

Effect of sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication on consumer purchasing behavior in tourism: A case study of Facebook

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Abstract

This paper delves into the intricate dynamics between sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication, focusing on their combined impact on consumer purchasing behavior in tourism, specifically within the Facebook platform. Data were collected through a survey using a quantitative research method, with a sample of 250 Facebook users. The SPSS program was employed for data analysis, utilizing t-tests, ANOVA, reliability, and correlation analyses to discern the relationship between consumer purchasing behavior, social media advertisements, and word-of-mouth communication. The research findings indicate that gender and word-of-mouth communication significantly influence Facebook-sponsored advertisements, guiding consumers toward purchasing behavior in tourism.

Keywords: Social media, Advertising, Facebook, Consumer purchasing behavior, Word of mouth communication.

1. Introduction

Social media, a digital environment facilitating content creation and idea sharing without temporal or spatial constraints (Demir & Günaydın, 2023), has become an essential aspect of individuals' lives. As social media usage becomes ubiquitous, people spend a significant portion of their time on these platforms, making a presence on social media a fundamental need (Kim et al., 2023). This trend has led to the prominence of advertising in social media environments (Hanaysha, 2022).

Advertising, an endeavor to persuade the target audience to make purchases, serves as a communication tool conveying information about businesses and the products or services offered (Sreejesh et al., 2020). The prevalence of social media users as recipients of advertisements necessitates advertisers to engage in social media advertising. Effective advertising on social media requires a comprehensive analysis of the target audience's demographic, psychological, socio-cultural, and personal characteristics (Lee & Kim, 2022). Social media platforms offer opportunities to tailor message content accurately, employ effective advertising techniques, and reach the right target audience (Jacobson et al., 2020).

Consumers leverage social media to discover businesses, follow their accounts for product and service information, and make informed choices by comparing offerings from competing businesses (Demir et al., 2023). Analyzing personal, socio-cultural, and psychological factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior becomes crucial to enhance the effectiveness of advertising messages. While various studies explore different facets of "sponsored advertisements on social media" and "Word of mouth communication" (e.g., Chen & Yuan, 2022; Çokyaşar, 2018), comprehensive studies on the "relationship between Facebook sponsored advertisements and word-of-mouth communication's effect on consumer purchasing behavior" are limited, necessitating further research in this area.

This research aims to uncover the effects of sponsored advertisements on Facebook in Azerbaijan on the relationship between consumer purchasing behavior and word-of-mouth communication. Additionally, it seeks to elucidate the impact of advertising and word-of-mouth communication on factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior based on existing literature. Research questions:

1. What is the impact of online ads on word-of-mouth communication?

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2. How do online advertisements impact consumer purchasing behavior in tourism?

3. What is the interaction between consumer purchasing behavior and word-of-mouth communication concepts?

2. Literature

2.1. Social media

Communication, an essential aspect of human existence, has taken various forms throughout history. As individuals strive to meet their fundamental needs, such as acquiring basic necessities, obtaining information, and sharing experiences, the concept of social encompasses these basic needs (Kim et al., 2023), while media defines the means of communicating with others (Santos et al., 2022). Today, communication occurs through various media tools like writing, television, websites, mobile phones, photography, and video. Media encompasses all technological tools facilitating communication (Uzgören & Korkmaz, 2015).

The internet's rapid development in the last three decades has led to the emergence of social media, where users control their content, share, and interact across online platforms (Ying, 2012). While social media lacks a specific definition, it generally includes websites hosting social content (Köksal, 2013). Social media serves as a platform for individuals to freely express thoughts and feelings, encouraging social interactions and information sharing, with its importance growing daily (Özgen & Doymuş, 2013).

Social media platforms often incorporate features enabling users to communicate in word-of-mouth through commenting, retweeting, replying, and recommending (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021). Additionally, social media facilitates new channels for obtaining and sharing shopping information (Karabiyik & Çetin, 2022). Social media tools are crucial in reaching target audiences (Çabuk et al., 2019). While social media's primary purpose isn't sales, it aids in sales by enhancing organizations' reputation and leveraging online communication. Facebook, founded in 2004, has emerged as the leading social media platform, boasting the highest number of users globally (Parasnis, 2022).

