MEASURING ONLINE ADS AVOIDANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL MEDIA A CONCEPTUAL STUDY IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Users of social media avoid visiting the sites related to social networking to behold ads. They probably go for browsing a site or searching a certain item of information. As a result, the content of advertisement is likely to be avoided. In this article, the impact of controversial perception of social media ads will examine with moderating function of ethical judgment of social media on intent to avoid ads, will be highlighted through an experimentation conducted online. This study will indicate probable features which can reverse the customers' perceptions towards controversial ads avoidance on the environment of social media. With the help of data of more than 100 social media users in Pakistan, a conceptual research model of social media ads avoidance will test by means of structural equation modelling. The findings of this study will show that controversial perceptions of social media ads relation with social media ads avoidance behavior of consumers, but, this relation is moderated by personal reasons like ethical judgment.

Keywords: Social Media Ads; Ads Avoidance; Controversial Ads; Ethical Judgment.

INTRODUCTION

The consecutive rise in the number of users of social media has promoted spending in expenditure of ads on such media networks (Ma, 2018: Marketer, 2014). And this increasing usage of social media means for ads have raised apprehensions that content of ads is likely to be useless in the noise of other websites and apps contents which will make ad useless in terms of profit-making and behavior changing. Sequentially, this gives way to the advertisers that they should create ads that can make a line between offensive and edgy (Zaman, et al. 2015; Chan, et al. 2007; Fogul, 2002). Nevertheless, contrary to media platforms that function offline, social media lets consumers have a stronger hold on the substance of communicative process (Ioanăs & Stoica, 2020; Thackeray, et al. 2008; Roehm & Haugtvedt, 1999; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This raises agency and strength of consumers when challenged by advertising communicative process (Ioanăs & Stoica, 2020; Kerr, et al. 2012; Denegri-Knott, 2006). It is well recognized fact that consumers of internet media avoid ads, either as an advertising professional or academic literature. The circumstance, where there is mounting of ads whereas viewers possess more options to avoid and overlook ads, can create challenges for the advertisers and marketers and also for the social media models of numerous companies.

Problem Statement

The number of consumers of internet is on the rise that changes the environment, and Pakistan has no different trend than this. There is rapid growth of consumers of internet in Pakistan. As is the report of datareportal.com that was conducted in 2020, there had been almost 77 million people who subscribed for internet usage. There was rise in users of internet in Pakistan by 17% from 2019 to 2020 and in the early days of 2020, 35% internet users penetrated. 37 million users, who used social media, existed in Pakistan in the month of January 2020. 7% users of social media increased in Pakistan which is 2.4 million. National and multinational companies' are always in the ambush to approach social media consumers for their business growth due to the high rise of social media consumers in Pakistan. Social media advertising has changed the ways and methods a consumer buy a product in Pakistani environment.

Research Objective

Turning to the past research, the current study seeks to explore the association between user ethical judgment of ads on social media, ad controversy perception and avoidance social media ads. Fundamentally, the key purpose of the research is to indentify fundamental relations between controversial perception of ads and consumer decision of ads avoidance and ignorance of controversial ads while using social media.

Research Questions

Q_1:   What is the impact of controversial perception about ads (on social media) on ad avoidance by a user of social media ?

Q_2:   At what extent ethical judgment of user of social media moderates the association of controversial perception of ads on social media and ads avoidance by social media user?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Ad Avoidance

Any action that a social media consumer does to steer clear of viewing ad is called ad avoidance. So ad avoidance is "*All actions by media users that differentially reduce their exposure to ad content*" (Speck & Elliott, 1997, p. 61). There are two approaches of avoiding ads as highlighted by some recent past research: one is to avoid ads physically such as leaving the place where ad is being played and the other is to fast-forwarding or skip the channel (Abernethy, 1991). various previous studies explore other form of consumer ad avoidance that is related to cognitive avoidance, that means to completely ignore the presenting ad by not viewing towards it placement (Speck & Elliott, 1997). Further research also highlights that in online advertising environment such avoidance types takes place, where ads can be avoided mechanically via filtration, deletion or skipping (Pashkevich, Dorai-Raj, et al. 2012; Kelly et al. 2010). For instance, Pashkevich et al. (2012) investigate the induction of video ads that can be skipped in YouTube, that lets viewers have the authority to ignore the ad and watch the desired video five seconds later. Pashkevich et al. (2012) conclusion suggests that addition of skippable ad lessens the negative experience of social media user and thus avoid negative impact on viewers' regarding perception of social media ads.

