
Consumer Attitudinal Insights about Social Media Advertising: A South Asian Perspective

Imran Anwar Mir ¹

Current study aims to indentify the underlying belief dimensions that influence consumer attitudes toward social media advertising in a collectivistic cultural context of South Asia. It also examines the influence of consumers' favorable attitudes toward social media advertising on their ad clicking and online buying behaviors. To meet the objectives of the current study data was collected from randomly chosen university students (n=210) using survey at Islamabad capital city of Pakistan. Results reveal four factors of consumer beliefs about social media advertising. However, only two dimensions i.e. information and economy are statistically significant predictors of consumer attitudes toward social media advertising in Pakistan. Furthermore, results reveal that favorable attitudes toward social media advertising significantly influence consumers' ad clicking behavior, which in turn positively affects their online buying behavior. Findings of the current study are useful for the multinational companies which intend to advertise their products and services through social media channels (e.g. through FaceBook, LinkedIn etc.) in South Asia.

¹Imran Anwar Mir, Research Scholar (Marketing), Department of Management Sciences, Iqra University, Islamabad Pakistan, Mr.Imran.Mir@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Evolution of social media profoundly transformed the communication landscape (Edwards, 2011). Most importantly, it changed the consumers' way of thinking (Mir and Zaheer, 2012). Communication through social media channels has revolutionary impact on human attitude and behavior. Recent democratic movements in Arab world justify the claim of revolutionary impact of social media communication. Social media communication psychologically united the common Arabs against the decades old dictatorships and facilitated them in toppling down those dictatorships (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Marzouki et al., 2012). Due to its revolutionary influence, social media has become the foci of marketing communication and is on the top of agenda for business decision makers today. It has enabled businesses to interact with their customers directly and timely at the lower cost (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media is a broad umbrella and consists of online networks (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn), wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), multimedia sharing sites (e.g., YouTube and Flickr), bookmarking sites (e.g., Del.icio.us and Digg), virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life), and rating sites (e.g. Yelp). Social media works as a common platform for people around the globe to interact with each other and share information and experiences related to products, events and issues (Edwards, 2011; Heinrichs et al., 2011). It is distinct than traditional media because it is generated by users. Users exercise more control over its use and content generation (Dickey and Lewis, 2011).

Rapid growth in the use of social media across the countries indicates that companies can use it to enrich their product or service interest in

consumers (Mathur et al., 2012). Today marketers use different platforms of social media to enhance their corporate and brand images. In addition, marketers use social media advertising (e.g. display ads on social networking sites) to persuade users to buy advertisers' products (Neti, 2011). Despite the rapid growth of social media globally and its revolutionary impact on young generation's attitude, the research in this area from marketing communications perspective is still at exploratory stage particularly in developing countries of South Asia. The majority of studies that have examined consumer attitudes toward social media marketing have been conducted in western countries particularly in USA. Current study intends to provide the consumer insights of social media advertising impact from South Asian perspective. Specifically, current study aims to identify the underlying dimensions of consumer belief of social media advertising and their influence on young consumers' attitudes toward social media advertising (ATSMA) as well as on their behavioral response (BR). The following facts justify the examination of consumers' advertising beliefs and attitudes in the context of social media. Consumers' beliefs about advertising need to be addressed in the context of social media because beliefs influence consumers' attitudes (Bauer and Greyser, 1968; Duncan, 1990) which in turn affects their purchasing and choice behavior (Ambler, 2000; Rossiter and Percy, 1996).

Literature Review

Beliefs and Attitudes

Understanding advertising beliefs and attitudes is important because they affect consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Durvasula, Mehta, Andrews, and Lysonski, 1997; Mehta, 2000). In general, beliefs about advertising influence overall consumer attitudes toward advertising (Bauer and Greyser, 1968). Researchers possess divergent views about the relationship between consumers' beliefs and their attitudes toward advertising. One school of thought views

consumer beliefs and their attitude interchangeable constructs both conceptually and operationally (Mehta, 2000; Schlosser & Shavitt, 1999). Other school of thought characterizes consumer beliefs and attitudes as distinct psychological factors (Brackett and Carr, 2001; Ducoffe, 1996; Pollay and Mittal, 1993). In fact, beliefs and attitudes are closely linked and belief brings variations in attitude (Anderson, 1972). By following the second school of thought, current study treats the beliefs and attitudes as distinct constructs in the context of social media advertising. “A belief is a descriptive thought that a person holds about something. An attitude is a person's enduring favorable or unfavorable evaluation, emotional feeling, and action tendencies toward some object or idea” (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Consumers’ attitude toward advertising reflects the advertising effectiveness (Mehta, 2000).

