

The Impact of Web Addresses in Offline Media Advertising

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Abstract

The majority of the businesses begin to establish their own web sites in order to perform a great variety of marketing and sales activities through this channel. In order to gain the advantage of having a web site, companies have to find out the ways of drawing traffic to their web sites. Generating web traffic and increasing web awareness are among the basic issues of today's marketers. For that purpose, in this research it is aimed to investigate the impact of web address presence in traditional media advertising. Hence, this paper is founded on the study of Maddox and Gong (2005) which mainly examines the effects of URLs in traditional media advertising.

Introduction

Internet, which is a fast-growing medium in terms of penetration and usage, has become a source of information, communication and entertainment short after its advent. The business and particularly marketing related opportunities via Internet has also expanded within the last decade. Today it is possible to comprise a variety of marketing activities through company web sites. Giving detailed product information, providing product distribution, establishing interactivity, offering product samples, and building a customer database, encouraging consumer involvement with the product range are among the various web site applications (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996a). Web sites can also be used to handle consumer complaints, queries and suggestions (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996b). Most of the companies use web sites to promote their products and services as well as their overall company (Clow and Baack, 2007). Furthermore, web sites serve as a way of creating favorable and positive corporate image by utilizing public relations (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996b). Advertising, sales support, customer service, public relations, and e-commerce are among the primary functions that a company web site can provide (Clow and Baack, 2007). In other words, web sites of companies gain increased importance as a marketing communication instrument. Marketers begin to see web as a new advertising media, which can be changed more easily, frequently, and quickly (Ducoffe, 1996). However, in order to improve web site traffic and online sales, there is a high need to create user awareness about the web site. To generate web site awareness, marketers have to include web addresses in the traditional advertising/off-line media, such as newspapers, magazines, trade

journals, brochures, TV and radio ads (Berthon, Pitt, and Watson, 1996; Geissler, 2001; Patton, 1999). It is observed that, the number of hits on a B2B web site is directly related to the amount of off-line advertising and sales promotion (Patton, 1999). For a year, a high-tech web company placed ads and published articles in trade magazines that feature the company's web site; and each time an ad or article appeared, the company's web site traffic spiked 250 to 350 hits each week during the following month (Patton, 1999). According to a recent study conducted by Marketing Evolution between 2004-2007, magazine ads have a major impact on building web traffic and they generate web traffic at each stage of the purchase focus, particularly purchase intent (MPA- Magazine Publishers of America, 2007). Another finding of Marketing Evolution is that existence of a web address in magazine ads significantly increased web visits (MPA, 2007). Meanwhile, a group of researchers begin to examine the impact of existence of web site addresses in off-line media (Maddox, Mehta, and Daubek, 1997; Maddox and Gong, 2005; Pardun and Lamb, 1999). Furthermore, the issue about the integration of web and traditional media-integration of online and offline media-become a hot topic that attracts the attention of academic world (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Sheehan and Doherty, 2001; Rowley, 2001, 2004; Gurau, 2008).

This paper is founded on the study of Maddox and Gong (2005) which mainly examines the effects of URLs in traditional media advertising. It is found that both users and nonusers of Internet in China notice URLs in mass media; and TV, newspapers, radio and magazines are respectively the media types that gather high noticeability among Chinese consumers (Maddox and Gong, 2005). Telecommunications, automotive and entertainment are the product/service categories in which the ads with web addresses are most likely detected by consumers (Maddox and Gong, 2005). The authors also investigate the perceived differences between advertisers with web addresses and those without; it is seen that the presence of URLs in ads improves the image of the advertiser. Finally, Maddox and Gong (2005) explore consumers' use of information from web sites and comfortableness about purchasing directly through a web address, and find out that as the consumers' internet usage level increase, their use of information from web sites to make purchase decision also raise. In addition, the authors conclude that both user and non-users of internet express low comfort levels about shopping online.

