THE ROLE OF GENDER BETWEEN THE VISUAL CONTENT AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS MOBILE ADVERTISEMENT: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Mobile phone is a medium of promotion that people carry with them every time. The study aims to use the stimulus organism response mechanism to investigate the concept of customer engagement towards mobile advertising and the effect of visual content, source appearance, and self-influencer congruence in the COVID-19 lockdown context. Four in-depth focus group sessions were conducted, containing respondents from different Pakistan areas and data was analyzed using thematic analysis through NVIVO. The study recommends that visual content positively impacts customer engagement through source appearance and self-influencer congruence in a more robust way, while there is no direct effect of the visual content on customer engagement behavior. The customers have free time and prefer to get information about the product during the pandemic period. However, these customers engage when the source is attractive and has a huge fan following. The lousy source in mobile advertisements intensifies the customers' irritation in the uncertain situation, and they evade it. The findings also illustrate that this study's theoretical model is valid and suggests gender differences play a significant role in engagement strength which is unique and peculiar. This study also minimizes the gaps by conducting qualitative research to explore the impact of COVID-19 lockdown uncertainty on customer engagement behavior.

Keywords – Visual content, Source appearance, Self-influencer congruence, Customer engagement, Qualitative study

Introduction

The growing mobile phone market opened new avenues for marketers as they started using mobile phones as an advertising channel (Clark et al., 2018). Mobile advertising refers to communicating advertisement messages through mobile devices (Ünal et al., 2011). The concept of mobile advertising emerged almost two decades ago and was studied by many researchers (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021). Application developers put ads in their applications using the application programming interface (API) of the provider's library. They are then paid based on the users' click counts or the duration of exposure (Lee et al., 2019). As a result of the COVID-19 impact, for instance, consumers are increasingly turning to online purchases; thus, managers need to be innovative in seeking alternative supplies that raise the interest in the facilitation between firms and consumers (Hudecheck et al., 2020).

COVID-19 lockdown uncertainty has positively affected the customers watching mobile advertising experience. The pandemic has also affected the organizational initiatives that enable firms and customers to interact and have emotional and psychological bonds with mobile advertisements (Gill et al., 2017; Kumar & Pansari, 2016) in case of relevant information (Kim & Kim, 2021), also contributing to social media word of mouth (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The promotional effects of communication depend on individual beliefs, consumer personality, and life experiences that shape people's confidence in advertising in general (Luo et al., 2020). Visual content is for getting users' attention (Pieters & Wedel, 2004; Underwood & Klein, 2002; Madzharov & Block, 2010); the growing popularity of social media platforms and content that focuses on visuals has made it harder to design firm-generated content which is an essential thing for a firm.

Xu and Pratt (2018) used the ideal self-celebrity congruence model to look at the effect of social media influencer endorsement on the Chinese Generation Y in the context of destination marketing. They found that congruence positively affected the intention to visit the endorsed destination. Influential endorsements happen when there is a lot of similarity between the image of a social media influencer and the consumer's ideal self-image (Shan et al., 2020). People follow particular influencers on social media to experience a sense of connection (Xiao et al., 2021), which further impacts the customers' mobile advertisement engagement behavior in the COVID-19 pandemic era.

Rather than this, there is little evidence available about customer advertising engagement behavior. This study aims to minimize this literature gap by determining customer engagement impacts visual content, source appearance, and self-influencer congruence. The objectives of this research are:

- To understand how the customer perceives and shows engagement behavior with the mobile advertisement.
- To what extent do the visual content, source appearance, and self-influencer congruence affect customer advertising engagement behavior.

The theoretical base of this study is on the stimulus-organism-response framework, which describes the individuals' internal reactions, such as their cognitive functioning, which are impacted by external signals (or stimuli), which subsequently result in subsequent behavioral responses (Park & Park, 2020). The two mobile channels are examples of stimuli that impact consumers' cognitive processing (i.e., their level of recognition), affecting their behavioral reactions (e.g., their engagement with the mobile advertisement). Customers may have gender diversity to react differently to the ad; the authors added gender as a regulator to their model.

