THE IMPLICATIONS OF ADVERTISING AND SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER AWARENESS AND BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

With the expansion of digital technologies, advertising strategies are evolving significantly on a daily basis, influencing consumer awareness and behavior by personalizing and making consumption experiences more interactive. The aim of this paper is to analyze the implications that advertising and social media have on consumer awareness and behavior. A comparison is made between traditional and modern methods and approaches to advertising, with a focus on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral influence. Influencers (prominent figures on social media), individualized advertising algorithms, and user-generated content tailored to consumer needs are highlighted as contemporary advertising tools. This research indicates that consumers—especially from younger age groups—often make impulsive purchases due to the constant exposure to social media content from various brands and influencers who frequently advertise brands through tailored content (setting trends), which is often considered manipulative rather than authentic and based on personal views regarding product quality. Although consumers have access to information before making purchases, due to limited product research and the ease of succumbing to persuasive ads, such opportunities are rarely used. This paper will offer recommendations for ethical advertising and help consumers better understand the purpose of digital advertising.

Keywords: *consumer awareness, digital advertising, influencer marketing, consumer behavior, targeted advertising, social media engagement*

JEL Classification:M31, M37, D91, L82

INTRODUCTION

The steady yet rapid rise in the popularity of social media, along with advancements in advertising techniques, has had a strong influence on consumer awareness and behavior. Traditional forms of advertising—such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines—are increasingly being replaced by digital formats. Social media platforms offer more personalized recommendations, typically from influencers whom users trust and identify with. In this way, consumers' perception of brands and their decision-making processes have undergone a complete transformation.

In today's digital economy, it is crucial to understand how social media advertising influences consumer awareness and behavior. A behavioral pattern has already been established, one that consumers follow regularly. They are constantly exposed to content specifically designed to sell something or to provoke the fear of missing out (FOMO). As a result, users of social media are persistently targeted by businesses using personalized and individualized marketing strategies.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of traditional and social media advertisements on consumer awareness and behavior. Through an analysis of persuasive mechanisms and a comparison of the effectiveness of various advertising formats, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving relationship between consumers and digital advertising environments. Additionally, it will address the ethical

challenges posed by personalized advertising practices, highlighting the importance of critical consumer literacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research into the influence of advertising and social media on consumers has intensified over the past two decades, particularly with the development of digital communication platforms. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is frequently used as a foundation for understanding how attitudes, norms, and perceived control influence purchase intent, especially in digital contexts.

Many authors argue that visual appeal, message repetition, and emotional manipulation in advertisements significantly impact the decision-making processes of consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Solomon et al., 2019). Social media advertising content has the potential to trigger both cognitive and affective responses in users, which are reflected in their intentions and purchase decisions (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Special attention is given to the influence of social media influencers as a contemporary media and marketing phenomenon. Studies show that the influence of such individuals is often based on their perceived expertise, authenticity, and closeness to their audience (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019), making them powerful tools for shaping consumer behavior. There is also growing criticism of the hyper-personalization of content, where algorithms create so-called "echo chambers" (Pariser, 2011), exposing consumers only to information that confirms their existing views and preferences. This further amplifies the influence of advertisements on both awareness and behavior.

In the realm of marketing communication, advertisements are increasingly viewed not only as sources of information but also as tools for constructing consumer identity. According to Belk (1988), consumer choices are an extension of the self, and social media marketing enables a more personal and intimate relationship between the brand and the consumer.
This literature review lays the groundwork for further analysis of how advertising and social media influence consumer awareness and behavior in the digital era.

DEFINING CONSUMER AWARENESS AND BEHAVIOR

Consumer awareness refers to the level of knowledge and understanding that individuals have about a product, brand, or service. Consumer behavior includes the choices, purchases, usage, and rejection of products or services (Solomon, 2017). These two concepts are closely linked, meaning that the perception consumers have of a brand significantly influences whether they decide to purchase from it.

