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Contextual, emotional and behavioural influences of YouTube product review videos and official advertisements on consumers

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Summary

Research Question:	In comparing product review videos to official advertisements on YouTube, what type of video has a stronger contextual, emotional and behavioural influence on consumers?
Methods:	Empirical study by means of an online survey, based on a comparative approach, to gauge consumer perceptions upon exposure to both product review videos and official advertisements on YouTube.
Results:	YouTube product review videos are found to have a stronger contextual, emotional and behavioural influence on consumers as compared to official advertisements.
Structure of the Article:	1. Introduction; 2. Literature Review; 3. Hypothesis; 4. Empirical approach; 5. Empirical Findings; 6. Conclusion; 7. About the author; 8. References

Introduction

Prior to the widespread use of the Internet and social media for sharing of information and opinions, social networks relied on the spread of information via word of mouth to a huge extent (Herr et al., 1991). Upon improvement in Internet technology and growth in the online community, many online market places introduced a review system in order to rate various products and services so that consumers could gauge the worth and value of a product based on opinions shared by other consumers (Dellarocas, 2003).

Advertisements that are promoted by various businesses have also been trying to capture consumer attention in order to increase product awareness and create a positive brand image. The digital revolution and the development of the Internet has allowed for advertisements to go online and thus be accessible to billions of Internet users.

Advertising on YouTube enables companies to target specific consumers, wherein; the broadcasting of the advertisement can be narrowed down to only a selective set of consumers based on location, demographic and interests (YouTube, 2017).

The presence of both official advertisements and product review videos on YouTube has exposed consumers to both the advertised aspects of a product and to the shared opinions of other consumers and reviewers on the same. Thus it has become increasingly relevant and important to define what type of video has a bigger impact on consumer perceptions and buying behaviour.

This study focuses on the contextual, emotional and behavioural influences of product review videos and official advertisements on YouTube in order to address the above statement.

Literature Review

Contextual Influence:

According to MacInnis et al. (2002) the success of an advertisement is known to depend upon the creative characteristics of an advertisement, which can evoke positive feelings in the viewers. Apart from the influence of attractive audio-visual cues, consumers exposed to video based advertising are known to be influenced by their own subconscious mind and experiential memories (Braun, 1999). Thus it is relatively hard to create an advertisement that would appeal to all viewers. This could help explain why the survey taker group showed relatively less interest in the advertisements.

Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggest that sharing of content on social media websites depends on two factors: identification of existing content that users have in common and that of new content that would appeal to users' interests. The product review videos on YouTube cater to this particular need of the consumers by providing them with information that increases viewer engagement and generates consumer interest in the video's content.

Dellarocas (2003) observed that the ability on online review systems to control the information that is shared and

influence the aggregation of it provides the system moderators with the power to influence the opinions of the consumers with regards to the content that is shared. The ability of the content creators on YouTube to design their product review videos in order to control the information that is being shared, has allowed them the control to shape the information being shared and the manner in which it is shared in. Thus, allowing for the content creators to generate viewer interest in the videos.

Emotional Influence:

Mangold et al. (2013) noted that consumers are likely to have a higher level of trust when they experience the presence of "structural assurances" that minimize social uncertainty, thus portraying a sense of normalcy of conditions in which the consumer feels relatively more comfortable. They also pointed out that an individual's willingness to reveal personal information, in terms of their own personal identity, could have a positive influence on the trust that others have on them.

In another study conducted on the trustworthiness of online reviewers by Banerjee et al. (2017), it was revealed that consumer trust in a reviewer depended on six characteristics: positivity, involvement, experience, reputation, competence and sociability.

Videos that successfully establish trustful relationships with viewers comprise a combination of the above mentioned characteristics and rely on the reviewer's identity to appeal to the viewer's emotions.

Based on research conducted by Hahn et al. (2016), it was discovered that emotional response to an advertisement had a positive effect on brand evaluation. Thus the challenge that companies face is to appeal to the emotional responses of their consumers via advertisements that are of relatively short durations.

Behavioural Influence:

Kim et al. (2010) relate consumer purchase intentions to perceived informativeness and perceived entertainment. The study found that consumers who have high levels of product involvement have a tendency to shop for products in shopping malls rather than websites where they have the opportunity to gain more product information, whereas, consumers with a low level of product involvement are more drawn towards entertainment factors. As the product information that is usually provided by the advertisements is relatively low compared to online reviews, they tend to have a minimal influence on consumers with a high level of involvement. The low-level involvement consumers who are influenced by the entertainment factors of the advertisement however are hard to please as the entertaining aspects of the advertisements are entirely dependent on the subjective experiences of the viewers. Thus advertisements are mostly at a disadvantage when it comes to influencing consumers on their buying decisions.

