



Review

INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND AGE ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate and establish the influence of gender and age on the attitudes of young consumers of advertising. To achieve this goal, an empirical study was conducted with a contingent of 474 young respondents, whose advertising needs were analysed in three Bulgarian universities. The research data confirm, albeit partially, the presence of an influence of gender on the cognitive and affective attitudes of young consumers, with affect placed above cognition. When measuring the age differences, also by means of analysis of variance (ANOVA), a strong influence was found on the sample age group - young people aged 21 to 24 years, in which cognitive attitudes have the strongest manifestation compared to all others. Linear correlations between attitude types indicated that stronger affective attitudes evoked stronger cognitive and conative attitudes in youth. The obtained scientific results can serve specialists in the psychology of advertising, behavioural psychology and some business organizations in Bulgaria.

Key words: differences in consumer attitudes, advertising influence.

INTRODUCTION

Research on consumer attitudes, as well as attitude shift, is of great importance to persuasive processes in advertising, emphasizing the dynamics of human attitudes. Passing through the conceptualization of attitudes (1), the structure of attitudes and the processes of their change (2), modern research is interested in consumer behaviour and shifts (3), which are observed in the formation of consumer attitudes. The present article aims to establish the evaluative interpretation of advertising consumers in relation to cognition and affect in the attitude structure and whether this is determined by the gender and age characteristics of the consumers. The depth of the research will determine to what extent the two demographic characteristics: gender and age, are related to consumer behaviour when exposed to advertisements (4).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the present scientific work, the author deals with the effects in advertising achieved by measuring the types of attitudes according to gender and age. Our focus, which differs from previous research, is on types of attitudes as part of embedding products and services in the consumers' mind during advertising; the role of consumers' initial and current attitudes and their relationship to the types of attitudes; consideration of affect, cognition and emotion when forming an attitude towards products and services.

Many researchers agree that the evaluative interpretation of cognition and affect experienced in relation to an object determine consumer attitude (5, 6). These evaluative abstractions vary in strength, which in turn has implications for the persistence, resistance, and consistency of consumer attitudes and behaviours. Mere exposure to a stimulus can also influence attitude formation at subconscious levels (7, 8) because frequency of exposure is perceived as affectively positive (9).

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Views in this direction would explain some of the effects achieved through the impact of advertising. It is important to clarify that ordinary exposure to influence refers to the formation of an attitude, not to the change of the relevant attitude. Change processes are related to other factors such as duration of influence, consumer interest, desire to own, propensity to make a purchase, and others. Our observation and measurement of consumer attitudes suggests that social marketing campaigns that link positive role models to desired behaviours may be beneficial for those who maintain a neutral to positive initial attitude toward the recommended actions, but are unlikely to fully reduce negative attitudes towards advertised products or towards advertising in general.

In content analysis, researchers engage in interpretation of the fundamental construct of attitude (10), as well as the evaluative integration of cognitions and affects experienced in relation to an object (5, 6). These evaluative abstractions vary in strength, which in turn has implications for the persistence, resistance, and consistency of consumer attitudes and behaviour. Other authors comment that subconscious processes in attitude formation do not always lead to change (11-14), the explanation being that they include other external factors in the process of influence. For example, the difference between affect and cognition in attitude structure has implications for attitude change. According to the matching hypothesis, persuasive appeals are effective to the extent that they match the structural (affective-cognitive) composition of the target's attitude (15). Therefore, the types of attitudes should not be studied as separate constructs, but as a unity of a system determined by the processes of human thinking and behaviour.

In the classical model, the communication process includes the transmission of the message, processing of the information, as well as perception of the essence of the message, which leads to the formation of an attitude and a change of behaviour (or corrective action) (10). On the other hand, the revised attitude can influence subsequent behaviour under appropriate conditions, which is described by the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (16), and the heuristic/systematic model (HSM) (17, 18), defined as double-effect models (10). Proponents of these models believe that if receivers are capable and properly motivated, they will develop or analyse persuasive

messages (10). The author presents these models because she believes that it is an important condition for the message to be well-argued without relying too much on the auxiliary features of the context.

