

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Message in Advertising and Social Change: An Empirical Investigation of Relationships

Iqra Manzoor and Zia-ul-Haq
Islamia College of Science and Commerce, India
Central University of Kashmir, India
mir.eqr@gmail.com

This study was carried out to investigate consumer behavior toward advertisements that convey social messages. Not many studies have focused on the social message in ads and the subjective well-being of customers regarding such ads. To study this gap, the paper examined the relationship between (a) the attitude towards the ad with a social message and the purchase intention of the consumer and (b) the purchase intention of the consumer and their subjective well-being. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to study the interrelationships within the proposed model. The data was collected through an experiment and qualitative survey among university students. A field survey of 395 students was conducted to test the hypotheses. The results confirm that attitude towards the ad positively affects the purchase intention. Moreover, purchase intention positively influences the subjective well-being of the consumer. This study adds to the theory by providing a new insight into the advertising literature. It also offers marketers and advertisers the requisite knowledge on commercial advertisements targeted at bringing about social change and consumers' subjective well-being.

Keywords: social message, advertisements, subjective well-being, life satisfaction

JEL Classifications: M31, M37

Message in advertisements connects the customer with the brand and the product. In times of growing competition and increased customer exposure to ads, marketers need to create effective advertisements. At times, customers discover advertisements that convey a socially relevant message. These advertisements present the message and issue in such a way that they grab the attention and engrave the message and issue in the minds of the customers for all time. To notice the importance of social issues for customers and learn ways to employ them, marketers did not take much time. There is a need to manifest responsibility and take a stand on something to build trust between the target audience and the company or brand (Bredava, 2021). *To build positive*

associations in the minds of the target audience, many companies implement social cause campaigns in which they invest in social causes and promote them through numerous communication channels (Bloom et al., 2006; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Hill & Moran, 2011). Social cause programs were previously advertised and marketed by government and non-profit organizations only to create awareness. Lately, companies have started incorporating social messages in their commercial campaigns and advertisements to position their products and brands in customers' minds. To promote the welfare of individuals and society, social cause advertising aims to affect the voluntary or involuntary behavior of a target audience (Donovan & Henley, 2003).

Marketing experts face the challenge of making sure that commercial advertising highlighting a social issue effectively achieves its objectives. Given how difficult it is to track the results of these campaigns, marketing experts find it challenging to determine their effectiveness. However, by assessing the subjective well-being of customers, it is possible to determine whether or not socially conscious advertising is having the desired effects. The sum and substance are that a consumer must be able to respond favorably to an advertisement for it to be considered effective (for example, by publicly expressing support for the messages it conveys or the mood it creates). Positive consumer reactions are likely to promote the advertisement's message to other consumers, increasing awareness (Lee & Hong, 2016). Two research questions have served as the motivation for the current study in this regard: (a) Does advertising with a social message have an impact on consumer response (purchase intention)? and (b) Is the favorable consumer response a predictor of their subjective well-being? These issues have not been systematically addressed by previous studies.

Advertising encourages the use of comfort goods, which reduces life satisfaction while also requiring greater economic well-being (Becchetti & Conzo, 2018). In post-industrial societies, the concept of subjective well-being—which encompasses happiness and life satisfaction on an individual level is highly valued (Ferrans & Powers, 1992; Sirgy et al., 1982; Yuan, 2001; Dagger & Sweeney, 2006). Advertising encourages the notion that material items can improve happiness and make up for a lack of life satisfaction (Richins, 1995; Sirgy et al., 1998). However, more research is needed in the area of advertising and subjective well-being, as it is currently understudied. Moreover, to explore the relationship between consumer attitudes and intentions toward advertising, numerous studies from various perspectives have been conducted (e.g., Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Shimp, 1981; MacKenzie et al., 1986; Cox & Locander, 1987; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Lee et al., 2017). None of the studies, however, examined the influence of consumers' attitudes and intentions in the context of commercial ads incorporating a social message.

The purpose of this research is to study the impact caused by a social message in an ad on the behavior of consumers and to empirically examine the relationship between (a) attitude toward the advertisement with a

social message and purchase intention of the consumer and (b) purchase intention of the consumer and their subjective well-being. Therefore, two hypotheses can be formulated by combining the theoretical background: (a) the attitude towards the ad influences the purchase intention of the consumer and (b) the purchase intention of the consumer influences their subjective well-being. The study offers several contributions; first, it has investigated the effect of intention on subjective well-being, which has been ignored by the current literature. Second, the paper examines the relationship between attitude and intention from the perspective of advertisements with a social message.

