

# Luxury Branding through Advertising in the Age of Post-Truth: A Study on Select Television Advertisements

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## Abstract

Advertisements have always provided brands a major platform and people have started to adopt a default position of trust and reliability in the information shared by brands through branding. Branding involves retelling the same fictional story again and again until people are sub-consciously convinced that it is the truth. Branding tries to masquerade opinions as facts and focuses on alternative facts to persuade consumers. This is expected to contribute to the creation of the age of post-truth, and present-day television advertisements that market luxury portray post-truth characteristics. This paper analyses four television advertisements and attempts to prove that branding of luxury through advertising is paving the way for an intimidating era of post-truth which results in a state of post-trust.

**Keywords:** Advertising; Alternative facts; Branding; Luxury; Post-trust; Post-Truth.

## Introduction

“It is difficult to speak the truth, for although there is only one truth, it is alive and therefore has a live and changing face,” said Kafka (qtd. in Arendt 28).

The term post-truth has recently become commonplace. It is no longer confined to the realm of politics but widens to a social context. Post-truth is characterized by the repeated assertion of a set of opinions which disregard the contradictory fact.

Public opinion is being framed by false notions and ideologies rather than

truth factors and truth is no longer considered to be relevant or important. The Oxford Dictionary selected it as the 'Word of the Year' and defined it "as a term relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (qtd. in Brahms).

"Post-truth is the circuitous slippage between facts or alt-facts, knowledge, opinion, belief, and truth" (Biesecker 329). Post-truth is a social and political condition whereby the audience no longer respects truth but simply accepts what they believe or feel as true. Anderson and Ingraham note that post-truth appears through a repertoire of forms, bearing false statements, a disregard for or misrecognition of

facts and a corresponding false belief or confusion (qtd. in Harsin 9). The post-truth phenomenon does not deny the existence of truths and facts, but rather it is the subjugation of facts to subjective perceptions. In a post-truth era, some facts are more important than others and a criterion that a person uses to prefer one fact over the other is the extent that the fact concurs with his opinion and his perspectives (Brahms). Factual evidence has lost its validity in the age of post-truth. These days, there is a blurring between facts and opinions and the outcome is a confused public. This confusion is empowered by mass media. Today false notions, ideologies and alternative facts are primarily channelled through mass media to deceive everyone. This turn to emotion is built on, "revolutions in cognitive science and neurophilosophy over the last thirty years, which holds that there is no actual separation between emotion and reason" (Harsin 22). Promotional industries like advertising and branding use this research to produce strategies.

Branding is the marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products ("Branding"). Branding tells the consumers what they can expect from the products of a particular brand. A brand strategy is how, what, where, when, and to whom the brand messages are communicated and delivered. A branding strategy also includes what is communicated visually and verbally. It is more about minds and emotional sharing. Most brands are successful as their appeal is emotional as well as rational. With an increased number of brand-based advertisements and competition, consumers get a proliferation of choices in many markets and consumers are no longer interested in products because of its necessity. As a result, the emphasis shifted to symbolic, emotional features that led to an association between consumers and the product. Therefore, a new way of branding has devel-

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oped in which the functional advantages and necessities are completely or partially neglected and symbolic values or alternative facts have become more important in differentiating the brand. Thus brands, through branding, transformed from production of things to production of images. To understand the link between brand products and the consumer

psyche, Belk considers the concept of the extended self, suggesting that unknowingly, intentionally, or unintentionally we regard our possessions as reflective and as part of ourselves (Belk 139-168). Thus, consumers regard brand products as badges that convey social meaning and have the power to generate social acceptance. Brand consumption provides an opportunity for individuals to express themselves not as they are, but as how they would like to be or be seen. Branding uses persuasive ways of selling concepts, services, opinions, and products to the consumers. Through branding, brands play an integral role in the construction of the self.

