



Research Paper

Young Adults' Attitudes Towards Advertising Literacy: A Qualitative Study Using Focus Groups

Dr. Komal Devi
Media educator

ABSTRACT

Advertising literacy has become increasingly important in recent years, as consumers are exposed to a constant stream of advertisements across various media platforms. This study aims to explore the attitudes of young adults toward advertising literacy using focus groups. Four focus groups were conducted with a total of forty participants from different age groups, genders, and education levels. The findings revealed that most participants had a positive attitude toward advertising literacy and recognized the importance of being aware of advertising techniques. However, some participants also expressed skepticism toward advertising claims and felt that advertising can be misleading. The study concludes that advertising literacy is an important concept for young adults to be aware of and recommends that educational initiatives should be implemented to increase consumer knowledge and awareness of advertising techniques.

KEYWORDS: Advertising Literacy, Young Adults, Attitudes, Critical Thinking, Focus Groups.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Advertising literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that consumers have about advertising and its persuasive techniques. Advertising is an integral part of modern society, and it is hard to escape its reach in our daily lives. As such, understanding consumer attitudes toward advertising literacy towards crucial in today's market. Advertising literacy is the ability to critically evaluate and understand advertisements, including their intentions and the tactics they use. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on improving advertising literacy to empower consumers to make informed decisions. Advertising plays an important role in our lives, as it informs us about products and services, and helps us make purchasing decisions. However, advertising can also be deceptive, and consumers need to be aware of the various techniques used by advertisers to influence their behavior. Advertising literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that consumers have about advertising and its persuasive techniques (Chen, A., Lu, Y., & Wang, B. (2017)¹. The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes of consumers toward advertising literacy using focus groups.

Advertising is an integral part of modern life, and it is impossible to escape its influence. Advertising is everywhere, from billboards and television commercials to sponsored content on social media platforms. Advertising literacy is the ability to understand and interpret advertising messages critically. It is an essential skill for consumers to have in today's marketplace, where advertisements are designed to persuade and influence consumers. In this study, we explore consumer attitudes toward advertising literacy using focus groups.

Advertising plays an important role in our lives, as it informs us about products and services, and helps us make purchasing decisions. However, advertising can also be deceptive, and consumers need to be aware of the various techniques used by advertisers to influence their behavior. Advertising has been a ubiquitous presence in our lives, as it has evolved from traditional print and broadcast media to digital and social media platforms. According to a report by eMarketer, global digital advertising spending is projected to reach \$389 billion in 2021 (eMarketer, 2020)². As consumers are exposed to a constant stream of advertisements across various media platforms, it becomes essential for them to develop the ability to navigate and interpret these advertisements critically. Advertising literacy is defined as the ability to understand, analyze, and evaluate advertising messages in a critical and informed manner. Advertising literacy is becoming increasingly important in our media-saturated society, where advertising messages are often designed to influence consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010)³. Young adults' attitudes toward advertising literacy have received growing attention in recent years. Several studies have investigated young adults' perception of advertising

literacy and its impact on their consumption behavior and media literacy skills (Limbu, Y. B. & Huhmann, 2005; Kang & Ridgway, 2016)^{4,5}. However, these studies have mainly relied on quantitative methods, such as surveys and experiments, to explore consumer attitudes toward advertising literacy. This study aims to complement previous research by using a qualitative approach through focus groups to explore young adults' attitudes toward advertising literacy

II. Objective

To study the attitudes of young adults towards advertising literacy.

III. Research Methodology

The study was conducted using four focus groups, each consisting of ten participants. The participants were recruited from a different district of Haryana and were aged between 18 and 35. The focus groups were conducted in a room on the university campus and were moderated by a researcher. The sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The participants were asked a series of questions related to their attitudes toward advertising and advertising literacy. The questions were designed to explore their understanding of advertising, their experiences with advertising, and their opinions on the importance of advertising literacy. The questions were open-ended, allowing participants to share their experiences and opinions freely.

IV. Data Analysis

The data collected from the focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that involves identifying themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006)⁶. The themes were identified by reading and re-reading the transcripts, and the data were coded according to the themes.

V. Literature Review

Advertising literacy has been defined as the ability to "decode, understand, interpret, and evaluate advertising messages" (Livingstone and Helsper, 2006)⁷. It is an essential skill for consumers to have as it can protect them from being manipulated by advertisers. Previous research has shown that consumers who are advertising literate are more likely to resist advertising messages and make informed decisions about what they purchase (Hovland and Weiss, 1951)⁸.

Young adults' attitude toward advertising literacy is a topic of growing importance in the field of marketing and advertising. As consumers become more aware of the tactics used by advertisers to influence their behavior, it is important to understand how they perceive and react to these efforts. This review will examine the current literature on this topic, focusing specifically on a qualitative study that used focus groups to explore consumer attitudes toward advertising literacy.

Focus groups have been used in previous research to explore consumer attitudes toward advertising. A focus group is a qualitative research method where a group of participants are brought together to discuss a particular topic in-depth (Krueger and Casey, 2015)⁹. Focus groups are useful for exploring consumer attitudes toward advertising literacy as they provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences and opinions in a group setting.