The paper is arranged in the working order as follows. First, the literature is reviewed to gain knowledge and understanding of the concepts and hypothesis formulation. The literature on customer attitude, purchase intention, and subjective well-being provided insight into the hypothesis formulation. Further, the paper presents the pretest, design, sample, and manipulation check to test the experiment. Next, the results and key findings of the study are presented. Finally, limitations and future research directions are provided in the paper.

Literature Review

Social Message in Advertisements

Many people criticize glossy advertisements and TV commercials as an intrusive approach for businesses to enter our daily lives and force their products down our throats, but printed ads can serve other purposes as well. A well-crafted advertisement is made to catch your eye and stick in your mind long after you have left it behind, and many of the societal issues are in desperate need of that. Raising awareness and concern about different social and environmental concerns, such as air pollution, racism, and human trafficking, is essential for increasing public support and enacting lasting change. To increase social awareness, the advertisement must also touch the viewer's emotions. Social message is used in many commercial advertisements for a number of product categories, for example, Vogue's "Start With Boys," Ariel's "Share the Load," Anouk's "Bold is Beautiful," and Titan Raga's "Her Life, Her Choices" relate to gender equality and women empowerment. Also, Surf Excel's "Rang Laaye Sang," Red Label's "Swad

Apnepanka,” and United Colors of Benetton’s “United by Play” aim at showing unity between religions. “Raise a Generation of Equals,” an advertisement by Flipkart, sends a message of treating both genders equally. “Salute the Homemaker” by Midea shows how to do an incredible job of making homes a place to live in. These examples show that social messages have been used in advertisements considerably. During the COVID-19 pandemic, advertisers swiftly revised their communication strategies, focusing on advertising campaigns that included a social message related to the pandemic. Some of the examples include Apple’s “Creativity Goes On,” Nike’s “If You Ever Dreamed of Playing for Millions Around the World, Now is Your Chance. Play Inside, Play for the World,” Uber’s “Thanks for not Riding,” “No Mask, No Ride,” and “Move What Matters,” Audi’s “Stay at Home, Keep Your Distance, Support Each Other – We are in This Together,” and Coca-Cola’s “Staying Apart is the Best Way to Stay Together.”

Attitude Toward the Advertisements

The consistent positive or negative attitudes held about a thing, concept, feeling, or tendency to act result in the treatment of similar objects in a consistent manner, whether an object is liked or despised (Kotler et al., 2014). The two types of attitudes toward advertising are general attitudes and attitudes toward a specific advertisement. Over time, consumers develop broad attitudes toward advertising that are defined by favorable or unfavorable responses towards advertisements in general. An individual’s attitude towards a particular advertisement can be described as the favorable or unfavorable attitude that the consumer acquires when exposed to that advertisement (Lutz, 1985). People develop an attitude toward advertising as an ascertained tendency as they gradually come to comprehend the benefits and drawbacks of advertising for themselves or the public. It is common for certain characteristics of advertising to be perceived as advantageous (disadvantageous), which tends to create favorable (unfavorable) predispositions toward advertising (Redondo & Aznar, 2018).

According to Munusamy and Hoo (2007), there is a connection between consumers’ favorable attitudes and their assessments of a particular advertisement as pleasant, likable, and annoying (Bauer & Greyer, 1968). According to researchers, a person’s behavior and attitude are linked to one another and can influence

their purchase behavior, which can either be beneficial or bad (Hawkins & Coney, 1976; Zanot, 1984; Antonides & Fred, 1998).

Although customer attitudes are important in assessing the effectiveness of marketing communications, it has been discovered that these attitudes are insignificant in comparison to what consumers actually do in the marketplace (Schultz, 1998). Furthermore, according to Kotler (1999), attitude is defined as an individual’s long-term favorable and unfavorable sentiments, behavioral inclination, and assessment of certain objects and ideas. Therefore, under some circumstances, it can be said that attitude and behavior are linked (Hashim et al., 2018). Numerous studies have also shown that attitudes toward advertisements have a favorable impact on purchase intention (Raluca & Ioan, 2010; Yan et al., 2012; Sallam & Algammash, 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Singh & Banerjee, 2018). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Purchase intention of the consumer is positively influenced by the attitude towards the ad with a social message.

