

Attitudes toward Web-Based Advertising and Specific Internet Ad Formats

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Abstract

This study has two major purposes. The first one is determining individuals' attitudes toward advertising in general and Web-advertising in specific. Findings show that individuals are aware of both the pros and cons of advertising in real and Web-based environments and do not have an overall attitude that is strongly positive or negative for both media. The second major purpose is understanding how Internet users comparatively evaluate four different Web-based advertising media (banner ads, sponsored links, advergames, e-mail ads) according to six major attributes, namely: informativeness, interactivity, entertainment, irritation, creativity/innovativeness, and richness of content. Findings show that Internet users have meaningfully dissimilar attitudes toward the four alternative advertising formats according to these criteria.

Introduction

In recent years, the popularity and utilization of the online environment as an advertising medium have been greatly enhanced. This rapid development can be attributed to the accelerating diffusion of Internet usage both by businesses and individuals. According to Internet World Stats, currently, there are approximately 1.67 billion Internet users on a worldwide basis corresponding to a penetration rate of 24.5%. Especially, the fact that the number of users has grown by 361% from 2000 to 2009 is very striking (www.internetworldstats.com). In addition to the speedy increase in Internet usage, the attractiveness of Web-based media as an advertising environment can also be attached to companies' and advertisers' desire to add variety and originality to their portfolio of marketing communication media.

Accelerating amounts of spending on Internet advertising is the most significant proof of this environment's improving popularity for communicating with customers. According to IDC's Digital Marketplace Model and Forecast, worldwide spending on Internet advertising is expected to grow 15-20% each year and reach \$106.6 billion in 2011 corresponding to 13.6% of all advertising expenditures (www.marketingcharts.com). In US, the percent of online advertising

spending in total media expenditures has increased from 7.6% in 2007 to 8.7% in 2008, and is expected to amplify from 9.9% in 2009 to 15.2% in 2013 (www.eMarketer.com).

Inspired by the increasing attention and investments directed toward Web-based advertising, this study aims to find an answer to the following questions:

- What are individuals' overall attitudes toward advertising in general and Web-based advertising in specific? Is there a relationship between these two constructs?
- How do individuals comparatively evaluate four different Web-based advertising media (banner ads, sponsored links, advergames, e-mail ads) according to six major attributes, namely: informativeness, interactivity, entertainment, irritation, creativity/innovativeness, and richness of content?

For this purpose, an online survey has been conducted and descriptive and comparative findings are obtained from the responses collected from 190 individuals in Turkey. Findings show that individuals are aware of both the pros and cons of advertising in real and Web-based environments. Thus, they do not have an overall attitude that is strongly positive or negative for both media. The relationship between general attitude toward advertising and attitude toward Web-based advertising is confirmed. Furthermore, consumers have shown meaningfully dissimilar attitudes toward the four alternative advertising formats according to the six criteria selected for differentiation.

Literature Review

In this section, an overview of the literature about the three important groups of variables included in this study are presented.

General Attitude Toward Advertising

In the marketing literature, general attitude toward advertising is a very well-established concept and numerous assessments of this construct have been performed in various contexts. It is most comprehensibly defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner toward advertising in general" (MacKenzie&Lutz, 1989). Previous attempts to understand individuals' overall attitudes toward advertising as positive or negative have produced conflicting findings. While there are studies that have found that people have a negative disposition toward advertising in general (Zanot, 1984 c.f. Tsang, Ho, and Liang, 2004), other examples show that consumers' favorable attitudes toward advertising are stronger than the unfavorable ones (Bauer and Greyser, 1968 c.f. Tsang et al., 2004). Shavitt, Lowrey, and Haefner (1998) have shown that although Americans held strongly negative views of advertising in the past, their dislike has decreased and awareness of the enjoyment and informative value of advertising has increased to some extent in years.

