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The Role of Emotional Storytelling in Product Promotional Videos on Purchase Intention: A Systematic Literature Review with Emphasis on Skincare Service Products

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2

ABSTRACT

This study aims to systematically examine the role of emotional storytelling in product promotional videos and its influence on consumers' purchase intention, with a particular emphasis on skincare service products. Emotional storytelling has emerged as a persuasive marketing strategy that leverages affective narratives to foster consumer-brand relationships, build trust, and enhance behavioral responses. Given the increasing prevalence of emotionally driven promotional content across digital platforms, especially within the visually rich skincare industry, this research conducts a structured literature review to synthesize theoretical perspectives and empirical findings. Utilizing a descriptive quantitative approach, this study reviewed 30 peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2024, focusing on emotional narrative structures, psychological mechanisms, and behavioral outcomes. The findings indicate that emotional storytelling positively impacts consumer purchase intention by fostering narrative transportation, emotional contagion, and perceived authenticity. Specifically, narrative coherence, emotional valence, and brand relatability were identified as key drivers of consumer engagement. In the skincare sector, emotionally charged videos that depict transformation, self-care, and identity alignment proved to be especially effective in motivating purchasing behavior. Moreover, platform-specific dynamics such as video format and interactivity were found to moderate storytelling effectiveness. The study contributes to the theoretical development of affective marketing and offers practical guidance for brands aiming to craft emotionally resonant promotional content. It also proposes a conceptual framework for future empirical testing on emotional storytelling and consumer behavior in the context of beauty and self-care services.

Keywords: Emotional Storytelling, Purchase Intention, Skincare Marketing, Narrative Advertising, Consumer Engagement.



I. Introduction

In the digital marketing ecosystem, promotional content has evolved beyond the traditional display of product features into a more affective and narrative-centered experience. Emotional storytelling has emerged as a compelling tool within videos, allowing brands to construct immersive narratives that transcend rational appeals and foster emotional bonds with consumers. As media consumption habits shift increasingly toward short-form video content, particularly in visually driven industries such as skincare, understanding how storytelling mechanisms influence consumer behavior becomes an urgent imperative. Emotional storytelling—the strategic use of characters, conflict, emotional arcs, and resolution—has been posited to elicit stronger psychological and behavioral responses than informational approaches alone. Thus, the integration into product promotional videos is not merely a creative choice but a strategic method to influence consumer attitudes, memory recall, and purchase intention. The application of emotional storytelling is particularly salient in the skincare service industry, where product efficacy is often perceived subjectively and intimately tied to consumer identity and aspirations. Unlike commodities with clearly measurable performance, skincare products rely heavily on perceived quality, trust, and emotional resonance to drive purchasing decisions. Consumers do not only seek skin improvement—they seek confidence, self-care rituals, and aesthetic ideals often embedded within cultural and personal narratives. Consequently, marketers of skincare services frequently employ emotionally charged stories in visual media to portray transformation, personal testimony, and lifestyle alignment, all of which aim to generate affective commitment and action. This phenomenon reflects a broader paradigm in consumer psychology that privileges emotion over cognition in decision-making processes, especially in contexts involving self-image and personal care (Escalas, 2004; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010).

The theoretical foundation of emotional storytelling's effectiveness is grounded in several interdisciplinary frameworks. From a psychological perspective, the narrative transportation theory posits that individuals immersed in a story are more likely to experience changes in attitudes and intentions consistent with the narrative message (Green & Brock, 2000). Furthermore, emotional contagion theory suggests that viewers may unconsciously mimic and internalize the emotions displayed in narratives, fostering empathy and identification with the brand message (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). In marketing research, emotional appeals have improved ad recall and brand favorability (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Boller, 1990), particularly when messages are personally relevant or tied to intrinsic motivations. These theoretical frameworks underscore the persuasive potential of emotionally rich promotional narratives, particularly when deployed in highly competitive markets saturated with functionally similar offerings. Recent empirical studies strongly support emotional storytelling's efficacy in enhancing consumer engagement and behavioral intention. For instance, Hsu (2021) found that storytelling-based advertising campaigns produced higher emotional arousal and memory retention than traditional feature-based advertisements. Similarly, Gao et al. (2022) discovered that emotional narratives significantly influenced the purchase intention of millennial consumers in the beauty product segment, especially when the content aligned with social values such as sustainability or inclusivity. In the specific context of skincare, Tan and Tan (2023) identified a positive correlation between emotional video narratives and brand attachment, which in turn predicted higher willingness to try new skincare services. Additionally, a study by Kim and Lee

(2020) revealed that narrative coherence and emotional valence strongly predict consumer trust in cosmetic brands, especially among female consumers aged 18–35. These studies collectively affirm the instrumental role of storytelling in shaping affective responses and mediating consumer trust and loyalty within the skincare domain.

