

Consumer Perception Towards Social Media Advertisements : A Study Done in a Semi-Urban City of South India

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Abstract

The drastic growth in the usage of social media among the people in India has created a new platform for promotion, that is, social media advertisements. However, the effectiveness of these advertisements has been interrogated by many. Lower acceptance of advertisements has been one of the major challenges faced by the marketers. Henceforth, it is vital to understand the critical factors influencing the consumers' attitude towards social media advertisements. This study thus identified and analyzed the factors influencing behavioral intention of the consumers concerning social media advertisements. The constructs like corporate reputation, emotional appeal, informativeness, creativity, irritation, and materialism were considered to affect the attitude, which in turn influenced the behavioral intention of consumers. The study was carried out in a semi-urban city of Karnataka, South India and the data were collected from 217 respondents. The analysis was carried out using the partial least square approach. The results indicated that the two factors - creativity and informativeness had a significant influence on the attitude of the consumers towards social media advertisements. The study further analyzed the moderating role of the factor - 'gender' between the identified constructs and attitude. The results revealed the existence of differences among the male and female respondents towards the advertisements. Further, based on these outcomes, appropriate practical implications of the findings were discussed. Subsequently, this study will certainly help in gaining better insights into the consumers' perception towards social media advertisements and will assist the marketers in framing effective advertisement strategies.

Keywords : social media advertisements, consumer perception, purchase intention, digital marketing

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Social media is a computer mediating technology which facilitates the creation and sharing of information, ideas, and other forms of interest. Social media has evolved as one of the most popular mediums of communication across the globe (Cotter & Perrin, 2017). The usage of social media in India is one among the top five positions in the world and recorded a growth of 15% usage in the year 2016. The most popular social media sites in India are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. India has the largest Facebook users with 147 million monthly active users and Twitter has the second largest users with 23.2 million monthly

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active users in the world ; whereas, LinkedIn has 30 million users, and YouTube has 60 million unique active users with the usage of 48 hours a month video content ("Active social media users in India grow by 15 % from 2015 to become 136 million: Yral Report 2016", 2017). This has gradually shifted the advertising platform from traditional media to social media, which has been gaining a lot of importance over the years (Lee & Hong, 2016). This transformation in social media made businesses scramble to boost digital offerings with new apps and advertisements since it is one of the dominant tools for communication. Measuring the success of these advertisements is still a challenging aspect for the businesses, and several strategies are being formulated for the same. However, the effectiveness of these is always questionable for developing countries like India with a diversified culture, tradition, and value system (Chen, Chen, & Xu, 2016 ; Muralidharan, La Ferle, & Sung, 2015). Thus, there is a higher scope of research in this field of digital marketing. One of the key areas for study in this field is on analyzing consumers' perception towards social media advertisements (Farhan & Yousaf, 2016). This study will help in measuring the penetration of social media advertisements in the market and their awareness among consumers, the knowledge of which will help in better understanding of the consumers based on which appropriate strategies can be formulated (Yadav, 2017).

Social media advertisements strongly influence brand equity, while traditional media advertisements have greater influence on brand awareness (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). Although social media advertisements are technically online banner advertisements, they provide a different experience for people to like, follow, and share options (Logan, Bright, & Gangadharbatla, 2012). Social media advertisements are the less - expensive advertisement platform even for small firms and businesses. The influence of word of mouth (WOM) and viral marketing in social media has a direct impact on the purchase intention of the consumer. In social media, brands with more likes and shares suggest that the 'brand' is more reputable (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015). Thus, it is notifiable that the consumer's perception of the corporate reputation of a company is also a vital component which results in buying a product or service. Marketers should also use social media as a platform to build promotional strategies, and they should effectively use this for developing consumer communities. The benefit of this will be in the form of higher consumer awareness about the brand and customer retention. Past literature also highlighted the importance of measuring consumer's perception of belief towards social media advertisements (Natarajan, Balakrishnan, Balasubramanian, & Manickavasagam, 2014).

The primary objective of the study is to analyze the factors that significantly influence the attitude towards social media advertisements and its subsequent impact on purchase intention of the consumer. The present study also triggers some of the research questions : (a) What are the factors that affect the impact of social media advertisements ? (b) To what extent do the factors influence the purchase intention of the consumer? (c) Does the perception of social media differ based on gender bias ?

