

Consumer Perception towards Social Media Advertisements in Urban India: How it is Correlated to their Buying Decisions

Shreyam Ramesh¹, Anil Jadhav²

^{1,2} Symbiosis Centre for Information Technology, Symbiosis International University, Pune, India

ABSTRACT: This paper looks into the factors that influences consumers’ perception towards social media marketing in urban India. In addition, this study searches for a correlation between the factors discovered and consumers’ buying decision. Based on literature review on previous studies and theories of social media marketing and consumers’ perception, a survey was used to gather data from 367 social media users in urban India. Our analysis suggests that the extent of consumers’ perception of credibility, information, entertaining, interactivity, as well as endorsement in the social media advertisements are moderately correlated to their buying decisions. Moreover, the level of consumers’ perception of irritability and personalization in the social media advertisements are weakly correlated to their buying decisions. Some deviations from previous studies were also discussed and were accounted for in this paper. Furthermore, this study has practical contribution to social media marketing by providing some guidelines to be followed by businesses. Directions for future research on this topic are also provided.

KEYWORDS: Social media advertisements, consumer perception, buying decisions, marketing.

INTRODUCTION

In this Era of Social Media, more and more people are joining social media networks all around the globe. Facebook, since its launch in 2004, continues to grow in terms of active users and time spent on the platform. It is the largest social media platform with nearly 2.45 billion monthly active users as of 2020. Facebook is daily visited by 1.62 billion users[1]. Twitter, the second largest social media network, has 330 million monthly active users and 145 million daily users[2]. Figure 1 displays the rise of social media users globally from 2010 to 2023. The main reasons for this surge of users in social media platforms are that humans are social in nature and it is free to use. Hence it is not very shocking that businesses have accepted social media as a profitable medium for marketing.

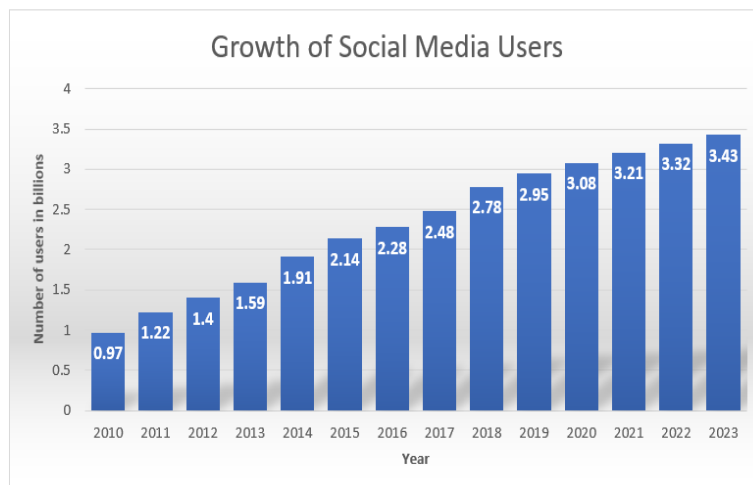


Fig 1. Growth of Social Media Users(adopted from Statista 2020)

Many definitions of Social Media has been defined by researchers in this domain over the years. The most generalized definition is "Mobile and Web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content"[3][4]. In accordance with statistics, the most popular online activity is Social Networking and atleast 91% of adults who are online use social media regularly. This huge penetration of social media allows businesses to derive value by collecting, understanding and visualizing information on customer tastes and preferences, manage customer relationship, promotions, new product research, emergency management and rival intelligence[5]. The value here suggests

discovering lucrative and commercially valuable knowledge that can be advantageous to the organizations from analysis of those data. But before collecting data pertaining to the customers in order to create value, there is a need to understand how customers perceive social media marketing.

There are two objectives of this particular study. The first purpose of this paper is the discovery of the factors that influences consumers’ perception towards social media advertisements in urban India, while the second purpose is to calculate a correlation between the factors discovered and consumers’ buying decision.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Media Marketing and its Effectiveness

Social Media Marketing is defined as “Monitoring and facilitating customers interaction, participation and sharing through social media platforms to encourage positive engagement with a company and its brands leading to commercial value”[6]. With a huge potential customer base available on social media platforms, it is only natural for businesses to invest in social media marketing.