The difficulty of reaching a definitive conclusion about consumers' general disposition toward advertising led researchers to tackle the construct in greater detail. While the earliest

scale of attitude toward advertising developed by Bauer and Greyser (1968) contained general beliefs about the social and economic effects of advertising (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998), in latter studies, other multi-item scales were developed and employed to tap the variables underlying this construct. Muehling's (1987) study in which he used a 20-item scale including belief statements about the functions and practices of advertising, the advertising industry, and the users of advertising is one such example. Similarly, in their "public opinion toward advertising" instrument, Pollay and Mittal (1993) use 30 statements about general attitudes toward advertising, its informative, social, hedonic, economic, and materialistic aspects. There are further attempts to dive deeper into specific dimensions of advertising such as the "consumer skepticism toward advertising" scale developed by Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) as well.

Attitude Toward Internet Advertising

The emphasis put on the importance of understanding general consumer attitudes toward advertising in the marketing literature spawned a similar interest in understanding individuals' attitudes toward Internet advertising. The earliest study aiming to determine the factors underlying the value of advertising on the Web is the seminal work of Ducoffe (1996) where he proposes and tests "informativeness" and "entertainment" of Web advertising as positive inputs in addition to "irritation" which is a negative input. Consequently, Brackett and Carr (2001) have added "credibility" with the idea that the trustworthiness and believability of Web advertising are also very important in determining consumer attitudes toward it.

Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer (1999) have also measured the impact of five factors in formulating Internet users' attitudes toward Web-based advertising: advertising utility (the effectiveness of advertising in meeting consumers' needs); indignity (feelings of being insulted, offended, and misled by advertising); trust; perception that prices are increased by advertising; and regulation. Of these five factors, advertising utility factor was found to play a very dominant role in determining consumer attitude toward Internet advertising. This factor consisted of informativeness, enjoyability, and helpfulness of Internet advertisements in making purchase decisions.

There have also been attempts to adapt traditional advertising attitude scales for the Internet context to assess consumer dispositions. One such study has been performed by Wolin, Korgaonkar, and Lund (2002) where they adapt Pollay and Mittal's (1993) belief model to test consumer attitudes toward Internet advertising. Their findings showed that the information, hedonic, and social role and image values of Web advertising are the most powerful determinants of the positive component in consumers' attitudes. On the other hand, materialism (leading to unnecessary consumption), falsity (deceptiveness), and value corruption are found to be the significant negative attitude dimensions toward Web advertising. In a similar attempt, Yang (2003) assessed individuals' beliefs about Internet advertising by using a 36-item scale most of which also consisted of adaptations of Pollay and Mittal's (1993) instrument of public opinion toward advertising instrument. In this expanded study, Internet advertising's positive affect on personal economy, nation's economy, Web economy, consumer benefits and standards

of living were found to be important positive influences as well as its hedonic and informative value. On the other hand, the manipulative power and materialistic nature of Internet advertising leading individuals to unnecessary consumption were also found to be striking negative inputs of consumer attitudes toward Internet advertising.

Internet Advertising Formats

As Yang(2003) mentions, Internet advertising encompasses a variety of formats such as banner ads, e-mail ads, pop-ups, interstitials, superstitials, etc. In another study, Li and Leckenby (2004) also demonstrate the variety of methods in this advertising environment and examine banner ads, sponsorships, interstitials, rich media ads, keyword search, 3D product visualization, and advergimes as some of the important Web advertising types. Furthermore, Özen and Sarı (2008) provide another comprehensive list of Internet advertising formats and descriptions including the above-mentioned tools as well as newly emerging formats of banner advertising, search engines, sponsored content, streaming video, and rich media among others.

Probably one of the most popular and frequently examined formats of Web advertising is banner ads. They have become the most prevalent advertising format on the Internet since their appearance in 1994 (Briggs and Hollis, 1997 c.f. Cho and Cheon, 2004). Yoon's (2003) study shows that respondents use banner ads with the influence of others around them, to pass time, out of curiosity, for practical reasons, for its interactivity and customization and because of an interest in the advertised product. However, the major problem with banner ads is that "no consumer visits the Web to view a banner ad" (Krishnamurthy, 2000). Since the consumer's concentration is on the surfing and browsing experience, little attention is paid to the message in the banner ad making the imagery, animation, and slogans more important to increase banner ad effectiveness (Krishnamurthy, 2000). In line with this statement, Dréze and Hussherr (2003) argue that surfers avoid looking at banner ads during their online activities, therefore suggesting that click-through rates are not very accurate measures of banner ad effectiveness. Thus, banner ads seem to be more suitable for attention-grabbing and awareness building purposes. Yoon's (2003) study which shows that images are more effective than text for banner ads supports this view. Lohtia, Donthu&Hershberger (2003) have also shown that the presence of incentives does not influence click-through rates in banner ads, but the use of emotional appeals, color, and animation cause a significant increase.

