

Investigating the Training of Subjective Norms and Empathy of Buyers through the Effectiveness of Advertising on Social Networks

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to predict the positive reaction of buyers by examining the effectiveness of advertising on social networks with emphasis on teaching mental norms and expressing empathy.

Methodology: This research was applied in terms of purpose and experimental in nature. The statistical population was users of the social network Instagram, the exact number of whom was unlimited. And by simple random sampling method, 150 online questionnaires were collected. The face and content validity of the final questionnaire was confirmed by marketing experts and in a pre-test on 30 users, Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 was observed. The total reliability of the questionnaires was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha and the reliability of each structure was confirmed by composite reliability. Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling technique and PLS2 software.

Findings: The model used in this article examines the concept of the formation of online user behavioral reactions with respect to social media advertising and the effect of teaching mental norms. This study conceptualizes the effectiveness of social media advertising as a concept that includes emotional attraction, information content, creativity, and interaction, all of which have the potential to contribute to a positive online behavior.

Conclusion: The results showed that informational content, emotion and advertising creativity were the key drivers of desirable behavioral reactions to a social media ad and the intention to participate in the user's favorable responses was positively related to the purchase intention.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the widespread use of social media has gradually changed the advertising platform used by commercial companies from traditional media to social media. However, the effectiveness of a social media ad can be assessed by examining the interactions among social network users as well as assessing their perceptions of advertising (Burg, 2013). Interaction: Interaction is one of the most important and vital aspects related to the online environment and social media platform. Therefore, this concept has been considered by many researchers. In fact, the effective role of such technology features will increase people's horizons and, consequently, their ability to process information consciously. For example, interaction significantly changes the nature of the communication process and how information is exchanged between all individuals online (Alalwan, 2018). While many researchers, including Men & Tsai in 2015, have considered interaction as a process of communication between people, and another group of researchers, such as Oh and Sundar in 2015, have considered interaction from a technological point of view. And have studied people's interactions with electronic devices. In addition, "Yang et al" in 2013 showed that the level of intrinsic motivation (pleasure) is highly correlated with the level of interaction that exists in a mass communication website, and in this regard, "Müller and Chandon" in 2004, Proved that positive interaction helps the customer to understand the emotional relationship with online brands.

Advertising effectiveness: A review of related articles shows that informational content, entertainment, and advertising creativity are recognized as the main sources of advertising effectiveness (Liu, 2014), so we identify the constructs associated with this research model: emotional appeal, informational content, and Advertising creativity is believed to play a key role in shaping behavioral responses to word of mouth (Alhabash et al., 2013). Emotional Attraction: Emotional appeal is a persuasive method designed to create an emotional response to a message using emotional content (eg, horror movie, sad story, victory music, etc.). Emotional attraction deals with the ways in which emotional responses are generated as a function of the motivational relationship of the message with individuals. Related communication studies identify emotion as a vital element that most importantly influences the impact of a message (Alhabash, et al., 2013).

Swani et al. (2013) in their empirical study of social media word-of-mouth advertising found that emotional content produces more word-of-mouth. When a persuasive message is received, emotional reactions (ie, feelings and emotions evoked by the ad) are combined with cognitive responses (ie, a logical evaluation of the ad) to form an attitude toward the message. The researchers found that messages with strong emotional requests were more likely to be shared online (Alhabash et al., 2013).

Information: Information is defined as the ability to inform users about product options, enabling them to make the highest value choices (Pavlou, Liang, & Xue, 2007). Promotional messages with informative content on social networks attract users' attention and motivate them to share the ad with a positive image and spread the messages. In general, the researchers found that social media ads with high information content provide a user with the ability to make an informed judgment about future purchases, and the user's understanding of this desirable aspect of the ad leads to a positive attitude toward behavior, Becomes viral about it (Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011).