Three areas – omni-social presence, rise of influencers and privacy concerns – has been identified by previous study that can influence the social media landscape in the immediate future[7]. According to the researchers, these areas will impact various stakeholders for example, discrete social media users, companies and trademarks that use social media, and politicians (e.g., administrations, controllers).

According to a previous study, Social Media has a high positive correlation with increased sales[8]. This means that as marketing in social media channels increases, sales increases and vice-versa. Social Media as a digital marketing channel has unlimited potential. Companies are likely to succeed more if they consider consumers’ needs and perception as top priority[8]. With enhanced customer experience and targeted social media marketing strategy, businesses can improve their marketing performance.

For Social Media to be effective as a marketing tool, organisations present on social media channels should provide accurate and well-timed information needed by the consumers. The best way consumers can join or follow a brand on social networking sites is through advertising[9]. Hence the focus of this paper is on social media advertisements.

B. Consumers' Perception and Buying Decision

According to the researchers, consumers' perception refers to the process in which consumers pick, arrange and interpret their stimuli that influences their buying decision or behavior[10]. When buying the same product, each consumer may have a different point of view which makes their buying behavior unique[11].

The process of perception (see Figure 2) consists of three stages. In the first stage i.e. Exposure stage, consumer is exposed to a stimuli via one or more senses. Stimuli here is actually the product the consumer comes across. In the second stage i.e. Attention stage, consumer's mental processing is activated due to the stimuli. In other words, consumer's attention is grabbed by the product he/she is exposed to. In the third stage i.e. Perception stage, perception of the consumer is formed based on their interpretation of the information they have processed[12].

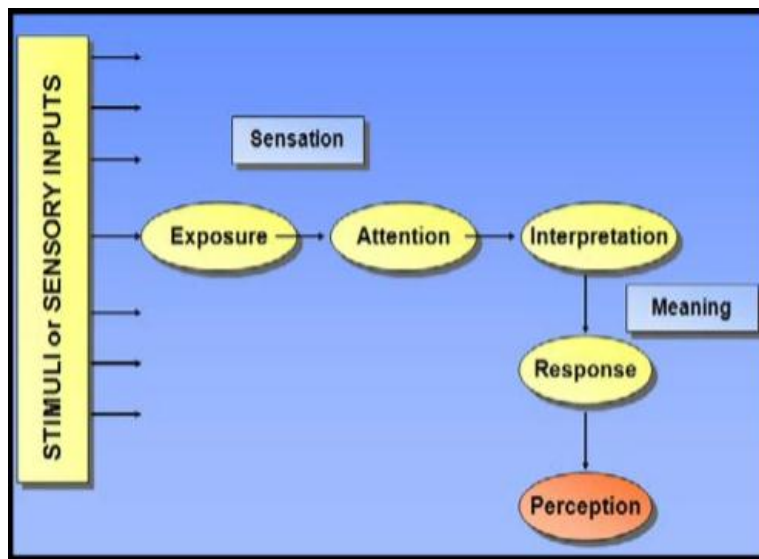


Fig 2. Process of Perception[12]

There are five stages involved in the process of Buying Decision (see Figure 3). In the first stage i.e. Need Recognition, consumer recognizes a need or a problem that can be solved by a product. In the second stage i.e. Information Search, consumer seek for more information for a product. In the third stage i.e. Evaluation of Alternatives, after relevant information is collected, alternative products are evaluated on the basis of features of the product, the degree of relevance, belief in the brand, satisfaction etc. In the fourth stage i.e. Purchase Decision, consumer finally decides to buy the product on the basis of the previous evaluation. In the fifth stage i.e. Post Purchase Behavior, consumer judges their level of satisfaction derived from the product[13].



