

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE ACCEPTANCE OF SOCIAL-NETWORKING ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Investments on online advertising have increased in the last decade. Large amounts of money have been invested in different media such as search engine sites. Recently, due to the growing membership on social-networking sites (SNS), social-networking advertising (SNA) has appeared as an important medium for online advertising. Although many organizations are investing in SNA, effectiveness of SNA remains unclear. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to analyze factors that affect the acceptance of SNA using the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Results of this study may provide additional insight into the understanding of online consumer behavior and improving the effectiveness of SNA.

Keywords: electronic commerce, social-networking sites, online advertising, social-networking advertising

INTRODUCTION

Since its emergence, online advertising has been of interest to retailers. Online advertising includes different options such as display advertisements, search engine advertising, email advertising, and social-networking advertising (SNA) (e.g., Sathish et al., 2011). Nowadays, many retailers are investing in online advertising in order to promote their products and/or services as online advertising approach allows retailers to reach a boarder customer base than do traditional advertising approaches.

Although search engine advertising has received much attention by retailers, interest in SNA has increased in the past few years because of the increasing participation on social-networking sties (SNS). For instance, the Facebook has 845 million active users (Facebook, 2012) and Twitter has 300 million users (Taylor, 2011). Moreover, it has been suggested that SNS are the most visited websites on the Internet (Wen et al, 2009), and that Internet users spend a large amount of their time visiting SNS (Davis & Angel, 2011). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that SNS are effective advertising media (e.g., Steinman & Hawkins, 2010).

Given that investment on SNA has increased dramatically, questions related to the effectiveness of SNA need to be addressed. For example, Hadija et al. (2012) calls for the study of how to reach target population and understand consumers' opinion of advertisements in the context of SNS. Moreover, Taylor et al. (2011) suggests that it is important to understand consumers' acceptance of SNA as it determines much of the effectiveness of SNA. The purpose of this study,

therefore, is to analyze factors that influence the acceptance of SNA. In this study, acceptance of SNA is operationalized as an online consumer's action of clicking on an advertisement displayed on an SNS. To achieve the research objective, we apply and extend the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) as the theoretical base. Figure 1 shows our proposed research model and hypotheses.

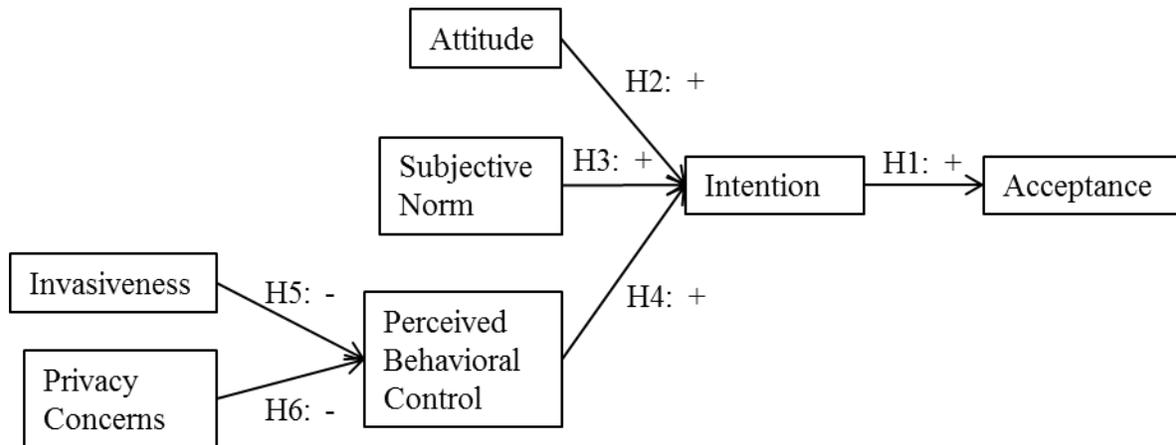


FIGURE 1. RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

This study is organized in six sections. In section two, a literature review of previous studies related to SNA and applications of the TPB in the context of e-commerce is presented. Next, we develop our theoretical arguments and hypotheses for the proposed research model. This is followed by the procedures of testing the proposed research model empirically. Section five reports the expected results of the study and the final section discusses findings, limitations and recommendations for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social-Networking Advertising

