Measuring the Effectiveness of Internet Advertising in Jordan (A Field Study)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to determine whether consumer reactions to website influence their subsequent brand attitude, and to assess whether these websites have an impact on consumers' attitudes toward Internet advertising itself. In essence, the current study attempted to measure Internet advertising effectiveness through consumers' reactions to websites. We surveyed a purposive sample of 1231 undergraduate students at four universities in Jordan. A questionnaire was designed to test four major hypotheses. The study findings show that most of the respondents said that the website had a positive impact on the recall of brands seen on the Internet, leading to improving their views of the brand. Besides, it was revealed that consumers who felt that websites improved their perceptions of brands saw more advantages in Internet advertising, but they perceived more disadvantages as well. Finally, the consumers highly favored advertising in other media, such as TV and magazines. A number of recommendations were proposed for the formulation of an effective marketing communication strategy.

KEYWORDS: Advertising; websites; Internet advertising; Banner advertising; e-advertising; e-communication strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing communications is a management process through which an organization enters into a dialogue with its various audiences with a view to repositioning the organization and/ or its offerings in the mind of each member of the target audience (Vraica, 2001). A number of tools, referred to as marketing communications mix, such as advertising, publicity, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations are often utilized to realize this objective. Indeed, these tools constitute the organization's marketing communications strategy (Fill, 1999; Goldsmith and Lofferty, 2002). In the Internet age, this mix comprises an important component of e-commerce strategy (Strauss and Frost,

2001). Internet advertising, in particular, is now a popular tool used by e-marketers, within a clear cut e-communications strategy, to influence the attitudes of e-customers. In the context of this study, advertising can be viewed as consisting of two major components: (1) offline traditional media advertising (TV, magazines, newspapers, radio, and outdoor/ other; and (2) online or web advertising (banner ads, buttons, interstitials, etc). Leading organizations often utilize all these tools (offline and online) within an integrated marketing communications strategy. Duncan and Everett (1993) recall that this new (media) approach has been referred to variously as orchestration, whole egg and seamless communication.

Internet advertising has generated a great deal of discussion and argument in which six themes can be discerned:

(1) There is no one best form of Internet advertising[*]. Sometimes a simple brand - building message is suited for the marketing objectives of a given organization. At other times, that message may need to add a direct-response component. And sometimes the organization may need to take control over the content environment through forms of corporate communication and/ or electronic transactions.

(2) No universally agreed upon way has appeared to evaluate the effectiveness of Internet advertising (Chen and Wells, 1999; Al-Alak, 2004).

(3) There exists no single definition of what is meant by Internet advertising. This term is evolving and expanding. By the time this paper is published, there will undoubtedly be new forms of advertising.

(4) Widespread doubts have been raised regarding the effectiveness of Internet advertising (Green and Elgin, 2001; Veronica, 2001).

(5) Internet advertising may very well be just the first manifestation of the shift to digital advertising that extends across many different media forms. A future question might well be: what is digital advertising? (Choi, S. and Rifon, N. 2002); and

(6) while there are ample site visit data, there has been little systematic study of specific dimensions of the effectiveness of Internet advertising.

(7) The current study was motivated by this sixth concern. Consequently, the study was designed to assess two major issues. First, do consumers' reactions to websites influence their subsequent brand attitudes? Second, do consumers' reactions to websites influence their attitudes toward Internet advertising itself?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although billions of dollars are spent each year on Internet-based advertising, either in online or offline media, serious doubts have been raised regarding the

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[*] Any form of advertising that is totally designed, planned, executed and delivered via the World Wide Web (WWW); it is also called "banner advertising, online advertising, or e-advertising.