Fig 3. Process of Buying Decision[13]

C. The Conceptual Model

In this paper, the conceptual model (see Figure 4) proposed is based on three previous researches which are [14], [15] and [16]. Researchers in [14] suggested a model in which there are five factors which affects the consumer's perception of Instagram advertisements which in turn affects the consumer's buying decision. These five factors are credibility, lack of irritation, informativeness, entertainment and personalization. Researcher in [15] suggested another model where features of social media advertisements affecting consumer's purchase intention are informative, interactivity, entertainment and credibility. According to [16], endorsement by celebrities can also be considered a factor of social media advertisements which influences the consumer's buying behaviour.

By combining the above mentioned factors of social media advertisements, we obtain seven factors which are important to be considered for consumer's perception which correlated to their buying decision.

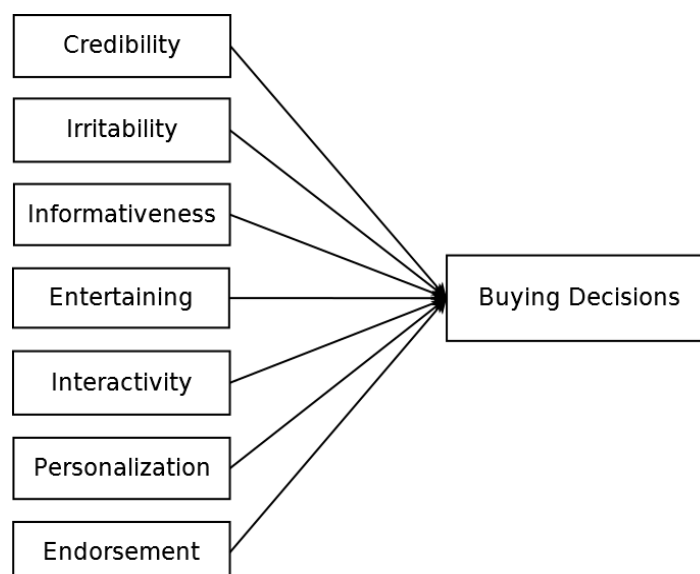


Fig 4. Proposed Conceptual Model

These seven factors are credibility, irritability, informativeness, entertaining, interactivity, personalization and endorsement.

Table 1. Factors of Social Media Advertisement and their Description

Features/Factors of Social Media Advertisement	Description
Credibility	Credibility of advertisements is defined as “the extent to which the consumer perceives claims made about the brand in the advertisement to be truthful and believable”[17]. According to a previous research, credibility can be used to predict the effectiveness of advertisement[18]. It was [19] and [20] who suggested that credibility of advertisements can positively influence consumer's buying decision in social media platforms.
Irritability	Irritation from advertisements can be defined as “when advertising employs techniques that annoy, offend, insult, or are overly manipulative, consumers are likely to perceive it as an unwanted and irritating influence”[20]. According to previous research, if consumers, on a social media platform, get interference due to advertisements, then advertisements will be perceived as vexing and unwanted[21].
Informativeness	Informativeness of advertisement is defined as “the ability of the advertising message to inform the recipient of different product and service alternatives so that the consumer gets the most satisfaction he wants”[20]. Due to the high volume of advertisement that consumers come across, consumers prefer informative advertisements that allows them to make the final purchasing decision on product or service alternatives[20].
Entertaining	Entertainment in advertisement refers to "the ability of the advertisement to fulfill an audience's needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional enjoyment"[20]. Uses and Gratification Theory explains that people prefer entertaining content on social media due to their natural playfulness[20].
Interactivity	Interactive Advertisement is defined as "the paid and unpaid presentation and promotion of products, services and ideas by an identified sponsor through mediated means involving mutual action between consumers and producers"[22]. Researchers found evidence that consumers who interact or engage with brands on a social media platform have better relationship with those brands[23].
Personalization	Personalization of advertisement can be defined as “the ability of a company to recognize and treat its customers as individuals through personal messaging, targeted banner ads, special offers on bills, or other personal transactions”[24]. Customers tend to prefer a customized advertisement that is pertinent to their needs and interests. Higher perceived relevance to advertisement improves advertising effectiveness positively such as greater awareness to advertisements and decreased advertisement elusion[25].
Endorsement	Endorsement of advertisement is defined as "any advertising message, that message which consumers are likely to believe, reflects the opinions, beliefs, findings or expertise of a party other than the sponsoring advertiser"[16]. Advertisements endorsed by celebrities has higher potential to grab consumer's attention[26].