As defined by the advertising association of the UK, advertising is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid by those who send them and are intended to inform or influence people who receive them ("Definition of Advertising"). "Advertising is a public form of discourse" that forms "part of the way in which we construct our ideas about the world around us" (Goddard 65). "Advertising often presents an image of things to be desired, people to be envied, and life as it 'should be'" (Sturken and Cartwright 189). Therefore, advertisements portray what the consumer wants and not his needs. Advertisements as a discourse thus shape the behaviour of consumers, influence their identity and construct particular meanings around different conditions which eventually lead to consumption. It can also make people think that they lack something in their lives and they should have what they lack to lead better lives. Thus, advertisements have social effects and it can bring about changes in the knowledge, belief, attitudes, and values of the consumers. Consumption influences the thinking, beliefs, and ideologies of the consumers. Products of consumption generate a sense of self for the individual user. Objects become the means of differentiating individuals. Consumer culture aims to use images, signs, and symbolic goods that generate dreams, desires, and fantasies which will be fulfilled by the commodities.

### **Luxury Gimmickry in Advertisements**

In today's consumer culture, style dominates over function and product is shifted from its function or use to display and aesthetics. "Luxury is the

excessive stylization of life, the culture of display, ornamentalism, and spectacle" (Nair 61). India has suddenly emerged as a major market for

luxury products. This marks a new culture that is emerging in the twentieth century which is the culture of luxury. Luxury is the stylization of life that marks the identity of a person. Consumption of luxury results in a "deluxe edition of life" (Nair 69). Consumption for satisfaction is a need and consumption for pleasure indicates wants. The consumption of luxury results in the satisfaction of pleasure. Luxury grants emotional pleasures like recognition, validation, and social status.

Earlier, luxury was seen as something wrong and sinful. It was considered to be an excess. But the consumption of comfort was accepted. In earlier times, luxury consumption was seen as materialist and capitalist in India and therefore not to be indulged in. But this view differs from person to person considering their social and economic status. But this attitude has changed in the twentieth century as consumption of luxury is now encouraging manufacturing and trade in India. Therefore, luxury is an element that is required to improve the status of the country. This shift in attitudes is termed as "de-moralization of luxury" (Sassatelli 36). This de-moralization happens when society willingly ignores cultural norms and moral codes. Consumption of luxury happens when people accept anything that circulates among them. Branding takes advantage of this and the availability of information about the consequences of consuming diverse products in advertisements results in a different moral attitude regarding these commodities in the minds of people.

Hence, no sin is associated with the consumption of luxury products now, and a deluxe life is the only life considered to be worth living. Brands promote their products through advertisements by focusing on this attitude of people rather than the necessity of the product. People wish for recognition, validation, and social status, and therefore, brands have taken advantage of this and use luxury as bait to fulfil these desires of the consumers. Thus, brands try to market luxury to attract people to buy their products. To showcase how certain brands give a primary position to luxury to market their product rather than focusing on the necessity and objective truth, the paper has chosen to study four different advertisements in mass media. These adverts can be used as tools to know about changing cultural patterns. What all were valued by people who belonged to previous generations are not being attached much value these days. The analysis of the selected four advertisements are as follows:

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## 1. Chicking 2019 Commercial

This advertisement begins by showing a Chicking outlet in a busy city at night. The advert shows a person jumping on a skateboard, and then it moves on to a person coming to the shore after surfing in the sea. A young woman comes to him with a Chicking fried chicken. Then it shows two chicken pieces emerging out of nowhere and shows how its crispy parts scatter. Then it goes on to show the man and woman having Chicking fried chicken by the seashore. When the man bites the chicken, a crispy sound is also heard. Then another girl in shorts is shown to be listening to music over headphones and enjoying a Chicking burger. She is placed in an urban background with tall buildings and exotic cars. After this, the advertisement presents a spacecraft in outer space in which an astronaut eats chicken from the Chicking bucket. Then another little girl is shown to be enjoying Chicking noodles using a fork. After this, a young man is shown to be relishing Chicking roll in an outlet. Then the scene moves to a road where two young girls are taking selfies and having Chicking popcorns. Then another girl is shown to be enjoying Chicking pizza and the attractive ingredients of the pizza are also shown separately. Then the scene moves on to a teenager jumping on a skateboard and having a Chicking burger, after which a group of friends is shown to be in a Chicking restaurant having Chicking rice. The advertisement continues with a football match where the spectators in the gallery are shown to be having Chicking fried chicken while enjoying the match. Then the advert moves on to show a group of Arab friends having Chicking grilled chicken. After this, the advertisement presents hot and sizzling varieties of Chicking fried chicken to excite the consumers and ends with the tagline, 'Chicking, it's my choice.'