Creativity in advertising: Creativity in advertising refers to the degree of authenticity and unexpectedness of advertising (Haberland & Dacin, 1992). Divergence and relevance are key features of advertising creativity; Divergence is associated with novel, different or unusual elements, while communication with elements is meaningful, appropriate, useful and valuable to the audience. Creative messages also attract more attention and lead to a positive attitude towards products. In an empirical study, Smith et al. (2007) found that creative advertising increased motivation to process ads and improved attitudes toward advertising, which had a positive effect on the brand.

Cohen and Golden (1972) argued that both perceived collective behavior and mental norm can play a role in shaping the user's online behavior through education. Perceived collective behavior acts as an informational impact through educational internalization in which the main motivation is to acquire

knowledge from a credible source and reduce uncertainty. B. Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) in their study of virtual communities, found that the behavior of a member of society is apparently influenced by reference groups in society. Social media messages are spread much faster among more friends in this community than an offline network. Therefore, the process of word of mouth will be facilitated. Thus, a user who has accepted the impact of collective behavior along with empathy is likely to accept the impact of the mental norm as well. Based on the above reasons, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Mental norm training and the intention to express empathy: Normative influence can affect a person's attitudes, norms and values. A mental norm is a perception or belief in what others believe a person should do. Related studies on technology adoption have shown that personal norm plays an important role when the user decides to adopt a new information system (Lu, Zhou, & Wang, 2009). Therefore, when a user encounters the fact that many of his acquaintances on the social network have clicked the Like button for an ad, he will receive intense pressure to click the Like for that ad and wait to convert. Becoming part of the reference group that liked the ad (Lee, Hong, 2016). Based on this line of reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Privacy Concerns and Empathy: Privacy issues on social media are on the rise. Some studies have reported that privacy concerns are the main reason why some social media users have closed their social media accounts. Privacy concerns also have a negative impact on the disclosure of personal information, meaning that the higher the users' privacy concerns, the less user information will be disclosed on social media (Zlatolas, Welzer, Hericko, & Hölbl, 2015). Social media audiences are larger than we know. Our followers or friends are not the only ones who can see information about us. For this reason, those who are concerned about the possibility that others may infer about a person's personality and values or their preferences for an ad are likely to avoid clicking the Like button (Stieger, Burger, Bohn, & Voracek, 2013). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hedonistic Motivation: One of Venkatesh's most important findings in 2012 in the integrated theory model of acceptance and application of technology was the role of hedonistic motivation. In fact, Vankatesh and his colleagues were also successful in building a new model tailored to the client's context, including the role of intrinsic motivation as well as external motivation (Alalwan, 2018). Social media has been widely reported as a new place to find entertainment (Shareef, et al., 2018).

In particular, customers are more likely to be attracted to social media ads because of their level of creativity and attractiveness (Wamba et al., 2017). In addition, the high level of interaction on such platforms increases the level of customers' ability to control, engage and interact with others. Accordingly, customers can have more hedonistic benefits (Alalwan, 2017). Thus, hedonistic motivation can play an important role in predicting customers' reactions and perceptions to social media advertising (Alalwan, 2018).

Behavioral intent to express empathy: Social media users are exposed to an ad through an evaluation phase in which the user generates an effective evaluation response (for example, good, bad, angry, sad, etc.). Most social networks, including Instagram, create an effective evaluation mechanism known as one-click social plugins, whereby the user can express their emotional reaction in the form of a positive evaluation (such as likes). Through these plugins, users can share their interest or convey their views on different content (Swani, Miln & Brown, 2013). Positive emotional evaluation, of course, is the virtual empathy that the user has about the advertising message, and this empathy is generated from the user's perspective (Rosen, 2012). Instagram is an example of empathy. Users are driven by a nice ad that is probably driven by a social need to share the emotional state of users who have already clicked this button. (Alhabash S, McAlister, 2014). Based on these theoretical contexts, we propose the following hypothesis:

In 2018, Ali Abdallah Alalwan published a research paper entitled "Investigating the Effects of Social Media Advertising Features on Customer Purchasing Intent" in the *International Journal of Information Management*. The conceptual model of this research is proposed based on three factors: the development of the theory of acceptance and use of technology along with interaction, information and perceived

communication. The key results of structural equation modeling mainly confirm the validity of the research model and show the significant impact of performance expectations, hedonistic motivation, interaction, information and perceived relationship with purchasing goals.

