

## Determinants of Advertising Effectiveness on Facebook: A Conceptual Framework

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### **Abstract**

*Being one of the most popular social networking sites with the largest user base, facebook is an influential advertising platform for businesses. With facebook offering user-friendly applications and optimization features for ad creation, facebook ads have become an imperative marketing strategy of most companies, in order to target the huge base of potential customers. Despite the massive effort and resources spent by businesses, past research indicates that facebook users generally have a negative attitude towards facebook advertising. This study aims to qualitatively explore the determinants of advertising effectiveness on facebook as perceived by Indian facebook users. For this, semi-structured interviews with frequent facebook users were conducted to collect data. The qualitative data analysis yielded six determinants of advertising effectiveness, namely; informativeness, entertainment, credibility, emotional appeal, creativity and perceived ad relevance. Based on the research findings and literature support, a conceptual framework has been proposed consisting of these six determinants as predictors of advertising effectiveness indicated by consumer attitude towards ad, intention to click/interact with ad and purchase intention. The results have been discussed along with concluding remarks, study limitations and future research directions.*

**Keywords:** Facebook, Advertising, Effectiveness, Interviews



## 1. Introduction

The advent of social networking sites (SNS) has not just revolutionized the means of socializing and communication, but also the face of digital advertising. They are increasingly becoming an important communication tool for businesses enhancing their ability to increase brand awareness and attract new customers (Ferreira and Barbosa, 2017). Of the various SNSs available, Facebook is one of the most popular SNSs worldwide with 1.71 billion active users (Chao and Keung, 2017). García-domingo et al. (2017) also noted that three out of four global internet users are on Facebook, probably asserting its popularity.

As a virtual social media platform, Facebook offers an easy, cost-effective way of advertising for businesses which includes communicating product information, promoting their products and services, and building brand communities. The interactive capabilities offered on Facebook also make virtual content-sharing activities easy for users and encourage target audiences to engage in marketing activities (Thackeray et al., 2008). Businesses can easily learn to use Facebook pages, advertising applications and plug-ins to create self-made ads in order to achieve specific business goals such as increasing brand awareness, products launching, customer service, selling products and services (Haydon et al., 2012). Facebook also offers unique optimization features for ad creators based on their goals and constraints such as decrease marketing cost, increase sales, higher conversation rate, improve attention, solidify customer loyalty and create advocates who publicize you and defend you against critics (Carter, 2014).

The recent changes in Facebook's news feed algorithm and the increased volume of content shared has resulted in an increased use of advertising which has eventually reduced the organic reach. Advertising is more brazenly used by the companies to enhance their post reach and has become an imperative marketing strategy to drive their news feed visibility (Ferreira and Barbosa, 2017). Despite these best efforts and

resources spent, consumers generally have a negative attitude towards advertisements on facebook (Bannister et al., 2013; Hsu and Bailey, 2015). Too many or repeated advertising is highly ineffective and might lead to consumer irritation or overlooking. Conversely, a relevant and personalized ad might prove effective which constantly reminds a user of his/her recently searched products through latest browser history. Thus, even if the user has forgotten or postponed the purchase, the remainder of the relevant products and brands via customized advertising might motivate him/her to make a purchase. However, even such overly personalized ads raise concern among many consumers due to the fear that their personal information and browsing history details are available to outsiders and might be misused (Kim and Huh, 2016). Thus, these varying perceptions indicate that consumer response to advertising on facebook is rather complex and intriguing. Hence, this study attempts to qualitatively investigate the consumer perception of the factors which determine advertising effectiveness on facebook.

## 2. Literature Review

With the emergence of the internet, the past two decades have witnessed the growth and various innovations in digital advertising which has been widely acknowledged in marketing literature. It all began with simple banner and displays ads, followed by pop-ups and then paid search and pay-per-click ads and finally social media advertising which is currently in vogue. Recognizing the widespread use and significance of advertising on social media, various researchers have explored a range of areas and issues in the field of advertising on social media platforms.

