An Experimental Study of the Effects of Promotional Techniques in Web-Based Commerce

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effects of two specific message delivery techniques frequently adopted by online stores: continuously animated site banners and unexpected pop-up ads. Results from 128 surveys collected in a 2x2 factorial design showed that each of the two techniques had a significant effect on perceived irritation in the hypothesized direction. This paper also confirmed that perceived irritation has a significant negative relationship with a visitor’s attitude toward the website. This study fills a vacuum in academic research with respect to the negative effects of Web advertising and advises caution in the deployment of certain techniques. This paper advocates future research that links format attributes and presentation techniques to attitudinal consequences in Web advertising, as well as in the design of an entire website.

Keywords: attitude toward the site; perceived irritation; Web advertising.

INTRODUCTION

The Web offers many tools a firm can explore to reap the benefits of this rich medium. Both practitioners and scholars are beginning to investigate ways to take full advantage of the techniques used in site promotion (Berthon et al., 1996; Ducoffe, 1996; Coyle & Thorson, 2001). These techniques may include the overall structure of the online retailing interface (Westland & Au, 1998), and such individual features as banners, animation, sound, video, interstitials, and pop-up ads (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). Features like banner size, image maps, audio, and Website interactivity have been found to enhance site appeal (Li & Bukovac, 1999;
Coyle & Thorson, 2001). Nonetheless, the use of such promotional techniques also comes with its negative effects. Such effects have been largely overlooked in the academic literature. The question of how certain advertising techniques have influenced consumers’ perceptions of and attitude toward a site calls for more research in this field.

Traditional advertising research has established a hierarchical model of advertising effects, spanning the spectrum from ad content to cognition, attitude, and behavior (Holbrook, 1986; Olney et al., 1991). Olney et al. (1991) saw TV advertising content and techniques influence consumers’ emotional dimensions, attitude, and subsequent viewing behavior, e.g., zipping and zapping in watching TV and video programs. This chain of links has been well documented in advertising and marketing research where both content and form variables were examined as predictors of attention, memory, recall, click-through, informativeness, attractiveness, and attitude (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000).

Nevertheless, the study of the effects of executional factors extended to the Web involves new factors to be considered and requires a higher level of comprehensiveness due to the volume and scope of a Website in comparison to print or TV ads. While maintaining that many of the ad features found in traditional media (such as color, size, and typeface in the print media, and audio, sound level, animation, and movement in broadcast) are relevant to the Web, Rodgers and Thorson (2000) consider such techniques as banners, sponsorships, interstitials, pop-up windows, and hyperlinks additions to ad formats in interactive marketing. A brief description of each type, based on Rodgers and Thorson (2000), is presented in Table 1.

In addition to information content, format and presentation attributes that contribute to the delivery of Website appeal have also been examined (Palmer & Griffith, 1998; Huizingh, 2000). Consumer behavior related to online shopping experience is gradually explored in the information systems literature (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997; Bhatnagar et al., 2000; Koufaris et al., 2001; Koufaris, 2002). In a recent study, Vijayasarathy (2003) performed a psychographic profiling of online shoppers and studied the relationship between consumers’ shopping orientations (home, community, and apathetic) and their intention to use and actual use of the online shopping medium. We recognize the interdisciplinary nature of research.

Table 1: Ad Formats in Interactive Marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ad Format</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banners</td>
<td>Rectangular-shaped graphics, mostly horizontal but some vertical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstitials</td>
<td>Full-screen ads between two content pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popups</td>
<td>A separate window on top of the user’s content window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorships</td>
<td>Indirect persuasion, such as brand name, associated with key content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperlink</td>
<td>A highlighted word, phrase, or graphic that allows the user to click to go to another page or site</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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