Generally, beliefs influence consumers’ attitudes toward advertising (Bauer and Greyser, 1968). The empirical evidence in the context of online and online social network advertising has supported this notion. For example, Wang and Sun (2010) found belief statistically a significant predictor of consumer attitudes toward online advertising. Young consumers are likely avoid the online social networking advertising if they expect a negative experience, perceive the message irrelevant or are skeptical toward the advertising message or are skeptical toward the advertising medium (Kelly, Kerr, and Drennan, 2010). Nevertheless, alike traditional and online advertising social media advertising researchers come up with diverse findings (See Chu, 2011; Kelly et al., 2010).

Consumers’ belief about advertising is a multi-dimensional construct. Bauer and Greyser (1968) identified two dimensions underlying consumers’ beliefs: economic and social. Polly and Mittal (1993) categorized consumers’ belief about advertising into two dimensions: Personal uses and societal effects. Personal use consists of three dimensions; Product information, social role and image, hedonic and

pleasure, societal effects consist of good for the economy, materialism, value corruption and falsity/no sense. Ducoffe (1995) identified four factors; informativeness, deceptiveness, irritation, and entertainment as a starting point for how consumers assess the value of advertising. In case of online advertising Wang and Sun (2010) identified five belief dimensions: information, entertainment, credibility, economy and value. Most common belief dimensions identified in the traditional and online advertising contexts are “information”, “entertainment”, “good for economy” and “value corruption”. Current study focuses on these four factors of consumer beliefs about advertising in social media context.

Consumers' perception of advertising as “informative” is an important belief dimension affecting consumer attitudes toward online advertising (Ducoffe, 1996; Wang and Sun; 2010; Wolin et al., 2002).

Current study presumes that consumers perceive social media advertising as an important and useful source of product information.

Consumers deem advertising as a valuable source of information because product information shown in advertisements help them in making the informed and right purchase decisions (Polly and Mittal, 1993). In Romania and USA Wang and Sun(2010) found consumers belief of advertising as “informative” an important predictor of attitude towards online advertising with varying behavioral effects.

Entertainment is an important factor affecting consumer attitudes toward advertising. An ad is considered entertaining if it is attractive and provide sensory pleasure and gratify consumers/audiences' sentiments (Polly and Mittal, 1993). Yaakop, Hemsley-Brown and Gilbert (2011) found Malaysians having more positive attitude towards the advertising than non-Malaysian because of their belief about advertising ability in providing pleasure-seeking and entertaining materials. Entertainment is a critical factor affecting consumer attitudes toward the online advertising by establishing an emotional link between consumers and online advertising (Wang and Sun, 2010).

Current study assumes that consumers belief of social media advertising ability to entertain their sensory and emotional needs and wants affect their attitudes toward social media advertising positively. Besides information and entertainment, “good for economy” is an important belief dimension of advertising. Consumers may like the advertising as it contributes to the health of the economy. In other words, it generates revenue, which is beneficial for the economic prosperity of a nation (Polly and Mittal, 1993). Wolin, Korgaonkar, and Lund (2002) found that “good for economy” has no significant effect on consumers’ attitudes toward internet advertising. Wang and Sun (2010) found “good for economy” as an important predictor of consumers’ attitudes toward online advertising. Current study presumes “good for economy” as an important predictor of consumers’ attitudes toward social media advertising in South Asian Context.

Advertising appeals are developed on the value premises of a society. Consumers believe that advertising corrupts the social values rather than improve them (Polly and Mittal, 1993). People tend to view online advertising negatively when they believe that online ads undermine the social value system (Wang and Sun, 2010). Wolin et al. (2000) found negative association between value corruption and consumer attitudes toward online advertising. Current study anticipates that consumers associate social media advertising negatively with the values of the society. In other words, respondents are expected to perceive social media advertising as a new marketing tool to corrupt the social values. Social values work as a guiding principle in one's life and keep a society organized.

