

ONLINE ADVERTISEMENTS & CONSUMERISM

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Abstract

In today's age of globalization, the numbers of E-shopping websites are continuously on the rise catering to the growing demands of the people. Advertising also continues to evolve and sell large quantities of mass produced goods, thus creating a consumerist culture in the society. This online shopping and consumerist culture is extensively influenced by media and online advertisements. The social media sites through its advertisements give a constant reminder to customers about different products, motivating them to buy those. Advertisements promote products which are not of actual necessity but are only used for luxury. The online advertisements and promotion strategies are thus, successfully entering the minds of the people and creating desires in them to own various goods and commodities. This is leading the people to enter the world of consumerism. This study aims to understand how people are influenced and motivated by online advertisements to shop in different e-commerce spaces by purchasing beyond their limited budget and how this increased purchasing behaviour is leading to a consumerist society. A survey was conducted among 50 respondents to figure out how online advertisements influence people to shop online. The research reveals that online promotional advertisements motivate consumers to buy products from E-shopping websites which is leading to consumerism.

Keywords: Online shopping, Consumerism, Online Advertisement, Social Media, Buying Behaviour.

Introduction

The nature of shopping in today's world has undergone a vast change. Consumers can now buy goods and commodities directly from sellers through E-shopping websites. A lot of time and energy is saved in this process. Contrary to the conventional ways of shopping, online shopping provides a host of facilities which makes it all the more popular in today's digital age. People can choose from the wide range of available products that suits their style and preference. The additional features of e-shopping websites offer services such as detailed description of purchases for transparency, cash on delivery options, free shipping across various parts of the country and customer feedback for self-assessment and enhancing competition. Online shopping is thus, a new phenomenon and a revolution in the shopping scenario. The earlier process of shopping has now been made comparatively a comfortable one, where consumers do not need to visit stores or malls physically but they can buy their desired items from the virtual world. It is a revolutionary change for the marketplace at doorstep. This is the result, rather gift of globalization and ICT. It has vastly changed the way people shop. People now find all their desired goods and services in the virtual screen. All national and international brands are available online for the prospective buyers. This online shopping culture is continuously increasing in today's world. The expansion of E-shopping websites means that the consumers now have a growing choice of shopping destinations to satisfy their needs. Some of the most prominent online shopping websites include *Flipkart, Snapdeal, Myntra, Amazon, Shopclues, Nykaa, Mirraw, E-bay, Abof* and others. Apart from having their websites, the online shopping platforms also have their mobile applications providing easy access to

their sites. Sitting at the comfort of home, one can order products and services which will be delivered at one's doorstep. Other facilities like exchange and return policy also assure money back guarantee if customers don't like the product. This has made shopping a pleasurable and luxurious experience and thus this culture of online shopping is growing at a faster pace. Online shopping platforms are almost like ultimate shopping paradise since everything is carefully presented and available for consumption. After a consumer consumes one product, the need for another one is instantly created. A number of sites are there for clothing and accessories, home decor and furniture, electronic devices and gadgets, books, games and sports, outdoor and offices products, baby products, beauty products, health and personal care, grocery items and so on. Besides sales and discounts, they offer exciting and attractive deals to the prospective buyers to attract them not only in the festive seasons but also throughout the year. Most of the luxury products which we use today are mostly bought online. Even if we don't regularly buy a product online, we keep a check of the latest trends and what are the available products on sale. Consumers can check and wish-list items or put them to favourites for buying them in the near future. One of the crucial questions that can be raised in this connection is why do people shop? One way to give the answer is to examine consumer's motivations behind shopping. Tauber (1972) conducted numerous studies to identify shoppers underlying consumption motives and their relationship to buying behaviour. On several analyses it was found that the driving factors behind the shopping motivations of consumers is not that they need to shop for purchasing their required goods. In many cases the customers enjoy the shopping activity and shop for product acquisition with a utilitarian, extrinsic, product oriented motivation (Tauber, 1972).

