ONGOING INFORMATION SEARCH MOTIVATION: AN INFLUENCER OF USERS’ APPROVAL OF FACEBOOK BANNER ADVERTS

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ABSTRACT

Facebook is a leading social network site worldwide and Facebook users use this social medium for several interactional reasons like to socialize or access and share informative content with others. Several users participate in Facebook to fulfill their ongoing information needs. The current research investigates the ongoing information search motivation (OISM) as an influencer of users’ approval of Facebook banner advertising. To investigate the study phenomenon primary data was collected through online survey questionnaires from 230 Facebook users in Pakistan. Structural Equation Modeling was conducted to examine the construct validity and to test the model and hypotheses. The results showed OISM as an important influencer of users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising. Moreover, the analysis also revealed that the Facebook banner ad informativeness mediated the relationship between users’ OISM and their attitudes toward Facebook banner advertising. Additionally, attitude towards Facebook banner advertising was also found to be influencing the users’ Facebook banner ad-click behavior. These findings can be beneficial to social media marketers and marketing managers to organize user-relevant Facebook banner ad content. The study findings can specifically be implied to the social media customers in Pakistan.

Keywords: Facebook; Ongoing Information Search Motivation (OISM); Informativeness; Attitude, Banner Advertising; Ad-click.

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INTRODUCTION

Social network sites (SNS) (e.g., Facebook) since their inception have got unprecedented popularity worldwide. They succeeded in becoming a vital constituent of users' everyday tasks (Mir, 2021). Daily, billions of users worldwide use SNS to socialize, share, and access informational content (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020). SNS (e.g., Facebook) allow their users to create personal profiles and interact with other users on the same network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Users can upload and share the content (e.g., text, photos, and videos) on SNS as well as view, comment, and like/dislike it (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014). SNS users were expected to grow up to 3.35 billion in 2021 (Von Abrams, 2020). Among SNS platforms, Facebook is the most popular SNS with 2.85 billion monthly active users (Omnicore, 2021). The primary source of income generation model of Facebook is advertising (Johnston, 2021). The management of Facebook has to make certain that its users appreciate and like Facebook advertising (Mir, 2021). Users appreciate and like that SNS (Facebook) advertising which is relevant to their motivations for participating in SNS (Kaspar, Weber, & Wilbers, 2019). Several SNS studies (e.g., Eid, Nusairat, Alkailani, & Al-Ghadeer, 2020; Noguti & Waller, 2020) examined the relationship between several user motivations (e.g., building social capital, making social contact, getting emotional support, receiving excitement, past time, entertainment, information seeking) and their approval of Facebook advertising. However, a few (e.g., Celebi, 2015; Noguti & Waller, 2020) have examined the relationship between users’ ongoing information search motivation (OISM) and their approval of Facebook advertising.

OISM is a key motivational factor for using SNS like Facebook (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Mir, 2018; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Pertegal, Oliva & Rodríguez-Meirinhos, 2019). It is not linked to users’ recognized purchase decisions (Bloch, Sherrell, & Ridgway, 1986). The motives behind OISM can be diverse. For instance, improving and updating product knowledge and gathering information for future use or sharing it with others etc., (Bloch et al., 1986; Hirschman & Wallendorf, 1982; Fodness & Murray, 1999). OISM refers to the information gathering and processing activities not linked to any specific problem or buying decision (Bloch et al., 1986). Social media, especially SNS, have become a vital source of product information (Alarcón-del-Amo, Rialp, & Rialp, 2016; Mason, Narcum, & Mason, 2021; Zembik, 2014). Users use SNS such as Facebook to explore new information useful in updating and enhancing product-related knowledge (Mir, 2018; Pertegal et al., 2019). Users join and use social media platforms such as Facebook to find products, gather product-related information and evaluate products (Mason et al., 2021).
The aim of the current research is to investigate the influence of OISM on users’ approval of Facebook advertising. Specifically, traditional banners ads which appear on SNS are focused. Banner advertising is the most prevalent and common form of SNS advertising (Bang & Lee, 2016). Online or Facebook banner ads are click through images. Clicking a banner ad transfers a user from the current web or SNS page to the specific advertiser’s webpage or website (Robinson, Wysocka, & Hand, 2007). On the advertiser’s webpage, a user can either explore more about the product or acquire it (Mir, 2014). The current research measures the approval of Facebook banner advertising in terms of user beliefs, attitudes towards, and banner ad click behaviour. User belief about Facebook banner advertising is measured in terms of informativeness (See Eid et al., 2020; Noguti & Waller, 2020). Advertising informativeness influences user attitude towards SNS advertising (Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017). Attitude is just an evaluation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It should lead to banner ad click behaviour (Briggs & Hollis, 1997). SNS businesses are paid by advertisers when users click SNS banner ads (Farris, Bendle, Pfeifer, & Reibstein, 2010).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

