

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS SPONSORED-LABELLED TARGETED ADVERTISEMENTS ON META PLATFORMS IN THE CONTEXT OF MAURITIUS

Eric BINDAH ¹, Leenshya GUNNOO ²

¹Faculty of Law and Management, University of Mauritius, Mauritius

²School of Business, Management and Finance, University of Technology Mauritius, Mauritius

Article History:

- received 22 February 2023
- accepted 27 February 2024

Abstract. The purpose of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of 'sponsored' labelled targeted ads in Mauritius and whether these ads can impact the brand awareness and purchase intention of Meta group social media users. By adopting the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), this research brings forward a conceptual model of six constructs (customisation, informativeness, entertainment, intrusiveness, brand awareness and Purchase intention) to quantitatively understand the effectiveness of targeted ads on Meta Platforms. A sample of 382 students participated in the survey, where 333 valid responses were used for further analysis. In this research, Confirmatory Factor Analysis was utilised to examine the measurement model for brand awareness, customization, informativeness value, entertainment value, intrusiveness value, and purchase intention. The fit indices indicated a reasonable fit between the model and the data. Using Structural Equation Modelling to test the model, the regression weight between customisation, informativeness, entertainment, intrusiveness and brand awareness were statistically significant. The regression weight between brand awareness and purchase intention was also statistically significant. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for marketers and advertisers to invest in strategies that effectively increase brand awareness through targeted advertising.

Keywords: sponsored ads, brand awareness, customization, informativeness value, entertainment value, intrusiveness value, purchase intention, Mauritius.

JEL Classification: M37.

✉Corresponding author. E-mail: bindahe@yahoo.co.uk

1. Introduction

Beyond keeping in touch with friends and family, social media platforms are becoming frequently used for various purposes. Users spend a substantial amount of time on these platforms for a variety of activities, including exchanging material and interacting with peer groups (Kemp et al., 2021). Even though there are a lot of studies on buying behavior in the current literature, behavioral differences are mostly centered on generational cohorts and, more lately, the impact of social networking on consumer preferences. On the other hand, not much is known about consumer behavior with regard to sponsored-labelled targeted adverts on meta platforms, despite the fact that this generation has grown up entirely on the internet. Furthermore, contextually, Mauritius is a free upper middle market economy

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whereby there exists a continual escalation of private consumption, and such alterations in the consumption patterns of residents in Mauritius are due to their evolving lifestyles coupled with demographic changes (Jaunky et al., 2020). As such, research in this area in the local context is considered important and necessary.

This study aims to highlight how consumers view targeted advertisements on Meta Platforms (Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp) in Mauritius. Over the previous ten years, there has been a huge increase in the usage of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Chen & Qasim, 2021). Hence, the purpose of this research is to contribute to the existing literature by identifying the factors that influence the perception of ads from the consumer's point of view, as they have access to significant data through the different platforms and whether choosing to advertise on Meta platforms can lead to a consumer purchase intention.

This paper follows a structured approach. It begins with a comprehensive review of literature concerning consumer behavior towards sponsored-labelled targeted advertisements on Meta platforms in Mauritius. Subsequently, it outlines the theoretical framework and the development of hypotheses. The methods employed for data collection and analysis are then detailed, followed by sections presenting and discussing the results in light of both theoretical insights and managerial implications. Finally, the paper concludes by addressing limitations and providing suggestions for future studies.

2. Review of literature and hypotheses development

2.1. Conceptual model

The UGT offers a psychological communication perspective of how people fulfil their needs and wants via mass media or other forms of communication and the consequent expectations that are generated (Rubin, 2009). Several other needs have been identified, like the need for the acquisition of information (Stafford & Gonier, 2004), credibility (Tsang et al., 2004) and interactivity (Wang et al., 2002). Dehghani et al. (2016) mentioned that attitude toward an ad is a good measure of the advertisement's efficacy. On the other hand, Yang et al. (2017) investigated the intrusive aspect of advertising, finding that intrusiveness influences purchase intention. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model for this study. It examines the influence of four independent variables, customisation, informativeness, entertainment and intrusiveness of sponsored-labelled targeted ads on purchase intention, with brand awareness as a mediator variable.