2.2. Advertising

Advertising, recognized as an effective communication method with customers (Demir & Tür, 2019), serves as a tool guiding consumers in choosing products that align with their needs (Özgen & Doymuş, 2013). Social media advertising, a product of advancing technology, has simplified the process of consumers obtaining information in recent years, fostering interactive communication between customers and businesses. The term advertising, derived from the Latin verb "adverte," signifies announcing a service, good, or business to a large audience in exchange for money (Kızgın & Benli, 2019).

Advertising falls under the category of paid and non-personal communication forms. It aims to convey thoughts and

information about products through various media (Kaya-pınar et al., 2017). Advertisements significantly influence customers' purchasing decisions (Ceran & Karaçor, 2013). Social media advertising has proven more effective than traditional media (Creevey et al., 2022; Tanyer, 2018), allowing companies to employ viral marketing strategies more efficiently, thereby enhancing brand awareness (Battallar & Cömert, 2015).

The style, message content, and audiovisual tools used in social media advertisements substantially impact consumers' attitudes toward ads (İnce & Bozyiğit, 2018). The impact of online advertisements hinges on factors like advertisement value, perceived entertainment, information, economy, and reliability (Buzlukçu & Avcıkurt, 2021; Yaşar & Demir, 2021). Advertiser credibility, reflecting the customer's perception of the company as a reliable information source, is influenced by factors like the overall company credibility and the advertisement message.

Facebook has emerged as an alternative advertising medium, affording opportunities for companies, non-profit organizations, and celebrities to promote their offerings (Maru & Sai Vijay, 2024; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023). Facebook allows small businesses to expand their networks, establish connections with potential customers, and share company information through visual content (Donthu et al., 2021; Kuyucu, 2021). The platform facilitates ad targeting based on users' interests, likes, shares, and demographic characteristics. Facebook leads the social media sphere with \$5 billion in advertising revenues (Köseoğlu, 2013).

2.3. Word-of-Mouth communication

Concerning the influence of social media on purchasing behavior, word-of-mouth (WoM) communication plays a significant role. Şener and Yücel (2020) conducted a study revealing that consumers' engagement with brand messages extends beyond mere following and liking, encompassing activities such as commenting on Facebook and tagging other users. The findings underscore the substantial impact of word-of-mouth communication on social media platforms on consumers' purchasing behavior. WoM communication imparts information to consumers, particularly those within their social circles, through individual comments regarding the products or brands they use (Dang & Raska, 2022). Verbal communications influence purchasing decisions, whether recommending products or businesses or not.

WoM encompasses both positive and negative comments from both existing and new consumers about the brand, product, or service (Chen & Yuan, 2022; Kara, 2012). WoM serves as a crucial data source shaping consumers' purchasing behavior (Marangoz, 2007). Consumers tend to share information about products, services, and business experiences with their peers (Çabuk et al., 2019), highlighting WoM as a primary source of information acquisition for consumers from their friends (Fang et al., 2023). This form of communication underscores the pivotal role that

experiences and opinions from fellow consumers play in the decision-making process (Kılıçer & Öztürk, 2012). The impact of WoM communication on consumers' purchasing decisions differentiates it from other communication channels. Nevertheless, contemporary consumers predominantly seek information about prospective purchases online (Kılıçer & Öztürk, 2012), emphasizing the assertion that word-of-mouth communication has evolved into a vital strategy for businesses.

In the literature, WoM communication is alternatively termed "Word of Mouth Marketing," "Buzz Marketing," and "Viral Marketing" (Demir, 2011; Strydom et al., 2023). Within these designations, "Word of Mouth" and "Viral" are considered electronic counterparts to traditional word-of-mouth communication (Gülmez, 2011). Traditional WoM communication revolves around customers expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction to others (Gülmez & Türker, 2013) and entails interpersonal, non-commercial communication about a brand, product, organization, or service (Ergün & Akgün, 2016). Consumers exposed to WoM typically receive information from their close circles, enhancing the communication's credibility and impact (Müftüoğlu et al., 2018). Evaluations of a product by consumers have perennially held significance for brands. Presently, consumers can make informed purchases by aggregating diverse information through personal sources and word of mouth, circumventing traditional marketing tools and commercial sources such as advertising, packaging, and display (Yaşar et al., 2023).