Alsamydai and Khasawneh (2013) explored the antecedents and consequences of consumers' attitude towards facebook advertising among Jordanian facebook users. They identified informativeness, entertainment, irritation, credibility and personalization as the antecedents of consumer attitude which lead to satisfaction and usage facebook advertising. Pancaningrum and Rahayu (2017) adopted the EPIC model developed by Nielson (2008) to study the effectiveness of facebook advertising among Indonesian consumers. EPIC represents four dimensions of measuring the ad effectiveness i.e. empathy, persuasion, impact, and communication. Ferreira and Barbosa (2017) analysed the perception of Portuguese facebook users towards facebook advertising by comparing their attitude towards brand posts and facebook ads. The results indicated that consumers had a more favourable attitude towards brand posts than facebook ads. While examining the relation between users' ad avoidance and electronic word-of-mouth, they found that ads are considered more annoying by who spend more time on facebook.

A huge number of studies focussed on understanding the perception of young consumers, specifically college students. Bright and Daugherty (2012) examined the

effect of customization, desire for control and type of advertising on U.S. college students' attitude towards advertising, content recognition and behavioural intention for interacting with advertising. They found that participants who thought they were exposed to a customized media environment had greater behavioural intention for interacting with advertising. Celebi (2015) studied the motives of undergraduate students in Turkey which affect their attitudes and behaviours toward internet and facebook advertising. Interpersonal utility was found to be the most important motivation i.e. individuals who have a need of belonging to groups and enjoying a sense of community has a positive attitude toward Internet and facebook advertising. Pass time, information seeking and entertainment were the other motives for using internet. In case of facebook advertising, informativeness, entertainment, quality of life, structure time, peer influence and self-brand congruity were drivers of positive attitude while privacy concern and invasiveness were reasons for negative attitude towards facebook advertising. In an experimental study, Chang et al. (2012) investigated the impact of three factors i.e. tie strength, endorser expertise and product type on facebook advertising effectiveness among undergraduate students in Singapore. The results showed that in case of utilitarian product ads, high-expertise endorsers were more effective. Conversely, for ads selling hedonic products, strong-tie endorsers were more effective than weak-tie endorsers in influencing purchase intention.

Significant number of studies on college students' perceptions showed that facebook ads were not effective for this demographic segment. In an exploratory study, Bannister et al. (2013) analysed the college students' perceptions of and behaviours regarding facebook advertising. The results showed that while most college students are active Facebook users, they are very unlikely to click on facebook ads or engage in purchase behaviours. The overall perception towards facebook ads was either negative or indifferent. Respondents were more likely to click on advertisements for events, movies/television programs or games but generally believed facebook ads were irrelevant, uninformative and not of interest. Despite their positive attitudes toward facebook, they were not interested in clicking on ads or making purchases. In a similar study, Hsu and Bailey (2015) conducted a study of effectiveness of facebook advertising on U.S. college students. They found that facebook advertisements are not effective for traditional undergraduate college students. They viewed facebook as a platform for socializing and mostly relied on search engine, word of mouth or visiting the store for making purchases. In a study of advertising effectiveness on social network sites, Maurer and Wiegmann (2011) observed that users do not actively use facebook as an information source and their purchase decisions are not influenced by facebook advertisements. They found facebook as an ideal platform for direct communication between organizations and customers.

Jung (2015) investigated the factors affecting attitudes and behavioural intention towards facebook advertising among facebook users in South Korea. Peer influence

was determined to be the strongest predictor of attitude and behavioural intention across all types of ads. Both invasiveness and privacy concern individually had no impact, but interestingly their interaction term was found to be statistically significant diminishing both attitude and behavioural intention, particularly when perceived invasiveness and privacy concern were high simultaneously. In an attempt to predict user responses to social media advertising in Korea, Lee and Hong (2016) found that informativeness and advertising creativity were key drivers of favourable behavioural responses to social media ads and that intention to engage in favourable user responses was positively associated with purchase intention. In their study of ad relevance and privacy concern among American internet users, Kim and Huh (2016) found that consumers with high levels of perceived ad relevance pay more attention; more positively evaluate, and click on the ad. While privacy concern was found negatively related to consumer attitude toward the ad, it played a much less important role than perceived ad relevance in predicting consumer responses to ads.

