
**ADVERTISEMENT SKEPTICISM OF FEMALES: STUDY ON FACIAL SKIN CARE
PRODUCT ADVERTISEMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATES IN SABARAGAMUWA
UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA**

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ABSTRACT

Facial skin care product industry is one of the fastest growing industries in recent years and use a high level of advertisements to create a positive attitude targeting female consumers. Yet, despite all the efforts of marketers, Ad skepticism (tendency to disbelief advertising claims) becomes a challenging situation. Hence this study focused on examining the impact of two factors; persuasion knowledge and product involvement on Ad skepticism of females about facial skin care product advertisements. Self administered questionnaire was used and female undergraduates were selected as the sample which highly fits for the study because of high level of homogeneity & socialization. Results of the multiple regression analysis depicts that two predictors; persuasion knowledge, product involvement have a significant impact on Ad skepticism. Persuasion knowledge and product involvement were tested which have not been explored together previously with facial skin care product advertisements in literature. Findings help advertisers and companies to understand how Persuasion knowledge and product involvement impact on Ad-skepticism and to develop strategies to avoid them causing skepticism. Future researchers are encouraged investigate different product categories and different consumer groups.

Keywords: *Ad Skepticism, Facial Skin Care Products Advertisements, Female Undergraduates, Persuasion Knowledge, Product Involvement*

1 INTRODUCTION

With the growth of the facial skin care product (FSCP) industry and the competition within the industry, promotion strategies also were increased. Advertisements have been used for many years as one of the major tools to influence the buying behavior of the consumers (Huang & Darmayanti, 2014). During the last fifteen years, advertisements have been the most visible

marketing strategy. The marketers of facial skin care product industry are mostly making use of TV to advertise their products (Koshy & Manohar, 2016) yet Sri Lankan facial skin care product industry use various advertising methods, especially such as television, social media, radio, newspapers, magazines etc. for promoting their products and they utilize vast resources on these advertising methods.

Though it was difficult to count the exact frequencies of facial skin care product advertisements of all advertising media; the frequency of facial skin care television advertisements per day was counted compared to other product and service advertisements while the media of the advertising were different, the information content of all the advertising media was same. According to the observations, Facial skin care product advertisements appear on TV screen up to maximum 40% compared to other advertisements per hour in a particular day which means marketers vastly use advertising to promote facial skin care products than marketers of other products and services do.

Despite vast resources and the efforts, advertising faces huge challenges to the objective of influencing sales, not least of which is that many consumers simply do not believe advertising claims (Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005). The preliminary survey results revealed that level of Ad Skepticism among female consumers in Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL) was 3.40 which is higher than the average mean value of the five point likert scale.

Most research on ad skepticism has focused on the development of ad skepticism by adolescents (Boushet al. 1994; Mangleburg & Bristol 1998; Moscardelli & Liston- Heyes 2005). There were very few studies that can be found regarding ad skepticism of females (Wang & Chien, 2012) even though the dominant customers of facial skin care products are still females (Krishnan, Amira, Atilla, Syafawani, & Hafiz, 2017; Yu et al., 2015). Therefore, current study chooses to study the skepticism of females.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Advertisement Skepticism (AS)

Skepticism toward advertising, in general, can be defined as the tendency to disbelief of advertising claims (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Advertisement skepticism is showing distrust on what is being claimed in advertising (Delorme et al, 2009). When customers are skeptical about advertising, information value also diminished. Therefore, ad skepticism limits the potential of the advertising. Ad skepticism necessarily reflects a more general tendency not to believe any communications. It is a marketplace belief. With the socialization and market place experiences, consumers get awareness about the extent that they should believe ad claims. Advertising skepticism

varies from person to person as per Hardesty et al (as cited in Raziq et al., 2018). Advertising skepticism positively linked to advertisement avoidance, irritation and privacy concerns among consumers (Munir, Rana, & Bhatti, 2017). Thakor and Goneau-Lessard (2009) studied the influence of peers, the influence of parents and personality variables on skepticism of social advertising.

2.2 Persuasion Knowledge (PK)

Advertising skepticism is situated within the consumer persuasion knowledge hypothesis and conceived skepticism as a socially learned psychological state that develops and changes over time as part of persuasion knowledge about advertising (Boush et al., 1994; Obermiller et al., 2005; Spengenberg & Obermiller, 2013).

