



The Wanderlust generation: determining factors on millennial consumers' responses to travel advertisements

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The purpose of the study is to determine factors influencing millennial consumers' response towards travel packages and services advertised online. Analyzing data from the Philippines using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, results indicate that consumer awareness influences purchase decision while consumer awareness affects consumer perception. Moreover, consumer perception has a significant influence on purchase decision. The findings in this study can be the basis of managers and marketing communication practitioners for producing efficient online marketing communication programs, i.e., to launch informative advertisements that raise the millennial group's awareness about travel offerings, advertisements that establish positive impressions, and advertisements that translate buying interest to actual purchase.

Keywords: consumer awareness, consumer perception, consumer response, millennial consumers, travel industry

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Introduction

Studying the consumers' attitudes toward advertising of any form have always been one of the advertisers' aims. Advertisements that effectively deliver their messages to their audiences can help endorse and build awareness of its offerings. With the fast growth of information technologies globally in the past decade, advertisers seemingly depend on several modes of interactive technology to promote their products and services (Eisend & Tarrahi 2016). Moreover, the idea of launching current and entertaining content could get consumers to interact electronically effectively. These powerful features are seen as a forthcoming of advertising. Advertising become more figurative in consumers' perspective than television advertising as a marketing stimulus that stands out as compared to others in their environment (Yaakop & Hemsley-Brown 2013). Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and others have

become avenues for marketing practitioners to engage their promotional activities (Arceo et al. 2018). However, research studies about online advertisements and how they are perceived by a group of primary users, the Millennials, are relatively limited, especially in the Philippines. Also, little is known about how factors influence Internet users' attitudes toward online advertising quantitatively. On the other hand, capital investments in online advertising are often targeted mistakenly due to lack of familiarity, and limited research is done on consumers' sensitivity to online advertising. Scenarios causing advertisers to choose the wrong advertisement characteristics and platforms, send imprecise messages, and not recognize the target audience (Campbell et al. 2011). The Millennials, the wanderlust generation (Slater 2019), are being influenced by several associated factors such as the Internet (technology adoption), specifically when it comes to their perception and attitude to travel options and the environment (Jamal & Newbold 2020). And as the Internet is becoming a powerful medium to capture millennial consumers' interest, online advertising is necessary for businesses aiming for wider or global reach, including the travel industry. Many people in the travel industry realized that they needed to try more modern techniques in marketing; marketing the travel industry can be done in several ways (Rasty, Chou & Feiz 2013).

This study is based on the Consumer Perception Theory—how the consumer receives, selects, organizes, and interprets information to create meaning. Perception depends on internal factors such as someone's beliefs, involvements, needs, moods, and outlook. This theory is effective when creating a campaign or a message for a product or a brand (Belch & Belch 2018).

The purpose of the study is to determine what levels of association can be measured between the relationships of the factors affecting Filipino Millennial consumers' response to online travel advertisements? Specifically, we determine the relationship between advertisement informativeness and consumer awareness; consumer awareness and consumer perception; and, consumer perception and purchase decision. In the following section, we present the theoretical framework and hypothesis development, methodology, analysis and results, followed by discussion and implication for managers. We also discuss limitations of the study and directions for future research.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

This research is anchored to the Consumer Perception Theory and Consumers Response Theory. The perceptual process in marketing is the consumer being influenced by stimuli such as what is seen in adverts. Then they develop a sensation from these, thus drawing their attention, interpreting these stimuli, and generating a response. The consumers determine this response's scheme, defined by Solomon (2010) as 'organized collections of beliefs and feelings. Alternatively, consumers' set of reactions after seeing, hearing, or reading the message is known as a response. Consumer response can range from non-observable activities such as storing information in memory to observable actions such as actual product purchases or even spreading the news to friends, etc. (Belch & Belch 2018). Following relevant literature review, the following conceptual model has been developed. The research framework is based on the premise that informativeness generates consumer awareness, which impacts consumer perception and influences consumers' purchase decisions. Figure 1 depicts the general consumer response process dimensions.

