



Attitudes to Internet Advertising: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract

This research examines attitudes towards TV and Internet advertising. It is based on two studies previously carried out in the US by Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999) and Shavitt, Lowrey and Haefner (1998).

In a quantitative survey of 200 undergraduates, our respondents were significantly more negative towards Internet advertising than TV advertising, liking it less and finding it more irritating and annoying. The attitudes of UK respondents were also significantly more negative than US respondents. The model of overall attitude to advertising devised by Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999) was less satisfactory in explaining UK attitudes; the addition of a new factor 'irritation-annoyance' significantly improved this model.

Key Words

E-commerce, Internet marketing, Internet advertising.

Attitudes to Internet Advertising: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

Introduction

Global Internet advertising was worth \$9bn in 2000 and was then expected to reach \$15.4 billion by 2004 (Jupiter, 2001).

To advertise effectively marketers need to be aware of consumer attitudes to Internet advertising. Internet advertising can be irritating (Rettie, Robinson and Jenner, 2000) and this may reduce advertising effectiveness. In the last four years, click-through rates have fallen from 5 per cent to less than 0.3 per cent, and continue to fall. Using an eye-tracking device, Drèze and Hussherr (1999) found that surfers avoid looking at banner ads during their online activities.

A report by Forrester Research found that the Internet is the “least trusted medium” (Walsh, Mcquivey and Wakeman, 1999).

This study compares attitudes to UK Internet advertising with attitudes to UK TV advertising. It also compares these results with a similar study of US attitudes to advertising.

Conceptual Framework

There is substantial research on consumer attitudes to advertising in general. Gallup (1959) found that in America, the majority of respondents liked advertising; respondents liked it because it was informative, and they preferred advertised to unadvertised products. However, in 1968, Bauer and Greys found advertisements were perceived as annoying because respondents had heard or seen them too often. Barnes (1982) suggested that increasingly negative attitudes towards advertising could be attributed to the growth of television advertising, consumer concerns about ‘misleading’ advertisements, and the rise of consumer organisations. Andrews (1989) found that most respondents did not think advertising presented a true picture of the products advertised, and that advertising was believed to insult the intelligence of the consumer. Most of Mittal’s (1994) respondents thought that most television commercials were neither honest nor believable.

There are some conflicting studies: Heyder (1992) found 84 per cent of respondents expressed positive views. Shavitt, Lowrey and Haefner (1998) found that more Americans like, rather than dislike, advertising.

Attitudes Towards Internet Advertising

Ducoffé (1996) found respondents rated Internet advertising as fairly informative but less entertaining. Gordon and De Lima-Turner (1997) examined consumer attitudes towards Internet advertising in a social-contract perspective. They found that web advertising is more effective for developing a favourable brand attitude than it is for actually selling something. Respondents did not object to Internet advertisements as long as they were clearly identified. A number of authors have found that the more experience the consumer has online, the less accepting s/he is of Internet advertising (Bruner and Kumar, 2000; Flores, 2000).

Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999) conducted a study of Internet advertising attitudes using the same questionnaire as Shavitt, Lowrey and Haefner (1998) and comparing Internet attitudes with a demographically matched sample from this earlier survey of general advertising attitudes. They found that respondents were approximately equally divided between liking, disliking and feeling neutral about Internet advertising. Only 38 per cent of respondents liked Internet advertising compared to 46 per cent for general advertising, but fewer were offended by Internet advertising than by general advertising (29% versus 48%). Their study also analysed overall attitude to Internet advertising in terms of five components: utility, indignity, trust, price-effect, regulation.

Cross-Cultural Replication

Since the research by Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999) occurred only in the USA, cross-cultural replication is appropriate. The case for further replication studies has been made by Leone and Schultz (1980) and Creusen and Schoormans *et al*, (1997). Hubbard and Armstrong (1994) argue that although replication and extension are rare in marketing, the few that are published often conflict with their original papers, confirming the need for replication. Since the Internet is global in reach some consider cross-cultural research is relevant (Javenpaa and Tractinsky, 1999); others treat the Internet as a coherent virtual cultural region inhabited by Netizens (Hauben and Hauben, 1997; Johnston and Johal, 1999).

