

From Brand Evangelism to Advocacy: Does Conspicuous Consumption Bridge the Gap and Cynicism Break It?

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Abstract

Understanding how brand evangelism converts into customer advocacy and the conditions under which this conversion succeeds or fails represents a vital issue when it comes to e-commerce brand management. This paper explores the process by which Brand Evangelism (BE) creates Customer Advocacy (CA) of e-commerce brand users with Conspicuous Consumption (CC) as a mediating behavioural pathway and Consumer Cynicism (CYN) as a moderating boundary condition. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982), the model was empirically validated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with data collected from 503 Pakistani users of e-commerce brands. Results confirm that brand evangelism directly influences customer advocacy, and this relationship is significantly mediated by conspicuous consumption. This indicates that evangelistic consumers first channel their brand passion into visible brand display before converting it into advocacy behaviour. On the other hand, consumer cynicism significantly moderates the relationship between brand evangelism and customer advocacy, substantially weakening this effect when cynicism is high. These results contribute to theoretical knowledge of the behavioural processes of brand evangelism and provide practical implications for e-commerce practitioners aiming to develop genuine brand evangelism.

Keywords: Brand Evangelism, Customer Advocacy, Conspicuous Consumption, PLS-SEM.

Introduction

E-commerce has grown rapidly, fundamentally changing the dynamics of brand-consumer relationships. Within this highly competitive digital market, brands have become more and more reliant not only on loyal customers but on devotees as well, consumers who willingly recommend, market, and defend their favourite brands to others. Brand Evangelism (BE), a missionary-like devotion among consumers that leads to active persuasion of others to adopt preferred brands, is one of the most powerful antecedents of such advocacy behaviour (Matzler et al., 2007). Brand evangelism is a version of consumer-brand relationship, the most profound and the most useful, which is a blend of emotional loyalty, investment in identity, and pro-social promotion. Its development has gained strategic focus among e-commerce companies aiming to build organic brand equity through consumer advocacy.

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Despite growing academic interest in brand evangelism, a key question remains unanswered: how does brand evangelism evolve into customer advocacy via what behavioural mechanism? This paper hypothesises that Conspicuous Consumption (CC), as a visible and public expression of brand consumption in order to convey social identity and status (Sahin & Nasir, 2022), constitutes a key mediating behavioural intermediary in this process. Angelists, driven by deep brand identification and perceived self-brand congruity, are motivated to display their brand consumption conspicuously in the social and digital environments of e-commerce. Public display of brand allegiance, in turn, reinforces their brand commitment and propels them toward explicit advocacy behaviour. Conspicuous consumption is therefore not a final goal but a means to an end, a conspicuous identity assertion as a prelude to active branding.

The second critical but under-researched question is: under what circumstances does this evangelism-to-advocacy conversion work, and when does it not? This study suggests Consumer Cynicism (CYN) as an important moderating boundary condition. The problem of consumer cynicism, which is the generalised mood of distrust and scepticism toward brands and their commercial interests (Rim & Kim, 2016), can significantly undermine the potential of brand evangelism to create advocacy because cynical consumers do not want to make open endorsements even in cases where they have strong brand attachment. In an era of growing marketplace scepticism, understanding this boundary condition is of pressing practical relevance for e-commerce brand managers.

Although the literature on brand evangelism, customer advocacy, and conspicuous consumption is exhaustive, no previous study has investigated the integrated model as espoused here, which puts conspicuous consumption as a mediator and consumer cynicism as a moderator in the brand evangelism-customer advocacy relationship within the framework of e-commerce, which is one of the substantive theoretical gaps that are directly answered by this study. This study relies on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982) to develop a theoretically grounded model and empirically test it using PLS-SEM, based on responses from 503 Pakistani e-commerce brand users. The study contributes to the body of research in three important ways: first, it is a primary mediated route where brand evangelism is linked with customer advocacy through conspicuous consumption; second, it introduces consumer cynicism as a key moderator that limits this evangelism and advocacy transformation; and finally, the extension of both the brand evangelism literature and the consumer cynicism literature into the underexplored e-commerce context in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The proposed study is based on two theoretically complementary views that together explain the model holistically. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) assumes that social behaviour is based on the exchange of value, and that those who get a lot out of a relationship feel an obligation to reciprocate by providing something that maintains and enhances the relationship. When applied to consumer-brand situations, brand evangelism is found in circumstances where consumers whose lives have been significantly enhanced through their engagement with a brand, in terms of functional, emotional and symbolic value, experience a strong need to give back to it by becoming brand evangelists. This theory describes the direct brand evangelism-advocacy relationship (BE→CA) and the evangelism-conspicuous consumption relationship (BE→CC), both of which are forms of reciprocal value exchange in which consumers return to the brand through publicity and active promotion.

Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982) addresses the identity-based mechanism, clarifying the role of conspicuous consumption as a mediator between brand evangelism and customer advocacy. Self-Congruity Theory is based on the desire to maintain, reinforce, and express congruence between the brand image and the consumer's self-concept. Brand evangelists perceive a high degree of alignment between the brand's symbolic identity and their own self-image, leading them to publicly express this compatibility through conspicuous brand consumption, which serves as a way to attest to and express their self-brand identity to their respective social worlds. This conspicuous show, on its part, enhances the congruity of self-brand and generates an identity commitment, which is automatically transferred into advocacy behaviour. Consumer cynicism disrupts this process by introducing a sense of incongruence, leading cynical consumers to perceive a mismatch between their self-image as critical. Discerning consumers and the uncritical public endorsement that advocacy demands, thereby suppressing the evangelism-to-advocacy conversion. When combined, these two theories offer a logical, self-supporting theoretical basis for the intended model as a whole.

Brand Evangelism and Customer Advocacy

Brand evangelism (BE) is the term used by Matzler et al. (2007) to describe a consumer's strong, passionate loyalty to a brand, expressed through promotion, persuasion, and defence of the brand to others without expecting to make money from it. Evangelical consumers actively promote their favourite brands, which is the highest level of consumer-brand engagement. This is more than just being happy with a brand, being loyal to it, or even advocating for it in the traditional sense. In the world of e-commerce, brand evangelism involves aggressively seeking new customers, sharing brand content, giving products high ratings, and defending the business in online forums (Murthy et al., 2025).

Customer advocacy (CA), a part of customer citizenship behaviour that involves speaking up for and promoting a brand to their social networks, is when customers voluntarily and proactively support a brand. It is an extra-role, high-value behaviour that consumers promote a brand, and they do not have any obvious incentive to do so because they simply enjoy it and would like to share what they believe is valuable about it. The theoretical basis of the BE→CA relationship is the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964): brand evangelists who gain substantial value from a brand relationship are motivated to reciprocate by promoting the brand to others, the most obvious and straightforward form of reciprocation being advocacy. It is expected that this direct relationship (H1) will persist even after considering the mediating pathway through conspicuous consumption.

The Mediating Role of Conspicuous Consumption

This study argues that, even though the direct BECA relationship reveals an essential route in the process of evangelism-to-advocacy transition, a significant portion of the transition process occurs through an indirect behavioural pathway, mediated by Conspicuous Consumption. Conspicuous Consumption (CC) is the act of buying and showing off branded goods in public to show off your social status, identity, and group membership (Veblen, 1899; Sahin & Nasir, 2022). Online, conspicuous consumption manifests itself in ways such as uploading unboxing videos, showing off purchases to friends on social media, and joining popular brand communities.

The first element of the mediation, which is the Conspicuous Consumption being driven by Brand Evangelism, is explained by the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982). Brand evangelists who feel a close relationship between brand image and their self-image are highly motivated to demonstrate this relationship by wearing the brand in public. The placement of the brand is one way to assert

identity; it demonstrates to those around you who you are and what you uphold. The greater the number of people who evangelise a brand, the greater the feeling that they are a part of that brand, which makes them more willing to display their brand consumption (H2). This lays the groundwork for the first mediation path.

The second section of the mediation, Conspicuous consumption driving Customer Advocacy is also anchored on Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982). By displaying the brands they purchase, people make a visible social commitment to an identity. They inform the people who associate with them of the brand they represent and the values they stand for. This social pledge further enhances self-brand congruity, producing a psychological drive for motivation. When individuals express their brand loyalty publicly, they feel a need to carry through with explicit advocacy to maintain their public identity cue and align their actions with it. The next logical step that follows conspicuous display is advocacy (H3). It builds on and strengthens the same identity affirmation that conspicuous consumption started. This sets up the second leg of mediation.

The whole mediation hypothesis results from the theoretical foundations of the two legs of the mediation. Conspicuous consumption (H2) results from brand evangelism, which in turn leads to customer advocacy (H3). This forms an oblique path between evangelism and advocacy. This indirect route and the direct BE→CA path (H1) indicate that brand evangelism is partially mediated; the evidence also supports advocacy via conspicuous consumption (H6), which is a significant, though not exclusive, path. This mediated route is the main theoretical contribution of the study.

Consumer Cynicism: Direct Effects and Moderating Role

Rim and Kim (2016) state that consumer cynicism (CYN) is a general attitude disposition of distrust, cynicism, and uncertainty towards corporate brands, their alleged values, and their commercial purposes. It is not an expression of a single brand contact, but a constant, learned inclination toward the marketplace, founded on accumulated experiences of corporate opportunism and brand inauthenticity. The current model has two roles for consumer cynicism: it directly predicts customer advocacy and mediates the relationship between brand evangelism and customer advocacy.

In terms of its direct role, regardless of their level of brand evangelism, cynical consumers are naturally less likely to publicly support or recommend brands, as they harbour a basic suspicion and mistrust of them. Because it goes against their perception of themselves as logical, critical consumers, cynical consumers oppose advocacy, which forces them to put their own credibility behind a brand's reputation. According to a Self-Congruity approach (Sirgy, 1982), an identity conflict that stifles advocacy action results from the inconsistency between the suspicious, critical posture that cynical customers retain and the trusting, enthusiastic stance that advocacy demands. This proves that cynicism has a direct, detrimental impact on advocacy (H5).