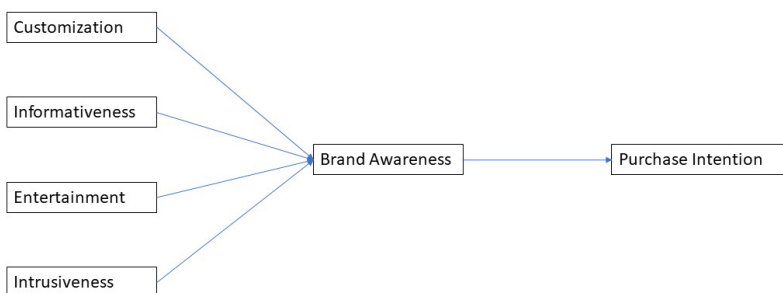


Figure 1. Conceptual model

2.1.1. Customisation

Rimadias et al. (2021) define customization as a marketing and communications service aimed at enhancing customer satisfaction by offering easy access to information and customizable services, thereby creating value for specific customers. This approach also facilitates connectivity with target consumers, fosters trust, and enhances the value of individual clients (Cheung et al., 2020). Customer customization is highlighted as a key aspect of social media marketing and personalized content tailored to consumer preferences leads to unique brand experiences, thereby increasing brand awareness and fostering positive brand associations (Cheung et al., 2021). Moreover, Kim (2017) found that customization leads to positive attitudes towards advertisements, resulting in enhanced advertising memory. Similar conclusions were drawn by Dehghani et al. (2016) and Douglas and Pracejus (2020). Douglas and Pracejus (2020) further underscore the importance of customization, revealing that higher levels of customization correspond to increased perceived customer relationship strength, task engagement, trust in the company, and favorable attitudes towards advertisements. Additionally, research by Lina and Setiyanto (2021) demonstrates that tailoring advertisements to users' interests, purchase history, and preferences leads to a perceived benefit, subsequently enhancing users' purchase intention. In their study, Nguyen et al. (2022) aim to identify and assess factors directly influencing customers' online purchase intention for advertised products, while also exploring the mediating role of attitude towards advertising. Their findings indicate that personalization and the credibility of social media ads, such as those on Facebook, have a significant positive impact on purchase intention. Building on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Customization of preferences for labelled targeted ads positively influences brand awareness.

2.1.2. Informativeness

According to Ducoffe (1995), informativeness refers to the degree of new, valuable, and resourceful content provided by an advertisement to the consumer. Within the framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), informativeness is recognized as a crucial factor contributing to a positive attitude towards online advertisements, as it helps users satisfy their informational needs (Yang et al., 2017). Consumers perceive information as a positive attribute of advertisements when they seek knowledge about new products, discover previously unknown benefits of existing products, or compare different product options (Li et al., 2015). Nasir et al. (2021) conducted a study to recognise various consumer segments on the basis of social media advertising features and found that consumers' purchase intentions for products and services advertised on social media are significantly impacted by the level of informativeness. Similarly, Gupta and Kumar (2022) explored the impact of advertising on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions across various social media platforms, revealing that factors such as informativeness, significantly shape consumers' attitudes towards advertisements. In Nguyen et al. (2022) study, empirical findings indicated an indirect effect of informativeness on purchase intention, mediated through attitudes towards advertising. Drawing from existing literature, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H2: The informativeness value of a labelled targeted ad is positively related to brand awareness.