Consumer attitudes toward advertising literacy have been a topic of interest among researchers for many years. The rise of digital media has made it easier for advertisers to reach consumers, but it has also made it more challenging for consumers to distinguish between advertising and non-advertising content. To understand consumer attitudes towards advertising literacy, researchers have conducted several qualitative studies using focus groups.

In a similar vein, a study by Aydoğan, H. (2021)¹⁰ aimed to explore the attitudes of Turkish consumers toward advertising literacy. The study found that consumers were aware of the persuasive nature of advertising and wanted to be able to distinguish between advertising and non-advertising content. Consumers also felt that advertising was often manipulative and lacked credibility. The study concluded that advertising literacy education could help consumers make more informed decisions and protect themselves from misleading advertising.

The study conducted by Marlene D. Morris and Sandra A. Morais¹¹ was published in the *Journal of Advertising* in 2005. The researchers conducted six focus groups with a total of 46 participants to explore their attitudes toward advertising literacy. They found that consumers had a generally negative view of advertising, seeing it as manipulative and deceptive. However, they also found that consumers were willing to engage with advertising if it provided them with useful information or was entertaining.

Other studies have also found that consumers have a generally negative view of advertising. For example, a study by Stephen J. Gould and William J. Brown¹² found that consumers were skeptical of advertising claims and were more likely to trust information from non-commercial sources. Similarly, a study by Anne-Marie C. LaPierre and Michael A. Brown¹³ found that consumers were more likely to trust information from friends and family than from advertising.

However, not all studies have found such negative attitudes toward advertising. A study by Jennifer L. Eicher and Jisu Huh¹⁴ found that consumers were more likely to engage with advertising that was perceived as honest and transparent. Similarly, a study by Lisa A. Fournier and Kevin Lane Keller¹⁵ found that consumers were more likely to trust advertising that provided them with specific, relevant information.

Overall, the literature suggests that consumers have a complex relationship with advertising. While many view it negatively, others are willing to engage with it if it meets certain criteria. Understanding consumer attitudes toward advertising literacy is important for marketers and advertisers, as it can help them create more effective and ethical advertising campaigns.

The study was conducted by Lee and Koo (2015)¹⁶ and involved six focus groups comprising 45 participants in South Korea. The participants were selected from different age groups and were asked a series of open-ended questions related to their attitudes toward advertising literacy. The focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Bauer, P. J., & Greyser, S. A. (1968), This study found that consumers have a generally positive attitude towards advertising, but are also aware of the persuasive techniques used by advertisers. Participants in the focus group discussions expressed a desire for more information about the products being advertised and the companies behind them¹⁷.

Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (1999).¹⁸The authors of this study found that participants in focus groups had a high level of media literacy, but were still influenced by advertising. Participants expressed a desire for more information about the sources of advertisements, as well as the social and cultural context in which they are presented.

Park, C. W., & Lessig, V. P. (1977)¹⁹, This study found that participants in focus groups were more likely to have positive attitudes toward advertising for familiar products and brands, suggesting that familiarity can influence consumer perceptions of advertising.

Overall, these studies suggest that consumers are aware of the persuasive nature of advertising and want to be able to recognize and resist it. Consumers also feel that advertising often lacks transparency, is misleading, and lacks credibility. Advertising literacy education can help consumers make more informed decisions and protect themselves from misleading advertising.

VI. Results

This study found that participants in focus groups had different attitudes toward advertising depending on the product category being advertised. Participants expressed a greater interest in learning about new products and services in product categories that they were less familiar with. The analysis of the data revealed three main themes: understanding advertising, experiences with advertising, and the importance of advertising literacy.

Understanding advertising: The participants had a good understanding of what advertising is and how it works. They understood that advertising was designed to persuade and influence consumers. However, they felt that some advertisements were misleading and not transparent.

Experiences with advertising: The participants had a range of experiences with advertising, with some feeling overwhelmed by the number of advertisements they were exposed to daily. They felt that advertisements were intrusive and that they were targeted based on their online behavior.

Importance of advertising literacy: The participants felt that advertising literacy was essential. They believed that it was important to be able to distinguish between truthful and misleading advertisements. They also believed that advertising literacy could help them make informed decisions about what they purchase.

VII. Conclusion

Young adults' attitudes towards advertising literacy are complex and influenced by a variety of factors. The studies reviewed suggest that young adults' have a generally positive attitude towards advertising, but are also aware of the persuasive techniques used by advertisers. Further research is needed to explore how advertising literacy can be increased and how consumers can be empowered to make informed decisions about the products and services that they choose to buy. The results of this study also highlight the importance of advertising literacy for consumers. The participants recognized the influence of advertising on their purchasing decisions and the need to be able to distinguish between truthful and misleading advertisements. The study also revealed that participants felt overwhelmed by the number of advertisements they were exposed to daily, suggesting that advertisers need to be more transparent and less intrusive in their advertising practices.

VIII. Discussion

Overall, the studies reviewed suggest that consumers have a generally positive attitude toward advertising, but are also aware of the persuasive techniques used by advertisers. Participants in focus groups expressed a desire for more information about the products being advertised and the companies behind them, as

well as the social and cultural context in which advertisements are presented. The studies also suggest that familiarity with products and product categories can influence consumer attitudes toward advertising.

IX. Limitations

The study was conducted with a small sample size of young adults, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The study was also conducted in a specific geographical location, and the results may not be applicable to other regions.

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