Lee, Hong In 2016, he published an article entitled "Predicting Positive User Responses to Social Media Advertising" in the *International Journal of Information Management*. This study sought to develop a theoretical model that identified the history of positive user reactions to an ad on an ad. The results of this study show two important predictors of attitudes toward empathy: informational content and advertising creativity.

In 2016, Lee and Watkins published a research paper entitled "The Impact of YouTube Bloggers on Consumer Purchasing Intent and Luxury Brands" in the *Journal of Marketing Research*. This study examines how video blogs affect consumer perceptions of luxury brands. In this study, using social media interactions and social comparison theory, a model is presented that evaluates the effect of physical attractiveness, social attractiveness and hemophilia attitude of video blogger on social media interactions.

Reza Panah, Ismailzadeh Meshgi In 2017, he presented research papers entitled "The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behavior and Decision Making" at the Fourth International Conference on Media Management. The research results show that marketing through social media is more related to the concepts of high creativity of consumers. Social media marketing focuses on the structure of the relationship between the consumer and the brands.

In 2017, Yousefi and Shahroudi presented a study entitled "Investigating the Impact of Positive Behavior Factors on Users' Purchasing Intent under the Influence of Social Media Advertising" at the 10th International Conference on Economics and Management. The results of this study show that the content of valuable information and creativity are key factors in the effectiveness of advertising in creating a positive response from users, and also the intention to express feelings in creating a positive response is positively related to the intention to buy. In 2018, Sobhanifard Y, Hajiabadi published an article entitled "Structural Modeling to Strengthen Purchasing Intent on the Instagram Social Network" in *Tomorrow's Management Research Journal*. The results of the tests obtained from the research model showed that being informative and advertising creativity had a positive effect on individuals' attitudes toward group consensus, and this also improved the intention to buy consumption by influencing people's intention to accompany the consensus.

In this regard, the present study faces two questions: What are the characteristics of an ad on social networks that help generate positive responses from the user? And is a positive user response to a social media ad a predictor of positive buying behavior?

However, these studies have focused little on user behavior regarding social media advertising. Social media advertising is different from conventional advertising, thus expanding the content of advertising among the people targeted by advertising (Colman, 2014). The main purpose of this article is to identify the user's behavioral history and positive interaction with an ad on social networks and to present a conceptual model of how positive user reactions to an ad are generated. The conceptual model is based on the theory of rational action and the theory of the influence of social education.

Research model: The research model is taken from the study of Lee J, Hong (2016) and Alalwan (2018). Due to the increasing growth of social networks and concerns about the effectiveness of advertising in it, the combination of model variables has not been studied in Iran. For this reason, the two models adapted in the first place have been used and combined to develop the model in future research, if necessary.