Viral marketing, a concept that has rapidly gained prominence, pertains to the dissemination of marketing messages through WoM communication on the Internet (Baş & Karaca, 2021). Viral marketing constitutes the manifestation of word-of-mouth marketing online and is often referred to as "e-WoM." E-WoM, a subset of word-of-mouth communication, involves the electronic sharing of information (Yavuzylmaz, 2008). Viral marketing strategies encompass sending messages or advertisements to friends through email lists or social media networks (Sashi & Brynildsen, 2022). Also known as "buzz marketing," viral marketing involves consumers contributing to the brand's propagation by discussing the product, brand, or company (Yavuzylmaz, 2008). In recent years, this term has also been synonymous with "e-WoM," "online buzz," or "internet buzz" (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2023; Shankar et al., 2022).

2.4. Consumer behavior in tourism

Consumption is acknowledged as the fundamental condition for ensuring individuals' well-being by fulfilling their needs and is evidenced through consumers' acquisition and utilization of products and services (Fang et al., 2023). In this context, consumption, as an activity, remains a fundamental element persisting throughout human history (Müftüoğlu et al., 2018). Consumers typically partake in diverse activities such as acquiring information from their social circles, comparing product prices, observing advertisements, and

assessing their needs during consumption (Şener & Yücel, 2020). Word-of-mouth (WoM) communication stands out as a crucial factor influencing social media's impact on purchasing behavior. Research findings indicate that consumers' interactions with brand messages encompass not only following and liking brands but also engaging in activities such as commenting on Facebook and tagging other users (Tran & Strutton, 2020). The study underscores the significance of WoM communication on social media in influencing consumers' purchasing behavior. Social media facilitates individuals of all ages and cultures in expressing their personalities and enables rapid, universal communication through online profiles or content creation. When examining individuals' skills, habits, and preferences in social media for effective online communication, the generational conditions of each era should not be overlooked (Ünal & Deniz, 2020). Studies on consumers' purchasing behavior assert that marketing efforts are influenced by four factors: psychological, sociocultural, personal, and situational factors (Gülmez, 2011).

The continual advancement of technology has impacted the tourism sector (Demir & Kozak, 2011). Sharing experiences on social media can influence consumer preferences, prompting businesses to develop various advertising and marketing strategies. Consumers' ages are a pivotal demographic factor in strategic decision-making during the advertising campaign process (Mandıracıoğlu, 2010). Different life stages entail shifts in behavior, such as young individuals gravitating towards sportswear and later considering suits upon entering the business realm. Income level constitutes another critical factor affecting consumers' purchasing behavior (Demir & Kozak, 2011). While a higher income level encourages purchasing behavior, lower income levels may lead to expense reduction and consequent alterations in purchasing behavior. Income and debts are economic features influencing consumers' purchasing behavior (Durgun, 2021).

Gender plays a significant role in product or service acquisition. Beyond the gender of the product or brand user, the influence of the opposite sex on product purchase is noteworthy concerning the impact of gender on consumer behavior (Çabuk & Keleş, 2008). For instance, women may influence men's perfume selection, as they are more attuned to the olfactory impact of men's fragrances. Advertisements for such products often hinge on themes of femininity and masculinity. Education level and profession are additional factors shaping individuals' purchasing behavior (Demir et al., 2013). Consumers' occupations and education levels mold their needs and preferences for specific goods. Furthermore, as consumers' education levels rise, their needs and desires tend to broaden and diversify (Uslu, 2015).

Olgun's (2014) study revealed that participants primarily spent between 2 and 4 hours on social media, during which time they researched their purchasing needs, with a preference for Facebook and Twitter platforms. Canlı's (2015) research demonstrated that well-crafted advertisements

positively impact consumers' preferences and purchasing decisions. Consumers exposed to advertisements expressed a desire to visit the products in-store, establishing a significant relationship between social media advertisements and consumer purchasing behavior. Online advertisements elevate living standards and contribute to the availability of higher-quality products. Additionally, individuals who perceive these advertisements positively often engage in word-of-mouth communication. Young people spend extended durations on social media, utilizing it as an effective information-gathering tool for purchasing goods or services. Furthermore, participants expressed a tendency to find social media advertisements monotonous, leading to reluctance in engaging in purchasing behavior.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

H1 - There is a significant relationship between Facebook-sponsored ads and consumer purchasing behavior in tourism.

H2 - There is a significant relationship between word-of-mouth communication and consumer purchasing behavior in tourism.

H3 - Perceptions and expressions about Facebook-sponsored ads vary according to demographic characteristics.