2.1.3. Entertainment

According to Ducoffe (1996), entertainment in advertisements stems from the enjoyment derived by consumers, contributing significantly to brand awareness. Entertaining ads evoke a positive response, providing consumers with a sense of satisfaction. Moreover, within the framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), entertaining advertisements satisfy consumers' hedonic needs for "escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional release" (McQuail et al., 1983) as noted by Fischer and Reuber (2011). The positive impact of entertainment on the advertising value of online ads is supported by Dehghani et al. (2016), who found similar results in a study conducted on the YouTube platform among millennials from Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. Additionally, Nguyen et al. (2022) found that factors such as entertainment in social media ads, like those on Facebook, significantly influence purchase intention. Yin et al. (2024) investigated the impact of entertainment in short-form video apps on users' defensive judgments about advertising, suggesting that entertaining ads reduce defensive reactions and foster a more positive perception of sponsored-labelled targeted ads. Their findings indicate that entertaining ads stimulate consumer interest and desire, ultimately impacting purchase intention. Building on the literature review, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H3: The entertainment value of a labelled targeted ad is positively associated with brand awareness.

2.1.4. Intrusiveness

With advancements in modern technology, various online advertising formats, such as in-stream video advertising, often compel social media users to encounter advertisements while engaged in their goal-oriented activities. This interruption of advertisements is frequently perceived as intrusive and frustrating by users (Kim, 2017). Targeted advertisements disrupt the regular activities of social media users and interrupt their consumption of organic content, leading to negative reactions such as irritation and ad avoidance (Li et al., 2002). Previous research has shown that intrusiveness can result in irritation and subsequently decrease brand awareness and purchase intention among social media users (Dehghani et al., 2016; Niu et al., 2021). However, Nielsen and Huber (2009) found that within a certain limit, even though social media platforms displayed ads intrusively, there were positive evaluations of the advertised brand upon recall. Additionally, Chatterjee (2008) discovered that small intrusive pop-up ads could enhance brand recall, with their negative impact diminishing over time. Based on the existing literature, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H4: The intrusiveness value of a labelled targeted ad is positively associated with brand awareness.

2.1.5. Brand awareness and purchase intention

The ability of a consumer to identify or recall a certain brand of a product or service is known as brand awareness (Rrustemi & Baca, 2021). It represents the extent to which consumers remember or recognize a brand after being exposed to its advertisement (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Brand awareness plays an important part in the decision-making process preceding a purchase, as consumers need to be familiar with the product category, brand category, and brand name to make a specific purchase (Kang et al., 2022). Purchase intention refers to a customer's willingness and plan to proceed with an online transaction to acquire a product

or service from a brand (Takaya et al., 2019). Mubarak and Mufeeth (2020) describe purchase intention as consumers' predisposition to take actual purchase action. MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) found that attitudes toward an advertisement influence both brand awareness and purchase intention. Similarly, Chen and Wells (1999) discovered that purchase intention serves as a reliable indicator of an advertisement's effectiveness and is influenced by attitudes toward the ad. Hameed et al. (2023) specifically looked into the effects of brand awareness on purchase intention within the digital landscape, highlighting that while brand awareness is crucial, it may not alone suffice to effectively drive consumers' purchase decisions in today's digital age. Their research emphasizes the importance of considering consumer attitudes as an additional determinant influencing purchase intention. By examining the relationship between brand awareness, consumer attitudes, and the efficacy of sponsored-labelled targeted ads, their study offers valuable insights into the complexities of digital advertising. Sesar et al. (2022) explored the impact of advertising disclosure (displayed/not displayed) on influencer credibility, focusing on the moderating role of influencer type (celebrity/micro-influencer). Additionally, the study investigated the mediating role of brand awareness in the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention. Their findings validated a direct and positive association between brand awareness and purchase intention.

H5: The consequent brand awareness from a labelled targeted ad is positively related to the purchase intention.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This research originated from a philosophy of positivism and adopted a deductive research approach. The study used a quantitative methodology and a questionnaire to collect primary data to meet the study objectives. Questionnaires were distributed to learners of the University of Mauritius in electronic e-mail format, which was designed using Google Forms. A probabilistic sampling approach was adopted for this study. Simple random sampling was employed, giving every potential element in the targeted population at the University of Mauritius an equal chance of being selected.