Cross-cultural replication of the UK and the US is particularly appropriate as the two countries are very similar. Hofstede (1980, 1997) distinguished five cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, individualism-collectivism, long-term time orientation.

The UK and the US scores vary only slightly on these five dimensions: with the USA slightly higher in terms of uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. Hall (1977) distinguished between high and low context cultures; both the UK and the US are low context cultures.

There are several studies that suggest cross-cultural differences affect attitudes to advertising. Gregory and Munch (1997) found that advertisements portraying norms and roles in line with local cultural values are more effective. Taylor *et al* (1997) found that consumers from low context cultures preferred informative commercials. Han and Shavitt (1994) and Zhang and Gelb (1996) found that advertising based on individualistic values was more persuasive in the US but that the converse was true of Korea.

The objective of our research was to compare to UK attitudes to TV and Internet advertising with attitudes US advertising attitudes.

Methodology

Our research used the same questionnaire as the two US studies (Shavitt, Lowrey and Haefner, 1998; Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer, 1999), with a few modifications. Instead of comparing attitudes to Internet advertising with attitudes to general advertising our survey compared Internet advertising with TV advertising. It was felt that 'general advertising' was confusing, and consisted of different components, so TV advertising was used instead of 'general' advertising. Our questionnaire (see Appendix) included the 17 questions from the original questionnaire - one covering overall evaluation and 16 sub-scales on the utility, indignity, trust, price-effect, and regulation of TV/Internet advertising. In addition, we added two questions about the irritation and annoyance of advertising.

The self-completion questionnaire was completed by a sample of 200 Kingston University undergraduates (100 male and 100 female). In line with the original study, attitudes were measured with 5-point Likert-type items, eg 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', 'like a lot' to 'like a little', etc. To facilitate comparison between the two countries, the statistical analysis applied mirrored that of the original papers. The top and bottom two boxes of the 5-point scales are collapsed into 'agree' and 'disagree' respectively for reporting purposes; the statistical analysis used the original 5-point data except for the Chi-square in Table 1 which used 'like', 'neutral' and 'dislike', in line with the US analysis.

Results

Overall attitudes towards Internet advertising were significantly less positive than attitudes towards TV advertising, UK consumers were more polarised, liking TV advertising more and Internet advertising less than their US counterparts (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 2, UK respondents did not like looking at Internet advertising and found it less informative than TV advertising, whereas most people in the US felt that Internet advertising was informative. While UK respondents were significantly less likely to trust Internet advertising than TV advertising, in the US trust was higher for Internet than general advertising,

US respondents felt more confident using information from Internet advertisements than from general advertisements, whereas in the UK they had significantly less confidence in Internet advertising than TV advertising. In both countries respondents were significantly less likely to use Internet advertising in making purchasing decisions.

Overall Attitude	TV		Internet		Pearson
	Like	Dislike	Like	Dislike	χ^2 , 4 df.
In general, do you like or dislike TV/Internet advertising, UK	61%	14%	25%	45%	24.38**
In general, do you like or dislike general/Internet advertising, US study	46%	25%	38%	35%	16.02**
Comparison of UK/US: Pearson χ^2 , 4 degrees freedom	14.11**		15.65**		
Base: UK 200; US 402					**p<0.001

Table 2: Characteristics of Advertising						
Agree	UK			US		
	Internet %	TV %	t	Internet %	General %	t
I like to look at most advertising I am exposed to. Agree...	23	59	7.87**	38	50	3.45**
Most advertising is informative. Agree...	46	67	4.33**	62	59	0.87
In general I feel I can trust advertising. Agree...	37	61	4.94**	48	38	2.88**
In general, how confident do you generally feel using information you see in an ad to make a purchase decision? Somewhat/very...	26	66	8.76**	70	62	2.40**
How often do you use advertising to help make your purchase decisions? Sometimes/often...	19	65	10.52**	33	67	7.23**
Most advertising is annoying. Agree...	66	44	4.53**	-	-	-
Most advertising is irritating. Agree...	65	45	4.10**	-	-	-
** p<0.01(test for proportions)			Base: UK 200; US 402			

Irritation /Annoyance

Our respondents found Internet advertising significantly more irritating and annoying than TV advertising. Unlike previous research, we found no relationship between Internet annoyance or irritation and length, quantity and frequency of Internet usage.