Based on the study of Maddox and Gong (2005), this study aims to further examine whether consumers' need and intentions to purchase the product/service prior to the exposure of ads with web addresses can influence the noticeability of ads with URLs. Furthermore, we also explore whether or not these consumers buy the product/service, and if they buy, whether they purchase it from an online vs. offline store. In addition, this study was conducted in an emerging market, where internet penetration is at an intermediate level, and online advertising has been getting a greater portion from the advertising budget of companies despite the economic recession that influences the whole market. In their study, Maddox and Gong (2005) merely examine the relationship between internet usage level of consumers and their use of information from web sites to make purchase decision; and the authors give place to internet users' and non-users' comfort levels about shopping online. In other words, the basic contribution of our research is the investigation of whether consumers a) need the product/service, and have a purchase intention for the product/service prior to the exposure to the ad with web address, and b) finally buy the product/service from an online vs. offline store.

The Study

This research aims to examine the role and effects of URLs in traditional advertising and presents insights into the manner in which international advertisers may take the

advantage of this fast spreading interactive medium in Turkey. Our study investigates Turkish consumers' perceptions about brands and advertisers with URLs in their advertising. Initially, the same study was performed in the US by Maddox et al. (1997) and it was found that URLs in advertising were noticed by both users and non-users of the internet. Furthermore, in that initial study respondents reported different perceptions about advertisers who included URLs in their advertising than those who did not. The next similar study was conducted by Maddox and Gong (2005) in China and it was seen that both users and non-users of the internet in China notice URLs in mass media ads, and particularly the web addresses were seen most in TV. Furthermore, URLs in ads for telecommunications and auto products and services were most likely to be noticed in China (Maddox and Gong, 2005). In line with the initial study which was held in US, the study in China also showed that the mere inclusion of a URL in advertising enhances the image of the advertiser. Moreover, it was suggested that advertisers who use the internet and advertise it by including URLs in their mass media advertising actually drawing non-users of the internet to the medium.

Based on the studies which were conducted in USA (Maddox et al., 1997) and China (Maddox and Gong, 2005) respectively, our study searches the answers for the following research questions (the last two questions were included by this paper's researchers):

- Are URLs noticed by users and non-users of the internet in Turkey and does noticeability differ by medium and product/service categories?
- Do Turkish consumers say that a web address in an advertisement affects their awareness of and perceptions about the brand or company?
- Do Turkish consumers believe that advertisers who include a URL in a mass media advertisement are different from those who do not?
- Will Turkish consumers use the URL advertised in traditional mass media to make further inquiries online about the product or company and/or use the information from the web site to make purchase decisions?
- Is there any difference between Turkish consumers with and without a need for and a purchase intention of a certain product/service in terms of noticeability of advertisements with URL addresses?
- Do Turkish consumers buy the advertised product/service from the online vs. offline store of the company?

Methodology

As mentioned before, our study is a replication of studies which were conducted in USA (Maddox et al., 1997) and China (Maddox and Gong, 2005). So that, the same methodology is used in this current study. The design of the questionnaire closely followed that of the original studies in USA and China, and the survey was translated into Turkish by a native speaker and then back-translated for accuracy. A random sample was drawn from three urban cities in Turkey: İstanbul, İzmir, and Eskişehir. They were chosen for two basic reasons: first of all the majority of web sites were located mainly in these cities. Secondly, these cities resemble the educated and young population of Turkish internet users.

Sample Size and Profile

The data were collected by trained surveyors from different parts of the three chosen cities by a structured questionnaire during a two-week period. The response rate varied among cities so that approximately 60% for İstanbul, 25% for İzmir, and 15% for Eskişehir. İstanbul dominates the sample size; however, the distribution is closely related with the population density of these cities, and since İstanbul carries almost 21% of Turkey's general population, the domination of İstanbul can be justified. At the end a total of 400 surveys were

collected. The demographic and webgraphic profiles of the respondents are presented by Table 1.

