

The impact of social networking sites advertisement on consumer purchasing decision: The Mediating role of brand awareness

Reema Nofal^{a*}, Cemal Calicioglu^b and Hasan Yousef Aljuhmani^c

^aDepartment of Marketing, Girne American University, North Cyprus, via Mersin 10 Turkey

^bGirne American University, Faculty of Business and Economics, Department of Marketing, North Cyprus, via Mersin 10 Turkey

^cFaculty of Business and Economics/Centre for Management Research, Girne American University, via Mersin 10, Kyrenia, Cyprus (Northern), Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the impact of social networking sites advertisements on consumer purchase decisions. It also seeks to examine how brand awareness mediates this primary effect. The data for this study was collected based on 360 followers from student's perspectives towards major apparel brands across Girne American University in North Cyprus. Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in order to analyze the data collected. The study found that SNS advertisement had a significant impact on brand awareness, alongside consumer purchase decisions. Similarly, it found support for the mediating role of brand awareness. This research extends prior research by investigating the mediating effect of brand awareness between the SNS advertisements and purchase decision path. Finally, this study enriches social media marketing literature by providing evidence from North Cyprus.

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1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) has become the way of the early 21st century and which aims to exchange thoughts, opinion between businesses and individuals in social media platforms. Blogs, social networking sites, sharing stories, reviews and comments are the typical forms of social media, which are two ways of sharing information into the virtual reality network (Salkhordeh, 2010; Thrackery et al., 2008; Touchette et al., 2015). Especially the usage of social networking sites is being progressively more embraced by social, educational, political and economic or any other areas (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). There are many reasons why people are using social networking sites, SNS afford people with space for the purpose of communicate with each other in different ways, among the most dominating social networking platforms are Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snap Chat and Youtube which they are more important for organizations, managers and academics (Salkhordeh, 2010; Noguti et al., 2019),

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: reema.nofal1@gmail.com (R. Nofal)

which have been also increasingly gotten attention for many fashion brands, service providers and customers (Aslam et al., 2018; Ha & Lee, 2018; Naeem, 2019). Social networking sites also gave a platform to consumer to raise their voice for a better access of product information and purchase decision (Permatasari & Kartikowati, 2016; Estell & Davidson 2019). These opportunities help the marketers form a conversation with the customer directly, modify the marketing and keep the brands existence in online market and share their purchasing decision understanding in SNS platforms (Kshetri & Jha, 2016).

In order to improve the quality and the relationship between marketer and consumer, SNS has been used by the fashion industries to communicate more effectively with customers. Clothing brands utilize SNS to understand the motivations driving customers to use their SNS and their purchase behavior (Pujadas-Hostench et al., 2019). The clothing-related literature suggests that many consumers who visit clothing brands' in SNS platforms do so in search of websites where they can buy products (Touchette et al., 2015). A lot of clothing brands are using SNS platforms as a marketing tool to stay competitive in the constantly changing environment of online retailing, or e-tailing (Constantinides et al., 2008). There are different factors which affect consumer purchase decision toward clothing brand in social media platforms. However, the most significant factors effecting purchase decision include various internal and external factors, increased by online communications such as SNS advertisements (Kim and Jones, 2009; Darley et al., 2010). Turkey is set to be a huge market for fashion clothing industry in Northern Cyprus such as Koton, Calliope, LC Waikiki, Terranova, Mavi Jeans, Bostanci Magazasi, Pologarage and others. Against this backdrop, SNS advertisement has gained a great deal of attention in recent years due to its potential effect on online shoppers' responses (Dehghani et al., 2016). While previous studies have identified the impacts of SNS advertisement on basic consumer reactions such as purchase intention (Hajli et al., 2017), a significant gap remains in the theoretical understanding of how SNS advertisements influences consumer purchase decision (Gilani et al. 2019; Nash, 2018; Zhao & Li 2019; Erkan & Evans 2018). This study sets out to fill this gap in the literature by investigating the effects of SNS advertisement on consumers' purchase decision. In addition to the potential direct impact of SNS advertisement on consumer purchase decision, this study also establishes the role of brand awareness effect as an important mediator in the relationship between SNS advertisement and purchasing decision (Loureiro and Lopes 2019).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Social networking sites (SNS) advertisements

Advertising is often considered as the main marketing tool in terms of influencing consumer purchase decisions (Kiang et al., 2000; Shaouf et al., 2016). According to Rao and Vemkatrao (2015) advertising can be defines as “*a form of communication intended to convince an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to purchase or take some action upon products, information or services*” (p.,1). Increased competition in advertising has motivated researchers to study the success of various other method of advertisement. McCoy et al. (2017) stated out that online advertisements considered as the second largest media spending and it already exceeds newspapers and magazines by 2017. It is predicted that online advertising is going to exceed spending out of all advertising classifications. Thus the encouraging growth rate and excellent performance of online advertising are powerful barometers that online advertising brings tangible results to companies who invest in it. However, Aghazadeh and Bakhshizadeh (2010) found that electronic advertising is not successful in the clothing industry and would not go further than awareness step.