The advertisement shows that Chicking fried chicken represents pleasure and sociability and not utility or function. Chicking shows its chicken to be a dish that one has to consume to experience pleasure and entertainment at its peak. This conveys that pampering oneself is not a sin. Every instance in the advertisement, the product is connected with an urban space or some kind of sports or other leisure time, like meeting with friends. The people portrayed in the advert are also modern men and women living in urban culture and wearing modern attire. The target of the advert is mainly youth culture and the brand tries to make its product a part of their lifestyle. This advertisement tries to

convey the idea that if someone wants to be modern, cool, and socially acceptable, the only thing the person has to do is to buy and have a Chicking

food product. This leads to an opinion among the public that consuming Chicking products are cool and will make them young and modern. This is connected to the emotional pleasure of a person. Such images bombard the minds of the consumers who are craving to become spectacles in society. This advert conveys that to buy something that makes us feel good in this way, rather than one that is necessary, is perfectly fine. In the advertisement, the product is linked to style and conveys that one can satisfy the human need to participate in the culture of the spectacle by consuming Chicking fried chicken. The advert also tries to arouse hunger and interest to consume Chicking food products by incorporating the crispy sound while biting, the enticing images of sauces and other ingredients used in it and also by showing other people having and relishing it. This kind of branding has made it a necessity for people to consume Chicking products when they meet friends or when they indulge in social activities and entertainment. Having anything less than Chicking products is considered to be below the elite status. In this way, Chicking has become connected to the identity of a person. All these fabricated opinions can dupe millions of consumers. Hence, instead of focusing on the necessity and utility of the product, the brand tries to market its product by connecting it to social recognition, youth, and validation, which in reality does not have any connection with a fried chicken. People consume it in great quantities even though they are doubtful of the health benefits of this product. Hence, it is sure that the advertisement appeals to the emotions of the public, and consumers use this brand product to create their own story. Through this ad, the Chicking product becomes a symbol of youth and social status, and the ad gives a model of how a society should work and think. An ideological manipulation happens in order to appeal to the emotions of the public which is a post-truth characteristic.

## **2. Tata Harrier Above All**

At the beginning of the advertisement, the setting is very dark and a man stands near a car. At this point, the advertisement raises the question "what does it take to be above all?" Then the car is set into motion, raising dust, after which the car is shown to be moving majestically on a snow-clad path. Then the advertisement states that "it's about power that's above all" while showing a man clicking

pictures in a snow-covered area. After this, the car is shown to be moving adventurously with great speed, stating that "it's performance that rises above all." In all these dark scenes, the car is shown to be moving with its lights on to lend it a royal and devilish look. Then the car is shown

moving through a fully active city at night. Later the car is shown to be fiercely moving through a hilly rural area, through a rocky place, then on a snow-covered path with great speed and applying brakes immediately when it reaches a curve. Here the advert states that "it's about control." The car is shown to be moving very adventurously with great speed through different places raising dust everywhere. It also shows that the power of the vehicle is such that it raises so much dust, which creates difficulty for people on the road. Again, as the car moves, the advert states that "it's about the pedigree that elevates you above all." Different views of the car from different angles are shown as it moves. Then the people inside the car are shown to be smiling when the advertisement states that "and luxury that makes you feel above all." The advertisement ends with the statement that "the SUV that has it all; Harrier, Above All." Then the advert presents the tagline of Tata Motors, "Connecting Aspirations."

