

The Moderating Role of Social Media Advertising in Customers' Purchase Intention

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Abstract: Social media advertising has been studied from different perspectives in the last decade. This research aimed to investigate how the advertising relevance moderates the relationship between social media advertising and customers' purchase intention. Social media networks advertising is a strategy that can be used to enhance the credibility of a promotional message from the brands, making the advertisement more persuasive and credible. The study included 1973 respondents, aged between 18 and 60 years ($M = 29.60$; $SD = 9.73$) with a majority of female respondents (53.0%). To measure Purchase intention, a composite variable was created, consisting of the four items developed by Duffett (2015), namely: (i) I will buy the products I see in the commercials; (ii) I wish to buy the products that are advertised in the commercials; (iii) I am likely to buy the products I see in the commercials; and (iv) I intend to buy the products I see in the commercials. Data analysis revealed that the most purchased products through online advertising on social networks are mass consumption products (71.7%), which are commercialized in large retailers. Based on these results, it was considered relevant to understand whether the relevance attributed to advertising moderates the relationship between online advertising on social networks and purchase intention. Data analysis revealed that, online advertising on social networks and the relevance attributed to advertising are analyzed separately, both variables significantly influence consumers' purchase intention. However, when they are in interaction, the effect is no longer significant. The positive effect of interaction suggests the tendency to buy mass consumption products through online advertising on social networks is greater when consumers consider advertising relevant.

Keywords: Social Media Advertising, Purchase Intention, Advertising Relevance, Mass Consumption Products.

1. Introduction

A study carried out by the Marktest Group (2022) revealed that the number of users of social networks has been increasing significantly, verifying that in the last decade the values quadrupled, going from 17.1% to 68.5%. In Portugal, it is estimated that around 85.0% of the population frequently uses the internet, that is, more than 8 million users and more than five million shop online. It was also found that four out of ten users have already purchased a product through a social network.

Globally, today more than half of the world uses social media (59.0%), which means 4.76 billion people. At present, figures show that 137 million new users came online in the last 12 months (DataReportal, 2023). Using social media is one of the most popular online activities. In 2021, more than 4.26 billion people used social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to nearly six billion by 2027 (Statista, 2023).

The market research numbers mentioned above shows that most consumers around the world are engaged and actively communicate on social media globally. According to figures published by Statista (2023), Facebook was the first social network to exceed one billion registered accounts and currently has approximately 2.7 billion monthly active users, making it the most popular social network in the world.

After the success of Facebook in the market, several authors started research about Facebook, Google+, Snapchat, YouTube, Twitter and Tiktok (Arora et al, 2019; Kim and Kim, 2018; Lee and Kim, 2022; Meliawati, Gerald and Aruman, 2023; Shareef et al, 2017).

The advertising investment figures refer to the segment of social media advertising that is projected to reach 269 billion US dollars in 2023 worldwide (Statista, 2023).

In this sense, it becomes relevant to study the impact of advertising carried out by brands on social networks on the consumer's purchase intention, a topic that has been studied from different perspectives (Alalwan, 2018).

2. Literature review

Advertisements made in the online advertising format (ads made for Web 1.0 applications) allow companies to carry out more informative and interactive (bidirectional) communication with their customers (Barreda et al, 2016; Swani et al, 2017), which does not happen with advertising in traditional mass media. Therefore, online and social media advertisements can help companies achieve many marketing objectives such as creating awareness in customers, building customer awareness, shaping customer perception.

Social media ads are a form of Internet advertising in Web 2.0, that allows customers to have different perceptions and experiences when interacting with social media ads. This is also due to the nature of social media ads as they empower customers to be more engaged (e.g., like, reshare, comment, post, and learn) with targeted ads (Tuten and Solomon, 2017).

Digital advertising has similar characteristics to traditional advertising, such as creativity, which in digital is associated with interactivity. The main characteristics of creativity in advertising are originality and quality in its production (Amabile, 1996; Amabile, 2020; Hennessey, 2010; Runco and Jaeger, 2012). Advertising creativity must be original, divergent, appropriate and have advertising production quality (Haberland and Dacin, 1992; Modig and Dahlen, 2019; Smith et al, 2007), criteria that can be applied through the image, the colors chosen, the slogan and the formats chosen (Franch, Lopes and Albiol, 2014). Creativity in advertising is original or unique and can be subjective according to the context as long as it has meaning from the perspective of brands on the one hand and above all from the perspective of the consumer.