Social netwrking sites defined as “*a group of internet based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). One of the most popular SNS such as Facebook with more than 1.56 billion active users (Facebook, 2019). Thus it is a great opportunity for marketers to promote their brands on SNS platform and allows them to reach final-users in a timely manner with a low cost (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In addition, SNS has also effect on consumer behavior and perception

(Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Williams & Cothrell, 2000) and this attracts researchers to approach SNS as a distinct research area (Hu & Kettinger, 2008).

Social networking sites advertising is a form of advertisement that uses the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies for delivering marketing messages to attract consumers (De Mooij, 2018). Examples of such advertising include contextual advertisements on search engine results pages, banner advertisements, Rich Media advertisements, social network advertising, online classified advertising, advertising networks and e-mail marketing, including e-mail spam (Bhakar et al., 2019). Marketing professionals recognize that advertisements shared among friends on social media has a significant effects on brand awareness and purchase intent than the traditional marketing tools (De Mooij, 2018). Because of globalization social media have an influence in our society. Social media is creating a close relationship between people and the brands (Mousavi et al., 2015), thus it also contributing into relationship between brands and customers. Social media provides an environment where people can trust their brands more and brings a new form of socialization with consumers (Vinerean et al., 2013; Alam & Khan 2015). Consumers communicate directly with companies through social networking sites to make their own decisions (De Vries et al., 2012; Lee, & Kahle, 2016). On the other hand, companies also use social media as a marketing tool because of its popularity and it is considered as a new channel of advertising (Huang, & Benyoucef, 2017). Therefore companies' interaction with customers on social media sites is rapidly increasing.

Social networking sites had been emerged as one of the most powerful media for advertising across the world. Companies on globally level are allocating large part of their advertising budgets towards SNS for the purposes of much better reaching and interactive (Hays et al., 2013). Companies are looking at social networking sites as low-cost method, which could yield results in less possible time for the targeted 'Facebook generation' (Ndiege, 2019). Such facts motivate researchers to study advertisements value by using social networking sites such as Facebook, and other sites (Saxena, & Khanna, 2013, p., 17). Social networking platforms rapid growth has changed the way that many consumers interact with others and organizations. Such change extended to cover the way in which organizations attract and retain their consumers (Leung et al., 2015). Therefore, marketers create their own advertising messages and acquire a space in such media hoping that consumers will aware and develop their preference and purchase marketers' brand. SNS has change marketing communications through changing ways in which consumers select, share and appraise information (Hughes et al., 2019).

2.2 Brand awareness (BA)

Customers relationship can be mainly effected and enhanced by brands (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Brand awareness can be viewed as the memory or recognition of brand (Huang & Sarigollü, 2014). In today rapidly changing environment created by increasing usage of social media among customers, these new media usage not only emphasis the relationship between firm to customer and customer to firm, but also present new transformation on conventional options, boosting the ability of firms to interact with customer dialog and accordingly strengthening their communications 'tool (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). The usage of social media among customers can raise and build the awareness of brands in SNS platforms (Stephen & Toubia, 2010), due to the increasing number of people using social media which allow customers to spread the brand name all over those SNSs among friends, families and others to notify them about the brand and become widespread with the firm, which in turn people became aware about the brands in social media platforms (Dehghani et al., 2016). Brand awareness is one of the brand equity component (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 1993; Shen et al., 2014; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Yoo et al., 2000; Seo & Park, 2018; Sürücü et al., 2019). According to Keller (1993), the brand equity has been conceptualized as divided into four different concepts brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image and brand loyalty have been most popular (Horng et al., 2012; Hyun & Kim, 2011; Kim et al., 2003; Lu et al., 2015; Nel et al., 2009; Camarero et al., 2010; Dioko & So, 2012; Hsu et al., 2012; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010; Manthiou et al., 2014; Nam et al., 2011; Oh & Hsu, 2014;

Prasad & Dev, 2000; Šerić et al., 2014; Xu & Chan, 2010; Kim et al., 2018), together reflecting the brand equity concept. In addition, brand equity has been defined as the total debts and asset which is related to the brand symbol and/or brand name (Aaker, 2009; Seo & Park, 2018). We based our conceptualization of brand awareness based on Keller (1993) model of brand equity.

