

A Cross-Platform Model of Audience Perception Toward Social Media Advertising: The Role of Format, Personalization, and Platform Context

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Abstract

This study investigates how various audience segments view social media advertising. The study investigates the ways in which several demographic groups react to different advertising tactics on social media sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The study examines elements that impact customer perception, such as ad type, platform context, personalization, and content relevancy, using both primary and secondary data. The results show notable differences in perception according on platform choices, age, and digital proficiency, which has significant ramifications for marketers looking to maximize the efficacy of their ads. The findings show that while intrusive formats and over-personalization frequently elicit unfavorable reactions from audiences, transparency, genuine messaging, and value-oriented content greatly enhance audience receptivity to social media advertising. The research contributes to understanding the evolving relationship between consumers and digital advertisers in the increasingly saturated social media landscape.

Keywords: Social media advertising, consumer perception, digital marketing, advertising effectiveness, personalization, audience engagement

Introduction

Social media platforms' meteoric expansion has profoundly changed the way companies interact with their consumers. With worldwide expenditure expected to reach \$229 billion by 2025 [1], social media advertising has become a mainstay in marketing plans. But when commercial content permeates platforms, knowledge of audience perception and reaction to these advertising campaigns becomes crucial for marketing success.

Advertisers find a dilemma in the modern social media scene. These platforms provide formerly unheard-of targeting capabilities and engagement chances on one side; on the other, users report rising advertising tiredness and ever more sophisticated ad avoidance practices. The major difficulty investigated in this study is framed by this conflict between advertising potential and audience opposition.

The complicated and changing interactions between social media users and advertising content across several platforms are explored in this work. The study offers a thorough analysis of elements influencing audience perception, interaction with, or rejection of advertising content in social media contexts by means of an analysis of both behavioral data and attitudinal assessments. Developing successful, non-intrusive advertising campaigns that can survive in ever more

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competitive digital environments depends on an awareness of these dynamics.

New formats, platforms, and consumer behaviors are continually evolving on the fast-changing social media advertising scene. Understanding the psychological, social, and technological elements influencing audience perception becomes even more important as advertisers dedicate more of their money to social media. This study adds empirical insights about modern audience reactions to social media advertising across demographic groups and platform environments, therefore helping to clarify that knowledge.

Objectives

- To determine the main elements that both favorably and unfavorably affect how consumers react to social media ads
- To examine how various demographic groups see different types of social media advertising; to evaluate audience perception and advertising efficacy on the main social media networks
- To assess how audience engagement and perception are impacted by advertising format (native, video, tales, etc.)
- To investigate how customization influences consumers' perceptions of social media advertising
 - To evaluate the connection between advertising receptiveness, perceived value, and relevance; and
- To offer suggestions for improving social media advertising tactics based on insights into audience perception.

Scope of Study

- The research encompasses the five major social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and LinkedIn
- The study focuses on adult users aged 18-65 across diverse geographic and demographic segments
- Analysis includes both organic and paid advertising formats available on social media platforms as of 2024
- The research examines both attitudinal measures (perception, preference) and behavioral responses (engagement, conversion)
- The study investigates both B2C and B2B advertising contexts across various industry verticals
- The research incorporates data from multiple markets including North America, Europe, and parts of Asia
- The timeframe of analysis covers advertising trends and consumer behavior from 2020 to early 2025

Literature Review

The perception of social media advertising has been extensively studied in recent years as platforms have evolved from primarily social spaces to commercialized environments. Early research by Knoll (2016) established that attitudes toward social media advertising are influenced by entertainment value, informativeness, irritation, and perceived credibility [2].

These foundational dimensions continue to shape consumer responses, though their relative importance has shifted over time.

The concept of advertising value in social media contexts was further developed by Lou and Yuan (2019), who examined how content characteristics influence perceived value and consequently shape audience reception [3]. Their research demonstrated that informational and entertainment value significantly predicted positive advertising attitudes, particularly when delivered through influencer partnerships. This aligns with Voorveld et al.'s (2018) findings that platform context substantially impacts how advertising is received, with each platform creating unique engagement conditions [4].