A qualitative study was carried out to conduct this research for two reasons. First, most previous research has found customer engagement through quantitative methods. Secondly, the exploratory nature of the study focuses on the participant's point of view instead of measuring and testing theory (Diffley & McCole, 2019). Moreover, this approach provides a more profound understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's point of view (Priporas et al., 2017; Diffley & McCole, 2019).

The findings of this paper were in line with the researchers (Kim & Kim, 2021; Huang & Rust, 2013; Kunz & Walsh, 2020; Xu & Pratt, 2018), which stated that the attractive advertisement visual content having graphics and animations, containing the source looks physically attractive towards the opposite gender, especially females. The source's ability to influence their self or ideal congruence through the mobile advertisements makes them show more engaging behavior, motivating them to purchase the products or show loyalty towards the brands. Besides that, the behavior of mobile users declines when the source appearance is not good while watching the ads in the first impression during the pandemic period, neglecting the animations, graphics, and self-influencer behavior of mobile users. The female respondents expressed how they could get the chance to comment and criticize the advertisements during and after the COVID-19 lockdown period. Female users attract more to the source appearance and show self-influencer congruence behavior in the mobile ad than the male, which also discriminates the gender engagement behavior towards mobile advertisement (Abuhashesh et al., 2021).

This paper examines previous literature on customer engagement and the constructs affecting it. Next is the methodology, followed by the discussion, conclusion, and limitations for future study possibilities.

Literature review

According to Van Doorn et al. (2010), customer engagement (C.E.) is defined as "the behavioral manifestation of a customer toward a brand or firm, beyond purchases, stemming from motivational cues." They believe that customer engagement will benefit a company overall if the goals of the customer and the company are linked. Customers' digital engagement is "brand-related cognitive, emotional, or behavioral activity during or related to focused

consumer-brand interactions" (Eigenraam et al., 2018).

Visual content is also a significant element in mobile advertising to grab users' attention during and after the COVID-19 lockdown (Pieters & Wedel, 2007; Pieters & Wedel, 2004), drive customer satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intentions (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Rahi et al., 2021; Richards, 2009). Most people remember 80 percent of what they see and only 20 percent of what they read (Manic, 2015). The attractive communicators are consistently loved more and have a more positive influence. Literature also suggests that attractiveness is associated with increased levels of positive sentiments and that the endorsers seen as beautiful are more likely to lead to buying aspirations (Samarasinghe, 2018). The statistics about the number of posts shared based on the visual content on social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram (apps on mobile), containing the image post has more views on both platforms, 36,490 and 51,651, respectively, in the post-COVID-19 period (Ahmadi et al., 2022).

Customers watch advertisements more when they perceive the visual content influences the source's appearance in the mobile ad. In contrast, customers also find something similar in themselves and the influencers working in the mobile advertisement, which enables their engagement behavior. Celebrity endorsement will change how and what consumers do, impacting customers' attitudes (Belch & Belch, 2021), and advertisers think that a celebrity can change how consumers see a

company. People want to be like him because he is trustworthy and attractive and has much in common with them (Priyankara et al., 2017).

Self-congruence is the perceived match between a consumer's self-image and another's image (Zhu et al., 2019). Customers attract and feel emotionally good about the source's appearance when they are likable, influenced by the visual ability of the advertisement (Teng & Tsai, 2020; Sanders, 2006). According to the self-congruity theory, the study's findings show that people follow particular influencers on social media to experience a sense of connection (Xiao et al., 2021), especially this behavior found in the post-COVID-19 period. Besides that, self-influencer congruence affects consumer behavior (Shan et al., 2020).

However, gender has played an essential role in the traditional literature in impacting customers' behavior in the advertisement context. In most cases, a man's and a woman's decisions are dramatically opposed to one another, particularly when it comes to purchasing a specific product and incorporating newly emerging and prominent technology (Wong et al., 2014). Hew et al. (2015) have shown that gender affects people's intentions when using mobile apps. Although, gender has also been utilized as a regulator in determining the customer attitude toward advertising (Abuhashesh et al., 2021; Alam et al., 2019) and purchasing intention of customers (Samarasinghe, 2018).