SNS (e.g., Facebook) flourished in becoming a vital constituent of users’ everyday tasks (Mir, 2021). Daily, billions of users worldwide use SNS to socialize, share, and access informational content (Appel et al., 2020). Like international users, Pakistan users use SNS to socialize, generate and share as well as gather informational content. Specifically, Facebook is still a prime SNS in Pakistan (Statcounter.com, 2020). Especially, OISM is a key motivational factor for Pakistani users to use SNS like Facebook (Mir, 2018:2021). Despite its significance, the relationship between users’ OISM and their approval of Facebook advertising in the Pakistani context has been investigated hardly. As already mentioned, the current research investigates the influence of OISM on users’ approval of Facebook advertising.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

OISM is a key user motivation for using Facebook (Mir, 2018; Pertegal et al., 2019). It has been acknowledged to influence users’ approval of SNS advertising (See Mir, 2018: Noguti & Waller, 2020). The current research uses SNS gratifications literature and uses and gratifications theory for rationalizing the association between OISM and user beliefs, attitudes, and Facebook banner ad click behavior. Specifically, Katz’s (1959) question 'why' users use media, and Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch’s (1973-1974) uses and gratifications theory assumptions are focused. Despite its criticism of lacking explanatory power (See Severin &
uses and gratifications theory has been found useful in identifying users’ SNS (e.g., Facebook) motivations (See Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Hossain, 2019; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Rodríguez-Ardura & Meseguer-Artola, 2020) and linking them with users’ approval of SNS advertising (See Mir, 2017; Plume & Slade, 2018). Uses and gratifications theory primarily focuses on the identification of user reasons or motivations for using media (Hossain, 2019). Users are active, media is chosen selectively, chosen media is stronger and user centric, and users are free to judge the media and its content are fundamental assumptions of uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973-1974). For instance, users voluntarily and actively use Facebook (Buami, 2014) to fulfill their needs and drives.

Several SNS (e.g., Facebook) gratifications research such as Heinonen (2011), Kuss and Griffiths (2011), and Pertegal et al. (2019) identified OISM as an important SNS motivation. Users join and use SNS (e.g., Facebook) to collect informational content, improve and update knowledge, and discover new products. SNS gratifications literature such as Mir (2018) and Plume and Slade (2018) acknowledge the positive association between users’ SNS participation motivations and their attitudes toward SNS banner advertising. Attitude refers to a user’s positive or negative evaluations about executing a specific behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The current research postulates OISM for using Facebook as a positive influencer of users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising (See Figure 1). Specifically following hypothesis is offered:

**H1. OISM positively influences Facebook users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising.**

SNS research (e.g., Gaber, Wright, & Kooli, 2019; Mir, 2015; Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017) identified informativeness as a vital belief that users hold about SNS ads. Informativeness is the ability of advertising to tell users about the benefits and functions of the product (Ducoffe, 1996). It is the core function of advertising (Alwitt & Prabhaker, 1992). The current research offers that Facebook banner ad informativeness mediates the relationship between users’ OISM for using Facebook and their attitude towards Facebook banner advertising (See Figure 1). Zhang and Mao (2016) found that motivations for using SNS (e.g., Facebook) positively influence users’ perception of SNS ads as informative. Gaber et al. (2019), Logan, Bright, and Gangadharbatla (2012), and Mukherjee and Banerjee (2017), discovered that perceived SNS ad informativeness associates with users’ attitudes toward SNS advertising positively. Rooted in above argument the following hypothesis is offered:
H2. Facebook banner ad informativeness mediates the relationship between OISM and users’ attitude toward Facebook banner advertising.

