THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF DIGITAL MARKETING: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN ONLINE ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

As the use of digital media especially through the use of mobile phones increases firms have exploited social media to reach consumers and with each passing day as the dynamics of social media change it brings a plethora of difficulties with it. This research aimed to examine the challenges being experienced by online advertising agencies in Pakistan. To identify how these challenges can be managed especially due to the advance in the use of technology, Semi-structured interviews were conducted which included participants who work in advertising agencies, that deal with Digital, Media, and Advertisement designing. They indicated several issues including restricted availability of payment methods where clients, both within the country and internationally have issues, a fluctuating economy, and ethical issues on content development. Other problems include political and financial issues, which also compound the issues, especially because customer trust and business loyalty must be sustained. To address these issues, the study suggests several strategies: as follows; Establishing secure and effective payment methods, minimizing taxes on small enterprises, supporting e-commerce ventures, and guaranteeing appropriate and aesthetically pleasing content. This research helps in addressing these issues to the best ability. **Keywords:** Online advertisement, Digital Media, Advertising agencies.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has expanded businesses and has significantly influenced online marketing as well as strategies (Masoud, 2013; Nair, 2017). Digit media has thus changed marketing strategies to promote digitalization (Li et al., 2021). Online advertisements have exceeded their limit up to the old traditional level with a lot of transformation in it (Wijenayake & Pathirana, 2019). It has been estimated that globally, digital advertisements have increased and reached up to 332.84 billion dollars, according to the statistics of 2020 (Appel, 2020). Whereas of almost 332.84 billion, 59% of this digital marketing is influenced by online advertisements (Li, 2021).

Online advertising agencies utilize advertising agencies' most used applications to gain an idea regarding certain thought patterns to design certain techniques to attract more and more customers (Aiolfi et al., 2021; Wijenayake et al., 2019). The demographic variables used by a person enable the advertisements to employ some of the crucial strategies to target the core precisely (Li & Yin, 2021). Getting traffic is also a very crucial and important part of online advertising behavior as the traffic is gained using the most common strategies designed based on the most visited site (Goldfarb, 2014).

It is also assumed that customers are attracted in an influential way through online advertisement rather than traditional way (Goldfarb, 2014). The targeted advertisement refers to an idea in which the focus or the target of online advertisement is to find an accurate trading platform through which they can gather a lot of traffic by analyzing the consumer's need in no time. The more websites a person opens the greater the probability that is to be stored in the web usage and thus it becomes indicative to those who are searching for most trafficking websites. In this manner, they deliver exceptionally relevant commercial information tailored to the

personalized characteristics and requirements of advertising agencies (Ju et al., 2015).

The targeted advertisements promote advertising products and their benefits at an accurate period which helps advertising agencies to convert that advertisement into an essential need (Adam, 2002; Philip & Gray, 2007). In comparison with online advertisements, the more open advertisements were less open than new glamorous advertisements (Fullerton et al., 2019), It highlighted the fact that advertising agencies are more attracted to new and fashionable stuff than the old-fashioned traditional advertisements. The advertisers opt for targeting advertisers to refine marketing strategies.

These practices are useful in most of the situational references, as the challenges faced by the advertising agencies could be reduced to the minimum. Also, to address those issues, the positive effects should be utilized, playing with certain colors and curiosity-provoking questions so that the buyers couldn't avoid it and thus increase traffic to a certain advertisement. To improve the efficacy of online advertisement it is crucial to highlight the buyer's attitude regarding certain brands. Certain things are required to increase buying behavior, including perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, trust, and attitude toward The advertiser's advertisements. perception highlighted that people tend to avoid those advertisements to whom they perceive negatively, which highlights the direct role of the advertiser's perception (Malaquias & Hwang, 2016).

Digital marketing however has disrupted the advertising industry and presents new opportunities but also threats to online advertising agencies: negative consumer attitudes, consumers avoiding ads, perceived risks, and ad resistance. The above challenges affect the efficiency and longevity of digital campaigns. However, as a growing discipline of marketing, little is known about how these challenges may be overcome in the field of online advertising. The purpose of this research is to identify the challenges unique to online advertising agencies and recommend methods that can be used to enhance this style of advertising to make online advertising ventures more successful.