The advertisement begins with a question that catches the attention of the consumers who crave social acceptance. The advert depicts performance, power, control, pedigree, and luxury as the factors that make one superior to others. In the end, it claims that since Tata Harrier has all these qualities, it is above all which in turn makes the one who possesses it superior to others. The brand proves that the product has all these qualities by showing its majestic and fierce run even on difficult paths. Nothing is mentioned about the function and utility of the car. Hence style is given dominance over function and utility which marks luxury. Consumers are furnished with the idea that those who own a Harrier can become style icons who are above all and thus participate in the culture of spectacle. Thus, the consumption of Tata Harrier guarantees that the consumer will be integrated into the world of the elite where there is power, control, pedigree, and luxury. Therefore, consumers expect social recognition if they use the product. Consumers are made to understand that since Harrier is above all, the consumers of Harrier will also be placed above all, thus connecting the product with the identity of the consumer. Hence, this branding creates a link between the product's story and consumer's story which generates luxury. The function of the car is shown to be attracting attention and it acts as a status symbol. Here, public opinion is framed by factors of luxury like social recognition rather than giving any basic information about the car, which is an important characteristic of the post-truth world. Here, the brand creates a propaganda around the product which is disguised as authentic information and it is clear that the brand has ulterior motives. Propaganda is a set of distorted information, especially of a biased or misleading nature. The propaganda employed by the brand can deviate marginalized populations across the world to believe and focus

on what is not true.

### 3. Kajol for Joyalukkas

The advertisement begins with a very pleasant note where a bride is getting ready for her wedding. There are happy sounds and laughter and the room is filled with other women and some are helping the bride with her makeup and ornaments. But in the meanwhile, the bride starts to think and her thoughts are stated aloud in the advertisement. The bride and all others are extremely happy and are laughing. Even though the bride is thinking, it is not shown on her face. The camera is focused on a portrait of Kajol, a famous Bollywood actress, and states that she was amazing in the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. Then she reveals that it is the most important day in her life and she wishes Kajol to be with her. At this point, everyone looks back with such awe and wonder and even the bride is taken aback. The very Kajol arrives at the wedding house and greets everyone. She is wearing a beautiful light colour saree which is decorated with bright stones and she is shown to be more elegant in her beautiful catchy necklace and matching earring which is also made up of stones and pearls. Everything is depicted as if it is taking place in a magical world.

Kajol is in more focus and is given more attention than anyone in the room. Everyone else is blurred and is shown as dull and unattractive when compared to Kajol. Even the bride is not shown as charming as Kajol, and the bride does not wear much jewellery except something on her head and hands. Kajol goes to her and touches her nose and the bride also hesitantly touches Kajol's nose and both of them share a smile. Then someone gives Kajol a box with a label 'Joyalukkas,' and she hands it over to the bride as a gift from her. When the bride opens it, she cries out of surprise as there is a very big and expensive necklace made of shiny red and white stones. It is so big that it covers the entire neck. After this, both of them exchanged a smile. The advertisement ends with Kajol asking the consumers to make every moment a celebration with Joyalukkas.

The advertisement gives the common consumers a feeling that this entire incident is taking place in an otherworld or a magical world. The jewellery worn by Kajol and also the necklace that was given to the bride is shown to be distinct from other everyday objects. It is shown as rare and as something that has special meaning. This is called "sacralization" (Nair 79) which is another form of luxury used by brands to market their products as luxury involves culture of display and spectacle. This distinction of the jewellery is emphasized by introducing Kajol, who is a very rich and



famous Bollywood actress and has an elite status that other people admire and tries to achieve. The setting of the advert gets an otherworldly atmosphere with the entry of Kajol. Kajol is shown to have visited one of her fans on her wedding day by understanding her wish. This is something that rarely happens in reality but only takes place in some magical fantasy. Only a person like Kajol can gift such an expensive majestic necklace to an unknown fan of hers. Thus, this advertisement gives an idea about the lifestyle of the rich and as a result brings the world of the rich to the imagination of the consumers. Here, Kajol is distinct in her saree, beauty, and jewellery. No other person in the advert is shown to be so elegant and rich like Kajol. Here, Kajol holds the consumers in thrall not through her personality but by the jewellery she owns and also by the one she has gifted to the bride. This is called “re-enchantment” which “is a process of sacralization where we are held in thrall by the objects and lifestyles, and not humans alone” (Nair 79).

Thus, Joyalukkas jewellery gets the status of a rare and wondrous object as it is shown as embedded in the life story of the actress Kajol. Kajol lends it her meanings too and hence the product biography is enhanced by the user biography. This shows that the product is not marketed by showing or saying anything about the jewellery but the advertisement is fully centred and focused on Kajol. Kajol is shown to be wearing Joyalukkas jewellery. The brand gives an image and idea that it produces such distinct, rare, and quality products that can only be worn by people like Kajol. So, if people buy and wear it, they can form an image of themselves as being rich and elite and in this way, they can become spectacles in society. Thus “luxury is the process of displacement from the commodity to the user in a process of branding” (Nair 68). The cultural environment of India has a direct bearing on the marketing of the products of Joyalukkas. The brand has adopted regio-centric approaches to sell their product in the market. This advertisement also shows the characteristics of the post-truth world by giving importance to the achievement of emotional pleasure through social recognition, rather than focusing on the necessity of the jewellery.

