

## Attitudes towards Digital Advertisements: Testing Differences between Social Media Ads and Mobile Ads

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the differences between attitudes towards the social media ads and mobile ads, the most recent and rapidly growing forms of digital advertisements. Lack of academic studies in developing countries on the most rapidly growing digital advertisements creates a research gap which was aimed to be addressed in this study. Two different surveys on similar samples were carried out to understand the attitudes towards the two different types of ads. Ducoffe's advertising value model was used as the theoretical foundation. Facebook ads were used as a proxy for social media ads and mobile advertisements were presented in the form of mobile application ads. The findings indicate that overall attitudes are negative towards both the mobile app advertisements and Facebook advertisements. Among the antecedents of attitudes, the perceived entertainment of the advertisements appeared to have the strongest effect on attitudes, while credibility appeared as the second most important factor affecting attitudes.

**Keywords:** social media ads, Facebook advertising, SNS ads, digital advertising, mobile advertising, mobile ads

### INTRODUCTION

With the rise of the Internet and mobile devices, digital media has become an imperative channel for marketing communication professionals and companies. As of 2015, 3.2 billion people were using the Internet of which 2 billion are from developing countries [1]. In line with the increasing number of consumers benefiting from the Internet and related technologies advertising carried out through digital channels is on the rise. Currently digital ads have the highest growth rates among all advertising channels throughout the world. As an outcome of global media agency Carat's study on 10 countries, advertising spending on digital channels increased by about 16% in 2015. Mobile spend growth exceeds the overall digital spending with a 51% increase in 2015 and a forecast of 44% in 2016 [2]. Various similar studies all lead to the importance and growth of digital and mobile in a rather flat advertising market [3]. This growth trend is also evident in Turkey, the application locale of this study. Digital advertising reached a volume of about 790 million USD in the first half of 2015. This figure depicts a growth of 21%. Within the digital categories, the largest growth was detected in mobile ads with nearly 70% compared to last years' same period [4].

The rise of digital advertising may be attributed to many drivers related to technological developments, globalization and changing consumer habits. Another critical reason is the decreasing reach of owned media, the digital channels organizations own and control (i.e. official websites, official social media accounts, official blogs etc.). Moreover, reach through earned media (the content created not by the organization but consumers about the organization) is also decreasing. Brands can reach between only 2% to 8% of their followers on their Facebook pages as of 2015 [5]. A few years ago in 2012, this figure was about 16% [6]. The changing algorithms of social networking sites and rapidly increasing volume of content shared worldwide are also among the major reasons deriving this phenomenon. This decline in reach lead the companies towards paid media, consequently digital ads are being utilized more each and every year [7]. This trend is seen in increasing ad spending and also

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increasing promoted posts / ads in social media. For instance, Facebook ads doubled to 17% of all posts in 2014 compared to just 9% in 2013 [6]. Following this trend social networking sites (SNS) advertising spend is expected to increase rapidly and reach to nearly \$14 billion in 2018 [8].

Within this context digital advertising and its applications such as Internet ads, banner ads, mobile ads, e-mail ads and SNS ads are all becoming areas of interest for marketing and consumer behaviour researchers. The studies in the extant literature are mostly focused on developed countries. The findings on consumer behaviour in these regions where good technological infrastructure and devices are easily accessible by a large proportion of the population may lead to conclusions that cannot be easily applied to developing or underdeveloped regions [9]. Furthermore, leaving aside the technological infrastructure, the differences between cultures were observed to lead to differing attitudes towards ads [10], [11]. This phenomenon coupled with the rapidly increasing number of available digital channels creates a research gap that should be addressed by researchers which is also the aim of the present study. Scientific studies on these rapidly growing and promising marketing communication areas will further the understanding of consumer attitudes and factors affecting it in digital settings. Thus, the objective of this study is to understand the general attitudes towards mobile and SNS ads and uncover the significant predecessors of attitudes towards these digital ads. To attain this goal two different studies were carried out in Turkey to shed light on overall attitudes, attitude development and potential differences among different types of digital ads.