ability of offline advertising to attract consumers to websites and persuade them to buy (Bulick, 2000, a; Green and Elgin, 2001; Quick, 2001; Coyle and Thorson, 2001; Dahlen, Rasch, and Rosengren, 2003). Internet advertising is often regarded as nonsensical, unfocused, forgettable and generally ineffective (Hwang and Kranhold, 2000). According to O'Connell (2001), there are no connections between the advertising and any meaningful results, such as sales or profits. Furthermore, online advertising has been especially described as ineffective because of the low click - through rates for banner ads, its often lack of useful information, its dullness or lack of internet, it is often offensive, and the fact that sometimes it confuses consumers (Bulik, 2000b, c; Gaffney, 2001; Mathews, 2000). Also, Rettie (2001) found that disruption in flow by banners, interstitials, pop - ups, and other forms of advertisements can create negative attitudes toward those ads. In general, these researchers argue that much Internet advertising fails to convey the right message, and definitely cannot effectively communicate brand building information. In contrast, several studies show that online advertising itself is effective in generating sales and maximizing profits (Al-Alak, 2005; Gaffney, 2002; Orwall, 2000). Schlosser et al. (1999) found that most people have both trust and confidence in the commercial content and presentation of an Internet ad more than a traditional ad. Daugherty and Reece (2002) argue that Internet advertising in services organizations has proven to be effective in image and brand building, and that Internet ads seem to be more persuasive compared with traditional ads. Gong and Maddox (2003) argue that Internet advertising as a component of integrated marketing communications strategy is effective in attracting attention to the brand, increasing its familiarity, delivering the right and exact message, describing the true features of the brand, persuading consumers of its value, and encouraging initial and repeat purchase.

One of the most influential theories in marketing communications research is attitude - toward - the - ad (Bruner and Kumar, 2000; Lutz, 1989; Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989; Mackenzie et al., 1986; Muehling, 1987).

Attitude - toward - the - ad has been defined as:

a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a predisposition advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion (Lutz, 1985:46).

The attitudes that are formed toward the ad can influence consumers' attitude toward the brand as well as their purchase intent (Homer, 1990; Lord et al., 1995; Lutz et al., 1983; Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989; Mackenzie et al., 1986). A variety of studies show that the positive emotional response of liking an ad is positively related to subsequent brand-related cognitions, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions (Brown and Stayman, 1992; Stone et al., 2000).

Another component of advertising effectiveness is the consumers' ability to recall the advertised brand (Dubow, 1994). The ability to recall an advertisement appears to be related to the valence of the consumer's attitude. In general, research suggests that those consumers who have a positive attitude toward an ad are more able to recall it than those with a negative attitude (Donthu et al., 1993; Mehta, 2000; Stone et al., 2000). Research also shows that attitudes toward the website are positively associated with attitudes toward the ad, the brand, and purchase intentions. The more a website is liked, the more it helps to improve the other key attitude variables of interest to advertisers (Bruner and Kumar, 2000). Website design, ease of reach and navigation, simplicity, ease of use, and richness of content, were found to be factors affecting advertising effectiveness on the web, thus creating favorable attitude by consumers to the brand (Al-Alak, 2005). As such, the attitude – toward - the - site plays an important role in website effectiveness.

Numerous other studies have also shown that consumers who respond favorably to a website, and who visit this website repeatedly see more advantages to Internet advertising than those who do not view the website favorably or positively (Chen and Wells, 1999; Dncoffe, 1996; Itein, 1997; Rich, 1997; Colkin, 2001; Green and Elgin, 2001; Kennerdale, 2001; Mostafa, 2001; Goldberg and Gorn, 1987).

Other researchers argue that the interactive nature of the Internet makes Internet advertising more effective compared with traditional advertising which is both impersonal and stagnant (Fill, 1999; Hein, 1997: Rich, 1997). However, there are others who indicate that the effectiveness of Internet ads is negligible (Colkin, 2001; Green and Elgin, 2001; Kennerdale, 2001). Al-Alak (2003) found that the Interactive nature of the Internet is not reflected favorably on banner ads, which are viewed by visitors as both intrusive and obstructive. It could be argued that if a commercial is alone on the web page, greater attention and hence effectiveness could result. According to Samadi (2001), the complexity of the website reduces the effectiveness of advertising on this medium, whereas other forms of advertising in other media tend to be more appealing and less intrusive. Ducoffe (1996) proposed a model, which showed that irritation can directly affect advertising value, which in turn, affects attitude toward the Internet advertising. Norhan (2002) found that customers who view banner ads favorably may not necessarily do so when it comes to advertising in other media, and vice versa. She argued that website visitors are not necessarily obsessed with Internet advertising, as the majority of them were more conscious of traditional ads than banner ads.