3.2. Measurement

The questionnaire items have been measured on 5 points Likert scale, starting with strongly disagree to strongly agree. The measurements were derived from previous studies (Xu et al., 2008; Ducoffe, 1995; Li et al., 2002; Yoo et al., 2000; Kim & Han, 2014). The reliability scales for all scales studies ranged from 0.825 to 0.94.

3.3. Sample

In total, 382 students participated in the survey on googleforms. Out of these 382 students, 23 participants representing 6% of the total participants, responded that they do not have an account on the Meta Group platforms and an additional 23 respondents, representing 6.4% of the remaining respondents, answered that they have not seen an advertisement labelled as "sponsored" on Meta platforms for the second question. These students were not allowed to proceed further with the survey as they were not part of the population being studied. Due

to incomplete information, three (3) cases were eliminated from the sample. The remaining 333 responses were eligible and were used for the data analysis to check the hypotheses proposed in the study.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

This sample was made up of a majority of 214 female respondents (64.3%) compared to 119 male respondents (35.7%). More than half of the respondents were adults less than 29 years old (214, 64.3%), and 105 respondents (31.5%) were between 30 and 42 years old. In this sample, 233 respondents (71.8%) are single, while 91 (27.3%) are married. Among the 333 Meta platform users, 97.9% of this respondent sample are active Meta platform users, accessing the system at least once every two days, and 97% of this sample consumes a sponsored labelled targeted ad at least once every two days.

4.2. CFA results

The measurement scales for customisation, informativeness, entertainment, intrusiveness, brand awareness and purchase intention had high reliability ranging from $\alpha = 0.835$ to 0.847. Following Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used in this research to assess the measurement model and test the validity and reliability of the constructs under investigation. CFA is a statistical technique used to evaluate the fit between the observed data and a hypothesized measurement model. In this study, CFA was used to study the measurement model for brand awareness, customization, informativeness value, entertainment value, intrusiveness value, and purchase intention. Each construct was represented by multiple observed variables or indicators. CFA helps to determine the extent to which these indicators accurately reflect the latent constructs they are intended to measure.

The fit indices obtained from the CFA provide information about the overall fit of the measurement model to the observed data. These indices include various goodness-of-fit measures such as chi-square (CMIN), degrees of freedom (DF), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

By conducting CFA, this study was able to evaluate the adequacy of the measurement model, evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs and ensure the reliability of the measurement scales. CFA allows researchers to validate the measurement model and provide confidence in the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the structural relationships between the constructs. Figure 2 presents the CFA model and results.

Based on Table 1, the CMIN/DF ratio assessed was 1.678, which indicated a reasonable fit between the model and the data. The RMR value was 0.044, which indicated a relatively good fit. The GFI value of 0.930 suggested that the model accounted for 93% of the variance in the observed variables. These values were considered acceptable. All the indices (NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, CFI) ranged from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating better fit. The CFI value of 0.978 indicated a good fit, while the other indices (NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI) also suggest a reasonable fit. The RMSEA value of 0.045 was below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.08, indicating a good fit. The PCLOSE value of 0.776 suggested that the RMSEA value was not significantly different from the cut-off of 0.05. The AIC value of 335.846 suggested a relatively good fit, considering the complexity of the model.

