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Tourism Management 29 (2008) 221–236
TOURISM MANAGEMENT
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Influential factors and relational structure of Internet banner advertising in the tourism industry

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Received 21 June 2006; received in revised form 15 March 2007; accepted 20 March 2007

Abstract

The Internet serves as a major marketing and communication tool in the tourism industry; it is, therefore, surprising that there have been few discussions of the structural relationship between tourism and Internet-based advertising. This study focuses on determining how Internet-based advertising has influenced travel agencies operating in the tourism industry. The sample of 605 respondents is, therefore, limited to those with experience of both Internet-based advertising and travel agencies. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), it was found that while both consumer contact and attention paid have a direct relationship to a consumer's attitude of an advertisement, they only indirectly affect the consumer's response. The level of importance ascribed to the content of Internet advertisements creates two distinct responses, indicating that the consumer's degree of product involvement is a significant variable in determining the success of Internet advertisements.
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Keywords: Internet advertising contact and attention; Internet advertising content design; Internet advertising attitude; Product involvement degree; Internet advertising effects

1. Introduction

The rapid development of the Internet has had an enormous impact on traditional media, and has revolutionized commercials. Many enterprises have adopted the Internet in the marketing and sales of products and today the web is an important advertising medium. These effects are emphasized in the tourism industry; surveys conducted by the World Wide Web for the Taiwanese Civil Service of Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) noted that online shopping is largely tourism based and planning and booking trips online is already common (Tsai, Huang, & Lin, 2005), and that marketing and sales are chiefly conducted through the Internet. Experts believe tourism has the potential to adopt e-commerce and internet advertising as its main communicative tool (Kim, Kim, & Han, 2007; Murphy & Tan, 2003). Information technology and web based advertising has been used to redefine tourism and deliver products to end consumers (Aaron, 2006; Gretzel, Yuan, & Fesenmaier, 2000).

Internet advertising significantly impacts travel and purchase behavior (Buhalis & Licata, 2002; Tierney, 2000). Currently, there are several questions that we believe need to be answered by marketing researchers: (1) in conditions of extreme competition, advertisements may become highly prevalent, and customers would be barraged with advertising; would customers then begin to ignore advertisements? (2) What level of importance is placed on the content of Internet advertisements? (3) What degree of consumer involvement with product affects the attitude toward advertisements, and how does this affect the impact of advertisements? (4) What is the intensity of cause and effect relationships in the online marketplace?

Studies concerning advertisement design methodology and its results have been undertaken previously

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doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2007.03.020

(e.g. Bayles & Chaparro, 2001; Briggs & Hollis, 1997; Ducoffe, 1996; Leong, Ang, & Tham, 1996; Rethans, Swasy, & Marks, 1986); however, there are very few studies that discuss the effect of Internet advertising on the tourism industry. Our study has, therefore, selected tourism in an attempt to understand advertising's effect on intangible commodities (tour service marketing and sales), and determine the effect of Internet advertisements on users' perceptions and behavior. While our subject is the tourism industry, this study focuses on the travel and leisure sectors. Our objective is to develop a knowledge base from which travel agencies engaged in Internet-based advertising can draw from.

Compared to traditional media, the Internet is instantaneous, low-cost and global. Internet-based advertising provides a medium to disseminate information to consumers in the form of "enterprise and consumer interactive scenarios"; it also aids advertisers in identifying target markets and in accurately grasping the consumer demands. Advertisers can further narrow markets, identifying individual consumers to be targeted by marketing; this practice benefits enterprise–consumer relationships, helps increase brand value, and aids the creation of a business image.

Studies have found that consumer purchase behavior is occasionally impulsive (Wells & LoSciuto, 1966). Media such as radio, newspapers, and magazines were previously used to deliver messages; if a consumer noticed an advertisement, he/she had to physically travel to a store to make his/her purchase. The time taken to reach a store gave consumers time to suppress their desire to make a purchase; however, Internet stores combine both advertising and purchasing (Hoffman & Thomas, 1996), thus enabling consumers to make a purchase instantly. The Internet, therefore, encourages impulsive purchasing compared to traditional media.

This study discusses the relationships between: consumer's contact and attention paid to and the effect of advertisements, the content and effect of advertisements, and the influence of these variables on travel agents' advertising. Combinations of these variables have been analyzed, and in this paper, the influence of various factors on advertisements' effects have been established and verified through structural equation modeling (SEM). The objectives of this research are:

(1) To find consumers' contact and attention, and the level of importance placed on the content of Internet-based advertisements, and determine how the effect of Internet advertisements is altered by these two dimensions.
(2) To determine how the attitude toward Internet advertisement, and product involvement degree alters its effect.
(3) To construct a relationship between Internet advertisement contact and attention and Internet advertisement content design, and determine what part Internet advertisements play in the cause and effect model.
(4) Generate results that may serve as a reference for industry operators as they devise strategies for Internet-based advertising.

2. Literature review and hypothesis

2.1. Contact and attention to Internet-based advertising

Successful advertisements draw customers into purchasing or viewing the product or a company in a more favorable light (Weilbacher, 2003). Craik and Lockhart (1972) believe that recall is higher when one is exposed to continuous stimuli; this view is also held by Rethans et al. (1986). Nua Internet Surveys (2001) estimated that 85% of advertising, marketing, and sales companies believe online advertising aims to increase traffic to the websites promoted. Briggs and Hollis (1997) believe that viewing a banner on a website can convey a message; therefore, regardless of whether the consumer clicks or not, simply viewing a banner increases the chance of a purchase. This position appears to be supported by Nua Internet Surveys (2000), which says that 32% of online trade is the result of viewing advertisements online. Studies by the Internet Advertising Bureau, USA (IAB, 1997) have determined that exposure to online advertising creates a recall rate of 12%; two percent higher than that of television. Bruner II and Kumar (2000) further pointed out that layered effects exist among advertising attention level, advertising attitude, attitude of brand, and purchase intention. Therefore, to increase consumer contact to advertising, and attract consumer attention to Internet advertising, a positively strengthened attitude and Internet advertising effects are improved. Internet advertising contact and attention of consumers affects the advertising attitude and purchasing behavior. This study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1. As the frequency of contact and attention paid to Internet advertising increases, consumers' attitude towards the advertisement becomes more positive.

H2. Consumers react more positively and pay a greater attention when contacted to a higher frequency.

2.2. Internet advertising content design

Advertising content is a key success factor in Internet advertising (Cho, 1999); if the content is congruent with customers attitudes, beliefs, and values, the effect of advertising is enhanced (Braun-Latour & Zaltman, 2006). Online advertisements' content includes variables such as: web interface, background colors, pictures, sound effects, textual content and dynamic techniques (Dreze & Zufryden, 1997); Ducoffe (1996) noted that content presentation also contributes highly to advertisements' results. Consumers form values and alter their consumption patterns based on the messages conveyed; messages that help consumers make decisions positively influence a willingness to make a purchase.

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