D. Hypotheses Development

Based on described features of Social Media Advertisement from Table 1, following hypotheses can be formulated about consumer's buying decisions:

H1 Perception of consumers on credibility of Social Media Advertisement is positively correlated to their buying decisions.

H2 Perception of consumers on irritability of Social Media Advertisement is positively correlated to their buying decisions.

H3 Perception of consumers on informativeness of Social Media Advertisement is positively correlated to their buying decisions.

H4 Perception of consumers on entertaining contents of Social Media Advertisement is positively correlated to their buying decisions.

H5 Perception of consumers on interactivity of Social Media Advertisement is positively correlated to their buying decisions.

H6 Perception of consumers on personalization of Social Media Advertisement is positively correlated to their buying decisions.

H7 Perception of consumers on endorsement of Social Media Advertisement is positively correlated to their buying decisions.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study follows the correlational research design where the purpose is to find a relationship between dependent variables and independent variables. Quantitative data is required for this type of research.

Data was collected via a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire has 14 questions in total. The first set of questions in the survey profiles the user based on their age, gender, educational background, favourite social media platform etc. The second set of questions collects information about user's perception on different factors of social media advertisements which is positively correlated to their buying decision, i.e. our research objective.

The questionnaire was created based on the previous studies and our research questions were evaluated on the five-point Likert scale. Single-item measures based on consumers' perception were adopted for each factor in the model. Single-item measures are valid in this research because of our assumption that factors, selected from previous researches, are precise[27].

The population of our research is social media users in urban India. For hypothesis testing, a link to the survey was circulated via social media platforms. College students, professionals and aged people with work experience were targeted in this study. This study utilized self-selection sampling technique which is highly popular with recent researches that examines consumer perception and behaviour on social media channels, for example [14], [28] and [29].

Data collected was analysed using SPSS version 25. First, Descriptive Statistics was applied to get an idea about the sample of the respondents. It helps in summarising large amounts of data, which enables researchers to make crucial observations at a glance[30].

Second, internal consistency of the factors was checked by calculating Cronbach's Alpha. It is a coefficient of reliability. Research variables are considered consistent or reliable if Cronbach's Alpha is above 0.7[31].

Lastly, correlation analysis was done by calculating Spearman's correlation coefficient, which supports our hypothesis testing. For hypothesis to be accepted, correlation coefficient, between dependent variable and independent variables, must be positive.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Descriptive Statistics

A total of 367 responses were collected, out of which 55.6% were males and 44.4% were females.

Of the total respondents, 58.6% were between 21 and 30 years, 16.9% were between 31 and 40 years, 11.4% were between 41 and 50 years, 8.7% were between 51 and 60 years and 4.4% were above 61 years.

Further and detailed data is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Age	Percentage (Number)
21-30	58.6% (215)
31-40	16.9% (62)

41-50	11.4% (42)
51-60	8.7% (32)
61 & Above	4.4% (16)
Gender	Percentage (Number)
Male	55.6% (204)
Female	44.4% (163)
Education	Percentage (Number)
Undergraduate	15.3% (56)
Graduate	53.4% (196)
Postgraduate	30.5% (112)
PhD	0.8% (3)
Occupation	Percentage (Number)
Student	25.1% (92)
Profession	16.1% (59)
Service	50.7% (186)
Business	8.2% (30)

Figure 5 represents a bar chart of most popular social media channels and their number of active social media users. Social Media Channels are organized in descending order of popularity.

