# Antecedents of consumer attitude towards affiliate marketing advertisements in retail sector: Special reference to generation Z consumers in Western province, Sri Lanka

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***ABSTRACT***

*Affiliate marketing is a crucial aspect of digital marketing, offering businesses a cost-effective and performance-based method to engage with their target audience. Although it is an essential strategy, researchers have identified that consumers' trust in affiliate marketers is limited due to authenticity and commercialization concerns, with influencer fatigue indicating growing skepticism. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of consumer attitudes on affiliate marketing advertisements in Generation Z, particularly within the Western Province of Sri Lanka. However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that bridge the gap between affiliate marketing theory and the practical execution of affiliate programs, particularly in the retail sector in Sri Lanka. Following a quantitative research design and a deductive approach, this study focused on 384 respondents residing in the Western*

*Province of Sri Lanka who have encountered or been exposed to affiliate marketing*

*promotions within the retail sector among Generation Z residents. Data were gathered using a purposive sampling method through a self-administered questionnaire, and regression analysis conducted for the data analysis. The results showed that informativeness and entertainment significantly enhanced the perceived value of affiliate marketing advertisements among Generation Z. Social norms and irritation had a minimal impact on value perception. The study also found a strong positive correlation between the perceived value of*

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*affiliate marketing ads and overall consumer attitude.The results underscore the need for marketers to prioritize informative and entertaining content to build trust and positive perceptions, thereby shaping the future of affiliate marketing practices for this influential consumer group.*

**Key Words: Affiliate advertisements, Affiliate marketing, Generation Z**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is crucial in the marketing world, distributing nonpersonal information to persuade audiences about products, services, or ideas. It drives awareness, interest, and commerce across sectors, shaping consumer perceptions and bridging the gap between offerings and people (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Bovee, 1995). Digital advertising refers to the strategic utilization of Internet technologies by firms in order to disseminate promotional advertisements to their target clients (Mehta, 2020). The utilization of technology, the wide range of available materials, and the interactive nature of communication facilitate seamless and customized client engagement (Rizvanović et al., 2023). Digital marketing and advertising, including PPC, display, and social ads, has transformed how businesses engage with their customer base, outpacing traditional media and increasing advertising spending, making it effective for targeting worldwide customers (Chung et al., 2023). Digital marketing's global emergence is gaining momentum, with global advertising spending projected to reach 695 billion U.S. dollars in 2024, underscoring its growing global importance (Statista, 2023). Asia's growing internet penetration and smartphone usage have led to rapid growth in digital marketing, accounting for 82.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2020. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, digital advertising expenditure increased by 53% in 2020 compared to the previous year, reflecting the rising significance of digital marketing in the country (Sri Lanka ICTA, 2023). These trends highlight the expanding opportunities and the transformative role of digital marketing in both global and local contexts. Affiliate marketing is a cost-effective and performance-based digital marketing strategy where businesses pay external publishers to generate traffic or leads, with affiliates motivated by commission income (Sudhagar, 2012). The advent of the Internet has significantly elevated the visibility and significance of affiliate marketing (Mangiò & Di Domenico, 2022). AM, characterized by its performance-based nature, has undergone significant growth in recent years. It involves collaborative efforts between businesses and affiliates, which may range from publishers to social media influencers. AM is a partnership between a business and an affiliate, acting as an intermediary to promote products or services. Affiliates promote the business through various channels, creating promotional content. They act as independent marketers, earning commissions based on sales or leads generated (Johnson & Brown, 2019). Sophisticated tracking systems are used to reward affiliates for their marketing efforts, monitoring customer interactions with their content using a unique affiliate ID (Bormann, 2016). If a client engages in a purchase or performs specific actions such as subscribing to newsletters, downloading