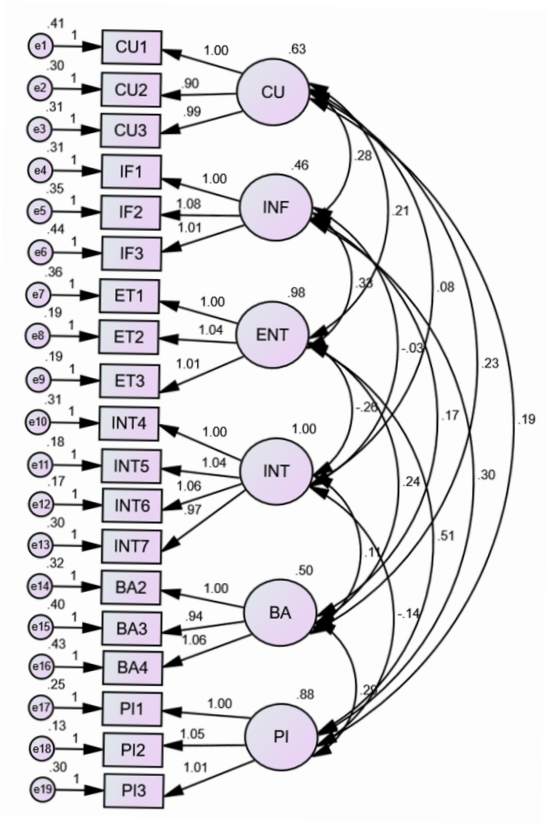


Figure 2. CFA model for the study

Table 1. Fit indices

| Fit Index | Value |
|-----------|---------|
| CMIN/DF | 1.678 |
| RMR | 0.044 |
| GFI | 0.930 |
| NFI | 0.949 |
| RFI | 0.936 |
| IFI | 0.979 |
| TLI | 0.973 |
| CFI | 0.978 |
| RMSEA | 0.045 |
| AIC | 335.846 |
| BIC | 537.677 |
| PCLOSE | 0.776 |

4.3. Hypotheses testing

The results of the analysis provided valuable insights into the relationships between customization, informativeness, entertainment, intrusiveness, brand awareness, and purchase intention. Figure 3 provide the hypothesised model for this study. These findings advance the understanding of consumer perceptions and behaviours in the context of labelled targeted ads and have important implications for marketers and advertisers aiming to enhance brand awareness and purchase intention.

The analysis employed in this study examined the proposed hypotheses rigorously and derive meaningful conclusions about the relationships among the variables under investigation.

Model Fit Indices:

Table 2 provides the fit indices for the hypothesised model of this study. The RMR (Root Mean Square Residual) is 0.184, indicating a relatively good fit of the default model to the data. GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) is 0.864, suggesting a good fit of the default model to the data. AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) is 0.824, indicating a relatively good fit of the default model considering the degrees of freedom. NFI (Normed Fit Index) is 0.896, indicating a relatively good fit of the default model to the data. IFI (Incremental Fit Index) is 0.926, suggesting a relatively good fit of the default model to the data. CFI (Comparative Fit Index) is 0.926, indicating a relatively good fit of the default model to the data. RMSEA (Root Mean

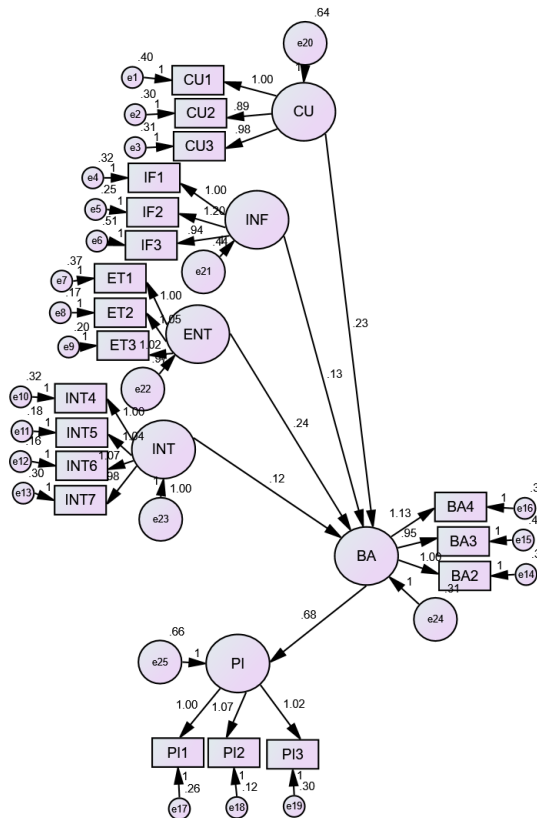


Figure 3. Hypothesised model for the study

Square Error of Approximation) is 0.081, suggesting a relatively good fit of the default model to the data.