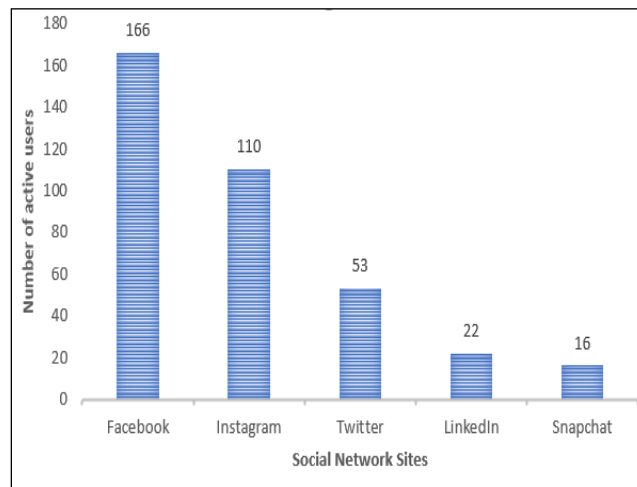


Fig 5. Most Preferred Social Network Sites

Figure 6 represents a bar chart of various mediums of advertisement and number of social media users highly influenced by them. Mediums of Advertisement are organized in descending order of influence.

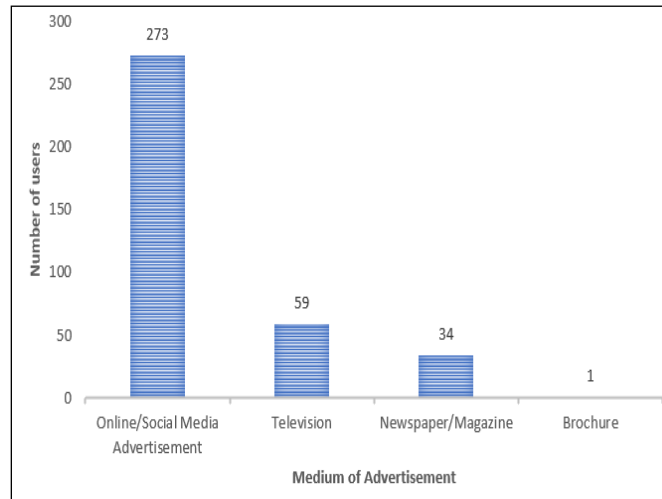


Fig 6. Which Medium of Advertising has the Highest Level of Influence on you as a Customer

B. Reliability Analysis

Cronbach’s Alpha of the model was 0.747, which is acceptable according to [31]. Further data is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Cronbach’s Alpha if Item is Deleted

Factors	Cronbach’s Alpha if Item is Deleted
Credibility	0.710
Irritability	0.760
Informativeness	0.711
Entertaining	0.707
Interactivity	0.696
Personalization	0.710
Endorsement	0.713

C. Correlation Analysis

Spearman Correlation Coefficient was calculated to measure correlation between independent variables and dependent variables. According to Table 4, correlation coefficient of Credibility is 0.579, Irritability is 0.215, Informativeness is 0.344, Entertaining is 0.342, Interactivity is 0.345, Personalization is 0.297 and Endorsement is 0.456.

Also, p-value is 0.000 i.e. less than 0.01, for the correlations between dependent variable i.e. Buying Decisions and all independent variables.

Table 4. Spearman Correlation Between Dependent and Independent Variables

	Buying Decisions	Significance(2-Tailed)
Credibility	0.579	0.000
Irritability	0.215	0.000
Informativeness	0.344	0.000
Entertaining	0.342	0.000
Interactivity	0.345	0.000

Personalization	0.297	0.000
Endorsement	0.456	0.000

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability Analysis of this study tells us that our model has acceptable internal consistency among the variables. In Table 3, except Irritability, all factors will reduce the overall reliability of the model if deleted.

Concerning the Correlation Analysis of the model, all the correlations between Buying Decisions and independent variables are significant. Credibility of Social Media Advertisement is established to be positively correlated to their buying decisions (0.579**), thus H1 was supported. Irritability of Social Media Advertisement is established to be positively correlated to their buying decisions (0.215**), thus H2 was supported. Informativeness of Social Media Advertisement is established to be positively correlated to their buying decisions (0.344**), thus H3 was supported. Entertaining of Social Media Advertisement is established to be positively correlated to their buying decisions (0.342**), thus H4 was supported. Interactivity of Social Media Advertisement is established to be positively correlated to their buying decisions (0.345**), thus H5 was supported. Personalization of Social Media Advertisement is established to be positively correlated to their buying decisions (0.297**), thus H6 was supported. Endorsement of Social Media Advertisement is established to be positively correlated to their buying decisions (0.456**), thus H7 was supported.