The Questionnaire

The survey questions were identical with the original studies except that two additional questions were included to this questionnaire. In the first part of the survey, webgraphic questions were asked that include whether the respondents use internet, and how frequently they go online. Then the respondents were asked the major reasons of going online. The noticeability of a URL was directly measured by asking whether the respondent noticed it in advertising, in what media and for which product/service categories.

To measure respondents' attitudes towards the ads (AAD), the original studies use a multidimensional perspective which includes hedonism, utilitarianism and interestingness as AAD's attitudinal components. In the original studies, hedonic aspect of the respondents' AAD was measured by asking them the importance of creativity to attract them to a web site. On the other hand, in order to determine the utilitarian dimension, respondents were asked if advertisers with URLs are more customer-oriented, more informative, more reliable, and more responsive. Likewise, to measure the interestingness dimension, respondents were asked whether they considered ads with URLs as more geared toward a young market, more personal, more high-tech and more sophisticated. Respondents were also inquired if they would use information from the web site in deciding whether or not to purchase. Finally, the survey asked whether or not the respondent perceived differences between advertisers who included web addresses in their ads and those who did not. Four-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used to measure all these questions. In addition to these questions, two more questions were added. The first question is composed of two parts and in the first part of the question it was directly asked whether the respondent had a need to purchase the product/service prior to the exposure of an ad with a URL; and in the second part the respondent was asked whether s/he had an intention to purchase the product/service prior to the exposure of an ad with a URL. The second question also consists of two parts, in the first part it is determined whether the respondent buys the product/service, and the second follow-up question asks the place where the participant purchases that product/service (whether from an online or offline store).

The sample consists of a relatively equally distributed group of young, early adult and middle-aged consumers which typically identifies the Turkish consumer market. In gender distribution males are quite higher than females but the number of respondents in each group is high enough to represent each gender group. In terms of education level, university and high school graduates dominate the sample. This is because of the fact that the chosen three Turkish urban cities are the ones that have the highest education level in general.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=400)

	16-26	27-35	36-45	46-60	>60
Age	170 (42.5%)	100 (25%)	73 (18.2%)	54 (13.5%)	3 (0.8%)
	Female	Male			
Gender	157 (39%)	243 (61%)			
	Under High school	High school	University (graduate)	Postgraduate degree	
Education	23 (5.8%)	116 (29%)	221 (55.2%)	40 (10%)	
	< 1000 TL	1001-2000 TL	2001-3000 TL	3001-5000	>5001
Income (\$1=1.50TL)	115 (28.8%)	205 (51.2%)	44 (11%)	25 (6.2%)	11 (2.8%)

	Yes	No			
Internet Usage	368 (92%)	32 (8%)			
	Once a day or more	1-6 times per week	1-3 times per month or less	Never	
Frequency of Using Internet	280 (70%)	66 (16.5%)	22 (5.5%)	32 (8%)	

Results

Noticeability of Web Addresses in Advertising

The first question was “Have you seen or noticed any advertising in the mass media during the last month that included a web address?”, which attempts to measure the noticeability of URLs in traditional advertising by Turkish consumers. Approximately, 80% of all respondents answer this question affirmatively. Furthermore, there is no difference between users and non-users of internet in terms of noticeability of web addresses in advertising. However, this can be due to the small ratio of non-users of internet in the sample.

Table 2: Noticeability of Web Addresses

	Are web addresses noticed by Turkish Consumers?	
	Yes	No
All respondents	318 (79.5%)	82 (20.5%)
Users of Internet	292 (79.3%)	76 (20.7%)
Non-users of Internet	26 (81.2%)	6 (18.8%)

Noticeability of Web Addresses in Advertising by Media Type

To find out the media in which in which web addresses were noticed, respondents were read a list of mass media options. As it is seen from Table 3, television was mentioned the most by 47%. Newspapers (41%), magazines (28,5%) and billboards (22,50%) were the next three media in which respondents noticed advertising with URLs.