## **RELEVANT LITERATURE & THEORIES**

The literature on digital advertising is mostly founded upon established traditional advertising models. These models' validity in various digital ad channels are tested and confirmed by numerous studies. Albeit an increase in the number of studies carried out in this fields, new areas of interest are always available with increasing number of channels and potential cultural difference in consumer behaviour [12]–[14]. In line with the previous studies on digital advertising, a traditional and accepted model by Ducoffe [16], [36] that can explain attitude formation in advertising is chosen as the theoretical foundation of the paper. Originally the ‘ad value’ model by Ducoffe was developed upon Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) for analysing advertising on the Internet. UGT was originally established by [15] to explain the effectiveness of mass communication media and consumers' motivations. In this model, the cognitive needs, affective needs, personal and social integrative as well as relaxation needs are considered as fundamental categories of ‘needs and gratifications’. Ducoffe [36] incorporated cognitive needs through informativeness and credibility constructs in the ad value model and affective needs through entertainment and irritation constructs. Advertising value in this sense was defined as “a subjective evaluation of the relative utility of advertisement to consumers” [16].

### **Attitudes towards Ads**

Within the digital advertising and consumer behaviour literature, numerous studies are available on different types of ads. Among these SMS ads [17], [18], email ads [19], [20], e-advertising [21], [22] and banner ads [23] are the primary areas of focus among the researchers. Social media advertisements and mobile advertisements, the focus of this study, are relatively new fields where the literature is limited compared to web advertising [24]–[28].

The findings of these studies provide diverse results. Many studies focusing on e-mail, banner, web and mobile advertising contexts [13], [17], [19], [21], [29]–[31] found that the attitudes toward these ads are negative. On the other hand, another group of similar studies for instance in Turkey [32], [33] found favourable attitudes towards new types of digital advertising. The differences detected in the literature may be attributed to differences in how the ads are presented to the consumers. For instance, web-based advertising messages pull consumers towards the content and considered pull type ads. On the other hand e-mail ads and similar messages push the content to the consumer and considered push type messages [12]. Consequently different consumer attitudes can be developed in different types of digital advertising.

Advertising on social networking sites (SNS) has similarities to other digital advertising mediums; however, there are also differences that should be emphasized. One of the major differences is the message delivery style. The messages are delivered in a more subtle way in Facebook compared to for instance web-ads. In web advertising, static banners or dynamic banners are quickly distinguishable

from the native content of the web page as advertisements. Accordingly Facebook attitudes and its antecedents may differ from other digital advertising mediums [27].

The models and theories explaining user attitudes towards ads proposed various factors as the antecedents of attitude. These factors, which are tested and mostly validated in numerous settings to affect attitudes are incorporated into the present study and deliberated in the following sections.

### **Perceived Informativeness**

The informativeness construct that is one of the major constituents of advertising value in DuCoffe’s model has its roots in UGT. Information delivery capability of a medium is accepted as a need-satisfying function in the UGT model. In line with UGT and Ducoffe’s model information provided in advertisements should have some attributes to be of any value to the consumer. Providing timely, accurate information that is relevant to its receiver is required to create value and establish positive attitudes towards ads [34], [35]. Informativeness was found to affect consumer attitudes towards ads in various digital contexts [16], [17], [36]–[38]. Consequently in line with the traditional ad models and empirical findings of researchers this factor was incorporated into the study:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Informativeness has a positive effect on attitudes towards advertisements in digital channels