Therefore, this study uses visual content as the signal of the source appearance of the influencer and the self-influencer

congruence between the influencer and the customers and examines its effect on customer engagement as a response. Previous studies demonstrate that when people have good experiences with a product or ad and start giving positive feedback, they become more open to mobile advertising. People prefer ads tailored to their interests and values (Robins, 2003), and when they are happy, the ads they see on their phones make them feel good (Gao & Zang, 2016). People watch mobile ads in their free time for other reasons,

especially in COVID-19 lockdown uncertainty justified by the respondents, which also continues in the post-COVID situation. The purpose of this research is to check further the impact of both males and females on the source appearance and the self-influencer congruence. For this purpose, a qualitative approach has been utilized, and focus groups were conducted with mobile users to understand the spectacles in detail. The conceptual model of the exploratory study is following:
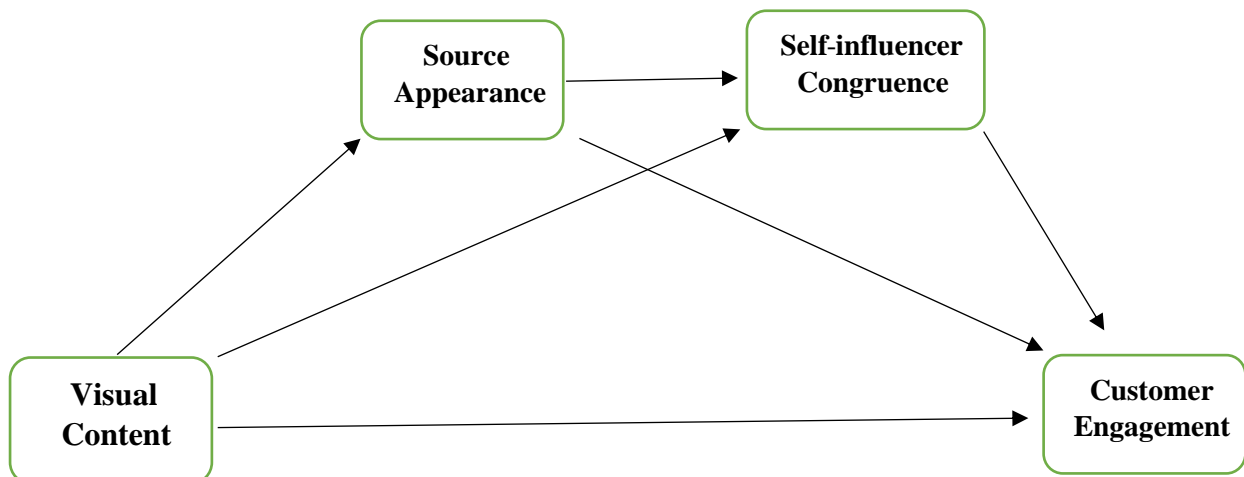

Figure 1: The Research Model

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was utilized to address the customer mobile advertisement engagement behavior (Saunders et al., 2009). The purposive sampling technique was used to get the data relevant to the research topic (Bryman & Bell, 2007). To make the respondent's responses more meaningful to the research,

their knowledge about the mobile advertisement was ensured. In addition, the interviews were taken from people who belong to diverse groups having diverse knowledge that allow for a better understanding of the engagement behavior. The respondents belonged to different cities in Pakistan, having an education at different levels, increasing the precision of the results.

Four in-depth focus groups (Foroudi et al., 2017) were conducted. Each focus group session contained six to seven participants to identify the research objectives. All the focus group interviews were recorded and also transcribed. The basic information about the topic was provided to the participants before conducting the focus group to promote credibility. The focus group interviews began by asking about the participant's perceptions of the mobile advertisement. Then they were asked to recall the attractive things about the ad on mobile platforms and the negative ones. Participants talked about their experiences with the ad on mobile and explained which type of mobile advertisement they prefer. In addition, the questions were asked in line with the respondents. They were focused on bringing more descriptions about the advertisement characteristics that enable them to express engagement (or skepticism) towards the advertisement. Further, the open and probing questions were asked, focused on participants' own experiences and points of view (Saunders et al., 2009). At the same time, gender diversity was also maintained in the session to reduce discrimination in the results.