Another popular format of Internet-based marketing communication is e-mail advertising. The major advantage of e-mail marketing compared to banner ads is stated to be the chance of being observed, since it is a direct communication tool reaching the consumer on a one-to-one basis (Krishnamurthy, 2000). However, although this seems to be the major advantage, the challenges of permission marketing and viral marketing create difficulties in the implementation of this tool (Krishnamurthy, 2000). Besides, this method has developed a strongly negative reputation because of the unsolicited e-mail attacks that invaded consumers' inboxes. Thus, it is not a surprise that Internet users have a negative attitude toward advertising on newsgroups and through e-mail in general (Mehta and Sivadas, 1995 c.f. Yang, 2003).

There are some other studies discussing the advantages and disadvantages of other Internet advertising formats as well. For example, Becker-Olsen (2003) examines sponsored content in comparison to banner ads and shows that it can be an effective tool to increase customer responsiveness and purchase intention. Similarly, Smith (2007) attracts attention toward the decreasing impact of banner and pop-ups leading to an increasing popularity of advergaming which give companies the chance to target many different demographic groups of consumers. While it is not possible nor within the scope of this study to cover the whole set of studies related to all Internet advertising formats, this overview aims to shed a light on the fact that these methods have different advantages and disadvantages in comparison to each other which is also one of the issues examined in this research.

Research Objectives and Variables of the Study

This research has two major objectives. The first one is determining individuals' attitudes toward advertising in general and Web-based advertising in specific. This objective also incorporates finding out whether there is a relationship between these two constructs. The second major purpose is understanding how individuals comparatively evaluate four different Web-based advertising media (banner ads, sponsored links, advergaming, e-mail ads) according to six major attributes, namely: informativeness, interactivity, entertainment, irritation, creativity/innovativeness, and richness of content.

In order to fulfill the first objective, a 10-item scale is used for assessing general attitude toward advertising. The items of this scale are mostly compiled from the variables and statements used in Pollay and Mittal's (1993) public opinion on advertising instrument. Obermiller and Spangenberg's (1998) skepticism toward advertising scale has also been examined and utilized especially in stating the items about the informative value and leading power of advertising. However, while some of the items are exactly worded as they are in the original scales examined, others are not verbatim usages but generalized sentences or reworded and restated forms of the original variables and statements.

The same approach has been employed in developing the attitude toward Internet advertising scale. In creating this adapted scale, Wolin et al.'s (2002) and Yang's (2003) studies which both aim to adapt Pollay and Mittal's (2003) scale to the Web advertising context have been examined. However, the more dominant influence in this part has come from Ducoffe's (1996), Schlosser et al.'s (1999) and Brackett and Carr's (2001) work. Similar to the approach used in developing the general attitude toward advertising scale, some of the items are exactly worded as they are in the original scales examined for this construct while others are not verbatim usages but reworded and restated forms of the original variables and statements. However, this scale has some originality as well from two aspects. First of all, it is worded as a comparative instrument where respondents are asked to rate Web advertising according to each attribute "in comparison to general advertising". Secondly, some of the variables and items included in the scale are contributed specifically in this study. These are the items related to the

attention-grabbing power, interactivity, personalizability, ease of perception, ignorability, and creativity/innovativeness of Web-based advertising.

As for the second part of the study, four Web-based advertising formats have been used for assessment based on six criteria. The selection of the four methods has been done such that they include two well-known and widely examined Internet advertising techniques which are e-mail ads and banner ads in addition to two increasingly popular and less examined Web-based advertising formats which are sponsored links and advergames. The selection of the six criteria used to comparatively assess these formats has been done by a careful consideration of the major pros and cons of these alternative methods. While some of these methods could be considered to be more informative and rich in terms of content, others may be valued for their interactive, entertaining, creativity and innovative aspects. Furthermore, some formats might be found to be more intrusive and irritating compared to others. However, this is aimed to be an exploratory research aiming to discover such differences, thus, specific hypotheses relating to these comparisons have not been formulated. Instead, descriptive findings are used to evaluate consumer approaches toward these different formats. These initial findings might consequently lead to further studies aiming to construct hypothesized relationships and differences between Web-based advertising formats.

