Factors Influencing Consumers' Attitudes toward Social Media Marketing

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ABSTRACT: *With the growth of Internet social media has transformed itself into an innovative platform where people from different regions interact and share experiences with each other. People with common interest interact and share their experiences with the other members of the Social Networking Sites (SNS). SNSs have become a center stage for e-commerce with the phenomenal rise in the number of the SNSs users. It has become a platform where different marketers advertise their products and services. This medium has equipped the marketers in reaching their target consumers easily. The researchers in the present study have used an 18 item scale to study the factors determining attitude of the students towards advertisement over SNSs. Usefulness, Reliability and Word of Mouth Quality emerged to be the critical factors determining the attitude of the SNSs users towards the advertisements.*

KEYWORDS : *Internet, Social Media, Social Networking Sites (SNS), Social Media Marketing, Advertisements.*

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of Internet in the last decade has made it a vital part of each and every soul. The Internet users' base worldwide has grown to 3.42 billion in 2016 from 2.92 billion in 2014 (Internet Live Stats, 2016). Internet is being used for various activities like searching product features, compare prices, select and place order and make payments (Senthil, Prabhu, & Bhuvaneswari, 2013; Sinha, 2010). The fast and flexible communication competencies of the Internet has made it a platform where people communicate and exchange information with others (Ahmad, Rahman, & Khan, 2017; Ahmad, Rahman, & Khan, 2016; Ahmad & Khan, 2015). Internet has evolved itself into an interactive and collaborative from that of passive readings (Sharma, 2008). The interactive quality of the internet has given its' users a new way to interact. Online Social Networking Sites (SNS) are the digital networks in which there occurs an intrinsic connection with other members present over the site (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Social media has proved itself to be the most significant medium which has extended its root to different segments of the world population (Corbett 2009; Barnes & Mattson, 2008; Bernoff, Pflaum, & Bowen 2008). Traditional channels like television, radio, newspaper etc. delivers single-directional communication but with the advent of Internet and social media the users are able to get two-way conversations (Mayfield, 2008). Among the different types of social media SNSs have been considered to be the most important for the digital media revolution (Vogt & Knapman, 2008). It has also been reported that e-mail has been replaced by SNSs to be the most popular online activity and the primary source from where the Internet users seek information (Fuscaldo 2011; Albanesius 2010).

The growing popularity of the social networks and the ever changing lifestyle of the consumers have brought a revolution in the interaction of the consumers with different brands. The interactive

property of the social media have provided the consumers with the power to shape brand and product images through word of mouth in the online connections (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit 2011). It has been found that consumers now search brand and product related information over social network rather than the corporate websites (Dei Worldwide, 2008). With the increasing popularity of social networking sites it has grabbed the attention of the marketers as a center stage in e-commerce and they are thinking of way and means of using these sites as an advertising medium (Bausch & Han, 2006). These networks has also been used by the marketers to reach out to their target population where they are able to build relationships with their consumers on a more personal level (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010). The marketers are trying hard to use these mediums to engage their consumers (Avery et al. 2010). The marketers must keep a balance while advertising through SNSs as many users may not be fine with the unwarranted advertisements on their social mediums (Mesure & Griggs, 2007; Nutley, 2007).

2. Literature review

The growth of social media has brought a communication revolution which helps in creating social relationships platforms over the Internet. It has also helped in expanding the social ties which have increased the psychological well-being among the Internet users worldwide (Thoren et al., 2013; Nabi, Prestin, & So, 2013). In the present online landscape consumers have been turning to the Internet and social media to express their opinion and to exchange information, which have made these mediums an ideal tool for the advertisers to build relationships with their target consumers (Hair, Clark, & Shapiro, 2010). Online consumers extract the product related information from various sources, especially through the product reviews on the social networking sites (Clemons, 2009). Before actual buying of products and services, consumers continuously search for the product reviews (Akar & Topçu, 2011). It has been found that sixty percent of the online consumers do believe on the product reviews by different consumers (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). The e-wom is taken more seriously than the marketing messages (Akar & Topçu, 2011). The online consumers who use social networking sites have been found to be vital as they are supposed to be active and effective, they share their experiences with other consumers through the social media (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). If the Internet users use blogs and finds it important then it is likely that they will use them again. The intention to use the blogs again is also impacted by the level of satisfaction of the users (Shiau & Luo, 2010). The Social media users' shops through the social networking sites when they find the services over the social sites are useful as well as easy to use (Cha, 2009).