Millennial Consumers

Millennials or also known as *Generation Me* and *Echo Boomers*, are the demographic cohort following Generation X. There are no particular dates for when this group starts or ends; demographers usually refer to the early 1980s as starting birth years and ending birth years ranging from the mid-1990s to early 2000s. Authors like William Strauss and Neil Howe broadly endorsed the Millennial group's naming (Horovitz 2012). Firms today are competing for millennial mindshare as millennials have a significant

impact on older groups and are trendsetters across all business industries, from fashion to food (Schawble 2015). Businesses have been hostile in connecting with this generation, for traditional advertising methods have proven ineffectual to capture their attention and response.

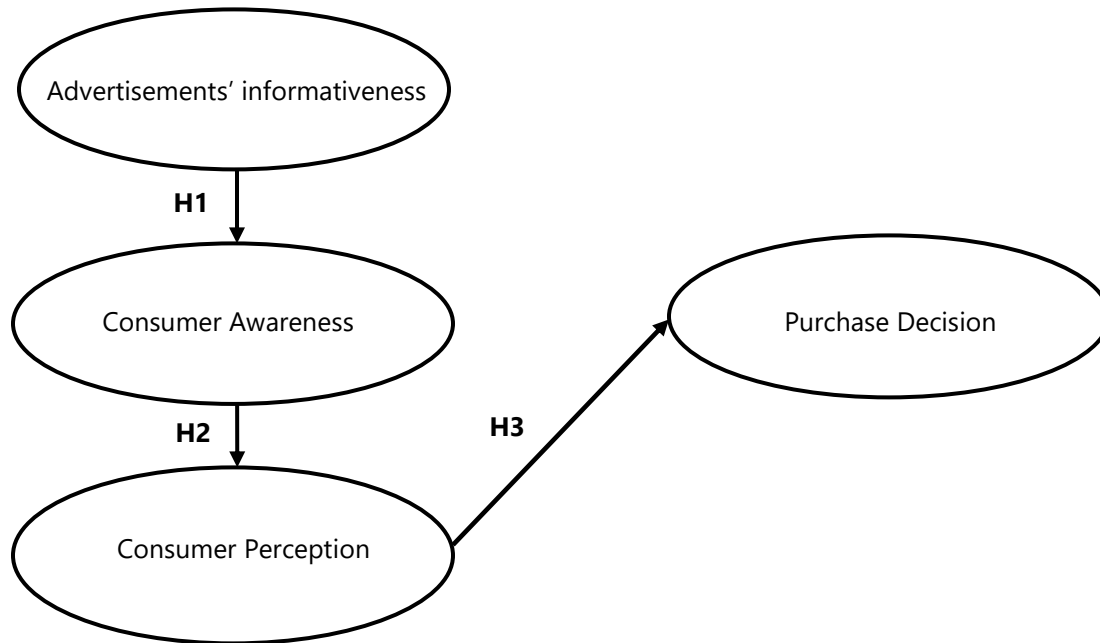


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

Source: the authors

Advertisement Informativeness and Consumer Awareness

Informative content was vital for Internet advertising. Most consumers recognize the Internet as an information source (Bibi et al. 2016). Informativeness can be viewed as the fulfillment of consumers' longing for awareness about a product and gives marketers a chance to show different products and services by dispensing important information through advertising (Gao & Koufaris 2006). Shimp and Andrews (2014) emphasize some of the advantages of online advertisements, including individualization, interactivity, cost-efficiency, and immediate publishing. Today, consumers have more access to marketing communications online. Online advertisements perform many functions for companies. Since then, traditional media used in advertising such as television, radio, magazines, and newspapers serve advertisers' needs. However, there has been an effort in the advertisers and their industry to locate new media that are more cost-efficient, less cluttered, and more effective – which online advertising does (Shimp & Andrews 2014). As the Internet is becoming a standard internet platform, the Web offers interactive rich media tools and global reach to advertisers (Gupta 2013). Our first hypothesis is:

H1. Advertisement informativeness leads to consumer awareness.

Consumer Awareness and Consumer Perception

High brand awareness could promote positive perception among consumers. The higher the awareness is, the higher the trust and the purchase of intentions consumers can feel. Moreover, consumer awareness can be seen as the degree to which consumers consider a product or a brand when a provided product category is mentioned and distinguish the features of a product or a brand instinctively. Also, the more positive consumer awareness is, the greater the influence on perceived quality, which specifies that

awareness has an undeviating positive effect on perception (Liao et al. 2011). On the other hand, Shahid et al. (2017) argued that consumers prefer to buy products and brands they are aware of. They also argued that a consumer is hesitant to purchase unfamiliar products. Before buying anything, consumers tend to do the market research or rely on someone he trusts and be well aware of what, how, and where to buy. As both consumer awareness and customer perception play an essential role in consumer buying behavior (Modak et al. 2016), it was determined that consumer's knowledge and awareness with respect to online advertising resolute their perception and attitude (Dehling 2019). And consumers with a high degree of awareness tend to show an optimistic level of perception towards ads and products. Our second hypothesis is:

H2. Consumer awareness leads to consumer perception.