Social networking advertising (SNA) refers to advertisements that are delivered through SNS (Taylor et al., 2011). Because of its perceived marketing effectiveness, SNA has been studied from different research streams. One research stream focuses on identifying ways to better use SNS to promote companies. For example, Gil-Or (2010) conducted an experiment of the usage of viral marketing on the Facebook. He created a group on the Facebook for promoting a restaurant and sent a message via the Facebook to 20 prospective consumers. After a month of the initial promotion, Gil-Or found that 80 individuals became part of the Facebook group and therefore concluded the potential effectiveness of advertising on the Facebook. In another study, Gregurec et al. (2011) discussed the importance of using database marketing and further suggested that personalization of a customer database allows a SNS to be an effective marketing medium. Finally, Mathur et al. (2012) analyzed the impact of SNS usage on consumer purchase behavior and found a significant relationship between SNS usage and purchasing behavior. Based on their findings, Mathur et al. further concluded that “there are opportunities for

advertisers and other marketing planners to use social media as a beneficial marketing tool to influence consumers' purchasing behavior" (p.19).

A second research stream analyzes factors that affect consumers' attitudes toward SNA. For instance, Chung and Austria (2010) studied attitudes toward social media marketing messages using the media uses and gratifications theory and found that attitudes toward social media marketing messages were related to social media interaction and information gratifications. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2011) used the media uses and gratification theory as the theoretical framework to analyze factors that motivate users to attribute positive and negative attitudes toward SNA. Their results demonstrated that users had positive attitudes toward SNA when he or she perceived the advertisement to be informative and entertaining. On the other hand, when a user perceived SNA to be invasive and had privacy concerns, he or she tended to form negative attitudes toward the advertisement.

A third research stream focuses on examining the effectiveness of SNA. For example, Hadija et al. (2012) conducted personal in-depth interviews with 20 college students and analyzed these students' reactions of watching screenshots of advertisements on SNS. Their findings suggested that students did not dislike such advertising approach but other contents on the SNS could reduce the attractiveness of the advertisements. In another study, Wen et al. (2009) sought to identify the best type of advertisements on SNS. Specifically, they explored the impact of tie strength, a consumer's perception toward endorser, and the product type on SNA effectiveness and found that strong-tie endorsers were more effective than weak-tie endorsers for hedonic products (e.g., designer clothes, sports cars, etc.) endorsed on SNS. Additionally, Wen et al. found that high-expertise endorsers resulted in higher consumers' purchase intention for utilitarian products (e.g., microwaves, minivans, etc.) endorsed on SNS.

Although the above three research streams have provided important insight into SNA, little scholarly attention has been paid to behavioral intention and actual behavior in the context of SNA. Specifically, what affects a consumer's intention and actual behavior in terms of clicking on advertisements on SNS remains unanswered. To answer these questions, this study applies Ajzen's (1991) TPB as the theoretical base. In the next section, we provide a brief review on the TPB.

The Theory of Planned Behavior

According to the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), an individual's actual behavior is affected by his or her intention to perform the behavior, which in turn is affected by his or her attitude toward the behavior, his or her subjective norms related to performing the behavior, and his or her perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. Because the TPB has been shown to be a useful theory in understanding human behavior (e.g., Ferdous, 2010; Fu, Richards, Hughes, & Jones, 2010), it has been applied in various research fields such as consumer behavior (e.g., King, Dennis, & Wright, 2008), health (e.g., Turchik & Gidycz, 2012), public safety (e.g., Parker, Stradling, & Manstead, 1996), leisure activities (e.g., Hyo, 2011), etc.