Social media marketing is the use of different forms of social media to promote the products and services of a company. These kind of online marketing activities generally completes the traditional Internet promotional strategies like e-mail and Internet advertising campaigns (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). Social media transforms the consumers into marketers and advertisers, who in turn can create positive or negative impact for the products and services offered by the company (Roberts & Kraynak, 2008). Through social media marketing individuals are capable of presenting their products and services to a large community and to get their feedback through social networking sites which is not possible in general advertisements (Weinberg, 2009). According to Ontario (2008) social networking sites helps the marketers to exchange thoughts and information related to product and services. Viral advertising has been defined as "unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to

others" (Porter & Golan, 2006). In these form of advertising campaigns the advertisers first send the message to their potential consumers who further share the information with other potential consumers (Southgate, Westoby, & Page, 2010; Dobele et al., 2007). It has gained tremendous popularity with the advent of social media. The way the consumers' responds to advertisements have dramatically changed because of the Internet and social media (Marken, 2007). Facebook and other social media have helped the marketers in transforming their target consumers to become message senders when the users share the advertising message with their group or friends (IAB, 2009).

The purchasing decision of a large chunk of Internet users are affected by the Social Networking Sites hence the use of social media as a marketing medium has become an effective marketing strategy (Miller & Lammas, 2010). It is very important for the e-retailers to understand the consumers and their activities over social media to engage them (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013; Rapp et al., 2013).

The number of researches examining the impact of word of mouth on product sales and marketing strategies, consumer product reviews and its' usefulness in consumer decision making and the usefulness of consumer reviews in sales forecasting have increased with the growing number of social network users (Chen, Wang, & Xie, 2011; Dhar & Chang 2009; Chen & Xie 2008; Sen & Lerman 2007; Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad 2007; Chevalier & Mayzlin 2006; Liu 2006; Mayzlin 2006; Smith, Menom, & Sivakumar 2005; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Youth are considered the most ideal group in online setting (Bolton et al., 2013). Thus it is very important to study the Internet and social networking patterns of this group as the behaviors of this group is likely to differ with different contexts. There are literatures demonstrating the variance in the behaviors of males and females with respect to e-commerce but generation Y is yet to be tested (Ruane & Wallace, 2013; Yeh, Hsiao, & Yang, 2012; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004; Rodgers & Harris, 2003). Generation Y is supposed to be active users of social media where they search and share product related information (Bolton et al., 2013). This group have lived their whole life in the digital environment and are profoundly affected by information technology (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008).

This study aims to study the factors which influence the attitude of the social media users towards the advertisements over the social media. The researchers in the present study have proposed a research model (Figure 1) with *Perceived Usefulness, Reliability and Word of Mouth Quality* to better explain the *Attitude* towards social media advertisements.
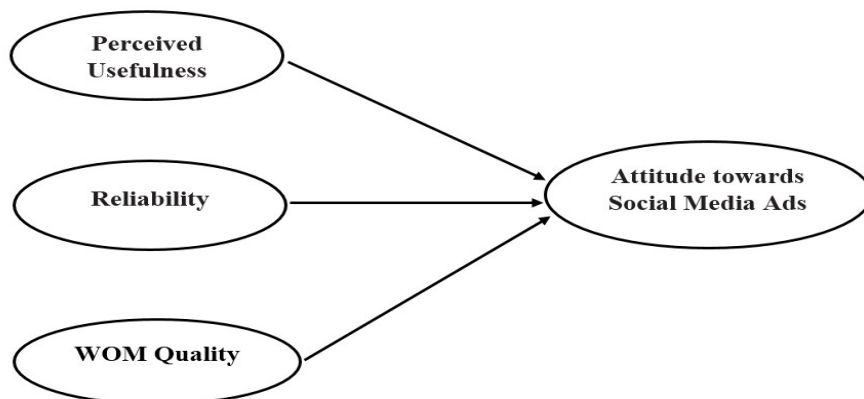

Figure 1   Research Framework

2.1 Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were proposed with respect to the above literature and the proposed research framework:

H1: Perceived Usefulness has a positive effect on Attitude towards social media advertisements.

