Online and Offline Advertising Media: Exploring the Antecedents to Advertising Trust

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Breaking through the clutter of advertising to reach consumers is no easy feat. Getting consumers to believe and act on the messages delivered is even harder. By understanding which specific media and channels consumers are more trusting of, marketers can more wisely choose where to place their messages for the highest levels of efficiency. This study looks to create a conceptual model outlining the predictors of advertising trust so that marketers can choose an advertising medium based on their target audience. By identifying which sources are most or least trusted by a given type of consumer, marketers will know which channels to choose or avoid when determining their media mix in a campaign.

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than material purchases (Howell & Hill, in press). We take these findings one step further by proposing that an experience by oneself may make people less happy than an experience in which others are included. The current research tests this hypothesis with experimental designs.

In the first study, 89 undergraduates were given a survey in which they were shown pairs of 9 experiences, each framed once as involving others and once as done alone. Participants were asked how happy the purchases would make them and how much money they would spend to acquire each. Results supported the hypothesis that experiential purchases are more valuable when framed as social than as solitary. Participants reported feeling happier with an experience when it involved others than when it was solitary, t(89)=18.55, p<.001, and were willing to spend more money to acquire it, t(89)=13.50, p<.001. These data suggest that an experience gains value—in terms of willingness to spend money to acquire it and happiness gained upon doing so—when it involves others.

A second study compared the value of social and solitary experiences to material objects. In this study, 84 participants were shown sets of three purchases—material, experiential with others, and the same experience alone—all matched for cost. For each set, participants were asked to indicate which of the three they would choose and which of the three would make them most happy. Partially replicating the results of Van Boven and Gilovich (2003), participants chose the social experience over the other purchases the majority of the time (M=8.75 times per 13 opportunities). Importantly, participants chose material objects significantly more (M=3.47) than solitary experiences (M=0.76). The same pattern was found for happiness ratings. These results suggest that the value of experiential purchases over material objects depends on others being included in the experience. When experiences are solitary, the relative value of material objects increases.

A final study addressed a methodological shortcoming in the second experiment. Namely, when participants pick one purchase from a set of three, the relative value of the two remaining purchases is not clear. Therefore, the final study broke down three purchase options into three between-subjects comparison conditions—material vs. social, material vs. solitary, and solitary vs. social purchases—and asked participants which they would choose and which would make them happier. The final study also included a fourth condition in which material purchases were presented alongside ambiguously social experiences (e.g., “taking a road trip” without specifying whether or not others were involved). Subjects in this condition provided an unprompted, open-ended description of the experience. If participants spontaneously describe the experiences as involving others, this adds support to the overarching hypothesis that the reason experiences promote happiness is because they involve others.

In the final study, 327 participants were randomly assigned to conditions in which they were presented 1 of 4 possible choices—material objects and social experiences, material objects and solitary experiences, solitary and social experiences, and material objects and ambiguous experiences—and were asked to pick which one they would choose and which would make them happier. Results participants chose social experiences relatively more than material possessions (M=7.63 times per 12 opportunities). Participants chose material possessions relatively more than solitary experiences (M=7.53). Participants chose social experiences relatively more than solitary experiences (M=9.83). Finally, participants were no more likely to choose ambiguous experiences than material objects (M=6.16). However, participants reported that experiences would make them happier than material objects (M=7.20 times) and described the experiences in terms of people involved significantly more than would be expected by chance (63.3% of the time).

The results of three studies suggest that the value of experiential purchases, both in terms of willingness to consume and happiness after consumption, depends on others being involved. Consistent with Van Boven and Gilovich (2003), experiences with others are more desirable and make people happier than material possessions. Experiences without others, though, are less desirable and make people less happy than material possessions. These results are consistent with research by Rosenbaum (2006) suggesting that some consumers consistently patronize establishments that offer feelings of connectedness and social support. In addition, Russell, Norman, & Heckler (2004) demonstrate that television consumption represents an outlet for feeling connected to television characters. Taking into account the relationship context of experiential purchases may be critical to predicting how they best promote happiness.