Different discipline scholars have various interpretation and definition of brand awareness for instance, Rossiter and Percy, (1987) defined brand awareness as “*the ability of a consumer to identify a brand in another situation or to memorize the brand*” (Seo & Park, 2018., p.36). Many researchers (e.g. Jamalim & Khan, 2018; Hutter et al., 2013; Keller, 1993; Barredaa, 2015) defined brand awareness as the probability that customers have information about brand association, things and essentially all highlights of the brands. While, Aaker, (2002), defined it as the characterized as the quality of the brand in the customer's memory. Obviously, the higher the dimension of brand mindfulness, the more prominent the probability that customer will purchase items or potentially benefits offered by it (Bertsch & Osterman, 2011). Brand awareness is made through customers rehashed and remarkable experience to brand components. For example, the name, motto, logotype or bundling. These exposures add to set up brand hubs in customers memory, to fortify brands' connections with the item type , usage and consumption events (Aaker 1991) and to build the feeling of brand recognition (Keller 2003a).

2.3 Consumer purchase decision (CPD)

According to Cheung and Thadani, (2012) purchase decision-making can be defines as “*a cognitive process resulting in the selection of a product, service or course of purchase action from several alternatives*” (Huang & Benyoucef, 2017, p., 11). In the early years, Liang and Lai (2002) propose a five stage consumer decision-making process that includes need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, post-purchase evaluation. In the need recognition stage, consumers concerns with purchasing motivation such as social recommendation, ease of initiation, navigation, visual aesthetics, reviews and ratings and social communities (Liang & Lai 2002; Ono et al. 2003; Hajli 2014; Sadovykh et al. 2015; Yang et al. 2015). Consumers’ needs derived purchasing motivation for the purpose of reaching their families; friends and colleagues rapidly, share pictures with them, and reach to latest news (Wei, 2008). Based on purchasers, decisions depend on individual’s needs either social or work contacts. In the search stage, consumers search for the need of information is necessary for the purpose of solving consumer’s need regarding certain or new product such as product accessibility, information provisions, search capability, information content, navigation, ease of use, social support and complete information (Ranganathan & Shobha, 2002; Liang & Lai, 2002; Hassanein & Head, 2007; Vila & Kuster, 2011; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Hajli, 2014; Sadovykh et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2015). There are many information sources which customers may use such as their past experiences, friends, family experiences, television commercials, Internet, magazines, and some other resources through testing that specified product. In the evaluation of alternatives stage, after collecting the needed information, the consumer is ready to make a decision regarding the alternstive available in the market such as brand trust, price and recommendations from others (Liang & Lai, 2002; Hassanein & Head, 2007; Kang & Park-Poaps, 2011; Liang et al., 2011; Kim & Park 2013; Hajli, 2014; Sadovykh et al., 2015). Consumers are able to evaluate and assess different options and to select products that meet there needs and wants (Jeddi et al., 2013). In the purchase stage, purchase intention happens when the consumer made their final choice about specific products, but they still did not purchase the product (Hassanein & Head 2007; Park & Lee 2009; Fan & Tsai 2010; Vila & Kuster 2011; Wang & Zhang 2012; Wang et al., 2012; Deng & Poole, 2012; Liu et al., 2013; Kim & Park 2013; Hajli, 2014; Sadovykh et al., 2015; Huang & Benyoucef, 2015; Seckler et al., 2015; Shaouf et al., 2016; Permatasari & Kuswadi, 2017). In this stage unexpected events may affect the potential consumer purchase decision (Ferrell & Hartline, 2011). In the final stage, post-purchase evaluation after-the actual buying behavior activities which include for example product refunds, service recommendations and customer becoming aware of superior alternatives (Foxall et al., 1998; Huang & Benyoucef, 2017).

The above mentioned five purchase decision making stages has been used by many researchers to investigate the relationship between online shop design and consumer purchase intention (Bai et al., 2008), and in the vital role of social support in the association between quality and social commerce (Hajli, 2014). In addition, to explore the difference between consumer adoption of traditional channels and electronic channels (Choudhury & Karahanna, 2008). According to Yadav et al. (2013), argued that marketer should pay attention to the all five stages of consumer purchase decision making rather than focusing in the final decision purchase alone. Researchers such as Kang and Park-Poaps (2011), indicated that the evaluation and search stages elements can effect consumer purchase intention on social networking sites platforms. Furthermore, the five main stages of consumer purchase decision making have been used in understanding the behavior of consumer in social commerce (Fan & Tsai, 2010; Vila & Kuster, 2011; Liu et al., 2013; Ellahi & Bokhari, 2013; Hajli, 2014; Sadovykh et al., 2015; Huang & Benyoucef, 2015; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). More recently, Huang and Benyoucef (2017) used the decision making processes to understand the effect of the factors of social commerce design such as functionality, sociability and usability on the consumer decision making stages.