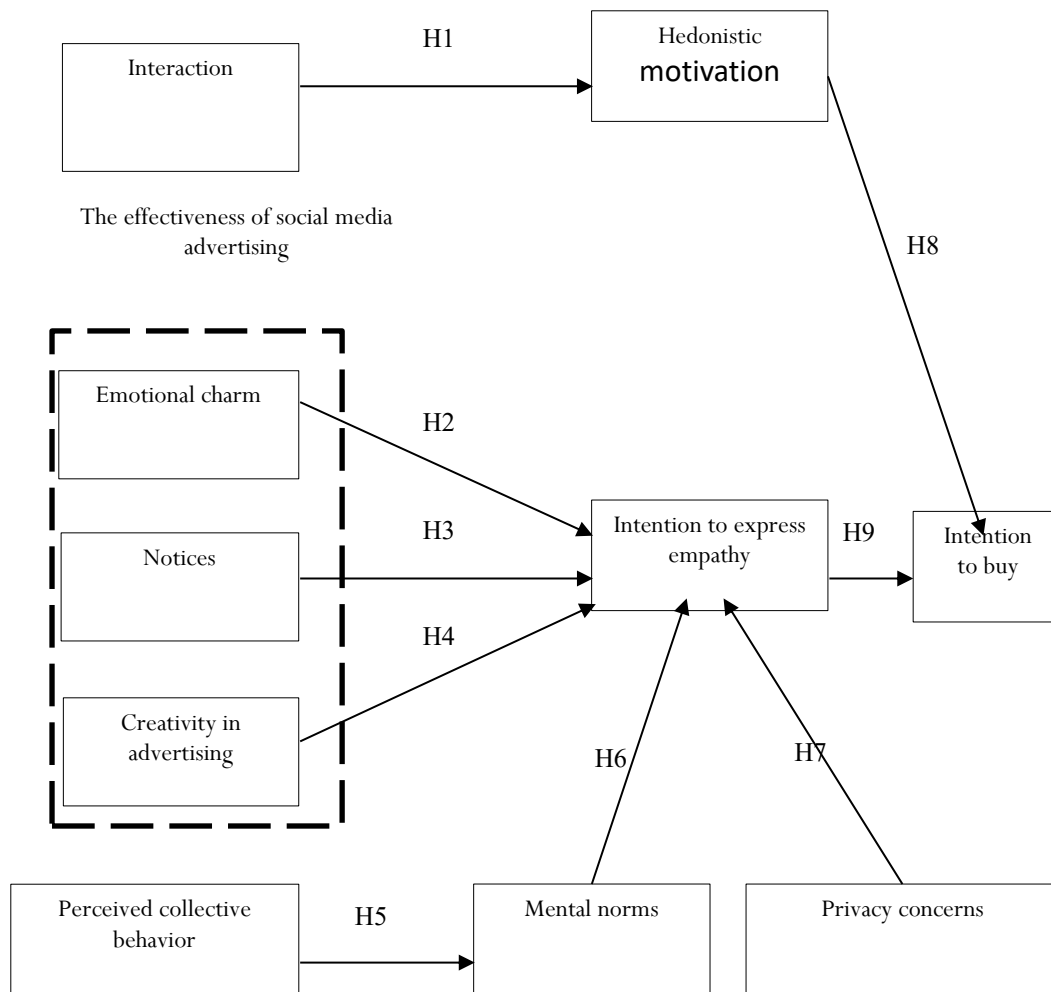


Figure1. Research model

2. Methodology

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and in terms of experimental collection method and based on analysis of variance matrix using structural equation model and 2PLS software. The statistical population was users of the social network Instagram, the exact number of whom was unlimited. According to Hair et al. (2011), the sample size calculated for structural equation analysis was considered to be at least 5 respondents per index. According to the initial 30 indices, at least 150 respondents were required. By distributing 200 questionnaires among Instagram users, 150 eligible questionnaires were used in the analysis process.

An online survey was conducted using the Google Form tool to collect data for experimental analysis. In this study, a data collection method based on quasi-experimental design was used. A quasi-experimental design is designed to collect data by applying a treatment (or stimulus) and observing a reaction. In our study, an Instagram advertising post was presented to test participants as a stimulus, and a questionnaire was used to record our participants' perceptions after encountering an Instagram advertising post. The study lasted for a week and an additional week was given to encourage participants. Instagram users were considered suitable participants because it is one of the most popular social networks in Iran. The stimulus used for the experiment is an advertising post about dairy products published by Kaleh on its Instagram page.

Participants were redirected via email and Instagram with a link to a web-based page, including an image and an online questionnaire.

Standard measures of previous studies have been used to measure variables. All measures were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree = 1" to "strongly agree = 5". The face and content validity of the final questionnaire was confirmed by marketing experts and in a pre-test on 30 users, Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 was observed. The total reliability of the questionnaires was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha and the reliability of each structure was confirmed by composite reliability. Convergent validity tests have been used to confirm the validity of the structure. The mean criterion of variance extracted with Fornell Larker in all components is higher than 0.5, which indicates convergent validity confirmation (Table 1).

