

Advertising on Social Networking Sites (SNSs): Exploring the Gender Differences

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Abstract

With the growth of Internet, it has changed the way we work and live. Presently around 42 percent of the world population is using Internet. We get up-to-date information over the Internet which is accessible 24X7. Internet has also become synonymous with Social Networking Sites (SNS). They help us remain in contact with near and dear ones as also business contacts on a real time basis and its reach has been growing with a scorching pace. According to certain estimates, around 30 percent of the world population accesses some form of Internet based social media. The marketers too have taken notice of potential of this medium and started using it in innovative ways to reach to their target audience. This study primarily focuses on how male and female patrons of social networking sites perceive advertisements over social networking sites as also their perceptions towards online purchases. The results indicate that both the genders have similar attitudes towards advertisements over SNSs but they perceived online shopping differently. The findings have important theoretical and managerial implications.

Keywords: Internet; Social Media; Social Networking Sites (SNS); Social Media Marketing

Introduction

Internet has transformed itself into a platform where advertise their products and services (Ahmad & Khan, 2017a; Ahmad & Khan, 2017b). It is a platform where people communicate and do businesses. Internet as a medium has given a globalized dimension to the world; everything we need is just a click away. It has been found to be the most democratic medium providing information to millions of people. Internet has evolved as a vast global market where we communicate and exchange goods and services. It is being used by the individuals for various purposes like to search product features, compare prices, look reviews of the products, make payments etc. (Ahmad, Rahman, & Khan, 2017; Sinha, 2010). Around 3.8 billion people i.e. more than 50 percent of the population world-wide is using Internet. In a report (Internet World Stats, 2017). Social networking has become the most prevalent Internet activity surpassing other online activities (Ahmad & Khan, 2017b). With the increasing popularity of social networking sites, marketers are coming up with ways and means to use these sites as an advertising medium (Hart 2007; Bausch and Han 2006). Marketers must understand the way these sites can be used by the marketers to reach their target consumers (Ahmad & Khan, 2017b;

Ahmad, Akhter, Khan, & Khan, 2013).

Advertising over the Internet has been acknowledged for its interactivity and ability to record the behavioural responses of the Internet users (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). Researchers have discussed the relevancy of the advertisements as is the most important feature which makes the ads effective (Lee and Mason 1999; Muehling and McCann 1993). It has also been reported that when consumers perceive that advertisements contain useful information they are more likely to respond to it (Ahmad & Khan, 2017b; Ducoffe 1996; Muehling and McCann 1993). Hence, it can be said that if the marketers use the social networking sites to exhibit ads which are useful than the users will exhibit a positive behavioural response to the ads.

Literature Review

Online Buyer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour differs over the Internet in comparison to offline stores, where one can touch and feel the product (Ahmad & Khan, 2015). Realizing the importance of e-buyer behaviour, a number of researchers have explored the area (Ahmad et al., 2017; Tsai & Men, 2013; Chen, Hsu & Lin, 2010; Jayawardhena et al., 2007; Cheung, Chan & Limayem, 2005; Brown et al., 2003). Internet users browse the web to get information along with enjoyment (Ahmad, Rahman & Khan, 2016; Katerattanakul, 2002). In the evaluation of websites, researchers have found both informativeness as well as entertainment to be vital factors (Richard, 2005; Ducoffe, 1996). In other words, hedonic and utilitarian motivations play significant role in affecting online buyers purchase intention (Ahmad et al., 2017a; Wolfinger & Gilly, 2001).

Aljukhadar and Senecal (2011) divided online buyers into three categories: basic communicators (users using Internet to communicate), lurking shoppers (users who shop heavily) and, social thrivers (Users using the interactive features of Internet to interact by means of chatting, blogging, video streaming, downloading etc.). In online buying, word of mouth also has an important role. It has been found that negative word of mouth elicits a conformity effect (Lee, Park & Han, 2008). Experience, word of mouth, and marketing communications has been found to help build brand image (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2003). Several researchers have found a significant and positive influence of the volume and the valence of the reviews on sales (Chen, Wang & Xie 2011; Chevalier & Mayzlin 2006; Liu, 2006).

The young generation that forms an important consumer group because of their unique purchasing behaviour have also been found to have a positive attitude towards online

shopping (Ahmad & Khan, 2015; Cole, 2011; Arnaudovska, Bankston, Simurkova & Budden, 2010; Xu and Paulins, 2005). Researchers have also analysed e-buyer behaviour with respect to socioeconomic characteristics i.e. age, gender, income etc. (Hernández, Jimenez, & Martin, 2011). Researchers have found difference in the attitude of men and women towards online shopping. Men have been found to have shown favourable attitudes to Internet and Internet Shopping (Dennis, Morgan, Wright & Jayawardhena, 2010; Jackson, Ervin, Gardner & Schmitt 2001; Bimber, 2000). Studies have also revealed that, men are content with the overall message themes, whereas women go for a detailed elaboration of the content (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991; Meyers-Levy, 1989).