e-books or guides, filling out contact forms, requesting price quotes, or participating in webinars or events, comes under the interactions of affiliate advertisements (Rangaswamy et al., 2020). Users engage in various activities like interacting with interactive content, installing mobile apps, booking services, entering contests, sharing content on social media, writing reviews, and joining loyalty programs. AM operates on a commission-based model, promoting win-win dynamics (Mangiò & Di Domenico, 2022; Patrick & Hee, 2019). The 2020 Global Affiliate Marketing Survey conducted by Affiliate Summit also revealed that 94% of respondents considered AM to be an essential part of their overall marketing strategy (Allison O'Neil, Marketing & Affiliate Partnerships Manager at Hypelinks, 2024). Research shows 51% of individuals conduct most of their purchases online within a three-month period, excluding grocery items. Online shopping is increasingly recognized as a valuable component of digital marketing (Statista, 2023). Adobe's cross-generational research shows that Gen Z is the most receptive to internet advertisements, with 52% of this group expressing a positive attitude towards such ads (McCarthy, 2019). Within the realm of marketing, the advertising landscape holds a crucial position (Chung et al., 2023). In this context, the digital advertising domain has emerged as a notable element, characterized by a prominent transition towards performance-based models. Among these models, affiliate marketing has gained particular prominence (Ghosal et al., 2020). The retail sector dominates affiliate advertising, accounting for 43% of total revenue generated through affiliate marketing, followed by telecommunications, media, and travel sectors (Webster, 2023). Digital technology adoption is crucial for digital marketing automation, but Sri Lanka ranks 87th out of 141 on the CISCO Digital Readiness Index 2023. This discrepancy, coupled with deceptive affiliate marketing practices, affects affiliates and consumers' perceptions, leading to a decline in confidence. In Sri Lanka the emerging digital marketing environment in Colombo, were chosen as the study's context. Sri Lanka offers a unique scenario for understanding the efficacy of affiliate marketing techniques due to the growing engagement of Generation Z consumers with internet content (Statista, 2023). An excellent place to investigate affiliate marketing consumer behavior is Colombo, which is the nation's commercial center and has a high rate of digital engagement and technology adoption (Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka, 2023). Sri Lanka's internet penetration rate is 40.1%, with Gen Z being a significant population. Baby Boomers are vulnerable to online commercials and misinformation, while Gen Z is more understanding of truth and data exchange (McCarthy, 2019). The study explores consumer attitudes' impact on affiliate marketing advertisements in Generation Z, particularly in Sri Lanka's Western Province. It highlights the potential of affiliate marketing in reshaping the digital marketing and advertising sector.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Informativeness

The concept of informativeness refers to the degree to which advertising drives customers to acquire products that fulfil their wants (Ducoffe, 1996), enabling them to generate surface-level assessments regarding the most advantageous service (Amr et al., 2022). This phenomenon has the potential to establish an equilibrium between the demands of consumers and the offerings of producers, hence facilitating a more optimised marketplace (Pollay & Mittal, 1993). This holds true for information conveyed through advertising. In essence, advertising serves the purpose of generating consumer awareness regarding various products and services (Iyer et al., 2005). Consequently, information disseminated through online media must exhibit qualitative attributes, including accuracy, timeliness, and utility for customers (Siau & Shen, 2003). Furthermore, the study conducted by Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer (1999) provided empirical evidence supporting a favourable correlation between consumers' attitudes towards Internet advertising and its informative properties. Therefore, the role of information in marketing is of significant importance, as individuals are more likely to be attracted to commercials that provide incentives (Varshney, 2003). With all the literature of previous studies, the informativeness of the affiliate marketing advertisement may have a significant impact on the value of AM advertisements and, eventually, attitude towards AM advertisements. Based on that, the hypotheses could be formulated as follows.

H1: There is an impact of the informativeness on the value of AM advertisements in the retail sector, special reference to Generation Z western province of Sri Lanka.