Problem statement

Digital marketing has rapidly developed in the current world and the recent past thus transforming the face of the advertising industry and no other marketing technique can offer better platforms for advertising to the world. However, it has introduced new issues to online advertising agencies as well They include Other worries such as unfavorable consumer attitudes, advert avoidance, perceived risks, and resistance however have metamorphosed into key challenges that define the effectiveness of online campaigns. Besides, these challenges are destructive not only for the level of consumer engagement and overall conversion but there is an actual problem in the digital advertising field and its future viability. While there is a growing trend of concern toward web advertising, this research field is still unfortunately characterized by a lack of a systematic study of these aspects and methodical guidelines. This paper seeks to find out these challenges unusual to online advertising agencies and suggest potential strategies in dealing with the said challenges towards enhancing the advertising effectiveness of firms' electronic commerce promotional campaigns.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study to knowledge is in mapping the changes that have taken place in the existing challenges. This study is useful in shedding light on these challenges and helping to map out ways through which consumer engagement can be raised a notch higher as well as strategies for the improvement of internet advertising. In doing so, the research aims to contribute to the improvement of the overall disclosure, usability, and ethical approaches to the advertisement practice to the benefit of both sides, clients and consumers adapting to the modern digital world.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the challenges faced by advertisers.

2. To focus on how we can address those challenges.

Research Questions

RQ1 - What are the challenges faced by online advertising agencies?

RQ2 - What are the ways through which we can address those challenges?

Literature review

Online Marketing

Marketing involves various activities, including sales, advertising, promotion, and pricing (Maria, Suharyadi, & Hudiono, 2021). When a business leverages Internet media or the "www" network to market its products or services, this approach is known as Internet marketing, e-marketing, or online marketing (Meria et al., 2021). Online marketing encompasses using the Internet and other media platforms for communication and promotional purposes (Shino et al., 2022). It presents numerous opportunities for businesses and necessitates ongoing strategic development in a constantly evolving environment. As noted by various researchers, online marketing comprises activities aimed at promoting products and services and building customer relationships through online channels (Simanjuntak, 2021). They describe the Internet as a vast public network that connects computer users worldwide and serves as a significant information repository (Hariyanti & Wirapraja, 2018). E-commerce, also referred to as online marketing, involves selling products and services via the Internet (Kurnianti, 2018). The most frequently purchased items online include clothing and computers, and due to security concerns, advertising agencies often prefer cashon-delivery or ATM-based transfer payments (Rii et al., 2022).

Online marketing allows organizations to implement self-service methods, enabling them to serve customers with less reliance on human resources and reducing the need for extensive telephone infrastructure and services (Achmadi & Veronika, 2019; Wediawati & Rahmayanni, 2021). (Kurnianti, 2018) differentiate between brick-andclick businesses that operate both online and offline and virtual businesses that operate solely online (Suharto, 2022). Internet marketing activities include product development, crafting marketing messages, soliciting or purchasing, web banner advertising, search engine design, promotions, email marketing, affiliate marketing, interactive advertising, and more.

Challenges Faced by Advertisers

A person who usually purchases certain products is referred to as a purchaser or a consumer (Barotto, Fenu & Marras, 2022). There are certain challenges faced by advertising agencies when they use social media and come across several online advertisements.

(Meria et al., 2021) highlighted Online advertising as a kind of marketing through which the products are introduced to the advertising agencies to gain traffic whereas the perception of online advertisement is used to relate consumer opinion regarding specific products sometimes is ironic (doesn't depict a real image). Such things become a challenge for the advertisers some of them are comprised of negative emotions, advertising avoidance, perceived risk, resistance, and negative emotions. A detailed description is given next:

Negative Perception

Extensive research has shown that targeted online advertising can significantly enhance various aspects of brand performance, including brand awareness (Drèze and Hussherr, 2003; Niu et al., 2021), brand recognition (Keller, 2010), and purchasing intentions (Lewis and Reiley, 2014). However, not all customers respond favorably to the design of online advertisements, as growing awareness of their intrusiveness leads to negative perceptions and emotions (Wijenavake and Pathirana, 2019; Youn and Kim, 2019). This has resulted in many advertising agencies attempting to block advertisements (Verlegh et al., 2015; Dodoo and Wen, 2019), contributing to the alarming statistic that 82% of Americans actively avoid online advertising (OneSpot, 2021).