Consumer Perception and Purchase Decision

Online advertisements almost influence the respondents in purchasing a product and play an essential role in consumers' buying decision process (Saravanan & Sajitha 2016). Their research also mentioned that most of the respondents believe that online advertising is a dependable medium. There could be diverse phases consumers can go through, from being unconscious to actual purchase behavior (Hanekom 2007). However, suppose there will be considerations into Henekom's use of the consumer response process. In that case, the research result shows that online ads have a substantial impact on Millennial consumers' cognition (awareness) and affect (feelings and desire) with a degree of influence on consumers' behavior (actual purchase or trial adaption). Wee et al. (2014) also viewed that consumers' perception will impact behavioral intentions and actual purchase of the products. It was also determined that in the perspective of online retail and advertising, consumer perception, constituting behavioral attitudes on online commerce platforms, augment buying intentions and purchase (Hajli et al. 2017). Our final hypothesis is:

H3. Consumer perception leads to purchase decision.

Methodology

Instrument and Data Collection

The primary data were attained through the use of questionnaires (5-pt scale) after pilot testing on five respondents. The authors developed items for the questionnaire that involve a distinctive set of questions based on the variables' concepts. The question items were grounded on the descriptions of the variables defined by marketing references and authors including Babin and Harris' (2018) definition of Consumer Awareness (CA) and Consumer Perception (CP) and Belch & Belch's (2018) definition of Consumer Perception (CP) and Advertisement Informativeness (AI). The questionnaire was translated into an electronic format (Google Form), in which links that land respondents to the electronic questionnaire were distributed via electronic mail and messaging platforms. A total of 120 invitations were distributed online with an 83.33% response rate or a total of 100 respondents. The members of the sample were selected via purposive sampling from the population.

Analysis

We adopted a PLS approach to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the gathered data as this method is more advisable and considered as most suitable method for testing the causal relation (Hair et al. 2011). We used Ordinal Logistic Regression to predict the dependent variable with 'ordered' multiple categories and independent variables. This study measured dependent variables (having multiple ordered

levels) with multiple independent variables. With the identified set of variables, respondents' purchase decisions (dependent variable) were measured through a 5-pt Likert scale where 1 being strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree.

Reliability and Convergent Validity

Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE results are presented in Table 1. It shows that the statistics for Cronbach's alpha ranged between .71 to .92, and for composite reliability between .87 to .95, an acceptable range for reliability. Moreover, AVE should be equal to or more than .5 (Fornell & Larcker 1981). In this study, all AVE results are more than in the acceptable range.

Table 1. Reliability, Convergent Validity and Average Variance Extracted

Variables	Indicators	Loadings	AVE	CR	R^2	Cronbach Alpha
AI	AI1	.89	.82	.93	-	.89
	AI2	.92				
	AI3	.90				
CA	CA1	.95	.90	.95	.43	.89
	CA2	.95				
CP	CP1	.85	.69	.94	.34	.92
	CP2	.87				
	CP3	.90				
	CP4	.84				
	CP5	.88				
	CP6	.70				
	CP7	.77				
PD	PD1	.84	.77	.87	.70	.71
	PD2	.91				

Discriminant Validity

We assessed the discriminant validity of this study through analysis of cross-loadings. If items "crossload," then their loading is higher for another construct than that it purports to measure, which is problematic (Chin 2010). Items should load high on the construct that they purport to measure but low on all other constructs. Based on the results, the loading of each variable in its respective construct is higher than the other constructs, confirming the constructs' discriminant validity.

Structural Relationships

The criteria for evaluating the structural relationship model are squared multiple correlations (R^2) and path co-efficient (β) of each path. GoF, SRMR and NFI statistics for this study were .65, .09, and .70, respectively. Table 3 reports the correlations and across the variables.