Some studies argue that originality has positive effects on consumer responses to advertising as it helps to persuade consumers and leads them to purchase the product (Smith, Chen and Yang 2008). Additionally, professionals working in the field of advertising tend to define originality as the characteristic that best defines advertising creativity (Modig and Dahlen, 2019).

Advertising creativity must be original, divergent, appropriate, and have ad production quality (Ang, Lee and Leong, 2007; Haberland and Dacin, 1992; Modig and Dahlen, 2019; Smith et al, 2007).

Online advertising on social media attracts customers due to its level of creativity and attractiveness (Mazerant, et al, 2021). This adds to the high level of interactivity available on these platforms, which increases the level of ability for customers to control, contribute and interact with each other. All these criteria can be easily found in social networks advertising creativity.

Following the above, it is possible to consider that creativity in advertising on social networks encompasses the characteristics of originality, divergence, appropriateness, quality in production and interactivity.

2.1 Advertising on Social Networks and its Relationship With Consumers' Purchase Intention

The impact on purchase intention that advertising on social networks can have is a topic that has been studied by different authors. In their studies, Boateng and Okoe (2015a) highlight the importance of consumer attitude towards advertising on social networks and their behavioral response (Boateng and Okoe, 2015b).

Research by Yang et al (2017) conclude that consumer attitudes towards YouTube ads can lead to purchase intention. These consumers may have strong positive attitudes towards video advertising and what suggests that the consumer is done with the purchase process. Jin, Hu and He (2014) emphasize that most studies exploring online shopping focus on purchase intention rather than concrete online purchase behavior. Furthermore, Lin and Kim (2016) argue that consumers dislike Facebook ads and are less likely to purchase products as a result of interacting with Facebook ads.

The use of online advertising on social networks has attracted more attention than traditional advertising, which is reflected in consumers' purchase intention (Kim and Kim, 2020). Based on the literature, the first study hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Social Networks advertising has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

2.2 Relevance of Online Advertising on Social Networks

In his study, Jung (2017) finds that the perceived relevance of the advertisement, influences the effectiveness of advertising, as increased attention to ads and decreased ad avoidance. The main reason for rapidly increased use of social media advertising is its highly relevant targeting techniques based on users' personal information. Social media platforms provide advertisers with users' personal information such as gender, age, schools that users are currently attending or graduated from, language, job title, living and working places, interests, and friends.

In general, perceived relevance of advertising messages plays an important role in generating positive impact on advertising effectiveness in cognitive, affective, and behavioral areas. For example, higher relevance attracts more attention (Celsi and Olson, 1988; Pechmann and Stewart, 1990). Similarly, people are more likely to show a positive attitude toward advertising when it includes personally relevant products compared to less relevant products (Trampe et al, 2010). Studies from Pavlou and Stewart (2000) and also from Xia and Bechwati (2008) refers that perceived ad relevance also increases intention to purchase advertised products.

In view of the above, the following study hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 2: Relevance of online advertising on social networks positively influences consumers' purchase intentions.

2.3 Advertising Relevance Moderates the Relationship Between Online Advertising on Social Media and Consumers' Purchase Intention.

The online consumer profile largely influences the intention to buy the products they see daily on social networks, so it is important to know the factors that trigger this motivation, including the relevance they attach to advertising (Abbas et al, 2020). According to Yeo et al (2022), technological advances and tools from the digital sphere have driven the construction of a new paradigm in the advertising industry, noting that the range of features and possibilities is considerably larger and more attractive.

Studies conducted in the recent past show that advertising carried out on social networks plays an extremely relevant role in consumer purchase intentions (Lin and Kim, 2016; Shareef et al, 2017).

In view of this evidence, the following research hypothesis was outlined:

Hypothesis 3: The relevance attributed to advertising moderates the relationship between online advertising through social networks and consumers' purchase intention.

3. Methodology

The present study was operationalized using a quantitative methodology, based on a hypothetico-deductive approach. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey with a non-probability sample. The use of this type of sample is related to the fact that only subjects who shop through social networks and are affected by the advertising on social network could participate in the study. A group of respondents with both of these characteristics is not easy to find. Therefore, the questionnaire was sent to researchers professional contacts who fulfill the requirements to be able to participate in the study. This first respondent group indicated people with the same characteristics or common interests. The sample grew as individuals invited new groups of participants. The snowball sampling method is often used in studies focused on social networks because it allows overcoming the disadvantages inherent in convenience samples (Dosek, 2021).