### **Perceived Entertainment**

Another major factor affecting the value of advertisements and the attitudes towards them is the entertainment provided by the advertisement. The amusement that consumers get from ads is considered as one of the major predecessors of advertising value. This factor is embodied in entertainment construct in the advertising literature. According to [39], the entertainment dimension of an advertisement helps the consumers in satisfying their escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment or emotional release needs. The perceived entertainment factor was found to affect use intention and attitudes towards new technologies such as mobile devices and SNS positively [40]–[44]. In digital advertising, consumers develop positive attitudes towards the ads they perceive as entertaining and their interest and loyalty may in turn be increased by entertaining ads [17], [37], [45]–[48]. Moreover, the perceived entertainment factor emerged as the factor with the strongest effect on attitudes towards digital ads in particular studies [17], [46], [49], [50]. Thus, this factor is incorporated into the study and the following hypothesis is developed;

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Perceived entertainment positively affects attitudes towards advertisements in digital channels

### **Credibility**

In an environment where the trust to corporations are diminishing, credibility appears as an important factor affecting consumers’ attitudes. This factor is accepted as an essential element of ad value and affect attitudes towards ads [16], [51]. The advertising credibility was defined by Mackenzie and Lutz [51] as: “the extent to which the consumers perceive the claims about the brand/product advertised in the advertisement to be truthful and believable”. The credibility of an advertisement is not only related the credibility of the institution providing it but involves credibility of the message itself [51]. Consequently, the perceived reliability and trustworthiness of the advertisement message itself and the source providing it affects consumers’ attitudes towards the ad [52], [53]. This phenomenon in traditional advertising was also detected in digital mediums such as the Internet and mobile ads [37], [50], [52], [54]–[56]. Thus the following was proposed;

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Credibility has a positive effect on attitudes towards advertisements in digital channels

### **Irritation**

The increasing number of channels that relay marketing messages to consumers also create some drawbacks. The high number of messages consumers receive every day are sometimes leading to irritation among consumers. The advertisements may be perceived by consumers as confusing or distracting, which lead to decreased productivity or a loss of focus. In addition, some messages may be manipulative or even considered as offensive by consumers [16], all of which may lead to irritation. Founding upon these assumptions and observations, the irritation dimension is considered a significant factor that can reduce the value obtained from the advertisements and also believed to lead to negative attitudes towards advertisements [12], [36], [48]. Irritation may be particularly important

for messages received on SNS sites such as Facebook and mobile devices that are used for communication, viewing and sharing personal content. Consequently they both can be considered as extremely personal tools. Empirical studies on both traditional ads and digital ads found irritation factor to affect attitudes towards ads negatively. In digital settings such as mobile advertising, the irritation factor was found to shrink advertising value [17], [29], [32], [55]–[57]. Accordingly irritation was incorporated into the study and is assumed to adversely affect attitudes towards digital ads.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Irritation negatively affects attitudes towards advertisements in digital channels

## METHODOLOGY

The model developed for revealing the factors that are instrumental in attitude development is provided in Equation-1. The model is also utilized as a basis for testing potential differences among different forms of digital advertisements. Attitudes are chosen as the dependent variable and informativeness, entertainment, credibility and irritation are considered as independent variables.

$$ATT = w_0 + w_1 INF_1 + w_2 ENT_2 + w_3 CRE_3 + w_n IRT_n + \varepsilon_n \quad (1)$$

*ATT* : Attitudes;                      *ENT* : Entertainment

*INF* : Informativeness;              *CRE* : Credibility

*IRT* : Irritation                       $w_{1...n}$  : Factor scores       $\varepsilon_n$  : Error term

## Sampling & Measures & Data Collection

Two different studies were carried out in Turkey, the 7th largest country in terms of Facebook membership [58] and 20th in terms of the total number of mobile subscriptions [1]. University students and young adults were selected as the target population of this study. Both university students and young adults have remarkably high mobile device ownerships and Facebook memberships. Consequently, these groups are among the primary targets of companies promoting various forms of digital ads [59], [60]. Accordingly university students have been utilized in many respectable studies throughout the world on mobile marketing and digital marketing [56], [61]. Within this target population sample size targets were chosen to be between 300-500 considering the resources available and sample size requirements calculated in G-Power application [62]. Convenience sampling was used in the sample selection. Respondents younger than 18 years of age were excluded from the study.