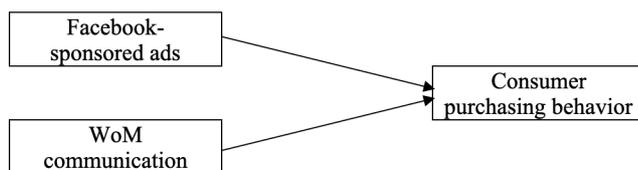


Fig. 1. Conceptual model

3. Methodology

Since this study is a graduate course project at Azerbaijan State University of Economics, the Ethics Committee approval process was carried out under the legislation of the relevant university. The data was collected in the period 01.11.2023-01.12.2023.

This research comprehensively addresses the intricacies of social media, Word-of-Mouth (WoM), and consumer purchasing behavior, aiming to delineate the effects of social media advertisements on consumers' purchasing behavior and WoM in the context of tourism. Employing a descriptive and exploratory survey design, the study seeks to generate data for future investigations. The survey, administered to Facebook users, initially profiles participants' demographic characteristics and subsequently delves into their interactions through inquiries about online advertisements, purchasing behavior, and WoM. The overarching goal is to contribute to enhancing social media advertisements in today's highly competitive environment by conducting a comprehensive examination and establishing guiding criteria for marketing. Methodologically, Facebook-sponsored ads and Word-of-Mouth serve as independent variables, while consumer purchasing behavior in tourism is considered the dependent variable. Data analysis is performed using the SPSS

program, with survey questions developed based on scales from the works of Mikalef et al. (2013) and Sun and Wang (2020).

The research adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing the survey method with participants drawn from social media users. The relationship between consumer purchasing behavior, social media advertisements, and Word-of-Mouth is assessed through T-Test, ANOVA, Reliability, and Correlation analyses. The survey instrument comprises two sections with a total of 18 questions. The first segment contains four questions aimed at determining the sociodemographic characteristics of the surveyed sample. Responses to statements in the scales employ a five-point Likert-type metric (1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree). The research's scope involves the distribution of a simple random survey to a sample group totaling 300 individuals. Commencing on 01.11.2023, the survey concluded on 01.12.2023, with 250 surveys being considered for analysis. Principal limitations of the research pertain to its exclusive focus on Facebook users and the duration of the survey administration.

Table 1. Demographic variables

Age	n	%
18-23	105	42
24-29	83	33.2
30-35	47	18.8
36-41	9	3.6
42+	6	2.4
Total	250	100
Gender		
Female	123	49.2
Male	127	50.8
Total	250	100
Education		
Secondary School	11	4.5
High School	36	14.7
Undergraduate	122	49.8
Master	66	26.9
Doctorate	10	4.1
Total	250	100
Income		
0-500	86	34.5
501-1000	109	43.4
1001-2000	43	17.3
2000+	12	4.8
Total	250	100
Social media		
Facebook	149	59.4
Instagram	69	27.7
YouTube	19	7.6
Twitter	3	1.2
Other	10	4
Total	250	100
Time spent on social media		
less than 1 h	62	24.8
1-2 hours	95	38
3-4 hours	41	16.4
more than 4 h	17	6.8
none	35	14
Total	250	100

4. Findings

The research findings indicate a positive relationship between Facebook-sponsored ads and consumer purchasing behavior as well as Word-of-Mouth (WoM) communication in the context of tourism. Regression, t-test, reliability, and ANOVA analyses reveal a robust association between Facebook-sponsored ads and the variables under consideration. These outcomes signify a rising interest in Facebook-sponsored ads and a substantial connection between consumer purchasing behavior and WoM communication within the tourism sector. Demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1, showcasing a predominantly male sample, with the majority holding undergraduate degrees (49.8%). Facebook emerges as the most frequently used social media platform (59.4%), and 38% of participants dedicate 1-2 hours daily to Facebook usage. Factor analysis was employed to evaluate the relationship between Facebook-sponsored ads, consumer purchasing behavior, and WoM communication in tourism. The "KMO and Bartlett's" test and "Principal components" method were utilized for assessing differences. The KMO Sampling Appropriateness Measurement value exceeding 0.6 ($0.91 > 0.6$) and a p-value below 0.05 validated the appropriateness of the data.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's test

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KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy			.911
	Approx. Chi-Square	1909.819	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df		66
	Sig.		.000

