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Designing and explaining the persuasiveness model in social media messages in promoting green products

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to design and explain the conceptual model of persuasiveness in social media messages for promoting green products. This research is applicable and developmental in terms of purpose, and mixed (qualitative-quantitative) in terms of approach. In the qualitative part, the statistical population included experts in the fields of green marketing, advertising, and business management, from whom 15 people were selected by purposive sampling and based on the principle of theoretical saturation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed by Brown and Clark's thematic analysis method in six stages. In this stage, 62 initial codes were identified, which, after coding and aggregation, were classified into 18 organizing codes and 8 overarching themes. At this stage, using the interpretive structural modeling (ISM) method, self-interaction matrices, initial and final access were prepared and the relationships between the components were determined in the form of six hierarchical levels. Four criteria of validity, reliability, confirmability and transferability were also used to validate the qualitative data. Cohen's kappa coefficient (0.72) was also used to measure the reliability of the analyses. The findings showed that "social participation and collective responsibility in the environment" is at the highest level of the model (level six) and is considered the most important factor affecting persuasion. In contrast, "digital and media capacity" and "cultural-personality characteristics of consumers" have the highest level of dependence and are located at the first level of the model.

Keywords:

Persuasion,
Green Products,
Social Networks,
Transferability,
Digital Space

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Today's world is constantly changing; transformations that are mainly the result of scientific advances and emerging technologies and have a wide impact on the individual and social lives of humans. In recent years, communication and information technologies have grown and developed more significantly than any other technology (Jafari et al., 2017). Since the 1970s, with the beginning of the communication and information technology revolution in Western countries, new tools such as satellites, the Internet and mobile phones have entered the field, caused a significant change in the level of expectations, norms and social interactions (Bastani et al., 2017). Simultaneously with these developments, new communication technologies, especially social networks, have provided an efficient and low-cost space for communication and interaction between individuals and organizations; in such a way that these media, due to the possibility of access at any time and place and the active participation of users, have gained a more prominent and effective role than other media (Mahmoud et al., 2020).

Today, citizens are able to receive and analyze information and news content at the lowest cost and fastest speed, and this process can lead to the formation of perceptions that are in line with reality or sometimes distorted (Lin et al., 2020, Hamidi Zadeh, 2019).

Since social networks host diverse segments and groups of society with different interests and approaches, the reflection of persuasive messages in this space can promote the acceptance and support of various products, especially green products. By using marketing on social networks, companies not only strengthen customer attitudes and satisfaction, but also influence their purchase intention and repeat purchase (Ghaforian Shagerdi et al., 2016).

In addition, attention to the environmental impacts of products has gradually become one of the important criteria in purchasing decisions, so that price is not the only determining factor, but environmental consequences are also seriously considered. Global statistics, as well as the situation in Iran, show a worrying increase in environmental pollution and waste, which highlights the need to pay serious attention to the development and promotion of green products (Du et al., 2020). Despite previous research that has emphasized the importance of social awareness and persuasion in supporting green products (Ogbeibu et al., 2020), there is still a lack of analytical and model-based research in this field. Accordingly, the research question is: What are the persuasive factors in social media messages in promoting green products?

Theoretical foundations

Persuasion

Persuasion, as a complex and multidimensional process in the field of human communication, deals with changing the attitude, emotions, and behavior of the audience and has long been the focus of theorists and activists in the fields of communication and psychology. In the classical view, persuasion was considered a one-sided effort in which the speaker, using verbal and non-verbal capacities, tried to attract the audience's intellectual and emotional attention and convince them of a specific issue. However, contemporary studies emphasize that success in the persuasion process requires a deep understanding of the audience's cognitive, emotional, and cultural backgrounds so that the persuasive message can be designed in a format that has the greatest impact on changing the audience's beliefs and behavior (Lin et al., 2020).

Persuasion Theory and Persuasive Communication

Persuasion theory is one of the most basic frameworks in the field of communication and marketing, which emphasizes the role of the main elements of the message, including the source, content, and audience. The credibility of the message source and the audience's trust in it play a key role in the acceptance and effectiveness of communication messages. In this context, research has shown that the use of credible sources and persuasive figures can increase the acceptance of environmental and green messages (Kim et al., 2016). On the other hand, the individual and cultural characteristics of the audience also affect the way they receive and process green messages and determine their level of participation in accepting these messages (Lin et al., 2020).