Social Media Marketing

Social media includes sites like blogs, social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), content communities (e.g., Youtube) (Akar & Topcu (2011)). These sites enable the marketers to reach the target consumers through social communities where they also work to build a healthy relationship with the consumers on a more personal level (Kelly, Kerr & Drennan, 2010; Avery, Lariscy, Amador, Ickowitz, Primm & Taylor, 2010). Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) have emerged to be the most important driving force of the digital media revolution (Vogt & Knapman, 2008). Social media marketing has enabled the marketers in presenting their products and services to a large community and to get their feedback through social networking sites (Weinberg, 2009). Social networking sites help the marketers to exchange thoughts and information related to products and services (Ontario, 2008).

The intention to use any services over the Internet is affected by the level of satisfaction of the users (Ahmad et al., 2017; Shiao & Luo, 2010). Social media users shop through the social networking sites when they find the services over the social sites useful as well as easy to use (Cha, 2009). Online consumers extract the product related information from various sources, especially through the product reviews on the social networking sites (Clemons, 2009). Before actual buying of products and services, consumers continuously search for the product reviews (Akar & Topcu, 2010). A large chunk of the online buyers have been found to believe the product reviews by other consumers (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). The social networking activities of the users have increased the ad recall, awareness and purchase intentions of the online consumers (Neff, 2010). The social networking users have become a kind of brand endorsers when they forward some viral advertising to the friend list (Chu, 2011).

The online consumers who use social networking sites have been found to be vital as they are supposed to be active

and effective, they have also been found to share their experiences with other consumers through the social media (Blackshaw&Nazzaro, 2006). Consumers rely more on the e-word-of-mouth (e-wom) in comparison to marketing messages (Akar, 2010). It is the need of the hour that, the interrelation of the social media and marketing aspects needs to be understood by the marketers as the social media effects the marketing performance of the products and services (Stephen &Galak, 2010). There are various studies which have investigated online communities (DeKay 2009; Gangadharbatla 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia 2002), but there is a dearth of literature which has explored the perception of the male and female social network users towards the advertisements on the SNS in the Indian context.

Research Methodology

Objectives

The objectives of the study are listed below:

1. To explore the differences in perceptions of the two genders in terms of attitude towards advertisements appearing on Social Networking Sites (SNSs).
2. To explore the differences in perceptions of the two genders in terms of utilitarian value of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in online purchases.
3. To explore the differences in perceptions of the two genders in terms of Trust on Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in online purchases.

Hypothesis

In the light of the study objectives and above literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H01: Significant differences do not exist between the two genders in terms of attitude towards advertisements appearing on Social Networking Sites (SNSs).

H02: Significant differences do not exist between the two

genders in terms of utilitarian value of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in online purchases.

H03: Significant differences do not exist between the two genders in terms of Trust on Social Networking Sites (SNSs).

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire employing 5 point Likert scale consisting of 10 items related to three variables has been used in this study. The items of Attitude and Utilitarian has been adapted from Khare and Rakesh (2011) and the items of Trust has been adapted from Koo (2006). The variable items were modified and rephrased by the researchers keeping in mind the profile of the respondents. The responses were generated from Internet users who had accounts on Social Networking Sites for last six months.

Sample

The sample for the study comprised University students who were enrolled in under graduate courses as also higher studies at a large University of repute in northern part of India. The University is a Central Government institution fully funded by the University Grants Commission and is popular with students who belong to middle class families (Ahmad et al., 2017; Heslop, 2014). Students belonging to the middle class can be deemed to represent the masses (Ahmad et al., 2016; Shabnam, 2012), hence the sample can be considered to represent the student population of the country as a whole.

Data Collection

Researcher controlled sampling was used for data collection. As suggested by previous studies Dornyei & Taguchi, (2010), the researchers were personally present while administering the questionnaire to clarify doubts, if any. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed by the researchers, of which 150 were received back and 140 of them were suitable for further analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

	FREQUENCY
Qualification	
Graduate	60
Post Graduate	80
AGE	
Less than 22 Years	66
Above 22 Years	74
GENDER	
Male	86
Female	54

Data Analysis and Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using SPSS 20 employing Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization as the factor extraction method. The KMO measurement of sampling adequacy value was found to be 0.7, which indicated that the factors caused variance in the variables. In addition, the Bartlett's test of Sphericity value was found to be significant (Chi-square = 1124.781, $p < 0.005$) that was less than 0.05 (Hair et al., 1998; Herington & Weaven,

2007), which proved that the analysis was significant with the sample size of 140.