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Consumer purchasing behavior	3.7496	.91688	250
Facebook-sponsored ads	3.8910	.79839	250
WoM communication	3.9240	.91933	250

The SPSS regression analysis output investigates the relationship between the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable and the independent variables "WoM Communication" and "Facebook-Sponsored Advertisements." The primary objective of this analysis is to assess the impact of two independent variables on one dependent variable. In the Descriptive Statistics section, the mean value of the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable is 3.74, with a standard deviation of 0.91. The mean value of the WoM variable is 3.92, with a standard deviation of 0.91, while the mean value of the "Facebook-Sponsored Advertisements" variable is 3.89, with a standard deviation of 0.79. Moreover, the Pearson correlation coefficient between these variables is calculated as 0.623, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between the variables "Word of Mouth" and "Sponsored Advertisements" with "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism."

In the Variables Entered/Removed section, it is evident that only the WoM and "Sponsored Advertisements"

variables are included in the analysis, signifying the exclusive evaluation of these two variables on "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism." The Model Summary section presents various statistics to assess the accuracy of the regression model. The R Square value indicates that the independent variables explain 59.4% of the variance in the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable. The ANOVA section tests the significance of the regression model, yielding an F statistic of 180.434. The P value is 0.000, indicating the significance of the regression model, with at least one independent variable significantly affecting the dependent variable. The total variance explanation highlights that the factors account for 65% of the total variance. Rotated factor loadings elucidate the explanatory capacity of each variable, with the first factor having the highest variance explanation (55.38%) and the second contributing to a 9.57% explainable variance. These results underscore the high explanatory capacity of factor analysis, with two factors being pivotal in the outcome.

T-test analysis was conducted for consumer purchasing behavior questions, measuring differences through the "Independent Samples" test. The SPSS output encompasses group statistics and independent sample t-test results for the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable across two gender groups. In the group statistics section, mean, standard deviation, and standard error values for the "Female" and "Male" gender groups are reported. The number of women responding to the questions is determined as "127" (with an average of 3.8), and the number of men is determined as "123" (with an average of 3.5). In the Independent Sample T-Test Results section, the F value is calculated as 2.55, and the p-value is 0.008, given Levene's test under the assumption of equal variance. Since this value is ($0.008 < 0.05$), a statistically significant difference is observed between male and female participants in terms of "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism." A "One Way" analysis was selected with different income groups for questions measuring purchasing behavior, and a "Post Hoc Test" was executed to identify possible differences between the groups. Given that the p-values between the "Gender" and "Duration" groups are less than 0.05 ($0.019 < 0.05$) ($0.016 < 0.05$), a significant difference is detected between the groups.

5. Discussion and conclusions

According to the findings of this research, Facebook-sponsored ads appear to be effective in influencing variables such as gender and Word-of-Mouth (WoM) communication, which in turn impact consumer purchasing behavior in the tourism sector. This observation substantiates the accuracy of the proposed hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. The positive and significant relationship between consumer purchasing behavior in tourism and WoM communication, along with Facebook-sponsored advertisements, underscores that enhancing the perception of Facebook-sponsored advertisements among the target audience can stimulate consumer purchasing behavior.

Table 4. Correlation analysis results

		Consumer purchasing behavior	Facebook-sponsored ads	WoM communication
Pearson Correlation	Consumer purchasing behavior	1.000	.728	.623
	Facebook-sponsored ads	.728	1.000	.572
	WoM communication	.623	.572	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Consumer purchasing behavior	.	.000	.000
	Facebook-sponsored ads	.000	.	.000
	WoM communication	.000	.000	.
N	Consumer purchasing behavior	250	250	250
	Facebook-sponsored ads	250	250	250
	WoM communication	250	250	250

Table 5. Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error in the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.770a	.594	.590	.58682	.594	180.434	2	247	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), WoM communication, Facebook-sponsored ads

Table 6. ANOVA results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1					
Regression	124.268	2	62.134	180.434	.000b
Residual	85.057	247	.344		
Total	209.325	249			

a. Dependent variable: consumer purchasing behavior

b. Predictors: (Constant), WoM communication, and Facebook-sponsored ads

Table 7. Group statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Consumer purchasing behavior	Female	127	3.8992	.84134	.07466
	Male	123	3.5951	.96817	.08730