3. HYPOTHESES

Based on the previous literature review, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Consumers who have a positive response to websites would be more likely to recall brands advertised on the web than those who do not respond positively.

H2: Consumers who have a positive response to websites would see more advantages to advertising on the Internet than those who do not respond positively.

H3: Consumers who have a positive response to a website will see fewer disadvantages to advertising on the Internet than those who do not respond positively.

H4: There will be no difference in the valence of response to ads recalled from the Internet compared to ads recalled from traditional media.

4. METHOD

Sample:

A purposive sample was drawn from undergraduate students at four universities in Jordan, namely Yarmouk University, Al-Zaytoonah Private University of Jordan, Applied Science University and Petra University. Out of 1500 distributed questionnaires, a total of 1231 or a response rate of 82 percent was returned. This total was used for analysis. The questionnaire was distributed and completed by students who said they had access to the Internet. There were 703 men (57 percent) and 528 women (43 percent). Ages of the students ranged from 18 to 39 years. Most of the sample (96.4 percent) was between the ages of 18 and 24, with an overall mean of 20.7 years (SD = 2.5). Almost half the sample was studying Business Administration, Marketing and Accounting (49.4 percent). 21 percent of the sample was studying Management Information Systems, whereas the remaining students were conducting their studies in Information Technology (7.3 percent), Nursing (6.4 percent), Law (6.1 percent), Pharmacy (5.9 percent), and English Literature (3.9 percent). There was no statistically significant (P < 0.05) difference in mean age between men and women.

Questionnaire:

In addition to demographic questions describing the age, sex, and class and faculty standings of the respondents, the questionnaire covered a number of aspects such as Internet use, overall attitudes to websites, recall of web ads, advertising and disadvantages and free recall of liked and disliked ads. Ten specific brands were used in some questions regarding advertising. These were chosen to represent a variety of the types of brands that are both well known in Jordan, especially among young students, and frequently advertised on the Internet.

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

H1: stated that consumers who have a positive response

to websites[*] would be more likely to recall brands advertised on the web than those who do not respond positively[**]. The independent variable represented consumer reaction to a visited website. The question asked: "In general, website for brands that you have visited, did contact with these sites overall: 1= improve your view of the brand, 2= detract from it, and 3= have no effect?" 897 respondents (73 percent) said that visiting the website had improved their view and 334 (27 percent) said that it had no effect, with none stating that it had detracted from their opinion. Thus, most of the respondents said that the website had a positive impact.

The dependent variable, recall of web ads, was operational zed by presenting respondents with a list of 10 brand names and asking them to indicate which of these they could recall seeing on the Internet. The responses were summed to form a variable termed RECALL that ranged from 0 to 10 brand names recalled, with mean, median, and mode of 4 (SD = 3.4). A t-test was used to compare the mean number of ads recalled between two groups of consumers, those who reported that visiting websites had improved their view of the brand and those who reported that visiting the websites had no effect. The results showed that the "improved view of the brand" group recalled significantly more ads (M = 4.8, SD = 3.6) than the "no effect group" (M = 3.1, S D= 2.7, t = 3.1, p = 0.006, two - tailed). Thus, H1 was supported, suggesting that the consumers who felt that visiting a website improved their view of the brand could recall more brand names than those who felt that visiting a website had no effect on their view of the brand.

H2: stated that consumers who have a positive response to websites would see more advantages to advertising on the Internet than those who do not respond positively. Similarly, H3 stated that consumers who have a positive response to a website would see fewer disadvantages to

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[*]Those who visit website regularly and systematically to view ads.