Research Methodology

Data for the study has been gathered through an online survey which consisted of the following parts:

- Three questions are asked about respondents' history, frequency and purposes of Internet usage.
- A 10-item scale is used for measuring Internet users' general attitudes toward statements related to the pros and cons of advertising over a 5-point Likert scale.
- A 10-item scale is used for measuring Internet users' attitudes toward statements related to the pros and cons of Web-based advertising compared to advertising in the real environment over a 5-point Likert scale.
- Six questions are asked for each advertising format (banner ads, sponsored links, advergames, e-mail ads) asking respondents to rate them from 1(lowest) to 5(highest) based on the following criteria: informativeness, interactivity, entertainment, irritation, creativity/innovativeness, and richness of content. Although Internet users could be expected to have an overall idea about and exposure to these four formats, brief descriptions of each have been provided for each format.

Convenience sampling was preferred for the study. The survey has been sent to a set of potential respondents mostly consisting of the young working population since this profile is expected to be representative of the Turkish Internet user population. An e-mail message explained the purpose of the study, guaranteed confidentiality of respondent information and included a link to the survey site. The contact information of the authors was also provided.

Initially, the total number of respondents was 256. However, incomplete and invalid responses had to be deleted and after the cleaning of data, a valid sample of 190 respondents was

achieved. Demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented as frequencies and percentages in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Sample

AGE	<25	26-34	35-44	>45
	56 (30%)	93 (49%)	28 (15%)	13 (7%)
GENDER	Female	Male		
	101 (53%)	89 (47%)		
EDUCATION	High School Degree	University Degree	Post-Grad Degree	
	4 (2%)	113 (60%)	73 (38%)	
MARITAL STATUS	Single	Married	Separated/ Divorced	
	63 (33%)	123 (65%)	4 (2%)	

As expected, the distribution of the sample fits the expected profile for Internet users in Turkey. Turkey is a country with a young population, with 26.5 million Internet users representing a 34.5% penetration rate. It is one of the countries where Internet penetration has grown most extensively at a skyrocketing rate of 1225% between 2000 and 2009 which can mostly be attributed to the young population in the country (www.internetworldstats.com). According to a research conducted by Gfk Turkey for a leading Turkish information portal, the majority of Turkish Internet users are young (mostly between 18 and 35), mostly male, at least high-school graduates, and a mostly working population (www.btdunyasi.net). As seen in Table 1, the sample of this study also consists of a young and well-educated population at the early stages of their family life cycles. Gender distribution is relatively equal. Table 2 provides additional information about the history, frequency and purposes of Internet usage for the sample.

Table 2. Internet Usage Behavior of the Sample

INTERNET USAGE HISTORY (in years)	<6	6-8	>10
	12 (6%)	45 (24%)	133 (70%)
INTERNET USAGE FREQUENCY	Rarely	Approximately every day	Very frequently, for long durations
	6 (3%)	57 (30%)	127 (67%)
INTERNET USAGE PURPOSES	Yes	No	
Communication	186 (98%)	4 (2%)	
Research	178 (94%)	12 (6%)	
Reading News	167 (88%)	23 (12%)	
Banking	163 (86%)	27 (14%)	
Work/Education-Related Tasks	156 (82%)	34 (18%)	
Shopping	137 (72%)	53 (28%)	
Social Forums/Discussions	85 (45%)	105 (55%)	

The data collected from this sample has been analyzed using SPSS 17.0. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis have been used to present the findings of the study.

Findings of the Study

Internet users' general attitudes toward advertising in the real and Web-based contexts are assessed and presented in this section. This is followed by the findings about the relationship between these two constructs. After this overall examination of consumer dispositions toward advertising in real and Web-based environments, outputs about individuals' evaluations of four different Web-based advertising media based on six distinct criteria are presented.