Table 8. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for the Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Consumer purchasing behavior	Equal variances assumed	2.550	.112	2.653	248	.008	.30409	.11461	.07836	.52982
	Equal variances not assumed			2.647	240.930	.009	.30409	.11487	.07782	.53036

Table 9. ANOVA for groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Between Groups	5.964	12	.497	2.084	.019
	Within Groups	56.520	237	.238		
	Total	62.484	249			
Age	Between Groups	5.725	12	.477	.483	.924
	Within Groups	234.339	237	.989		
	Total	240.064	249			
Income	Between Groups	8.314	12	.693	.978	.471
	Within Groups	167.236	236	.709		
	Total	175.550	248			
Education	Between Groups	6.058	12	.505	.663	.786
	Within Groups	176.742	232	.762		
	Total	182.800	244			
Duration	Between Groups	41.943	12	3.495	2.133	.016
	Within Groups	388.361	237	1.639		
	Total	430.304	249			

Consumer purchasing behavior initiates with perception, necessitating businesses to engage more intensively and establish a presence on social media channels. In this context, businesses should contemplate collaborations with professionals, such as influencers and Social Media Marketing (SMM) experts, to gain a competitive edge in today's markets. The principle of "There is no good or bad advertising" encapsulates the fundamental mission of our subject. According to literature sources (Demir et al., 2021; 2023), the tourism industry has recently shifted its focus toward digital transformation. Strategies and innovations incorporating data-oriented approaches, personalized experiences, and artificial intelligence empower companies to meet consumer expectations. At this juncture, the results of our research find support, indicating that consumers exhibit their purchasing behavior in trustworthy businesses.

As posited by Mladenović et al. (2023), it has been argued that online shopping entails a more rational decision-making process than in-store shopping. Our analysis results demonstrate variations in purchasing behavior between men and women, highlighting the importance consumers attribute to these factors. As emphasized by Sashi and Brynildsen (2022), most daily interactions occur on social media platforms today. Consumers utilize these platforms to gather information about products, brands, and companies, as well as to share their experiences. Such platforms have given rise to new media, providing users with various opportunities. The outcomes of our research indicate that consumers' inclination to share their experiences on online channels facilitates swift actions, such as destination selection and reservation. The findings of this study, coupled with the literature review, affirm that social media, WoM communication, and consumer behavior in tourism are interconnected factors. Businesses in the tourism sector must amalgamate diverse efforts to avoid exploiting consumers' trust and mitigate potential harm. Consumers exhibit a propensity for trustworthy and transparent businesses, a critical factor for the long-term success of these enterprises.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior in the context of tourism on social media platforms, particularly Facebook. The research emphasizes the interconnectedness of sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Identifying gender as a significant factor in this dynamic adds nuance to existing theories, suggesting that demographic variables play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses to online advertising and interpersonal recommendations. Scholars and researchers can use these insights to refine existing models and frameworks related to consumer behavior in the digital era, considering the interplay between social media advertising and word-of-mouth as a more nuanced determinant.

5.2. Practical implications

This study offers actionable insights for practitioners in the tourism industry, especially those engaged in digital marketing. The demonstrated influence of both sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication on consumer purchasing behavior underscores the importance of a holistic marketing approach. Marketers can leverage these findings to design more effective and targeted advertising campaigns on Facebook, considering the gender-specific nuances revealed by the study. Additionally, fostering positive word-of-mouth through social media interactions can be strategically integrated into marketing strategies. By understanding the synergistic effects of these two elements, businesses can optimize their digital marketing efforts, enhance customer engagement, and drive tourism-related sales.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite the valuable contributions of this research, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on Facebook, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other social media platforms. Moreover, relying on a quantitative research method may overlook qualitative nuances that could provide deeper insights into consumer perceptions. Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across multiple social media platforms and incorporating qualitative methodologies to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, considering the dynamic nature of social media and technology, longitudinal studies could provide insights into consumer behavior patterns. Exploring the impact of cultural variables on the relationship between social media advertising, word-of-mouth, and consumer behavior could also be a promising avenue for further investigation.

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Author contributions

Sebine Beşirova: Conceptualizing and writing the original draft, methodological design, investigations, and formal analysis and interpretation.

Disclosure statement

The author reported no potential competing interest.

Ethics committee approval

Since this study is a graduate course project at Azerbaijan State University of Economics, the Ethics Committee approval process was carried out under the legislation of the relevant university. The data was collected in the period 01.11.2023-01.12.2023.