

Persuade to Buy: Implications for Online Advertising

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the development of a variety of online advertising tools and the implications that the characteristics of these tools have on their effectiveness, as well as to discover how important are the amount and nature of cognitive processing that a person does about a persuasive message in order to determine the kind of persuasion that occurs.

Even though advertisements are a necessary and important component of the Internet, most users are merely concerned with the quality of online experience and do not appreciate pop-up ads. However, the majority of previous researches in the area of online advertising lack in application of psychological theories of information processing and attitude change. This article seeks to explore the connection between cognitive processing and consumers' online experience as well as behaviour change in order to provide the most important factors that attract customers. The study

is designed in qualitative research approach in which literature review method has been chosen. The overview of contemporary researches in the area of online advertising will be provided together with the analysis of psychological aspects of information processing. Moreover, this study aims to obtain deeper understanding of elaboration likelihood model with the special emphasize on two routes an individual will take in a persuasive situation and its application to online advertisements.

It is concluded that cognitive aspects of information processing as well as elaboration likelihood model need to be taken into account when creating online advertisements, especially banners and pop-up ads. Also, the list of major factors that attract customers' and should be elaborated in each advertisement is result of this qualitative research study.

Keywords: online advertising; persuasion; cognitive processing; banners; pop-up ads; elaboration likelihood model; consumer behaviour; perceived intrusiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Even though advertisements are a necessary and important component of the Internet, most users are merely concerned with the quality of online experience and do not appreciate pop-up ads. Recent researches that explored forced viewing of online advertisements provided an understanding of how consumers experience forced exposure situations in interactive environment and also shed some light on feelings of irritation and avoidance as two major consequences of perceived intrusiveness. However, the majority of previous researches in the area of online advertising lack in application of psychological theories of information processing and attitude change.

This article seeks to explore the connection between cognitive processing and consumers' online experience as well as behaviour change in order to provide the most important factors that attract customers. Moreover, this study aims to obtain deeper understanding of elaboration likelihood model with the special emphasize on two routes an individual will take in a persuasive situation and its application to online advertisements.

Two factors that most influence which route an individual will take in a persuasive situation are motivation and ability. Which route is taken is also determined by the extent of elaboration. Under high elaboration, a given variable can either serve as an argument, or as a biasing factor, while under conditions of low elaboration, a given variable can act as a peripheral cue. The persuasion is either increased or decreased depending on the strength of the argument presented. Also, variables can affect the extent to which a person has confidence in, phenomena known as self-validation role.

By linking missing parts together, this article connects the achievements of marketing research, information science and psychology in order to explore the role and impact of online advertising on consumers' behaviour. Also, the list of major factors that attract customers' and should be elaborated in each advertisement is result of this qualitative research study.

2. METHOD

The study is designed in qualitative research approach in which literature review method has been chosen. The overview of contemporary researches in the area of online advertising will be provided together with the analysis of psychological aspects of information processing.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Online Advertising: When, Why, How

According to the psychologist Carl Jung, every individual has a primary mode of operation in each of the following four categories (Brook, 2000):

1. our flow of energy
2. how we take in information
3. how we prefer to make decisions
4. the basic day-to-day lifestyle we prefer.

Within each of these categories, people tend to be either extraverted or introverted, sensing or intuitive, thinking or feeling, judging or perceiving. Advertisers should target their ads to appeal to people with specific personality traits.

There are different types of creative advertising that can be used in order to attract consumers' attention. The most popular are:

1. banner ads - attract customers' attention through color, graphics, and, sometimes, animation;
2. e-mail messages - companies use the e-mail model of advertising to cross-sell and up-sell their products, to try to acquire potential new customers, to persuade existing customers to buy again, to enhance customer loyalty, and to build long-lasting relationships with customers;
3. interstitial ads - ads appear automatically as customers move between the pages of a Web site, making customers wait for another page to load;
4. online directories - allows companies to gain visibility through online directories that help customers find them easily, using a search engine;
5. pay-per-click ads – since advertisers pay only when customers click their ads, the companies that display these ads benefit only when customers click them, and many companies depend on this form of advertising to generate revenues;
6. pop-up ads - appear in a separate window, therefore they interrupt the flow of customers' current tasks. The only way to move ahead is to close the window in which the ad appears or click the window containing the site that caused the ad to appear;
7. pop-down banner ads - appear beneath the content on a Web page, on a banner at the bottom of the page, so customers have to look at and click these ads to get rid of them;
8. search engine optimization - seeks to promote a company's Web site by increasing its visibility on search engine results pages;
9. sky scrapers - ads have the same function and properties as banner ads, but the rectangular boxes containing them have a vertical rather than a horizontal layout. These ads usually appear on the right side of a page and are linked to the advertiser's Web site;

- 10. social networking - works best when it results from word-of-mouth or when a group exists for people who want to know what is happening with a company or product;
- 11. sponsorship - companies can sponsor a Web site or a certain section of a Web site where their ads appear.

Companies must also begin using advertising techniques that evoke an emotional response from customers and that can be obtained through strategic planning and development of new marketing touchpoints. Behavioral advertising observes customers' behavior as they move from one Web page or site to another (Sutherland&Sylvester, 2000). When following this advertising model, companies target ads to specific individuals, based on each customer's past surfing behavior. Because behavioral advertising tracks customers' interests, there is an increased likelihood that they will want the product or service advertised and be motivated to click an ad (Sutherland&Sylvester, 2000). With this method, different customers do not see the same ads on a Web page.

There are several factors that help people to identify an ad that would bring them benefit, therefore these variable factors should be motivating enough to ensure people act on the information. Table 1 provides a summary of these advertising approaches and the factors that attract particular customer to particular ad.

Table 1: Factors that attract customers to ad (Sutherland&Sylvester, 2000)

TYPE OF AD	HIGH ATTRACTION	MODERATE ATTRACTION
BEHAVIORAL	Targets individual customers Based on context and customers' needs Motivates customers to process information	-
CONTENT LURE	Appealing to customers' emotions Moves customers to their next steps Makes customers want to know more	-
CONTEXTUAL APPROACH	Based on customers' needs Culturally significant Blends in with surrounding content	-
CREATIVE ATTRACTION	-	Rarely used, but when used, is highly attractive Provides a different flavor Moves away from the mundane associations of advertising

		Customers subjectively perceive creativity
HUMOR	-	Rarely used, but when used, gets customers' attention Provides a different flavor Moves away from the mundane associations of advertising Customers subjectively perceive humor
INFORMATION	Based on context and customers' needs Relevant to customers Motivates customers to process information An excess of information can add to customers' cognitive load	-
INTERACTIVITY	Gets customers' attention Engages customers' motor and cognitive skills Motivates customers to process information	-
GEOGRAPHY	-	Based on customers' needs Culturally significant Blends in with surrounding content For a specific audience; ignores the rest
PRODUCT PLACEMENT	Non-intrusive Subliminal information processing affects the psyche positively Shows the product in a real-life scenario	-
SPECIAL OFFER	Most persuasive Motivates customers to process information Based on customers' needs	-
TARGET AUDIENCE	Based on customers' needs Culturally significant Blends in with surrounding content	-
VISUAL LURE	Makes a good first impression	-

	Gets customers' attention Emotionally appealing Motivates customers to process information	
WELCOMING IMAGERY	Warm imagery attracts customers' attention Emotionally appealing Motivates customers to process information	-

It is evident that information processing, cognitive functioning and emotional responses have an important role in shaping consumers' responses. Therefore, psychological aspects of advertising need to be explored briefly.

3.2 Psychology of Online Advertising

The physiological changes that accompany customers' emotional responses to advertisements determine their next action, therefore the context in which an advertisement appears determines whether the ad constitutes an effective call to action. Depending on what advertisers want to convey particular advertisement type will be chosen. While the advertising approaches that typically result in moderate attraction do affect customers, their perception of them can be subjective (Schuman&Thorson, 1999).