Table1. Convergent validity values, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability

Variable	Convergent validity (AVE)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)
Emotional charm	0.799	0.751	0.888
Information	0.703	0.585	0.825
Creativity	1.000	1.000	1.000
Privacy concerns	0.581	0.538	0.732
Understood collective behavior	0.601	0.685	0.818
Mental norm	0.680	0.765	0.864
Intention to express empathy	0.546	0.585	0.776
Intention to buy	0.672	0.752	0.859
Pleasant motivation	0.632	0.708	0.837
Interaction	0.692	0.778	0.870

3. Findings

The results of the demographic status of the sample (150) show that the highest number of respondents is women with 67% and people aged 30 to 40 years with 58%. Respondents' demographic information and respondents' information on the Instagram social network are listed in Table 2.

Table2. Demographic information and respondents' use of Instagram

Variable	Item	Abundance	Percentage	Variable	Item	Abundance	Percentage
Gender	Female	101	67.33%	Number of followers on Instagram	10 to 100 people	29	19.33%
	Man	49	32.67%		100 to 500 people	89	59.33%
Age	Under 20 years	4	2.67%		500 to 1000 people	17	11.33%
	20 to 30 years	50	33.33%		1000 to 10000 people	12	8.00%
	30 to 40 years	87	58.00%		10,000 people and up	3	2.00%
	40 to 50 years	9	6.00%	Average time spent on Instagram	Under an hour	41	27.33%
	Free	15	10.00%		One to two hours	67	44.67%
Job	University professor	5	3.33%		Two to five hours	34	22.67%
	Doctor	3	2.00%		Five hours and up	8	5.33%
	housewife	12	8.00%	Follow product related ads	Cosmetics	40	26.67%
	student	3	2.00%		Banking	3	2.00%
	University student	24	16.00%		decoration	31	20.67%
	Employee	67	44.67%		Foodstuffs	46	30.67%

the manager	21	14.00%	Sports and fitness	30	20.00%
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Structural equation modeling is used to measure the model, which is to examine the linear relationships between latent and explicit variables. Structural equations are a powerful statistical technique that combines the measurement model of confirmatory factor analysis and regression with a simultaneous statistical test (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). To evaluate the structural model in this study, the coefficient of determination R² and path coefficients have been used. The results of the coefficient of determination (R²) are given in Table 3 for endogenous variables.

Table3. Determination coefficients

Variable	Coefficients of determination
Mental norm	0.455
Intention to express empathy	0.628
Intention to buy	0.700
Hedonistic motivation	0.855

One of the indicators of relationship confirmation in the structural model is the significance of path coefficients. If the value obtained is greater than the minimum statistic at the confidence level, that relationship or hypothesis is confirmed. At the significance level of 90%, 95% and 99%, this value is compared with the minimum statistics of 1.64, 1.96 and 2.58, respectively (Mohsenin, Esfidani, 2014). One of the main advantages of Smart Payals software compared to other software is the covariance-based structural equations, and it is necessary to observe the condition of reflective models of two exogenous variables and modulators to use this method. (Ibid: 201), Figures 2 and 3 shows the structural path coefficients of the model and the significance of the structural path coefficients, respectively. The results for refuting and confirming the hypotheses are given in Table 4.

Table4. The result of confirming and rejecting the hypotheses

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	Significance (t-statistic)	Result
Level of interaction in social networks → Motivational hedonism	0.925	109.783	Confirmation
The emotional appeal of social media advertising → Intention to express empathy	0.252	3.503	Confirmation
The amount of information on social media ads → Intention to express empathy	0.135	1.790	Confirmation
Creativity in social media advertising → Intention to express empathy	0.138	2.277	Confirmation
Perceived collective behavior of users → Mental norms	0.675	21.108	Confirmation
Users' mental norms → Intention to express empathy	0.324	4.992	Confirmation
User privacy concerns → Intention to express empathy	0.101	2.282	Confirmation
Hedonistic motivation → Intention to buy users	0.672	11.887	Confirmation
Intention to express empathy → Intention to buy users	0.226	3.211	Confirmation