Attitudes and Behavioral Responses

Understanding consumers’ behavioral response is essential because behavioral response/purchase intentions assists in predicting the consumers’ purchase behavior (Engel, Blackwell and Kollat, 1978;

Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Warshaw, 1980). Consumers' positive attitudes toward advertising is expected to help consumer to recall the brands shown in the ads and influence their behavioral intentions (Mehta, 2000). Wan and Sun (2010) found Romanians had the most positive ATOA and were most likely to click on advertisements. Current study assumes that consumers' positive attitude towards social media advertising has positive effect on their behavioral response. Behavioral response consists of two outcome variables; number of time consumers click on the banner ads and watch/read them and purchase the products/brands shown in those ads. Ad clicking is an important tool to measure the effectiveness of online advertising (Dreze and Zufryden, 1997). The same technique can be applied to measure the effectiveness of social media advertising because most of the social media advertising is akin to online advertising (esp. banner ads/display ads on SNSs, YouTube etc.), however the environment in which these ads are presented is different.

Proposed Model and Hypotheses

Current study examines a proposed model of belief, attitude, and behavioral response in the context of social media advertising. It advances that consumers' belief about social media advertising (BASMA) influence their attitudes toward social media advertising (ATSMA). Past studies (e.g. Bauer and Greyser, 1968; Durvasula et al., 1997; Mehta, 2000) documented that consumers' beliefs about advertising influence their attitudes toward advertising. Similarly, Belief affects consumer attitudes toward online advertising (Wang and Sun, 2010). However, belief is a multidimensional construct. Majority of the previous studies conducted in traditional and online advertising environments found information, entertainment, good for economy and value corruption important belief factors affecting consumer attitudes toward advertising (see Polly and Mittal, 1993; Wang and Sun, 2010; Wolin et al., 2000; Yaakop et al., 2011). Current study

expects these four belief factors are significant predictors of consumer attitudes towards social media advertising (ATSMA) (See Figure 1). Furthermore, current study postulates that consumers' positive ATSMA influences their ad clicking behaviour, which in turn affects their online buying behaviour (See Figure 1). Attitude towards the ad is an important mediator of advertising effects (Lutz et al., 1983). Several studies in the context of online advertising confirmed the mediating effects of attitude. For example; Dreze and Zufryden (1997) and Wang and Sun (2010) found that ATOA mediates the relationship between consumers' beliefs of advertising and their behavioural response to it. In case of online advertising, consumers' attitudes toward advertising may result into ad clicking or online buying behaviors (if ads are shown on the parent site of the company). However, in case of social media consumers' attitudes toward advertising would affect first ad clicking behavior which may then motivate them to log on the commercial site of the product(s) mentioned in social media ad(s) and buy the product there. This difference exists because mostly online advertising is conducted on commercial sites where users can place the online order without clicking on the ad. Social media is not a commercial media (although commercial activities take place on social media) so placing the direct order without clicking on the ad appearing on social media site(s) is not possible.

Figure 1

Proposed Model



On the bases of past research findings and proposed model current study suggests the following hypotheses:

H1. Consumers' positive beliefs about advertising influence positively their attitudes toward social media advertising.

H2. *The more favorable attitudes toward social media advertising, the more likely one will click on the advertisements on social media sites (e.g. ads appearing on Facebook).*

H3. *The more one clicks on social media ads, the more likely one will shop online from the website(s) of the company mentioned in those ads on social media sites.*

Method

Respondents of the current study were students enrolled in a private sector university of Islamabad, Pakistan. Through a survey, questionnaires were distributed among a random sample of 300 students. Sample students were drawn from the database of the university by applying basic lottery system. Student sample population was used as they have easy access to internet facility and more exposure to social media sites. Out of 300 questionnaires, 210 were received backed in a usable condition. Finally, 210 questionnaires (n=210) were used for data analysis. Out of 210 respondents, 68.1 percent were male and 31.9 percent were females. The 16.7%, 73.8%, 8.6% and 1.0% belonged to the age groups under 20, 20 to 29, 30 to 39, and 40 to 49 respectively. The 21.0%, 61.9%, 14.8%, and 2.3% were enrolled in 14 years, 16 years, 18 years and doctoral programs respectively. The 82.9%, 2.9%, 5.2%, and 9.0% were using Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and “All of them” respectively.