Table 5. Positive Correlation Coefficient Interpretation[32]

Positive Correlation Coefficient Values	Relationship
0 – 0.3	Weak Positive Correlation
0.3 – 0.7	Moderate Positive Correlation
0.7 – 1	Strong Positive Correlation

According to the Table 5, consumers’ perception of credibility, informativeness, entertaining, interactivity and endorsement are moderately positively correlated to their buying decisions. Out of these five moderate positive correlations, credibility has the highest correlation to buying decisions, followed by endorsement. The remaining two factors, irritability and personalization, are weakly positively correlated to customers’ buying decision.

These findings are in compliance with older studies that investigated consumer’s perception towards social media advertisement that in turn influences their buying decisions, such as [14], [15], [19], [23], [25] etc.

Previous researches, such as [14] and [21], considers irritability to be an important factor that is correlated to the consumers’ buying behaviour. But our study refutes this theory. The main reason for this deviation might be that consumers in Urban India are used to the irritation or disturbance caused by advertisements, both online and offline. Hence, they do not consider irritability as an important factor that can influence their buying behaviour.

According to [14], personalization was found to be a trivial factor for the sample of Instagram users in Egypt. This is again proved to be true for our sample of social media users in Urban India. But, in another study, personalization was reported as important in affecting advertising effectiveness in social media with American sample[33]. The main reason for this disparity might be that companies, in developing nations like Egypt and India, lack the resources, attitude and will to provide appropriate personalization of social media advertisements according to consumers’ requirements. Hence the consumers in these developing nations do not perceive personalization as a factor that can influence their buying intentions.

VI. IMPLICATION

Since most of the social media users are young, companies should develop their advertisements in such a way that allows customer engagement with that particular market segment. Nowadays, businesses are being converted from transactional relationship to social relationship, so Engagement Marketing principles should be considered when building advertisements[9]. Customer Relationship Management is necessary because if customers are unhappy with a particular product or service of a brand, they would give bad reviews on social media that may in turn influence potential customers negatively.

Even though irritability is not correlated to consumers' buying decisions, businesses should still position their social media advertisements appropriately. Targeted advertisements are not considered as an invasion of privacy[34]. Businesses should engineer innovative advertisements that provides relevant information about the product in a timely manner. Both Entertainment and Interactivity elements of online advertisements is also important to attract new customers.

Use of local language can be the first step in providing personalization to the customers. Language represents the culture and people are emotionally attached to their culture. Even if the users know English, many businesses and brands can influence them by taking advantage of the linguistic preferences of multiple ethnic communities[35].

Businesses should also keep in mind the process of perception and buying decisions when formulating their marketing strategies. Many small businesses can pump up their advertising spending on social media channels, to maximize sales which will in turn maximize profits, also suggested by [36].

Businesses should concentrate on building an influencer-based marketing strategy on social media for better sales prospects. Influencer marketing has high success rate because of the large amount of confidence that influencers have built up with their following, and endorsements from them serve as a form of credibility to the potential customers[37].

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Despite the contributions of this research, there are some limitations to it. First, the sample size is small which may not provide the complete representation of the population. Second, since India is a diverse country with multiple varying cultures, there may be some conflicts arising from cultural bias and personal beliefs. Third, only educated and working-class urban population of India was considered for the research sample. Fourth, usage of single-item measures in our methodology may not provide complete understanding of our research objectives.

For future research, larger sample size can be considered, including both urban and rural population for proper representation. Instead of using single-item measures, multiple-item measures can be used for higher precision and reliability. Regression Analysis can be conducted by future researchers to understand how the factors of social media advertisements affects consumers' buying decisions. Moreover, other variables such as familiarity, advertisement spending and social imaging can also be examined in future models.

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