H2: Reliability has a positive effect on Attitude towards social media advertisements.

H3: Word of mouth quality has a positive effect on Attitude towards social media advertisements.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Survey instrument

The researchers have adapted an eighteen item research instrument that comprised of 4 items on Attitude (adapted from Khare & Rakesh, 2011); 4 items on Perceived Usefulness (adapted from Childers et al.,2001) ; 7 items on Reliability (adapted from Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011); and 3 items on Word of Mouth Quality (adapted from Awad & Ragowsky, 2008). The respondents of this study were heavy Internet users having accounts in Social Networking Sites (SNSs) for the last one year.

2.2.2 The sample

India is a country of youths where around 50% of the population is below the age of 25 years (Heslop, 2014). And also the majority of the Internet users in India are young i.e. 15-24 years of age (Statista, 2016). The sample of the study comprised secondary and senior secondary school and college going students of a government funded premier central university of India. Middle class strata of the society, who are considered as the representative of the masses (Ahmad & Khan, 2017; Shabnam, 2012) are concentrated in these kind of institutions (Heslop, 2014). Thus, the sample may be deemed representative of the entire student population.

2.2.3 Scale development

The variable items were modified and rephrased by the researchers keeping in mind the profile of student respondents. As per the suggestions of Liao et al. (2011) a pilot study was conducted to check the appropriateness of the scale in the Indian context. Responses were generated from 40 social media users for the pilot study. On the basis of the responses various items were re-phrased. To check the appropriateness of the scale on Indian setting, it was analyzed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Items which cross loaded or had loadings less than 0.5 were dropped (Khan & Adil, 2013; Metin et al., 2012; Büyüköztürk, 2003; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Hair et al., 1998, Kline, 1994; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The analysis resulted in a shorter 13-item scale comprising four variables (*Attitude, Perceived Usefulness, Reliability and Word of Mouth Quality*).

2.2.4 Data collection

To collect data, the researchers employed convenient sampling technique. The refined questionnaires were administered to secondary, senior secondary, graduates and post-graduate students. The researchers personally administered the questionnaires to clarify doubts which enhances the quality of the responses (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010). A total of 195 questionnaires were distributed of which 160 questionnaires were returned. Out of the 160 returned questionnaires 140 were usable responses. Table 1 provides the summary of the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1   Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Frequency
Qualification	
Secondary & Senior Secondary	75
Graduates & Post graduate	65
Age	
Less than 17 Years	67
Above 17 Years	73
Gender	
Male	80
Female	60
See ads over social media	
Yes	133
No	07

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3. Results

3.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA was performed to determine the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization as the factor extraction method using SPSS 20. The items indicated a practical level of variance as the KMO measurement of sampling adequacy value was found to be 0.728 (KMO > .6), in addition, the Bartlett's test of Sphericity value (Chisquare = 1654.781, p < 0.005) was found to be significant (Herington & Weaven, 2007; Hair, Anderson, Tatham & William 1998), which proved that the sample size of 140 was significant for analysis. Items with value .5 or more are acceptable (Khan & Adil, 2013; Metin et al., 2012; Büyüköztürk et al., 2004; Hair et al., 1998). Table 2 shows the loadings of the various items which are found to be acceptable i.e. more than 0.6. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of Factor "Attitude" (3 items), "Perceived Usefulness" (4 items) and "Reliability" (3 items) and "Word of Mouth Quality" was found to be 0.675, 0.712, 0.693 and 0.670 respectively. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of all the four variables were within acceptable range (Khan & Adil, 2013; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Hair et al., 1998).