Literature Review

As discussed, the perception of the consumers towards social media advertisements is influenced by various factors, which have a direct bearing on its effectiveness. The important factors influencing the attitude towards social media advertisements and the buying intentions of consumers were identified from past literature and are discussed in this section.

(1) Corporate Reputation : Most of the companies have realized the significance of 'corporate reputation' to be more competitive in the market. Various studies have proven that 'corporate reputation' has a significant impact on corporate image. The trust of the customer as a factor directly affects the purchase intention wherein the word-of-mouth plays a moderating role (Boateng & Okoe, 2015).

Corporate reputation can be referred to an overall evaluation of a company over a period of time. The assessment is based on the direct evaluation of the company, any other forms of communication and symbolism

that provide information about a firm's action and comparison with other leading rivals (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Corporate image is considered to have a direct bearing on the trust factor of the consumer. It also helps in developing a positive impression among consumers and assists in building brand loyalty. Companies which contribute more towards philanthropic outflows have an excellent reputation, and customers thereby have a favorable impression towards such organizations (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Caruana & Ewing, 2010).

Studies also claimed that companies should focus more on developing a corporate brand which will set a desirable and believable image. This corporate branding then gets converted into corporate reputation (Balakrishnan, Dahnil, & Yi, 2014; Caruana & Ewing, 2010; Hamouda, 2018). Usage frequency of social media by consumers also helps in creating a positive corporate reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015). Corporate reputation helps build a trustworthy relation and commitment with the customers. These are the bridges which connect corporate reputation with purchase intention of the customer. This reputation will result in building a strong loyalty with the customer (Balakrishnan et al., 2014; Caruana, & Ewing, 2010; Keh & Xie, 2009).

The hypothesis framed considering this factor is given as:

✎ **H1** : Corporate reputation in social media advertisements positively affects the purchase intention.

(2) Emotional Appeal : Emotional appeal is a mode through which consumers can be influenced by designing an ad using emotional content (Lee & Hong, 2016). Companies often use two kinds of appeals in their advertisement strategy ; one is rational, and the other is emotional. These two appeals in advertisements are crucial, which inclines the customer purchase intention (Jovanović, Vlastelica, & Kostic, 2016). Rational advertisements represent information, content, usefulness, product features in advertisements and emotional appeal plays with the emotional desire of consumers. Emotional appeal may be positive or negative, but its purpose should create the right attitude among consumers to buy a product (Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Fasseur, 2011; Lee & Hong, 2016).

It can also be claimed that men have a strong inclination towards rational advertisements, and women are drawn towards emotional advertisements (Jovanović et al., 2016). Importance is also given to negative emotions in advertisements, but this may not work always, it may even create a negative attitude among consumers. The positive effect created from the emotional appeal in an ad contributes to the development of a right brand image (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Geuens et al., 2011).

The type of product plays a moderating role in an emotionally appealing advertisement (Zhang, Sun, Liu, & Knight, 2014). Some products may show a lower response to emotional advertisements not because of weak projection, but the failure of the product itself in creating the right attitude. One of the studies revealed that people with high effective intensity had a favorable attitude towards positive emotional advertisements (Moore & Harris, 1996). Past research also proved that consumers of different countries exhibit different emotional and other appeals (Zhang et al., 2014). Advertisers need to concentrate on these aspects before planning a social media advertisement strategy. Thus, the hypothesis framed with this factor is:

✎ **H2** : Emotional appeal in a social media advertisement has a positive influence on attitude towards advertisements.

(3) Creativity : Advertisement creativity is a critical factor that attracts the consumers to see the advertisements. A study suggested that divergence is a significant determinant in the creativity of advertisements. Smith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz, and Darley (2007) argued that divergence has several elements such as originality, flexible nature, synthesis, elaboration, imagination, and fluency, and artistic values are the primary determinants that decide on creativity. An ad with high creativity along with a combination of divergence and relevance will create brand intentions.

One of the studies proved that creative advertisements increase the rate of recall among consumers. Even with

less amount of exposure to creative advertisements, consumers can recall creative advertisements. The attitude towards advertisements is also high for creative advertisements (Lehnert, Till, & Carlson, 2013). Creativity is generally considered to have three dimensions, that is, novelty, meaningfulness, and emotional appeal or content in the ad. Novelty refers to surprise, meaningfulness to informative content, and emotional content alludes to intense feelings that are generated after seeing an ad. When the effectiveness of dimensions of creativity was calculated, an ad with positive emotions, unexpectedness, and surprise showed a favorable nature towards attitude (Ang, Leong, Lee, & Lou, 2014).