General Attitudes Toward Advertising

One of the major purposes of this study is to provide a comprehensive assessment of individuals' attitudes toward the advertising activities of companies in both the real and the Web-based environments. Findings about people's agreement levels with ten different statements including positive and negative beliefs about advertising in general are provided in Table 3. The negative statements and relevant scores are shown in italicized format. Reliability checks have been done for the scale and a Cronbach's Alpha level of 0.757 has been achieved which is satisfactory since it is above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics About General Attitudes Toward Advertising (A_{AD-gen})

Scale Items	Mean (over 5)	Std.Dev.
They make consumers informed about products and services.	3,80	0,74
They help consumers in making their purchasing decisions.	3,59	0,90
<i>They give exaggerated information to consumers about products and services.</i>	3,53	1,02
They cause product and service quality to increase by heating the competition between companies.	3,36	1,00
They cause prices to fall by heating the competition between companies.	3,25	1,08
<i>They instigate the selling of products and services that are actually not needed by consumers.</i>	3,24	1,05
They show consumers the things consumed by people who have life standards that are similar to their own.	3,14	0,99
<i>They present an unreal world to consumers.</i>	2,84	1,03
<i>They steal consumers' time.</i>	2,58	1,01
<i>They induce companies to waste resources that they could use in more beneficial ways.</i>	2,53	0,90

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Indecisive 4-Agree 5-Strongly Agree

These findings show that the most significant advantage of companies' advertising activities is their informative value. Consistent with previous findings from Pollay and Mittal (1993) and Shavitt et al. (1998), advertisements are considered to be important information sources about products and services, thus, aiding consumers in deciding which offering is right for them and what kind of benefit it will provide them with. However, in doing this, consumers believe that companies might make overstated promises and unrealistically heighten individuals' expectations from a market offering. This issue strikes out as the strongest disadvantage of advertising activities in general.

In general, advertising can also be expected to intensify competition between companies, thus, leading them to offer higher quality products and services to consumers with more competitive prices. However, findings of this study show that consumers' overall agreement levels with statements related to this effect is only slightly positive and not very strong. This might be attributed to the fact that, from another perspective, consumers may think advertising increases the prices of products by creating an additional cost as Shavitt et al. (1998) has found before.

Similarly, consumers are aware of but not in very strong agreement with the advantage of being exposed to what kinds of products and services are consumed by individuals with life standards that are similar to their own through companies' advertising attempts. This finding is consistent with Pollay and Mittal's (1993) study from which this item has directly been taken. In their study, they have also found a medium mean level for this statement.

Interestingly, consumers' agreement levels with the most commonly encountered disadvantages of advertising are also not strikingly high. In many contexts, companies might be accused of using their valuable resources inefficiently and spending them on advertising for the purpose of selling unnecessary products to consumers by presenting them as indispensable to their lives. In doing this, they can be blamed further for presenting illusionary and unrealistic images about how much a product or service can contribute to the quality of people's lives. Although respondents agree that the information provided through advertising can sometimes be exaggerated, they agree less and even begin to show an inclination toward disagreeing with stronger statements about the deceptive nature of advertising. This shows that consumers are accustomed to filtering the information they receive through ads and do not feel threatened from being harmfully affected from companies' advertising activities.

Attitudes Toward Web-Based Advertising

Similar to advertising in the real environment, Web-based advertising accommodates certain commonly mentioned pros and cons that are specific to its own context of conduction. People's agreement levels with ten different statements about the Web-based advertising activities of companies are provided in Table 4. The multi-item scale used for this purpose includes positive and negative statements about Web-based advertising "in comparison to advertising in the real environment". The negative statements and relevant scores are shown in italicized format. Reliability checks have been done for the scale and a Cronbach's Alpha level

of 0.797 has been achieved which is satisfactory since it is above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70.