This study also investigates the impact of brand evangelism on customer cynicism (H4). It makes sense to anticipate that brand evangelism, which reflects strong brand devotion and a positive brand experience, will lessen or challenge cynical orientations. It is equally possible, though, that cynicism is such a solid dispositional trait that it is not significantly impacted by particular brand-level events. This is empirically tested.

Most importantly, this study suggests that consumer cynicism is a moderating boundary condition in the link between brand evangelism and customer advocacy (H7). This is the study's main contribution to moderation. High levels of cynicism significantly reduce the conversion of intense brand emotion into overt advocacy behaviour, even among highly evangelical consumers. This

moderating mechanism is explained by Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982): cynical customers perceive an increasing discrepancy between the unquestioning public brand endorsement that lobbying requires and their self-image as critical, discerning consumers. This identity contest heightens consumer cynicism, and even though the intensity is high, brand evangelism is less effective at creating advocacy. This proves that a crucial negative moderator is customer cynicism. Finally, all of this leads us to our hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant impact of Brand Evangelism (BE) on Customer Advocacy (CA).

H2: There is a significant impact of Brand Evangelism (BE) on Conspicuous Consumption (CC).

H3: There is a significant impact of Conspicuous Consumption (CC) on Customer Advocacy (CA).

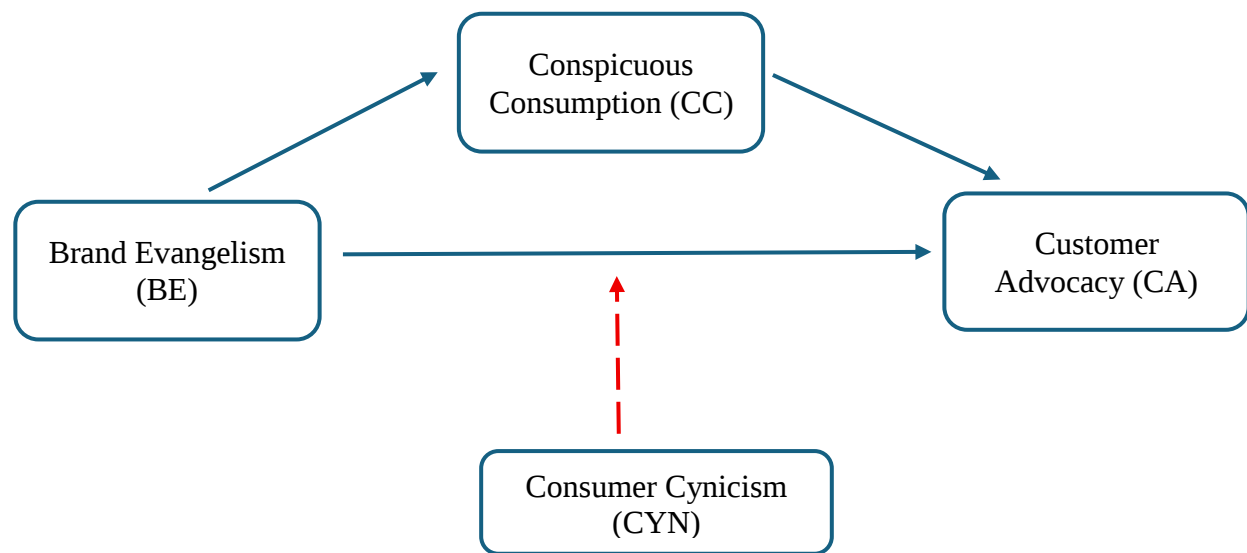
H4: There is a significant impact of Brand Evangelism (BE) on Consumer Cynicism (CYN).

H5: There is a significant impact of Consumer Cynicism (CYN) on Customer Advocacy (CA).

H6: Conspicuous Consumption (CC) mediates the relationship between Brand Evangelism (BE) and Customer Advocacy (CA).

H7: Consumer Cynicism (CYN) moderates the relationship between Brand Evangelism (BE) and Customer Advocacy (CA).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Methodology

Research Philosophy and Design

This study is based on the positivist research theory, which asserts that social reality is objective, measurable, and can be analysed through causal studies using empirical methods (Bryman, 2016). This philosophical stance aligned with a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The cross-sectional design is most suitable for examining the proposed structural relationships between brand evangelism, conspicuous consumption, customer advocacy, and consumer cynicism at a single point in time, as it aligns with the common set of procedures in PLS-SEM-based consumer behaviour research (Hair et al., 2019).

Population, Sampling, and Sample Size

The target population comprised individuals who had already purchased at least one product in an e-commerce platform in the past 12 months, and all respondents had accessible and recent experience with the consumption of e-commerce brands. The data collection methodology was a mix of convenience and purposive sampling, in which respondents were identified based on accessibility and predetermined inclusion criteria (Andrade, 2020). An online and physical questionnaire was administered in a structured format, with an eligibility screening question at the beginning to screen out unqualified respondents. After data collection and screening, 503 complete and valid responses remained for analysis.