Previous research identified two significant resistances that affect the judgment of creative advertisements. One is the ability to judge itself, and another one is the training or instruction to the judge. These are the two constraints advertisers need to take care while judging creative advertisements. This study also revealed that if the advertisements have originality, they can be called as more creative (Caroff & Besançon, 2008). Research in the field of social media advertisements on creativity has not been carried out extensively (Lee & Hong, 2016). Hence, the hypothesis framed is:

☞ **H3** : Creativity in social media advertisements has a positive influence on attitude towards advertisements.

(4) Informativeness : For the majority of the customers, the most important belief factor is 'information content' in advertisements. Informativeness grabs the interest in the consumer's mind because it provides sufficient information to the consumer about a product (Wang, Sun, Lei, & Toncar, 2009). It can be said that if the information motivation is high, then the consumer is more inclined to like it, and also, the consumers believe that advertisements having more information content are less irritating (Bassam - Mahmoud, 2014). Studies identified the direct favorable influence of information content in a web ad on the attitude towards advertisements (Alalwan, 2018).

Studies also revealed why consumers give more importance to the 'information content' in advertisements. Studies have shown that the Internet provides easy and free access to information for the consumer. The ability of these Internet-based advertisements to indicate information about products such as price, features, and warranty with ease makes them an attractive choice (Singh & Ahluwalia, 2017; Verma & Saranya, 2014). Hence, the hypothesis (H4) considering informativeness is as follows :

☞ **H4** : Informativeness in social media advertisements will have a positive influence towards advertisements.

(5) Irritation and Materialism : Consumer's reaction to advertisements need not always be positive. The most common negative reaction in advertisements is the feeling of getting irritated. Irritation is referred to as a state of feeling annoyed or impatient, and this effects negatively in a web-based advertisement. The factors that may result in irritation are ad repetition ; ad intrusiveness ; and interruptiveness, strategy similarity, ad characters, ad relevance, etc. (Jagani & Goldsmith, 2017 ; Thota & Biswas, 2009). Studies have also been carried out on how these factors create clutter and irritation and will result in avoidance and ad blocking. Some techniques used by web marketers to attract consumer attention may result in consumers getting irritated (Haida & Rahim, 2015 ; Saadeghvaziri, Dehdashti, & Askarabad, 2013).

Materialism is one of the prominent negative belief factors that affect advertisements. Over tempting of advertisements to buy a product will make consumers dislike the advertisements (Natarajan et al., 2014). Materialistic advertisements generate in society a need to buy a product or service just for the sake of enjoyment. Materialistic advertisements are condemned because they may encourage uncertainty and selfish desire in the society (Saadeghvaziri et al., 2013). Thus, the hypotheses H5 and H6 are framed for the study:

☞ **H5** : Irritation towards social media advertisements will have a negative influence on the attitude towards advertisements.

↳ **H6** : Materialism in social media advertisements will have a negative influence on the attitude towards advertisements.

(6) Effect of Attitude Towards Purchase Intention : A good and a favorable attitude of the consumers towards social media advertisements will lead to purchase intention and vice versa. Past studies have identified that attitude of consumers towards web advertisements has a direct and significant impact on purchase intention (Saadeghvaziri et al., 2013). Some studies also proved that most of the factors would not have a direct influence on purchase intention, but instead, it will influence the attitude of the consumer. This may be through the formation of web ad values (Alalwan, 2018; Shaouf, Lu, & Li, 2016). The hypothesis for the attitude towards purchase intention is :

↳ **H7** : Attitude of consumers towards social media advertisements will have a positive influence on purchase intention.

(7) Gender as a Moderating Variable : A behavioral study in marketing considered gender as one of the most important moderating variables. It is assumed that each gender exhibits different behavioral characteristics. Several types of research have been carried out to know whether there are any opinion differences between the genders in most of the marketing - related studies. Sun, Lim, Jiang, Peng, and Chen (2010) in their research articulated that men and women are biologically varied, they imagine and act differently. These are the issues that a marketer has to take care of while evaluating an advertisement. Another study revealed that men and women have the same behavioral responses, but they do differ when it comes to attitude and purchase intention. In this case, men have more positive attitude towards purchase intention (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Saadeghvaziri et al., 2013).