Table 3: Noticeability by Media Type

Media Type	Frequency	%
TV	190	47,00%
Newspapers	164	41,00%
Magazines	114	28,50%
Billboards	90	22,50%
Brochures	65	16,30%
Radio	54	13,50%
Direct Mail	51	12,80%

Noticeability of Web Addresses in Advertising by Product/Service Category

To find out if recognition of a web address differed by product/service category, participants were asked if they had seen or noticed any ads last month for the following 11 product/service categories: travel, finance, computer, home improvement, automotive, food, health, cosmetics, telecommunications, education, and entertainment. The respondents have the opportunity to give multiple responses. Table 4 illustrates that 33,8% of the respondents noticed an ad with a web address for computer/electronics category with Bimeks and Teknosa being mentioned most. Telecommunication came in second among 27,80% of the respondents with Turkcell Telecommunication and Nokia mobile phone company being mentioned most. Automotive category closely followed Telecommunication and ranked third

in the list by being cited by 26% of the respondents. Volkswagen and Toyota were the two companies being mentioned the most. Finance/Banking is another service category which received a great amount of attention by respondents with 24,80% and Garanti Bank is the most mentioned company in that category.

Table 4: Noticeability by Product/Service Category

Product/Service Category	Frequency	%
Computer/Electronics	135	33,80%
Telecommunication	111	27,80%
Automotive	104	26,00%
Finance/Banking	99	24,80%
Travel	91	22,80%
Home Improvement	81	20,30%
Education	79	19,80%
Health	60	15,00%
Food	47	11,80%
Cosmetics	47	11,80%

Perceptions about Advertisers who use a Web Address and Those who do not

Respondents' attitudes toward companies with web addresses in their ads were evaluated on a four-point scale for 12 attitudinal questions. Table 5 demonstrates that in general the attitudes toward advertisers with URLs are more favorable than those without. For instance, the dominant majority of those surveyed (83%) agreed that advertisers with URLs are more informative. Furthermore, 73% of the respondents agreed that advertisers with URLs are more responsive and 70% of the consumers find these advertisers with URLs as more customer-oriented. %75 of those surveyed stated that advertisers with URLs are more high-tech; whereas over two-thirds of the respondents agreed that advertisers with web addresses are more sophisticated than those without; and more than half of respondents agreed that advertisers with URLs are more reliable, more personal, more geared toward a young market, and more likely to stay in business longer. What is more interesting is that 67% of the respondents supposed that advertisers who do not currently have a web address will probably have one within the next six months. Furthermore, it is also found that a dominant majority of the respondents (83%) agreed that advertisers should have an internet or web address within the next six month. This finding means that Turkish consumers expect more companies to establish a web site. Finally, Turkish consumers generally (65%) think that advertisers including web address in their ads are different than those that do not.

Table 5: Turkish Consumers' Responses on Attitudinal Questions

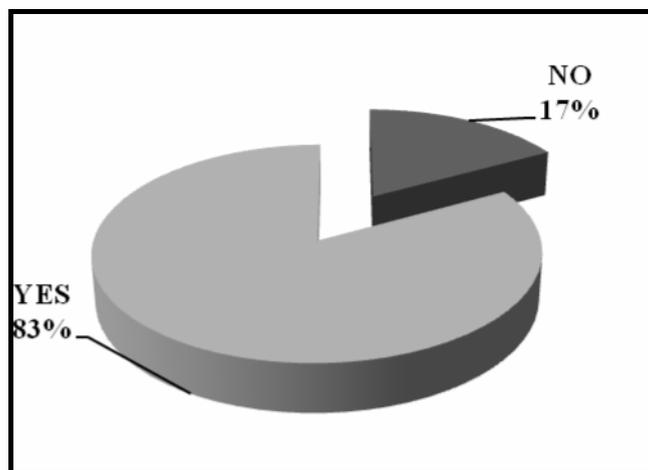
Advertisers that include web addresses are:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean (out of 4)
More informative	30	39	213	118	3,05
More geared toward a young market	40	159	166	35	2,49
More customer-oriented	14	105	238	43	2,77
More responsive	17	92	235	56	2,82
Should advertisers currently have no URLs in their ads include one within the next six months?	15	54	225	106	3,05
More "high-tech"	16	84	220	80	2,91
More personal	22	144	189	45	2,64
More sophisticated	17	124	203	56	2,74
More likely to stay in business longer	23	153	176	48	2,62
Will advertisers currently have no URLs in their ads include one within the next six months?	10	121	229	40	2,75
More reliable	28	170	167	35	2,52