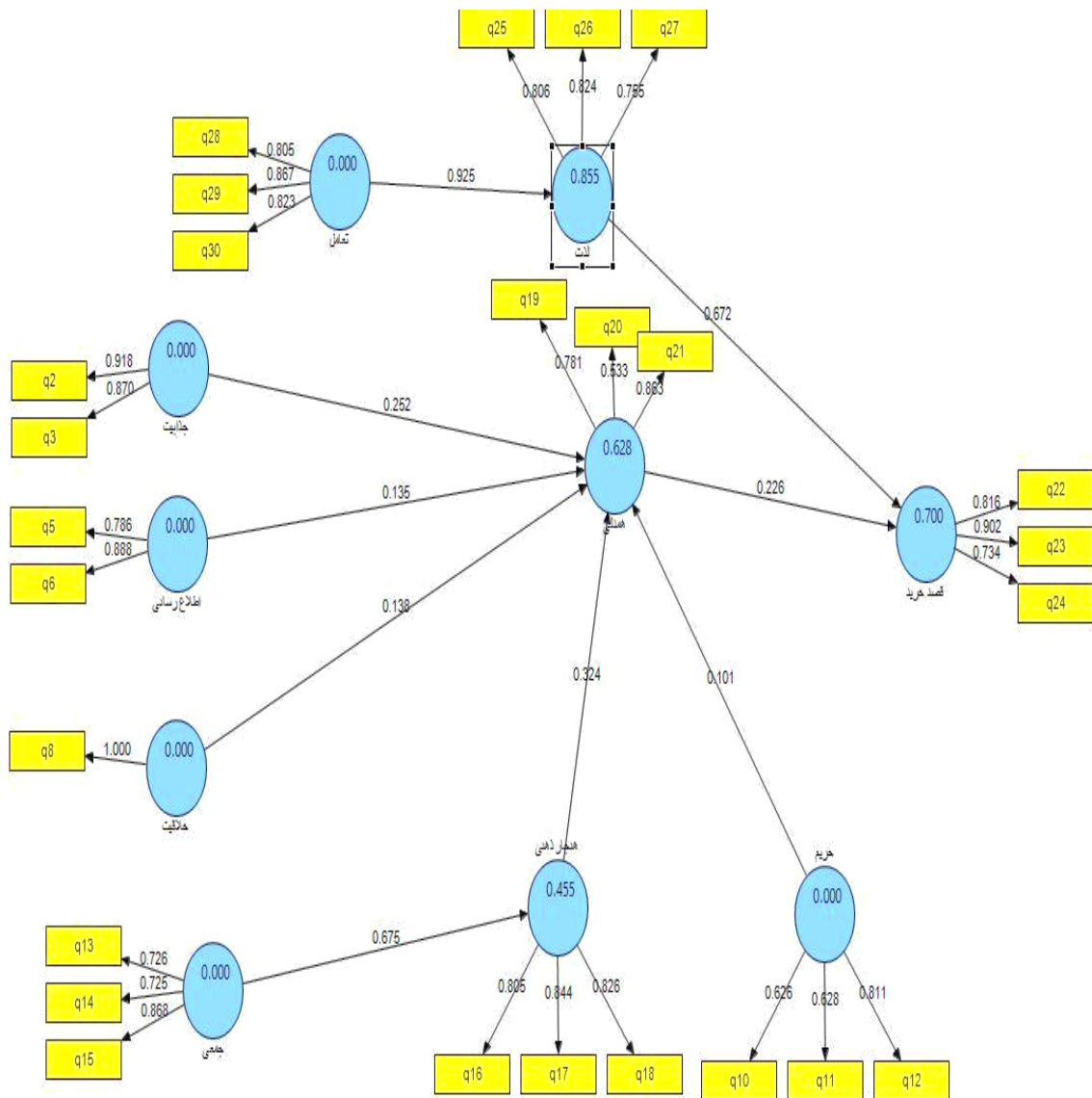


Figure2. Structural path coefficients

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide useful insights into what contributes to the formation of behavioral intent to express empathy for a social media ad. We argue that an empathetic attitude may have better predictive power in explaining the viral behavioral intent that characterizes the social network environment. Although we did not analyze the relationship between the two structures empirically, the findings show that the attitude towards empathy seems to be an appropriate structure in a social media advertising context (Lee J, Hong, 2016). The results also show that social impact theory and rational action theory are powerful theories that can help researchers predict the factors influencing users' positive viral responses (e.g., clicking or subscribing) and a subsequent marketing response (For example, the intention to buy). These two theories complement each other, which together provide a comprehensive view of user behavior in a social network, enabling us to consider both personal and social factors. Positive feedback on social media can help generate a direct marketing response, thus helping to boost sales. When users want to buy a product or service shown in an ad and also have a strong intention to engage in viral behavior for it, it indicates that an advertising

strategy is set to increase the number of likes and subscriptions. Layout will ultimately be useful (Alalwan, 2017).

Our results identify three records of behavioral intent to express sympathy for social media advertising. That is, the effectiveness of advertising, the mental norm and privacy concerns. In particular, informational content and advertising creativity and emotional content were found to be significant predictors of attitudes toward empathy. Therefore, to increase the likelihood of users responding to an ad, advertisers and marketers must make their advertising messages so informative and creative that such messages effectively force users to express their empathy. Also, marketers and advertisers need to pay attention to the product or type of service in order to pay attention to them when creating an advertising campaign (Alhabash et al., 2013).

The results of this study show three important predictors of empathy: emotional attractiveness, informational content, and advertising creativity. In particular, we found that the more users understand the emotional, informational, and creative aspects of social media advertising, the more positive their attitude toward empathy will be. Thus, when an ad provides information that addresses their functional needs (e.g., making an optimal choice of product / service) and when it is creative enough to provide value for pleasure, users They are more likely to offer a positive attitude to express emotional evaluation on social media.