Table 1: Focus group

Focus Group	*Participants*	*Age*	*Gender*	*Duration*
1	7	18-30	Both	45 minutes
2	7	22-38	Both	30 minutes
3	7	19-28	Both	50 minutes
4	7	21-42	Both	35 minutes

Data analysis approach

The traditional inductive qualitative approach was utilized in analyzing the data. Grounded theory was used to analyze the respondents' terms, categories, and codes through the NVIVO shown in Table 1 (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, the respondent's centric first order codes (e.g., "The acting and expressions in the mobile advertisement attract," "Supernatural characters in the mobile advertisement are memorable") were grouped to generate second-order themes (e.g., "Source expressions"), which directed to the formation of the aggregate dimensions (e.g., "Visual content") of the developing data (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Table 1: Qualitative study data structure

Aggregate Dimensions	Second Order themes	First Order codes
Visual Content	Source expressions Mobile advertising precision and personalization Lifestyle and Travel advertising	● The acting and expressions in the mobile advertisement attract. ● Comic characters in the mobile advertisement are memorable. ● I prefer mobile advertisements with attractive graphics, precise timing, and a message. ● Personalized stories in the mobile social media apps drive purchasing intentions. ● The mobile advertisement attracts a combination of good animation, source, and video and audio quality. ● Mobile Advertisement attracts that comprises a person's lifestyle and travel information.
Source Appearance	Situation based appearance Factors overlooking source appearance effects Attractive source Wicked source	● I prefer the mobile advertisement when the brand (Dawlance) advertises in the actual usage condition (home). ● Source in the mobile advertisement influences watcher's personality. ● Since the mobile advertisement contains humor, I would prefer it even if it has a lousy source appearance. ● The source will be preferred if it has a good personality and huge fan base. ● I would prefer to watch the advertisement on mobile having a beautiful actress wearing the traditional dress (Isra Bilgic in Mobilink ads). ● The awkward looks of the source in the mobile app (YouTube) Advertisement (LGBT) bother most of the audience.

Self-influencer Congruence	Actual and ideal self-relevancy	- I will do what the influencer does in the mobile ad to look identical. - I have changed my beard style as the source (Fawad khan) has in the mobile ad. - I prefer Hania Amir in the Sunsilk wedding diaries to look like her in my family weddings. - Engage with the ads to learn about the fashion trends and the ideal self in the pandemic context.
COVID-19 Lockdown	Leisure time scrolling Shopping styles transformation Information searching	- I have free time and prefer to watch mobile advertisements while scrolling. - The change in online shopping patterns of people towards mobile advertisement. - Getting information about the product from an official website advertisement is accessible in the situation. - Mobile Advertisement is not that irritating than the pre-COVID-19 lockdown situation
Customer Engagement	Situational engagement Information relevancy Combination enable engagement	- I would prefer to watch the mobile advertisement in a lockdown situation. - Engagement with the story in the mobile advertisement. - Whatever the mobile advertisement is, I will engage in it is shown to be the first time. - I will engage with the mobile advertisement to get information. - The graphics, source appearance, timing, and tune combination enable us to engage.

Data analysis:

Customer engagement

COVID-19 lockdown uncertainty has positively affected the customers watching mobile advertising experience. The pandemic has also affected the organizational initiatives

that enable firms and customers to interact and have emotional and psychological bonds with mobile advertisements (Gill et al., 2017; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). As per customer engagement theory, the firms or brands impact the customer's emotional and affective experiences states, resulting in the customer's indirect engagement with the mobile advertisement, contributing to social media word of mouth (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Relate to that, the participants' quotes as;

Before the COVID-19 lockdown, I don't need to find the information about the product through mobile. But in the pandemic, I search a lot by watching Daraz.pk, Olx.com.pk, and other multiple official website advertisements on mobile for finding product information. I also watch advertisements on different mobile platforms like web pages, brand apps, etc. (Focus group 2, Respondent 5).