#### **4. Indian Luxury Brand Zoya, Presents its Greece Collection Inspired by Arachne**

The advertisement begins with the statement “Zoya presents Greece.” Then they start narrating the story of the curse of Arachne. They start by saying that the legend of Arachne is a Greek tragedy often forgotten. Then by displaying the model of Arachne, the advertisement talks about the most skilful weaver of ancient Greece who faced the wrathful Athena,

the goddess of crafts. While showing a craftsman polishing and smoothing the base model for the jewellery in his workshop, the advert tells the consumers that the weaver in Greece was guilty of being too skilful for a mortal. Both of them entered into a duel on the condition that one who loses will never be allowed to touch the spindle again and Arachne wove beautifully. As the story progresses the advertisement continues showing a craftsman polishing the model with his tools. The story tells that Athena loses the competition and thereby loses her only way to spin and turns Arachne to a spider. When this is uttered, the shadow of the model that falls on the table resembles that of a spider. Then the model is shown to be made beautiful with blue pearls, which makes it look like a girl wearing a blue gown. At this point, the advertisement states, "Arachne, the Great." The advert goes on saying that little does Arachne, who spins even now, know that somewhere a craftsman just as skilled as she continues to remember her. After telling this, the advertisement showcases different jewellery items with stones on it which resembles a spider. The advertisement ends by stating "Zoya, Crafted to Inspire."

Through this branding strategy, this jewellery brand achieves luxury by distinguishing its jewels from usual jewels available in other commonplace jewellery shops. The brand makes its jewellery luxurious by invoking an older meaning to its new model jewellery and re-positions that older meaning as valuable today. This is known as "antiquarian turn" (Nair 83) in contemporary luxury. The brand used the legend of Arachne and thus gives a meaning to its new model jewels and presents it as something valuable today. The advertisement presents Arachne as the best weaver in Greece and the new models of the brand are crafted in remembrance of Arachne by craftsmen who are as skilful as Arachne. Thus, by comparing the skill of Arachne and that of Zoya's craftsmen, they try to emphasize the skill with which they are moulding their jewellery and thus present Zoya jewellery as valuable today. Here, luxury is emphasized by showing co-existence of the past in the present and by the geographical mixing of cultural practices. Zoya, through this advertisement, gives importance to the legend of Arachne which is popular in some cultures of Greece and makes it a valuable possession in the present time. They have also made their model resemble both a spider and a girl who wears a blue gown, presumably Arachne. Thus, this is the discourse of "polychronicity and multi-spaciality" (Nair 84). "Polychronicity refers to multiple times and multi-spaciality refers to the adaptation of cultural habits and artifacts from multiple locations and cultures" (Nair 84). Since the jewellery recalls past in the present time, it is untimely.

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By showing a craftsman polishing and smoothing the jewel with his tools and by their tagline “Crafted to Inspire,” the brand Zoya tries to give importance to craft, thus convincing the consumers that their products are carefully handmade. This is another luxury with which the brand tries to market their products. This is also an antiquarian turn as Zoya jewellery is not manufactured using a machine but it is handmade like those in the ancient times and thus recalls an older form of product formation. In ancient times, everything was handmade carefully and as a result, it was perfect and had great quality. Later on, with industrialization, people started using machines as they reduced the labour and brought great profits. Hence, in this time of advanced technology, Zoya tries to market their product by convincing the consumers that their brand is distinct and they guarantee that their jewellery has the quality of the products of ancient times. There is also a belief that all machine-made jewellery is the same with no distinction but each hand-made jewel is unique and distinct from the other. Thus hand-made products are another luxury offered by Zoya.