[**]Those who are affected positively by banner ads, and purchase advertised products.

advertising on the Internet than those who do not respond positively. t-tests were used to compare the mean number of advantages and disadvantages reported between those who reported that visiting websites had improved their view of the brand and those who reported that the websites had no effect. The results confirmed H2. Those who reported an improved view of the brand checked more advantages (M = 3.4, SD = 2.7) than those who said the website had no effect (M. 2.1, SD = 1.7), and this difference was statistically significant (t = 3.86, p = 0.002, two - tailed).

The test of **H3**, however, revealed a surprising finding. Those who reported an improved view of the brand also checked more disadvantages (M = 2.1, SD = 1.01) than those who said the website had no effect (M = 1.6, SD = 1.07), and this difference was statistically significant (t = 3.41, P= 0.009, two - tailed). Thus, H3 was not supported.

H4: stated that there would be no difference in preference for Internet ads compared to ads appearing in other media. To test the hypothesis, the free recall of liked and disliked ads along with the medium in which they were encountered were tabulated. This resulted in a count of 2.765 ads recalled. A total of 20 media were mentioned, including direct mail and catalogues. Most of the media mentioned (97 percent) were classified into five categories:

(1)   TV (1365).
(2)   Internet (727).
(3)   Magazines (411).
(4)   Newspapers (145).
(5)   Radio (76).

Most of the 2765 ads were liked (73.7 percent) rather than neutral (14.3 percent) or disliked (12 percent). A significant association was evidenced by this analysis. While most TV, magazine and newspaper ads were liked almost 41 percent of Internet and radio ads were liked. The Internet ads were more likely to be rated as neutral than the other media's ads, and radio ads (followed by newspaper ads) were more likely to be supported.

Consequently, H4 was not supported; overall, the students seemed to like their TV ads, but Internet ads were only moderately liked.

6. DISCUSSION

The present study was motivated by an interest in how young consumers were influenced by the website they visited. Based on the scholarly and trade literature, we formulated four hypotheses and tested them using data from a survey of 1231 undergraduate students at four universities in Jordan. The results provided mixed support for the hypotheses.

The results showed that the "improved view of the brand" group recalled significantly more ads (M = 4.8, SD = 3.6) than the "no effect group" (M = 3.1, S D= 2.7, t = 3.1, p = 0.006, two- tailed). Thus, confirming that visiting websites appeared to enhance aided recall of brands seen on the Internet and to improve consumers' views of the Internet.

The results also showed that those who reported an improved view of the brand checked more advantages (M= 3.4, SD = 2.7) than those who said the website had no effect (M. 2.1, SD = 1.7), and this difference was statistically significant (t = 3.86, p = 0.002, two - tailed).

Those who reported an improved view of the brand also checked more disadvantages (M = 2.1, SD = 1.01) than those who said the website had no effect (M = 1.6, SD = 1.07), and this difference was statistically significant (t = 3.41, P= 0.009, two - tailed). Thus, confirming that consumers who felt that websites improved their perceptions of brands saw more advantages in web advertising but they perceived more disadvantages as well.

In a free recall protocol, the consumers in our study described ads they remembered, whether they liked them or not, and the medium in which the ads appeared. By far, the most frequently recalled ads were those on TV, but the Internet was the next most frequently recalled medium. Internet ads, however, were not the most liked; they were not very well liked compared with ads in the other four media. Only radio ads fared worse. It may be that while websites have a positive impact on consumers,

Internet advertising does not. This resulted in a count of 2765 ads recalled. A 20 media were mentioned, including direct mail and catalogues. Most of the media mentioned (97 percent) were classified into five categories:

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7. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study suggest that there are ample opportunities before marketers to improve the perception of their brands using well - designed and customer - oriented and customer - centric websites, but that they need to reevaluate the role and effectiveness of Internet advertising. When consumers responded positively to websites, they appeared more likely to remember brands that they encountered. In this case, one may fairly conclude that well planned and effectively designed and operated websites not only help consumers in responding positively to the website, but also enable consumers to have favorable attitudes to the advertised brands on the website. It seems that websites do a good job in enhancing the brands. Moreover, those who felt that websites improved their view of brands saw more advantages in web advertising than those whose brand perceptions were not enhanced, suggesting that as websites can be improved, they may be more effective in supporting brands. Because more disadvantages were also reported, marketers should consult consumers when it comes to designing their websites, and pre - test these websites prior to making them operational. Consumers should also be consulted in issues related to the

identification of problems with the sites and ways of correcting these problems. This could result in systematic improvement of the sites, making them more effective.