Table 2. Fit indices for hypothesised model

| Fit Index | Value |
|-----------|-------|
| RMR | 0.184 |
| GFI | 0.864 |
| AGFI | 0.824 |
| NFI | 0.896 |
| IFI | 0.926 |
| CFI | 0.926 |
| RMSEA | 0.081 |

H1: Customisation of preferences for labelled targeted ads is positively related to brand awareness.

The regression weight between CU (customization) and BA (brand awareness) is estimated to be 0.235 (Estimate). It has a standard error (S.E.) of 0.052 and a critical ratio (C.R.) of 4.506, indicating statistical significance. The p-value suggests that the relationship is statistically significant at a conventional significance level (e.g., $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the findings support H1, indicating that customization of preferences for targeted ads has a positive impact on brand awareness.

H2: The informativeness value of a labelled targeted ad is positively related to brand awareness.

The regression weight between INF (informativeness value) and BA (brand awareness) is estimated to be 0.135. It has an S.E. of 0.061 and a C.R. of 2.216. With a p-value of 0.088, we can say that the relationship between informativeness value and brand awareness is not statistically significant at the conventional significance level of 0.05.

However, with a p-value of 0.088, there is some indication of a potential relationship between the variables. This p-value falls within a range that is considered marginally significant, suggesting that there may be a weak or modest association between the informativeness value of targeted ads and brand awareness.

H3: The entertainment value of a labelled targeted ad is positively related to brand awareness.

The regression weight between ENT (entertainment value) and BA (brand awareness) is estimated to be 0.240. It has an S.E. of 0.041 and a C.R. of 5.882, indicating statistical significance. The p-value suggests that the relationship is statistically significant at a conventional significance level (e.g., $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the findings support H3, suggesting that the entertainment value of targeted ads has a positive association with brand awareness.

H4: The intrusiveness value of a labelled targeted ad is positively related to brand awareness.

The regression weight between INT (intrusiveness value) and BA (brand awareness) is estimated to be 0.123. It has an S.E. of 0.038 and a C.R. of 3.249. The p-value suggests that the relationship is statistically significant at a conventional significance level (e.g., $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the findings support H4, suggesting that the intrusiveness value of targeted ads has a positive relationship with brand awareness.

H5: The consequent brand awareness from a labelled targeted ad is positively related to purchase intention.

The regression weight between BA (brand awareness) and PI (purchase intention) is estimated to be 0.681. It has an S.E. of 0.094 and a C.R. of 7.282. The p-value suggests that the relationship is statistically significant at a conventional significance level (e.g., $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the results support H5, indicating that brand awareness resulting from targeted ads has a positive influence on purchase intention.

The findings provide support for all the hypotheses tested in this study. The results indicate that customization, informativeness, entertainment value, intrusiveness, and consequent brand awareness all play significant roles in influencing brand awareness and purchase intention. These findings highlight the importance of tailoring targeted ads to individuals' preferences, providing valuable information, and creating engaging and entertaining ad experiences to effectively increase brand awareness and drive purchase intention.

5. Discussion

The positive relationship between customization and brand awareness aligns with studies that have emphasized the significance of personalized advertising experiences. Research by Li and Kannan (2014) found that customization positively influences consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions towards brands. Likewise, a study by Bigne et al. (2021) demonstrated that personalized ads lead to higher brand recall and recognition. The current findings reinforce these previous studies, suggesting that allowing individuals to customize their ad preferences can enhance brand awareness.

The positive association between informativeness value and brand awareness is in line with studies highlighting the effect of informative advertising on brand perception. Research by Pieters and Wedel (2004) showed that informative ads lead to increased brand knowledge and improved brand attitudes. Additionally, research by Chen and Chang (2013) discovered that informative ads positively influence consumers' cognitive responses and brand evaluations. The present study's findings support these previous findings, indicating that ads perceived as informative can contribute to higher brand awareness.