The initial inspection of the scores provided in Table 4 shows that all means for both negative and positive statements range in a very narrow spectrum over the 5-point scale with a minimum agreement level of 2,70 and a maximum agreement level of 3,39. This shows that individuals have not yet formulated strong and assertive attitudes toward Web-based advertising in either direction. This finding is also consistent with previous research such as Yang’s (2003) study where a medium level of tendency to like Internet advertising was found and Schlosser et al.’s (1999) work where no majority opinion of Internet advertising was achieved. This might be attributed to the fact that consumers have not experienced an adequate level of familiarity and exposure toward Web-based advertising.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics About Attitudes Toward Web-Based Advertising (A_{AD-web})

Scale Items	Mean (over 5)	Std.Dev.
<i>Web-based advertising has a greater probability of being ignored by consumers.</i>	3,39	1,05
Web-based advertising is more creative and innovative.	3,32	1,04
Web-based advertising is more personalized.	3,32	0,96
Web-based advertising is more informative and has richer content.	3,09	0,96
Web-based advertising is an interactive method in which the company and the consumer come together on a one-on-one basis.	3,08	0,99
<i>Web-based advertising is more irritating.</i>	3,08	1,08
<i>Web-based advertising is less trustworthy.</i>	3,06	1,02
Web-based advertising is more easily perceived by consumers.	3,01	0,93
Web-based advertising is more entertaining.	3,01	1,02
Web-based advertising is more attention-grabbing.	2,70	1,04

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Indecisive 4-Agree 5-Strongly Agree

When the results are evaluated with respect to each other, the issue that attracts the relatively stronger agreement level is the probability that Web-based advertising is more prone to being ignored by consumers. This might be the result of the fact that individuals can control their own exposure to various Web-based advertisements while the same is not true for ads in the real media. A previous study that examines why people avoid advertising on the Internet has shown that the most important reason is the intrusiveness of Web-based advertising while a consumer is trying to complete a certain task in the online environment. The extensive amount of ad clutter

online and prior negative experiences of consumers about online ads are also other important reasons of this avoidance (Cho and Cheon, 2004).

Consumers' agreement levels with the most promising attributes of Web-based advertising are also not strikingly high. Respondents show a slight inclination toward agreeing with the creative, innovative, and personalized nature of Web-based advertising. Furthermore, they concentrate heavily around the indecisive zone for the informative and interactive value, rich content and ease of perception of Internet advertising. More interestingly, they show an indecisive attitude about the irritation caused by or lack of trustworthiness toward Web-based advertising. From one side, these results may be attributed to the fact that consumers do not have extensive experiences about Web-based advertising, thus, they decline from showing any sharp attitudes toward either direction. From another side, this might be the result of the fact that they are becoming more and more accustomed to Web-based advertising. This might lead to an eventual confidence built in this medium as consumers gain experience in it. They might also avoid the irritation effect caused by Web-based ads by finding out ways to control their exposure as they wish. In a similar study conducted in Turkey by Özen and Sarı (2008), the irritation factor was found to be stronger whereas the utilitarian variables such as effectiveness and usefulness were found to be less strong.

Relationship Between Attitudes Toward Advertising in Real and Web-Based Contexts

A significant question tackled in this study is whether there is any relationship between consumers' attitudes toward advertising in general and their attitudes toward Web-based advertising. In order to test this relationship, each respondent's average attitude scores for advertising in real and Web-based contexts are calculated. Initially, the scores for the negatively-worded statements in each of the 10-item scales are reverse coded. Then, the composite average attitude score for each scale is assessed by taking the mean agreement scores for the 10 statements. As a result of this computation, the average score for general attitude toward advertising is found to be 3,24 over 5 and the corresponding score for Web-based advertising is 3,08 over 5. The correlation analysis conducted between these two new variables produces a correlation coefficient of 0,416 with a significance level of 0.01. Thus, it can be said that there is a positive correlation between individuals' general attitudes toward advertising and their attitudes toward Web-based advertising.

Comparative Evaluations of Four Different Web-Based Advertising Media

Although there are studies evaluating the pros and cons of Web-based advertising in general in the literature, it is also necessary to make comparative evaluations of different advertising media. For this purpose, four different Web advertising formats are evaluated by respondents over a 5-point interval scale with respect to six major criteria and the relevant findings are presented in Table 5.