The rise of video-centric platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts has further amplified emotionally driven content in brand communication. In an era where consumers face a barrage of digital content daily, storytelling offers a means of differentiation and emotional stickiness. Unlike static ads or textual information, promotional videos incorporating storytelling engage multiple cognitive channels—visual, auditory, and affective—enhancing message memorability and emotional impact (Quesenberry & Coolson, 2014). This is particularly critical for skincare service brands, where brand differentiation hinges more on perceived values and consumer experience than on product functionality alone. Consequently, the competitive landscape has seen many narrative-based campaigns featuring customer testimonials, behind-the-scenes journeys, and problem-solution arcs that foreground emotional connection over technical explanation.

However, despite the growing prevalence of emotional storytelling in promotional strategies, research has yet to fully synthesize findings specific to the skincare service industry through a systematic and comprehensive lens. Most existing studies have focused on general beauty advertising or consumer responses to traditional video content without isolating the emotional storytelling element. Furthermore, narrative structure variations—such as personal versus fictional stories, positive versus negative emotional framing, and linear versus episodic formats—remain underexplored in their relationship to purchase intention. There is also a limited understanding of how demographic variables (such as age, gender, and cultural background) mediate the effectiveness of storytelling in shaping consumer decisions, particularly in high-involvement product categories such as skincare. To address this gap, the present study employs a systematic literature review to investigate the role of emotional storytelling in promotional videos and its impact on purchase intention, with a targeted emphasis on skincare service products. By synthesizing existing empirical studies across marketing, communication, and consumer psychology disciplines, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how different storytelling elements affect consumer behavior and their implications for skincare marketers. Unlike meta-analyses relying on statistical aggregation, this study adopts a descriptive quantitative approach to categorize, compare, and interpret recurring findings from diverse contexts, offering theoretical and managerial insights.

The relevance of this inquiry is heightened by the rising demand for ethical and emotionally resonant branding in the post-pandemic era. Consumers today are more emotionally attuned and more skeptical of overtly commercial messages. They seek authenticity, relatability, and emotional depth in brand communications. As storytelling becomes an expected norm rather than a novelty in promotional content, understanding its mechanics and psychological underpinnings becomes a critical competency for marketers, particularly in sensitive product categories such as skincare, where trust and emotional affinity are paramount. Thus, the objective of this study is fourfold: first, to systematically identify and review empirical literature that explores the relationship between emotional storytelling in video promotions and consumer purchase intention; second, to isolate and categorize storytelling variables (e.g., emotional tone, character relatability, narrative structure) that have been shown to influence decision-making; third, to contextualize these findings within the skincare service domain; and finally, to propose a conceptual framework that can guide future empirical investigations and managerial practice. This objective is pursued through a rigorous selection and evaluation of scholarly articles

published between 2015 and 2025, using inclusion criteria based on relevance, methodological rigor, and thematic alignment with emotional storytelling and purchase intention.

In conclusion, this research offers a much-needed consolidation of knowledge on emotional storytelling's impact in a rapidly evolving promotional landscape, with practical implications for brands seeking to deepen consumer engagement and drive conversions in the skincare service industry. It situates itself at the intersection of narrative psychology, affective marketing, and consumer behavior, bridging theoretical insights with applied marketing strategies. By illuminating the persuasive power of emotional narratives, the study contributes to academic discourse. It equips practitioners with evidence-based guidelines for crafting emotionally intelligent promotional videos that resonate deeply with target audiences.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Emotional Storytelling in Marketing

Emotional storytelling has long been conceptualized as a persuasive consumer marketing strategy grounded in cognitive-emotional processing theories. Rooted in narrative transportation theory, emotional storytelling proposes that when consumers are immersed in a narrative, they are more likely to adopt the message conveyed by the story (Green & Brock, 2000). The power of this approach lies in its ability to bypass the logical scrutiny typical in rational appeals and instead foster emotional resonance, which can influence attitudes and behavioral intentions. In advertising, this immersive experience has been linked to increased consumer empathy and identification with the brand's message (Escalas, 2004; Wang & Calder, 2009).

Complementing this view, emotional contagion theory explains how viewers can internalize emotions exhibited in narratives through unconscious mimicry and synchronization, fostering empathetic connections with characters or brands (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Such affective resonance is essential in shaping positive brand evaluations, especially in saturated markets with minimal functional product differentiation. Emotional content in storytelling can activate specific brain regions associated with memory and reward, reinforcing message recall and positive associations with the brand (Takahashi et al., 2006). Therefore, emotional storytelling is not merely a communicative tool but a psychological device for influencing consumer cognition and affect.