The phenomenon of advertising avoidance refers to actions taken by media users to reduce their exposure to advertising content (Speck and Elliott, 1997). Such behavior poses significant challenges for reducing marketing costs through online targeted advertising and poses a threat to the survival and growth of businesses (Ma and Pan, 2020). In response, advertisers have proposed various marketing practices to mitigate advertising avoidance, such as employing attention-grabbing headlines (Swatmarketing Solutions, 2021). By adopting these strategies, businesses can address the issue of advertising avoidance and improve the effectiveness of their online advertising efforts,

leading to better engagement with their target audience and improved brand performance.

Advertising Avoidance

Advertising avoidance refers to the actions taken by individuals to avoid specific content or advertisements on social media platforms (Speck & Elliott, 1997). This behavior can be categorized as affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses (Speck & Elliott, 1997; Cheon, 2004; Kelly et al., 2018). Examples include scrolling past advertisements or quickly closing them to remove them from view. Several factors contribute to such behavior, including perceived time and effort wastage (Duan & Wu, 2021), negative past experiences, deviating from goal-oriented approaches (Cho & Chen, 2004; Shin & Cheon, 2006; Shin & Li, 2016), perceiving advertisements as clutter or irrelevant, and perceiving them as relative to personal needs (Kelly et al., 2013). Knittel et al. (2016) emphasized the impact of advertising behavior on advertising avoidance. This study can aid marketing managers in devising strategies to minimize consumer perception of risk and negative outcomes associated with social media advertisements.

Perceived Risk

Perceived risk, initially introduced by Bauer in 1960, refers to the uncertainty or apprehension individuals have regarding certain products or services (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In this study, perceived risk is considered a challenge with potential negative consequences (Zhang, 2019). Existing research suggests that perceived risk in online advertising is multidimensional. encompassing various dimensions (Stone & Gronhaug, 1993; Forsythe & Bo, 2004; Chen, 2020). Cunningham (1967) proposed six structures of perceived risk, including financial, psychological, physical, time-related, social, and performance risks associated with a stimulus. Physical (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972), social (Faqih & Jaradat, 2015), and psychological (Forsythe & Bo, 2004; Shao et al., 2006) risks have been identified as the most common dimensions. It is assumed that online advertisements or buying behavior can pose threats to advertising agencies in various ways (Chen et al., 2019; Labrecque et al., 2021).

Resistance

Resistance occurs when advertising agencies perceive limitations or threats to their freedom (Liu, 2019). The theory of resistance suggests that individuals feel motivated to restore their freedom when it is threatened. Resistance has emerged as a new dimension or challenge in the relationship between online advertisements and consumer buying behavior. It can influence buying behavior (Wai et al., 2019; Tobi et al., 2020), impulsive behavior (Wu et al., 2022), and loyalty (Esmaeili et al., 2021).

Negative Emotions

Negative emotions are psychological responses in which individuals react to external stimuli with concern. These emotions can be constructive or destructive, including anger, depression, or regret (Jaeger et al., 2019). Negative emotions can significantly impact buying behavior and attitudes toward online advertising (Akram et al., 2021). Anxiety and anger also influence buying behavior (Huang, 1997). When advertising agencies associate negative feelings with certain websites or advertisements for various reasons, their emotional response and perception may lead them to avoid those websites and advertisements (Umair et al., 2018). Emotions play a mediating role in advertiser behavior and attitudes, and they have been extensively studied in information processing (Li, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019).