### 2.2. Entertainment

Entertainment denotes “the ability of advertising to fulfill consumer needs for escapism, diversion, esthetic enjoyment or emotional release” (Ducoffe, 1995). Enjoyable advertisement grabs the attention of a consumers exposed to the ad (Ducoffe, 1995) at the same time, for the advertisement’s message to immediately capture consumers’ attention, it needs to be concise and funny (Zia, 2009). In a digital environment, advertisement has the capability of satisfying the hedonic needs of consumers by offering pleasant entertainment (Edwards Li, Lee, 2002). In a Web 2.0-based digital social media environment, ‘the entertainment value lies in the ability to fulfil audience needs for emotional release, diversion and enjoy-ment’ (Muntinga et al., 2011). Further Research on web advertising shows that entertainment in advertising can fulfil audience needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional release, and thus, have a positive impact on consumers’ perception of the advertisement value. Another study shows that Web advertising highly enriched with entertaining content achieves a more positive appraisal by recipients and leads to a higher target to revisit the homepage than websites without entertainment features (Raney et al., 2003). In this regard, entertainment can be considered as an important predictor of the value of

advertising besides being a crucial factor for internet advertising (Teo et al., 2003). With all the literature of previous studies, the entertainment of the affiliate marketing advertisement may have a significant impact on the value of AM advertisements and, eventually, attitude towards AM advertisements. Based on that, the hypotheses could be formulated as follows.

H2: There is an impact of the entertainment on the value of AM advertisements in the retail sector, special reference to Generation Z western province of Sri Lanka.

### 2.3. Social Norms

While advancements in robotics might Researchers in past studies have also made efforts to comprehend the significance of social impact in elucidating how social norms function as determinants of attitude (Amin & Ramayah, 2010). Social norms are a manifestation of the standards upheld by a particular group. When an individual belongs to many groups, such as family, friends, and colleagues, and the standards these groups uphold do not agree, a state of normative conflict arises (McDonald & Crandall, 2015). Conflicting norms can create polarisation among individuals, as they may be inclined to align themselves with their preexisting attitudes. This can be attributed to the varying assessments individuals make regarding the effectiveness of their actions when confronted with conflicting standards (McDonald & Crandall, 2015). When individuals encounter competing norms, they may attribute a decrease in effectiveness to their own behaviours as they observe others not conforming to the expected behaviour. On the other hand, certain individuals may perceive the fact that not all others are taking action as an indication of the urgent necessity for them, on a personal level, to take action.

According to Yang's (2007) study, which utilised the technology adoption model (TAM), it was shown that social influence played a notable role in shaping individuals' attitudes towards mobile advertising. The researcher further emphasised the relevance of technology acceptability in the context of mobile advertising uptake, particularly among the younger demographic (Yang, 2007). In addition, the acceptance and utilisation of new technology by individuals is notably influenced by the favourable disposition of a major individual in their social circle, such as a close relative or a marital partner (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Palka et al., 2009). A favourable social climate has been found to decrease negative attitudes towards mobile advertising, hence fostering favourable intents towards the use of mobile advertising (Zhang & Mao, 2008). With all the literature of previous studies, the social norms of the affiliate marketing advertisement may have a significant impact on the value of AM advertisements and, eventually, attitude towards AM advertisements. Based on that, the hypotheses could be formulated as follows.

H3: There is an impact of the social norms on the value of AM advertisements in the retail sector, special reference to Generation Z western province of Sri Lanka.

### 2.4 Irritation

Irritation refers to how the advertising message irritates and displeases consumers

(Kim & Han, 2014). While informativeness and entertainment relate to the perceived benefits of advertising, irritation relates to the perceived cost of advertising. Web advertising has the potential to present a wide range of information that may lead to confusion, distraction, and even overload for the viewer. Customers often experience dissatisfaction and adverse reactions towards advertisements that elicit annoyance, offence, disrespect, or excessive perceived as unpleasant and irritating, disrupting consumer engagement with a medium's content (Ducoffe, 1996). Consumer irritation with advertising is negatively correlated with perceived value and attitude. Factors contributing to dissatisfaction include advertising material, clutter, perceived lack of transparency, and erosion of privacy. Multiple factors contribute to annoyance or irritation, including product nature, intrusiveness, and perceived loss of control over behavior. Research focuses on specific characteristics of advertising that could irritate consumers (Edwards et al., 2002). With all the literature of previous studies, the social norms of the affiliate marketing advertisement may have a significant impact on the value of AM advertisements and, eventually, attitude towards AM advertisements. Based on that, the hypotheses could be formulated as follows.