Another respondent claims to engage with mobile advertisement during the pandemic, mentioned as;

I watch a mobile advertisement to reduce boredom; maybe I will get something on mobile during the COVID-19 Lockdown Situation to entertain me (Focus group 1, Respondent 6).

Furthermore, the engagement towards the mobile advertisement can also depend upon the situation (Khan et al., 2013) in which the customers utilize their devices, e.g., free and no work to do, scrolling social sites, etc. At the same time, the relevant information enables the users to open the advertisement on their mobile phone's screens when advertisers expose them (Kim & Kim, 2021). The respondents also prefer the relevancy, situation, and the combination of visual content that makes the advertisement attractive on the mobile. They quoted this as follows;

Scrolling Facebook and Instagram as a leisure activity let me know what is happening worldwide. At that time, watching advertisements while utilizing mobile applications was also common. They provide us with valuable and relevant information. The animations, graphics, text, and audio combination in the mobile advertisement make it more meaningful and drive behavior to watch that advertisement (Focus group 4, Respondent 3 & 7).

Visual content effects

The source nonverbal cues (expression) in mobile advertisements evoke multiple brand associations in the customer's mind (Mizik & Jacobson, 2003). Visual-focused platforms like Snapchat and Instagram are becoming more popular, and visuals are becoming more important on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, which have changed their layouts to make more room for visual content (Hatmaker, 2021; Appel et al., 2020). The mobile advertisement will also be more engaging when the acting

of the advertisement's source is relevant and the influencer is physically attractive (Kim & Kim, 2021). The literature supports what the respondent said:

The actor's good acting and expressions in the mobile advertisement enable me to watch the ad. The dressing and looks of the actor, animations, and graphics impact making the mobile advertising more engaging through visual content, especially the mobile ads in games (Focus group 1, Respondent 6).

Moreover, the advertisement aid in differentiating a brand by creating a unique image compared to other competing brands, while the main concern is to create equity from mobile advertisement (Bruhn et al., 2012). The respondents were told to prefer the visual contents of the mobile advertisement. They quote:

Mostly comic characters in mobile advertisements look unnatural, but they are also attractive and memorable; on the other hand, just like using the tagline "YUM YUM YUM" in the ad on the YouTube app makes it more appealing, special, and unique. Lastly, the "Mola Jatt" character in the advertisement is also memorable (Focus group 4, Respondent 2).

*The leading actor and graphics have a more significant role in the mobile advertisement than the product they are advertising. The person's personality is relevant to the ad also matters (*Focus group 3, Respondent 5).

I enjoy a mobile advertisement if the colors are good and the message, text, and short

and precise timing make me feel comfortable. At the same time, the stories in the mobile advertisement encourage us to watch even if we think to skip at the start (Focus group 1, Respondent 5).

Respondents emphasize and show interest in advertisements on mobile containing authentic lifestyle and travel stories as social media sites allow their users to share travel-related information through electronic word-of-mouth behavior as well as user-generated content (Chu et al., 2019; Kang & Schuett, 2013; Kaosiri et al., 2019).

I prefer the mobile advertisement containing the person's lifestyle information, especially how rich kids spend their lives. It influences my actions and, most probably, my lifestyle. At the same time, the travel guides' visualization on social media pages (Ukhano page on Facebook) enables me to learn about hidden travel places and the leading adventurous sites better (Focus group 3, Respondent 4).

Furthermore, the participants alleged that they are not solely focused on the visual content of their mobile phones' advertisements. In contrast, the literature shows that social media advertising content is also the determinant in building brand success, just because of the repeated promotions on mobile, which increase the chance of recognition and recall (Yoo et al., 2000). The appealing visual content engages more customers with mobile advertisements. In the COVID-19 lockdown uncertainty situation, participants showed engaging behavior with the mobile ad even though the visual content was terrible and there was no

other option outside. The participants explain the reason for watching the mobile advertising having lousy content. They quoted as;

I would criticize the advertisement or maybe something interesting to watch through mobile advertisement during the pandemic period (Focus group 3,

Respondent 7).