The hypotheses developed with gender as a moderating variable are listed in the Table 1. The model considering these factors is given in the Figure 1.

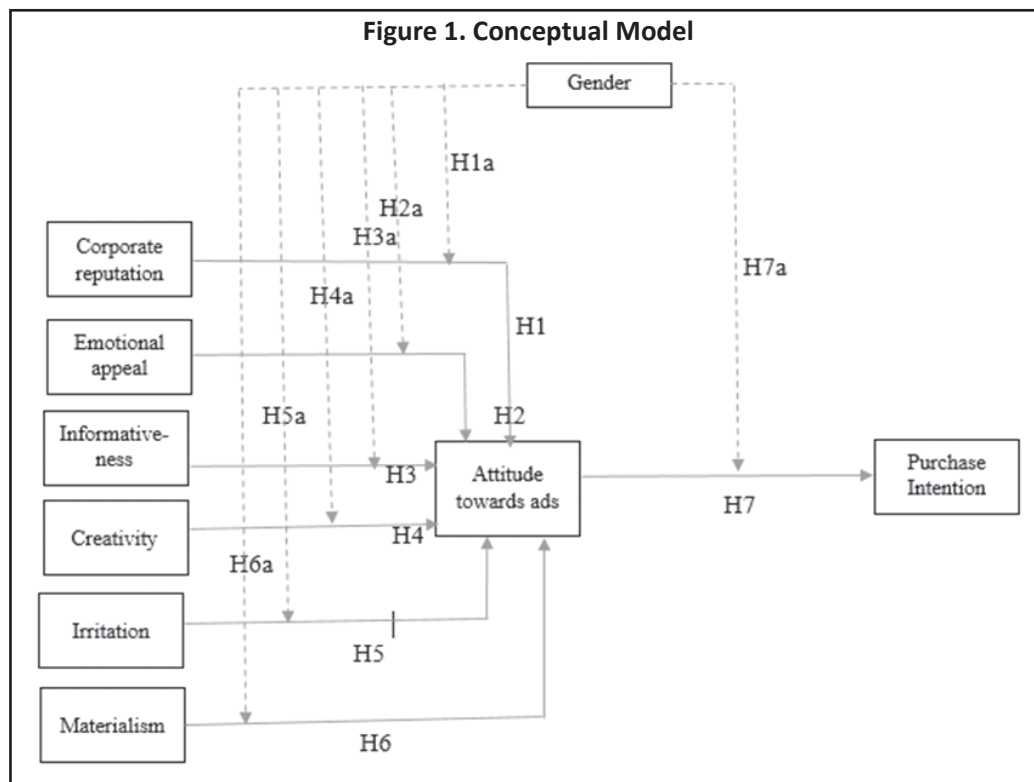


Table 1. Hypotheses with Gender as a Moderating Variable

H1a:	Gender moderates the relationship between the factors - corporate reputation and attitude towards social media advertisements.
H2a:	Gender moderates the relationship between the factors - emotional appeal and attitude towards social media advertisements.
H3a:	Gender moderates the relationship between the factors - creativity and attitude towards social media advertisements.
H4a:	Gender moderates the relationship between the factors - informativeness and attitude towards social media advertisements.
H5a:	Gender moderates the relationship between the factors - irritation and attitude towards social media advertisements.
H6a:	Gender moderates the relationship between the factors - materialism and attitude towards social media advertisements.
H7a:	Gender moderates the relationship between the factors - attitude towards social media advertisements and purchase intention.

Research Methodology

To test and validate the hypotheses framed in this research, the required data were collected using a questionnaire :

(1) Sampling : In this research, a random sampling technique was used. A total of 217 responses were collected from the respondents. The respondents were from the Mangalore region, which is a prominent city of Karnataka State in South India. The minimum sample size required for this study was 180 respondents, but to compensate the errors during the data collection process, the questionnaire was distributed to around 230 respondents, of which only 217 were gathered. The time period of the study is from August 2016 - December 2017.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are described as follows. It can be observed that the sample consisted of 51.4% men and 49.6% women respondents. About 50% of the respondents were in the age group of 18 - 25 years. The remaining 30% were in the age group of 25 - 35 years and the rest were in the age group of 35 - 45 years. It is very important to note that most of the respondents were very active on social media usage and were using social media on an everyday basis (around 83% of the respondents). The educational level of the respondents was either under graduation (70.04%) or post-graduation (29.9%).