Ways to Address Challenges Faced by Advertisers

Time, a Resource

Time management plays a pivotal role in the success of any venture. Efficiently utilizing time resources will lead to improved productivity and overall effectiveness. Utilizing popular hashtags can enhance the visibility of content and attract a wider audience on social media platforms. Ethical values should be at the core of every business decision. By ethically conducting business, companies can build trust and long-lasting relationships with their customers. To promote e-commerce and maintain stability, it is essential to overcome political challenges and create a conducive business environment (Chakrabarti et al, 2023).

Prioritize Quality over Quantity

In the pursuit of success, prioritizing quality over quantity is crucial. Delivering exceptional products and services will leave a lasting impact on customers and foster brand loyalty. Furthermore, keeping an eye on trending content will help in developing innovative and relevant marketing strategies. To ensure a positive and inclusive online presence, businesses must maintain a vulgar-free and respectful approach to content creation(Kim et al., 2019). Incorporating visually appealing images in posts can significantly attract consumers' attention and enhance engagement. Influencer marketing can be an effective strategy to promote products and services. Collaborating with influencers who have a strong following and influence in product reviews, can lead to increased brand visibility and consumer trust (Iacobucci and Cicco, 2020).

Current Online Trends of Advertisement

Certain trends are followed by Pakistan regarding online advertisements such as the Internet as a Promotional tool, as an Influencer, Engagement, ease of communication, and consumer reliability. A detailed description is given next:

Internet as a Promotional Tool

Social media has become an increasingly important platform for advertising and marketing efforts (Cooley and Parks-Yancy, 2019). To succeed in the competitive digital marketing landscape, brands must create viral and unobtrusive advertisements on social media to cut through the clutter (De Veirman et al., 2017). One popular strategy is native advertising, where brands seamlessly integrate their ads into websites or social media feeds to blend with regular content (Perrin, 2019). This approach is less disruptive compared to traditional online ads like banners or pop-ups Notably, it is projected that US advertisers will invest over US\$52.75 billion in native advertising on social network platforms in 2020 (Perrin, 2019). Embracing native advertising allows brands to leverage the power of social media to effectively engage their target audience and achieve greater marketing success.

Current Trends

A new emerging trend in native advertising revolves around brands collaborating with micro-

celebrities on Instagram to develop ads that resemble their regular posts (Mediakix, 2020). These Instagram micro-celebrities boast a substantial number of engaged followers who trust their opinions and view them as experts in specific domains like beauty, fashion, or lifestyle (De Veirman et al., 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020). As credible opinion leaders, these micro-celebrities possess the ability to influence their followers' opinions about the brands and products they endorse (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

In the realm of social media native advertising, their accessibility and reliability often make them more impactful than traditional celebrities (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Despite the growing use of micro-celebrities by brands to create native advertisements on Instagram, there remains a dearth of research exploring the underlying mechanisms that contribute to their effectiveness; Johnson et al., 2019). Understanding these mechanisms is vital for businesses seeking to leverage the potential of micro-celebrities in their marketing strategies and effectively connect with their target audience on social media platforms.

Introducing New Features

Social media platforms have revolutionized the commercial sector by introducing various features such as user-friendly interfaces, attractive designs, content-sharing options, messaging systems, and real-time notifications (Constantinides, 2014). These changes have led to the emergence of a diverse and elusive customer base that is challenging to influence, convince, and retain. Social media offers numerous benefits to businesses, including the ability to attract customers, expand marketing reach, increase revenue, and foster customer loyalty.

Engagement

It is not an easy task to grasp the attention of the audience. Increasing the interaction between the company and the consumer through online advertisement engagement is the only way utilized by the advertiser to attract advertising agencies (Wu et al., 2022). A correlation has been observed between the usage of social media and engaging in advertisements (Carlson et al., 2022; Chetioui et al., 2021). Tafesse & Wood (2021) emphasized the idea that engagement in online advertisements is multidimensional as it not only includes the

emotions associated with certain advertisements but also entails how much a person can achieve his/her goals. It is anticipated that consumer interest mostly depends on the brands they prefer, which is why they usually open advertisements that represent their favorite brand. The existing literature revealed that the rating of the advertisement is based on the future of the purchase decision, most reviews are only on those advertisements that people want something to buy from (Fink, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this research stems from the Media System Dependency (MSD) theory where media usage raises its dependency thus transforming human lives. This is why MSD has a strong affinity to internet marketing, primarily as the digital network that impacts the user. It is also important to note that in today's world, advertising agencies largely rely on a written mode of communication instead of face-to-face communication (Ali, 2018) such a shift is through the following trends that appear to foster online advertising.