Factor Analysis

In the US study, principal component factor analysis found five factors: advertising utility, indignity, trust, price-effect, regulation.

Before proceeding to examine the significance of these factors in the UK, the reliability of the multi-item scale developed by Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999) was examined. Using the UK data for TV advertising, these scales all demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's Alpha >

0.5, inter-item correlation > 0.03). However, for Internet advertising the scale 'indignity' did not meet the set criteria, so we used the single item 'misleading' as this showed the highest correlation with overall attitude. Our items 'annoyance' and 'irritation' yielded an additional reliable scale.

Regression Analysis

The five original factors were averaged and then regressed on overall attitude to Internet advertising using stepwise regression. The results indicated that 27.0% of the variance could be explained by the five factors, with utility alone accounting for 26%. In the US results there was a much better model fit for Internet advertising; the original five factors accounted for 47% of the variance, with utility alone accounting for 43%. For TV advertising in the UK the five factors accounted for 27% of the variance, with utility accounting for 26%. The addition to the model of 'annoyance-irritation' significantly improves the model accounting for a further 4% of the variance in Internet advertising in the UK, ($F=9.71$, $p=0.01$) and a further 9% of the variance in TV advertising, ($F= 28.85$, $p =0.01$).

Conclusion

The model devised by Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999) was less satisfactory in explaining the attitudes of UK consumers. For both Internet and TV advertising, the 'utility' factor accounted for most of the variance in overall attitude in both countries. This supports the theory that information and entertainment are crucial to advertising effectiveness (Ducoffe, 1996; Schlosser *et al* 1999). However, unlike the US respondents, most UK consumers thought that Internet advertising was neither entertaining nor informative; consequently their overall attitude to Internet advertising was negative. In the UK 'annoyance-irritation' are important components of both Internet and TV advertising. This may be because the nature of UK advertising is less informative and entertaining, and more annoying or, more likely, because the cultural attitude to advertising in the UK is more critical. These findings suggest the cultural grounding of advertising extends beyond Hofstede's five dimensions.

Marketers need to be aware of the negative attitudes held by consumers towards Internet advertising and the adverse effect it could have on the brands advertised. Improved targeting with relevant advertisements related to the page content might counterbalance this attitude.

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Appendix: Questionnaire Items

Overall

In general, do you like or dislike Internet/TV advertising? Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

Utility

Most advertising is informative. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

I like to look at most advertisements that I am exposed to. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

How often do you use advertising to help make your purchase decisions? Often ... seldom

In general, how confident do you feel using information you see in an ad to make a purchase decision? Very ... not at all

Indignity

Most advertising insults my intelligence. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

How often do you feel offended by TV advertising? Often ... seldom

How often have you felt misled by advertisements? Often ... seldom

Trust

In general, I feel I can trust advertising. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

Products that I have used usually live up to the promises of quality and performance made in their advertisements. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

How comfortable are you about purchasing an item directly through an address or phone number in an advertisement? Very ... not at all

Price

In general, advertising results in lower prices for the products I buy. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

I usually get better value for my money in advertised brands of products than in unadvertised brands. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

What effect do you think advertising has on the prices of advertised products? Increases ... decreases

Regulation

I think the government should put less effort into regulating the content of advertising I see. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

Advertising regulation should be done by the advertising industry through its member associations rather than by the government. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

How do you feel about the amount of regulation which the government currently places on advertising? Too much ... too little

Additional questions

Most advertising is irritating. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly

Most advertising is annoying. Agree strongly ... disagree strongly