(2) Questionnaire Design : A questionnaire developed with the help of past literature for the purpose is measured using the factors. The questionnaire was then subjected to modifications based on the inputs obtained through expert opinions. All the factors were measured based on a 5 - point Likert scale. Furthermore, the questionnaire was tested and validated by conducting a pilot study. Responses were collected from 30 respondents.

In the pilot study, several tests were carried out to check the suitability of the survey instrument, and the result values are found to lie within the limit (Table 2). Initially, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed to determine whether the factor loadings were within the limit. The results show that all the values of factor loading crossed the acceptable limit of 0.5. Then, a reliability analysis was conducted to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The value for Cronbach's alpha crossed an acceptable limit of 0.7 for all the factors. Similarly, the composite reliability was more than 0.6, which is acceptable. Also, the values of average variance extracted (AVE) met the minimum requirement of 0.6 and above (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Thus, the questionnaire can be said to be valid and met the internal consistency.

Structural equation modeling (using Smart - PLS 2) has been used in this research. This method is considered to be more apposite for the analysis of multiple regressions (Saadeghvaziri et al., 2013). Here, the analysis of dependent and independent variables can be conducted precisely.

Table 2. Results of Reliability Tests

Factors	Items	Factor Loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Corporate Reputation	I believe in social media advertisements of companies that are concerned about their customers.	0.709	0.921	0.886	0.744
	I believe in social media advertisements of companies that can be generally trusted.				
	I recommend to my friends and relatives only those social media advertised companies that are credible.				
	I believe in social media advertisements of companies with whom I am satisfied with my overall experience.				
Emotional Appeal	I am emotionally attracted by the key messages of SMAs.	0.91	0.915	0.878	0.729
	The emotional aspect of SMAs is very attractive and leads me to like the advertisements.				
	I had intense feelings after seeing the SMAs.				
Informativeness	Information obtained from the SMAs would be useful.	0.85	0.923	0.891	0.821
	I would learn a lot by using the SMAs.				
	I think the information obtained from the SMAs would be helpful.				
Creativity	Social media advertisements are unique.	0.87	0.757	0.681	0.701
	Social media advertisements are really out of the ordinary.				
	Social media advertisements are fascinating.				
	Social media advertisements are surprising.				
Irritation	Social media advertisements are irritating.	0.79	0.72	0.820	0.733
	Social media advertisements are repetitive (too often).				
	Social media advertisements are annoying.				
Materialism	Social media advertisements make you buy things you don't really need.	0.71	0.83	0.721	0.733
	Social media advertising increases dissatisfaction among consumers by showing products which some consumers can't afford.				
	Social media advertising leads to a materialistic society - interested in buying and owning things.				
	Social media advertising makes people buy unaffordable products just to show off.				
Attitude Towards Social Media Advertisements	I feel good about clicking "like" for social media advertisements.	0.81	0.742	0.828	0.625
	My overall attitude towards social media advertising is positive.				
	Overall, I like social media advertising.				
	In general, I am favorable towards social media advertisements.				
Purchase Intention	I might purchase a product which has been advertised on social media.	0.86	0.73	0.775	0.619
	It is worth purchasing a product which has been advertised on social media.				

Analysis and Results

The structural equation modeling approach using a SMART PLS software was adopted in order to test the hypotheses framed for the current study. The model developed considering dependent and independent variables were analyzed using the data collected through the survey. The results of this analysis are discussed in the Table 3 and Table 4.

It can be observed that even though the factors - corporate reputation and emotional appeal have a positive influence towards attitude, the influence is not significant enough ($\beta = 0.126, p < 0.05$ and $\beta = 0.103, p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Results of Hypotheses Testing

Paths	β	p -value	Result
Corporate Reputation → Attitude	0.126	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Emotional Appeal → Attitude	0.103	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Informativeness → Attitude	0.316	$p < 0.05$	Supported
Creativity → Attitude	0.301	$p < 0.05$	Supported
Irritation → Attitude	- 0.117	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Materialism → Attitude	- 0.128	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.552	$p < 0.05$	Supported

Table 4. Results of Hypotheses Testing Considering the Moderating Variable : Gender

Paths	β		p - value	Result
	Male	Female		
Corporate Reputation → Attitude	0.129	0.076	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Emotional Appeal → Attitude	0.095	0.105	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Informativeness → Attitude	0.305	0.116	$p = 0.05$	Supported
Creativity → Attitude	0.323	0.277	$p < 0.05$	Supported
Irritation → Attitude	- 0.105	- 0.112	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Materialism → Attitude	- 0.111	- 0.05	$p > 0.05$	Not supported
Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.527	0.521	$p > 0.05$	Not Supported

Thus, concerning social media advertisements, corporate reputation and emotional appeal fail to have a significant impact on attitude, and the hypotheses H1 and H2 are not supported.