Table 2   Results of EFA

Constructs	Items	Code	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude	I am interested in social media advertisements	AT1	.779	0.675
	I feel comfortable with online advertisements	AT2	.784	
	My attitude toward online advertisement is positive	AT3	.678	
Perceived Usefulness	Social Networking Sites improves my shopping productivity	PU1	.789	0.712
	SNS would be useful in buying what I want	PU2	.801	
	SNS will improve my shopping ability	PU3	.684	
	SNS would enhance my effectiveness in shopping	PU4	.839	
Reliability	SNS's can be trusted to safeguard my personal information	RL1	.737	0.693
	My privacy would be guaranteed on Social Networking Sites	RL2	.756	
	Social Networking sites are reliable	RL3	.635	
WOM Quality	The reviews are relevant for me	WOM1	.613	0.670
	The reviews are helpful	WOM2	.728	
	I get the information I need in the reviews	WOM3	.746	

The proposed model was further analyzed using *Structural Equation Modelling* (SEM) to understand inter-relationships between the variables which were retained after EFA. SEM is a two-step model-building approach which involves testing the *measurement model* which is further followed by testing of hypothesized linkages through *structural model* (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair, Clark, & Shapiro, 2010).

3.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In EFA, there are certain limitations, e.g. items loading on more than one factor, although correlate statistically but they cannot be explained theoretically (Ahire, Golhar, & Waller., 1996). CFA has been recommended by the researchers to overcome the kerbs which EFA suffers from (Lee, 2008; Adil, Akhtar, & Khan, 2013). In the present study CFA was performed using AMOS 20 on the following factors, i.e., Perceived Usefulness (PU), Attitude (AT), Reliability (RL) and Word of Mouth Quality (WOM). Items loading on the respective factors were specified and the measurement model (Figure 2) was then tested for model fit.
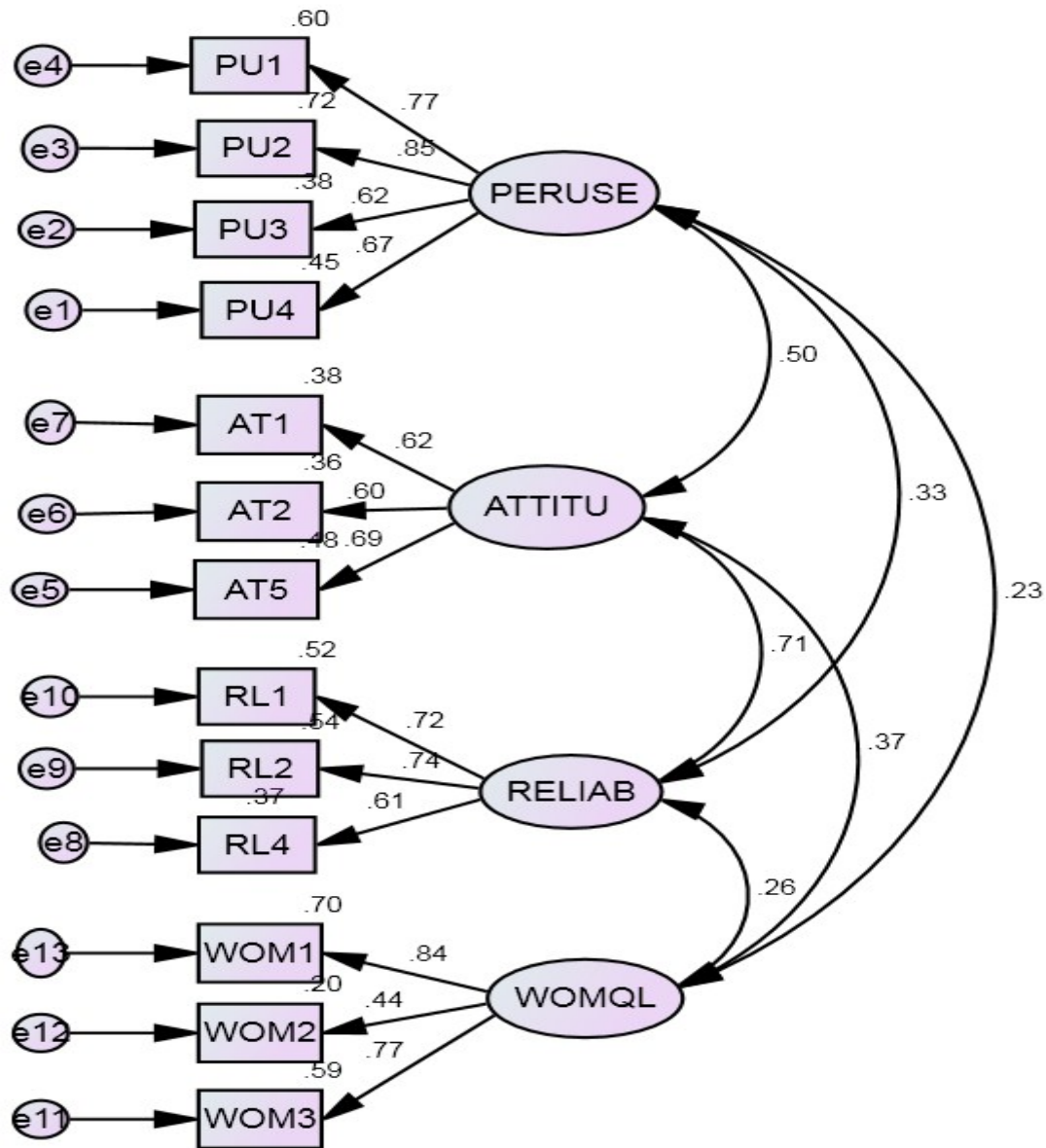
(PERUSE = Perceived Usefulness; ATTITU= Attitude; RELIAB= Reliability; WOMQL= Word of Mouth Quality)