Information seeking motivation and users’ belief of social media (e.g., SNS) advertising as informative are positively associated (Noguti & Waller, 2020). Prior research (e.g., Kim, Kang, Choi, & Sung, 2016; Mir, 2015) found a direct association between users’ perceived informativeness of SNS ads and their ad-click behaviour. The current research offers that the informativeness of Facebook banner ads influences directly and positively users’ Facebook banner ad click behaviour (See Figure 1). Ad-click is a common technique of transferring the users from the present web location to the specific advertiser’s website. There, they can engage with the advertised products (Cho, 2003). Rooted in the above conceptualization, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3. Facebook banner ad informativeness directly and positively influences users’ Facebook banner ad click behaviour.

Prior gratifications research (e.g., Erdem, Durmuş, & Özdemir, 2017; Mir, 2014; Zhang & Mao, 2016) acknowledges that there exists a positive relationship between user attitudes toward SNS (e.g., Facebook) advertising and their SNS ad click behaviour. Understanding attitude towards Facebook banner advertising is crucial because it enables users to decide whether to perform a behaviour or avoid it (Duckworth, Bargh, Garcia, & Chaiken, 2002). Users’ decision to click on SNS ads depends on their attitude towards SNS banner ads (Jambulingam, Dorasamy, Balasundrasun, & Matiah, 2019). Thus consistent with prior scholarship, the current research offers that users’ attitude toward Facebook banner advertising positively influence their Facebook banner ad click behaviour (See Figure 1). Determining the influence of attitude towards Facebook banner advertising on Facebook users’ ad click behaviour is crucial as advertisers pay money to SNS (e.g., Facebook) when their users click SNS banner ads (Farris et al., 2010). Rooted in above argument, the following hypothesis is offered:

H4. Users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising positively influences their Facebook banner ad-click behavior.
Figure 1. Conceptual Model

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Size and Technique
Data was collected from 230 (58 per cent male and 42 per cent female) Facebook users in Pakistan via an offline survey. Hoe (2008) states that to conduct a comprehensive analysis, a sample size exceeding 200 is sufficient. The '18-45' year age group of respondents was selected since it is the most growing user group of the internet and social media in Pakistan. Facebook was focused because '88.96' percent of social media users still use Facebook in Pakistan (Statcounter.com, 2020). Second, the business model of Facebook is based on advertising (Fortune.com, 2017). The key issue that SNS like Facebook face is to ensure that their users approve of the advertising appearing on these websites (See Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). By following the purposive sampling procedure (See Patton, 2002) only regular Facebook users were targeted. Regular users are those who use Facebook almost daily. Regular Facebook users better understand why people use Facebook and their social media activities. Targeting those respondents who have a good understanding of the event being researched is the prerequisite of purposive sampling.

Measurement Scales, Sources and Assessment
To measure the study constructs items were adapted from previous SNS studies (See Table 1). Their content validity was ensured by matching them with the theoretical definitions of constructs. Hinkin (1995) recommended this technique of establishing content validity. The
responses of study respondents were recorded on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 5. Through the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), construct measurement scales’ goodness of fit and their convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. The CFA of OISM measurement model did not show a good fit with a $\chi^2 = 27.941$, $df = 14$ and $P = .02 < .05$. Nonetheless, OISM measurement model presented a good fit on the alternate test of $\chi^2$ which is $\chi^2/df$ ratio = 1.996 < 3. OISM measurement scale also fitted data on indices GFI = .969, NFI = .964, IFI = .982, TLI = .972, CFI = .981 and RMSEA = .066 with 7 valid items. The CFA of Facebook Banner ad Informativeness model with a $\chi^2 = 1.575$, $df = 2$ and $P = .455 > .05$ yielded good fit to data with 4 valid items. Similarly, the CFA of Attitude towards Facebook Banner Advertising with a $\chi^2 = 2.059$, $df = 2$ and $P = .357 > .05$ yielded good fit to data with 4 valid items. Since Facebook Banner Ad Click consisted of only one item, CFA was not applied. Table 1 shows construct measures and their path statistics.