Advertisements are a key factor in shaping consumer awareness and attitudes. Marketing strategies that create emotional engagement, frequent message exposure, and interaction contribute to a lasting impression in the consumer's mind (Belch & Belch, 2021). Through such techniques, a consumer develops a "personal" and meaningful connection with a brand, helping to embed it in their memory and increasing the likelihood of product or service selection (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING ON THE CONSUMER

Television and radio commercials, billboards, and print media advertisements were, for a long time, the primary media through which brands established contact with consumers. The goal of these traditional forms of advertising was—and still is—to inform, remind, and persuade consumers to buy certain products or services (Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 2011). This traditional advertising method conveys basic information about products or services, creates positive attitudes, or changes pre-existing ones, and helps maintain brand awareness through repetitive messaging.

Traditional advertising involves one-way communication, where the consumer does not participate but only receives the message. The audience is typically broad and

undifferentiated, and targeting is not personalized according to consumer characteristics (Belch & Belch, 2011). While traditional advertising remains effective in building brand awareness and loyalty, its impact has decreased with the expansion of digital media.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE CONSUMER

Today's social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube—enable two-way communication between brands and consumers. Unlike traditional advertising, these platforms allow consumers to build strong relationships with brands through direct interactions such as comments, shares, ratings, private messages, and user-generated content (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016).

Social media advertising is far more personalized than traditional methods. Content is targeted based on users' interests, behaviors, and demographic characteristics. Advertising success often depends on the platform's algorithm, which ensures that ads are shown to the "right" consumer. This increases the likelihood of consumer engagement and eventual purchase (Duffett, 2017). One of the most significant trends in modern digital marketing is influencer marketing. Influencers are individuals with a large following on social media who promote products and services. This approach is effective because followers often base their purchasing decisions on the influencer's endorsement. Influencers build trust and long-term relationships with their audience, which increases the relevance and effectiveness of their recommendations (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). Another successful method is user-generated content. Consumers trust the opinions and experiences of other users more than commercial or paid advertising. However, this trend is not without risk, as manipulation or the spread of inaccurate or unverified information may occur (Pew Research Center, 2023).

PRINCIPLES OF PERSUASION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Persuasion is a fundamental element of social media advertising and marketing communication. According to Cialdini (2001), the process of persuasion can be explained through several psychological principles.
The authority principle plays a key role. People are more likely to trust individuals perceived as experts in a given field. Influencers are viewed as credible sources due to their specialized knowledge, and their followers often trust their choices and purchase products based on their recommendations (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). The principle of likability also has strong persuasive power. Users often identify with influencers they find relatable or who share their values, interests, and opinions. Influencers use personal communication and empathy to build deeper connections with their audiences and enhance their persuasive influence (Cialdini, 2001). The scarcity principle creates urgency or emphasizes limited availability. The FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) phenomenon encourages impulsive purchases. Promotional campaigns on social media often suggest that products are only available for a short time or in limited quantities (Belch & Belch, 2021). When these principles are combined with personalized and authentic messages, the influence of advertising on consumer awareness and behavior increases significantly.

COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

It is clear that these two advertising methods differ greatly in their approach, communication style, and influence on consumers. Traditional advertising relies on one-way communication that reaches a broad audience with a unified message, while social media offers personalized and interactive communication with specific target groups.

Traditional media typically focus on building long-term brand awareness and gradually shaping brand image. In contrast, social media advertising directly influences consumer attitudes and behaviors through personal recommendations, real-time communication, and

immediate accessibility (Duffett, 2017). Moreover, social media platforms make it easier to reach target audiences through algorithms that analyze user habits and interests.

Table 1 presents the key differences between traditional advertising and social media advertising.

Table 1. Traditional Advertising vs. Social Media Advertising

Characteristic	Traditional Advertising	Social Media Advertising
Type of Communication	One-way	Two-way
Approach to Consumer/Audience	Mass	Personalized
Consumer Interaction	Limited	High
Response Speed	Slow	Real-time
Targeting	General, demographic	Precise, individual, interest and behavior-based
Trust in the Advertising Message	Lower	Higher (due to influencer endorsement)
Primary Goal	Brand awareness	Sales
Source: Lou & Yuan (2019)		

RISKS AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

Social media offers far more efficient advertising opportunities than traditional media. However, using these platforms as advertising channels also presents certain risks and negative consequences for consumer awareness and behavior. The most significant risk is the violation of privacy. By collecting and analyzing user data, brands and platforms create highly targeted ads, raising ethical questions about data protection and whether users' personal information is adequately safeguarded (Statista, 2024).