Measurement

Beliefs about Social Media Advertising

To measure the respondents' belief about social media advertising items were adapted from Chi (2011), Pollay and Mittal (1993) and Wang and Sun (2010). These items were related to four underlying dimensions of belief about social media advertising. Information (e.g. social media advertising: is a good source of product/service information, supplies relevant information etc.). Entertainment (social media advertising is: entertaining, pleasing, interesting etc.). Good for

economy (social media advertising: has positive effects on the economy, raises our standard of living, results in better products for the public etc.). Value corruption (social media advertising: promotes undesirable values in our society, distorts the values of youth, Isolates children from their parents etc.). Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Principle component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was conducted on 29 measurement items to screen them and identify the underlying dimensions of consumers' beliefs about social media advertising. The PCA produced four factors. Entertainment (F1) with eigen value 5.463. Value (F2) with eigen value 2.059. Information (F3) with eigen value 1.655. Economy (F4) with eigen value 1.092. The rule of minimum eigen value of 1.0 was applied. Only those items were selected whose factor loadings were at least .60 and commonalities more than .50. PCA produced KMO value .849 and Bartlett's test of sphericity 000 ($p < .05$). The four identified factors underlying consumers' beliefs about social media advertising explained 60.406 of the total variance. Table 1 shows the factors underlying the consumers' beliefs about social media advertising with factor loadings and Cronbach α (reliability). These items were used for confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the goodness-fit of the measurement model for belief factors. Amos version 18 was used for the structural modelling analysis. The model provides the bad fit to the data with a Chi-square (χ^2) = 193.014, $d.f.$ = 113, $P = .000$ ($p < .05$). $\chi^2 / d.f. = 1.708$ is satisfactory. The value of $\chi^2 / d.f.$ less than 5 is considered satisfactory to accept the model (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). Besides χ^2 and $\chi^2 / d.f.$ six indices, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

(RMSEA) were used to examine the model fit of the measurement model for belief factors. Typical cut-off criteria of model fit (see Bentler, 1983:1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Marsh and Grayson, 1995; McDonald and Ho, 2002; Schumacker and Lomax, 1996; Thompson, 2000) was utilized to assess the goodness-fit of the model for belief factors on these indices. According to typical cut-off criteria, the values of GFI, IFI, CFI, NFI and TLI should be equal or greater than 0.90 while the value of RMSEA should be less than 0.08. In the current study, CFA revealed the following values of these indices. GFI=0.900, IFI=.935, CFI=.934, NFI= .900, TLI=.920, and RMSEA=.058. Based on the typical cut-off criteria of model fit results indicate that the measurement model for belief factors fit the sample satisfactorily. Figure 2 presents the standardized estimates for the items of the factors underlying consumers' belief about social media advertising (BASMA).