3. Hypotheses development and research model

3.1. SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decision

Consumer purchase decisions are primarily influenced by the quality of information, products or services provided on an e-commerce website (Huang, & Benyoucef, 2017). Social commerce, however, provides a more social and interactive experience through which collective decision-making occurs (Kang & Park-Poaps, 2011). Empirically, Naeem (2019) conducted a study regarding the aspect of social networking platforms on purchase decision and found that social media platforms have enhanced the level of services quality and pre-purchase decision information for targeted market. That is, the utilitarian value of a marketing message relies on its ability to provide participants with sufficient information so as to facilitate a purchase decision (Wang et al., 2019). In addition, previous studies have also shown that advertising value is related to three factors: informativeness, entertainment and irritation, which in turn influence attitudes toward advertising (Waters et al., 2011). As a result, consumers have become more informative and concerned about obtaining information on product features before making any purchase (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014). Of the few studies conducted, Nasir et al. (2012) examine how social media affected the purchasing behaviour of Pakistani women. Their study reveals that Pakistani women consider the traditional word of mouth form of advertising to be more authentic than social media advertising in making purchase decisions related to apparels. In another study, Nawaz et al. (2015) investigate the impact of social media on the decision making process of 126 respondents working in higher institutes of education in Pakistan. Their study discloses that the decisions made by the social media users are influenced by the criticisms and information shared by other users. Therefore, we considered the following hypothesis for our empirical research:

H₁: Social networking sites advertisement is positively related to consumer purchasing decision.

H₂: Social networking sites advertisement is positively related to brand awareness.

3.2. The mediating effect of brand awareness

With respect to brand awareness, which was first advocated by Keller, (1993) and has pioneered by Aaker (1996a, 1996b), they proposed the model of brand equity. They define four elements of customer-based destination brand equity defined in their model range from ('brand awareness'), to ('perceived quality'), and then ('brand image'), and finally ('brand loyalty') (Kim et al., 2018, p. 320–329). Together, reflecting the concept of brand equity. Hence, brand equity can be defined as "*the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand*" (Keller, 1993: p. 8). To this end, we base our conceptualization of brand awareness based on Keller, (1993). Therefore, brand awareness refers to "*the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category*" (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). According to Keller (2003b), a high degree of brand awareness and brand familiarity, as well as strong brand associations in memory can create customer-based brand equity. In this regard, for example, studies find that brand awareness that has a significant impact on

brand commitment leads to a variety of outcomes such as brand loyalty (Hsu et al., 2012). Other studies examine the influence of brand awareness on the consumer decision-making process (Hafez, 2018). Additionally, a high level of brand awareness has several advantages in the customer purchase decision-making process such as learning advantage, consideration advantage, and choice advantage (Sürücü et al., 2019). When individuals are aware of the clothes brands advertisements on SNS platforms, they become willing and interested in that specific brand on SNS which led them to take a decision in purchasing that specific clothes brand. In line with this view, Alhaddad (2015) proposed a model where he showed that brand awareness is the mediator of brand equity in social media. Aghazadeh and Bakhshizadeh (2010) argued that electronic advertising is not successful in the clothing industry and would not go further than the awareness step. Previous literature indicates that the development of brand groups on Facebook and their potential for increasing brand awareness has been advanced by the rise of Web.2.0 in the past few years (Chu, 2011). Companies and service providers have begun to research and investigate the usage and efficiency of digital communications in order to improve their brand awareness (Johns & Perrot, 2008). In order to survive in today's intensely competitive market, firms need to be informed of the brand awareness of their consumers and devise up-to-date advertising strategies accordingly (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015). In this study, we expect that there is a positive indirect relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decisions through brand awareness towards clothing brands in social media platforms as shown in Figure 1. Therefore, we considered the following hypothesis for our empirical research:

H₃: Brand awareness is positively related to consumer purchase decision.

H₄: Brand awareness will mediate the positive relationship between social networking sites advertisement and consumer purchasing decision.