Media has a profound influence upon the ever increasing practice of consumerism. Consumerism is a state in which we end up buying products more than we need or want. This paper therefore, is an attempt at how consumers are influenced by such kind of shopping leading to consumerism and how can the media influence people in this process. In our consumer oriented society, shopping has almost become a hobby in itself. It is very easy to spend a day checking out the latest fashion or the latest gadget online for oneself. There are thousands of products to choose from and consume. Consumption means to acquire. But other meanings include using up, burning, wasting and decaying. In the first case consumption adds; while in the others it subtracts. Consumption also includes activities like attending advertising and searching online for commodities. It results in excessive buying behaviour. We may want to buy only one product but before we place the order, the online shopping websites tell us to add a few hundred rupees more to get free delivery or a free gift. This influences us to add more products to the online shopping bag. Thus making us think that it will be beneficial to us or we will get a product at a reduced price, but this only leads to our increased buying behaviour. Actually, buying more than what we need in reality. Emotional association act as a strong factor in creating consumer buying behaviour. These associations are created by advertisements. Advertisements create attachments of consumers with products, resulting in consumers buying those products with which they are emotionally attached (Zain-UI-Abideen & Saleem). In a consumerist society, people possess the habit of purchasing goods and services with little knowledge of their true requirement and durability. Such tendency of excessive shopping eventually leads to consumerism. The end result of consumerism is thus, materialism. Kasser (2002) rightly argued that it is insecurity that breeds materialism and the pursuit of materialistic goals fails

to increase happiness. It works against interpersonal relationships and against health and happiness of the people (Kasser, 2002). It affects the psychological health of an individual and replaces the true self with a false one. The consumerist culture in human life due to a longing for extreme materialistic consumption has resulted in the development of an unsustainable and unsatisfied false self.

The success of online shopping platforms depends on the understanding of consumer behaviour and thus, an effective implementation of media marketing strategies. Advertising is one of the widely used marketing strategies that have evolved to sell all the new leisure and convenience goods to people via mass media portals. Media has played a vital role in influencing today's youth culture. The advertising industry which runs business of billions and billions of rupees are the actual determinants of society. The influence of online advertisements is no less in this regard. Deshwal (2016) rightly said that World Wide Web has become a standard platform for advertising in today's mobile age providing effective online advertising opportunities. Advertisements are strategically executed to target the prospective customers. Social media is a very important and effective tool for the advertisers to send their messages to their target customers. Facebook through its promotional posts enables marketing within the mobile environment, since majority of the people now access Facebook from mobile application. (Deshwal, 2016) Instagram is also highly used for marketing products by advertisers. Images of products are posted along with prices and link to the website which directs the customers to the E-shopping websites. Enticing pictures and beautiful models motivate customer's mind to have the product. Finished goods and products in attractive packaging are presented to the customers in a tempting form so as to create a desire in them to own the product. People tend to believe that possessing the branded and advertised products will boost their social image and popularity with other beings. In this global world, advertising assumes and sets particular social standards for people and incites them to fit into that standard and norms. Busch refers to Adam Smith and holds that happiness lies not in having but in being and it can be acquired not through consuming but through peace and tranquillity (Busch, 2008). While advertisements showcase a hyper real world to the people and make them believe that it is the commodities which can satisfy them and provide true happiness. Continuous exposure to the hyper real world results in the people thinking that it is only the commodities that can improve the quality of their life.

Thus initiates the continuous process of 'wanting' and 'having'. This increased buying habit of the people leads to consumerism. Different products are advertised and promoted in order to increase sales. Advertisers see people as prospective buyers of their goods and services. Advertising usually has an identified sponsor and is intended to influence consumer's purchase behaviour. Researchers found that consumers click on online advertisements to read and get information. Consumers get the information from these advertisements which play an important role in the decision making process (Singh & Singh, 2015). The online advertisements are generated and also continuously presented in the social networking sites to attract the customers to the various online shopping websites. There the customers can check the unlimited number of items available and consume the shopping site's offerings. Kalia and Mishra (2016) concluded that promotional offers and promotional advertisements of products do attract people. Special discounts, offers, sales as well as promotional strategies are adopted by the shopping sites at different times of the year to increase their sales.