The sample size of 503 is justified by various established criteria. PLS-SEM studies by Hair et al. (2019) should have at least 10 times the maximum number of structural paths leading to a single construct in the model, which has been easily met in this study. Ringle et al. (2023) also reaffirm that a sample of more than 300 provides high statistical power to detect small-to-medium effect sizes in PLS-SEM models with complex structures that incorporate mediation and moderation. Also, Cohen (1992) suggests that behavioural research with more than 200 samples is needed to obtain sufficient statistical power, which is also met. Taken together, these requirements affirm that the 503 sample is sound, statistically robust, and sufficient to run the proposed PLS-SEM models with mediation and moderation.

Measurement Instruments

Established, validated scales tailored to the e-commerce setting were used to operationalise each concept. Five items modified from Murthy et al. (2025) were used to measure brand evangelism (BE), which assesses respondents' levels of active brand promotion, persuasion, and loyalty to their favourite e-commerce brands. Conspicuous consumption (CC) was measured using eight questions adapted from Sahin and Nasir (2022), which reflect the tendency of respondents to publicly express their consumption of e-commerce brands as a means of expressing social identity and status. The three-item advocacy subscale from Yi and Gong's (2013) Customer Citizenship Behaviour scale was used to operationalise Customer Advocacy (CA), which measures respondents' willingness to actively promote and suggest their favourite e-commerce firms. The Consumer Cynicism (CYN) scale by Rim and Kim (2016) was utilised to assess respondents' overall mistrust and scepticism towards marketplace messages and brand motivations. Eight items of the Consumer Cynicism scale were used to measure the respondents. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used to score each item.

One Consumer Cynicism item (CYN6) had a factor loading of 0.662, which is somewhat below the standard 0.70 criterion. CYN6 was also retained, as per Hulland (1999), who states that indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 can be retained when their deletion does not make a significant contribution to the AVE or to the composite reliability beyond the levels of recognition. The CYN construct with CYN6 added showed acceptable convergent validity ($AVE = 0.568 > 0.50$) and acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.900$, $CR = 0.913$). The item was retained to maintain the content validity of the cynicism construct.

Analytical Approach

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used for all analyses in SmartPLS 4. Because of its robustness with non-normal data distributions and suitability for predictive, theory-building research designs, including complicated models with mediation and moderation, PLS-SEM was chosen (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis was conducted in two phases:

the measurement model was initially tested for discriminant validity, convergent validity, and reliability; the seven hypotheses were then evaluated in the structural model. Using 5,000 bootstrap subsamples and the specific indirect effects approach, mediation (H6) was evaluated. A 95% bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence interval was used to determine significance (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The product indicator method was used in order to build the moderation interaction term ($CYN \times BE$) (Henseler and Chin, 2010).

Results

Demographic Profile and Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the 503 responders is shown in Table 1. The sample comprised 48.5% male and 51.5% female participants. The majority of respondents (94.3%) were between the ages of 18 and 24 (57.1%), followed by those aged 25 to 34 (37.2%). This is the young, tech-savvy generation that is the most active in Pakistani e-commerce. The percentage with postgraduate qualifications was 21.3, but most (64.8) had graduate qualifications. 40.0% of people made less than PKR 30,000 each month. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the mean scores across all constructs, confirming that the values are within the expected range of 1 to 5 and exhibit good variance.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 503)

Demographics	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	259	51.5
	Male	244	48.5
Age	18–24 Years	287	57.1
	25–34 Years	187	37.2
	35–44 Years	23	4.6
	45 Years or Above	6	1.2
Education	Graduation	326	64.8
	Post Graduation (MS/M.Phil/MBA)	107	21.3
	Intermediate	43	8.5
	PhD	7	1.4
	Matric & Other	20	4.0
Income (PKR)	Less than 30,000	201	40.0
	30,001 – 60,000	129	25.6
	60,001 – 100,000	108	21.5
	100,001 – 150,000	39	7.8
	150,001 – 250,000	13	2.6
	Above 250,000	13	2.6

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Construct Mean Scores

Construct	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Brand Evangelism (BE)	503	1.00	5.00	3.162	0.952
Conspicuous Consumption (CC)	503	1.00	5.00	2.953	0.919
Customer Advocacy (CA)	503	1.00	5.00	3.270	1.019
Consumer Cynicism (CYN)	503	1.00	5.00	2.823	0.885

Measurement Model Assessment

Indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were all assessed using the two-stage methodology suggested by Hair et al. (2019). The outer loadings and VIF values for each of the 24 items are shown in Table 3. Every loading for Customer Advocacy (0.836–0.850), Brand Evangelism (0.795–0.822), and Conspicuous Consumption (0.718–0.813) was higher above the 0.70 cutoff. Seven of the eight items for consumer cynicism were higher than 0.70, while CYN6 had a loading of 0.662. As mentioned in Section 3.3, CYN6 was kept after Hulland (1999) since its inclusion kept all reliability and validity criteria above thresholds. The lack of multicollinearity was confirmed by all VIF values, which ranged from 1.613 to 2.200 and were far below the 5.0 threshold (Hair et al., 2019).