Table 3. Path Coefficients

Variates	Advertisement Informativeness	Consumer Awareness	Consumer Perception	Purchase Decision	R^2
Advertisement Informativeness					
Consumer Awareness	.66				.44
Consumer Perception		.58			.33
Purchase Decision			.72		.51

Results

Table 4 reports the results. Hypothesis 1—advertisement informativeness leads to consumer awareness—is accepted. Thus, the finding is validated by Bauer et al. (2005) in that information supply is the primary reason behind consumers approving advertising. It also strengthens Bibi et al. (2016) argument that informativeness is important for Internet advertising and that the market recognizes the Internet as an information source. Hypothesis 2—consumer awareness leads to consumer perception—is accepted. This supports Susilowati & Sari's (2020) research that high brand awareness could promote positive perception among consumers. This also coincides to the proposition that the more progressive consumer awareness is, the greater the effect on perceived quality, thus considering awareness having an undeviating positive effect on perception (Liao 2011). The strength of relationship corresponds Shahid et al. (2017) argument that buyers prefer to purchase products and brands they are familiar with. Hypothesis 3—Consumer perception leads to purchase decision—is accepted. This supports Saravanan and Sajitha's (2016) research on online advertisements almost influence the respondents in purchasing a product and play an essential role in consumers' buying decision process. While consumers go through different stages, from being unconscious to actual purchase behaviour. The research result shows that online ads have a substantial impact on Millennial consumers' cognition and affect (feelings and desire) and has a degree of influence on consumers' purchase decision (Hanekom 2007).

Table 4. Significance of Path Coefficients

Variables	β	Mean	SD	p	Hypotheses
Advertisement Informativeness → Consumer Awareness	.66	.66	.05	.00	H1. Accepted
Consumer Awareness → Consumer Perception	.58	.58	.06	.00	H2. Accepted
Consumer Perception → Purchase Decision	.72	.72	.04	.00	H3. Accepted

Discussion

Classical principles of mass media advertising may not be applicable on the Internet. Advertisers should not take full advantage of the medium's capabilities to produce operative online advertisements (Gallagher et al. 2001). An equal chance for exposure to the target audience was given to both print and online ads. The same advertisements will be equally effective. Menon and Soman's (2002) find how stimulating consumers' interest to facilitate click-through online advertising emphasizes the formation of knowledge gaps in online advertising. An attribute of "clickability" of online advertising makes it relevant to understand why consumers will click an ad. It is like when curiosity is generated only when the gap is

moderate and controllable. Several researchers propose their conceptualizations of how consumers respond to online advertising, including Stern et al. (2002) conceptual model of online advertising, which includes the presentation and formation of image in consumer's mind by taking into respect the various message stimuli offered through the Internet. Rodgers & Thorson's (2000) integrated model identified four purposes of users as a determinant of ad exposure: researching, surfing, shopping, and communicating. The study also suggested how the advertisers' controlled elements affect consumer responses.

Advertising is often a pull strategy in promoting a product or service, usually designed to make proactive customers aware of the brand, change attitude, and stimulate good purchase intentions (Pereda 2014). Information and communication technologies impact many tourism advertising facets (Buhalis & Law 2008). Expansion of electronic social media is the Web's primary asset (Brogan & Smith 2009). Social media platforms have related a change in the locus of control in the creation processes of online tourism content, from mainly controlled by organizations and corporations towards a more inclusive online presence, which to a large extent is the expression of interaction and participation of end-users (Shih, 2009). The first generation of tourists to grow up with electronic information technology has been called *digital natives* (Prensky 2001) and the *Net generation* (Tapscott 2009).

Elements of consumer psychology such as consumer awareness, perception, and purchase intention play significant roles in consumer buying behavior (Modak et al. 2016). Online platforms and advertising engage consumers to incorporate constant views into the purchase decision-making (Hall et al. 2017). Abed (2018) claims that perceptions such as trust represent pertinent mechanisms to shape behavioral intention among consumers. Oliveira et al. (2017) illustrated that perception is contributory in persuading consumers' purchase intentions, and consumers having a positive level of perception exhibit a significant intent to purchase online. Because of online platforms such as social media applications, virtual purchases are progressively noticeable in the online community. Providing outstanding quality virtual experience is vital to support online consumers. The perceived structure of online advertising and the product and service value being established among consumers create experiences that significantly shape perception and purchase intention. These elements of the consumer perception process considerably impact consumers' purchases even in an e-commerce setting (Hsu et al. 2018).