An important condition is that the message is well-argued, not relying too much on the auxiliary features of the context. In the absence of motivation, recipients use auxiliary functions of the message - "peripheral signals" (expert opinion) or heuristics (the parent is always right) (10, 16). According to Wegener and Carlston (2005), such attitudes are less stable, more often do not lead to behavioural change, unlike attitudes that are formed after a thorough analysis (19). The author of the present work found in another of her studies that persuasion through advertising is achieved in a peripheral way (20), when consumers are distracted and not motivated to think about quality messages, even when these messages are based on persuasive principles, to which people are susceptible (16).

Different views of attitudes and the structure of attitudes can be very controversial because either a constructivist view of attitude is supported or an attitude is believed to be related to a stable object. The MODE (motivation and opportunity as determinants) model (21, 22) advocates a view of attitude stability, as does the MCM, or meta-cognitive model (23). What these models have in common is that they treat attitudes as structures of long-term memory, whereas in the MODE model (21, 22) object representation is related to global evaluation. The meta-cognitive model – MCM (23) includes the possibility that an object can be associated with more than one generalized evaluation with different associative strength. In contrast to these authors, others believe that attitudes are not constant predispositions, but rather evaluative judgments that are formed in a situation (24). Therefore, the dynamic structure of an attitude allows it to be constructed as an Associative Appraisal of Assertions (APE) (24), and Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2007) add that attitude is primarily formed in a situation (25). Later, Conrey and Smith (2007) emphasize that attitudes are "time-dependent states of the system" and not "static" things that can be "stored in memory" (26).

More intermediate positions are taken by Eagly and Chaiken (2007), as well as Cunningham et al. (2007) who present definitions that

encompass the key characteristics of tendency, attitude object, and appraisal (27-28). They derive an integrated model of reprocessing, which is a combined view that "current evaluations are constructed from relatively stable representations of the relationship" (28). From this empirical evidences, it can be assumed that, in general, attitude shows stability, but under certain conditions some of its components – cognition, affect, conation – can change (10).

In addition, the evaluative interpretation of cognition and affect in different users with different characteristics experienced in relation to certain products and services should be studied, as well as to what extent the aspects of attitude - cognition, affect, conation - can determine the attitude itself.

The author of the present paper attempts to fill this gap in research by examining the influence of some psycho-demographic characteristics of users such as gender and age on types of attitudes, but without looking for the evaluative abstractions that vary in strength, stability and consistency of attitude.

According to these previous researches, the researcher puts forward the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 0: Different consumer attitudes are not determined by demographic factors when exposed to product and service advertising.

Hypothesis 1a: Different consumer attitudes are determined by the gender of the subjects under the influence of advertising offering products and services.

Hypothesis 1b: Different consumer attitudes are determined by the age of the respondents when exposed to commercial advertising offering products and services.

In view of previous research that has found relationships between the aspects of attitude - cognition, affect, conation and individual characteristics of consumers, this article seeks to examine the influence of gender and age on types of attitudes and consumer behaviour. The results of the study can serve advertisers, marketers, as well as many companies offering products and services through advertising.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology includes the development of a suitable instrument in the form of a computer-based questionnaire survey to establish the individual evaluations of

consumers regarding the types of advertisements, as well as the influence of gender and age on the types of attitudes. It accepts the views of other researchers about a three-component attitude or the presence of cognitive, affective and conative attitudes (5, 6), which can change and vary over time. In support of the main objective, some combined effects of gender and age on consumer attitudes towards different advertisements will also be sought, applying appropriate statistical treatment.