Rodgers and Thorson (2000) explain that an individual does not choose to start an activity on the Internet based on a stimulus or an advertisement that they come across. Instead, individuals choose to make use of the Internet as a response to a certain "drive" which, in the case of online advertisement exposure leading to purchase decisions, starts with a desire to shop online.

Cheung et al. (2008) implied that consumers are influenced by two factors when it comes to online reviews: information quality and source credibility (Cheung et al., 2008). Information quality is in-turn seen as being reliant on content, accuracy, format and timeliness whereas, source credibility is the consumer's perception of the credibility of the source from where the consumer receives information (Cheung et al., 2008). Park et al. (2007), suggested that online reviews function as both informants and recommenders and that the quality of online reviews has a positive influence on consumers' buying intentions.

Hypothesis

Based on the research conducted on existing literature, the following hypothesis is established in order to determine the magnitude of influence of YouTube official advertisements and product review videos on consumers.

H: In terms of contextual, emotional and behavioural influence, product review videos have a stronger influence on consumers as compared to official advertisements on YouTube.

This hypothesis is seen as relying on the following null sub-hypotheses in order to determine its validity.

Sub-hypothesis for Contextual influence, $SH_0 1$:

Consumers have a higher level of interest in product review videos as compared to official advertisements on YouTube.

Sub-hypothesis for Emotional influence, $SH_0 2$:

Consumers have a higher level of trust in product review videos as compared to official advertisements on YouTube.

Sub-hypothesis for Behavioural influence, $SH_0 3$:

Consumers have a perception of being more influenced by product review videos as compared to official advertisements on YouTube, for their buying decisions.

Figure 1:

Visualization of the Hypothesis (H) and the Sub-hypotheses

The research hypothesis (H) is treated as a confirmed hypothesis only when the sub-hypotheses SH_01, SH_02 and SH_03 are confirmed, else it is rejected.

Empirical approach

An online survey based on a comparative approach was taken in order to determine con-sumer perceptions on product review videos and official advertisements. The survey in-volved an experiment wherein survey takers were asked to watch a set of videos relating to three different products: Google Chromecast, HTC Vive and Moto 360, and rate 12 related questions in order to gauge their perceptions on the videos that they were exposed to.

The survey takers were asked to take the online survey individually at a time that would suit their convenience.

The survey consisted of two different sections, each comprising a set of 3 different videos on the above-mentioned products and questions relating to the videos. Each question was asked to be rated by the survey taker with a score ranging from 1, indicating a "Low" score, to 5 that indicates a "High" score. In terms of a general interpretation of the sort of significance the ratings hold, this paper interprets the scale as follows:

1: very low score

2: low score

3: average score

4: high score

5: very high score

"Google Forms" which is a service designed by Google for implementing online forms and surveys, was used to conduct the survey. 44 participants took part in the survey of which 61.4% were male and 38.6% were female. 75% of the participants were aged between 25 to 44 years, 13.6% younger than 25, 9.1% between 45 to 64 years and the rest were older than 64. With regards to the occupation of the survey takers, 59.1% were noted as being employed, 27.3% were students, 9.1% were self-employed and the rest were either temporarily unemployed or retired.

Empirical Findings

Contextual Influence (SH01):

From the mean values listed in Table 1, we can see that the mean level of interest for official advertisements (Q1), M1, was rated at M=3.36, which is lower than that of the mean level of interest rated for product review videos (Q2), M6, which is M=3.89. This reflects the group's higher level of interest in product review videos as compared to their interest in official advertisements.

The standard deviation of responses to Q1, which is SD1=1.278, tells us that the individual scores for Q1 are relatively more distributed as compared to the standard deviation of re-sponses to Q6, which is SD6=0.895. Also, as the scores for product review videos are more closely clustered around the mean as compared to the results for official advertisements, it can be seen that there is more relative consensus in the level of interest shown towards product review videos.