Recent studies have extended these frameworks by integrating social and cultural dimensions. For example, Zhang and Mao (2022) argue that emotional storytelling reflects individual consumer narratives and aligns with broader cultural schemas and identity markers. This is particularly important in industries like skincare, where ideals of beauty, self-care, and health are culturally constructed and emotionally salient. As storytelling becomes increasingly visual and digitally disseminated, it also intersects with affect theory and media studies, emphasizing how sensory engagement in video storytelling contributes to emotional impact (Papacharissi, 2015; Ghosh, 2023). Altogether, the theoretical underpinnings of emotional storytelling offer a robust framework for understanding its impact on consumer behavior. The confluence of narrative immersion, emotional contagion, cultural resonance, and affective memory formation provides a multi-dimensional view of how stories in promotional videos can shape purchase intention. However, applying these frameworks in specific domains—such as skincare services—requires contextualization to account for unique consumer motivations and emotional triggers.

2.2. Emotional Storytelling and Consumer Purchase Intention

The relationship between emotional storytelling and purchase intention is well-documented in recent marketing literature. Hsu (2021) found that emotionally driven narratives significantly increased viewers' affective engagement and willingness to purchase skincare and beauty products, particularly when the content reflected authentic life scenarios. Likewise, Kim and Lee (2020) demonstrated that narrative coherence and emotional tone were major predictors of trust and purchase behavior among female consumers of cosmetic products. Emotional storytelling activates consumer empathy, enhancing cognitive evaluations and purchase readiness. Beyond individual emotional reactions, several studies suggest that storytelling influences purchase intention by fostering psychological ownership and attachment to the brand. Tan and Tan (2023) examined skincare brands that utilized transformation stories—where consumers shared their skincare journeys—and found a strong positive correlation between emotional storytelling and brand loyalty. Emotional arcs that include vulnerability, conflict, and resolution create a sense of relatability and authenticity, allowing consumers to envision themselves within the narrative (Kowalewski et al., 2020). This imagined experience often translates into stronger behavioral intentions like trial purchases or brand recommendations.

Moreover, research in affective neuroscience has revealed that emotionally charged video content can enhance memory encoding and retrieval, further reinforcing purchase intention. Emotional storytelling activates the amygdala and hippocampus—brain regions critical for emotional memory—strengthening the consumer's recall of brand messages (Dolcos & Denkova, 2014). When promotional videos are emotionally engaging, consumers are more likely to remember and act upon the brand when purchasing. Gao et al. (2022) corroborate this finding, showing that emotional video narratives led to higher recall and preference scores among viewers than traditional informational ads. Despite these positive outcomes, the effects of emotional storytelling can vary based on narrative structure, emotional valence (positive or negative emotions), and viewer characteristics. For instance, Pérez and de la Fuente (2023) found that while positive emotions fostered approach behaviors like trial and purchase, negative emotions, such as fear or sadness, were more effective in raising awareness and social sharing. Therefore, emotional storytelling must be tailored to campaign objectives and audience profiles to maximize purchase intention outcomes.

2.3. Skincare as an Emotionally Driven Consumption Category

The skincare industry presents a uniquely emotional consumption context, wherein self-image, social identity, and psychological well-being converge. Unlike functional goods, skincare services are often marketed as tools for personal transformation, confidence building, and self-care rituals. This emotional framing creates fertile ground for storytelling approaches. According to Wong and Lee (2019), emotional narratives in skincare advertising often evoke themes of personal growth, overcoming adversity (e.g., acne, aging), and self-love, all of which contribute to emotional engagement and brand affinity. Empirical evidence supports this phenomenon. A study by Liu and Lin (2020) found that emotional appeals in skincare advertising had a greater impact on consumer trust and brand preference than rational claims about ingredients or clinical effectiveness. This effect was powerful among Gen Z and Millennial consumers, who highly value authenticity, emotional transparency, and aesthetic narratives. Tan et al. (2022) emphasized that skincare consumers are often drawn to brands that reflect

their values and aspirations, which are more effectively communicated through emotional storytelling than conventional advertising.

The emotionalization of skincare marketing is also linked to cultural shifts in how consumers perceive wellness and beauty. As notions of holistic well-being gain traction, skincare is increasingly framed as a cosmetic concern and as part of broader emotional and mental health practices. This perspective is echoed in the work of Ryu and Park (2021), who argue that emotional storytelling in skincare advertising often includes cues about mental resilience, confidence, and lifestyle, aligning with consumer expectations in a post-pandemic world. The emotional depth of these narratives fosters perceived brand authenticity and consumer identification. However, some researchers caution against overreliance on emotional appeals in skincare storytelling. Choi and Han (2023) point out that if emotional storytelling is perceived as manipulative or exaggerated, it can backfire, reducing credibility and purchase intention. This finding underscores the need for authenticity and balance in crafting emotionally compelling narratives. The challenge lies in eliciting genuine emotional responses without crossing into sentimentality or disingenuous branding.