The study was conducted between the beginning of 2021 and the end of 2022, by collecting statistical data, through which an assessment of the achieved advertising influence of users in Bulgaria was made. The interviewees were randomly selected from the general population according to the actual gender and age distribution, students from Sofia University, Plovdiv University and Trakia University. All students were asked by e-mail to complete an online questionnaire, and the survey was conducted on an anonymous and voluntary basis. According to these criteria, the total sample amounted to 45.4% men (215 people) and 54.6% women (259 people), 37.1% aged 18 to 20 years (176 people), 42.6% from 21 to 24 years (202 people) and 20.3% over 25 years (96 people). Respondents answered all modules of the questionnaire, which consisted of several modules measuring cognitive, conative and affective attitudes. A five-point Likert-type scale was applied, which included ratings from: 1 - Disagree to 5 - Agree. The following items are attached to measure the types of attitudes: 1) Cognitive attitudes - For me, advertisement brings knowledge: When the exact product / service is named; When the organization offering the product is named; When showing product and service promotions; When there are more logical arguments; When it offers sufficient information; When there are lower prices; When elements of attractiveness of the products are present; When they show the benefits of the products / services; When the advertisement is combined with other media products - television show, film, news, the Internet space; When advertising is combined with other communications - during sales, discounts on goods, participation in competitions; When the useful information is available. 2) Positive affective attitudes - Advertisement makes me feel carefree; Advertisement makes me feel amused;

Advertisement makes me feel happy; Advertisement makes me feel satisfied; Advertisement makes me feel excited; Advertisement makes me feel enthusiastic; Advertisement makes me feel invigorated; Advertisement makes me feel safe. 3) Negative affective attitudes - Advertisement makes me feel sad; Advertisement makes me feel irritated; Advertisement makes me feel tired; Advertisement makes me feel depressed; Advertisement makes me feel ripped off; Advertisement makes me feel confused; Advertisement makes me feel deluded. 4) Conative attitudes - Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me watch the ad all the way through; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me write down the important information; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me interested in the benefits offered by the product/service; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me watch every ad in the same product category; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me look for additional information; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me look for information in a store; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me interested in the manufacturer; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me interested in the quality of the products/services; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me care about the prices; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me interested in the payment methods of the product/service; Advertisement of a favourite product/service makes me interested in competing products and services. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire measuring types of advertising consumer attitudes. The

reliability of the subscale measuring cognitive attitudes is $\alpha=0.516$ (Mean=32.16; SD=6.22; N of Items=11); the reliability of the subscale measuring affective attitudes is $\alpha=0.660$ (Mean=45.82; SD=6.48; N of Items=15); the reliability of the subscale measuring conative attitudes is $\alpha=0.734$ (Mean=33.11; SD=5.51; N of Items=11). For the entire sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha=0.663$. Since the values exceed the minimum recommended value $\alpha=0.600$ (29), the internal consistency for the respective subscales is sufficiently high, i.e. the elements that compose them form a common scale.

The data were processed with the statistical analysis package SPSS 19.0, applying several statistical analyses: Determination of the average values of the users, distributed by gender, age and the dependent variables; One-way analysis of variance ANOVA to examine the influence of demographic factors on types of consumer attitudes; Pearson's correlations to determine the causal relationships between the cognitive, conative and affective attitudes of consumers and the demographic characteristics of gender and age (30).

CONDUCTING RESEARCH AND RESULTS

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to determine the cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes of consumers by gender. The hypothesis that the arithmetic mean values for the scale measuring cognitive, conative and affective attitudes are different for different users belonging to different genders was tested. The results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) measuring consumer attitudes with distribution by gender, are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Influence of gender on consumer attitudes (ANOVA)

| Independent variable | Dependent variable | Mean | F | p |
|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------|--------|
| Gender | Cognitive Attitudes | X_1 (Male) = 3.86 | F=3.24 | p<0.00 |
| | | X_2 (Female) = 3.46 | | |
| | Affective Attitudes | X_1 (Male) = 3.59 | F=4.15 | p<0.00 |
| | | X_2 (Female) = 3.83 | | |
| | Conative Attitudes | X_1 (Male) = 3.67 | F=2.37 | p<0.09 |
| | | X_2 (Female) = 3.66 | | |