Figure 2   Measurement Model

The items were found to be loaded in their corresponding variables and the loadings of all the items were found to be within the acceptable range (Figure 2 and Table 3). The standardized regression weights for all the items emerged to be above the minimum criterion of 0.40 (Ford, MacCallum, & Tait, 1986; Ryu, Han & Jang, 2010). The Chi-square value was found to be 135.657 with 59 degrees of freedom (p<0.05).

Table 3   Standardized Regression Weights (CFA)

			Estimate
PU4	←	PERUSE	.671
PU3	←	PERUSE	.618
PU2	←	PERUSE	.846
PU1	←	PERUSE	.772
AT5	←	ATTITU	.694
AT2	←	ATTITU	.604
AT1	←	ATTITU	.618
RL4	←	RELIAB	.606
RL2	←	RELIAB	.736
RL1	←	RELIAB	.721
WOM3	←	WOMQL	.765
WOM2	←	WOMQL	.444
WOM1	←	WOMQL	.837

The value of GFI and AGFI was found to be less than that of the desired value of 0.9 but values of CFI (.916), CMIN/DF (2.299) and RMSEA (.063) were found to be within acceptable range thus the overall model was found to be satisfactory. The overall summary of the key fit statistics for the measurement model is demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4   Model Fit Indices (CFA)

| Fit Index	Recommended Values*	Observed Values
CMIN/DF	< 3.0	2.299
GFI	0.90	.879
AGFI	0.90	.813
CFI	0.90	.916
RMSEA	< 0.070	.063

Once the model fit was found to be acceptable, each of the constructs were evaluated for composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and the correlation. The CR of all the constructs were found to be of desirable level ranging from 0.734 to 0.874 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Clark, & Shapiro, 2010; Malhotra & Dash, 2011), indicating adequate reliability of the factors.