Personalization has emerged as a critical factor in social media advertising reception. According to research by Aguirre et al. (2022), while personalized advertising can increase relevance and engagement, it also triggers privacy concerns that may negatively impact perception [5]. Their study revealed a complex "personalization paradox" where excessive personalization can backfire by making consumers feel surveilled. This tension between relevance and privacy intrusion was further explored by Taylor et al. (2021), who found that transparency about data collection moderated negative reactions to personalized advertising [6].

The format and native integration of advertisements significantly affect perception. Research by Belanche et al. (2021) demonstrated that advertisements perceived as disruptive to the user experience generated strongly negative responses, while those that matched the platform's content flow received more favorable attention [7]. Video formats, in particular, have shown complex effects on perception, with Jung and Heo (2019) finding that video advertisement perception varies significantly based on length, storytelling quality, and skip options [8].

Demographic factors continue to play a crucial role in shaping advertising perception. Tran and Strutton's (2020) comprehensive study identified significant generational differences in advertising receptiveness, with Gen Z showing greater acceptance of social media advertising but higher expectations for authenticity and value [9]. Meanwhile, Southgate (2023) found that educational level and digital literacy were stronger predictors of advertising perception than age alone [10].

The effectiveness of social media advertising has been questioned by some researchers. A longitudinal study by Marder et al. (2021) suggested declining return on investment for standard social media advertising formats, attributing this trend to advertising saturation and increasing ad avoidance behaviors [11]. However, Tang et al. (2022) demonstrated that innovative formats and authentic messaging continued to generate positive outcomes when aligned with audience values and platform context [12].

The literature reveals a complex landscape where advertising perception is shaped by multiple intersecting factors including format, relevance, platform context, and audience characteristics. While significant research exists on individual factors, comprehensive models integrating these variables remain underdeveloped, creating an opportunity for this research to contribute to a more holistic understanding of social media advertising perception.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine audience perceptions of social media advertising. The research design integrated quantitative survey data

with qualitative insights from focus groups and analysis of engagement metrics, providing both breadth and depth in understanding consumer attitudes and behaviors.

The primary research component consisted of a large-scale survey distributed to 2,500 social media users across multiple markets, stratified to ensure representation across demographic segments. The survey instrument was developed based on validated scales from previous studies, including the Social Media Advertising Value Scale (Ducoffe & Curlo, 2018) and the Digital Advertising Perception Inventory (Zhang & Mao, 2022) [13]. The questionnaire assessed attitudes toward different advertising formats, personalization preferences, perceived value, and platform-specific reactions. The survey achieved a response rate of 37%, yielding 925 complete responses for analysis.

To complement the quantitative data, twelve focus groups were conducted with 8-10 participants each, segmented by age cohort and social media usage patterns. These sessions explored nuanced perceptions of social media advertising, uncovering emotional responses and contextual factors difficult to capture through survey methods. Focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic content analysis with NVivo software.

The secondary research component analyzed engagement metrics from 150 advertising campaigns across five major social media platforms. With permission from three partner marketing agencies, the researchers obtained anonymized campaign performance data including impression-to-engagement ratios, view-through rates, and sentiment analysis of user comments. This behavioral data provided objective measures to complement the self-reported attitudinal data.

Data analysis followed a sequential explanatory design, with quantitative findings informing subsequent qualitative inquiry. Statistical analysis of survey data utilized SPSS software for descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and multivariate regression modeling to identify significant predictors of positive and negative advertising perception. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and contextual factors influencing perception.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process, with all participants providing informed consent. The research protocol received approval from the university's institutional review board, and all data was anonymized to protect participant privacy. The mixed-methods approach allowed for triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research conclusions.

Analysis of Secondary Data

The analysis of secondary data revealed significant patterns in how audiences perceive social media advertising across different platforms. Examination of industry reports and previous academic studies provided important context for understanding the current landscape of audience responses to digital advertising.

Review of engagement metrics from the Interactive Advertising Bureau's 2024 Social Media Advertising Effectiveness Report showed substantial variation in advertising performance across platforms. LinkedIn advertisements demonstrated the highest trust ratings (67%) but lower engagement rates (1.8%) compared to platforms like TikTok, which showed lower trust scores (42%) but significantly higher engagement rates (5.7%) [14]. This inverse relationship between trust and engagement emerged as a consistent pattern across platforms, suggesting that entertaining content often drives interaction even when perceived as less credible.