Advertisers with URLs in their ads are no different than those without.	53	201	124	22	2,29
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Web Addresses and Memorability of Brand Names

In order to measure the impact of web address presence in an ad on the memorability of the brand name, the respondents were directly asked the question “Does the existence of a web address in an ad help Turkish consumers remember the advertiser’s brand name?” 83% of the respondents say “yes” to this question, an absolutely affirmative answer. This is a very strong and substantial proof in support of inclusion of web addresses in advertising for brand building and proposes that marketers should certainly use web addresses more often in their advertisements.

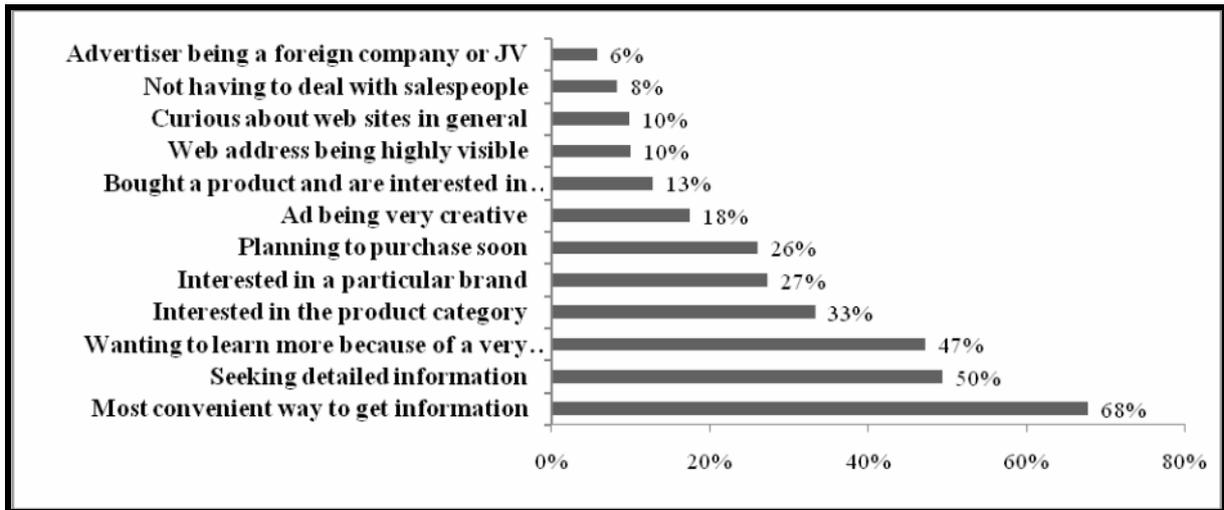
Figure 1. Does the existence of URL help Turkish consumers remember the advertiser’s brand name?



Reasons that Turkish Consumers Might Visit a Web Site

A list of reasons were given to respondents in order to find out why they might visit a web site after seeing it in an ad and then they’re asked the level of importance of each reason. Most convenient way to get information was mentioned by 68% of the respondents by a score above the mid-point as the most important reason to visit a web site. Almost half of the respondents declared that they would like to visit a web site because they’re seeking detailed information and wanting to learn more because of a very informative ad. On the other hand, Turkish consumers were not attracted to a web site simply because the advertiser was “foreign” or a joint venture (JV). Furthermore, not having to deal with salespeople is not a reason for Turkish consumers to visit a web site. In addition, general curiosity about websites do not drive Turkish consumers to a website.