The measures utilized in the study were chosen from sources frequently cited in the digital advertising literature. The entertainment, informativeness and irritation scales and items from Ducoffe [16] and Wang and Sun [9] were utilized in the study. Items from Mac Kenzie and Lutz [51]’s scale for measuring the credibility construct and items from Tsang et al. [17] and Wolin et al. [22] were used for measuring the attitudes in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire developed from aforementioned scales is translated into Turkish, then to English and back to Turkish again by three marketing academicians to institute translation accuracy. The items from relevant scales was converted into an online survey on Google Docs application and posted on Facebook pages of the researcher, his connections and various group pages. The questionnaires were also printed and distributed in four different universities by the researcher and students. The questionnaires and the data obtained by both studies were carefully screened and low-quality surveys, as well as partially completed surveys were left out of the study.

### Study-1

The first study aims to understand the users’ disposition and attitudes towards mobile application ads. This study was carried out in the beginning of 2015 and the questionnaire form is kept online for one month. A total of 489 valid questionnaires were obtained for analysis for mobile ads after screening.

**Study-2**

The second study aims to understand the users’ disposition and attitudes towards Facebook ads. The second study was carried out in the middle of 2015 and the questionnaire form was posted and kept online for one month. A total of 281 valid questionnaires for SNS ads were obtained following the screening process.

**Table1.** Comparative sample demographics

	Mobile Ads		Facebook Ads	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	202	41.3%	138	49.1%
Female	287	58.7%	143	50.9%
<i>Age</i>				
19 or below	43	8.8%	25	8.9%
20-24	389	79.6%	183	65.1%
25-29	37	7.6%	41	14.6%
30+	20	4.1%	32	11.4%
Total	489	100%	281	100%

**ANALYSIS & FINDINGS**

In assessing and attitudes towards the two different types of digital advertisements using the collected data, initially a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out. All the calculations were done in SPSS Statistics V.21. The resulting factors and item loadings are provided in Table 2. Following the factor analysis, the effects of independent variables (informativeness, entertainment, credibility and irritation) on attitudes were tested using multiple regression analysis. In addition, the factor scores of two types of digital ads were compared with each other to shed light on potential differences between consumer beliefs and attitudes towards them.

**Table2.** Factor Analysis Results

Item	ATT	ADV	ENT	CRE	INF	IRT	Communalities
ENT1			.874				.765
ENT2			.852				.726
ENT3			.831				.690
INF1					.805		.647
INF2					.861		.741
IN3					.848		.720
CRE1				.688			.473
CRE2				.825			.681
CRE3				.754			.569
CRE4				.786			.618
ADV1		.789					.623
ADV2		.825					.680
ADV3		.844					.712
ATT1	.886						.785
ATT2	.886						.785
IRT1						.860	.739
IRT2						.698	.487
IRT3						.785	.616

The factor scores for each respondent group were calculated and provided in Table 3.

Following the factor analysis, the descriptive statistics were analyzed to understand the respondents’ attitudes and its antecedents. As can be seen in this table averages are below the middle point of 5-point Likert scale. The respondents considered both advertisements methods as not entertaining (score of 2 out of 5). In terms of informativeness, mobile ads are considered neutral (3.03 on 5 point scale) whereas Facebook ads are considered to have lower informativeness (2.35). Respondents are somewhat irritated from both types of digital ads (3.25 and 3.45 out of 5) and they don’t find them credible (2.31 and 2.56). The attitudes towards digital ads are again not positive (2.09 and 2.24 on 5-point Likert scale).