The positive association between entertainment value and brand awareness is in line with studies emphasizing the role of entertainment in advertising effectiveness. Studies by Zhang and Mao (2016) demonstrated that entertaining ads capture consumers' attention and enhance brand recall. The current findings align with these studies, suggesting that ads perceived as entertaining can positively influence brand awareness.

The positive relationship between intrusiveness value and brand awareness is consistent with studies examining the effects of intrusive advertising. Studies by D'Astous and Chartier (2000) showed that intrusive ads can enhance brand recall and recognition. Similarly, a study by Nelson and McLeod (2005) found that intrusive ads are more likely to capture consumers' attention and result in higher brand awareness. The present study's findings support these previous findings, indicating that ads perceived as intrusive or attention-grabbing can positively impact brand awareness.

Furthermore, the positive link between brand awareness and purchase intention is well established in the literature. Numerous studies have demonstrated that higher brand awareness leads to increased purchase intention and actual purchase behavior (Keller, 2008). This relationship is rooted in the information-processing perspective, where brand awareness acts

as a cue for consumers in their decision-making process. The current findings align with these studies, suggesting that the brand awareness resulting from targeted ads can influence consumers' intention to purchase the advertised product or service.

This research's findings contribute to the current body of research by offering empirical evidence for the relationships between customization, informativeness, entertainment value, intrusiveness, brand awareness, and purchase intention. The outcomes support previous studies that emphasize the importance of tailoring ads to individuals' preferences, providing valuable information, creating engaging experiences, and capturing consumers' attention. These findings have practical implications for marketers and advertisers, highlighting the need to consider customization, informativeness, entertainment value, and intrusiveness in their targeted ad strategies to effectively enhance brand awareness and drive purchase intention.

5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

The inclusion of brand awareness as a mediator variable in this study has important implications for both theoretical understanding and practical implications. By examining the role of brand awareness in the relationship between targeted ads and purchase intention, this research sheds light on the underlying mechanism through which advertising efforts influence consumer behaviour.

The findings of this research suggest that brand awareness plays a significant mediating role in translating the effects of targeted ads into purchase intention. This implies that targeted ads not only directly influence consumers' attitudes and perceptions but also indirectly impact their purchase decisions through the pathway of brand awareness. This finding aligns with the cognitive hierarchy model proposed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), which suggests that brand awareness serves as an important phase in the decision-making process of the customer.

From a theoretical standpoint, the identification of brand awareness as a mediator contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological processes involved in advertising effectiveness. It emphasizes on the importance of creating brand awareness as an important objective of targeted ad campaigns. By enhancing brand awareness, marketers can create a solid foundation for influencing consumers' purchase intention and subsequent behaviour.

Practically, the findings emphasize the need for marketers and advertisers to invest in strategies that effectively increase brand awareness through targeted advertising. By leveraging customization, informativeness, entertainment value, and intrusiveness in their ads, advertisers can capture consumers' attention, create engaging experiences and deliver relevant information that resonates with their target audience. These efforts can ultimately contribute to the development of strong brand awareness, which in turn can positively influence consumers' purchase intention.

Additionally, the study suggests that marketers should not solely focus on immediate conversion or sales metrics but should also consider the long-term effect of brand awareness on consumer behavior. By prioritizing brand awareness as a key performance indicator, marketers can build brand equity and establish a strong brand presence in consumers' minds. This can lead to repeat purchases, customer loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth, which are essential for sustaining long-term business growth.

Furthermore, the identification of brand awareness as a mediator opens up avenues for future research. Scholars can explore additional factors that may moderate the relationship between targeted ads and brand awareness, such as individual differences in ad processing,

the role of emotional appeals, or the influence of social media platforms. Additionally, further investigation into the downstream effects of brand awareness beyond purchase intention, such as actual purchase behavior and brand advocacy, would offer a more thorough comprehension of the effects of targeted ads.

Hence, the identification of brand awareness as a mediator in this study highlights its crucial role in translating the effects of targeted ads into consumer purchase intention. By considering brand awareness as a key outcome variable and investing in strategies that effectively enhance brand awareness, marketers can maximize the impact of targeted advertising campaigns and drive desired consumer behavior.