H4: There is an impact of the irritation on the value of AM advertisements in the retail sector, special reference to Generation Z western province of Sri Lanka.

### 2.5 Value of Affiliate Marketing Advertisements

Companies commit significant financial resources to advertising on an annual basis. The optimal outcome for organisations would entail the implementation of effective advertisements that serve as reminders to guide consumers towards purchasing decisions. However, before prompting and guiding consumers into retail locations, the target demographic needs to possess awareness regarding the online advertisements amidst the vast multitude of comparable advertisements. The attainment of this objective necessitates the development of highly suitable web advertisements. In this context, the assessment of advertising value becomes a significant factor. It is vital to elucidate the determinants that impact the worth of advertising at present.

The web advertising model, developed in 1995, posits that the value of advertising has an impact on individuals' attitudes towards advertising. Ducoffe's model explains the functioning of advertising and the various aspects that impact attitudes towards it. In previous studies on mobile advertising, researchers have employed advertising value as a fundamental mechanism to assess the value of mobile advertising (Kim & Han, 2014). A study that examined the mediating role of advertising value in the relationship between the qualities of mobile advertising and attitudes towards mobile advertising within a cross-cultural environment. Comparably, the study conducted by Kim and Han (2014) demonstrated the role of advertising value as a mediator in the connection between cognitive, emotive, and

economic aspects and the desire to purchase. Based on that, the hypotheses could be formulated as follows.

H5: There is an impact of the value of AM advertisements on the attitude of AM advertisements in the retail sector, special reference to Generation Z western province of Sri Lanka.

### 2.6 Attitude towards the Affiliate Marketing Advertisement

The three component model of attitude comprises cognition, emotion, and conation. In this paradigm, the authors demonstrate that "attitude refers to an individual's comprehensive assessment of a particular concept." Nonetheless, Fishbein and Azjen (1980) provided a description that has gained significant acceptance among scholars. They defined attitude as an individual's positive or negative emotions towards an item. The formation of an individual's evaluations is influenced by the cognitive system and is characterised by emotive elements (Mustafi & Hosain, 2020).

The influence of attitudes on the efficacy of advertising is a significant factor for marketers, since they have the ability to strategically target and mould attitudes towards specific advertising messages. These attitudes subsequently impact the overall perception of the brand advertisement (Mehta, 2000). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitude can be described as a pre-existing disposition that is acquired through learning in human beings. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008), attitudes can be defined as an individual's assessment and emotional response towards a certain object or concept. In the realm of advertising, attitudes have been conceptualised as a "cognitively acquired inclination to consistently react in a positive or negative manner towards advertising as a whole" (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Based on that, the hypotheses could be formulated as follows.

H6: There is an impact of the relationship of the value of AM advertisements between informativeness, entertainment, social norms and irritation with the attitude toward AM advertisements in the retail sector, special reference to Generation Z western province of Sri Lanka.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Ducoffe Web Advertising Model