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	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	N (Male)	N (Female)	Mean for Male Responses	Mean for Female Responses
Advertise-ments	1.278	1	5	3.36	27	17	3.30	3.47
Product re-view videos	0.813	2	5	3.89	27	17	3.93	3.82

Table 1:
Descriptive statistics for questions on Contextual Influence

The paired samples t value for 44 samples, as shown in table 2, is noted as being t_{43}=-3.124 for probability value of p=0.003. This shows that there is a significant difference between the compared means, i.e., between the mean levels of interest in product review videos and that of the official advertisements. By comparing the means in table 1, we can see that the mean level of interest in product review videos is higher than that of the mean level of interest in the official advertisements
The result for Independent samples t-test based on gender for advertisements is noted as t_{42}=-0.436 for probability value of p=0.665 and the independent samples t-test result based on gender for product review videos is noted as being t_{42}=0.366 for probability value of p=0.716. This shows that there is no significant difference between the compared means, i.e., between the male and female mean levels of interest in official advertisements and product review videos. Thus we can conclude that the survey taker group has a higher level of interest in product review videos as compared to official advertisements on YouTube.

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Paired samples	-3.124	43	0.003**
Independent samples based on gender for advertisements	-0.436	42	0.665
Independent samples based on gender for product review videos	0.366	42	0.716

**p < 0.01

Table 2:

T-test results for Contextual Influence

Emotional Influence:

From the mean values listed in Table 3, we can see that the mean level of trust for official advertisements (Q2), M2, was rated at M=3.30, which is lower than that of the mean level of trust rated for product review videos (Q7), M7, which is M=3.89. This reflects the group's higher level of trust in product review videos as compared to their interest in official advertisements.

The standard deviation of responses to Q2, which is $SD2$=1.173 tells us that the individual scores for Q2 are relatively more distributed as compared to the standard deviation of responses to Q7, which is $SD7$=0.813. It can

also be seen in table 3 that the minimum score for level of trust in the product review videos as rated by the group is 2 and that no survey taker rated their level of trust in the product review videos as being 1. Also, as the scores for product review videos are more closely clustered around the mean as compared to the results for official advertisements, it can be seen that there is more relative consensus in the level of trust shown towards product review videos.

	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	N (Male)	N (Female)	Mean for Male Responses	Mean for Female Responses
Advertisements	1.173	1	5	3.30	27	17	3.19	3.47
Product review videos	2	2	5	3.89	27	17	3.78	4.06

**p < 0.01

Table 3:

Descriptive statistics for questions on Emotional Influence

The results paired samples t-test results for 44 samples, as shown in table 4, is noted as being t_{43}=-3.764 for probability value of p=0.001. This shows that there is a significant difference between the compared means, i.e., between the mean levels of trust in product review videos and that of the official advertisements. By comparing the means in table 4, we can see that the mean level of trust in product review videos is higher than that of the mean level of interest in the official advertisements.

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Paired samples	-3.764	43	0.001**
Independent samples based on gender for advertisements	-0.782	42	0.438
Independent samples based on gender for product review videos	-1.120	42	0.269

**p < 0.01

Table 4:

T-test results for Emotional Influence

The result for Independent samples t-test based on gender for advertisements is noted as t_{42}=-0.782 for probability value of p=0.438 and the independent samples t-test result based on gender for product review videos is noted as being t_{42}=-1.120 for probability value of p=0.269. This shows that there is no significant difference between the compared means, i.e., between the male and female mean

levels of interest in official advertisements and product review videos.

Behavioural Influence:

From the data provided in table 5, we can see that the mean level of perception of influence for official advertisements (Q3), M_3, was rated at M=2.89, which is lower than that of the mean level of interest rated for product review videos (Q8), M_8, which is M=4.02. This reflects the group's higher level of perception of influence by product review videos on their buying decisions as compared to the official advertisements.

The standard deviation of responses to Q3, SD_3, which is SD=1.262 tells us that the individual scores for Q3 are relatively more distributed as compared to the standard deviation of responses to Q8, SD_8, which is SD=0.902. Also, as the scores for product review videos are more closely clustered around the mean as compared to the results for official advertisements, it can be seen that there is more relative consensus in the level of interest shown towards product review videos.

	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	N (Male)	N (Female)	Mean for Male Responses	Mean for Female Responses
Advertisements	1.262	1	5	2.89	27	17	2.81	3.00
Product review videos	0.902	2	5	4.02	27	17	3.85	4.29

Table 5:

Descriptive statistics for questions on Behavioural Influence

The results paired samples t-test results for 44 samples, as shown in table 6, is noted as being t_{43}=-6.218 for probability value of p=1.7 * 10^{-8}. This shows that there is a significant difference between the compared means, i.e., between the mean levels of perception of influence product review videos on buying decisions and that of the official advertisements. By comparing the means in table 7, we can see that the mean level of perception of influence by product review videos on buying decisions is higher than that of the mean level of perception of influence by the official advertisements.