2.4. Digital Platforms, Video Format, and Emotional Storytelling

The proliferation of digital platforms has revolutionized how storytelling is delivered and consumed. Short-form video content on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube platforms has created new opportunities for emotionally driven promotional storytelling. These platforms prioritize engagement and virality, making emotional storytelling a strategic imperative. According to Quesenberry and Coolsen (2014), emotionally structured videos are more likely to be shared, commented on, and remembered, especially when they follow classic narrative arcs involving conflict and resolution. This shift is especially advantageous for skincare brands, which often operate in visually oriented markets. Emotionally engaging videos featuring testimonials, transformations, and behind-the-scenes product development footage can create intimacy and trust. Li and Chen (2023) found that skincare brands that utilized emotionally rich content on TikTok achieved higher conversion rates and brand favorability than those relying solely on influencer promotions or technical explanations. Moreover, the interactive features of digital platforms—such as comments, likes, and shares—amplify storytelling content's reach and emotional impact. In addition, algorithmic recommendation systems on social media platforms tend to favor content that elicits strong emotional reactions, whether positive or negative. Ghosh (2023) noted that algorithmic curation systems often prioritize emotionally intense content because of its potential to increase user dwell time and engagement metrics. This dynamic creates both an opportunity and a challenge for skincare marketers, who must craft emotionally resonant stories that perform well in algorithm-driven environments without sacrificing brand integrity or message coherence. However, the efficacy of emotional storytelling on digital platforms also depends on user preferences, platform culture, and video length. For example, storytelling strategies on YouTube may not translate effectively to TikTok due to differences in audience expectations and attention spans (Molyneux et al., 2022). Additionally, real-time feedback loops in comment sections can shape the emotional tone of the narrative and influence its reception. Brands must, therefore, consider not only the content of their emotional storytelling but also the platform and audience context in which it is delivered.

2.5. Methodological Approaches in Studying Emotional Storytelling and Purchase Intention

The empirical study of emotional storytelling in marketing has adopted various methodological approaches, from experimental designs and eye-tracking studies to neuroimaging and sentiment analysis. Experimental designs remain the most common, allowing researchers to manipulate narrative variables and measure their effects on purchase intention. For instance, Li and Zhang (2022) experimented by comparing emotional versus informational skincare videos and found that emotional content yielded significantly higher purchase intention scores across multiple demographic groups. Neuromarketing techniques have also gained traction in recent years. Functional MRI (fMRI) studies have shown that emotionally charged narratives activate reward and memory circuits in the brain more robustly than non-narrative content (Kühn & Gallinat, 2014). These insights provide a biological basis for the persuasive power of storytelling. Meanwhile, sentiment analysis tools allow researchers to analyze consumer-generated content, such as video comments or product reviews, to assess emotional reactions and their correlation with purchase behavior (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014).

Mixed-method approaches combining qualitative content analysis and quantitative surveys have also been used to explore how consumers interpret and respond to emotional storytelling. For example, Park and Kim (2023) used focus groups and survey data to examine how emotions (hope, sadness, pride) affected consumer perception of skincare advertisements. They found that authenticity, relatability, and emotional tone were critical moderators of purchase intention. Such studies offer a more holistic understanding of how emotional storytelling influences consumer behavior. Despite these methodological advances, challenges remain in isolating the causal pathways between emotional storytelling and behavioral outcomes. Confounding variables such as prior brand loyalty, visual aesthetics, and celebrity endorsements can complicate interpretation. Future research should aim for more robust longitudinal designs and cross-cultural validation to account for temporal and sociocultural variability in emotional storytelling effectiveness.

Based on the literature reviewed, emotional storytelling in product promotional videos has consistently demonstrated a significant impact on consumer purchase intention, especially within the skincare service context. Theoretical insights from narrative transportation theory, emotional contagion, and affective neuroscience, combined with empirical findings across digital platforms and consumer psychology, offer a compelling basis for hypothesis formulation. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Emotional storytelling in product promotional videos positively influences consumers' purchase intention for skincare service products.
- H2: Story's emotional tone (positive vs. negative) moderates the relationship between narrative engagement and purchase intention.
- H3: Narrative coherence and authenticity mediate the effect of emotional storytelling on purchase intention in skincare advertising.
- H4: The impact of emotional storytelling on purchase intention varies across digital platforms based on video format and audience engagement dynamics.

These hypotheses will guide future empirical testing and offer valuable directions for academic research and managerial practice in affective marketing.

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