Figure 2: Measurement Model

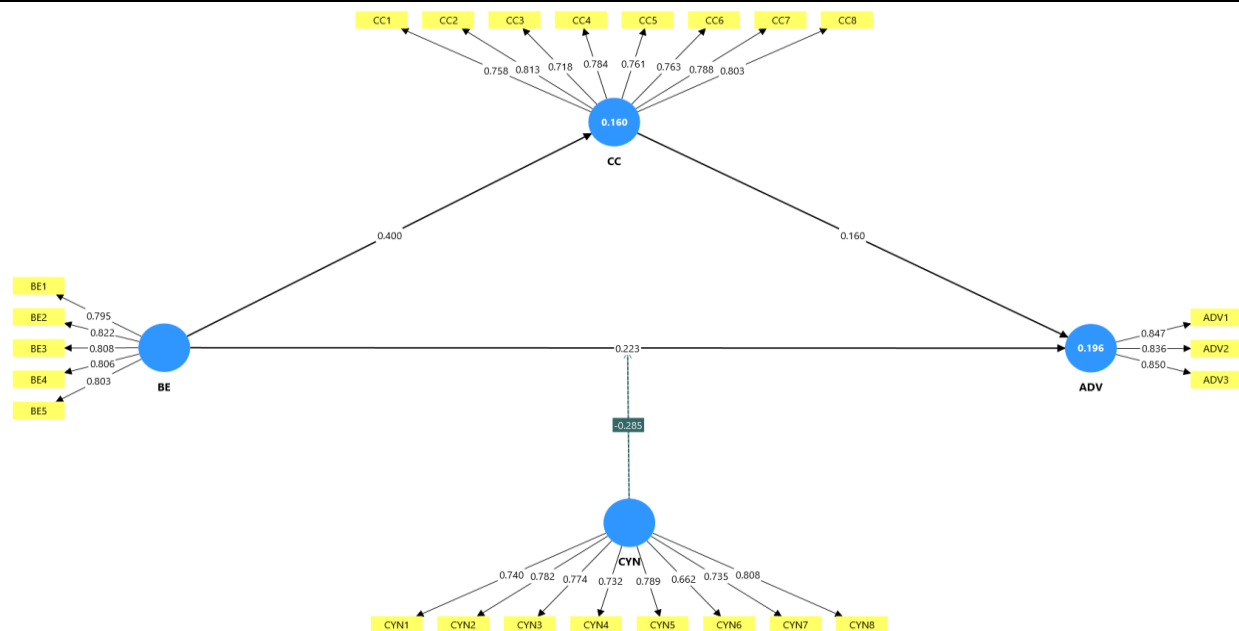


Table 3: Outer Loadings and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Item	Construct	Loading	VIF	Threshold	Status
ADV1	Customer Advocacy	0.847	1.780	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
ADV2	Customer Advocacy	0.836	1.613	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
ADV3	Customer Advocacy	0.850	1.748	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
BE1	Brand Evangelism	0.795	1.903	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
BE2	Brand Evangelism	0.822	2.009	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
BE3	Brand Evangelism	0.808	1.819	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
BE4	Brand Evangelism	0.806	1.933	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
BE5	Brand Evangelism	0.803	1.889	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CC1	Conspicuous Consumption	0.758	1.916	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CC2	Conspicuous Consumption	0.813	2.200	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CC3	Conspicuous Consumption	0.718	1.726	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓

CC4	Conspicuous Consumption	0.784	2.034	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CC5	Conspicuous Consumption	0.761	1.875	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CC6	Conspicuous Consumption	0.763	1.944	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CC7	Conspicuous Consumption	0.788	2.090	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CC8	Conspicuous Consumption	0.803	2.126	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CYN1	Consumer Cynicism	0.740	1.942	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CYN2	Consumer Cynicism	0.782	2.009	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CYN3	Consumer Cynicism	0.774	1.856	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CYN4	Consumer Cynicism	0.732	1.961	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CYN5	Consumer Cynicism	0.789	1.709	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CYN6*	Consumer Cynicism	0.662	1.842	> 0.40 retained	Retained
CYN7	Consumer Cynicism	0.735	2.066	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓
CYN8	Consumer Cynicism	0.808	1.862	> 0.70 / < 5.0	✓

* Retained per Hulland (1999): all reliability and validity thresholds met; removal does not improve model fit

Results for convergent validity and internal consistency are shown in Table 4. All of the composite reliability (rho_c) and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the 0.70 criterion, ranging from 0.882 to 0.923 and 0.798 to 0.904, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent validity was confirmed by all AVE values exceeding 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Customer Advocacy had the greatest AVE (0.713), indicating strong indication consistency for this three-item subscale.