Purchase Intention and Subjective Well-being

Diener et al. (1999) defined subjective well-being as “a broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction” (p.277). It is a person’s cognitive and affective evaluation of their life (Diener et al., 2002). According to Andrews and Withey (1976), someone who has more positive (such as optimism and joy) and less negative (such as melancholy and rage) life experiences is said to have high subjective well-being. Subjective well-being has received a lot of attention recently and has been extensively researched in the domains of humanistic psychology, sociology, and human resource management (Diener et al., 2003; Knight et al., 2009; Wei & Gao, 2017). Advertising is everywhere, and its volume is rapidly increasing. Life satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of one’s life based on one’s own standards (Michel et al., 2019).

Advertising typically presents a world filled with attractive people and appealing products and services (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003). The concept of life satisfaction is frequently used as the measure of well-being in studies of advertising and consumer behavior (Sirgy et al., 2012; Oprea et al., 2016; Webb et al.,

2017; Ghuman et al., 2022). However, the relationship between advertising and subjective well-being is still not fully understood. Andrew Oswald and his team at the University of Warwick analyzed survey data on advertising spending per country per year from 1980 to 2011 with survey data on the life satisfaction of over 900,000 people in 27 European countries (Torres, 2020). Researchers have found inverse relationships between the two. The more money a country spends on advertising in a year, the less happy its residents are after a year or two (Torres, 2020).

Advertisements impact consumer behaviors; they may sometimes lead to customer life satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Michel et al., 2019). Although the association between exposure to advertisements and life dissatisfaction has been demonstrated in children (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003), this relationship has not been investigated among adults. Also, Ma et al. (2018) investigated the impact of behavioral intention in the context of social media usage on life satisfaction. Research in advertising related to the impact of purchase intention on life satisfaction is scanty. Based on the above exploration, current research considers the hypothesis:

H₂: Consumers’ purchase intention has an impact on their subjective well-being.

Based on the above discussion, the research model shown in Figure 1 is proposed for the study. To encapsulate, attitude towards the ad influences the purchase intention of the consumer, and purchase intention, in turn, influences their subjective well-being.

Methodology

To test the two proposed hypotheses, a study was conducted in which university students were shown an advertisement with a social message, and they were

asked to complete the questionnaire. The study aims to examine the effect of attitude toward the ad with a social message on consumers’ purchase intention for the brand. The study also aims to look at the effect of a customer’s purchase intention for the brand on subjective well-being.

Stimuli

After reviewing 20 commercial advertisements, one ad was selected. Stimulus material comprised of a 1-2 minute commercial ad. The ad selected conveys a social message of treating both genders equally and raising them equally.

Design and Participants

The study includes 395 respondents who were exposed to the chosen commercial advertisement to analyze the (a) attitude of the customer towards the ad, (b) customers’ purchase intention, and (c) their subjective well-being. This study includes respondents from the Jammu and Kashmir region of India with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. The sample for the study involved university students in the region.

Young people are more targeted than ever before by advertising, media, and marketing, and their minds are both intelligent and unusually disillusioned (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007). The sample size was selected on the basis of item to respondent method (5:1 or 10:1, which means 500 or 1000 responses for 100 items; Hair et al., 2010). Respondents were shown the ad that included a social message, and then they were asked to fill out the questionnaire. They were asked to rate the items on a five-point scale indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Measure and Procedure

The study used Flipkart’s ad “Let’s raise a generation of equals,” with the brand name masked,



Figure 1
Research Model

and a pseudo brand name “Genkart” was used to study the impact of the stimulus on respondents. The respondents were told that the purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an advertisement. Respondents were exposed to the advertisement and then were briefed to fill out the questionnaire.

Attitude was measured using the Polly and Mittal (1993) scale, life satisfaction was measured using Sirgy et al. (2011) scale, and purchase intention was measured using Steinhart et al. (2014) scale. These constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (meaning Strongly Disagree) to 5 (meaning Strongly Agree). The items were rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating “not at all” and 5 indicating “very much”.

Manipulation Check

Manipulation check was employed to investigate how obvious manipulations are. Manipulation check was performed to investigate if respondents would perceive the social message in the advertisement. There was a significant effect of whether the participant saw a social message in the ad. In particular, participants saw the social message in the advertisement shown ($M = 3.88$; $t = 27.34$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the manipulation was successful.

Data Analysis

Covariance-based two-step procedure, structural equation modeling (SEM), was used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. SPSS 20.0 and AMOS 20.0 softwares were used for the analysis. The study examines the measurement model followed by the structural model.