6. Recommendations

Meta groups offer several platforms where organisations can have an online social presence and engage with their customers. The platform also allows organisations to share organic posts, which on the downside, have a limited reach. The results show that the characteristics of a 'sponsored' labelled targeted ad can eventually influence the purchasing intention of Meta social media users. Because the 'sponsored' labelled targeted advertisement is a paid feature, marketers are advised to use this service wisely, depending on the aims of the marketing strategy. The targeted ad should be used in strategic situations like launching a new brand, product or promotional offer to boost sales. Therefore, it is recommended that marketers use this type of advertising mechanism to increase their post reach rather than relying solely on organic posts on Meta platforms to increase conversion rate and boost the effectiveness of their digital marketing strategy.

Social media users prefer ads about subjects that meet their needs and preferences (Sundar & Marathe, 2010). As such, ad consumers like to have the ability to choose whether to consume a specific ad or not. The results show that the ability to customise the ads has a significant relationship with brand awareness. Therefore, it is recommended that platform designers provide social media users the flexibility to set their ad choices. Though intrusiveness has a negative connotation, an ad that intrudes on our daily activity is still temporarily viewed. Consequently, there can be some recognition and recall of the brand.

7. Limitations of the study and future research

The sample collected is such that more than 90% of the participants are from generation Z and millennials age. This age skewness limits the generalisability of the outcomes of this research to the Mauritian population as the sample does not cover all age ranges of Meta platform users.

The study did not specifically investigate the categories of goods that buyers may or may not find appealing on Meta platforms. Future research could be focused towards this area. To find out what kinds of products people would or would not consider buying in that setting, the researchers could, for example, do an experiment where customers are shown a variety of products that have been recommended via Meta platforms.

The sample collected is such that more than 90% of the participants are from generation Z and millennials age in Mauritius. This age skewness limits the generalisability of the outcomes of this research to the Mauritian population as the sample does not cover all age ranges of Meta platform users. Since a sizable portion of Meta platform users are located outside of Mauritius, future study could be expanded to a wider pool that more closely represents the

global population. One study might, for instance, use a pool of non-Mauritian nationals, and the results from the two pools might then be compared.

Only the effects of customer behaviours in the use of meta platforms were studied. Firms' behaviours' (performance, sales, brand image, reputation etc.) can be looked into to provide light on the situation. In this manner, it would be simpler to assess the significance of meta platforms and potential approaches in this field.

8. Conclusions

This study developed a conceptual framework where the influence of four independent variables, customisation, informativeness, entertainment and intrusiveness, adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model and the UGT, were analysed. This research used a quantitative methodology to test the hypotheses. The researcher selected the survey research strategy with the questionnaire as the measuring instrument. As an alternative to a census, a sample of 382 learners from the University of Mauritius participated in the survey, where 333 valid responses were used for analysis. Inferential statistics were used to reach conclusions about the population. The data suggest that customisation, informativeness, entertainment and intrusiveness are good predictors of brand awareness, which in turn, is a good predictor of the social media user's purchase intention, as supported by previous studies. The data also shows that customisation and entertainment are the factors that have the most substantial impact on brand awareness. This research contributes to the existing literature by bringing a model to predict the purchase intention of Meta platform social media users. This research recommends the strategic use of 'sponsored' labelled targeted ads, to invest in entertaining and informative ad content creation, to improve customizability and fine-tune the intrusiveness of the ads. Marketers are advised to take these factors into account when using sponsored labelled targeted ads on Meta platforms. Finally, this study addresses its limitations and further research to counteract these limitations were also proposed in terms of new possible studies to be conducted.

Acknowledgements

We thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments which have helped to improve the value of this paper.

Funding

The authors received no funding for this research.

Author contributions

Dr. Eric Bindah and Ms. Leenshya Gunnoo designed the conceptual framework and subsequently tested the framework for the study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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