Web advertising, also known as Internet advertising, is commercial content created by businesses to engage people about a product or service. Originating in the mid-1900s, it includes email marketing, display advertising, search engine marketing, native advertising, social media advertising, content marketing, video advertising, and banner advertising (Mackeviciute, 2022). The Ducoffe Web Advertising model, proposed by Robert J. Ducoffe, revolutionized marketing and advertising research by breaking traditional methodologies. Ducoffe's study on customer perceptions of online advertising during the early Internet's development revealed that perceived intrusiveness can be mitigated when content is highly valuable (Edwards et al., 2002). The web advertising model was proposed by Ducoffe (1995), drawing upon

the uses and gratifications theory (UGT). This particular model has been widely embraced as a means of forecasting individuals' views towards mobile advertising (Ducoffe, 1995) and theory posits that individuals select media content based on their cognitive and affective requirements, determined by their needs and incentives for obtaining satisfaction (Katz et al., 1973). The model incorporates three antecedents of advertisement value, namely informativeness, entertainment, and irritation. The theoretical framework proposed by Ducoffe (1996) will be employed to examine the impacts of the three factors preceding the advertising value model on consumers' expectations of quality (Ducoffe, 1996; Lou & Yuan, 2019). previous studies on mobile advertising have found that informativeness, entertainment, and irritation were significant predictors of the value of mobile advertising (Kim & Han, 2014).

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Demographic Analysis

The following data shows that among the persons who were exposed to and encountered affiliate marketing ads in digital platforms, male respondents made up 46.95% of the total, while female respondents made up 53.05% of the total.

Table 1: Demographics Analysis

| | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 146 | 46.95% |
| | Female | 165 | 53.05% |
| Employment Status | Student | 158 | 50.8% |
| | Employed in Private Sector | 121 | 39.9% |
| | Employed in Public Sector | 11 | 3.5% |
| | Unemployed | 17 | 5.5% |
| | Other | 4 | 1.3% |
| Daily Digital Screen Time | Less than 1 hour | 26 | 8.4% |
| | 1-2 hours | 44 | 14.1% |
| | 2-4 hours | 69 | 22.2% |
| | 4-6 hours | 83 | 26.6% |
| | More than 6 hours | 89 | 28.6% |

### 4.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability in a study is determined by the consistency and stability of the research tool or methodology. In this study, ensuring the reliability of measures used to evaluate behavioral intents and attitudes towards AI is crucial. Internal consistency can be measured using statistical techniques like Cronbach's alpha, with a reliability coefficient above 0.7 indicating inference reliability (Zhang et al., 2023).

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

| Variable | Cronbach Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|---|
| Informativeness | 0.896 | 5 |
| Entertainment | 0.902 | 5 |
| Social Norms | 0.855 | 3 |
| Irritation | 0.941 | 3 |
| Advertising Value | 0.850 | 3 |
| Attitude toward AA | 0.853 | 3 |

### 4.3 Validity Analysis

The provided results include the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and its associated significance (Sig) for all variables: Informativeness, Entertainment, Social norms, Irritation, Advertising value, Attitude towards AA. The KMO measure assesses the sampling adequacy for conducting a factor analysis. Generally, a KMO value above 0.5 is considered acceptable. In this context, "Informativeness" has the highest KMO value at 0.873. The significance values for all variables are 0.000, indicating that the correlations between items within these variables are significantly different from zero.

Table 3: Validity Analysis

| Variable | KMO | Bartlett's Test | Status |
|---|---|---|---|
| Informativeness | 0.873 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Entertainment | 0.866 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Social Norms | 0.732 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Irritation | 0.768 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Advertising Value | 0.712 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Attitude toward AA | 0.730 | 0.000 | Accepted |

### 4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4: Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error | Durbin-Watson |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | .695 | .483 | .478 | .544 | 1.823 |

According to the table 4, the adjusted R2, it can be described that 48.3 % of the variance of the attitude towards the affiliate marketing advertisements is explained by the independent variables including the mediator variable which is value of the advertisement under this study. Therefore, around 51% of the variance of attitude towards the affiliate marketing advertisements is explained by other influencing factors which are not covered by the current study.