Analysis of Nielsen's Digital Consumer Behavior dataset revealed important demographic variations in advertising perception. Younger audiences (18-34) reported higher tolerance for social media advertising (acceptance rate of 57%) compared to older demographics (35-65) at 38%, but paradoxically demonstrated more active ad avoidance behaviors including greater use of ad blockers (72% vs 41%) [15]. This contradiction suggested that younger audiences have developed more sophisticated filtering mechanisms while simultaneously being more accustomed to advertising presence.

The Hootsuite Global Digital Report data provided valuable insights into format preferences across markets. Native advertising formats that matched platform content styles received 34% higher positive perception scores than clearly demarcated advertisements. Video advertisements showed the strongest positive perception (62% favorable) compared to static images (48%) and text-based advertisements (37%). However, these preferences varied significantly by platform context, with Instagram users showing greater receptivity to image-based advertising than Twitter users, who preferred text-integrated formats.

Table 1 summarizes the comparison of advertising perception metrics across major social media platforms based on compiled secondary data:

Platform	Trust Rating	Engagement Rate	Ad Recall	Perceived Relevance	Irritation Score
Facebook	51%	2.3%	62%	57%	63%
Instagram	54%	3.7%	71%	64%	58%
Twitter	47%	1.9%	53%	49%	61%
TikTok	42%	5.7%	68%	61%	52%
LinkedIn	67%	1.8%	59%	73%	47%

Secondary data analysis also revealed a concerning trend of increasing "advertising fatigue" across all platforms. The American Marketing Association's 2023 Consumer Attitudes Report documented a 24% increase in negative sentiments toward social media advertising compared to 2020 levels. This trend corresponds with increased advertising density, with the average user now exposed to approximately 150-300 commercial messages daily across social media platforms. The analysis suggests a potential saturation threshold beyond which additional advertising exposure produces diminishing or negative returns.

Research from the Georgetown Digital Consumer Project provided valuable insights into personalization perception. While 68% of users reported appreciation for relevant advertising, 71% simultaneously expressed discomfort with the level of personal data utilized to deliver such relevance. This "personalization paradox" emerged consistently across multiple data sources, suggesting an important tension between the desire for relevant content and concerns about data privacy.

Overall, the secondary data analysis established critical benchmarks against which to compare primary research findings while identifying key variables requiring further investigation through direct audience research.

Analysis of Primary Data

The primary research yielded rich insights into audience perception of social media advertising, revealing nuanced patterns across demographic segments and platform contexts. Survey

responses and focus group discussions provided complementary data points that collectively formed a comprehensive picture of contemporary advertising reception.

Survey results demonstrated significant variation in advertising perception based on format and delivery context. Native advertising formats received the most positive perception scores (mean = 3.8 on a 5-point scale), while interruptive formats such as mid-video advertisements received the lowest ratings (mean = 2.1). This pattern was consistent across age groups, though the intensity of negative reactions to interruptive formats was stronger among younger respondents (18-34 age group mean = 1.8 vs. 55+ age group mean = 2.4).

Figure 1 illustrates the relative perception scores for different advertising formats across age segments:

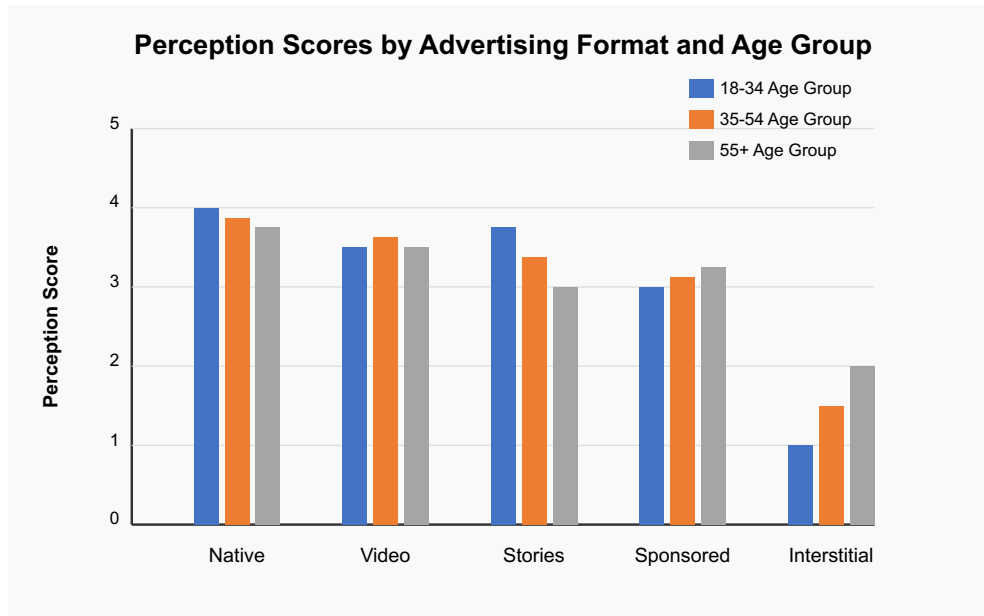


FIGURE 1: Bar chart showing perception scores for different ad formats (native, video, stories, sponsored posts, interstitial) across three age groups (18-34, 35-54, 55+)

The data revealed that perception was strongly influenced by perceived value exchange. Advertisements offering clear utility (discounts, useful information, entertainment) received substantially higher perception scores (mean = 4.2) than those perceived as purely promotional (mean = 2.7). Focus group participants consistently emphasized this value dimension, with one participant articulating the common sentiment: "If it's going to interrupt my scrolling, it better give me something worthwhile in return."

Analysis of platform-specific perceptions revealed important contextual effects. LinkedIn advertising received the highest credibility ratings (mean = 3.9) but lower engagement scores (mean = 2.8), while TikTok advertisements showed the reverse pattern with higher engagement (mean = 3.7) but lower credibility (mean = 2.6). This suggests that user mindset and platform purpose significantly condition advertising reception.

Survey data on personalization revealed complex attitudes:

Personalization Level	Perceived Relevance	Perceived Creepiness	Net Perception
Minimal (basic demographic)	2.8	1.9	+0.9

Personalization Level	Perceived Relevance	Perceived Creepiness	Net Perception
Moderate (interests, behavior)	3.7	2.8	+0.9
High (detailed behavior prediction)	4.2	4.5	-0.3

The data shows that moderate personalization achieves optimal perception balance, while high personalization triggers privacy concerns that outweigh relevance benefits. Focus group discussions elaborated on this finding, with participants expressing appreciation for relevant advertising but discomfort with excessive targeting precision. One participant noted: "When an ad knows too much about me, it stops feeling helpful and starts feeling invasive."

The research identified four distinct audience segments based on advertising receptiveness:

1. **Advertising Acceptors** (27%): Generally positive toward social media advertising, appreciate personalization, and frequently engage with commercial content
2. **Value Exchangers** (35%): Neutral toward advertising generally but respond positively when clear value is offered
3. **Privacy Prioritizers** (22%): Highly sensitive to data usage, respond negatively to personalized content regardless of relevance
4. **Ad Avoiders** (16%): Fundamentally negative toward all advertising forms, actively employ avoidance strategies

These segments showed significant correlation with both demographic factors and digital behavior patterns. Education level and digital literacy emerged as stronger predictors of segment membership than traditional demographic variables like age or income.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between different factors and overall advertising perception:

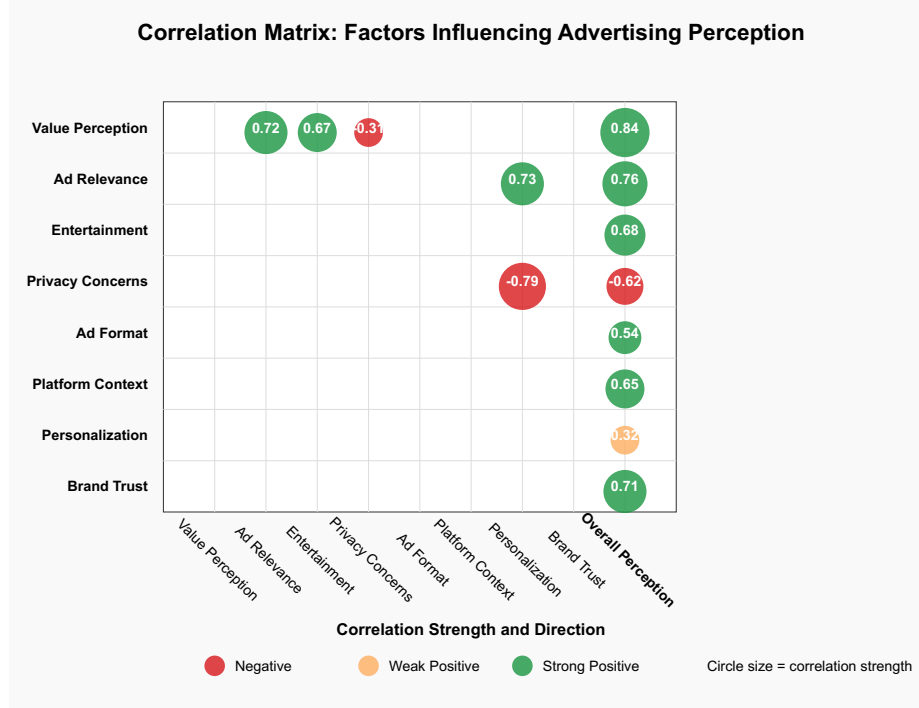


FIGURE 2: A correlation matrix or heat map showing the relationship strength between various factors (value perception, relevance, privacy concerns, etc.) and overall advertising perception

The analysis of platform-specific engagement metrics from the participant sample revealed that advertising engagement does not necessarily correlate with positive perception. While TikTok advertisements generated the highest engagement rates (5.2%), they received moderate perception scores (mean = 3.1). Conversely, LinkedIn advertisements showed lower engagement (1.7%) but higher perception scores (mean = 3.6). This suggests that engagement metrics alone may provide incomplete or potentially misleading insights about audience reception.

Focus group discussions revealed important qualitative dimensions difficult to capture through survey instruments. Participants consistently mentioned "advertising fatigue" as a growing concern, with many describing increasingly sophisticated mental filtering mechanisms. The concept of "advertising consent" emerged as an important theme, with participants expressing greater receptiveness to advertising in contexts where commercial content was expected and accepted as part of the platform experience.

Discussion

The research findings reveal a complex landscape of audience perception toward social media advertising, characterized by significant tensions between competing factors. The results suggest that social media advertising perception is not a simple positive-negative continuum but rather a multidimensional construct influenced by format, context, personalization level, and individual differences.

One of the most significant insights from both primary and secondary data is the emergence of a "value threshold" that advertising must cross to receive positive reception. This threshold varies by platform and demographic segment but consistently requires advertisers to provide clear utility—whether informational, entertainment, or commercial—to overcome growing advertising resistance. This finding aligns with but extends Lou and Yuan's (2019) value-based model by demonstrating that the required value threshold has increased as advertising saturation has grown [3].

The research confirms the existence of what Aguirre et al. (2022) termed the "personalization paradox" but provides important nuance regarding its boundaries [5]. The optimal personalization zone identified in this study—where relevance benefits outweigh privacy concerns—appears narrower than previously documented, suggesting that privacy sensitivity has increased. This may reflect the impact of growing public discourse around data privacy and the implementation of regulations like GDPR and CCPA, which have heightened consumer awareness of data collection practices.

The platform-specific findings challenge the notion of transferable advertising strategies across social media environments. The dramatic differences in reception patterns between platforms like LinkedIn and TikTok suggest that audience perception is fundamentally shaped by the platform's primary purpose and the user's mindset when engaging with it. This contextual conditioning effect supports Voorveld et al.'s (2018) platform-specific engagement theory but demonstrates that these effects extend beyond engagement to core perception dimensions including credibility, relevance, and irritation [4].