Thus, consumers are made to focus on luxury by elaborating the product biography which is linked to the legend of Arachne of Greece and thus emphasizes the timelessness of quality and uniqueness. They revive something rare and forgotten and thus creates an illusion of a return to a bygone age. This polychronicity is considered to be luxurious. Here, they successfully link the present fashion in jewellery with antiquity and convince the consumers that the Greece collection of Zoya is

the new accepted fashion in the field of jewellery. Thus, this narrative includes antiquity, nostalgia, preservation, and contemporaneity. The interest of the public for jewellery that has a link to the past involves a mode of sacralization of products owing to their distance from the present and continued relevance of the past. Nowadays, everything that was in the past becomes a contemporary fashion and style statement and thus luxury is hybridized. But practically, the brand would never dare to abandon contemporary technology even though they promote their product as something that is mainly connected to the past in making and also in the form to establish their product as a logical extension of the grandeur of the past. Here, the ad tries to exploit the importance given to memories by the consumers. This advertisement tries to frame the opinion of people by focusing more on factors of luxury like antiquity, polychronicity, and multi-spaciality rather than enumerating the necessity and truth factor about the product and in this way creating an age of post-truth. Propaganda and popularity are important elements of branding strategies in a post-truth world.

## **Conclusion**

Post-truth which shows its presence in the social and political fields has its effect in the corporate world too. We are living in a world where trust has evaporated and conspiracies play a big role. The aim of advertisements from the beginning is the same, but the messages spread through advertising have undergone a drastic change. False advertisement tactics are hitting at the emotions and sentiments of the public at large. Advertisements are a type of propaganda to influence and persuade the consumers. The advertisements that use luxury as bait for consumers emphasize emotional pleasures like validation, social recognition, and status. Style is also a factor that defines luxury. Most of the time, the necessity and utility of the product is completely ignored and alternative factors like antiquity, polychronicity, and multi-spaciality are given a pivotal position in the promotion of products. Branding conveys luxury as the marker of new royalty and thus creating a new community based entirely on spending and spectacle. Products that market luxury have become the markers of class and social belonging, thus persuading the consumers to regard these brand products as badges that convey social meaning and have the power to generate social acceptance. Luxury starts with the individual and widens to a social context. Brand consumption provides an opportunity for individuals to express themselves not as they are, but as how they would like to be or be seen. This changes the perception of consumers and they are thus forced to give importance to luxury rather than necessity and utility of the product while purchasing it. This kind of branding creates a post-truth world where objective facts are abandoned for the sake of alternative facts. How these alternative facts can affect the consumers at large is a question of debate.

Spinner Cory said that brands have to satisfy the emotional quotient as well as the logical quotient and if not brand isn't balanced, and is likely to fall flat on its face (Hotchkiss). This paper proved that luxury branding through advertising satisfies this idea to remain balanced and to become successful, leading to an age of post-truth. Luxury branding through advertising creates the post-truth era as it replaces facts with alternative facts. Emphasizing on false notions or alternative facts have become the new cultural norm in persuading, manipulating, or exploiting others. The post-truth interventions have created a post-trust society which has mistrust, doubt, and skepticism as its characteristics. Trust has become insignificant as there is a general lack of interest in truth. Consumers become confused about the ethical implications of the product being marketed. Branding through advertising is necessary for building the world

but the problem in the field of marketing in this post-truth age is ethics. Maintaining professional ethics in branding in this post-truth scenario is a Herculean challenge. The one and only option for brands in its message to consumers is absolute truth. Branding through advertising should have a steadfast devotion to truth instead of resorting to exaggerations or half-truths.

The article analysed branding techniques, making it transparent, and therefore open to scrutiny, disbelief, and interrogation. Branding should focus on rational and economic features, but nowadays the emphasis is shifted to symbolic, emotional features that lead to an association between consumer and the product. Therefore, a new type of luxury branding has developed in which the functional advantages are completely or partially neglected and symbolic values or alternative facts have become more important in differentiating the brand. All these branding tactics come under the semantic umbrella of post-truth. These advertisements may grab the attention of the consumers for a short term with half-truths, alternative facts, and over-promises but quickly die once they are exposed.

It lacks the depth and integrity that is needed for a lasting rapport. This results in a situation where people are doubtful and skeptical about branding through advertising and they indulge in a post-trust consumption.

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