Few researchers found facebook ads to be effective contributing to awareness and change in purchase intentions of the consumers. For instance, Dehghani and Tumer (2015) found that facebook advertising significantly affected brand image and brand equity, which in turn had a positive influence on purchasing intention of the facebook users. Duffet (2015) examined the influence of facebook advertising on cognitive attitudes of Gen Y. The results showed that there was a favourable effect on the awareness and knowledge regarding products advertised among the Gen Y facebook users in South Africa. This research establishes the value of facebook advertising to marketers who plan to make use of this potent channel to target this dithering group of consumers.

The extensive review of literature highlights the effort of various researchers to study the consumer perceptions and attitude towards facebook advertising. Most of these studies are focused on college students or young consumers. Moreover, they have analyzed the role of only a limited number of determinants on facebook advertising effectiveness. Thus, there exists a research gap since there are very few studies which qualitatively and thoroughly explore the exhaustive array of factors determining the effectiveness of facebook ads in the Indian context.

### **3. Objective of the Study**

Facebook has become one of the popular SNSs for digital advertising with marketers spending significant money and effort on designing and posting ads for their businesses. This study attempts to explore the determinants of advertising effectiveness on facebook as perceived by Indian facebook users.

### **4. Research Methodology**

The study was carried out in Chennai city in India. Being exploratory in nature, an inductive approach with the qualitative research design was employed to achieve the research objective.

## 4.1 Tool for Data Collection

Interviews were used as the data collection tool to analyse the various determinants of advertising effectiveness on facebook. Interviews have been one of the most widely used and effective form of conducting exploratory research which comprehensively capture the perceptions and opinions of the respondents regarding the subject area.

Semi-structured interviews were adopted for this research where open-ended questions were used across all interviews and the interview's job was to probe for more depth answers (Crouch and Housden, 2012). This type of interview is advantageous since it helps the researcher focus on the research topic and makes the most value of time spent with the interviewees. It also ensures that the interview questions exhaustively cover the research topic, and facilitates the comparability between interviews (Drever, 1995). For this study, a total of six questions were prepared based on extensive literature review (Bannister et al., 2013). Refer Appendix for the list of interview questions.

## 4.2 Study Sample

The sample for the study consisted of 32 facebook users selected using researchers' personal contacts through snowball sampling technique since such sample facilitates an enriched and candid discussion due to the personal connection between the researcher and the participants (Noy, 2008). The researcher ensured that the interviewees chosen were from wider demographic background belonging to diverse age groups, occupations and income levels for a more representative sample of Indian facebook users. Table 1 presents the profile of the interviewees.

Table 1: Profile of the Interviewees

	Demographic Characteristics	No. of Interviewees
Gender	Male	19
	Female	13
Age	<25 years	12
	25-40 years	11
	40-55 years	6
	>55 years	3
Occupation	Government service	3
	Private services	9

	Business	2
	Student	10
	Homemaker	7
	Retired	1
Monthly	Below Rs.10,000	4
Household	Rs.10,000 – Rs.25,000	9
Income	Rs.25,000 – Rs.50,000	11
	Above Rs.50,000	8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

### 4.3 Interview Procedure

The research first explained the study objective and purpose of the interview to each interviewee before starting the interview. The open-ended questions were put forth one by one to the interviewee. Based on the responses, the researcher asked questions for in-depth retrieval of required information. Each interview lasted for about 60-90 minutes. The data collection included audio recordings, observations of non-verbal cues and note-taking. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher provided a summary of major points discussed and gave the interviewees an opportunity to confirm or clarify the points.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The interviews were transcribed and analysed taking one question at a time. The key findings and inferences along with some of the interview excerpts have been summarized in this section.

### 1. How do you feel about advertising on social media networks such as Facebook?

The respondents who were regular facebook users acknowledged the overwhelming number of advertisements on facebook and claimed that advertising is a common activity with nothing extraordinary about it. Some of the excerpts are given below:

*"Yeah, it has become a kind of norm to post ads. Just like TV, newspapers, magazines, people have advertising here too. There is no big deal in this."*

*"I am a regular facebook user. I see a lot of ads on facebook. Some big companies keep posting their news or updates so much."*

*"Advertising stuff online has become so common today. If you don't advertise, how will people know about your company? Social media like facebook, instagram, snapchat are so popular now-a-days. Companies should make use of these platforms to advertise."*