Table 1

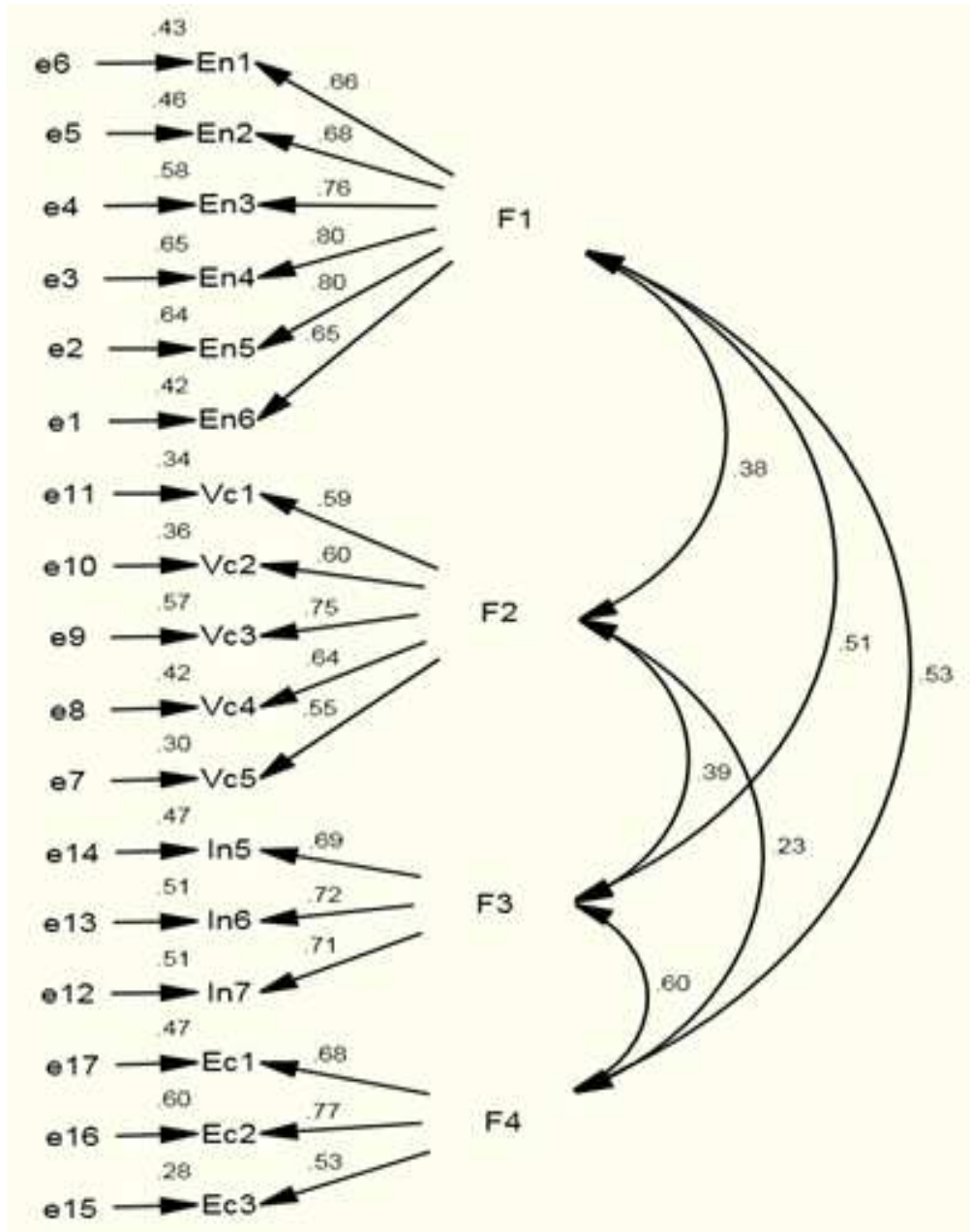
Items of Belief factors

No.	Items	Factors				Reliability
		1	2	3	4	
En1	Social media advertising is entertaining	.696				.868
En2	Social media advertising is pleasing	.705				
En3	Social media advertising is interesting	.749				
En4	Social media advertising is enjoyable	.818				
En5	Social media advertising is fun to use	.806				
En6	Social media advertising is	.695				

	exciting		
Vc1	Social media advertising promotes undesirable values in our society	.687	.761
Vc2	Social media advertising distorts the values of youth	.645	
Vc3	There is too much sex in social media advertising	.789	
Vc4	Some products/ services promoted in social media advertising are bad for society	.715	
Vc5	Social media advertising isolates children from their parents	.650	
In5	Social media advertising tells me which brands have the features I am looking for	.733	.753
In6	Social media advertising helps me keep up to date about products/services available in the marketplace	.737	
In7	Social media advertising is a convenient source of product information	.693	
Ec1	Social media advertising has positive effects on the economy	.645	.700
Ec2	Social media advertising raises our standard of living	.714	
Ec3	Social media advertising results in better products for the public	.739	

Figure 2

Four factor model of BASMA



Attitudes toward Social Media Advertising

To measure the respondents' attitudes toward social media advertising 5 items were adapted from Pollay and Mittal (1993) and Wang and Sun (2010). 'Overall, I consider social media advertising a good thing' (Cronbach's $\alpha=.829$); 'Overall, I like social Media advertising' (Cronbach's $\alpha=.803$); 'I consider social advertising very essential' (Cronbach's $\alpha=.805$); 'I would describe my overall attitude towards social media advertising very favorably (Cronbach's $\alpha=.811$), and 'My general opinion about social media advertising is favorable' (Cronbach's $\alpha=.824$). Subjects' attitudes toward social media advertising were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The overall reliability of these five items on Cronbach's alpha was .846.

Consumer Responses toward Social Media Advertising

Subjects' behavioral responses toward social media advertising were measured by recording their "ad clicking and shopping experiences. Ad clicking is an important tool to measure the effectiveness of online advertising (Dreze and Zufryden, 1997). In online context various researches (e.g. Wang and Sun, 2010) used the combination of ad clicking and shopping experience frequency technique. Two questions adapted from Wang and Sun (2010) were used to measure the consumers' responses toward social media advertising. Ad clicking and shopping experiences were measured in terms of frequency. 'I often click on ads on social media sites' (e.g. Facebook, My space etc.). I often buy products or services mentioned in social media ads from websites of the company'. Guttman Split-half coefficient of these two items was .620. Subjects' responses were measured on a five point likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (very often).