Table 5   Validity and Correlation of the Constructs

	AT	PU	REI	WOMQ	AVE	CR
AT	*1*				0.517	0.796

PU	*.628***	*1*			0.536	0.820
REL	*.512***	*.563*	*1*		0.659	0.874
WOMQ	*.594***	*.609***	*.576*	*1*	0.494	0.734

The AVE of attitude, perceived usefulness and reliability was well above the minimum value of 0.5, whereas for word of mouth quality the value was found to be 0.494. The values of the AVE indicated adequate convergent validity of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker 1981; O'Leary-Kelly & Vokurka, 1998; Hair, Clark, & Shapiro, 2010; Ryu, Han & Jang, 2010; Khan & Adil, 2013). The CR and AVE values (Table 5) of the constructs confirms the validity and reliability of the scale.
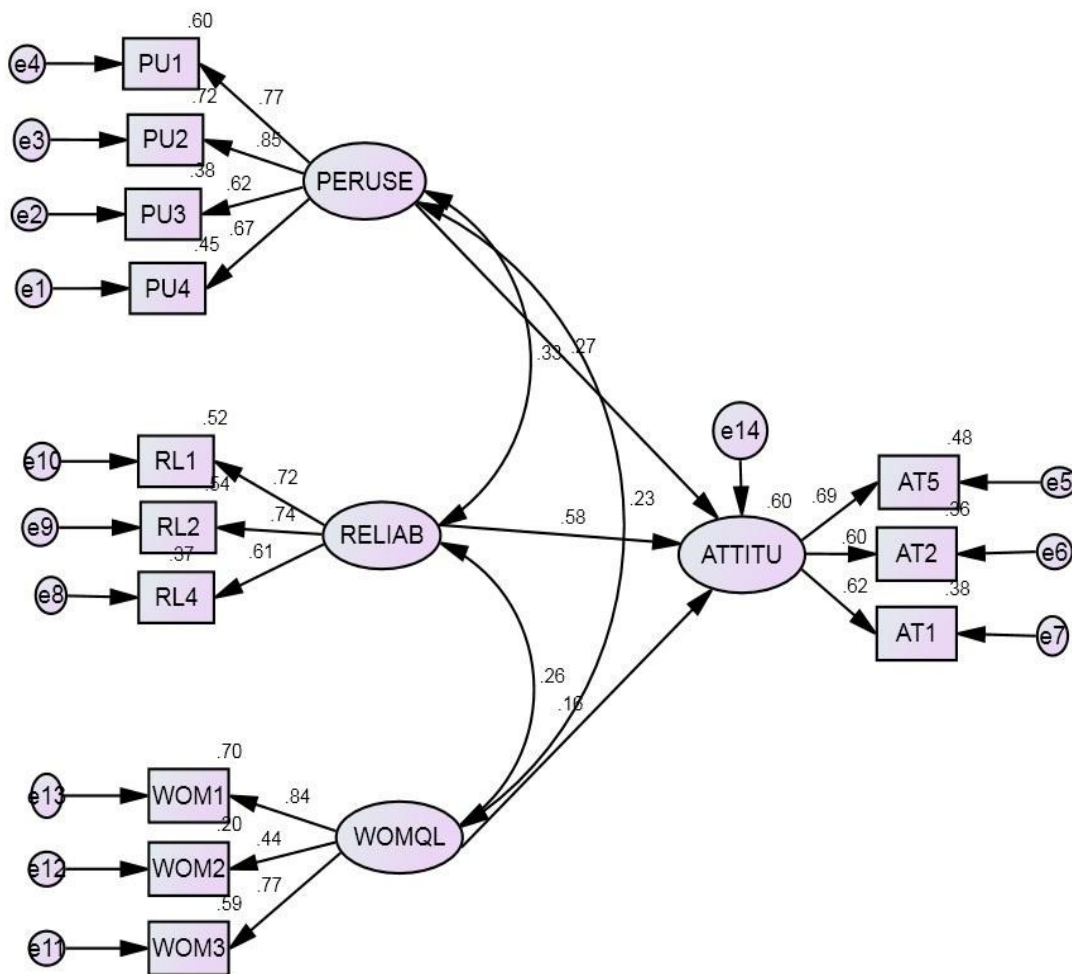
(PERUSE = Perceived Usefulness; ATTITU= Attitude; RELIAB= Reliability; WOMQL= Word of Mouth Quality)

Figure 3   SEM on Proposed Model

3.3 Structural model

The researchers further proceeded with analysis of the proposed model and the hypotheses. The structural diagram of the proposed model is presented in Figure 3. Overall the model fit indices and the goodness of-fit-measures were found to be within the acceptable levels. The value of the GFI (0.891) and AGFI (0.854) were a bit less than that of the desired value of 0.90. The values of CFI (0.908), RMSEA (0.061) and CMIN/DF (2.253) were found to be within the acceptable range. The overall summary of the key fit indices is mentioned in Table 6. Thus, the measurement model was found to be satisfactory.