People get persuasion knowledge in various ways. With the experiences in social interactions with friends, family, and co-workers; from conversations about how people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours can be influenced; by observing marketers and other known persuasion agents; and from observations on advertising and marketing strategies in different media (Boush et al., 1994). The researcher hopes to conduct the current study among female undergraduates who are staying in hostels during their university life and they have more chances to share experiences among them. In this regard, the relationship between persuasion knowledge and advertisement skepticism would be explored.

H_{1a}: Persuasion knowledge of female consumers in Sri Lanka positively impact on skepticism towards facial skin care products advertisements.

2.3 Product Involvement (PI)

Involvement can be referred to as the personally perceived relevance of objects based on internal interests, values, and needs. The involvement concept originates in the idea of “ego-involvement” that mentions the connection between an object and a person. The concept of involvement has been addressed in the advertising literature from a variety of perspectives (Zaichkowsky, 1986). Results reported by Mueller (2006) and Obermiller et al. (2005) indicate that a higher level of involvement might have positive effects on responses to advertising (Diehl, Mueller, & Terlutter, 2015). According to Diehl et al 2015, Product involvement and ad skepticism negatively correlated with each other regarding pharmaceutical advertising. Involvement is negative relative with ad skepticism and High involvement subjects were less skeptical to the persuasive message of BB cream according to the findings of the study (Wang & Chien, 2012). Facial skin care product category as a whole was not studied in past studies with product involvement; hence the relationship

between product involvement and advertisement skepticism would be explored.

H_{1b}: Product involvement of female consumers in Sri Lanka negatively impact on skepticism towards facial skin care products advertisements.

3 METHODOLOGY

Advertisements were aimed at a vast customer base and accurately cannot identify who are the exact customers to investigate under this subject matter. According to Calder et al and Cheong & Kim, if the purpose of the study is to examine the theoretical relationships between variables, a homogeneity sample considered appropriate (as cited in Diehl et al, 2015). Apart from that, by categorizing the age of female consumers, the cosmetics & skin care products users are relative of lower age, most of them are students, with quite low income, but manifest higher willingness of using cosmetics & skin care products (Chiang & Yu, 2010). Previous researches implied that appropriateness of homogeneity of the undergraduate sample (Amos & Grau, 2011; Austin et al., 2016; Obermiller et al., 2005; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Spangenberg & Obermiller, 2000; Spengenberg & Obermiller, 2013). Moreover, researches have shown that ad skepticism is an outcome of the socialization process and different product experiences (Jackson, 2011; McCreery & Krugman, 2017; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Sher & Lee, 2009; Spangenberg & Obermiller, 2000). Based on the observations, SUSL undergraduates are facilitated with hostels for their university study period and it leads to have higher socialization and also females are the main consumer category of facial skin care product industry (Krishnan et al, 2017; Meng & Pan, 2012; Yu et al., 2015). Thus female undergraduates of SUSL were selected for the study and the sample consists with undergraduates from five faculties of the university.

A self administered questionnaire was used to collect primary data which measures Ad skepticism, persuasion knowledge and product involvement. To measure the level of Ad Skepticism the researcher has used a 9 item scale which was developed by Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998 (Cronbach's Alpha value=0.85). Persuasion knowledge of consumers was measured by the 8 item scale which is developed by Boush et al., 1994 (Cronbach's Alpha value=0.85). To measure the product involvement of consumers, 8 item scale which is developed by Obermiller et al., 2005 and Laurent & Kapferer, 1985 were used. Since the current study focuses on facial skin care products advertisements, some items from the product involvement scale were deducted according to previous researches and two items were adapted (Diehl et al., 2015) (Cronbach's Alpha value=0.84). 316 responses were received and data were analyzed using a multiple regression. Table 1 shows the items used in the study

using 5 point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree).

Table 1: Items used in the questionnaire

Construct	Items
Advertisement Skepticism	We can depend on getting the truth in most facial skin care advertising
	Facial skin care advertising's aim is to inform the consumer
	I believe facial skin care advertising is informative
	Facial skin care advertising is generally truthful
	Facial skin care advertising is a reliable source of information about the quality and performance of products
	Facial skin care advertising is truth well told
	In general, advertising presents a true picture of the product being advertised
	I feel I have been accurately informed after viewing most facial skin care advertisements
	Most facial skin care advertising provides consumers with essential information
Persuasion Knowledge	How hard is the facial skin care advertiser trying to, Grab your attention
	Make you want the product
	Help you learn about the product
	Make you like the advertisement
	Make you like the product better
	Get you to remember the advertisement
	Get you to believe what the advertisement says
Product Involvement	Facial skin care products are, An interesting product category to me
	Very important product category for me

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

According to the demographic information, most of the respondents were between the age limit of 22-24 and majority of 87% use facial skin care products frequently. 36% of respondents take their facial skin care product buying decisions on actual results of the product based on experience of other customers and 60% of customers use word of mouth as the source of buying decisions.