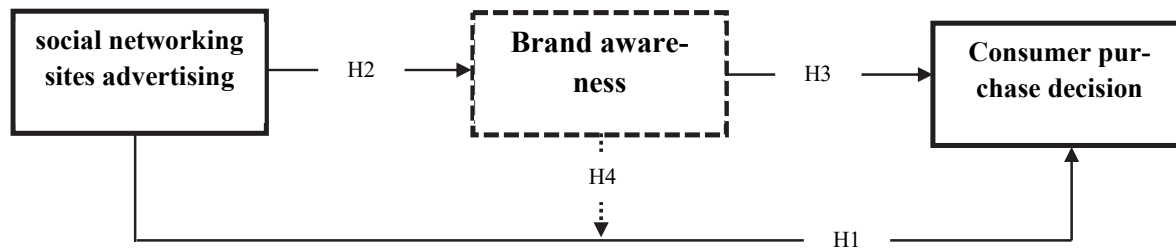


Fig. 1. Research model

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection Procedure and Sampling Technique

The questionnaire was conducted through a self-administered questionnaire in order to collect the data between April 2019 and May 2019 in Girne American University, a University of 19,000 students in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The population of this study consisted of all the undergraduate and graduate students, the respondents were from 17 years old and older. The respondents were the real consumer who reported their patronage habits within Turkish apparel brands in North Cyprus. This category was selected due to it is frequently the most purchased among the university students and they are very familiar with the apparel brands. According to Case and King, (2003), apparel is one of the most popular products to purchase for college students. This group of consumers is more homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic characteristics and more innovative in terms of learning and trying new products (Peterson, 2001). They represent an important future market for environmentally friendly products (Chan & Lau, 2002; Lee, 2008). Therefore, Girne American University students were our research subjects. Following Kaden (2007) recommendations, a solid sample size for marketing research is around 300. Although, based on the sampling calculator suggestion 378 sample size is adequate, however, the researcher distributed four hundred questionnaires (400) in order to increase reliability and also this was

conducted using a face-to-face (hand-delivered) method to the university students, due to “*a relatively inexpensive method of collecting high quality, accurate data in a face-to-face manner*” (Bush and Hair, 1985, p. 166). However, this method is the most reliable approach (Carson et al., 1992). Following Bush and Hair’s (1985) data were collected at different times in the day and different days in the week at the Girne American University. Three hundred and eighty-five (385) valid questionnaires were collected. 25 surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses. We end up with three hundred and sixty (360) valid and usable questionnaires for data analysis. The response rate was very satisfactory (96.25% response rate), because the questionnaire was conducted using a face-to-face method to develop the response rate. According to Nulty, (2008) face-to-face on paper survey method is better than the online survey method for increasing the response rate. Following Hair et al. (2010) recommendation, the structural equation modeling (SEM) required a minimum of two hundred (200) sample size, in order to provide a strong power for data analysis.

4.2 Measures

The constructs were measured for this research was using scale adapted from the previous studies. Social networking sites advertising was measured with eight (8) items adopted from (Taylor et al., 2011; Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017). Consumer purchasing decision was measured with three (3) items adopted from (Zhang, 1996; Bock et al., 2012; Shaouf et al., 2016). And, brand awareness was measured with five (5) items adopted from (Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000; Langaro & de Fátima, 2018). The questions were close-ended multiple choice questions giving respondents a choice from a range of answers based on the 5- point Likert-style rating scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used to assess each item. This study was controlled by gender, age and educational level.

5. Data analysis

IBM SPSS and AMOS program were utilized to analyze the collected data, SEM was used because of the mediation effect. Recently, marketing researchers and practitioners have used SEM in order to gauge and analyze the data collected (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Martínez-López et al., 2013). In addition, SEM allows researchers to jointly test a bunch of interrelated hypotheses by evaluating the relationships between multiple independent and dependent constructs in a structural model (Gefen & Straub, 2000). In order to do this SEM with AMOS program v24 was used for testing and estimating the measurement model of the research model and estimating the structural model (Byrne, 2013).

5.1. Robust tests

Firstly, we conducted the first step in SEM by cleaning up our data collected by using the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in order to maintain constant with our next step Exploratory Factor Analysis (CFA). EFA was used with the method of Maximum Likelihood and the rotation of Promax was utilized on SNS, brand awareness and consumer purchase decision factors. We conclude the results of EFA in the below Table 1. In order to retain the interrelated items to the study constructs 0.4 was taken as a minimum factor loading (Hoang et al., 2006; Sit et al., 2009), due to that three items related to SNS item number 4, 5 and 6 were deleted during EFA processes because of the low factor loading less than the acceptable threshold of 0.4. In addition, the extracted of variance values were ranged from 50.1 to 67.9 percent among the study constructs. All the values were above the acceptable cutoff point of 50 percent which seemed to be satisfactory and retained for our future analysis the CFA and structural model (Hair et al., 2009). Cronbach’s alpha was conducting for testing the validity and reliability of our collected data among the study constructs; hence, Table I below showed that all the factors were above the acceptable cutoff point of .70 (Hair et al., 2009).