In the context of consumer behavior in e-commerce, the TPB has also been widely utilized as it is suggested to be an effective model to explain online consumer behavior (Pavlou & Fygenon,

2006). For instance, Chen and Chang (2005) tested the original TPB model and extended TPB models and concluded that the TPB was applicable to predicting behavioral intentions in online shopping. In their study of consumers' purchase intention on the Internet, Lim and Dubinsky (2005) expanded the original TPB model and discovered that the original TPB constructs and salient beliefs significantly affected consumers' purchase decisions on the Internet. Similarly, Celuch, Goodwin, and Taylor (2007) applied the TPB to understand industrial buyers' intentions to use the Internet and suggested that the TPB to be an adequate model to predict Internet purchase intentions. Nasco, Toledo, and Mykytyn (2008) used the TPB to explain e-commerce adoption intention in small-to-medium-sized enterprises in developing countries and showed that attitude and subjective norms were predictors of e-commerce adoption. In their study of acceptance of e-reverse auction, Gumussoy and Calisir (2010) compared the TPB, the technology acceptance model (TAM), and an integrative model (i.e., integration of TAM and TPB) and suggested that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in the TPB model to be significant predictors of behavioral intention. In a more recent study, Huang, Wu, Wang, and Boulanger (2011) applied the TPB to identify factors affecting consumers' purchase decision via online actions and their results demonstrated that behavioral intention was determined by attitude and perceived behavioral control.

Our brief literature review on the TPB has suggested that the TPB is a viable theory in understanding behavioral intentions and actual behaviors in a wide range of contexts including the context of e-commerce. Harrison et al. (1997) confirmed this view by stating that "the theory of planned behavior has been successful in predicting important behaviors in a wide variety of domains" (p. 172). Given that SNS have been widely adopted by retailers as a means to reach prospective consumers, the focus of this study is on using the TPB to explain consumers' acceptance of SNA. In the next section, our theoretical arguments are presented.

THEORY DEVELOPMENT

Intention and Actual Behavior

According to Ajzen (1991), an individual's behavioral intention can be considered a motivational factor that determines the probability that he or she will follow through with the behavior. In other words, the stronger is an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior, the higher probability that the individual will engage in the actual behavior (Pejvak, Marie-Louise, Kaveh, & Phillip, 2009). Because of the perceived impact of behavioral intention on actual behavior, previous studies have consistently shown the positive relationship between intention and actual behavior in various contexts (e.g., Ashkenazi, Miniario, & Hornik, 2006; Cannière, Pelsmacker, & Geuens, 2010; Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010; Chandrashekar, McNeilly, Russ, & Marinova, 2000). Based on the findings of previous studies, one can reasonably expect that a consumer's intention to click on advertisements on SNS will have a positive impact on his or her actual behavior. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: *Intention to click on an advertisement on an SNS will have a positive impact on a consumer's actual action of clicking on the advertisement on the SNS.*

Attitude and Intention

According to the TPB, an individual's attitude toward a specific behavior refers to the amount of the individual's like or dislike of the behavior. Because attitude determines the amount of like or dislike of a particular behavior, prior research has demonstrated the impact of attitude on behavioral intention in the context of advertising. For instance, Bolls and Muehling (2007) investigated consumers' responses to high- and low-imagery radio advertisements and uncovered that high-imagery advertisements produced positive attitude toward the advertisements, which in turn affected purchase intention. Amos and Spears (2010) studied the impact of three visceral cues (i.e., proximity of reward, visual prime, and vividness of reward) on attitudes toward the advertisement and purchase intentions and their results demonstrated that the inclusion of these visceral cues positively affected attitudes toward the advertisement, which in turn positively influenced purchase intentions. In their study of consumers' attitudes toward mobile marketing and their intentions to purchase, Basheer and Ibrahim (2010) found that consumers who received text message advertisements without their permissions held a negative attitude toward the advertisements, which in turn reduced their intentions to purchase. In a more recent study, Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle, and Attmann (2011) analyzed Generation Y consumers' responses to cause-related marketing and discovered that these consumers' attitudes toward an apparel brand, affected by their evaluation of the advertisement, had a positive impact on their purchase intention.

Based on the findings of previous studies, one can expect that attitude affects an individual intention to perform a specific behavior. In the context of clicking on advertisements on SNS, we expect that if an individual has a positive attitude toward SNA, he or she will have high levels of intention to click on the advertisements. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Attitude will have a positive impact on a consumer's intention to click on an advertisement on an SNS.

