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Using Socialization and Personalization Strategies to Mitigate Intrusiveness of Social Network Advertising

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ABSTRACT

As the rapid expansion of social network advertising (SNA), advertising intrusiveness becomes a constant challenge to marketers, platforms and users. Normally, socialization (i.e., *anthropomorphism cues*, *reference group cues* and *social endorsement cues*) and personalization advertising strategies are employed to minimize SNA intrusiveness. However, limited theoretical insights have been provided by prior research. Hence, this study aims to shed light on the influence of socialization and personalization from a information processing perspective. A 4×2 experiment was designed and conducted on the self-developed system. By doing these, this study significantly advances the literature on socialization and personalization in the context of SNA, and provides theoretical and managerial insights.

Keywords

Social network advertising, socialization, personalization, intrusiveness.

INTRODUCTION

With the prevalence of social network sites (SNS), contemporary users spend a lot of time on SNS and rely on SNS for information acquisition. In response, more and more marketers and advertisers utilize SNS as advertising channels to target and reach out to potential consumer. Social network advertising (SNA) has risen to be the second biggest channel of digital advertising. By taking advantage of users' social connections and networks established on SNS, SNA is regarded as effective in promoting and monetizing brands, merchandises and services (Bakshy, Eckles, Yan, and Rosenn, 2012). However, improper advertising exposure on SNS can cause advertising intrusiveness, which has been proved to be detrimental to both advertising effectiveness and SNS platform satisfaction (Li, Edwards, and Lee, 2002). Therefore, both marketers and SNS platforms are facing constant challenges on how to effectively embed

advertisements on social networks through newsfeeds naturally to minimize intrusiveness to users.

Previous research has demonstrated that the advertising-environment congruity would reduce advertising intrusiveness (Aggarwal and McGill, 2012; Myers and Sar, 2013). SNS is featured with socialization, reflecting users' social status and supporting a range of social activities (Zhenyu, Chunhong, Yang, and Hao, 2010). As such, to cater to the socialized advertising context, social appeals are integrated into SNA, as important supplements of commercial appeals. Commercial appeals generally refer to the design features of advertising, which convey product-related information and offer utilitarian benefits (e.g., how the product works) (Zhang, Mou, Wang and Hu, 2020), and are promoted through personalization advertising strategy. Meanwhile, social appeals are featured with highlighting social aspects about intended advertising exposure and product consumption (Myers and Sar, 2013). And normally, the socialization advertising strategy is adopted to add social appeals to SNA, that is, attaching visual social cues (e.g., *anthropomorphism cues*, *reference group cues*, and *social endorsement cues*) to SNA (Aggarwal, and McGill, 2012). However, related theoretical insights have still lagged, and thus this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the socialization advertising strategy (i.e., social appeals), influence SNA intrusiveness?

RQ2: How does the personalization advertising strategy influence SNA intrusiveness?

RQ3: What are the differences of these three types of social appeals (i.e., *anthropomorphism cues*, *reference group cues*, and *social endorsement cues*) in influencing SNA intrusiveness?

THEORY AND MODEL

Information processing theory serves as a baseline theory in this study to model and explain the influence of socialization and personalization advertising strategies on mitigating SNA

intrusiveness and optimizing the attention-intrusiveness trade-off on SNA processing. Based on this theory, we proposed our research model (shown in Figure 1). Our main hypothesis is that socialization and personalization advertising strategies would have positive main effects on attention-attracting and intrusiveness-mitigating, respectively. Furthermore, the influence of social appeals is moderated by advertising personalization.

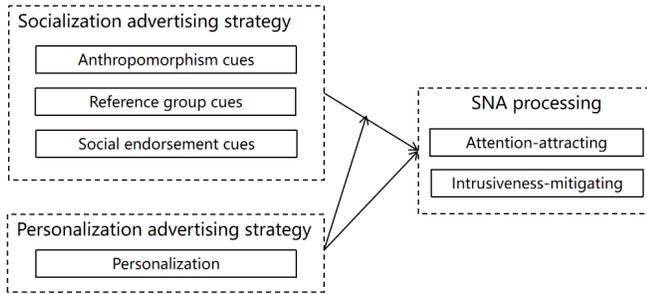


Figure 1. The research model.

In this theory, users' cognitive processing can be divided into several interactive stages, including attention-attracting, cognitive category, the activation of prior knowledge, motivation invoking, and evaluation making (Erlbaum, 1978). Attention-attracting is the first step for external stimuli to be further processed by users, and then users may try to make sense of and respond to the selected stimuli by categorizing them and invoking related prior knowledge, while users' motivation drives the whole process. Specific to the SNA processing, both personalization and socialization (i.e., social appeals) advertising strategies are visual inputs to users' cognitive systems. But personalized advertising arguments and social cues may invoke different cognitive processing. Personalized advertising arguments, like persuasive attempts, price discounts, and so on, are classified as commercial persuasion, and activate persuasion knowledge (Lieto, Radicioni, and Rho, 2016), which generally refers to as users' stereotypes of marketing campaigns, guiding them to handle persuasive attempts (Hamby and Ilyuk, 2018). And personalization is more likely to match users' needs for product information in a commercial context. On the other hand, socialization advertising strategy highlights social aspects of advertising communication and product consumption, and adopts social cues to simulate interpersonal interactions (Myers and Sar, 2013). Social cues make users "more likely to feel like they were in a social setting," and trigger their social responses (Wang, Qiu, Kim, and Benbasat, 2016, p.599). Users tend to categorize the SNA embedded with social cues into social information and invoke social scripts, the structural knowledge learned from previous social interactions, to interpret and evaluate the SNA (Wang, Baker, Wagner, and Wakefield, 2007). Different from persuasion knowledge, social scripts direct users to social responses, which are

proven to be more friendly and kindly (Hamby and Ilyuk, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

A 4 (without social appeals, anthropomorphism cues, reference group cues vs. social endorsement cues) \times 2 (personalization vs. non-personalization) between-subject factorial experiment was designed and conducted on a self-developed experimental system for data collection. We adopt popular WeChat newsfeed features for advertising exposure as our experimental context. Subjects were recruited online for a reward of 20 RMB, and they were randomly assigned to eight different experimental groups. Finally, 244 subjects have finished the experiment (30-31 subjects per group)

SPSS 26 was mainly used to analyze experimental data. A series of ANOVA analyses confirm that (1) socialization advertising strategy has positive influences on attention-attracting and intrusiveness-mitigating. Furthermore, our experimental results indicate that there is a nonlinear relationship between social cues with various levels of social validity and the SNA processing (i.e., attention-attracting and intrusiveness-mitigating). (2) Although personalization advertising strategy can increase users' attention, they also increase the intrusiveness caused by SNA. (3) As for the interactions of these two strategies, personalization advertising strategy negatively moderate the effects of social appeals on SNA processing.

In conclusion, by shedding light on the influences of widely adopted advertising strategies (i.e., socialization and personalization) on SNA processing (i.e., attention-attracting and intrusiveness-mitigating), this study provides theoretical insights into the adoption of SNA strategies and advance our knowledge in understanding underlying mechanisms of advertising intrusiveness on SNS. Hence, this study contributes significantly in advancing the literature of social media, social network advertising as well as marketing.

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