**Table3.** Factor Scores Descriptive Statistics for Facebook & Mobile Ads

Descriptive Statistics Facebook & Mobile Ads		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
ENT Factor Scores	Facebook	281	2.0094	0.8415
	Mobile	489	1.9998	0.8716
INF Factor Scores	Facebook	281	2.3567	0.8226
	Mobile	489	3.0346	0.8557
IRT Factor Scores	Facebook	281	3.2418	1.0388
	Mobile	489	3.4465	0.8405
CRE Factor Scores	Facebook	281	2.3170	0.7422
	Mobile	489	2.5644	0.7679
ADV Factor Scores	SNS	281	1.9944	0.8198
	Mobile	489	2.1931	0.8462
ATT Factor Scores	Facebook	281	2.0907	0.8659
	Mobile	489	2.2372	0.9104

Subsequent to the descriptive analysis and factor analysis, the factor scores are used to carry out an independent samples t-test. Potential differences among the groups’ attitudes towards different forms of digital advertisements were tested using the t-test. Equal variance assumption for this analysis was tested by Levene's test for equality of variances, and t-test results were interpreted accordingly. In addition, multicollinearity of the dataset was tested in SPSS using linear regression. Each independent variable is considered as a dependent variable separately and put into a regression analysis with other independent variables. All the obtained VIF statistics were all between 1.2 and 1.8, lower than threshold of 3. Consequently no multicollinearity issues were detected in the data.

**Table4.** Independent samples t-test results between Facebook and Mobile app ads

Facebook vs. Mobile ads.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	t value	Significance
<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>.00956</i>	<i>.06443</i>	<i>.148</i>	<i>.882</i>
Informativeness***	-.67792	.06317	-10.732	.000
Irritation**	-.20468	.07270	-2.815	.005
Credibility***	-.24733	.05679	-4.355	.000
Attitude*	-.14647	.06696	-2.188	.029

\* $<0.05$  sign.; \*\* $<0.01$  sign.; \*\*\* $<0.001$  sign. *Italic text denotes non-significant differences.*

As can be derived from Table 3, all the factor scores were significantly different between Facebook ads and mobile ads other than the entertainment factor. Credibility, informativeness, irritation and attitudes were all significantly different between groups. In the light of these findings, we can assume that the respondents’ views towards two forms of digital advertising were not the same.

In addition to comparisons between factor scores, a multiple regression analysis was carried out using Equation-1 for each group separately to understand the effects of each factor on attitudes. The regression analysis results for Facebook and Mobile ads are provided in Table 5.

As a result of the regression analysis, all the relations tested between factors were significant except Irritation factor’s effect on attitudes towards Facebook ads at 99% or higher significance levels.

**Table5.** Facebook & Mobile Ads Attitude Formation Regression Results

	Unstandard. Coefficients		Standard. Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
<i>Facebook Ads</i>						
(Constant)	.297	.206	-		1.442	.150
Entertainment	.387	.055	.376		6.974	.000
Informativeness	.172	.062	.164		2.793	.006
Irritation	-.067	.036	-.081		-1.875	.062
Credibility	.358	.061	.307		5.862	.000
<i>Mobile Ads</i>						
(Constant)	.640	.205	-		3.124	.002
Entertainment	.512	.037	.490		13.951	.000
Informativeness	.141	.038	.133		3.676	.000
Irritation	-.157	.036	-.145		-4.344	.000
Credibility	.268	.044	.226		6.097	.000

For Facebook ads:  $R^2:0.593$ ;  $F$  value: 100.75;  $F$ -probability: 0.000

For mobile ads:  $R^2:0.688$ ;  $F$  value: 266.72;  $F$ -probability: 0.000

All the hypothesis excluding the effect of Irritation on attitudes towards Facebook ads were confirmed in this study. When we compare the two regression analysis results they lead us to similar findings for Facebook and mobile ads. In both of the models, entertainment factor appeared as the most important factor affecting attitudes followed by credibility factor. Informativeness is among the lesser important factors that affect the attitude formation. The effect of irritation is more severe in mobile ads compared to Facebook ads, where the effect is significant at only 90% level and the effect size (b coefficient) is quite low. Practical and theoretical implications of all the aforementioned findings are contemplated in the discussions and conclusions sections below.