2. How much do you notice the ads? Do you see/read any of them or do you ignore them?

Majority of the respondents claimed that they do notice the ads but most of them simply scroll down once they see an ad. According to them, facebook is for socializing and communicating with friends. They generally do not go to facebook to browse about any product or service advertised by companies. Conversely, some respondents claimed that they click and see/read the ads. Some of the excerpts are presented below:

*"Ah.. No. I mostly don't even look at the ads or news updates. I just check out the photos, updates and status of my friends and other people. Actually, I am tired of so many ads."*

*"I love surfing on facebook. Whatever it is, an ad or news or anything, I just look at it for a second. If it looks interesting, I will definitely click on it and read."*

*"Whenever I have some free time, I simply scroll down and see if there are any interesting ads or news or brand posts."*

Thus, all respondents claimed that they notice the ads but most of them simply ignore them since their primary focus is to fulfil their socializing needs. These respondents felt that there were too many ads which are overwhelming and repetitive. Around half the respondents agreed that they do see or read the ads driven by either curiosity or recreation motives. Thus, the key takeaway is that facebook ads do capture attention and gather views if they are perceived to be interesting or informative or entertaining by the users.

3. How relevant are the ads to you?

Most respondents stated that majority of the ads posted on facebook were not relevant or useful to them in any manner as highlighted by the excerpts below:

*"I don't think any of the facebook ads are addressed to me. It's mostly some random general stuff advertised by companies or brands."*

*"Not all ads are relevant to me, but I do get some very personalized ads on facebook. I do a lot of online shopping using mobile apps like amazon, firstcry. So I get a lot of ads showing the products that I recently browsed on these apps."*



*"Very few of them are relevant. But I do get to know the latest updates and offers on various brands posted by different companies. Yeah, it's informative."*

The respondents felt that majority of the facebook ads were not relevant to them, but a few ads were very personalized and customized advertising the recent browsed products and services online.

4. Do ads on Facebook have a negative, positive or no influence on your perceptions?

The respondents stated that the facebook ads generally do not have a significant influence on their perceptions, both positive and negative. However, they ads do create an impact on the respondents' perceptions depending on the source, creator and endorser of the ads as indicated by the excerpts below:

*" Usually most of the news or updates posted on social media are fake and exaggerated. So generally don't trust most of the ads. But there are a few reliable and dependable brand pages."*

*"Mostly, the ad makers spice up the content to make it attractive and entertaining. I know that and so I do not take them seriously. I just see the ads for fun and enjoy my leisure time."*

*"I generally see the person who posts the ads or news on facebook. If my friend or people or companies I know well post something, then I will definitely see the ad and trust the content. If some random guy posts any ads or updates, I might look at it but not rely on it."*

Thus, peoples' feelings and opinions are not influenced easily and simply through ads. They can be influenced only if their trust is earned which is imperative for the effectiveness of ads. For example, if my friend or family has shared a post or ad, I will definitely be persuaded by the same. However, not all ads are endorsed or shared by friends, and this forms a really small percentage of the enormous number of ads being posted on facebook.

5. Do ads on Facebook influence purchases?

Majority of the respondents stated that facebook ads did not influence their purchases except a few who claimed that they did influence their purchase behaviour to some extent as shown in the excerpts below:

*"There are so many ads that I do not even remember what I saw yesterday. No, it doesn't really affect the way I buy things or spend my money."*

*"I generally do not rely on facebook info for buying products. If I have to buy something, I will first browse, visit stores nearby or ask my family or close friends. Ads on facebook are the last thing I will rely on."*

*"See. I just see some ads which attract my attention and are entertaining. I do not go to facebook with the intention of buying anything."*

*"They do. Yes, I get a lot of personalized ads from many online brands and companies like amazon, club factory where I generally purchase. They keep posting their top products on facebook along with price tags. I keep swiping to look at new products. It's actually very tempting and I do buy stuff on impulse."*

Facebook ads do not significantly affect direct purchases since a lot of ads are directed towards gaining attention and building brand awareness. However, personalized ads advertising relevant products and services to users based on their personal information such as hobbies, interests and recent browsing history have a considerable effect on purchase behaviour of facebook users.