Past research has highlighted the predecessors of advertising avoidance and attempts to categorize them because of content, communication, or media elements (Speck & Elliott 1997). Furthermore, Speck and Elliott (1997) recommend that the overall perception of advertising by consumers influence ad avoidance intentions on various media channels, while Rojas-Méndez, Davies & Madran (2009) note that much consumer demographic data includes sex and education, which also they talk about avoiding ads. Besides, consumer perceived irritation is also a significant aspect that influence ad avoidance (Baek & Morimoto, 2012), uncertainty about the advertised content (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Obermiller, et al. 2005), and perceived intrusiveness (Li, Edwards & Lee, 2002; Ha, 1996), and disruptive perceptions regarding ad Cho & Cheon, 2004). Nevertheless, a few of these aspects or precursor are likely to overlie and their intensity varies as far as influence on ad avoidance is concerned but this also depends on media platform.

Controversial Perceptions of Advertising on Social Media

It is up to consumers whether they want to have negative or positive perceptions about advertisement (Chan et al., 2007), and are likely to take ads in controversial mode (e.g. disgusting, offensive, harsh) because of product or service personality or nature of advertising appeals and their way of presentation (Chan et al. 2007; Dens, De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2008). For instance, display of sensual imagery, obscenity, sadism and frightening within an ad is violation of norms and it almost always creates negative picture in consumers' minds (Chan et al., 2007), and the result will be avoidance of such ads for all times to come. Moreover, some products which display is considered as controversial (like condoms, bras,) many times induce a sentiment of disapproval, bias or even wrath which may result in a total disaster altogether in terms of sale & purchase of such a product (Wilson & West, 1981; Waller, 1999;), and this will create negative perception in the minds of consumer.

However, the environment in which advertisements are played often creates a consumer perception of the advertisement and then the audience's perception of the particular media (for example, avoidance of advertising). Speck and Elliott (1997), in particular, suggest that viewers' indifference to advertising may be due to a strong belief or general perception of advertising, and that consumers view these ads in a negative (eg, offensive or annoying) way. It covers a wide range of advertising avoidance in a large number of media, regardless of the style of presentation and the way in which advertising is involved. Similarly, Chan et al. (2007) suggest that the idea of advertising controversy is related to the context in which, for example, advertising is associated with a media platform that acts as a social media platform. Advertising tools thus define the boundaries within which viewers usually find social advertising to be controversial.

H₁: *Controversial perceptions of social media advertising have a positive effect on consumers' avoidance of advertising on social media.*

Hence, there is an argument that the number of avoiding ads by persons will be more who consider advertisement as controversial as those who behold no controversy in ads on social media.

Ethical Judgment of Social Media Ads

Ethical judgment means the cognitive process by which a person makes an assessment of either an action is morally good or not (Nguyen & Biderman, 2008; McMahon & Harvey, 2006;

Trevino, 1992). As stated by Jones (1991), the ethical judgment denotes a mechanism through which an individual considers whether the action taken by him is all right. Thinking about the perception that some event of happenings or its suburbs may contain something which is morally inappropriate, an ethical judgment comes to pass and directs its follower what to do in such particular situation. It can also be said that action follows ethical judgment (Nguyen & Biderman, 2008). Recent research has focused on the relationship between ethical judgments and attitudes in management research, but can be extended to current research. Jones (1991) argues that an individual's ethical consciousness can ultimately be driven by ethical judgments, aspirations, and moral attitudes, while individual processes (individual characteristics, values) and situational differences mitigate these processes. Ethical judgment is therefore an important part of goals and attitudes, as it helps decision makers to assess ethical issues and challenges in specific situations (Jones, 2009). Some past research in the field of marketing communication has dealt with consumer ethics in advertising.