It was also revealed that consumers tend to like TV and magazine ads more than the ads they recalled seeing on the Internet, and that Internet ads came second in importance after TV ads. This finding suggests a number of important implications for marketers. This calls upon marketers to pay special attention to the creation of Internet advertising to give it the qualities that make it more likeable. Internet advertising is not the most powerful communication tool. It has limitations and problems that should be overcome. One way to alleviate this situation may be for marketers to pursue Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). This means different things to different people. However, if it is to be a significant development for organizations, then the term should embrace the marketing mix, the promotion mix, internal communications and all those outsourced providers who contribute to the overall marketing communication process. IMC offers opportunities to improve effectiveness and deliver messages in a more productive manner. Now that a genuine mixture of tools can be assembled, many marketers can see IMC as a way of putting right a number of problems across the organization, many of them structural or communication – oriented.

In fact, the findings of this study lead us to recommend that marketers ought to enter into a coordinated dialogue with their various internal and external audiences, and that the communication tools used in this dialogue and the messages conveyed should be internally consistent with the organization's objectives and strategies. The target audiences should perceive the communications and associated cues as coordinated, likeable and timely. In no way should marketers rely on one medium to convey their messages. This depends on the nature of their products and markets, but one ought to emphasize the need for harmonizing the messages conveyed by each of the promotional tools and media. It should always be remembered that marketing communications success is not determined solely by the

activities or use of the promotional tools. The elements of the marketing mix, however configured, also communicate. The price and associated values; the product, in terms of the quality, design and tangible attributes; the manner and efficiency of the service delivery people; and how it is made available, for

example the location, retailer/ dealer reputation and overall service quality, are brand identity cues with which recipients develop images and through time may shape brand reputations. Future studies should expand the scope of the study using these variables in particular to form a better picture of the situation in question.

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قياس فاعلية الإعلان عن طريق الإنترنت في الأردن (دراسة ميدانية)

بشير العلاق ورشاد الساعد

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد ما إذا كان تفاعل المستهلكين مع مواقع شبكة الانترنت يؤثر على مواقفهم واتجاهاتهم من أصناف السلع التجارية المعلن عنها من خلال هذه المواقع فيما بعد، وتقييم مدى تأثير هذه المواقع على اتجاهات هؤلاء المستهلكين نحو اعلانات الانترنت. وبنهاية المطاف، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى قياس مدى تأثير إعلانات الانترنت من خلال التفاعل بين المستهلكين وهذه المواقع.

تم اختيار عينة قصدية مؤلفة من 1231 طالباً وطالبة من أربع جامعات أردنية، وتم تصميم استبانة لقياس أربع فرضيات. وقد أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن هناك تأثيراً ايجابياً لاعلانات الانترنت على أصناف السلع المعلن عنها في هذه المواقع، كما ان هذه الإعلانات تحسن من النظرة لهذه الأصناف. وكشفت الدراسة أن الذين يشعرون بان اعلانات الانترنت حسنت من إدراكهم للأصناف المعلن عنها يرون أن هناك فائدة من إعلانات الانترنت، بالإضافة إلى وجود بعض السلبيات لها. وقد أظهرت هذه الدراسة انه مازال الكثير من المستهلكين يفضلون وسائل الاتصال التقليدية غير التفاعلية مثل التلفزيون والمجلات.

هذا، وقد تم اقتراح عدد من التوصيات التي ستساعد في صياغة استراتيجيات اتصال تسويقية فاعلة.

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