Table 4: Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	CR (rho_c)	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
Brand Evangelism (BE)	5	0.866	0.903	0.651	0.807
Conspicuous Consumption (CC)	8	0.904	0.923	0.599	0.774
Consumer Cynicism (CYN)	8	0.900	0.913	0.568	0.754
Customer Advocacy (CA)	3	0.798	0.882	0.713	0.844

Note: Threshold $\rightarrow \alpha > 0.70$, CR > 0.70, AVE > 0.50

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Table 5 (Henseler et al., 2015) shows all HTMT values below the 0.85 limit, with the highest value being 0.577 (BE–CC). Table 6 shows that the square root of AVE for each construct (bold diagonal) exceeded all off-diagonal inter-construct correlations, satisfying the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criteria. Both tests validate the discriminant validity of each construct.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity — HTMT Ratios

Construct	BE	CC	CYN	CA
Brand Evangelism (BE)	—			
Conspicuous Consumption (CC)	0.577	—		
Consumer Cynicism (CYN)	0.058	0.086	—	
Customer Advocacy (CA)	0.325	0.300	0.122	—

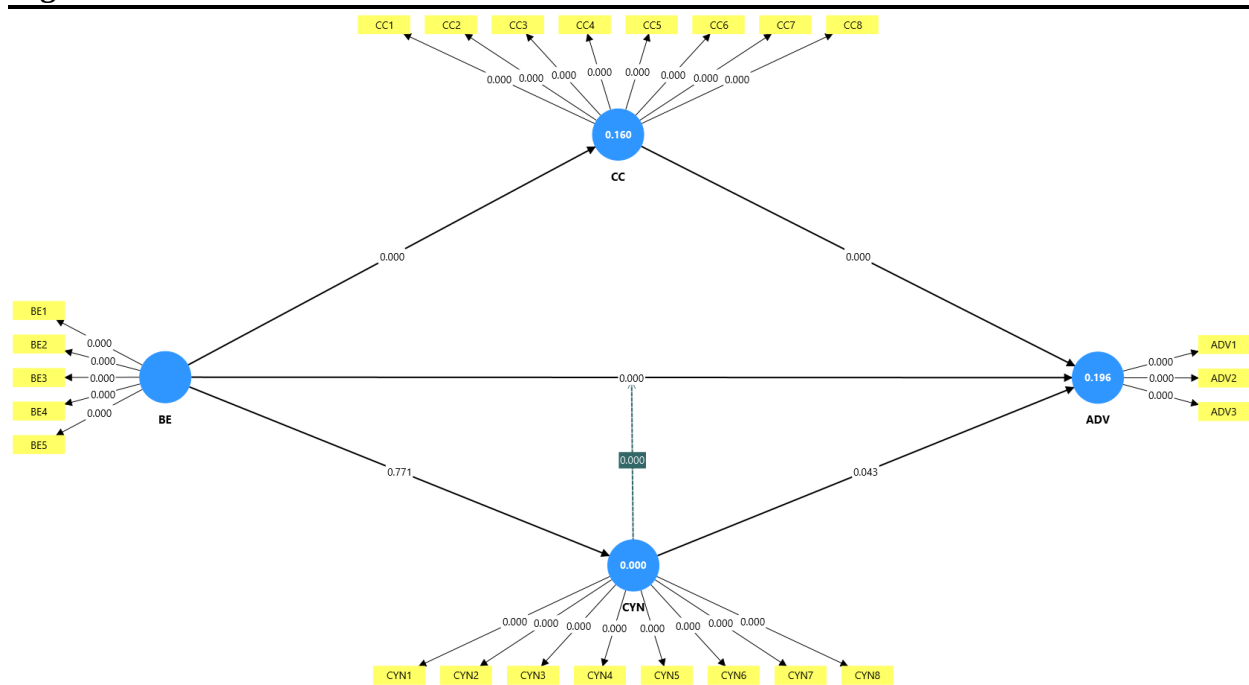
Table 6: Discriminant Validity — Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Diagonal = $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$)

Construct	BE	CC	CYN	CA
Brand Evangelism (BE)	0.807*			
Conspicuous Consumption (CC)	0.448	0.774*		
Consumer Cynicism (CYN)	0.063	0.085	0.754*	
Customer Advocacy (CA)	0.335	0.300	0.112	0.844*

* Diagonal values ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) must exceed all off-diagonal correlations

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated through 5,000 bootstrap subsamples. R-squared values are shown in Table 7. Both Conspicuous Consumption ($R^2 = 0.160$, $R^2_{\text{adj}} = 0.158$) and Customer Advocacy ($R^2 = 0.196$, $R^2_{\text{adj}} = 0.190$) show acceptable levels of explained variation for parsimonious behavioral models in social scientific research (Hair et al., 2019). All direct path findings are shown in Table 8. The specific indirect effect for mediation is shown in Table 9. All of the hypothesis results are compiled in Table 10.