The relationship between creativity and attitude of consumers towards social media advertisements shows that there is a significant impact of creativity on the attitude of consumers towards social media advertisements ($\beta = 0.301, p < 0.05$). Also, the factor - informativeness has a strong influence on attitude towards social media advertisements ($\beta = 0.316, p < 0.05$). Thus, the hypotheses H3 and H4 are supported by the results obtained.

The factors - irritation and materialism have a negative influence, with materialism having a higher impact than attitude. But both the factors fail to have a strong influence on the attitude of consumers towards social media advertisements ($\beta = -0.117, p < 0.05$ and $\beta = -0.128, p < 0.05$). However, it is better to minimize the effect of these, even though the hypotheses H5 and H6 are not supported in the current study.

Finally, with respect to the factor - attitude will influence the purchase intention, the results reveal that there is a significant impact of SMAs on the attitude of consumers towards purchase intention ($\beta = 0.552, p < 0.05$). Attitude shows a strong and significant influence on purchase intention. Hence, the hypothesis H7 is supported.

Analysis considering the moderating variable - gender was also performed to see if any significant differences are present among the male and female respondents. The number of male participants was 110 and female participants were 80 in number. The results of comparison reveal that the relationship between the factors - creativity and informativeness on attitude show differences among the male and female respondents, while the other factors do not show any differences (Table 4). Creativity on attitude has a beta value of 0.323 for male respondents and 0.277 for female respondents with the significance value of $p < 0.05$. Thus, the hypothesis H4a is supported. Similarly, informativeness on attitude has a beta value of 0.37 for male respondents and 0.116 for female respondents with a significance value of $p = 0.05$. Thus, the hypothesis H3a is supported.

Also, it is observed that the relationship between attitude and purchase intention fails to support the hypothesis (i.e. H7a). This reflects the importance of attitude on purchase intention and indicates that both groups responded strongly towards purchase intention. The other factors such as emotional appeal, corporate reputation, irritation,

and materialism fail to have a significant impact on attitude towards advertisements. Thus, all the hypotheses (H1a, H2a, H5a, and H6a) related to the same are rejected.

Discussion

The study has been conducted to identify the critical factors that affect the attitude of a consumer toward social media advertisements. Later, its influence on purchase intention was analyzed. Studies have highlighted the importance of designing advertisements considering these critical factors for improving their effectiveness in meeting the desired results (Balakrishnan et al., 2014; Singh & Ahluwalia, 2017). The results of the study imply that among the six identified factors which influence the attitude of consumers towards social media advertisements, the factors - creativity and informativeness are the significant predictors influencing the attitude and purchase intention. This implies that people will be persuaded to buy a product if they find the advertisements to be informative and creative. This acts as an effective channel for communication with the richer information source and provides easy access to these on a real-time basis (Verma & Saranya, 2014; Yadav, 2017). Similar outcomes were also observed by the studies carried out by Alalwan (2018), Farhan and Yousaf (2016), and Lee and Hong (2016).

The factor - corporate reputation fails to have a significant influence on attitude. Even though corporate reputation has an influence on attitude (Dijkmans et al., 2015), it was considered as a moderating variable in most of the recent studies (Boateng & Okoe, 2015 ; Hamouda, 2018). Furthermore, the factor of emotional appeal also fails to show a significant impact on the attitude of the consumers. This was also reflected in the study carried out by Lee and Hong (2016). This probably might be because consumers look into other factors like utilitarian aspects in an ad, and emotional appeal has a lesser impact in creating a positive attitude towards an advertisement.

Furthermore, the factors such as irritation and materialism have a negative influence on the attitude of the consumer. This may be due to lack of truthfulness, annoying, and repletion of advertisements. It is essential to note that these factors do not have a significant influence on the attitude, which is encouraging for the marketers. The extent to which the people are using social media on a daily basis is very high. They consider social media advertisements as an effective means of communication and are not deemed to be irritating, provided they are informative and creative. This probably is the reason for these factors not to have a significant negative impact on consumers' attitude (Natarajan et al., 2014; Saadeghvaziri et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2009).