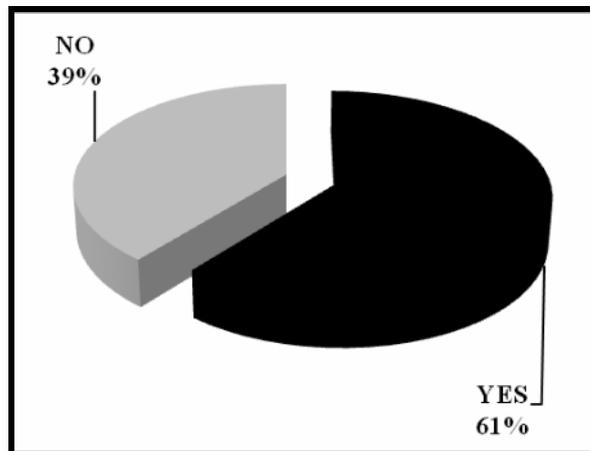
Figure 2. Reasons that Turkish consumers visit a web site



Turkish Consumers' Likelihood to Visit a Web Site after Exposure to an Ad with URL

Almost two third of the Turkish consumers mention that they would like to visit the web site that they'd seen in the advertisement. In addition, 65% of the internet users declare that they'd like to visit the URL that they saw in an advertisement; whereas only 13% of the non-users of internet said that they'd like to visit the URL that they saw in an advertisement.

Figure 3. Likelihood to Visit a Web Site After Exposure to an Ad with URL



The Need & Intention to Buy the Product/Service Prior to Exposure to an Ad with URL

More than 60% of the respondents who had seen an ad with a web address declared that they did not have a *need* for that product/service prior to their exposure to the advertisement. Moreover, almost two third of the respondents who had seen an ad with a web address mentioned that they did not have an *intention* to buy the product/service that they'd seen in the advertisement with a URL address. These findings mean that the majority of the people who have noticed an ad of a product/service with an URL in mass media, did not have a prior need and intention to purchase that product/service. On the other hand, 28% of the people who said they've noticed a product/service ad with a web address in mass media, *purchased* the product/service. Table 6 illustrates the number and percentage of people who saw the ad with a URL address and who had a prior need for, intention to buy the

product/service, as well as who have actually bought the product after exposure to that ad. So, it can be concluded that the noticeability of an advertisement in the mass media that included a web address, is something beyond “*selective attention*”. The basic reason is that consumers who do not need and have an intention to buy the product/service ad with a URL have also noticed the advertisement in the mass media. In other words, it is difficult to attribute the noticeability of ads with a web address merely to prior intentions and needs to buy that advertised product/service, namely to “*selective attention*”. Hence, from the perspective of advertisers it is crucial to include URLs in mass media ads in order to increase the web traffic to their web sites.

Table 6. Need for, Intention to buy and Purchase of a Product and Noticeability of an Ad with an URL

		I've seen/noticed an advertisement of a product/service in the mass media during the last month that included a web address.	
		n	%
Did you have a need for that product/service?	YES	122	39%
	NO	194	61%
Did you have an intention to buy that product/service?	YES	117	37%
	NO	199	63%
Did you buy the product?	YES	88	28%
	NO	228	72%

The Channel Where Turkish Consumers Buy the Product/Service

Turkish consumers who said that they purchased the product/service after exposure to its mass media ad that includes a web address is around 26%. However, approximately three quarters of the respondents declared that they did not buy the product. Nevertheless, 36% of those respondents who purchased the product/service mentioned that they bought it from an online store. Whereas more than half of the respondents preferred a traditional brick & mortar store to buy the product, only 6% of the buyers chose an alternative way to purchase the product. This alternative method generally includes giving the order online but then taking it from a post office or from a branch of the carrier company.