The significance of the correlations was observed between variables with a 95% confidence level. Further, according to correlation coefficients (r) values it can be concluded that there is a moderate degree of positive correlation between Ad Skepticism and Persuasion Knowledge ($r = 0.535$) and there is a low degree of negative correlation between Ad Skepticism and Product Involvement ($r = -0.325$).

The two hypotheses of the study, H_{1a} : Persuasion knowledge of female consumers in Sri Lanka positively impact on advertisement skepticism towards facial skin care products advertisements and H_{2b} : Product involvement of female consumers in Sri Lanka negatively impact on advertisement skepticism towards facial skin care products were accepted with 95% confident level. Goodness of fit of the model was 59.68%.

$$E (\text{Ad Skepticism/PK, PI}) = 1.057 + 0.949 \text{ PK} - 0.244 \text{ PI} \quad (01)$$

Equation 1 shows the fitted regression model. Constant (β_0) is 1.057. The expected level of Ad Skepticism of female undergraduates in SUSL is 1.057 when persuasion knowledge and product involvement level is zero. Apart from that, 0.949 is the regression coefficient of Persuasion Knowledge implies Ad Skepticism increases by 0.949 units if Persuasion Knowledge increases by 1 unit while keeping other factors constant. In the same manner, Ad Skepticism increases by 0.244 units if Product Involvement decreases by 1 unit while keeping other factors.

5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Sri Lankan cosmetics Industry have witnessed a rapid growth in sales in the last couple of decades. The range of cosmetic products has increased tremendously. This increment is attributed to the improved awareness of Sri Lankan people about their purchasing power and also the advertisements and its fascinating claims.

The results obtained through the current study demonstrates a relationship between Ad Skepticism and Persuasion Knowledge among Female Consumers in Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka under 95% confident level (p -value = 0.000) and the significant positive impact could be found ($\beta=0.949$). Consequently, when the persuasion knowledge is at a higher level,

adskepticism is also become higher among female undergraduates of Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka and hypothesized relationship between Ad Skepticism and Persuasion Knowledge is established. When consumers' awareness is increasing towards a facial skin care product they tend to be more skeptical towards the product. Persuasion knowledge develops through socialization process (Boush et al., 1994; Obermiller et al., 2005; Spengenberg & Obermiller, 2013) thus positive word of mouth should create by the marketers to defeat the persuasion knowledge of customers.

As per Diehl et al, 2015; Obermiller et al., 2005; Wang et al, 2012 high involvement consumers are less skeptical of advertising and vice versa. The results obtained through the current study shows a relationship between Ad skepticism and Product Involvement among Female Consumers in Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka under 95% confident level (p-value = 0.000) and the impact is negative ($\beta=-0.244$) and hypothesized relationship between Ad Skepticism and Persuasion Knowledge is established. Ad skepticism can be decreased by increasing the product involvement of the customers. Antecedents of the product involvement can be categorized into 3 main factors as personal characteristics, situation of the customer and physical characteristics of the stimulus. It can be differences in the type of media or the content of the communication or the variations found in the product classes being advertised (Zaichkowsky, 1986). Personal and situational factors cannot be easily manipulated by the marketer. Therefore marketers can focus on change the characteristics of stimulus and they can vary the media of advertising, can change the tactics of advertisements to get the involvement of customers towards their products.

New products have to face this problem of ad skepticism more widely. Marketers should have applied strategies to improve trust between marketers and customers. Especially, there should be some legislation to control the claims in the advertisement.

6 CONCLUSION

Purpose of the study was to analyze the impact of persuasion knowledge and product involvement on Ad skepticism towards facial skin care products advertisements of females. Ad skepticism is a construct that has received limited attention in marketing and advertising literature. There were very few studies were available in Sri Lankan context relates with Ad skepticism and the current study fills the gap with the existing body of knowledge. The findings confirmed that there is a significant positive impact of persuasion knowledge and negative impact of product involvement on Ad skepticism which has to be addressed by marketers to win the consumers heart to thrive in the competition.

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