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Paired samples	-6.218	43	$1.7*10^{-8**}$
Independent samples based on gender for advertisements	-0.470	42	0.641
Independent samples based on gender for product review videos	-1.613	42	0.114

**p < 0.01

Table 6:

T-test results for Behavioural Influence

The result for Independent samples t-test based on gender for advertisements is noted as t_{42}=-0.470 for probability value of p=0.641 and the independent samples t-test result based on gender for product review videos is noted as being t_{42}=-1.613for probability value of p=0.114. This shows that there is no significant difference between the compared means, i.e., between the male and female mean levels of interest in official advertisements and product review videos.

This suggests that the survey taker group was more influenced by the product review videos for their buying decisions rather than the advertisements.

Conclusion

Summary:

The research on advertisements revealed that they rely mainly on the creative make-up and the viewer's own subconscious mind and memories in order to evoke a desired feeling in the viewers and appeal to their interest. The effect that advertisements have on viewers varies from person to person based on the subjective experiences of the viewer.

Consumer trust in the advertisement is only developed when the advertisements evoke an emotional response in the viewers. Owing to the variation in techniques employed in creat-ing advertisements and the subjective reception of the viewers, the influence that adver-tisements have in the three influential areas considered for the study is entirely based on the subjective experiences of the viewers. It was also noted that advertisements have an effect on consumer purchase decisions only when consumers logon to the Internet with a prior intention to shop online.

With regards to product review videos on YouTube, user generated review videos act as recommendation systems that rely on information sharing to generate interest in consumers. The ability of reviewers on YouTube to shape and manipulate the content to appeal to consumers' interests has advanced the effectiveness of word-of-mouth systems online.

Research conducted on consumer trust in online reviews drew importance to a combination of various trust influencing factors and the reviewer's own identity, which when disclosed contributes to added trust within the viewership network. Product review videos that can provide interesting content and generate trust in their viewers have a higher chance of in-fluencing consumer buying decisions.

Limitations:

As the videos chosen for the survey were mainly based on technology related products and gadgets, a variation in the results for other types of products could be a possibility. This study has also not considered consumer reactions for various services that are offered as products. The intricacies of Internet culture and consumer behaviour on the Internet could also vary from region to region thus influencing how consumers react to product review videos and advertisements. Owing to its complexity, the influence of language, regional culture and social mindsets of consumers, belonging to various ethnic backgrounds, on their reactions to tailored advertising campaigns and review styles has also not been considered for the study.

Practical Application:

This study can provide companies with an insight into consumer perceptions and behaviour and help them plan their financial resources when it comes to expenditure on advertising. Although advertisements, when composed of effective audio-visual cues, can prove to be effective

in creating brand awareness and brand identity, their influence on consumer buying decisions is limited.

Companies can design a more effective advertising campaign when they take a proactive approach towards getting involved with popular product review channels on YouTube. By volunteering to donate or lend their products to popular "YouTubers" for the purpose of reviewing their products, many brands expand their chances of reaching a wider consumer base.

The act of directly sponsoring a "YouTuber" or a YouTube channel may also prove to be an effective advertising strategy. Though, in this case, a further research on emotional response and trust would need to be conducted, as consumers could be sensitive to the increased influence of companies in the content that is shared in the review videos.

In conclusion, consumer perceptions are seen to be biased towards product review videos as compared to official advertisements and this information could be utilised by companies to design and shape their advertising campaigns by balancing their presence on YouTube in the form of both advertisements and being showcased by popular YouTubers in review videos.

About the Author

Aditya Athni is an alumnus of the University of Applied Sciences in Kempten, Germany and a 2017 graduate of the MBA in International Business Management and Leadership Programme at the Professional School of Business and Technology, Kempten.

Upon completion of his Bachelors programme in Mechanical Engineering at The National Institute of Engineering, Mysore (India) in 2009, Aditya ventured into the Bancassurance sector and worked as a Financial Services Consultant for a year at ICICI Prudential, India.

From 2011 to 2014, Aditya took up the role of a Project-Coordinator on two EPC projects in Kuwait that involved planning, monitoring of site activities and material supply for various piping workflows and liaison with suppliers apropos of quality and warranty of equipment purchased for the projects.

His work experiences lead him to further his involvement in the field of Project/Business management and while an MBA student Aditya also developed a keen interest in the field of Marketing.

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