There was a statistically significant difference between the studied groups by gender, with the highest mean values reported for male and female users in terms of affective attitudes, where $F_{(2,472)} = 4.15$; $p < 0.00$; $X_{1(\text{male})} = 3.56$, $X_{2(\text{female})} = 3.83$, as well as for cognitive attitudes,

where $F_{(2,472)} = 3.24$; $p < 0.00$; $X_{1(\text{male})} = 3.86$, $X_{2(\text{female})} = 3.46$, (**Table 1**), with attitudes considered as distinct manifestations of advertising consumers. Since attitude formation can occur in many ways, the main distinction between them being the degree to which

individuals consciously accepted or rejected an attitude object (10), measurement of all types of attitudes was performed.

Attitudes have always been studied in the affect-cognition-behaviour trinity, where affect is seen as a determinant of the judgmental processes that underlie responses to advertising messages. Affect as a separate component of the attitude structure is assumed to take precedence in item responses over the behavioural component (31, 32). Affective attitudes are significant, which are activated faster than non-emotional (cognitive) attitudes according to

some authors (10). Giner-Sorolla (2001, 2004) have also favoured affective (over cognitive) responses only at high extremes and for affectively based (versus cognitively based) evaluations (33, 34).

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to determine the cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes of consumers by age. The results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) measuring the types of attitudes, stratified by age, are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Influence of age on consumer attitudes (ANOVA)

| Independent variable | Dependent variable | Mean | F, p | T-test |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Age | Cognitive Attitudes | x1 (18-20 years old) = 2.87 | F=4.87 p<0.00 | t _{1,2} = 2.43 |
| | | x2 (21-24 years old) = 3.01 | | t _{3,2} = 2.09 |
| | | x3 (over 25 years old) = 2.83 | | |
| | Affective Attitudes | x1 (18-20 years old) = 3.03 | F=1.76 p<0.01 | t _{1,2} = 1.16 |
| | | x2 (21-24 years old) = 3.08 | | t _{3,2} = 1.23 |
| | | x3 (over 25 years old) = 3.05 | | |
| | Conative Attitudes | x1 (18-20 years old) = 3.01 | F=1.24 p<0.00 | t _{1,2} = 1.05 |
| | | x2 (21-24 years old) = 3.02 | | t _{3,2} = 1.11 |
| | | x3 (over 25 years old) = 2.98 | | |

When analysing the obtained results, higher average values were observed for respondents aged 21 to 24, with the highest values for cognitive attitudes, where $F_{(2,472)} = 4.87$; $p < 0.00$; X_2 (21-24 years old) = 3.01, (**Table 2**), compared to other age groups $t_{1,2} = 2.43$; $t_{3,2} = 2.09$. The same age group also had the highest values on the other subscales measuring affective and conative attitudes, where respectively $F_{(2,472)} = 1.76$; $p < 0.01$; X_2 (21-24 years old) = 3.08 and $F_{(2,472)} = 1.24$; $p < 0.00$; X_2 (21-24 years old) = 3.02, (**Table 2**), compared to the other age groups, as for affective attitudes the t-test values are $t_{1,2} = 1.16$; $t_{3,2} = 1.23$, and for cognitive attitudes the t-test values are $t_{1,2} = 1.05$; $t_{3,2} = 1.11$. We assumed that this age group were young consumers of advertising who built their life experience towards products and services,

and showed greater persistence in forming affective and conative attitudes, the values of which were lower than cognitive attitudes. This may be emerging as the optimal age for cognition to predominate over affect, with attitude types measured as separate constructs in the current study. The author interprets the view that cognitions, affects and behaviour can be separate aspects in the structure of attitudes, but under certain conditions, interrelated cognitive, affective and conative attitudes are observed.