Figure 3: Structural Model**Table 7: R-Square Values**

Construct	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Customer Advocacy (CA) — Dependent Variable	0.196	0.190
Conspicuous Consumption (CC) — Mediator	0.160	0.158

Table 8: Direct Path Coefficients — Structural Model Results

H	Path	β	Mean	STDEV	T-Stat	f^2	p-value	Decision
H1	BE $\rightarrow$ CA	0.223	0.222	0.043	5.226	0.052	0.000	Supported ✓
H2	BE $\rightarrow$ CC	0.400	0.403	0.036	11.189	0.190	0.000	Supported ✓
H3	CC $\rightarrow$ CA	0.160	0.162	0.044	3.613	0.026	0.000	Supported ✓
H4	BE $\rightarrow$ CYN	0.022	0.026	0.075	0.292	0.001	0.771	Not Supported ✗
H5	CYN $\rightarrow$ CA	-0.115	-0.117	0.057	2.020	0.017	0.043	Supported ✓
H7	CYN $\times$ BE $\rightarrow$ CA	-0.286	-0.269	0.055	5.175	0.100	0.000	Supported ✓

Note: f^2 benchmarks — small ≥ 0.02 , medium ≥ 0.15 , large ≥ 0.35 (Cohen, 1992)

Table 9: Mediation Analysis — Specific Indirect Effect (H6)

Path	β	Mean	STDEV	T-Stat	p-value
BE $\rightarrow$ CC $\rightarrow$ CA (Indirect Effect)	0.064	0.066	0.019	3.324	0.001

*95% Bootstrap CI excludes zero — partial mediation confirmed (Preacher & Hayes, 2008)

Table 10: Complete Hypothesis Testing Summary

H	Hypothesis Statement	p-value	f^2	Decision
H1	There is a significant impact of Brand Evangelism on Customer Advocacy	0.000	0.052	Supported ✓
H2	There is a significant impact of Brand Evangelism on Conspicuous Consumption	0.000	0.190	Supported ✓
H3	There is a significant impact of Conspicuous Consumption on Customer Advocacy	0.000	0.026	Supported ✓
H4	There is a significant impact of Brand Evangelism on Consumer Cynicism	0.771	0.001	Not Supported ✗
H5	There is a significant impact of Consumer Cynicism on Customer Advocacy	0.043	0.017	Supported ✓
H6	Conspicuous Consumption mediates the relationship between Brand Evangelism and Customer Advocacy	0.001	—	Supported ✓
H7	Consumer Cynicism moderates the relationship between Brand Evangelism and Customer Advocacy	0.000	0.100	Supported ✓

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between Brand Evangelism and Customer Advocacy in the context of e-commerce, with a focus on the moderating influence of Consumer Cynicism and the mediating role of Conspicuous Consumption. Of the seven hypotheses put out, six were validated. Before discussing the supporting direct-effect findings, this section focuses on the central mediation and moderation findings, which constitute the study's main theoretical contributions.

The Key Finding: Conspicuous Consumption as a Mediator (H6 — Supported)

The first and foremost contribution of this study is confirming that conspicuous consumption ($\beta = 0.064$, $p = 0.001$) substantially mediates the relationship between brand evangelism and customer advocacy. This finding indicates that brand evangelism generates customer advocacy directly (H1) and indirectly through the behavioural bridge of conspicuous consumption. Here, the indirect

pathway operates as follows: brand evangelists who are highly self-congruent (Sirgy 1982) first incorporate and express their passion through overt, visible brand displays; this subsequently reinforces their identity commitment to the brand (more prominently exhibited behaviour), which then feeds forward into overt advocacy behaviour. The coexistence of significant direct ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$) and indirect ($\beta = 0.064$, $p = 0.001$) effects indicates partial mediation whereby conspicuous spending operates as an important but not sole pathway through which brand evangelism generates advocacy. The finding of this study is theoretically novel as it transforms conspicuous consumption from a basic consumption outcome into a significant behavioural mechanism. That connects external social promotion with internal brand enthusiasm. Brand evangelists reciprocate perceived brand value first through visual display and later through advocacy, as per Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). This two-stage reciprocation process has not been hypothesised or evaluated in a previous study.

The Second Key Finding: Consumer Cynicism as a Moderator (H7 — Supported)

The study's second main finding is that consumer cynicism significantly moderates the link between brand evangelism and customer advocacy negatively ($\beta = -0.286$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.100$). This moderate-to-meaningful effect size demonstrates that consumer cynicism is a practically significant boundary condition rather than just a statistical moderator: even among highly evangelical consumers, excessive cynicism significantly reduces the conversion of brand passion into advocacy behaviour. The explanation is provided by Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982), which states that cynical customers have an identity conflict between the unthinking, enthusiastic brand support that lobbying requires and their self-image as logical, sceptical marketplace participants.

Regardless of the level of brand passion, brand evangelism transfers into advocacy less successfully the more extreme this cynicism-induced incongruence is. This finding contributes significantly to the literature on consumer cynicism and brand evangelism by showing that cynicism functions as a behaviour-specific boundary condition. It limits advocacy, which is a purposeful, socially visible endorsement, but it does not eliminate the BE→CC relationship, the earlier stage of the mediation chain, because brand evangelists continue to clearly display their brand consumption despite their cynical dispositions.

