
Users' Attitudes in the Context of Blogs and Communities - A study

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has opened up new opportunities for companies to market and sell their products online. In the early days of internet marketing and still some of the more widely used methods are Pop-ups and Banners. Research and academic studies have proven that these methods perceived as irritating and more or less being ignored. With this in mind, marketers have been searching to find new and alternative ways of internet marketing in addition to the traditional methods. Eventually, when the trend of blogs and communities began growing, so did the companies interests towards them. The purpose of this paper is to examine if marketing on sites such as blogs and communities are more positively perceived upon by internet users, whether or not the tailoring of advertisements had more effect on users, and there were any differences in the general perception of blog- and community advertisements among consumers. Empirical data were collected through an online survey. And then a conceptual framework was used for analyzing data. Results indicate that a majority of the respondents are more inclined towards advertisements on blogs and community sites as well as customized advertisements through internet. It was further found that these advertisements did not disrupt the surfer's flow as much as traditional media. Findings also show that a majority of the respondents are aware of online advertisements in general and just as many have developed a dislike towards them. The most common response to the question why advertisement on these social media was considered most effective, was that these ads were more related to the interests of the community. Finally, tailored ads developed and placed in tune with the content of website, have a larger effect on internet users than other random advertisements.

Key terms: *Online marketing, Blogs, Communities, Attitude-towards-the-ad, Relationship marketing*

Introduction

The growth of the internet eventually lead to hundreds of thousands of companies setting up shops online, gaining millions of consumers worldwide as their customers and the company's attention turned to reaching out as many consumers as possible. Online marketing is just like its regular offline counterpart about sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing to customers, mainly through advertising as online advertising has the crucial role of persuading and informing consumers of the availability and selection of products and services. Based on the study

and analysis of each user's demographics, preferences and purchases, adaption of new products and sending messages through internet, it is evident that marketing based on systematic knowledge on

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the Customer is the key to the success even in the case of on line marketing.

Research Problem

Companies who have chosen to enter the field of online marketing, have automatically entered a race with the purpose of developing a strong marketing strategy with attractive advertisements. One major issue for companies has been to reach the unreachable customers through the use of online marketing channels. Although there are numerous ways of performing marketing on the internet, the most common ones have been the use of Banners, Pop-ups, E-mail marketing, Search-engine marketing, Blogs and Communities. However, during past years, there have been a number of issues related to effectiveness of most common marketing methods. The internet is a global way of connecting to consumers and consumers to organizations instantly. This purpose is well achieved through the online Community. Communities as a marketing channel can take many forms, but regardless of their types, they are characterized by groups of people with common norms, rules and values, sharing information through the community channels e.g. forums.

However, each community has its own culture and sense of identity creating an unique collection of members existing solely in the concerned community. Since communities are well organized, firms have the opportunities to offer customized products and special offers. This possibility exists due to the characteristics of a community in the sense that they have their own niche for each market segment (Allen et al, 1998). Since forums are the prime definition of online communities, they are the main focus regarding 'communities' in this paper.

Research questions

Based on the above discussion, the following research questions are framed;

1. Do consumers have a greater acceptance towards advertisement on blogs and communities compared to non-focused web sites, and why ?
2. How and why is consumer's attitude towards the advertisements affected by their degree of customization ?
3. Is there a difference on the perception of advertisement on blogs and communities between men and women?

Analysis

N=180

	Total Result		Percentage	
	Frequ ency	%	Men	Women
1. Knowledge about Blog				
Yes	156	86.7	85.6	88.9
No	24	13.3	14.4	11.1
1.1 Reading advice from an expert	4	2.4	2.5	2.2
1.2 Association to spread / share knowledge	2	1.0	0.6	2.2
1.3 Writing own life or current events	142	90.7	89.4	95.6
2.1 Knowledge about Community				
Yes	152	84.4	83.7	86.7
No	28	15.5	0.6	4.4
2.2.1 Reading advice from an expert	8	5.2	5	6.7
2.2.2 Association to spread / share knowledge	136	89.3	88.7	91.1
2.2.3 Writing own life or current events	6	3.9	5	2.2

3. Noticing Advertisements online				
Yes	128	69.3	69.3	62.2
No	52	28.8	16.2	17.8
Rankings				
1 Good	12	9.3	8.7	11.1
2	21	16.1	16.2	15.6
3	30	23.4	25.6	15.6
4	23	17.6	22.5	28.9
5 Bad	33	25.4	25.6	24.4
Mean	3.36			
Standard Deviation	1.321			
4. Affect of Surfing experience on Advertisements				
Rankings				
1 Good	8	6.3	7.5	2.2
2	12	9.3	10	6.7
3	37	28.8	29.4	26.7
4	40	30.7	30	33.3
5	29	22.4	20	31.1
Mean	3.55			
Standard Deviation	1.123			
5. Relation of advertisements with Hobbies				
Rankings				
1	21	16.1	19.4	4.4
2	37	28.8	30.6	22.2
3	43	33.6	29.4	48.9
4	13	9.8	9.4	11.1
5 Bad	12	9.3	8.1	13.3
Mean	1.79			
Standard Deviation	1.45			
6. Advertisements related to content				
Rankings				
1 Good	17	13.6	15.6	6.7
2	39	30.2	33.1	20.0
3	40	30.7	28.7	37.8
4	16	13.2	11.2	20.0