**Convergent and Discriminant Validity**

To assess convergent validity of study constructs standardized estimates ($\beta$), $t$ and $p$ statistics as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) were evaluated. Significant $\beta$ and $t$ statistics less than -1.96 and more than +1.96 indicate convergent validity of construct measures (See Byrne, 2001). Measures of OISM, Facebook banner ad informativeness, and attitude towards Facebook banner advertising satisfied all these conditions (See Table 1), thus convergent validity was ensured. To ensure discriminant validity of construct measures inter-construct correlations were compared with square root of AVE (See Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Square root of AVE > inter-construct correlations indicate discriminant validity of construct measures (See Hair, Anderson, Babin, & Black, 2010). The square root of AVE exceeded the inter-construct correlations of construct measures (See Table 2), thus ensured discriminant validity.

**Table 1.** Constructs, Measures, Path Statistics and Source

| Construct   | Measures                                                                 | $\beta$ | AVE  | $t$     | $P$     | $\alpha$ | Source      |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|---------|---------|-----------|-------------|
| OISM        | 1. I use Facebook to enhance my knowledge about different products         | .765    |      |         |         |           |             |
|             | 2. I use Facebook to gather the useful product information                 | .749    | 11.445 | .000   |         |           | Mir, 2018   |
|             | 3. I use Facebook to collect the product-related information for future use | .712    |      |        |         | .89       |             |
|             | 4. I use Facebook to collect the product-related information to share with others | .736    |      | 10.777 | .000   |           |             |
|             | 5. I use Facebook to keep myself well-informed of new product arrivals     | .782    | 12.007 | .000   |         |           |             |
|             | 6. I use Facebook to explore new products                                  | .712    | 10.884 | .000   |         |           |             |
7. I use Facebook to find interesting product content .696 10.500 .000

1. Facebook banner ads are a useful source of product information .764 - .000

2. Facebook banner ads provide me the up-to-date product information .833 11.592 .000 .84 Taylor et al., 2011

3. Facebook banner ads inform me about new product arrivals in the marketplace .715 .563 10.082 .000

4. Facebook banner ads provide me the relevant product information .681 9.721 .000

1. Generally, I view Facebook banner advertising beneficial .779 - .000

2. Generally, I admire Facebook banner advertising .806 11.872 .000 .85 Mir, 2017

3. I regard Facebook banner advertising as very crucial .757 10.913 .000

4. My general opinion about Facebook banner advertising is favourable .724 10.565 .000

1. I time and again click on Facebook banner ads Mir, 2017

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Square Root of AVE

| Construct                                      | Mean  | SD    | 1     | 2     | 3     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. OISM                                        | 2.4037| .88994| (.736)|      |       |
| 2. Facebook Banner ad Informativeness         | 2.4837| .90848| .624""| .751  |       |
| 3. Attitude towards Facebook Banner Advertising| 2.7011| .95850| .531""| .707""| .767  |

**p < .01, Std. Deviation (SD), AVE in Brackets

MODEL AND HYPOTHESES TESTING

Using structural equation modelling the offered model was evaluated in Amos version 21. It fitted the data with a $\chi^2 = 1.547$, df = 1, $p = .214 > .05$. Figure 2 shows the tested model.
The theoretical model tested consisted of five paths. In order to test the hypotheses, path statistics (β, t and p values) were measured. Byrne (2001) stated that a significant β with its corresponding t (i.e. t < -1.96 or > + 1.96) indicates statistically substantial relationship between two variables. The path statistics between OISM and users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising were positive and significant (See Table 3), thus supported H1. Similarly, the path statistics between OISM and Facebook banner ad informativeness and between Facebook banner ad informativeness and Facebook banner ad click behaviour were insignificant (See Table 3), thus did not support H3. Conversely, the path statistics between user attitudes toward Facebook banner advertising and their Facebook banner ad click behaviour were positive and significant (See Table 3), thus supported H4.