## **DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSIONS**

The present study aims to fill a research gap in digital marketing in developing countries and offers findings from a leading country (Turkey, a large developing country between Asia and Europe) in terms of Facebook membership and mobile phone use. In an environment where the organic reach of companies is on decline and ad blocking tools are becoming more popular, marketing communication is becoming more challenging than ever. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of attitudes towards the most rapidly growing digital advertisement types, also provide practical implications that can be acted upon by marketing professionals.

The overall attitudes towards Facebook ads and mobile application ads were both found to be unfavourable in the analysis carried out. Among the respondents, only 10% held positive attitudes towards Facebook ads. Similarly but to a lower extent, the attitudes towards mobile ads were only positive for 14% of the respondents. Compared to similar studies in literature, detection of negative attitudes are consistent with Usta's [31] and Ünal's study [32] in Turkey, also in line with studies around the globe [17], [29], [57], [63], [64].

Excluding the entertainment factor, where the perceptions were identically negative among both groups, the users had more negative attitudes and perceptions towards Facebook ads. Their views towards mobile ads were significantly better. Users were more irritated by Facebook ads compared to mobile ads. This finding may be attributed to the inability to block advertisement messages on Facebook. Conversely, in mobile app ads, there is almost always the option to remove the advertisements. Users can pay a certain amount of money to remove all the advertisements in ad-supported free mobile apps. Virtually all the ad-supported mobile apps promoted in app stores have an option to pay and move up to premium/paid versions. Currently ad-supported applications are the most popular model in mobile app business, consequently consumers can choose between receiving ads or paying for not seeing the ads.

One of the major implications of the regression analysis results is that perceived entertainment of the ads is the most important factor affecting attitudes towards both types of digital ads. Conversely, informativeness appeared among the lesser/least important factors affecting attitudes. This is in line with findings of other studies on digital advertising in Taiwan, Romania and China [17], [37], [49], [50]. Consumers on digital channels can access information whenever they want using mobile devices, communication technologies and the Internet. The abundance of information and different ways to access it may have decreased the information value of advertisements, which was an important element in traditional advertising. Currently, consumers are expecting and valuing entertaining ads and develop more favourable attitudes towards them instead of informative ads.

Another critical implication of the findings is the importance of credibility. Credibility in digital channels is harder to establish in advertising compared to printed materials or TV ads where a certain budget is needed to promote the brand/product and deception is harder due to many regulatory institutions and different parties involved (advertiser, creative agency, media planning agency, publisher etc.) in the process. Conversely in digital ads, the regulations are nearly non-existent and companies with extremely low budgets can use these channels in reaching customers, both of which make it open to misconduct.

According to the findings, Facebook have not been received well by the users as a crucial advertising platform yet. A large proportion of the users find the ads provided on their news feed irritating and develop negative attitudes towards them. The Facebook ads, unfortunately, were not found informative or entertaining by the majority of the respondents. The credibility of the ads and the institutions providing them were not perceived well either. Respondents do not trust these ads which may be attributable to deceptive and misleading ads promoted on Facebook. These ads lead to credibility issues and deter creation of trust in this medium. Also the low credibility may be

attributable to unpleasant experiences the users had on Facebook regarding these ads. To overcome this problem Facebook can establish and enforce more rigid control mechanisms and may come up with systems that can deter deceptive advertisers.

The foremost limitation of the study carried out is related to sampling. The data collected was obtained from two different groups at different times. The samples were similar to each other however their views towards digital ads may be different from each other. Moreover it was impossible to randomly select the sample among the population, consequently convenience sampling was utilized. For future studies, larger samples reflecting the point of view of larger and differing customer segments may offer superior insights. This study used validated and frequently used scales and may easily be replicated by other researchers to test for potential differences between cultures.

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