## 6. Conclusion

In this age of digital advertising, marketers are wholeheartedly embracing ads on social media platforms such as facebook, instagram, snapchat, etc. Given the massive reach of social media platforms, these have become one of the top channels of digital advertising. Almost all brands and companies today have recognized the importance and ease of advertising on social media and hence are increasing their spending on the same. Thus, the ads we see every day on social media aren't going out of trend any time soon (Gitlin, 2019). However, the million dollar question is – are these ads effective? In an attempt to seek answer to this question, this study conducted in-depth interviews with 32 regular facebook users and analysed their perceptions regarding facebook advertising.

The comprehensive qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts presented mixed responses and varying perceptions of facebook ads among the respondents in this study. There were certain positive responses which signify the effectiveness of ads and some criticisms which highlight the areas of improvement to enhance their usefulness and value. Based on these responses and learnings from literature review, a total of six determinants have been identified which influence the effectiveness of facebook ads.

The first determinant, informativeness signifies the extent to which the ad offers valuable information to the user. If the ad does not offer any useful information as perceived by the users, then it will not gain their attention. This is corroborated by a recent survey which found that almost one-third of people are likely to engage with social ads that are educational, with 65% of consumers saying they will click through to

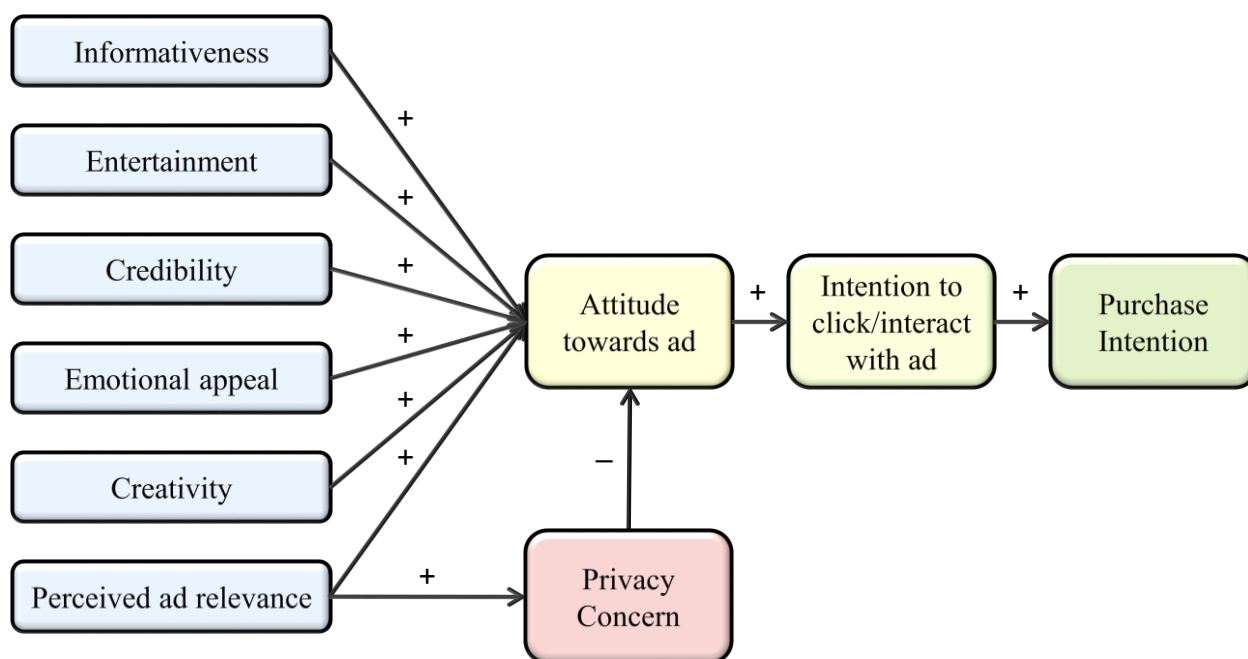
learn more (Williams, 2018). The second determinant, entertainment is one of the most important factors which decide the success of ads. With the monotony and stress of daily routine, people prefer ads offering entertainment. A latest study of facebook ads found that entertaining content was the most popular feature of ads (Williams, 2018). The third determinant, credibility refers to the extent of reliability of the ads as perceived by the users. As prominently highlighted during interviews, ads are extremely effective provided their source, creator and endorser are dependable or well known to the facebook users. Thus, ads do have an impact on users' perceptions if they are trustworthy. The fourth determinant, emotional appeal is a significant influencer of an ad's success. Emotional ads strategically manipulate consumers' feelings and stimulate the emotional triggers that influence how we make decisions. They can be designed to incite anger, sadness, or joy all targeted toward the brand's end goal (Miller, 2016).