**Table 3. Summary of Hypotheses Testing**

| Proposed Path                                                                 | Path Coefficients β (t) | Decision |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| H1 OISM → Attitude towards Facebook banner advertising                        | 1.47** (2.49)           | Accepted |
| H2 OISM → Facebook banner ad informativeness → Attitude towards Facebook banner advertising | 0.624*** (12.08), 0.616*** (10.44) | Accepted |
| H3 Facebook banner ad informativeness → Facebook Banner ad-click behaviour     | 0.121 NS (1.545)        | Rejected |
| H4 Attitude towards Facebook banner advertising → Facebook banner ad-click behaviour | 0.450*** (5.73)        | Accepted |

Note: **p < .01, ***p < .001, NS (not significant).
DISCUSSION, RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary source of income generation model of Facebook is advertising (Johnston, 2021). Facebook displays banner ads of different businesses on its webpages and in return generate revenue. The issue for Facebook management is to make certain that its users approve banner ads. Users appreciate and approve of that SNS (Facebook) advertising which is relevant to their SNS participation motivations (Kaspar et al., 2019). SNS investigations recognize OISM as important users’ SNS motivation (e.g., Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2016; Pertegal et al., 2019). Consistent with earlier SNS gratifications scholarship, for instance, Plume and Slade (2018), the current research identified that OISM influences users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising positively. Stavrianea and Kavoura (2015) found that users attend Facebook ads and consider them as an important source of information. As in the case of OISM, users’ purpose of using media is updating and improving knowledge about products (Bloch et al., 1986); thus, they may consider both user-generated content and ads important sources of new product information and attend it. Users’ attention to Facebook banner ads may form a positive attitude towards them.

Facebook banner ad informativeness plays a mediating role between OISM and users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising is another significant finding of the current research. Informativeness is a key belief that users hold about Facebook banner ads. It influences users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising positively. (Gaber et al., 2019; Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017). Unlike prior SNS studies such as Kim et al. (2016) and Mir (2015), the current research found that Facebook banner ad informativeness does not directly influence users’ Facebook banner ad-click behaviour. It highlights the importance of users’ attitude towards Facebook banner advertising. Despite the users’ information-belief about Facebook banner ads, they go through a cognitive evaluation process prior to click them (Jambulingam et al., 2019). The present study found that attitudes toward Facebook banner advertising influences users’ Facebook banner ad click behaviour positively. This finding is consistent with Erdem et al. (2017).

The present research contributed to the Facebook gratifications literature on advertising by theorizing and operationalizing the association between users OISM and their approval of Facebook banner advertising. Prior research (e.g. Mir, 2018; Pertegal et al., 2019) recognized OISM as an important motivator of SNS engagement. In addition, the current research conceptualized mediating role of Facebook banner ad informativeness. Prior SNS scholarship directly related it either with user attitude towards SNS advertising (See Gaber et al., 2019) or
SNS ad click behavior (See Kim et al., 2016). Findings of the current research indicate OISM as an important users’ Facebook participation motivation. It implies that SNS such as Facebook should publish those ads which contain new product content. Furthermore, the current research found Facebook banner ad informativeness an important mediator of Facebook banner advertising effectiveness. It highlights the importance of information-rich ad content (Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017). Thus, Facebook’s management should ensure that Facebook banner ads are rich in information content.

**CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Facebook is a leading SNS platform that users use almost every day for socialization and information gathering and sharing. OISM is an important Facebook engagement motivation. It influences users’ approval of Facebook banner advertising. Facebook banner ad informativeness and attitude towards Facebook banner advertising are two important cognitive tools that guide users to click banner ads on Facebook. Overall results suggest that if Facebook banner ads are designed by keeping user-motivations in view, they are likely to click them. The present research focused on traditional click-through Facebook banner ads. Researchers should investigate the link between OISM and non-conventional Facebook advertising, such as user-shared ads, links, and brand fan pages.
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