Results

Model Fit

The model provides the good fit to the data with a Chi-square (χ^2) = 12.458, *d.f.* = 9, *P* = .189 ($p > .05$). A low χ^2 value, indicating non-significance, would point to a good fit (Hoe, 2008). $\chi^2/d.f.$ = 1.384 is also satisfactory. The value of $\chi^2/d.f.$ less than 5 is considered satisfactory to accept the model (Thomson et al., 2005). Besides χ^2 and $\chi^2/d.f.$ six indices, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to examine the model fit. The model fit on these indices was examined by using typical cut-off criteria of model fit (see Bentler, 1983:1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Marsh and Grayson, 1995; McDonald and Ho, 2002; Schumacker and Lomax, 1996; Thompson, 2000). According to typical cut-off criteria, the values of GFI, IFI, CFI, NFI and TLI should be equal or greater than 0.90 while the value of RMSEA should be less than 0.08. In the current study GFI=.984, IFI=.989, CFI=.989, NFI=.961, TLI=.973, and RMSEA=.043. These indices of model fit extracted the good results to accept the proposed model.

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

Current study found four dimensions underlying consumers' belief about social media advertising. However, only two belief dimensions (information and economy) are statistically significant predictors of consumers' ATSMA in Pakistani context (see Table 2). The minimal value of standardized path coefficient (β) should be .20 and above .30 is ideal to accept the relationship between the two variables (Chin, 1998). Based on these two dimensions underlying consumers' belief about social media advertising H1 is supported. Results show that ATSMA statistically is a significant predictor of consumers' ad clicking behavior. Similarly, adclicking behavior is significant predictor of

consumers' online buying behavior. Therefore, H2 and H3 are approved. Figure 3 presents the structural model graphically.

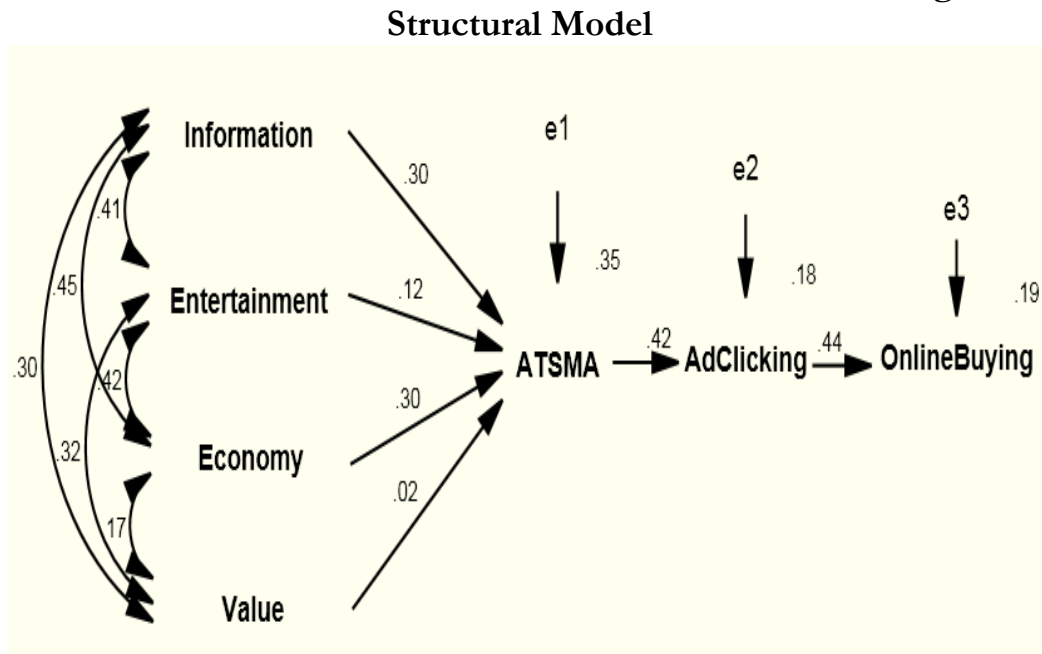
Table 2

Regression weights of structural model

Regression Path	β	S.E.	C.R.	P
Information → AT'SMA	.300	.065	4.599	***
Entertainment → AT'SMA	.125	.064	1.893	.058
Economy → AT'SMA	.305	.065	4.528	***
Value → AT'SMA	.021	.063	.356	.722
AT'SMA → AdClicking	.421	.084	6.718	***
AdClicking → Buying	.441	.067	7.113	***