Construct Validity

The construct validity of a measure refers to how closely the findings produced from using it match the beliefs that the test is based on (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). All of the items had loadings that were higher than the threshold limit of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Table 1 demonstrates that all items measuring one construct loaded highly on that construct and low on the others, indicating construct validity.

Testing of Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on three factors. Several indices were used to determine how well the measurement model fit, and the findings showed a good fit. Most empirical assessments recommend that the ratio of chi-square normalized to a degree of freedom (χ^2/df) should not be greater than

Table 1. *Rotated Component Matrix*

Construct	Items	Component		
		Subjective Well-being	Purchase Intention	Attitude Towards the Ad
Subjective Well-being	SWB3	.930	.066	.000
	SWB2	.892	.084	.065
	SWB4	.869	.108	-.033
	SWB1	.865	.061	.024
Purchase Intention	PI3	.064	.915	.137
	PI1	.107	.915	.205
	PI2	.120	.910	.199
Attitude Towards the Ad	AT2	.012	.169	.930
	AT3	-.018	.153	.902
	AT1	.050	.202	.901

Note: The loadings value for each construct is shown by bold characters.

3.0 for models with a good fit (Carmines & McIver, 1981). Additionally, both the obtained goodness-of-fit (GFI) measure and the adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI) measure were higher than the suggested values at 0.973 and 0.953, respectively. The normalized fit index (NFI) and comparative fit index (CFI), the other two good fit indices, should also be greater than 0.90. The results, with NFI = 0.978 and CFI = 0.991, likewise fulfill the criteria. Additionally, the RMSEA and RMR, badness of fit indices, which are 0.042 and 0.031, respectively, are in line with the recommended cutoff value for good fit (Byrne, 2013).

Convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability of the measurement model were investigated. Cronbach's α , composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) can all be used to determine reliability. For this study, Cronbach's α exceeds 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), CR exceeds 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), and AVE exceeds 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010), as shown in Table 1, exceeding the recommended threshold level, indicating the higher reliability of the measurement constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity can be assessed by factor loadings on their respective constructs (Table 2), which

Table 2. *Standardized Factor Loadings*

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings
Subjective Well-being	SWB3	.797
	SWB2	.863
	SWB4	.934
	SWB1	.824
Purchase Intention	PI3	.865
	PI1	.927
	PI2	.915
Attitude Towards the Ad	AT2	.937
	AT3	.849
	AT1	.883

Table 3. *Reliability*

	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)
Purchase Intention	0.929	0.930	0.815	0.162	0.934
Attitude	0.919	0.920	0.793	0.162	0.965
Subjective Well-being	0.915	0.916	0.733	0.042	0.976

Table 4. *Discriminant Validity*

Construct	Purchase Intention	Attitude	Subjective Well-being
Purchase Intention	0.903		
Attitude	0.403	0.890	
Subjective Well-being	0.205	0.049	0.856

range from a lower bound of 0.8 to an upper bound of 0.937 (Steenkamp & Geyskens, 2006). All the factor loadings are greater than 0.8 and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), indicating good convergent validity. Comparison between the square root of AVE (Table 3) and the correlation of the construct (Table 4) can be used to measure discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, the square root of AVE is greater than the corresponding inter-correlation coefficient, suggesting good discriminant validity.

Structural Model

After confirmatory factor analysis, the structural model is examined to test the hypothesized relationships. The model testing generated values of the goodness of fit indices and badness of fit indices (GFI = 0.973, AGFI = 0.955, NFI = 0.978, CFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.041 and RMR = 0.032) that met the standard values (Bentler, 1990), indicating a good model fit. The findings from the hypothesis testing are shown in Figure 2. All beta coefficients are positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Purchase Intention

The effect of attitude towards the ad on purchase intention was examined. Participants were more likely to intend to buy the product when they saw the advertisement incorporating the social message as there was a significant and positive impact of attitude towards the advertisement on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.403$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H_1 is supported.

Subjective Well-Being

On the main dependent variable, subjective well-being, the impact of purchase intention was investigated. There was a significant and positive impact of the purchase intention of the consumer on their subjective well-being ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H_2 is supported.

Discussion and Implications

General Discussion

In the study, the advertisement with a social message was used as a stimulus to manipulate the respondents. Findings show that attitude towards the ad has a positive relationship with the purchase intention of the customer for the brand. Also, it is shown that attitude towards the brand whose commercial ad (with a social message) has been shown to participants leads to higher purchase intention. This is in line with the empirical findings by Mitchell and Olson (1981), Gresham and Shimp (1985), Batra and Ray (1986), Dodds et al. (1991), Phelps and Hoy (1996), Goldsmith et al. (2000), Zhang and Zinkhan (2006), Lee et al. (2017), and Singh and Banerjee (2018).