Similarly, the results regarding the moderating variable - gender reveal that there was a difference in opinion among the male and female respondents. This study proves the presence of opinion difference among genders, especially on the factors like creativity and informativeness. These results are in line with the findings obtained by ul - Haq (2009); Akar and Topçu (2011); and Arora, Agarwal, and Kumar (2018). Hence, these differences are to be considered while framing the strategies.

Finally, it is vital to know why consumers had a positive attitude towards purchase intention, which was reflected in similar past studies (Alalwan, 2018; Balakrishnan et al., 2014; Boateng & Okoe, 2015). This is due to the benefits of social media advertisements, which are given to them. These results would encourage marketers to invest more in social media advertisements, which are considered to be a cost - effective means of advertisement with significant potential in meeting the desired purpose. Focus has to be on these outcomes while designing the advertisements to improve their effectiveness.

Conclusion

The growth in the usage of the Internet and social media websites has resulted in the drastic growth of social media advertisements. Social media is considered as a convenient mode of communication to a larger group of people at a very low cost. It also helps in accurately targeting the consumers with the right information in a timely manner.

Even though there is a huge potential for social media advertisements, there are certain limitations (like privacy, irritation, etc.) which, if not considered, will have a negative influence. Thus, it is important to understand and analyze the consumer behavioral aspects and their critical factors, which will help marketers in efficiently articulating an advertisement and target it in the right medium.

Hence, the aim of this study is to identify the key factors influencing the attitude towards social media advertisements. The factors like corporate reputation, emotional appeal, informativeness, creativity, materialism, and irritation are found to have an influence on the attitude of the consumers which, in turn, impact the purchase intention. The conceptual model developed was tested in a semi-urban location with a sample size 217 respondents. The required data were collected through a questionnaire survey after validating the developed instrument through a pilot study. The data were then analyzed using a partial least square approach. The results of the analysis reveal the importance of creativity and informativeness in social media advertisements to have a considerable impact on the attitude of the consumers, while the other factors did not show a significant influence on the attitude of the consumers. The study also reveals the differences in opinion among the male and female consumers with respect to the factors: creativity and informativeness. Here, gender is considered as a moderating variable in the study, the relation of which has been proved consistently in the past studies. The outcomes of this study provide overall guidelines about consumers' perception of social media advertisements. Accordingly, appropriate practical implications and future directions for research are also discussed and suggested, which would assist marketers in their decision making process.

Managerial Implications

The findings of the study give some essential insights on factors that have a significant influence on the consumers' perception of social media advertisements in semi - urban markets. India being a developing country has a number of semi-urban markets, and thus, market - based advertising strategies will be more effective. The decision makers, especially marketers, have to consider these aspects while designing their online advertisement strategies. For instance, the results imply that creativity and informativeness have a significant influence on attitude and purchase intention. Hence, a lot of focus has to be placed on the creative aspects while making advertisements, which positively appeal to the consumers of these markets. It is also important that these advertisements have a clear, informative orientation in their content. Even though the other factors like irritation and materialism do not have a significant influence, these should not be neglected since these have a negative influence on the consumers' mind. The other important implication is that men and women showed differences in characteristics, highlighting the importance of understanding the target audience in marketing. However, all these may also vary geographically. This implies that marketers have to invest more time and effort in finding which factor will have a greater impact on social media advertisements considering the market and consumer characteristics. This will help in the attainment of desired outcomes related to the social media advertisements in an effective manner.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Even though the current study has certain practical implications, it is critical to acknowledge some of the limitations of this study. First, the nature of the study being cross-sectional and self-reported, there is a possibility of common method bias. However, future research can consider the longitudinal study method, which can be used for validating the current findings. Secondly, the study has been limited to the respondents within the age group of 18 - 45 years. However, in the actual scenario, some people are active users of social media beyond the age of 45 years. In future research, these can be taken into consideration. Thirdly, the current study considers only seven important factors, however, other factors related to perceived risk and privacy aspects are found to have an influence on purchase intention (Akar & Topçu, 2011). Future studies can focus on these factors and extend the

current study. Lastly, since the study has been carried out in a semi-urban location, the generalizability of the findings is limited. A comparative study among the people from rural, urban, and semi-urban locations can give better clarity and insights on the perception of the people towards social-media advertisements, which can be a significant contribution in this area of research.

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