Table 1

The results of Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) among different factors

Factors	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha (α) values	EFA Factor loading Range	Variance Extracted Percentage
Social networking sites	5	0.91	0.428-0.934	50.1
Brand awareness	5	0.90	0.663-0.859	61.8
Consumer purchase decision	3	0.86	0.550-0.995	67.9

5.2. Reliability and validity tests

Next, CFA was utilized to check the measurement model convergent and discriminate validity. CFA was conducted on the overall research model. Following Bagozzi and Yi (1988), the acceptable value of χ^2/df must be less than three. And, the acceptable values for Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) must be greater than 0.90 or more suggests for a well fitted model (Hair et al., 2009). Likewise, value of 0.08 or less for Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) suggests for a well fitted model (Hair et al., 2009). The acceptable value for Normed Fit Index (NFI) of 0.9 suggests for a well fitted model also (Hair et al., 2009). Whereas, the acceptable value of 0.8 for NFI suggests for a well fitted model, these values have been accepted by other researchers (e.g. Blesa & Bigne, 2005; Olorunniwo et al., 2006). Hence, our model measurement met all the acceptable threshold for a good model fit: $\chi^2/df= 2.752$, CFI= 0.953, TLI= 0.936, NFI= 0.938, RMSEA= 0.07. CFA standardized factor loading (λ) was checked for testing the convergent validity. Furthermore, Construct Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were checked also based on the CFA model measurement. Table 2 below summarizes the results of standardized factor loading, CR and AVE, which give acceptable results (threshold greater than 0.70) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the values of standardized factor loading were above the acceptable cutoff point of 0.50 (Kline, 1998). Finally, the values of AVE were acceding the acceptable cutoff points of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results seemed to be satisfactory for a constructs reliability and convergent validity. Therefore, all these procedures have been used and tested in the most recent research in social media marketing in the same context of Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (e.g. Alrwashdeh et al., 2019; Alrwashdeh et al., 2020; Ibrahim, & Aljarah, 2018).

Table 2

The results of CFA measurement model

Variables	Items	CFA Standardized factor loading	AVE	CR
Social networking sites	SNS ads are a valuable source of product/service information.	0.867	0.675	0.911
	SNS ads are a convenient source of product/service information.	0.925		
	SNS ads help keep me up to date.	0.856		
	I feel that SNS advertisements are quite entertaining. *	-		
	I feel that SNS advertisements are pleasant. *	-		
	SNS advertisements are fun to watch or read. *	-		
	I use SNS advertising as a reference for purchasing.	0.699		
	I trust SNS advertisements.	0.740		
Consumer purchase decision	After viewing the web advertisement, I became interested in making a purchase.	0.681	0.695	0.871
	After viewing the web advertisement, I am willing to purchase the product being advertised.	0.922		
	After viewing the web advertisement, I will probably purchase the product being advertised.	0.879		
Brand awareness	I recognize its characteristics.	0.798	0.634	0.896
	I recall its advertising.	0.837		
	I remember the brand often.	0.865		
	I easily describe the brand to a friend.	0.748		
	I feel familiar with its products.	0.724		

Notes: Average variance extracted (AVE), Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Composite reliability (CR), * Items deleted.

As the last step for checking the discriminate validity. We used the results of Table 3 for looking to the correlations among the study constructs, the values of AVE should be greater than the correlations among the study constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), our results seemed to be satisfactory as the below Table illustrate that, the values of correlations among the study constructs with mean and standard deviation. In addition, we followed Hair et al. (2009) recommendation for checking the multicollinearity issues, the R-values among the independent constructs must not be greater than 0.90. Our results confirmed that, there is no multicollinearity issues among the study constructs.

Table 3

Correlation matrix with mean and standard deviation

Factors	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3
1. Brand awareness	2.087	0.678	<i>0.796</i>		
2. Social networking sites	3.053	0.996	0.601***	<i>0.822</i>	
3. Consumer purchase decision	1.959	0.677	0.562***	0.709***	<i>0.834</i>

Notes: Diagonals (in bolds and italic) represent the average variance extracted (AVE), while the other matrix entries represent the shared variance (the squared correlations). Correlation is significant at *** $p < 0.001$.