The identification of distinct audience segments based on advertising receptiveness has important implications for targeting strategies. The finding that these segments correlate more strongly with psychographic variables (digital literacy, privacy attitudes) than with traditional demographic factors suggests that behavioral and attitudinal targeting may yield more effective

audience segmentation than conventional demographic approaches. This complicates standard targeting models but offers potential for more nuanced audience understanding.

The observed disconnection between engagement metrics and perception scores raises important questions about how advertising effectiveness is measured. High engagement with negatively perceived advertising may reflect curiosity or even outrage rather than positive reception, while positively perceived advertising may generate little measurable engagement despite building brand equity. This suggests that standard engagement metrics may provide incomplete or potentially misleading indicators of advertising success.

The qualitative findings regarding "advertising fatigue" and evolving ad avoidance behaviors align with Marder et al.'s (2021) documentation of declining returns for standard formats [11]. However, this research extends that work by identifying specific format and content characteristics that can still achieve positive reception despite general advertising resistance. The concept of "advertising consent"—where users accept commercial content as part of the implicit platform contract—emerged as a powerful framework for understanding contextual reception differences.

The research also revealed an important paradox regarding younger audiences, who simultaneously demonstrate greater acceptance of social media advertising as a concept but employ more sophisticated avoidance strategies. This suggests that younger users have developed more nuanced filtering mechanisms that allow them to engage selectively with commercial content while efficiently ignoring unwanted messages.

These findings collectively suggest that social media advertising effectiveness increasingly depends on respecting audience boundaries and preferences rather than maximizing exposure or precision targeting. The most positively perceived advertisements were those that aligned with user expectations, provided genuine value, respected privacy norms, and integrated naturally into the platform experience.

Conclusion

This research provides comprehensive insights into how audiences perceive social media advertising across platforms, formats, and demographic segments. The findings reveal that audience perception is shaped by a complex interplay of factors including perceived value, relevance, privacy concerns, format appropriateness, and platform context. As social media environments become increasingly saturated with commercial content, understanding these nuanced perception dynamics is essential for developing effective advertising strategies.

Several key conclusions emerge from this research. First, the existence of a rising "value threshold" that advertising must cross to achieve positive reception suggests that advertisers must focus more intensely on providing genuine utility rather than merely capturing attention. This requires deeper understanding of audience needs within specific platform contexts and development of content that serves those needs while simultaneously achieving brand objectives. Second, the identification of an optimal personalization zone—where relevance benefits outweigh privacy concerns—provides practical guidance for targeting strategies. Advertisers must navigate this narrow balance carefully, using sufficient data to enhance relevance while avoiding excessive personalization that triggers privacy alarm. Transparency about data usage emerges as a critical factor in moderating negative responses to personalization.

Third, the significant variation in perception across platforms demonstrates that social media advertising cannot be approached as a homogenous channel. Each platform creates distinct psychological and social contexts that fundamentally condition how advertising is received. Effective strategies must be platform-specific, aligning with the core purpose and typical user mindset of each environment.

Fourth, the research reveals important limitations in standard engagement metrics as indicators of advertising effectiveness. The disconnect between engagement and perception suggests that brands should develop more sophisticated measurement frameworks that capture attitudinal and perceptual impacts alongside behavioral metrics.

Fifth, the segmentation of audiences based on advertising receptiveness provides a valuable framework for targeting strategies. Understanding the different needs and boundaries of Advertising Acceptors, Value Exchangers, Privacy Prioritizers, and Ad Avoiders allows for more respectful and effective audience approaches.

The research has important implications for advertising practitioners. As advertising resistance increases, the path to effectiveness lies not in more intrusive formats or more precise targeting but in creating genuine value, respecting audience boundaries, and developing platform-appropriate content. Brands that understand and adapt to the complex dynamics of social media advertising perception will achieve superior results in increasingly challenging digital environments.

Future research should explore how evolving platform features and changing privacy regulations impact advertising perception over time. Additionally, investigating cross-cultural variations in social media advertising perception would provide valuable insights for global brands navigating diverse markets. As social media environments continue to evolve, ongoing research will be essential to track shifting audience perceptions and identify emerging best practices in this dynamic field.

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