Note: * $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$

Figure 3



Discussion and Conclusion

Evolution of social media profoundly transformed the communication landscape (Edwards, 2011). Due to its revolutionary impact on human attitude and rapid growth in its use across the countries (Mathur et al., 2012) social media has become the foci of marketing communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Current study aimed to identify the underlying dimensions of belief about social media advertising and their influence on consumers' ATSMA. In addition, it aimed to identify the influence of consumers' ATSMA on their behavioural response. Most of the previous studies (e.g. Bauer and Greyser, 1968; Ducoffe, 1995; Polly and Mittal, 1993; Wang and Sun, 2010; Wolin et al., 2002; Yaakop et al., 2011) found information, entertainment, economy, and value important belief dimensions that affect consumer attitudes toward advertising in traditional and online contexts. Contrary to past studies, current study found only information and

economy as the significant predictors of consumers' attitudes toward advertising in social media context. The possible reason for this contradiction can be the difference in media and cultural contexts. Previous studies were conducted in traditional and online advertising contexts while current study shows the consumer insights about advertising in social media context. Users control social media platforms, which makes it a unique than traditional and typical online business environments. In addition, previous studies provide consumers' views from Western perspective whereas current study presents consumer insights from a South Asian context. Cultural context influences consumers' beliefs and attitudes toward advertising (Durvasula and Lysonski, 2001; La Ferle et al., 2008).

Current study found that favourable ATSMAs influences consumers' ad clicking behaviour that in turn affects their online buying behaviour. This finding is consistent with Azeem and Haq (2012), Wang and Sun (2010) and Wolin et al. (2002) who found Consumers' favourable attitudes toward online advertising influence their ad clicking and online shopping behaviours positively. However, this finding contradicts the previous findings in the sense that in case of social media advertising attitude affects ad-clicking behaviour, which in turn affects online buying behaviour. In case of online advertising attitude may affect both ad clicking and online shopping behaviour simultaneously as online advertising is conducted on commercial site(s) where consumers can place the order without clicking the ad. (This proposition is true in case when company displays ads on its own commercial site(s)). Social media on the other hand is a non-commercial media thus ad clicking will link the consumer to the commercial site of the company to place the order. For example in case of online advertising, Wang and Sun (2010) found that Romanian who had positive attitudes toward online advertising liked to click on online ads whereas Americans made the most online purchase. This is

possible only when both ad clicking and shopping options are available on the same site.

On the basis of above discussion, one can conclude that information and economy are significant predictors of consumers' favorable attitudes toward social media advertising in South Asian contexts like Pakistan. The above discussion also suggests that favorable attitudes toward social media advertising influence consumers' ad clicking behavior that in turn affects their online buying behavior.

Contribution, Limitations and Future Research

Current study makes some important contributions in marketing theory and practice. It substantiates the significance of consumer beliefs and attitudes toward advertising in social media context. Previous studies (e.g. Azeem and Haq, 2012, Wang and Sun 2010; Wolin et al. 2002) found beliefs and attitudes as important constructs in context of online advertising. Previous studies related to consumer attitudes toward advertising conducted in the context of social media used qualitative interviews (see Kelly et al., 2010) hence face generalizability problem. Few studies used uni-dimensional scales (see Mathur et al., 2012) to analyze the consumers' attitudes toward advertising in social media context. These studies failed to grasp the underlying dimensions of consumer beliefs about advertising. Current study used multi-dimensional scale to understand the consumers' ATSMAs. Furthermore, current study provides the consumer insights from a collectivistic cultural context of South Asia while most of the previous studies related to social media advertising are from Western contexts. The findings of this study are useful for multinational companies, which intend to advertise their products through social media in collectivistic cultures of South Asia.

Current study is not without limitations. It studied only the consumer attitudes toward social media advertising. Future studies should analyze the managerial views about social media advertising effect.

Future studies should also examine the influence of lifestyle dimensions on consumers' ATSMAs. Furthermore, current study collected data from student population only, what are non-student populations' attitudes toward social media advertising is still unaddressed.

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