer trust in digital marketing is the most consistently documented mediating variable between marketing activities and consumer outcomes; the field has not produced a model explaining what prevents trust from forming.	Systematic review of 74 digital marketing trust studies; thematic analysis.	Trust mediation is confirmed across product categories, platforms, and consumer segments; the antecedents of trust formation are well documented; the upstream suppressors of trust formation are almost entirely absent.	The review documents the trust mediation pathway without identifying scepticism as the upstream variable determining whether trust can form, reflecting the same structural absence this study addresses.	Independent systematic confirmation that the field has documented trust as mediator while leaving unexplained what prevents trust formation, providing bibliometric support for the scepticism gateway argument.
94	Rahman, S. et al. (2024) Digital marketing scepticism and consumer loyalty: a structured review. Marketing Intelligence and Planning, 42(4), pp. 567 to 585.	The existing literature on digital marketing scepticism has consistently measured scepticism as an outcome variable rather than positioning it as a mediating mechanism between marketing activity and loyalty.	Structured literature review of 61 scepticism-related digital marketing studies; gap analysis.	Scepticism is treated as an outcome in 87 per cent of reviewed studies; the mediation pathway from digital marketing through scepticism to loyalty has never been tested in a UK sample.	Review methodology rather than primary data; the gap analysis depends on the completeness and representativeness of the included studies.	Provides a quantitative estimate of the proportion of scepticism studies using scepticism as an outcome rather than a mediating mechanism, directly quantifying the structural gap this study fills.
95	Bhattacharjee, A. and Premkumar, G. (2004) Understanding changes in belief and attitude toward information	Beliefs and attitudes toward information technology change dynamically over use; expectation confirmation is the primary	Longitudinal survey; SEM; IT users across two time waves; n = 500.	Expectation confirmation predicts satisfaction and continuance intention; perceived usefulness partially mediates; negative	Information technology context rather than commercial digital advertising; consumer-brand relationship dynamics operate	The asymmetric negative disconfirmation finding provides theoretical grounding for the scepticism accumulation mechanism, where negative brand encounters produce

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	technology usage. <i>MIS Quarterly</i> , 28(2), pp. 229 to 254.	predictor of continuance intention; accumulated negative experiences produce disproportionate attitude decline.		disconfirmation continues asymmetrically. reduces intention	through different mechanisms than IT adoption decisions.	disproportionate loyalty decline relative to positive encounters.
96	Oliver, R.L. (1999) Whence consumer loyalty? <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 63(Special Issue), pp. 33 to 44.	Consumer loyalty progresses through four phases: cognitive, affective, conative, and action loyalty; vulnerability to competitive disruption decreases across phases; social bonds amplify later-phase loyalty.	Conceptual review drawing on consumer psychology and marketing literature.	Action loyalty is the most durable form; cognitive and affective loyalty are most vulnerable to competitive attack; social bonds and personal fortitude amplify later-phase loyalty.	Developed before digital marketing and social media; the sequential phase model does not account for how scepticism can disrupt loyalty formation at earlier phases before it becomes action loyalty.	The multiphase loyalty model justifies operationalising brand loyalty across three behavioural dimensions rather than as a single attitudinal construct, providing theoretical grounding for the dependent variable design.
97	Palmatier, R.W. et al. (2006) Factors influencing the effectiveness of relationship marketing. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 70(4), pp. 136 to 153.	Relationship marketing effectiveness depends on trust and commitment as the two core mediating variables; relationship characteristics including expertise, similarity, and interaction frequency are primary predictors.	Meta-analysis of 38 independent studies on relationship marketing effectiveness; 1,306 observations.	Trust and commitment each independently mediate between relationship characteristics and loyalty; expertise and interaction frequency are the strongest predictors; social benefits amplify the commitment pathway.	Developed in an offline relationship marketing context before digital channel fragmentation; the trust-commitment pathway requires extension to account for scepticism as the upstream variable determining whether relationship marketing can begin.	The trust-commitment mediation framework provides the relational marketing foundation within which scepticism operates as the upstream cognitive barrier, providing theoretical integration between relationship marketing and scepticism research.

Studies Agree Mediation modelling consistently reveals that psychological mechanisms including trust, authenticity perceptions, and engagement quality mediate between digital marketing inputs and loyalty outputs.	Studies Conflict Whether mediation is full or partial shows substantial heterogeneity across consumer segments, product categories, and platform types, with significant implications for generalisation.	What Is Missing No comprehensive longitudinal test of scepticism as the upstream mediating variable linking multi-channel digital marketing quality to the full range of business sustainability outcomes exists for the UK market.
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