When the relationship between purchase intention and subjective well-being is examined, it is evident that the consumer's purchase intention has a considerable impact on subjective well-being, which is in line with the study of Ma et al. (2018). Due to limited research on the relationship between behavioral intention and subjective well-being, there is limited support in the literature for this hypothesis. It can be said that customers portray higher subjective well-being when they have a willingness to purchase the products.

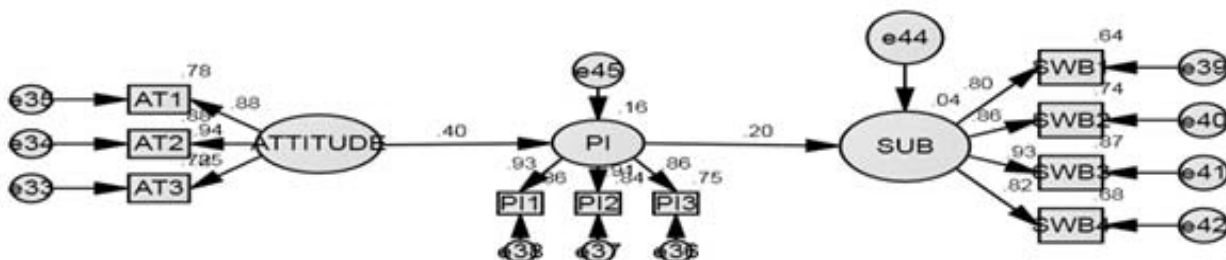


Figure 2
Structural Model

Implications

The findings of the study provide insightful information regarding consumer attitudes toward commercial ads as well as behavior intentions in relation to social messages in advertisements. This study sheds light on the theoretical and practical implications of socially conscious advertising.

Theoretical Contribution

By examining the commercial advertisement with a social message, this research adds to the existing and developing literature from a theoretical point of view. To start with, numerous companies actively address social issues in their advertising campaigns, but consumer responses to these ads have not been thoroughly researched. Also, psychology and sociology have generally investigated subjective well-being, but not advertising. The study explored the relationship between the customer's purchase intention and their subjective well-being, which has not been empirically explored in the case of advertising. This study also uncovers the relationship between consumer attitudes towards the ad and their purchase intentions. These findings add new insight to the advertising literature by showing that a social message in advertising can effectively impact the subjective well-being of the customer.

Managerial Implications

Although the use of social messages in advertising is expanding, little is understood about the power of these words that could improve communication with the consumer. Societal changes can be sparked by a strong argument and well-written content. Many advertising campaigns make an effort to get consumers to identify with a cause or issue because, in some cases, social messages in advertisements can encourage prosocial attitudes and behaviors. These messages might improve the relationship between the company and the consumer, encouraging them to take part in actions that promote the social cause and effect social change. It is typically considered difficult to persuade consumers to purchase products and adopt behaviors that primarily benefit society as a whole. Nevertheless,

it is necessary to take into account any advertisement with a social message that provides inspiration to engage in any kind of behavior that will lead to social change.

For advertisers and practitioners, the results of the study provide insight into advertisements and would help them attract more customers. This study provides the understanding that it will be easier to gain public support and implement significant social changes if we can use advertising to make people think and worry about numerous social problems. The attitude toward the advertisement affects the purchase intention, which in turn influences subjective well-being. This implies that if the advertisement has a social message, people may see it favorably and respond favorably to it. An individual aspires to subjective well-being as their goal. A happy consumer is more likely to try the company's other product lines, increasing its market share (Griffin & Herres, 2002). Happy customers make decisions more easily and are more likely to believe advertising claims (Barbosa, 2017). Therefore, including a social message in an advertisement merits consideration.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that must be addressed. The first limitation of this research work relates to the specific advertisement used and the nature of the sample. The advertisement used in the study provided information on only one issue in society. A few more social issues can be included in future studies. For this study, only students or youth were considered; other groups in society might be considered for future research. No control group was used as the research design for this study was quasi-experimental with one group post-treatment only and, therefore, no comparison was studied. Future research could look into comparing groups. More research is required into whether the social message in an advertisement influences the attitude, behavioral intention, and subjective well-being of customers. A lot of other variables can play a role in determining consumer behavior for ads with a social message and need closer attention.

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