5.3. Analyses and results

Finally, we analyzed the research hypothesizes using SEM when the estimation of Maximum Likelihood methods was adapted. Before doing so, we checked for the overall model fit measures: ($\chi^2/df=1.136$, CFI=0.999, TLI=0.998, NFI=0.997, RMSEA=0.019, SRMR=0.016, P-value=0.589). According to Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Hair et al. (2009), our results exceeded the acceptable threshold for a good model fit measure. All hypotheses were supported statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ (Table 4).

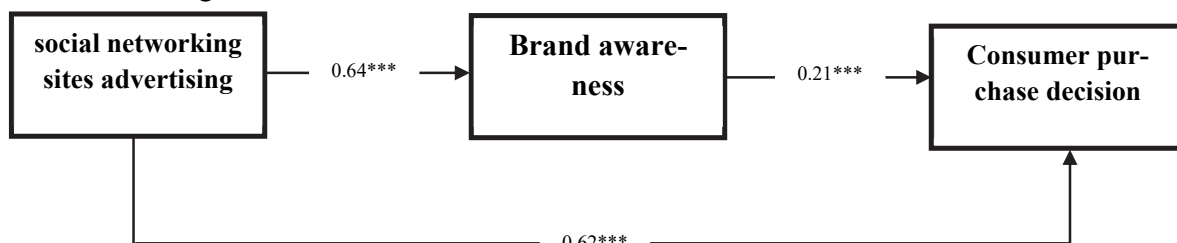
Table 4

The results of direct effects of path results

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Estimate	SE	Results
H1	SNS advertisements	Consumer purchase decision	0.422***	0.030	Accepted
H2	SNS advertisements	Brand awareness	0.438***	0.028	Accepted
H3	Brand awareness	Consumer purchase decision	0.215***	0.043	Accepted

Notes: Social networking sites (SNS), Coefficient is significant at *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4 presents the proposed model's estimated standardized path coefficients. We first hypothesized that social networking sites is related to consumer purchase decision and brand awareness. As the results of Fig. 2 below, there is a positive direct relationship between social networking site advertisement and consumer purchase decision (Beta= 0.422, $P = 0.001$). Therefore, H₁ was supported. The findings for H₂ (Beta= 0.438, $P = 0.001$) showed that, there was a statistically positive and significant relationship between SNS advertisements and brand awareness. Therefore, H₂ was supported. Finally, H₃ showed that, there is a statistically positive and significant association between brand awareness and consumer purchase decision (Beta= 0.215, $P = 0.001$). Therefore, H₃ was supported also. The results of the relationship paths are shown in Fig. 2.



Notes: Paths are significant at *** $p < 0.001$.

Fig. 2. Path model results

5.4. Additional mediation analysis of brand awareness

Next, we analyze our mediation hypotheses, we performed a supplemental mediation analysis. To test for mediation, we used Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation technique. According to this technique, brand awareness act as mediator effect. In Model 1, we assess whether there is a direct influence of SNS advertisement on brand awareness and purchase decision. We observed that SNS and brand awareness are significantly and positively associated with consumer purchase decision respectively. In addition, the results indicated that brand awareness partially mediates the positive relationship between social networking site advertisement and consumer purchase decision (Beta= 0.094, P= 0.003, CI =0.048:0.138). Thus, H₄ was accepted. This result showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between social networking site and purchase decision through brand awareness. This result contributes to the social media marketing by investigating the most important construct of consumer behavior towards brands advertisement in social media which in turn improves and enhances customer purchase intention.

Table 5

The results of mediation effects

Independent variable	Mediator	Dependent variable	Hypothesis	Coefficient	Confidence interval	
					Lower	Upper
Social networking sites	Brand awareness	Consumer purchase decision	H4	0.094	0.048	0.138

Notes: Confidence interval (90%) is based on 2000 bootstrap samples.

The results in Table 5 validating the mediation effect of brand awareness which indicate that the effect of SNS advertisements on purchase decision is partially contingent on the mediation effect of brand awareness, that is, SNS advertisements only become effective on consumer purchase decision through its effect on brand awareness. Accordingly, the final structural model and the significant path relationships are shown in Fig. 2. Since the indirect effect is significant and the effect of SNS on purchase decision fades in Model 2 of Table 5, this mediation type makes it unlikely that the theoretical framework is incomplete (e.g., because of an omitted mediator and variables).