3.1 Sample Characterization

The sample of this study is characterized by: 1973 people aged between 18 and 60 years old ($M = 29.60$; $SD = 9.73$) participated in the study and were mostly female (53.0%). It was found that more than half of the respondents had qualifications equal to or greater than a degree (52.1%). It was also found that the average monthly household income of 40.9% of respondents is equal to or greater than €2.000 per month (Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents' demographic profiles

Sociodemographic variables	n (%)
Sex	
Male	927 (47.0%)
Female	1046 (53.0%)
Age group	
24 years old and below	738 (37.4%)
Between 25 and 34 years old	708 (35.9%)
35 years old and over	527 (26.7%)
Education Level	
Secondary school /Professional course	945 (47.9%)
Bachelor's or higher degree	1028 (52.1%)
Monthly net income of the household	
Lower or equal than €1.499	723 (36.6%)
Between €1.500 and €1.999	443 (22.5%)
Higher or equal than €2.000	807 (40.9%)

3.2 Measures

Data was collected using the instruments described below and a set of sociodemographic questions intended to characterize the sample (e.g., sex, age, educational level).

Purchase intention: Four items were adapted from Duffett (2015), namely: (i) I will buy the products I see in the commercials; (ii) I wish to buy the products that are advertised in the commercials; (iii) I am likely to buy the products I see in the commercials; and (iv) I intend to buy the products I see in the commercials. This scale uses a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree). All items are formulated in a positive sense and the results are calculated by averaging the sum of all items, whereby high values suggest a greater purchase intention on the part of consumers.

Relevance attributed to advertising: Single item adapted from the scale developed by Zeng et al (2009; Online advertising on social networks is relevant to me). The answers were given using a dichotomous scale in which zero corresponds to No and one corresponds to Yes.

Online advertising on social networks: Single item based on the studies developed by Zhu and Chang (2016; I am strongly influenced by online advertising on social networks). Like the Relevance attributed to advertising, this item was also evaluated using a dichotomous scale (0 = No and 1 = Yes).

According to Dolbier et al (2005), this format is the most appropriate when you want a quick answer and easy interpretation. Both items were answered using a seven-point Likert agreement/disagreement scale. Despite this type of scale being frequently criticized, due to the impossibility of calculating its psychometric indicators, Littman et al (2006) argued that its use has advantages over scales consisting of several items, as it allows for more effective results.

3.3 Procedures

The data were mostly collected in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. Items that evaluate online advertising on social networks, the relevance attributed to it, the purchase intention and the set of sociodemographic questions were inserted into Google Forms. The link was sent by e-mail to the contacts of the researchers' professional networks. In the first part of the questionnaire an explanatory text was included on the objectives of the study, the scope of its realization and the estimated time for its completion (about five minutes). It was also ensured that responses would be treated in a completely confidential manner and that all directives of the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union [Regulation (EU) No. 679/2016 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 27 April] would be respected. The responses were analyzed using the statistical software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS; version 29).

4. Results

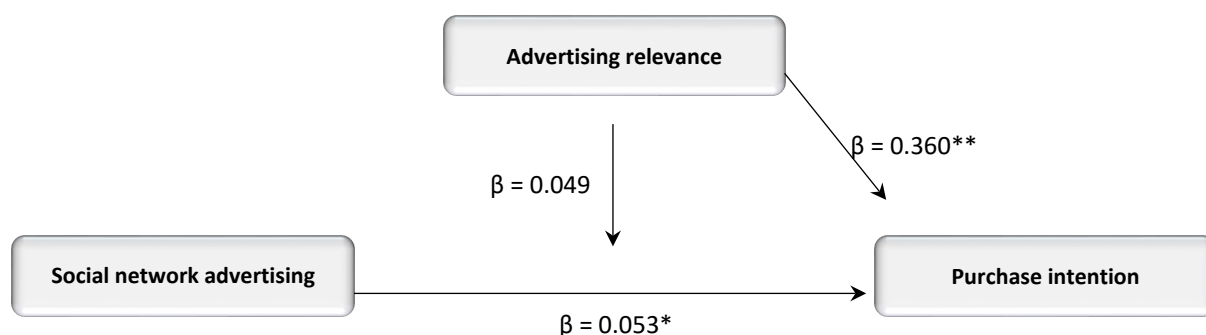
Data analysis revealed that 76.3% of consumers considered themselves to be strongly influenced by online advertising on social networks. Given these results, it was intended to find out which products are most purchased through this digital medium and it was found that they were the mass consumption products (e.g., food, hygiene, household cleaning), followed by those that fall into the category of Fashion and beauty (Table 2).