References

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Abstract
Breaking through the clutter of advertising to reach consumers is no easy feat. Getting consumers to believe and act on the messages delivered is even harder. By understanding which specific media and channels consumers are more trusting of, marketers can more wisely choose where to place their messages for the highest levels of efficiency. This study looks to create a conceptual model outlining the predictors of advertising trust so that marketers can choose an advertising medium based on their target audience. By identifying which
sources are most or least trusted by a given type of consumer, marketers will know which channels to choose or avoid when determining their media mix in a campaign.

**Introduction and Conceptual Overview**

The landscape for advertising is continuously changing with the explosion of new media options. With the options becoming endless, the question turns to the consumer. How do they want to be reached? How will they listen? Specifically, which channel is most trustworthy? Consumers’ trust of the messages companies are putting into their advertising has not been increasing. In fact, according to Forrester Research (Kim, 2006), in 2002 only 13% of North American heads of household indicated that they thought companies generally tell the truth in advertisements.

However, the fragmentation of the advertising market into a multitude of marketing channels makes these generalized trust statements hard to subscribe to. Consumers are well aware of the differences in advertising channels and are judging the messages contained in each differently. Recently, Nielsen (2007) surveyed consumers on their attitudes toward thirteen types of advertising, and found vast differences among the types.

Numerous studies have also found that consumers have a higher level of trust for content in traditional media sources (Ganguly, 2007; Parr, 2006; Soh, Reid, and King, 2007). Despite conclusive results indicating that channels differ in trustworthiness, previous research has not reached a consensus on how specific media differ. Planagin and Metzger (2000), for example, found that beyond newspapers, media trust differed very little. These seemingly contradictory findings reveal that how specific media differ from one another (i.e., TV vs. Internet) should be further explored.

From a marketing perspective, trust of specific channels is essential. Without trust, consumers are less likely to openly receive messages. Furthermore, classic persuasion research shows that trust is an antecedent to attitude and behavioral change. Thus, understanding levels of trust not only across various channels but also between forms on a given channel will help determine the most effective channel and form to use for a given marketing campaign. Although secondary research clearly indicates that consumers do, in fact, trust certain channels more than others, it fails to clearly identify factors that influence consumers’ trust perceptions. If one could determine factors (i.e., reliance) that impact trust, a marketing manager could better decide which channel(s) to utilize.

The trust consumers have with various advertisement channels may be impacted by the consumers’ experience and reliance with a given channel (e.g., Greer, 2003; Johnson and Kay, 2000; Johnson and Kaye 2004; Nail, 2005). Nail (2005) found that young consumers who were rated as technology optimists (consumers who are comfortable with technology and like to use it) were more likely to notice online ads than technology pessimists. Kim (2006) also suggested reaching out to consumers in the environment that they engage with most. Essentially, people who are trusting of magazine ads are more likely to be trusting of other offline advertising. From this, one could theorize that consumers who spend more time online would be more trusting of online advertising while those who spend more time with any offline channels would be more trusting of offline advertising.

While there have been other analyses undertaken to examine the predictors of consumers’ trust levels of web content, there has been little examination of the predictors of consumers’ trust levels of online advertising. Shankar, et al (2002) built a model of online trust which helped in predicting consumers’ trust of a given online channel. Much of this work centered upon the actual attributes of the website, the consumers’ experience with online channels (specifically e-commerce interactions) and security issues. While the study did not speak to trust of online advertising the underlying framework lends itself to further exploration of this specific topic. Thus, we will use this model as a basis from which we will build out a model of online advertising trust predictors. Similarly, the study done by Bart, et al (2005), while focusing on specific determinants of trust in e-commerce experiences across site categories, demonstrates that allowances for differences across types of sites is important. Similarly, we will address differences across types of internet advertisements.

For this particular study we’ve developed the following preliminary hypotheses:

- Consumers with a higher level of online media usage will be more trusting of online advertising
- Consumers will trust advertising messages more when they are delivered through the medium they spend the most time with
- Demographic factors influencing technology adoption will also influence trust of online advertising

**Method**

Because of the need for respondents that used both on and offline media we chose to use data collected in a mail survey. The data used was for Forrester Research’s 2008 Benchmark mail recontact survey. This survey is part of the Technographics product. The questionnaire was administered by mail to respondents aged eighteen and older from TNS’ North American mail survey panel. The survey respondents had also responded to an earlier Forrester Benchmark survey. Thus, the available sample to pull from was a subset of the original respondents of the Benchmark Survey which had been fielded in January of 2008. The survey respondents were selected to be representative of the North American household and individual population. Targets were used in pulling the sample to match the predicted returns to look like the general US population. Survey respondents were incented with an entry into a sweepstakes to win one of five cash prizes. The total collected sample size was 4,605 respondents.