The analytical mechanism emerging from the interview outcomes includes a process of categorizing themes into predominant themes as well as sub-themes to provide an energy structural design of data compilation and evaluation.

Methodology

The study was qualitative, whereby interviewbased open-ended questions were used to collect data. Based on the sub-themes and the themes of the study certain questions were pre-devised for a structured interview. The answers were composed with the help of a designed questionnaire and the demographic variables regarding the topic.

More specifically, this study revolves around a current perception-discourse analysis of online advertisements as seen through the lens of the advertiser. The research relies on the difficulties and the modern tendencies of online advertisement in Pakistan. Due to purposeful sampling, the subjects of the study were assured to be qualified and offer density and context information to questions. Discourse analysis is applied to get an understanding of the communication processes.

Analysis and Findings

This research focuses on the issues encountered by online advertising agencies with specific reference to the economic and social structure of Pakistan. A cross-section of respondents, especially from different advertising agencies, was found to have identified the following problems affecting their organizations. The first issue described is the economic situation in the country where ecommerce is not very advanced, payment conversion issues with foreign clients hence making transactions slightly challenging for the clients. On the same note, high taxes on the SMEs and the high cases of payment fraud, fake business, and issues to do with budget leakage were cited as other barriers.

Another great difficulty for these agencies is in developing content that is acceptable in the religious, social, and moral sense of Pakistan. They must consider several different factors so they do not post content with the wrong reception from the audience or even hurt the feelings of the viewers. This is more so for NGOs that play a significant role in shaping the content particular to the genders and equality between them. Other factors of considerations that agencies cannot afford to ignore include legal compliance to customer new image, satisfaction. and publicity. While COVID-19 has positively impacted digital media marketing, there have also been some negative implications. At the same time, COVID-19 fastened the dependence on the Internet business, and hence, increased the flow of demand for online platforms, such as freelancing or graphic design. Nonetheless, some of the respondents said that shift to the digital media was not without its glitches: that it had led to more exposure to fake news and a high precipitancy for more businesses to change their business strategies as far as marketing was concerned. They also talked about the policy of secrecy which is practiced by agencies due to the competitive nature of their business with clients. Some of the clients are fully conversant with the kind of advertisements that are being used while others are not aware, hence the varied level of client involvement. In conclusion, it can be said that the study of this problem reveals the conditions in which advertising agencies exist and that they come across in the process of their work -

economic factors, social norms, and opportunities in the digital sphere.

As for RQ2 various approaches were pointed out by the advertising agencies regarding the challenges that they encounter within the web advertising environment. One of the most powerful suggestions is the necessity of economic stability accompanied by governmental support such as getting rid of taxes or having minimum taxes on small businesses and introducing new technologies into e-commerce. Optimizing payment methods by the introduction of secure and easily accessible methods such as PayPal is also proposed to improve operations in dealings with domestic and international clients.

The two significant issues were quality and ethical concerns, as agencies were urged to create highquality material with social/moral relevance while engaging the audiences and being innovative. Some of the actions that are recommended to capture the consumer's attention and not let them grow bored are the usage of trending topics, appealing visuals, and the absence of leakage. Agreeably, recommendations that can be derived from the highlighted practices include the suggestion that consistency and time management in ad campaigns are critical in maintaining the audience's attention and gaining their trust. It is suggested to employ influencers to contribute to the promotion of the brand and make it come across to a broader audience. Thus, the use of SWOT analyses allows for learning more about the company's strengths and weaknesses from the clients' views, to create more appropriate strategies. Answering customers' queries, particularly, using optimal customer relations while being sincere and helpful is also considered crucial for building a trustworthy image of the brand.