Direct Effect: Brand Evangelism and Customer Advocacy (H1 — Supported)

The significant direct impact of Brand Evangelism on Customer Advocacy ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.052$) confirms H1. This direct relationship, grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), demonstrates that advocacy is generated independently by brand evangelism through reciprocal value exchange. Customers who derive substantial value from a brand relationship are genuinely motivated to give back through active promotion. This result supports the partial mediation conclusion and validates brand evangelism as a potent direct driver of advocacy in e-commerce by demonstrating that the mediated pathway through conspicuous consumption (H6) enhances rather than replaces the direct evangelism-advocacy connection.

Supporting Mediation Paths: H2 and H3

Each mediation was independently verified. With a medium effect size, Brand Evangelism significantly predicted Conspicuous Consumption (H2: $\beta = 0.400$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.190$), demonstrating that evangelistic brand commitment strongly drives prominent brand display. This aligns with the Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982), which states that customers who strongly

identify with a brand are encouraged to publicly reinforce and convey this alignment through visible brand consumption. Customer advocacy was then substantially predicted by conspicuous consumption (H3: $\beta = 0.160$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.026$), indicating that prominent brand display strengthens identity commitment and influences advocacy behaviour. Together, these two routes provide the empirical foundation for the mediation finding that was validated in H6.

Consumer Cynicism: Direct Effect and Non-Effect (H4 and H5)

Customer advocacy was significantly and negatively impacted by consumer cynicism (H5: $\beta = -0.115$, $p = 0.043$). This indicates that sceptical consumers are less likely to publicly support brands regardless of their degree of evangelism. This result underscores the importance of treating cynicism as a distinct strategic challenge. On the other hand, Consumer cynicism was not significantly impacted by brand evangelism (H4: $\beta = 0.022$, $p = 0.771$). This suggests that consumer cynicism is a stable dispositional construct that is not easily influenced by specific brand-level experiences, even extremely favourable ones such as brand evangelism. This result is consistent with the broader understanding of cynicism as a long-lasting attitudinal orientation grounded in accumulated marketplace experiences rather than a reaction to specific brand encounters.

Conclusion

This study investigated the process by which Brand Evangelism transforms into Customer Advocacy, suggesting Consumer Cynicism as a moderating boundary condition and conspicuous consumption as a mediating behavioural pathway. Six of the seven hypotheses were validated using PLS-SEM on a sample of 503 Pakistani e-commerce brand users, providing significant theoretical contributions and useful managerial insights.

The study makes three main theoretical contributions. First and foremost, it demonstrates for the first time that brand evangelists go through a visible identity display stage prior to fully committing to active brand advocacy, establishing conspicuous consumption as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between brand evangelism and customer advocacy. This enhances the literature on conspicuous consumption and brand evangelism by repositioning conspicuous consumption as a behavioural bridge rather than a terminal consumption consequence.

Second, the study identifies consumer cynicism as a crucial moderating boundary condition that particularly limits the conversion from evangelism to advocacy. This conclusion is behaviour-specific because cynicism does not interfere with the earlier step of the chain from evangelism to display. Third, the study advances our understanding of cynicism as a fixed, antecedent disposition rather than a flexible result of brand experience by showing that Brand Evangelism had no effect on Consumer Cynicism. These results provide obvious strategic guidance for e-commerce practitioners. First, building brand evangelism remains a crucial objective, as it creates consumer advocacy through the conspicuous-spending channel and directly, offering two complementary paths to organic brand growth. Second, businesses need to understand that symbolic brand investment is insufficient to overcome the structural barrier to advocate generation posed by cynical customer segments. Conversion of evangelist passion into public brand endorsement among cynical consumers requires building genuine brand trust through consistent delivery, open communication, and reliable customer testimonials, rather than relying solely on brand symbolism or evangelism cultivation.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, causal interpretation is not possible due to the cross-sectional design. To determine temporal and causal ordering, future longitudinal studies should monitor the sequential emergence of brand evangelism, conspicuous consumption, and advocacy. Second, cross-cultural generalizability is limited because the study's sample consists solely of Pakistani e-commerce customers. Future studies should replicate this model across a variety of cultural contexts, especially when contrasting individualistic and collectivistic societies, where there are significant differences in the reasons for conspicuous consumption and levels of cynicism.

Third, even though the suggested mediation model accounts for 19.6% of the variation in customer advocacy, other antecedents, such as perceived authenticity, brand trust, and brand community engagement, warrant further research. Fourth, to define the boundary conditions of this novel pathway, future research should investigate whether the mediating role of conspicuous consumption holds across product categories (luxury versus utilitarian), e-commerce platforms (social commerce versus traditional marketplaces), and consumer segments. Fifth, factors other than consumer cynicism, such as brand involvement, persuasion expertise, and incentives for digital self-presentation, may shed further light on the circumstances in which brand evangelism most successfully fosters endorsement through conspicuous expenditure.

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