Table 2: Most frequently purchased products

Products	n (%)
Mass consumption products	1415 (71.7%)
Fashion and beauty	1264 (64.1%)
Culture and leisure	725 (36.7%)
Technology and informatics	442 (22.4%)

The literature review on purchase intentions drew our attention to the fact that they can be influenced by the gender of consumers (Lopes et al, 2022), so it was considered pertinent to compare means according to this sociodemographic variable. The results revealed that women have higher mean values ($M = 4.59$; $SD = 1.20$) when compared to men ($M = 4.43$; $SD = 1.31$) with regard to purchase intention, with statistically significant differences [$t_{(1971)} = -2.728$, $p < 0.05$].

The next step in the investigation was to assess whether the relevance attributed to advertising moderates the existing relationship between online advertising on social networks and purchase intention (Figure 1). For this purpose, a composite variable formed by the four items that assess the intention was created and it was found that it has a very satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.89$), which allowed us to proceed with the analysis (Marôco, 2021). As previously mentioned, social network advertising and advertising relevance were measured using dummy variables, where zero means absence of the attribute (Social network advertising influence / Advertising relevance) and one means the presence of the attribute.

**Figure 1: Moderation Model**

Data analysis revealed that when online advertising on social networks ($\beta = 0.053$, $t = 2.234$, $p < 0.05$; Hypothesis 1) and the relevance attributed to advertising ($\beta = 0.360$, $t = 8.814$, $p < 0.001$; Hypothesis 2) are analyzed separately significantly influence the purchase intention of consumers, but when they are in interaction, the effect is no longer significant ($\beta = 0.049$, $t = 0.496$, $p = 0.620$; Hypothesis 3). The positive effect of interaction suggests the tendency to buy fast-moving products through online advertising on social networks is greater when consumers consider advertising relevant.

5. Discussion

Social networks are rooted in our daily lives, and it is increasingly common for us to be influenced by advertising included in them, often without realizing it (Appel et al, 2020). As such, Rodríguez et al (2020) argue that the use of digital tools is fundamental for organizations that want to promote their products or services, since consumers' purchase intentions are largely influenced by the advertising they see on social networks. These conclusions are like those found in this investigation, which allowed us to validate the first study hypothesis. Guthrie et al (2021), add that in recent years there has been a significant increase in online purchases of fast-moving consumer products, namely those related to well-being and personal care.

It was also found that purchase intention is significantly influenced by the relevance attributed to advertising, which allowed us to corroborate the second research hypothesis. These results are in line with the studies by Aloqool and Alsmairat (2022) according to which consumers tend to shop online when they consider that the advertising presented by the brand meets their needs and expectations.

Finally, it was possible to verify that online advertising on social networks and the relevance attributed to advertising have a significantly positive impact on consumers' purchase intention, but when the two variables are in interaction, this effect is no longer significant. These results did not allow validating the third hypothesis,

but they contribute to alert professionals responsible for online advertising on social networks that purchase intention tends to increase when consumers consider advertising relevant, as verified in the studies carried out by Yeo et al (2020). These conclusions are consistent with the work carried out by Nasir et al (2021) who state that consumers' purchase intention, in addition to being influenced by advertising on social networks, is largely motivated by the quality of the information transmitted and its relevance.

6. Conclusion

Online advertising on social networks has been growing in recent years, as it has been found that this type of strategy significantly increases consumers' purchase intentions, either due to the content of the message transmitted, its relevance or even due to the frequency with which it is viewed (Alalwan, 2018). This study is inserted in this context and sought to find out which are the most purchased products through online advertising on social networks.

Data analysis revealed that about two-thirds of the participants buy mainly mass consumption products because they feel strongly influenced by the online advertising they see on social networks. It was also possible to see that women tend to buy more products online than men. The research model was then tested, which revealed that online advertising on social networks and the relevance attributed to advertising have a significantly positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions. However, it was also found that when online social media advertising and advertising relevance interact, the effect on purchase intention is no longer significant.

The results obtained allowed us to validate all the hypotheses, since it was found that online advertising on social networks and the relevance attributed to it positively influence consumers' purchase intentions. Finally, it was found that the tendency to purchase FMCG products through online advertising on social networks is greater when consumers consider the advertising relevant.

The results of this study are very useful for marketing, communication, and advertising professionals as they make it clear that purchase intention tends to increase when consumers consider social networks advertising relevant.

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