Discussion

The RQ1- states the challenges faced by online advertising agencies, the unstable economy poses yet another obstacle for advertising agencies in Pakistan. Trust issues and fraud are prevalent in the online advertising space, leading to apprehensions among customers. Online shopping experiences often fall short of customers' expectations, contributing to a lack of trust in the digital marketplace. Addressing these challenges is essential to instilling confidence in consumers and

ensuring the sustainability of online advertising in the country. By establishing more secure and reliable online shopping platforms and transparent advertising practices, the agency can work towards building trust and credibility with its target audience. High taxes are a major concern for the agency as well. The burden of taxes on small businesses hampers their growth and innovation. The agency strongly believes that the government should take proactive steps to reduce taxes for small businesses and promote e-commerce, as it can have a positive impact on the advertising industry and overall economic development. By providing tax incentives and creating a more favorable business environment, the agency can better serve its clients and contribute to the growth of the digital advertising sector.

The research question RO2 indicated how we can address those challenges Cross-platform integration is a priority for advertising agencies aiming to maintain consistent messaging and branding across various social media apps. By harmonizing their strategies, agencies ensure maximum reach and impact on a diverse audience. Paid advertising opportunities, such as sponsored posts, ads, and promoted content, are strategically utilized by advertising agencies. They allocate budgets to these paid channels based on their client's objectives, optimizing the return on investment. Over the past decade, certain tasks that were considered challenging have transformed, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has contributed to the significant growth of digital media in Pakistan, fostering a stronger connection with this medium. Notably, brands like Khadi & Limelight have adapted to the changing landscape by establishing online shopping outlets, a crucial and timely move considering the prevailing circumstances. This shift towards online platforms was a necessary response, reflecting the evolving needs of brands in response to the pandemic-induced challenges. Consequently, COVID-19 has introduced a notable and positive change, facilitating convenient remote shopping experiences. The emergence of online shopping platforms has been pivotal during this time, enabling consumers to make purchases from the comfort of their homes. This transformation has been particularly advantageous for freelancing websites and graphic designers, whose services have been in high demand. The demand for graphic

designers, in particular, has experienced exponential growth as brands and businesses sought to enhance their digital presence. This trend signifies a direct outcome of the pandemic-induced changes and highlights the adaptability of various sectors to the evolving landscape.

Conclusion

Some of the issues that advertising agencies in Pakistan are facing include; underdeveloped ecommerce, content that should represent the society's stand, the unstable economy, and high taxes. In conclusion, it can be stated that these mentioned challenges need to be addressed in the country with sufficient policies and efforts to achieve the maximum potential of online advertising.

In this way, the agency can contribute to the development and support of the Pakistan advertising market: create a suitable environment for e-commerce, maintain customers' trust, and establish rational taxes for sale enterprises. As it concerns the patterns of difficulty, they have changed in the last decade and the COVID-19 pandemic overextends the changes in that area. This period pays more attention to the digital media in Pakistan and even upgrades the relationship between people and these media. In this case, what has come out is brands' approach to the pandemic through online shopping outlets as an example of the opportunities. On the one hand, the pandemic has expanded the longevity of such freelancing disciplines as graphic designing; on the other hand, it has spurred people's recognition of a social issue concerning the impact of media dependency on mental health. Thus, it is possible to acknowledge that there is a certain positive impact of COVID-19 on the sphere of digital media marketing, while at the same time acknowledging that the totality of the effects is as follows and includes both positive and negative trends.

Recommendations

Firstly, Further research studies should be directed towards increasing the number of samples in the study to improve the generality of the results. This would have a direct implication for contacting participants from different sources, backgrounds, or even different demography. A more representative sample can help to obtain a more or less equal perception of the phenomenon in question.

The second one is to stop using convenience sampling and instead use more scientific approaches such as random or stratified sampling. This will help in the minimization of prejudice and increase the transferability of the study since a range will be set in a bid to come up with an example that will present the characteristics of the population. target Third, it is suggested to conduct only Longitudinal research to describe some changes and trends during a certain period. This would be useful in a study because this approach would enable the researcher to have a dynamic view of the phenomenon and the different changes that the variables of interest undergo.

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