I prefer to scroll and watch the advertisement on Facebook or Instagram on my mobile during the COVID-19 Lockdown Situation, whatever will show on social media apps (Focus group 4, Respondent 5).

Shopping-related mobile advertisements attract me, whether they are good or not. Furthermore, I would watch an ad on my mobile to check what it is (Focus group 1, Respondent 3).

Source appearance effects

Customers rated bloggers higher who are more concerned with perceived similarity towards the bloggers than the advertisers, which ultimately leads to more favorable attitudes toward the product and the blog, and more significant information credibility (Chang, 2011). In addition, customers prefer what the source is doing and how it is done in the mobile advertisement. The participant explains this further as follows;

Source Appearance in the mobile advertisement attracts the customer to wear or use the product the way the source has used it. We even sometimes want to wear

clothes precisely the source in the mobile advertisement. Fashion comes from these advertising platform sources (Focus group 3, Respondent 2).

Another participant shared her experience with mobile advertisement as;

The Dawlance advertisement on the YouTube mobile app presents a household situation where a family lives and a refrigerator keeps the food cool the whole day. This mobile advertisement creates a memory in my mind (Focus group 4, Respondent 6).

The previous literature suggests that anything that leads to the similarity judgments between individuals themselves and an advertisement source, e.g., individual social class (Williams et al., 1989), ethnicity (Wooten, 1995), and cultural orientation (Aaker & Williams, 1998) which impacts the target and nontarget market, even the source appearance is not that good-looking. The participants also explain this as follows;

We enjoy the humor in the mobile advertisement. The rough source appearance may attract the targeted audience and entertain them but not for everyone. But it matters when I first see the mobile ad or especially when the source has a good personality and a huge fan following (Focus group 4, Respondent 3).

The unique story, graphics, and animations in the mobile advertisement minimize the effect of the source appearance. I would focus attract when the ad is shown on my

mobile first time (Focus group 2, Respondent 5).

Moreover, the respondents prefer the looks of the familiar source on the mobile phone's applications (Huang, 2016). The participants share their views as follows;

I would not engage when a random person acts in a mobile advertisement, and the person's credibility matters to me (Focus group 1, Respondent 2).

I do not want to watch any advertisement when my mind is not relaxed, especially if the ad has an unfamiliar source appearance (Focus group 3, Respondent 6).

The source's physical attractiveness determines how the people like the source and want to recognize themselves with the source (Cohen & Golden, 1972). According to that literature, people engage with advertisements on mobile when they see the source is attractive and credible. The respondent expresses that in their interview and differentiate the gender are as follows;

The girls in the advertisements on my mobile phone motivate me to engage with it rather than focus only on source abilities. In addition, the engagement towards the male source in the mobile advertisements is comparatively less (Focus group 2, Respondent 3).

Participants also suggested a positive relationship between the source appearance and the customer engagement with the mobile advertisements. The more the source looks attractive, the more customers engage with that ad. They also suggest no difference created by the pandemic on that relationship,

whether they attract from the source appearance which makes the first impression. They said sometimes we analyses the source from its appearance, not from its background when it is exposed. The previous literature also signifies the source appearance in the mobile ads as they create the customers' purchase intention behavior (Onu et al., 2019; Centeno & Wang, 2020). The participants expressed this as follows;

I don't want to watch the ad on mobile that I'm skeptical about because my mind will not accept the advertisement that I have already rejected due to the lousy source appearance.

I will not focus on the Source Appearance; is it good or bad to watch an advertisement to check what it is or get information about the COVID-19 Lockdown Situation.