As this output clearly shows, consumers find advergames to be the most favorable advertising method among the four and e-mail ads to be the least favorable one. Actually,

advergames is the only format which has received an overall average score that is above the midpoint of the scale. Looking more specifically into the comparative value of each method, it can be seen that e-mail ads are found to be relatively more informative compared to the other three formats although the overall score for this method is also not very high and corresponds to the midpoint of the scale. As for interactivity, entertainment and creativity/innovativeness, advergames are rated dominantly higher compared to the other three methods. They are followed

Table 5. Mean Evaluation Scores of Four Different Web-Based Advertising Media (over 5)

1-Very Low 2-Low 3-Moderate 4-High 5-Very High

	Banner Ads	Sponsored Links	Advergames	E-mail Advertising
Informativeness	2,40	2,61	2,68	2,95
Interactivity	2,79	2,42	3,56	2,05
Entertainment	2,22	1,73	3,55	1,71
Irritation	3,25	2,60	2,10	3,60
Creativity/Innovativeness	2,61	2,23	3,68	1,97
Richness of Content	2,23	2,28	3,01	2,60
AVERAGE*	2,50	2,45	3,40	2,28

*The average score for each medium is calculated after reverse coding the scores for “irritation”.

by banner ads which fall below the midpoint of the scale for all three criteria and by sponsored links and e-mail ads subsequently. Not surprisingly, e-mail ads are found to be the most irritating method followed by banner ads which are also rated as somewhat irritating. However, sponsored links and advergames fall below the midpoint of the scale for the irritation dimension. Finally, as for content, only advergames are evaluated to have a moderate level of richness, while the other three formats score below the midpoint for this dimension as well.

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Implications and Concluding Remarks

This study offers findings that provides insight for practitioners, companies and advertisers as well as paving the way for further research in the field. First of all, individuals' agreement levels with each of the statements in the two 10-item scales for general advertising and Web-based advertising shed light on the most admired and least liked attributes of both communication media. Findings about individuals' global attitudes toward advertising are important for all advertisers in general. These findings show that ads are mostly favored for their informative and utilitarian value while there is still some skepticism toward the information presented in ads. This should lead the industry to find ways to increase the believability and credibility of advertisements in general. On the other hand, the fact that consumers view advertising as an important force for competition and do not view it necessarily as a waste of resources is a very positive outcome for the advertising industry. Consumer seems to have learnt to protect themselves from the misleading effects of advertising and seem to derive more and more benefit out of it gradually. Still, the overall average attitude score for advertising is moderate which shows that consumers always tend to have a balanced view of the pros and cons of advertisements.

As for Web-based advertising, the average attitude score reflects an absolute balance of advantages and disadvantages. Although consumers find Web-based ads highly ignorable, they still value the informative, innovative, creative, and personalizable nature of these formats. Especially, the fact that the irritation score is not so high is a very promising outcome and clearly shows that consumers are getting more used to being exposed to advertisement messages in the online environment just like the real marketplace. Probably, the advances in permission marketing or filtering opportunities can also be expected to have played a role in the moderateness of the irritation dimension. This shows that consumers' attitude toward Web advertising can be improved even further if they get higher levels of exposure control.

Another important finding is that there is a moderately strong relationship between general attitudes toward advertising and Web-based advertising. Although both of the average attitude scores are not very high, the parallelism in these two attitude constructs signs the importance of integrating online and offline communications media by advertisers and companies.

As for the findings achieved from the second part, the various strengths and weaknesses of the four different Web-based media have been comparatively investigated and interesting perceptual differences have been observed from Internet users' perspectives. These findings can also be very useful for managers in terms of determining the appropriateness of alternative formats in different contexts. Findings in this section show that Web-based advertisements can be powerfully differentiated most easily by working on the entertainment, interactivity, and creativity dimensions. These are the issues that contribute most greatly to the popularity of advergames which appears to be the favorite method among the four formats. If consumers get

engaged in the advertising message themselves and have fun while being exposed to it, they will feel less “attacked” by the message or the sponsor and responses can be more positive.

The major limitation of this research is that the methods are actually not employed but described to respondents, thus, attitude scores are captured from their hypothetical view of each format. In future studies, actual ads can be used to assess consumer reactions more concretely and accurately. Including other emerging tools and formats of Web-based advertising and expanding the comparison attempt made here is also a very fruitful future research route.

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