They also regularly remind their customers by sending continuous updates regarding sales, prices and any available offers. Notifications in the form of pop ups, emails and SMS is a common practice adopted by the online shopping platforms to remind the prospective buyers about all the available offers that they are providing.

The online shopping sites also have various exciting features through which buyers can shop in groups and also recommend them to their friends and relatives. In this way, the virtual shopping culture is spreading across borders. Alsubagh (2015) found that Internet is a lucrative communication channel which links the customers and the organizations. The ability to interact in social media allows customers to share information and also make content in which others can participate. He added that social relations and interactions influence people's purchasing decisions by changing their mind sets. Some of the advantages of advertising in social media include the ability to address inquiries, rectify comments and revise online marketing approaches competently. (Alsubagh, 2015) The virtual space is flooded by sponsored advertisements alluring the consumers to buy and own the products for themselves. The social media sites like Facebook, Instagram sponsor advertisements of the online shopping platforms influencing people to buy a product motivating them that they will need the product. Persuasive words like 'shop now', 'buy now', 'discount' and other such words influence the purchasing behaviour of the consumers (Kalia & Mishra, 2016). This leads to consumerism. Since the applications of shopping sites have access to all our mobile in-app purchases and surfing practices, the items which we wish-list for ourselves are continuously showcased in the social media accounts privately. They give advertisements of those items particularly for the consumers as a sign of continuous reminder, thus motivating us to buy the product and have it. They use advertising in television also but online ads is the most preferred by advertisers because today's generations are most of the time online. In this digital age, people usually have smart phones and laptops with them and they are mostly active on the social media platforms. This serves the purpose of online shopping sites because they can endorse their products 24/7 to the people and this is a very easy way to make their mark in the people's mind. They don't even need celebrities to endorse their products, a mere picture of the available product is enough to garner their attention and make them want to own that particular product. All the E-shopping websites, be it new or the existing ones, make use of the social media sites extensively for promoting their sites and preparing the customer base. In this way, these social media sites are playing an important role in boosting the customers of their online shopping websites. Social media has become a powerful and cost free approach for marketing and promoting products to the consumers (Naidu & Agarwal, 2013). Most of the times we may not need a product actually but the way in which it is presented online makes us feel that we have to acquire that product, it is of our necessity and we buy that to fulfil our desire to own the product.

Operational Definitions

Online shopping: Online shopping is the purchasing of goods and services from Internet retailers contrary to shopping from a physical store.

Consumerism: Consumerism can be said to be an ideology that increasing consumption of items is economically desirable and it encourages people to acquire products and services in ever increasing amounts.

Online Advertisement: Online advertising is a marketing strategy which allows delivering marketing messages to target customers via Internet.

Social Media: Social media are computer-mediated technologies including websites and applications enabling users to create and share content as well as participate in social networking.

Buying Behaviour: The sum total of a consumer's attitudes, preferences, intentions and decisions when purchasing items is the consumer buying behaviour.

Objectives of the Study

The present paper takes into concern the following objectives:

- To study the role of online advertisements as an important contributory factor in influencing the public to shop online
- To study how the latest trend of online shopping is leading to a consumerist society

Methodology

This study involves both empirical and interpretative analysis. Empirical method uses data collection and interpretation too. Survey method has been utilized in this procedure to collect the data. It incorporates tabulation for data interpretation. The survey was based on purposive sampling. A sample of 50 respondents was selected. The respondents ranged from a variety of fields – from students to professionals, business to media persons and so on. Target population mainly included members from social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram who used E-shopping websites to purchase goods and services. The respondents were mainly 16-35 years of age. Through the method of questionnaire, an attempt was made to gather facts about their opinion as to their self-evaluation regarding how they shop online and if online advertisements motivate them to do so. The questionnaire was distributed directly among the participants and was also sent to them through e-mails and messages. The researcher developed a questionnaire using a 3-point Likert scale. This paper explains how people are influenced or motivated by online advertisements to buy beyond their limited budget and how this increased buying behaviour is leading to a growing consumerist society.