Self-influencer congruence effects

Self-influencer congruence creates the difference between the consumer self-image and the source (influencer's) image in mobile advertisements. The respondents wish to be like the endorser due to their reputation in society, their image, and the fashion trends they must follow. Endorsers in mobile advertisement affect the consumers' parasocial identification (Shan et al., 2020). While this consumer relevancy with the mobile advertisement's influencer is more significant during and after the pandemic, users were doing work from home and engaging with the mobile advertisements to get tips on a self-influencer congruence basis. The respondent also quoted related to the literature as;

I like to be the Hania Amir; I love her beautiful hair in the Sunsilk wedding diaries advertisement. I wish my hairs are like her. Even I have started using Sunsilk to improve my hair and look beautiful for my upcoming family wedding (Focus group 2, Respondent 1).

Engage with the mobile ads to know about the latest fashion trends because I think the influencers in the advertisements start the fashion trends and show us the image of our actual and ideal selves (Focus group 3, Respondent 5).

Moreover, the literature explains that the customers show purchasing intentions after watching the influencers utilizing the product in the mobile advertisement (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Shan et al., 2020). The customers try to utilize that product the same way the influencers have used it. Sometimes customers purchase the product to show their personality resemblance in their social gathering with the influencer. The respondents quoted this as following:

I will do what the influencer does in the mobile ad to look identical. It also helps me get recognition from my friends and family members as I'm using the latest products that are still booming (Focus group 4, Respondent 6).

Sometimes I avoid the mobile advertisement because I don't see anything in the ad relevant to my personality, especially the influencer's personality. I want to watch the ad to know the fashion brands or if I want to be like that influencer (Focus group 3, Respondent 7).

Most respondents show engagement behavior on the self-influencer congruence basis; either they see the actual self or customers wish to be like the influencer. The literature supports this view of customer engagement with mobile advertisements (Xu & Pratt, 2018; Shan et al., 2020).

Discussion

Despite the rise in the usage of the mobile as the competitive medium for advertisers, the visual content, source appearance, and self-influencer congruence have gotten limited attention in the literature. The unique aspects of mobile ad engagement, such as customer involvement and participation, allow customers to have a positive attitude towards the mobile advertisement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). This study explored the customer's engagement behavior by indicating the visual content impacted by the source appearance and the source-influencer congruence. In addition, the role of gender that respondents differentiate in accessing the mobile advertising engagement was identified.

The respondents stated the source appearance positive role in shaping customers' engagement behavior. Notably, it enhances the advertiser's motivation to utilize mobile as the dominant advertising platform, resulting the customer loyalty (Huang & Rust, 2013; Kunz & Walsh, 2020) and purchasing intentions toward that advertised product (Onu et al., 2019; Centeno & Wang, 2020). The male respondents express their positive attitude toward the mobile advertisements containing female source that

is visually (physically) attractive. It implies the difference in gender attitude towards the mobile ads focused on the source appearance. At the same time, female respondents prefer influencers more by perceiving their self-relevancy with the female influencers in the mobile ads, which relates to the findings of Smith (2019) and also justified gender roles by another researcher (Abuhashesh et al., 2021).

This study also identified the situational aspects that shape the customer's mobile advertising engagement behavior. It is possible when the users scroll the social media apps as their leisure activity in their free time during the COVID-19 lockdown, and it also continues in the post-COVID-19 situations.

The respondents emphasize their self-traits' relevancy with the influencers and prefer to watch those ads on their mobile. The customers may copy the behavior and attitude of a social media influencer whose image matches their ideal self in their mobile social media apps (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Some respondents like the influencers, so they can use the product the same way as the influencer has utilized in the mobile advertisements. Respondents also felt they were part of the upper class when associating with the influencers. A celebrity endorsing is likely to get customers to accept or want to use endorsed brands and products to convey endorsers' meanings and associations (Shan et al., 2020). According to the researcher Choi and Rifon (2012), consumers liked the mobile ad more when a consumer's ideal self-

image and a celebrity endorser's image were similar.

The lack of the source appearance and self-influencer congruence abandons the effect of the visual content on customer engagement. Respondents prefer visual content, which contributes to the source appearance, and self-influencer congruence, resulting in the customer's engagement behavior towards the mobile advertisements.