6. Discussion

There are dozens of researches who have investigated the importance of social media, despite the increasing number of social networking sites research which has been published, there is a scarce of research towards how the SNS advertisement enhance and improve consumer attitude toward brands (Langaro et al., 2018). The purpose of this research was to investigate a more comprehensive model of consumer purchase decision in social media towards apparel brands in North Cyprus. To achieve this, we investigated a novel conceptual model which explains the impact of social networking sites advertisements, on consumer purchases decision: mediated by brand. As a primary contribution, this research showed that there was a positive relationship between social networking sites advertisement and consumer purchase decision, these results are consistent with previous studies, where the researcher found that SNS had a significant direct effect on consumer purchase intention towards clothes brands in Spain (Pujadas-Hostench et al., 2019a, 2019b). These results indicated that, when the consumer realizes the clothes brand advertisement in SNS they would be willing and interested in that brands which led them make a decision in purchasing that specific clothes brand which in turn resulting in their actual buying behavior (Touchette et al., 2015). According to the theory of planned behavior (TPB), there is a significant relationship between consumer intention to purchase, use the product and actual paying behavior (Ajzen, 1991). More recently, these relationships between purchase intention and actual behavior based on TPB have been tested in the SNS platform (Al-Debei et al., 2013; Kang et al., 2013). Next, our second major contribution is how the relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decision happened through the role of brand awareness, we figured out that brand awareness mediates the positive relationship between SNS and purchase decision towards apparel brands, this result indicated that, brand awareness plays a critical role in building and minting the brands in SNS platform which in turn enhances and improves consumer purchases intention towards clothes brands in social media. This result is in line with the previous research which the researcher found that, brand awareness is an important factor of building and improving the brand in SNS platform (Langaro et al., 2018). In addition, we contributed to

the body of literature in social media marketing by investigating to which extent dose the consumer aware about the clothes brands advertisement in SNS platform, we found out that, brand awareness partially mediate the significant relationship between social networking sites advertisement and consumer purchase decision, this is because the primary relationship could be mediated by other factors of brand equity rather than brand awareness such as brand image and brand loyalty which could yield a fruitful results for future research.

6.1. Theoretical and empirical implications

This study contributes to social media marketing literature by empirically and theoretically. First of all, we empirically investigated the relationship between social networking sites advertisements and consumer purchase decision towards the major clothes brands in North Cyprus (such as Koton, Mavi Jeans, Bostancı Mağazası, LC Waikiki, Pologarage), and then, we tested the mediation effect of brand awareness among the study constructs. Secondly, brand awareness is an important factor for attracting the consumer through the advertisements in the social networking sites. Finally, we have tasted the research model in North Cyprus which is the most neglected country in social media research, our paper is among the pioneering researches in conducting the effect of SNS brand advertisements on consumer purchases decision especially in the context of Turkish clothes brands. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study make a good contribution to the existed body of knowledge in the context of apparel brands in several ways. The results provide a comprehensive understanding of the determinates of social media marketing and consumer purchase decision towards clothes brands. Hence, marketers need to pay more attention to the significant role of advertisements in SNS platforms in building consumer awareness towards brands. Advertisement is the most effective way of creating brand awareness in order to attract more customers in social media platforms which could increase consumer attention over brands, in turn, enhance and improver consumer purchase decisions. This research provides a strong evidence of the important roles of brand awareness as a main driven mechanism in social media marketing research in the relationship between SNS advertisements and purchase decision. The research enhances our understanding of the factors underlying consumer behavior on brand advertisement in social media platform.

7. Limitations and future research direction

The current study, like any other research, is not without limitations that needs to be taken into consideration in future studies. First, the main aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decision. Hence, the main objective of any advertising is the consumer actual behavior after they saw the ads in the social media platform. Future researchers are highly recommended in investigating the effect of SNS advertisings on actual buying behavior (Shaouf et al., 2016). Second, our research model focused in the brand awareness as the main factor which could influence the relationship between SNS advertisement and consumer purchase decision. Therefore, future research could combine affective and cognitive factors such as online trust and emotional responses, which may mediate the relationship among the study constructs which can provide a more comprehensive picture of consumer behavior in responding to the brand advertisements in social media platform. In addition, we measured consumer purchase decision using the three short measures validated by Shaouf et al. (2016) over the full measures of 36 developed by Huang and Benyoucef (2017). These three items may be not be reflective to the five stages of consumer purchase decision making processes (*need recognition; searching for information; the evaluation of alternatives; purchasing; and post-purchasing*) conceptualized by Liang and Lai (2002). Future research may supplement our measure of consumer purchase decision with the full measures of the five stages of consumer decision making processes. Further studies, therefore, must build upon these limitations in order to attempt to provide further insights into the nature of the relationships between social networking sites advertisements, brand awareness, and consumer purchase decision. Finally, the main focus of this study was on high-involvement products only (i.e., apparel brands), more investigation is needed on other product categories such as high touch involvement products e.g. smart phone. Future research may provide a holistic picture of the nature of the relationship between SNS advertisements and consumer purchase decision by extending our research model.

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