Table 5: ANOVA

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 84.687 | 3 | 28.3 | 95.5 | 0.000 |
| Residual | 90.733 | 307 | .296 | | |
| Total | 175.421 | 310 | | | |

As per Table 5, the model's significance level is 0.000, meaning it is below the 0.05 level. Consequently, the statistical significance of the regression model can be inferred.

Table 6: Coefficient

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 1.15 | .163 | | 7.06 | .000 |
| Informativeness | .503 | .052 | .523 | 9.69 | .000 |
| Entertainment | .221 | .048 | .250 | 4.62 | .000 |

Coefficient for informativeness is 0.503. It indicates that increasing one unit of informativeness causes to increase value pf advertising in 0.221 units while other independent variables remain constant. The significant value is 0.000 at 95% of confident interval level. According to Tables shows, Coefficient for subjective entertainment 0.197. It Indicate that increasing one unit of entertainment causes to increases value of advertising in 0.197 units while other independent variables remain constant. The significant value is 0.377 at 95% of confident interval level.

Table 7: Excluded Variable

| Model | Beta In | T | Sig. | Partial Correlation | Collinearity Statistics |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Tolerance |
| Social norm | .012 | 1.19 | .052 | .111 | .577 |
| Irritation | .055 | 1.33 | .193 | .074 | .876 |

According to table, social norm and irritation indicated as an excluded variable.

### 4.5 Mediating Effect

In addition to the above, the researcher has conducted Sobel test to assess the proposed mediating effect of advertising value and test H5. The Sobel test result outcomes are as follows:

Table 8: Mediating Effect

| Variables | Sobel test | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Test statistics | Std. Error: | p-value |
| Informativeness | 1.3389 | 0.0264 | 0.018 |
| Entertainment | 4.3583 | 0.0356 | 0.000 |

The Sobel test showed a statistically significant mediating effect between informativeness, entertainment and the attitude towards affiliate advertisements at the 95% confident interval since all the p-values are less than 0.05. Then, it is concluded that H5 is accepted.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study's conclusions highlight how entertainment and informational content influence Generation Z's perceptions of affiliate marketing. Since young consumers in Sri Lanka are increasingly using digital platforms, affiliate marketing that uses entertaining and educational material can boost positive attitudes and possibly enhance purchase intent (Ducoffe, 1996; Statista, 2023). Additionally, the study shows that social norms and annoyance have little effect, indicating that Sri Lankan customers might value content quality more than social influence. These results imply

that instead of depending only on social proof or other conventional marketing strategies, marketers should prioritize producing value-driven content that appeals to Generation Z.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHERS

Antecedents of consumer attitude towards affiliate marketing advertisements in retail sector; special reference to generation z consumers in western province, Sri Lanka. Future research should explore Generation Z's evolving preferences and behaviors in response to affiliate marketing ads, considering emerging technologies like augmented and virtual reality. Comparative studies across cultural contexts and markets can provide a comprehensive understanding. Ethical considerations and privacy concerns are also crucial. Longitudinal studies can offer valuable insights for businesses and marketers.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the impact of affiliate marketing (AM) programs on Generation Z in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Affiliate marketing is a performance-based promotional strategy that involves collaboration between businesses and affiliates, who can take on various roles. Gen Z, known for their digital literacy and understanding of privacy, is particularly susceptible to affiliate scams. The study examines consumer attitudes towards AM programs, focusing on factors such as informativeness, entertainment, social norms, and irritation. The Ducoffe Web Advertising model is used as a theoretical framework, focusing on informativeness, entertainment, social norms, and irritation. The study recommends avoiding strategies that provoke irritation and focusing on honesty and trustworthiness in advertising. The study employs a deductive research approach with a quantitative design, examining causal relationships between variables. The results show a positive correlation between informativeness and entertainment and their impact on the effectiveness of affiliate marketing advertisements. However, 62% of the variance in consumers' attitudes remains unexplained. A hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis explains 48.3% of the variance in consumer views towards affiliate marketing advertisements, but 51% remains unaccounted for.

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