Implications for practice

The respondents' inclination suggests that they show engagement behavior with the mobile advertisement during the pandemic when the advertisement exposed contains engaging visual content and the source is physically beautiful (Kim & Kim, 2021). This enables not only to watch the mobile advertisements but also to share that by copying the link, which will lead to customer loyalty (Rahi et al., 2021). In addition, this customer behavior also implies in the post-COVID situation because customers shift patterns towards online and high usage of mobile devices.

Exposing the false advertisement will discourage customers from mobile advertising engagement, while the relevant information and the visual content minimize this. Most respondents were encouraged by the appearance of the source containing the traits of similarity, likeability, and a little bit referring to familiarity to demonstrate customer engagement behavior. However, the source's physical looks have a more significant impact if it works with the attractive animations and graphics in the

mobile advertisements. On the other hand, incentives provide coins in the game app and free services that motivate users to click and watch the mobile ads fully, which sometimes allows them to get further information.

The respondents attract to the opposite gender in most of the responses. Utilizing sources to grow self-influencer congruence ultimately increases the engagement of especially females with the mobile advertisements.

Conclusion and limitations

An exploratory research design was utilized to explore customer engagement behavior in mobile advertisements during and after the pandemic. Four in-depth, purposively sampled focus group sessions were conducted to address the research objective. Traditional inductive qualitative methods were used to analyze the data, and grounded theory was used to examine the respondents' terminology, codes, and categories.

The findings of the qualitative study are significant, which provides the base for this study. In line with the researchers (Kim & Kim, 2021; Huang & Rust, 2013; Kunz & Walsh, 2020; Xu & Pratt, 2018), ads are appealing if it contains engaging visual content having graphics, animations, and physically attractive source. The source's ability to influence customers' actual or ideal selves through mobile advertisements enables more engaging behavior. In the dynamic environment, without these factors, user engagement declines. Thus, emphasizing the role of sharing customized

information and content in the ad enhances the behavior of customer engagement.

The female respondents expressed how they could get the chance to comment and criticize the advertisements during and after the COVID-19 lockdown period. Female users attract towards mobile ads based on self-influencer congruence than the males whose engagement is based on the source appearance, which also discriminates the gender engagement behavior towards mobile advertisement (Abuhashesh et al., 2021).

This study has some limitations. First, the quantitative method can be used, which increases the generalizability and validity of the results, to test the model in figure 1. Secondly, future studies could utilize the other demographic variables, e.g., the age of the respondents, as the regulator to check the level of engagement (high, low, and moderate) to mobile ads. Third, future research could study which congruence type (self or actual) has the more significant effect on advertising engagement.

Fourth, future studies could also examine the difference between global and local brand advertisements, which further impacts the customers advertising engagement behaviors. Literature has suggested that international brands have more power, trust, and value than local brands (Akaka et al., 2013), which could also check in the case of mobile advertisement. Fifth, future research can also apply the uncertainty management theory (Schroll & Grohs, 2019), which can enhance the understanding of

customer behavior with mobile advertisement in case of the COVID-19 pandemic and its post effect on the customers' minds in a better way.

Finally, future research can utilize the constructs, e.g., memes, humor, duration of the message, quality of the advertising image, etc., to know their impacts on customer engagement towards the mobile advertisement.

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Appendix:

Table 2: Qualitative Questions

1. Can you briefly explain your perception of mobile advertisement?
2. What type of mobile advertisement do you prefer?
3. What do you think about the visual content in ads?
4. Can you briefly explain the mobile advertising Platform?
5. Is there any mobile advertising platform you think is authentic?
6. Is there any mobile advertising platform that is frustrating for you?
7. What is your perception about the source's appearance in the advertisement?
8. Do you think the Source Appearance affects mobile advertisement?
9. Do you relate yourself to the influencer in the mobile ad?
10. What will you do with the mobile ad in which there is any influencer that is similar to you?
11. What is your perception about gender creating differences while engaging with the mobile advertisement?
12. Do you think the COVID-19 uncertainty situation affects mobile advertisement watching routine?

Figure 2: Word Cloud