5 Bad	13	10.2	8.7	15.6
Mean	2.67			
Standard Deviation	1.16			
7.1 Advertisements compared to				
random Websites				
Rankings				
1 Better	15	12.2	13.7	6.7
2	38	29.3	32.5	17.8
3	41	32.2	28.1	46.7
4	15	12.2	11.2	15.6
5 Worse	13	10.2	10.0	11.1
Mean	1.88			
Standard Deviation	1.45			
7.2 .1 Good Offerings	26	20.0	15.6	21.2
7.2 .2 Informative	14	11.7	8.9	12.5
7.2 .3 New Product and Services	24	19.0	17.8	19.4
7.2 .4 Interest	54	41.9	26.7	46.2
7.2 .5 Other Reasons	10	7.8	11.1	6.9
8. Customization of Advertisements				
Rankings				
1 Better	10	7.8	9.4	2.2
2	23	18.0	17.5	20.0
3	33	25.8	25.6	26.7
4	17	13.2	11.9	17.8
5 Worse	42	33.2	33.1	33.3
Mean	3.54			
Standard Deviation	1.72			
9.1 Consideration of certain Advertisements				
Yes	79	43.8	38.1	33.3
No	101	56.1	53.1	66.7
9.2 .1 Informative	5	6.8	8.1	8.9
9.2 .2 Interest	23	28.8	11.2	15.6
9.2 .3 Tailored to fit	8	10.7	32.5	8.9
9.2 .4 Other Reasons	7	8.3	6.2	8.9
10.1 Gender				

Male	140	78		
Female	40	22		
10.2 Age				
21-30 years	97	53.7	48.7	62.2
31-40 years	54	30.0	30.0	30.0
41-50 years	22	12.2	20.1	7.8
51 years and above	7	4.1	1.2	—

Data analysis on question : Do consumers have greater acceptance towards advertisement on blogs and communities compared to non-focused web sites, and why?

The question involves online consumers related to whether they have a greater acceptance towards advertisements on blogs and communities compared to non focused web sites and why this is the case. Majority (69.3%) of the respondents answered that they usually see advertisements online, but (25.4%) chose to the rate 5 which in turn is the worst rating possible. Thus, most of the respondents usually see advertisement online, but they generally dislike it.

This can be compared to the answers on the survey question six on advertisements tailored to the content of the blog or community. Here, the majority of the respondents have answered that they are positive towards such advertisement that are tailored to the contents of the blog or community. Approximately a third of the respondents (30.2 %) chose option 2, which indicates that they are more positive towards tailored advertisement. A vast majority was either more positive or indifferent towards tailored advertisement on communities and blogs. In the question seven, respondents answered that they see advertisement more positively when it is placed on a blog or community compared to a random web site, one third (30.2%) of the respondents were indifferent to this issue, while a total of 41.5 % chose either 1 or 2, indicating that they see advertisement positively when placed on a blog or community compared to another random web site. The reason cited by the respondents was that they were related to their interests and 41.9 %. were of that view followed by

the answer that it gives the consumer knowledge about good offers (20 %), while 19 % the respondents stated that ads gave them knowledge about new products or services. The respondents also think that advertisements on communities and blogs are affecting their surfing experience or flow in a negative way as more than half (53.1 %) saw it as negative (30.7 % chose option 4, 22.4 % chose option 5), while around a third (28.8 %) saw it as indifferent. Relating these to the sixth survey question, asking if the respondents look differently on advertisement when it is tailored to the content of the blog or community where it is located, they think that it is generally better when advertisements are adapted to the content of the community or blog where they are located.

Data analysis on question: How and why is consumer's attitude towards the advertisements affected by their degree of customization?