Subjective Norms and Intention

According to the TPB, an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior is partially influenced by his or her assessments of whether those people who are important to him or her think he or she should perform the behavior. Because subjective norms involve an individual's perceived external social influence, previous studies have examined its impact on behavioral intentions in various contexts. For example, Wu (2005) investigated the impact of attitude and subjective norm on the involvement of online behavioral intention and showed that subjective norm was related to online behavioral intention. In their study of time stealing at work, Henle, Reeve, and Pitts (2010) found that there was a positive relationship between subjective norms and employees' intentions to steal time at work. Lee and Lee (2011) analyzed factors affecting consumers' intentions to watch online video advertising and revealed that subjective norm positively influenced a consumer's intention to watch online video ads. In their recent study of information technology use and innovation, Carter, Thatcher, Chudoba, and Mareit (2012) found that social-control factors such as subjective norms to be predictors of behavioral outcomes.

In the context of intention to click on advertisements on SNS, we expect that if an individual perceives that those who are important to him or her believe that clicking on advertisements on SNS is a social norm, he or she will have high degrees of intention to click on the advertisements on SNS. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Subjective norms will have a positive impact on a consumer's intention to click on an advertisement on an SNS.

Perceived Behavior Control and Intention

Perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's perceived difficulty or ease of performing a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Although the positive impact of perceived behavioral control on behavioral intention has been demonstrated by previous studies (e.g., Broadhead-Feam & White, 2006; Farah & Newman, 2010; Ma, Littrell, & Niehm, 2012; White, Thomas, Johnston, & Hyde, 2008; Yoon, 2011), it has been suggested that resource-facilitating conditions and self-efficacy form much of an individual's perceived behavioral control (Taylor & Tood, 1995). In the context of intention to click on SNA, we expect that there are relatively few barriers related to resource-facilitating conditions as a consumer mainly needs a computer and the Internet access.

Meanwhile, because self-efficacy has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on consumer behavioral intentions in the setting of traditional shopping (e.g., Bearden, Hardesty, & Rose, 2001; Bettman, Johnson, & Payne, 1991; Fleming & Courtney, 1984), we expect that a consumers' perceived behavioral control affected by his or her perceived self-efficacy will also have a positive impact on his or her intention to perform an online task. Eastin (2002) supported this view by providing evidence from his laboratory study where high degrees of self-efficacy positively affected individuals' intention to perform an action online. Because perceived behavioral control can be viewed as a product of a consumer's perceived availability of resource-facilitating conditions and self-efficacy, which in turn affect the consumer's behavioral intention, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4: Perceived behavioral control will have a positive impact on a consumer's intention to click on an advertisement on an SNS.

Invasiveness, Privacy Concerns, and Perceived Behavioral Control

Invasiveness in previous research has been used to describe an advertising that irritates consumers by interfering with their behaviors (Li et al., 2002). In the context of SNA, we expect that high degrees of invasiveness exist as social-networking users can control neither the position of advertisements nor the number of advertisements on SNS. This lack of control could become a potential barrier for locating the information that consumers are looking for, which in turn might interfere with the consumers' social-networking behaviors.

In the context of e-commerce, privacy refers to "being in control of information that is available about oneself" (Buchholz & Rosenthal, 2002, p.35). In other words, privacy concerns arise when customers perceive loss of controlling their personal information (Taylor et al, 2011). Because of the advancement in information technologies, advertisers have been able to collect consumers' personal information and this might result in high degrees of privacy concerns (Rapp

et al., 2009). On SNS, users are frequently asked to provide personal information that is then used to send relevant advertisements back to them (Korolova, 2011). For instance, when social-networking users click on an advertisement, they might indirectly provide private information such as religion or sexual orientation to advertisers (Guha et al, 2010; Korolova, 2011), which results in the loss of controlling their personal information.