Table 7. Where do Turkish Consumers buy their products/services from?

Did you purchase the product/service after you see its ad in mass media with a web address?		N	%
	YES		101
NO		293	74%

Purchased from a/an:	
Online store:	36%
Offline store:	58%
Other:	6%

Conclusions

The authors of the original studies which were conducted in USA (Maddox et al., 1997) and in China (Maddox and Gong, 2005) conclude their research with a suggestion to conduct similar research in other markets. By taking this recommendation into account, the identical research was performed in Turkish market, and the research was further developed by considering some additional issues. This study demonstrates that both users and non-users

of the internet in Turkey have very high levels of noticeability of URLs in mass media ads. TV and newspapers are the two media where Web addresses are seen most by Turkish consumers. Marketers and advertisers should take advantage of this fact and advertise their URLs more in these media because readers do notice them. However, radio and direct mail are the two media which gained relatively lower levels of noticeability from Turkish consumers. This is something in line with the fact that the share of radio advertising from the full advertisement budget of companies has begun to shrink in the recent years. Furthermore, direct mail is not something very common and favorable in Turkish society.

Another finding of this research is that URLs in ads for computer/electronics, telecommunications, and auto products and services are most likely to be noticed. This is not something surprising given the fact that more than half of the Turkish population is under the age of 30, and they are generally the followers of technology products such as computers, mobile phones, iphones, PDAs, and etc. Finance/banking is another category that received a considerable noticeability which can be closely related with the recent online banking investments of financial institutions in Turkey. It can be concluded that the advertising issue from product-media match perspective has to be reevaluated, and marketers and advertisers should develop appropriate strategies by taking the importance of this fit into consideration.

It is shown that even the mere inclusion of a URL in advertising enhances the image of advertiser. Compared to those without URLs in their ads, advertisers with URLs are perceived more affirmatively by Turkish consumers in almost all attributes. In addition, it is also found that a dominant majority of the respondents (83%) agreed that advertisers should have an internet or web address within the next six month. This finding is very important particularly from the perspective of media executives since it questions the validity and reliability of conventional advertising effectiveness methods. This result raises a need for a better measurement tool than by simply considering click or hit ratios of URLs received. All these conclusions and interpretations are in line with the original study's contributions.

"Being the most convenient way to get information", "seeking detailed information", and "wanting to learn more because of a very informative ad" are among the basic reasons of Turkish consumers to visit a web site. Besides the interest in "a particular product/service category" or "a particular brand" that will draw consumers to a certain web site, "creative ads" can still have an impact on attracting Turkish consumers to a web site. Hence, it is equally important to be informative, technically enhanced, and visually aesthetic to draw traffic to a company's web site.

The dominant majority (83%) of the respondents mention that the presence of a web address in an advertisement help them remember the advertiser's brand name. This finding also leads to a series of managerial implications; that is to say, in order to create a strong, unique, and a favorable brand image, marketers should develop an easy to remember, pronounce, and spell online brand names. Subsequently, the marketers have to promote the web site/URL by using traditional advertising methods, so that consumers can be informed and knowledgeable about the brand due to increased awareness.

Another crucial finding is that, consumers who were exposed to a mass media ad of a product/service that includes a URL generally show a tendency of visiting that URL. Furthermore, even though more than two thirds of the respondents mention that they have neither a need for nor an intention to buy the product/service, they noticed this product's/service's mass media with a web address. This result decreases the probability of being noticed by consumers just because of their "selective attention". In addition, only 28% of the Turkish consumers, who said they've noticed a product/service ad with a web address in mass media, *purchased* the product/service. Furthermore, of those people who purchased that product/service, only 36% prefer to shop from an online store, and more than half of the respondents chose to shop from an off-line store. This can be attributable to lower confidence

levels towards e-commerce companies as well as economic recession during the survey period.

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