Another risk is the manipulation of consumers. Targeted ads—whether via influencers, other users, or paid advertisements—often create a false sense of authenticity. This can lead consumers to form unrealistic expectations and make decisions based on inaccurate or misleading information (Pew Research Center, 2023).

The spread of disinformation is also a growing concern. Any user can post content on social media, including content about products or services that is false or distorted, potentially increasing or decreasing demand based on misinformation. As a result, consumers may be unable to make informed choices. Nevertheless, when used ethically and transparently, social media can help create more informed and conscious consumption.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

The rise of social media has opened new opportunities for promotion and sales, while simultaneously raising ethical concerns about the practices used in these digital environments. Unlike traditional media, which operate under well-established regulations, social media advertising often exists in a gray area where content is difficult to distinguish from personal opinion, and audiences—especially young people—are more vulnerable to manipulation (Boerman, Willemsen & Van der Aa, 2017).

One of the most problematic aspects is the blurring of lines between paid promotions and organic content. Influencers frequently promote products or services without clearly disclosing that the content is sponsored. This creates a false impression of authenticity among consumers, undermining trust and leading to potentially misleading purchasing decisions.

Moreover, targeting algorithms are designed to identify users' emotional states, desires, and behavioral patterns. Ads are increasingly based on psychological profiles and personalized behavior models (Zuboff, 2019), raising the question: Are consumers truly making free

choices, or are they being subtly manipulated by systems that know more about them than they know about themselves?

Ethical dilemmas also arise from content that promotes unrealistic standards, encourages excessive consumerism, or fosters feelings of inadequacy, especially among younger audiences. Such ads can contribute to anxiety, low self-esteem, and impulsive purchases without educating users on the long-term consequences of their decisions. From an ethical standpoint, brands and influencers must establish transparent communication, clearly distinguishing between personal opinion and paid promotion. They must also act with social responsibility—respecting vulnerable groups, avoiding manipulative techniques, and promoting informed consumption. The shift toward more ethical advertising cannot come only from users or platforms—it must involve marketing professionals, the academic community, and regulatory institutions. Only through collective effort can a balanced and ethical digital marketing ecosystem be built—one that increases sales while also protecting the digital well-being of society.

DIGITALIZATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

Digitalization has led to a radical transformation in marketing, replacing traditional forms of advertising with interactive, targeted, and personalized digital strategies. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok allow direct communication between brands and consumers, surpassing the limitations of one-way communication that characterized traditional advertising (Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

The algorithms behind these platforms play a key role in determining which content reaches which users, based on their online behavior, interests, and interactions. This has enabled precise micro-targeting, which significantly enhances advertising efficiency but simultaneously raises questions about pri vacy and the ethical use of personal data (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In addition, digitalization has enabled the rise of user-generated content (UGC), where consumers themselves participate in brand promotion through posts, shares, and online recommendations. This represents a new form of advertising based on authenticity and shared values (Godey et al., 2016), significantly influencing trust and engagement within online communities. Although digitalization has democratized access to advertising, it has also increased the need for regulation, digital literacy, and responsibility among brands, platforms, and consumers themselves.

CONCLUSION

In today's modern and digital era, advertisements and social media have a major impact on consumer awareness and behavior. Through various forms of influence, they not only inform the public about the existence of specific products and services but also actively shape consumer attitudes and purchasing habits.

While traditional advertising still plays a role in shaping a brand's image, it offers only one-way communication and targets a mass audience. Social media, by contrast, enables more dynamic communication through personalization, interaction with consumers, and the influence of social media personalities, resulting in stronger relationships between brands and consumers. Despite the risks associated with social media advertising—such as privacy violations, misinformation, and manipulation—digital marketing, when used ethically, can bring significant benefits to brands. By closely examining the effects of digital advertising on consumer culture, we can develop strategies that balance the advantages of these methods while minimizing their negative consequences.

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