The survey was fielded in September of 2008. Six weeks were allotted for fielding. The mail based survey was a total of eight legal sized pages with a cover letter asking participants to complete the survey for a chance to win one of five cash prizes. As returns came into TNS they were processed by a DP team at TNS. This team was responsible for reviewing the returned surveys to ensure they were filled out properly and completely. The surveys were then cleaned and coded into a data set.

**Preliminary Results**

Thus far, we have yielded several general conclusions from preliminary data analyses. The sample consisted of 4,605 adults, ranging from age 18 to 95 (M=48.85). All 50 states were represented in this sample. Of the respondents, 48.7% were male, while 51.3% were female. When analyzing a ranked order of means, respondents indicate that yellow-page advertisements are the most trusted form of advertising (M=3.29) among 24 different types of advertising. Following yellow-page advertisements, the next top 6 forms of advertising...
are: Online consumer reviews (M=3.18); In-store displays (M=3.16); Newspaper ads (M=3.12); Email ads (M=3.08); Magazine ads (M=3.05); and TV ads (M=2.98). The bottom five types of advertisement (the least trustworthy), are as follows: Celebrity endorsements (M=2.29); Social networking site advertisements (M 2.28); Videogame ads (M=2.25); Blog ads (M=2.24); and Text cell ads (M=2.18).

Multiple regression analyses reveal that both age and gender significantly predict levels of trust in the six ad types (yellow page ads; online customer reviews; in-store displays; videogame ads; blog ads; and cell text ads). The older a respondent is, the more negative reviews will be for both ad types. Furthermore, females rate videogames ads more negatively, but rate online consumer reviews more positively. In addition, preliminary exploratory factor analyses have yielded several technology usage factors (e.g., New Tech Uses such as blogging, wikis, etc.; Online product research and Purchase; Traditional Ad Trust; Newer Tech Ad Trust).

Using AMOS 6.0, a path model also yielded many interesting findings (RMSEA=.024; CFI=.988). First, there were no significant differences among consumers that predicted trust levels in traditional media advertising such as TV, radio, newspapers or magazines. Second, the use of newer Internet technologies (such as blogs and wikis), Internet product use (i.e., the research and purchase of products online), and the overall reliance upon the Internet had a positive impact on trust levels for “controlled” forms of Internet media (e.g., consumer reviews, custom emails, etc).

Other demographic variables were also found to have an impact. Age had a negative impact on trust levels of “controlled” forms (i.e., forms that consumer typically controls exposure of such as blogs and consumer reviews) of Internet media and for new forms of Internet media. Females had higher trust level ratings for forms of media than males did. And finally, having a college degree negatively impacted a consumer’s trust level for most forms of media advertising.

The initial results show that there are differences among individuals who trust offline advertising and those who trust online advertising. The fact that there are no significant differences among consumers that will predict trust levels in traditional media advertising can be attributed to the established nature of these mediums. This only strengthens the need to further explore the predictors of trust among emerging advertising mediums so that consumers can be properly identified. Similarly, the apparent differences among controlled forms of Internet media versus un-controlled media should be explored as well. This is especially important with the rise of user-generated content on the Internet.

Creating a model of consumer ad trust will greatly empower marketers to make better choices about where to place messages. Further analyses will be connected to more deeply examine the predictors of online advertising trust. The end goal of the analyses will be to not only construct a model to illustrate the predictors of online trust but to create consumer profiles for each type of advertising. These consumer profiles will illustrate to marketers who is and who isn’t likely to trust each type of advertising.

References

When Preferences Differ Among Friends: How Positive Affect Influences Choosing to Accommodate Others vs. Choosing to Express Oneself
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Are people in positive affect more likely to accommodate the preferences expressed by their friend when making consumer choices? Or are they more likely to stay true to their own personal preferences? Indeed, the answer to both questions is yes. Results show people