Data Analysis

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Statements of Respondents</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
1.	I use Internet and social media on a daily basis	33	03	14
2.	I come across advertisements of E-shopping websites while on social networking sites	35	10	05
3.	I visit online shopping websites more than once a	24	15	11

	week			
4.	I prefer online shopping compared to conventional shopping from stores	22	08	20
5.	I use online shopping platforms to purchase maximum goods and services	17	09	24
6.	I often visit E-shopping websites and apps only to check the latest products and trends	35	03	12
7.	I run after discounts and offers on products that are advertised during festive seasons and sales	21	13	16
8.	Advertisements of various brands/sites through social media influence me	14	27	09
9.	Online advertisements promote youngsters to buy and acquire products shown in the virtual screen	24	11	15
10.	Manufacturer's advertisements usually present a true picture of the products advertised	05	17	28
11.	Alluring images, catchy taglines and beautiful models motivate and influence me to buy a certain product	22	20	08
12.	Online promotional advertisements are important	29	10	11
13.	I buy a new variety of product after viewing advertisement on social networking sites	14	20	16
14.	I get maximum information about products from social media and online advertisements	09	20	21
15.	I visit online shopping websites and apps after getting their notifications, emails regarding offers and discounts	15	17	18
16.	Advertisements of products on social media sites provoke my purchase decisions	12	18	20
17.	Advertisement increases consumerism	26	19	05
18.	I only buy things that I really need	09	15	26
19.	I often end up buying products beyond my budget	20	13	17
20.	Online shopping raises and increases lifestyle	22	16	12
21.	Monetary excess and luxurious indulgence creates conscience consumerism	22	24	04
22.	In the last one year, I have spent at least 5000 rupees for online shopping	24	08	18
23.	Increasing E-shopping websites are a demonstration of economic growth	19	20	11

Findings and Conclusion

The above study throws a light on how the online advertisements are influencing people to shop online, thus leading to a consumerist society. People usually come across advertisements of E-

shopping websites while on social networking sites. This study enables us to conclude that the people visit online shopping websites and applications not only to purchase products but also to keep an eye on the latest trends and fashion. This indicates that advertisements insist the shoppers to visit online shopping sites to check the items, which ultimately results in consumerism. Results show that customers find online promotional advertisements important and they run after the discounts and offers on products that are advertised during festive seasons and sales. In this way, online advertisements influence people to shop online, thus promoting consumerism. Alluring images and beautiful models motivate consumers to buy a certain product. The products and services are designed and presented in such a way so as to manipulate the minds of the consumers making them feel good about themselves by consumption of the material. This is a cyclical mechanism which tends to be a continuous process. To a great extent, this is promoted by the media. Online advertisement promotes youngsters to buy and acquire products shown in the virtual screen. The number of online shopping sites is on a constant rise today. Since people prefer online shopping compared to the conventional way of shopping from stores. Online advertisements also play a high role in changing the attitude of customers. As is evident from the study, it is agreed that online shopping raises and increases lifestyle of consumers. Research shows that online shopping does increase our spending habits. Respondents agreed that they do buy things that they do not really need, which finally results in buying beyond their limited budget. People visit the online sites where they end up buying products which are not really required for living but for leading a luxurious life. Equally rising is the want of consumers to live luxuriously, which is resulting in consumerism. But contrary to this, as Adam Smith said, the attempt of all humans should always be to acquire happiness which is found in prudence and tranquillity (Busch, 2008).

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