Using Pearson's correlation coefficient, linear relationships between cognitive, affective and conative attitudes of advertising consumers were measured, and the results of the analysis are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Correlations between types of attitudes (Pearson's correlations)

| Attitudes | Cognitive attitudes | Affective attitudes | Conative attitudes |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Cognitive attitudes | 1 | 0.652** | 0.618** |
| Affective attitudes | 0.652** | 1 | 0.431** |
| Conative attitudes | 0.618** | 0.431** | 1 |

**Correlations is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis showed that the assumptions of normality, linearity and homogeneity were not violated. Linear correlations between variables ranged from moderately positive, $r = 0.431$, $p < 0.000$ to strong $r = 0.652$, $p < 0.000$, with a sample of $N = 474$, (**Table 3**). The strongest proportional relationships for the studied sample show the following: 1) The presence of stronger affective attitudes in advertising users is related to the presence of stronger cognitive attitudes ($R = 0.652$; $p < 0.000$); 2) The presence of stronger conative attitudes in advertising consumers is associated with the presence of stronger cognitive attitudes ($R = 0.618$; $p < 0.000$). The weakest linear relationship was observed between the respondents' affective attitudes and conative attitudes ($R = 0.431$; $p < 0.000$). The obtained results can be explained by the achieved influence of affect in the advertisement, because a large number of advertisements evoke positive and negative emotions, which is also shared by the young respondents. Advertising contexts usually have positive or negative content that can trigger affective responses simultaneously with cognitive responses. These reactions are called emotional advertising responses (37) and a number of authors prove that they can be transferred to attitudes toward advertising (Aad), which affects attitudes toward ads in general (AG) (38). The merged linear relationship between cognitive and conative attitudes gives another idea of an achieved effect of advertising, that is, it is explained by another function of advertising, where it gives knowledge about products and services and educates at certain moments. This may be the reason why behavioural changes can also be observed in young users of advertising.

CONCLUSION

A number of studies on the types of attitudes converge around the trinity: affect-cognition-behaviour, where affect is seen as a determinant of the judgmental processes that underlie responses to advertising messages (10). In our scientific research, affect, or influence achieved by building affective attitudes during advertising exposure, is brought to the fore, the main explanation being that these attitudes are activated faster than non-emotional (cognitive) attitudes (10). The predominance of affective (over cognitive) responses at high levels of emotional state (31, 32) should also be considered in the research process of

advertising (31, 32). In our research, the established significance of affective attitudes compared to the other types in measuring gender differences is explained by the faster activation, looking for some causal relationships with the age characteristics of the users. Another explanation for the obtained results is that evaluative processing at different levels can lead to the development of dual attitudes that have a dual manifestation – as affective and as conative (10). In our study, the found significance of affective attitudes compared to other types in measuring gender differences is explained by the faster activation, with the affect manifesting to a greater extent in women than in men under the influence of advertising. The higher values in the measurement of cognitive attitudes in men, compared to women are explained by the better logical thinking of these individuals, who can easily process advertising information. According to other studies, the general thesis is that men and women have different views on advertising, and it can be assumed that men and women derive different meanings from the advertisements they see (36).

On the other hand, the age differences of advertising consumers also appear to be an important influencing factor, because when measuring the types of attitudes among youth aged 18 to 25 years, the formation of cognitive attitudes through advertising is observed in consumers aged 21 to 24 years compared to other age groups. The author assumes that this is the optimal age at which cognition predominates over affect.

Since a number of authors consider cognition, affect and behaviour as aspects in the structure of attitudes, as well as the evaluative integration of cognition and affect experienced in relation to an object (5-6), some linear relationships between individual attitudes built through affect are also sought in advertising. A strong relationship between affective and cognitive attitudes was found because a large number of advertisements evoked positive and negative emotions. In addition, evoking emotional advertising responses (Coulter, K. 1998) arouses the interest of young consumers, which also induces behavioural changes. In our study, a strong linear relationship between conative and cognitive attitudes was observed, with the strongest influence reported among youth aged 21 to 24 years. Therefore, the so-called "optimal age" is key in influencing advertising to achieve

its effects with these young consumers and impacts affect and cognition equally. The results of the present scientific study would serve to clarify the influence of gender on consumer attitudes, as well as to reveal some age characteristics of young respondents who use products and services offered in advertising.

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