The fifth determinant, creativity refers to fresh, quality ads with novel ideas. According to Willner(2018), people do not hate ads, but they just can't tolerate the ones which are pervasive and obnoxious. Almost two-thirds of the people feel that not all ads are terrible and they would like an ad-filter to see just the good ones. Thus, creative advertising is more memorable, longer lasting, works with less media spending, and builds a quicker fan following (Reinartz and Saffert, 2013). The sixth determinant, perceived ad relevance refers to the degree of personalization of the ads as perceived by the users which significantly affects their attitude towards ads. With the evolving online data collection techniques, a wide array of consumer information such as personal identifiers, demographics, interests, shopping preferences and purchase history is now available for advertisers. Additionally, consumers' online activity history data enables marketers to identify what their current and prospective customers are interested in and have been searching and buying online and to create extremely personalized and targeted ads (Kim and Huh, 2016). Compared to generic or universal ads, relevant and personalized ads on facebook have a greater impact on the users' perceptions leading to greater awareness and purchase intention. Contrarily, this can also cause privacy concern among many users due to the apprehension that their personal information is leaked to various advertising agencies (Jung, 2017) which in turn can negatively influence their perception and attitude towards ads. Based on learning from literature review, the effectiveness of ads can be indicated by three levels of consumer behaviour starting with consumers' attitude towards ad which influences their intention to click or interact with ad which eventually affects their purchase intention.

The conceptual framework depicting the effectiveness of facebook advertising has been designed based on this study findings and literature support as shown in the Figure 1. It consists of six determinants i.e. informativeness, entertainment, credibility, emotional appeal, creativity and perceived ad relevance which collectively have a positive effect on consumer attitude towards ad. Perceived ad relevance is hypothesized to have a

positive effect on privacy concern which in turn can negatively affect the consumer attitude. Consumer attitude towards ad is hypothesized to have a positive effect on consumer intention to click or interact with the ad which in turn is hypothesized to have a positive influence on consumer purchase intention.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Determinants of Advertising Effectiveness on Facebook



## 7. Limitations of the Study

Every research has its limitations. The findings and analysis of this study are based on semi-structured interviews of thirty-two facebook users which is unrepresentative of the population. Hence, the findings of this study may not present the exhaustive list of factors influencing advertising effectiveness on facebook. In addition, due to time and financial constraints, this study was conducted only in Chennai city in Tamil Nadu which restricts the generalizability of the results.

## 8. Future Research Directions

This study can be replicated with a larger and geographically diverse sample for better applicability and generalizability of the results. As a future research direction, the determinants of advertising effectiveness found in this exploratory study can be empirically validated to substantiate the qualitative research findings. The impact of these determinants can be tested on the actual purchase behaviour of facebook users. Further, researchers can conduct an experimental study to corroborate the practical real-time effect of these determinants on the advertising effectiveness in facebook. They can also conduct interviews with ad creators and marketers to understand the essentials of effective advertising from their perspective.

## Appendix

### List of Open-ended Questions in Interview

1. How do you feel about advertising on social media networks such as Facebook?
2. How much do you notice the ads?
3. Do you see/read any of them or do you ignore them?
4. How relevant are the ads to you?
5. Do ads on Facebook have a negative, positive or no influence on consumer behavior?
6. Do ads on Facebook influence purchases?

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## Biosketch



Dr. R. Ragu Prasadh is a Research Associate in Loyola Institute of Business Administration, Nungambakkam, Chennai. As part of his Ph.D. research, he worked on a novel attempt to develop and validate a new Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) for Indian Banking Industry. He published research articles in ABDC and SCOPUS indexed American and Canadian journals. Handled Marketing classes for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Assisted the Dean, School of Management in administrative and academic duties. and International Conferences. He has presented more than 15 scholarly papers in National consulted and provided actionable

insights to clients and conduct primary research projects using Bivariate, Multivariate techniques such as Correlation, ANOVA and structural Equation Modeling using SPSS statistical tool.