Loadings with value more than .5 are considered to be acceptable (Khan & Adil, 2013; Metin et al., 2012; Büyüköztürk et al., 2004; Hair et al., 1998). The Table 2 shows the loadings which were found to acceptable (>0.6) on intended factors. The variables Attitude, Utilitarian Value and Trust each consisted three, four and three items respectively.

Table 2: Results of EFA

Variables	Items	Code	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude	I am interested in social media advertisements	AT1	.819	0.715
	I feel comfortable with online advertisements	AT2	.684	
	My attitude toward online advertisement is positive.	AT3	.778	
Utilitarian Value	SNSs improves my shopping productivity	PU1	.754	0.793
	SNSs would be useful in buying what I want	PU2	.706	
	SNSs will improve my shopping ability	PU3	.784	
	SNSs would enhance my effectiveness in shopping.	PU4	.847	
Trust	SNSs safeguard my personal information	TR1	.693	0.737
	My privacy would be guaranteed on SNSs.	TR2	.732	
	The social networking sites are reliable.	TR3	.689	

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of all the three variables Attitude, Utilitarian Value and Trust were found to be 0.715, 0.793 and 0.737 respectively. The alpha values of all the three variables were within acceptable range and hence the factors were found to be reliable as the Cronbach alpha value of all the three variables were greater than 0.6 (Khan & Adil, 2013; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Hair et al., 1998).

To investigate the three hypothesis (H01, H02 and H03), Independent samples t-Test was employed to determine the variation in the factors and inferences were drawn. The results of the t-test showed that for the factor "Attitude" significant difference were not observed between the two genders at $p=0.05$ (Field, 2005).

Table 3: t-Test

Construct	Gender	N	Mean	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Attitude	M	86	3.96	-0.815	0.416
	F	54	3.87		
Utilitarian value	M	86	3.93	2.614	0.01
	F	54	3.35		
Trust	M	86	3.89	-2.177	0.02
	F	54	3.26		

On the other hand significant differences was found between male and female respondents for the factor "Utilitarian Value" and "Trust". Hence, H01 could not be rejected whereas H02 and H03 was rejected. Table 3 above presents the results for the independent samples t-Test.

Discussion and Conclusion

Social networks have become popular mediums for the world where people of various backgrounds meet. Social media, where users get connected with others, and even disclose their personal information and share other information with their contacts has been used as medium

by the marketers to communicate the advertising messages (IAB, 2015). The findings suggest that majority (93%) of the respondents did notice online advertisements on SNS. This implies that the marketers have realized the growing potential SNSs and to effectively target their users, advertisements are being placed in SNSs. It has also been found that that advertising through SNS influences the people in a positive way.

The SNSs are being used as a platform where the marketers easily establish their brand presence, bring awareness of their brands, and even it has helped them to save

advertising costs (Bolotaeva&Cata, 2010; Skul, 2008). Facebook has been found to be the most popular social networking application and has been found to be one of the most prominent medium of advertisement too (Xia, 2009). The results of the independent samples t-Test showed that there was no significant difference between males and females with respect to attitude towards the advertisements over the social media whereas significant differences were found between the two genders with respect to the utilitarian value and trust of social networking sites.

Internet shopping has grown tremendously all over the world in recent years. Social media marketing is playing an important role in the marketing strategies of companies such as advertisements (Chu, 2011) and brand pages on SNSs (Tsai & Men, 2013). It has been observed that the social media users are lively and the chance of taking positive marketing action (i.e. indulging in purchasing) by them is more, hence it can be a big advantage for the marketers who are present on the social networking websites (Ahmad et al., 2013). Consequently, companies who integrate elements of social media into their marketing mix have greater potential to influence buying choices (Klein, 2008).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present study suffers from certain limitations. The study adopted researcher controlled sampling and thus the findings of the study may have the limitation of generalizability. There are significant differences in the sample sizes of different groups which might have compromised the accuracy of the test applied in the study (Byrne et al., 2007). The study is also limited with respect to geographic extent which again might limit the generalizability of the results of the study.

However, the limitations of any study are likely precursors for new areas of research. Future researchers can work on larger and more representative probability based samples and validate the results of the present study. The significant differences in the various groups of sample need to be checked in future researches. Researchers also need to work on other occupational groups in the context of social networking sites to broaden the scope of study findings.

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