Implication for Managers and Scholars

With the results of this study, businesses in the travel industry can be provided with ideas as to what factors can motivate potential consumers to purchase and avail of travel packages and services offered online. The findings in this study could be their basis for formulating efficient online marketing communication programs. Marketing communication practitioners may launch ads that target the millennial group considering that majority of them are active online users and sharing a substantial part in the purchasing economy—driving informative ads to boost awareness, thus creating a chance to establish positive impressions and convert buying interest to actual purchase. As the Philippines Market submits to the call of online commerce, this study provides essential implications on online market players in travel and tourism.

As millennial consumers' perception and response to online advertising of the travel industry were examined- this study focuses on the quantitative understanding of perceptual and behavioral aspects of consumers. Purposive sampling was utilized for this study, and findings are not universal to the entire population. Future studies are encouraged to use probability sampling. In future studies, the researchers encourage qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve deeper insights into various purchase orientations for online customers. Therefore, future in-depth qualitative studies can help understand deeper motivations and meanings of relationships between the constructs. And as the data were gathered pre-pandemic, using the results of this research to other studies with the same concept but with a

different time context and setting (period during and post-pandemic) can be conducted. Latent variables such as consumer awareness, consumer perception, and purchase decisions are areas of consumer behavior that are interesting to tackle and explore with in-depth qualitative research techniques. On the other hand, informativeness as a characteristic of an ad can be viewed based on perspective. Research that will focus on a different point-of-view (eg different industry) implies and generates a different result; hence, finding an industry or advertising where informativeness can directly drive purchase decisions is an area of interest. Finally, analyzing relationships and differences among market segments using other multivariate statistics is helpful, such as ordinal logistics regression, revealing the market's behavioral patterns benefitting marketers' positioning strategy.

Scope and Limitations

The research is limited to the cities of Metro Manila for where data were collected through online survey questionnaires from 100 millennial consumers who were predetermined as internet participants and active users with purchasing power. There have been no exact dates for the birth year of the millennial group, but researchers and demographers typically use the early 1980s as beginning birth years and ending birth years ranging from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. But to limit the study, the researchers intended to choose participants born from the year 1985 to 2000 who might be young professionals (Horovitz, 2012). Only working millennial consumers participated in the study, for they were pre-identified as income earners with purchasing capacities. An excess of 20 questionnaires served as a buffer for retrieval and other problems that might occur along the way. The data were also gathered pre-pandemic.

Conclusion

This research concludes the relationship among factors influencing millennial consumers' response to travel adverts, which shows a significant association with the latent traits for the data. From the statistical treatment, it can be concluded that ads' informativeness has a strong relationship to consumer awareness. This indicates that consumers' awareness is being fed by the amount of information advertised online. It was also found out that there is a significant relationship between consumer awareness and consumer perception. Then it could be concluded that online advertisements' role in consumer awareness influences consumers' interest to purchase a product and that it plays a vital role in buying decision process among consumers. And that Informative content is deemed necessary for Internet advertising as it fulfills consumers' need for awareness about a product or a package of offerings.

The researchers' drive to pursue this study stems primarily from online advertising being a powerful marketing tool in today's generation. Online advertising can benefit business establishments, specifically the travel industry, with its advantages such as low cost, high reach, high credibility, accountability, ease of usage, and ability to reach a broader range of audience (Kallas 2017). With the increased use of broadband and general dissemination of internet services like YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, the researcher believes that there will be an increasing trend for online advertising to be adopted by companies as part of their promotional mix. Thus, showing the significance of this research topic to the target travel industry and many stakeholders. This can provide businesses with an idea of what factors can drive potential consumers to use this study as a basis for formulating effective online marketing communication strategies. This phenomenon should be taken advantage of, especially when considering the millennial group as part of their primary target audience. As online advertising seems to be in a never-ending development stage, authors did limited research on consumer perception and response to such marketing techniques. Hence, there is a need to draw the connection between factors that impact consumer perception and behavior to evaluate online marketing effectiveness, making this study beneficial to marketing communication practitioners. The academe may also use this research to reference

future studies as this provides gathered information about advertising, marketing, and consumer behavior. Students and researchers may also consider this as a reference for their future academic endeavors. It could also help them understand the phenomenon if they are to cite results from this research.

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