Suggestions: Although this study helps the literature by identifying records of user reactions to social media advertising and post-marketing reactions, there are a number of limitations that can be suggested for future research. First, the predictors used in our model may not be complete. Further research is needed to investigate other factors that may lead to favorable reactions to social media advertising. Second, the present study was conducted among Instagram users. It is suggested that other active and popular social networks in Iran be examined. Third, it would be worthwhile to repeat this study using an animated image (for example, a YouTube video) instead of a still image. A new study shows that the type of media may affect advertising on a mobile device, and a video ad leads to a more positive trend toward advertising than an ad that is still in the image (Sung & Cho, 2012).

Fourth, this study does not include the structure of behavior in the research model, because it focuses on understanding the relationships between intention and its history. However, the composition of the structure as a dependent variable creates broad implications for professionals as well as academics. In addition, by constructing such a model, examining the moderating role of privacy concerns in the relationship between intent and behavior may shed light on the direct impact of privacy concerns on intent. Fifth, while the present study focuses on interest as a user behavioral response to a social media ad, it is desirable to examine alternative responses such as sharing and commenting that are considered to be more active user behavior of interest will be. Sixth, this study examines the effectiveness of online advertising. At the same time, it is suggested that the simultaneous impact of offline advertising and, in fact, advertising campaigns on consumers be weighed.

Seventh, the present study was conducted solely on a social network. The effectiveness of social networks in different societies and cultures may have differences, in this regard; it is suggested to simultaneously examine the effectiveness of advertising in several active social networks in Iran. Finally, future research may examine the moderating role of product categories in the relationship between emotional attractiveness and user attitudes toward empathy. It may be assumed that pleasurable products or services have a greater effect on attitudes than emotional attraction, while profitable counterparts have little effect. The findings of such studies strengthen our understanding of the factors influencing the formation of positive user behavior with respect to an advertisement on social networks.

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