Effective communication must begin by obtaining the attention of the consumer. Then, the consumer must process the information carried in the advertisement. Such processing of information may be followed by an evaluation of the information, the source of the information, and ultimately the desirability of any actions suggested by the communication. This evaluation process may, in turn, give rise to the formation of attitudes, the development of intentions for future action, and, eventually, an action. Different characteristics of an advertisement have effects at different points in this hierarchy.

Recent researches have proven that pop-up ads elicit orienting responses (OR) (Diao&Sundar, 2004). The psychological data also revealed the superior effect of pop-up windows over the commonly used banners with respect to ad recall. This is consistent with contemporary theories of OR and visual attention, which suggest that people tend to orient automatically toward those mediated messages that are novel and unexpected in the immediate visual domain (Diao&Sundar, 2004). The larger implication of this finding is that formal features of media messages can evoke involuntary attention, ORs in particular, not only in traditional media as has been previously demonstrated but also in the new Web environment.

A recent study by Lang, Borse, et al. (2002) emphasizes the importance of considering content when it found that not only animated banners but also textual warnings about one's immediate environment shown on a computer screen (e.g., There is someone behind you!) elicit ORs. As for the effects on memory, it was found that banner ads had higher ad recognition than pop-up ads, quite contrary to expectations derived from limited-capacity theory (Diao&Sundar, 2004).

Pop-ups may not only orient users' attention to a specific location on the screen and thus influence which stories will be processed and which will not (Johnson & Proctor, 2004), but they may also elicit frustration and therefore induce a shift in the locus of attention from a global towards a local type of processing (Clare, Gasper, & Garvin, 2001). The absence of new modalities from informational Websites or the mere presence of a text-heavy site may increase frustration, and a relatively low number of pop-ups can perhaps serve to provide a release. It is needed to consider previous experience with computers and Internet along with other media experiences as contributing factors that can provide a deeper understanding of this proposition.

3.3 Elaboration Likelihood Model

The elaboration likelihood model is a theory that states that the amount and nature of thinking that a person does about a persuasive message is a very important determinant of the kind of persuasion that occurs. According to this model there are two routes to persuasion: peripheral route that does not require full cognitive processing and relies on a simple, low-effort decision strategy such as source attractiveness or message length, and the central route that involves carefully thinking about and thoroughly examining information relevant to a topic.

The extent of elaboration determines which route will be taken. Motivational factors include (among others) the personal relevance of the message topic, accountability, and a person's need for cognition, their innate desire to enjoy thinking (Petty, Briñol & Tormala, 2000). Ability factors include the availability of cognitive resources or relevant knowledge needed to carefully scrutinize the arguments. The subject's general education level, as well as their education and experience with the topic at hand greatly affect their ability to be persuaded.

Since the pop-up ads are not strong enough to catch consumers' attention, advertisers develop pop-under ads that remain hidden until the user have not completed her/his task on the main website. Therefore, the pop-under ads remain visible only after user has completed her/his job and become able to process the advertisement. By using pop-under ads, advertisers hope to take advantage of the permanent staying power of centrally processed pop-up ads.

3.4 Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings indicate that Web-site developers and marketing practitioners should not be discouraged by the potential of pop-up windows to cause annoyance and frustration, but carefully take advantage of this formal feature in catching online viewers' attention and, hence, increasing brand awareness.

Although awareness is generally considered by advertisers to be positively related to purchase intention, it might also motivate a negative behavioral response. At least one recent industry study has made the claim that online users actively penalize brands that use pop-ups and mistrust the companies that use and host pop-ups (Best, 2004). Another practical implication for advertising industry is to develop more innovative types of advertising. The lack of animation effect and the relatively inferior effect of banner ads on OR demonstrate the necessity for exploring more-creative executional cues to increase advertising effectiveness accruing from novelty effects. The pop-under ads should be considered in order to fill in the gap of peripherally processed pop-up ads, hence the purpose of the elaboration likelihood model cannot be neglected.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, the overview of contemporary online advertising techniques is provided together with users' psychological reaction towards them. It is concluded that cognitive aspects of information processing as well as elaboration likelihood model need to be taken into account when creating online advertisements, especially banners and pop-up ads. These results provide encouragement to develop and evaluate pop-under ads, as one of the effective advertising tools.

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