Green Marketing Theory and Corporate Social Responsibility

Green marketing is based on the principle that organizations should pay attention to protecting the environment and improving the quality of life in addition to meeting consumer needs. Today's consumers consider the environmental consequences of products in addition to price and quality in their purchasing decisions (Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Wei et al., 2018.) This change in customer attitudes has led brands to highlight their social and environmental responsibility in communication messages and marketing strategies to create a sustainable competitive advantage (Du et al., 2020).

Social Media Theory and Digital Participation

As one of the most important achievements of information technology, social media has provided a new platform for interactive communication between organizations and audiences. With features such as speed of dissemination, wide access, low cost and the possibility of two-way interaction, these media have become an efficient tool for marketing and promoting products (Jafari et al., 2017; Bastani et al., 2017).

Hu et al. (2024) conducted a study titled "The Role of Social Media Marketing on Green Product Repurchase Intention", and the results showed that social media marketing activities significantly increase green values, environmental concerns, and brand image, and positively affect brand engagement.

Huang et al. (2024) conducted a study titled "The Effect of Green Marketing on Repurchase Intention and Positive Word-of-Mouth of Accommodation Platform Users", and the results showed that green marketing affected repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth. Consumer trust also mediated the relationship between green marketing and repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth.

Research Methodology

This study is applicable and developmental in nature and purpose, and aims to design a conceptual model of persuasion in social media messages to promote green products. The research approach is mixed (qualitative-quantitative) and uses qualitative and quantitative methods in a complementary manner. In the qualitative section, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with experts in the fields of business management, green marketing, and advertising on social networks. Sampling at this stage is carried out purposefully and based on the principle of theoretical saturation to identify and extract all relevant components and indicators. The qualitative statistical population includes 15 elites and university professors with at least 5 years of work or research experience in related fields who have sufficient experience and expertise in the research topic.

Research findings

The results showed that the power of influence and the degree of dependence (influenceability) of the variables are measured. The findings showed that social participation and collective responsibility in the environment, with an influence of 8 and a dependence of 1, is at the highest level (sixth) and, as an "independent" variable with high influence and low influenceability, plays a key role and the main driver of the system. In contrast, digital, media and social network capacity and cultural, personality and behavioral characteristics of consumers, both with high dependency and lower influence power, are at the first level and are known as "dependent" or "linked" variables with strong influence.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to design and explain the conceptual model of persuasion in social media messages to promote green products, and identified and analyzed the key components influencing this process. The findings, through content analysis and interpretive structural modeling (ISM), showed that social participation and collective responsibility in the environment is at level one; this component was at the highest level of influence and showed that social participation and responsibility is the starting point of the persuasion process of green messages. The present finding is consistent with the research of Hu et al. (2024), which emphasized that environmental concerns and green values are the background of green purchase intention. It is also consistent with the results of Khalaji et al. (2022), which showed that sustainable consumption is not possible without social participation. Therefore, in the absence of collective participation, advertising efforts on social media will have limited effectiveness.

The findings showed that visual design and educational content are key tools in creating understanding and attention to green messages. This result is consistent with the research of Meysamizad et al. (2023) who attributed a prominent role to design and education in green product branding. The results of Antoun et al. (2023) also confirm that innovative and education-oriented marketing has a significant effect on improving consumer attitudes. Therefore, conveying environmental concepts with direct advertising messages alone is not enough and should be combined with attractive design and educational content. The findings showed that the persuasiveness of messages and audience participation are at the third level, this component was placed at the middle level of the model and indicates that the quality of persuasiveness of messages and active audience interaction can strengthen the connection between social platforms and consumer behavior. This finding is consistent with the results of Mahmoud et al. (2024) who showed that green advertising has an effect on purchase intention, although its magnitude varies depending on the quality of the message. It is also consistent with Hu et al. (2024) that brand involvement plays a mediating role between green values and repurchase. Therefore, persuasion will be effective when accompanied by active user participation.

The results showed that trust in the message source and the use of authoritative figures play a key role in the acceptance of green messages. This finding is consistent with Huang et al. (2024) that consumers' perception of trust mediates the relationship between green marketing and purchase intention. It is also consistent with Antoun et al. (2023) that green product awareness and trust in the source create a positive attitude towards purchase. Therefore, the use of authoritative persuasive figures and reliable sources is a basic condition for the effectiveness of green messages.