As mentioned earlier, we expect that invasiveness and privacy concerns might result in a consumer's perceived loss of control. Meanwhile, previous studies have shown that control is one of the predictors of an individual's perceived behavioral control (e.g., Elie-Dit-Cosaque et al, 2011). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 5: Invasiveness will have a negative impact on a consumer's perceived behavioral control of clicking on an advertisement on an SNS.

Hypothesis 6: Privacy concerns will have a negative impact on a consumer's perceived behavioral control of clicking on an advertisement on an SNS.

METHOD

A cross-sectional field survey will be conducted. Specifically, data will be collected from students in a private university in Mexico. Students are considered a good source of data for social networking studies because they have been actively participating in them (e.g., Ellison et al, 2007). It is important to note that this study focuses only on the Facebook because it has been the leader SNS and was originally designed for student users (Phillips, 2007).

A questionnaire will be developed by adapting existing validated instruments with necessary modifications in order to fit the objective of this study. The questionnaire will be distributed to students enrolled in classes offered by the College of Business of the University. Only students with Facebook membership will be invited to participate in this study.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of data will consist of two stages: descriptive data analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. SPSS 18 and AMOS 18 will be used in these two stages. In the descriptive analysis, the characteristics of the sample will be included. These characteristics include sample size and demographics. To test the hypotheses, we will use SEM because "it is particularly useful in testing theories that contain multiple equations involving dependence relationships" (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006, p. 706). In this study, we will follow the two-step approach recommended by Anderson & Gerbing (1988). Specifically, we will test the measurement model first followed by testing the structural model.

EXPECTED RESULTS

We anticipate the goodness-of-fit indices of the measurement model and a successful confirmatory factor analysis that will support the validity of the measurement model. Goodness-of-fit will be assessed using chi-square value and goodness-of-fit indices as indicated earlier.

Once model fit is assessed, we will analyze the structural model to test the hypotheses. The path between intention to click on an advertisement and acceptance (clicking) of the advertisement is expected to be positive and statistically significant, supporting hypothesis H1. It is expected that an important and significant amount of the variability in acceptance will be explained by the variability in intention.

A significant positive path between attitude and intention to click on an advertisement is expected, indicating that attitude has a positive effect on intention, supporting hypothesis H2. Besides, we expect that an important and significant amount of the variability in intention will be explained by the variability in attitude, indicating that attitude is a very important predictor of intention.

A significant positive path between social norms and intention to click on an advertisement is expected, indicating that social norms have a positive effect on intention, supporting hypothesis H3. Additionally, we expect that an important and significant amount of the variability in intention to accept will be explained by the variability in social norms.

A significant positive path between perceived behavioral control and intention to click on an advertisement will support hypothesis H4 as hypothesized. Although the path is expected to be positive and significant, we expect a low significant value for the amount of the variability in intention to accept explained by the variability in perceived behavioral control. This is because users of SNS have the resources and skills needed to perform the behavior of clicking on advertisements on SNS.

We expect negative and statistically significant paths for both: 1) the path between invasiveness and perceived behavioral control, and 2) the path between privacy concerns and perceived behavioral control. This will support hypotheses H5 and H6. We also expect that the amount of variability of perceived behavioral control explained by invasiveness to be higher than the amount of variability of perceived behavioral control explained by privacy concerns because it is more common for social-networking users to perceive lack of control for the amount and placement of advertisements than the lack of control for their personal information they may need to provide when they click on advertisements on SNS.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis of factors that affect the acceptance of SNA may provide additional insight into the understanding of online consumer behavior and may help improve the effectiveness of SNA. Specifically, this study provides new insight into the applicability of the TPB in the context of consumer behavior on SNS. Additionally, the results of this study may help increase effectiveness of SNA.

Although the study intends to provide a new perspective, it is not without limitations. First, all participants in this study will be the Facebook members. Future studies that investigate members of other SNS such as Twitter are needed in order to validate our results. Second, we use the action of clicking on an advertisement as the indicator of acceptance of SNA. As some authors have criticized the use of clicking on an advertisement as the measure of acceptance of SNA (e.g., Fulgoni & Morn, 2009), future studies that use alternative indicators to measure acceptance are needed.

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