Ethical perceptions and their assessments on the part of consumers influence their reactions to ads in a number of contexts (Simpson, 1998). As far as the context of social media is concerned, Kerr et al. (2012) are of the view that consumers may make use of online medium to judge, evaluate, endorse or present their ethical views regarding controversial, include those ads which are proscribed by the concerned authorities. Hence, ethical judgments (Reidenbach & Robin, 1988; Nguyen & Biderman, 2008) possess the flair to render consumer regard ads as controversial and also make them avoid ads on media including social media platforms in Figure 1. Past research indicates that controversial ads may culminate in negative perceptions for viewers (Waller, 1999; Tinkham & WeaverLariscy, 1994; Waller, 2005).

Hence, the researcher shapes a hypothesis that:

H_2:   *Consumers' ethical judgment toward social media advertising will moderate the link between social media advertising perceptions as generally controversial and the avoidance of social media advertising.*

On the basis of literature, the following conceptual model is developed.
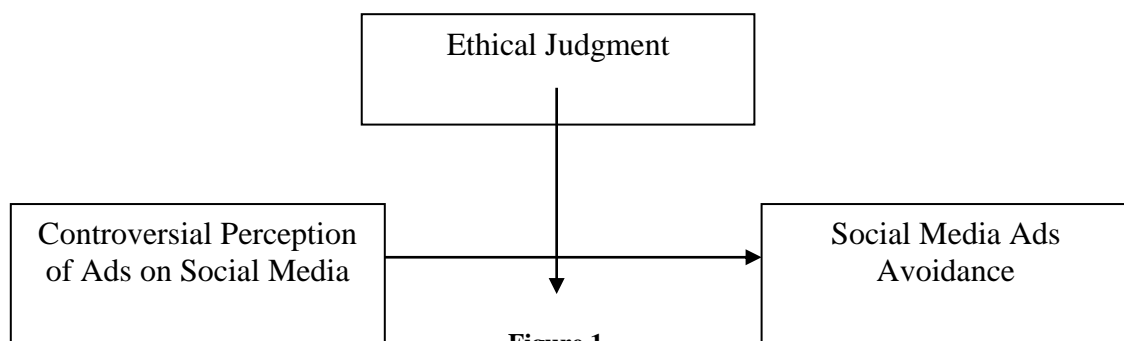

Figure 1
PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative research will design, pilot test and launch a questionnaire on survey conducted online.

First, three intellectual professionals will review the questionnaire.

Then it will conduct the pilot study with research participants (students from different universities of Pakistan), which is expected more than 100 participants. SPSS 24 will use for data analysis and moderation analysis. The convenient sampling technique will be used for data collection from more than100 Pakistani respondents (male & female) having passed more than 18 years of life, who presented themselves as having social media accounts. The research team shall exclude incomplete questionnaires. Numbered scales from the existing literature that will be appropriate for the purpose of the study will be used. To measure ethical judgments about advertising on social networks, Reidenbach and Robin (1990), Simpson et al. (1998) include dimensions in advertising on social networks. Measures to avoidance of advertising (eg behavioral, cognitive cognition, etc.) will be regulated in social media on the basis of Cho and Cheon (2004). In conclusion, to incarcerate controversial perception of social media ads, the study will make use of items which are based on the work of Chan et al.'s (2007).

CONCLUSION

Because social media is so widely used as an advertising tool, it is even more important to build an understanding of advertising on social media and to create an understanding of the ethical attitudes and moral values of the social media users who are influencing its customers perceptions. Our study contributes to this goal by expanding the scope of information on social media advertising (addressing ethical issues) (Kerr et al. 2012; Giebelhausen and Novak 2012;), specifically through social media advertising. In particular, scholar will examine the impact of the controversial perception of advertising on social networks for the purpose of advertising and the impact of receiving and avoiding advertising of products and services in Pakistan. At the same time, the role of social media users' ethical perspectives needs to be clarified in order to build a controversial understanding of advertising.

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