Table 6   Model Fit Indices for Proposed Model (SEM)

Fit Index	Recommended Values*	Observed Values
CMIN/DF	< 3.0	2.253
GFI	0.90	.891
AGFI	0.90	.854
CFI	0.90	.908
RMSEA	< 0.070	.061

Table 7 and Figure 3 demonstrates the results of the structural model. As shown in Table 7 and Figure 3 the relationship between Attitude and the other three factors, Perceived Usefulness, Reliability and Word of Mouth Quality was found to be significant. Out of the three hypothesized relationships, two of them were found to be significant at significance level 0.01 (p<0.01), supporting H1 (Perceived Usefulness → Attitude) and H2 (Reliability → Attitude). However, the relationship of the WOMQL was found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance supporting H3 (WOMQL → Attitude). Although the findings indicate that all the three factors have a positive relationship with the dependent variable (Attitude), but the effect of reliability (.585) on attitude was found to be greater than that of the other two variables.

Table 7   Standardized Regression Weights (SEM)

			Estimates	p- value
ATTITU	←	WOMQL	.146	.039
ATTITU	←	RELIAB	.585	.000
ATTITU	←	PERUSE	.263	.000

4. Discussion & conclusion

4.1 Summary of the study

The purpose of the present study was to examine the determinants of Attitude of the Internet users toward ads over social media. The researchers in the present study have adapted an 18-item scale comprising four variables for use in the Indian settings to explore various dimensions which affects the Attitude. The EFA yielded three constructs (Perceived Usefulness, Reliability and Word of Mouth Quality) which plays a significant role in the formation of positive attitude towards the ads over social media. The results of the study produced a petite scale measuring attitude of the Internet users towards ads over social media.

The EFA and SEM analysis discovered that the proposed model of the present study very finely predicts the attitude of the Internet users towards forming a positive attitude towards ads on the social networks. The convergent and discriminant validity of all the factors of the model were within acceptable range confirming the reliability of the scale. Since all the three proposed hypothesis were supported, it can be surmised that the development of attitude of the Internet users towards advertisements over social networks is determined by PU, RELI and WOMQL. Although all the three factors have a positive impact on the attitude, the results of the present study demonstrate that reliability has the strongest effect on attitude confirming the results of earlier studies (Cheung, Lee, & Thadani, 2009; Safko & Brake, 2009; Akar & Topçu, 2011), followed by Perceived Usefulness and Word of Mouth Quality. Earlier studies have also supported the vitality of PU in the attitude formation (Islam, 2012; Chen & Tseng, 2012; Chow et al., 2012). If the Internet users gets good words about the quality or service provided, they believe the capability of the source (Pai & Huang, 2011). Since all the three variables play an important role in the attitude formation, the marketers aiming to market through social media should pay careful attention to these variables.

4.2 Implications

Social media has become a prime source for the marketers to institute the presence of their brand, this even helps in cutting down the advertising costs (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010). Social media marketing has been included by almost all the marketers world-wide. To promote products and services the marketers advertise their products and services over SNSs and even have brand pages over the SNSs (Chu, 2011; Tsai & Men, 2013). The presence over the social networking sites can prove advantageous for the marketers as the SNSs users are livelier and their chance of purchasing products online is more. While advertising their products and services over the SNSs, the marketers need to keep in mind the three variables *perceived usefulness*, *reliability* and the *word of mouth quality* which plays an important role in forming a positive attitude of the users towards the advertisement campaign.

5. Limitations and directions for future research

The study may have suffered from certain limitations. The researchers have adopted a convenience sampling and thus the findings of the study may have the limitation of generalizability. There are differences in the sample size of the two group which might have hampered the accuracy of

tests applied (Byrne *et al.*, 2007). The generalizability of the results of the research may also have been limited because of the geographic extent of the study. However, the above mentioned limitations of the study are likely indicators for various other new areas of research. The results of the study can be further validated on a large sample. Future researchers can check the differences in the different groups used for the research.

Various other occupational and educational groups need to be worked upon in the context of advertising over SNSs which might broaden the scope of the findings of the study.

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