Question two is on the customization of advertisements and its affect on consumer's attitude towards them. Survey question three is a good starting point when analyzing the respondent's perceptions towards online advertising. A majority of the users (69.3 %) are clearly conscious of the ads, and most of them have developed a disliking towards them. The interesting results for the research question two began revealing themselves with survey questions five and six, as a large part of the respondents were either indifferent (30.7 % –33.6 %) or considered the online advertisements to be more acceptable (28.8 % - 30.2 %) if they are customized, e.g. related to their hobbies or to the site where they are located. The respondents considered ads (attitude-towards-the-ad) to be more

acceptable if they were related to their interests or to the content of the blog or community they were visiting (attitude-towards-the-site). Survey question nine asking the respondents whether they could recall advertisements from blogs or communities more than other non focused commercials, more than half of the respondents (56.1 %) replied that they could not recall these ads more than other online advertisements. These results are in tune with responses of other survey questions. However, there were still a high number of respondents (37.1 %) that could recall ads more often depending on their location. A majority of these respondents quoted their interests as a reason for their ability to recall them. These users have responded positively towards online advertisements and a higher acceptance towards customized ads.

Data analysis on question : Is there a difference on the perception of advertisement on blogs and communities between men and women?

This study chose to look into gender the (male and female) difference on the perception of advertisements on blogs and communities. General findings from the survey show smaller differences than expected on the first two survey questions: - if the respondents know what communities and blogs are both genders answered with a very similar distribution of choices. The largest notable difference is that 2.2 % of the female respondents answered that they do not know what a blog is and 4.4 % do not know what a community is. While only 0.6% of women answered that they do not know about both mediums. The survey question eight on what users thought about companies gathering information on consumer for customize advertisements, the response was very similarly for both genders. The variance in the alternative which were most frequently chosen by both men and women was as low as 0.2 %.

Moreover, on the survey question nine, whether they remembered it better if it was located on a blog or community, the majority of both genders provided a negative answer with a higher rate from the women (66.7 % women, compared to 53.1 % men). For those who responded positively, alternatives were again the same for both men and women. However, there was a difference in the percentage and women had chosen this alternative of lesser rates compared

to men (15.6 % compared to 32.5 %). The question three i.e. if the respondents usually see advertisements online and what they think of it, answers from men had a larger spread compared to women whose answers were more uniform. A clear majority of both men and women answered that they generally see advertisement online. But the difference was mainly seen in how they perceived these advertisements; the answers from men were distributed over a larger part of the scale as compared to women, who were more on the negative side of the scale.

Answers to the question four - if advertisements on blogs or communities affect their surfing experience, show a similar pattern as it was to question three. Answers have a large spread in both cases, female respondents were mostly negatively responded than the male respondents; around half (46.9 %) of the male respondents answered that it did not affect them negatively nor positively, for the females on the other hand, the percentage choosing alternative 3 was lower (35.6 %). Similarly, the percentage of both genders that answered that it affects them very negatively differed between male and female respondents (31.1 % compared to 20.0 %). In answering the fifth question - if they think differently of advertisements when these are related to their hobbies or interests, the majority of female respondents (48.9 %) chose option 3, 22.2 % chose option 2 compared to 11.1 % choosing a option 4. The male respondents showed a clearer pattern towards that they perceive the advertisements related to their hobbies or interests more positively as half (50 %) of the men chose a 1 or 2 which means that they perceive it more positively. The option 3 was chosen by a third (29.4 %). Thus, as much as 79.4 % of men perceived it either positively or indifferently.

The sixth survey question i.e. if they think differently of advertisement that is tailored to the content of the blog or community, a majority of the female respondents (37.8 %) answered by choosing alternative 3, that it does not matter to them, more interestingly, there were only 6.7 % of females who chose alternative 1. The percentage of males choosing alternative 1 was 15.6. Similarly, 20 % of females chose alternative 4, while 33.1 % of men also chose 4. Respondents of the survey question seven were asked if they think differently of

advertisement on blogs or communities that they like compared to a random web site. The answers to this question also follows what seems to be a pattern throughout this analysis, and the male respondents were more positive towards advertisement in blogs or community sites compared to random web sites. As many as half of male respondents (46.2 %) chose option 1 or 2, indicating that they think more positively of ads when placed on a blog or community. The percentage for the same alternative was almost half for women (24.5 %).

On the question ten related to gender and age, the age group most common was 31-40 for both genders, the clear difference was that there were more women in age groups 41-50 and 51+, men were more than women in the group between the ages 21-30. These differences might have affect results

Conclusions

This study is aimed at finding if marketing in blogs and communities are more accepted among the consumers. It also tried to find the reasons why ads in blogs and communities are more accepted relative to other means of online marketing. Findings on queries whether there were different attitudes for tailored advertisements on sites or where the advertisements on these placed affected the consumer perception, the choice of sites makes consumers more positive towards advertisements and tailored advertisements were found to be less negatively responded in comparison to regular advertisements. For professionals working with online marketing, it is very important to consider that female consumers generally are more negative towards advertisement regardless of customization or relatedness to the community or blog. So, if one works with products targeted specifically towards women, one should think more carefully and do more research before advertising online. The results contribute to a better understanding with respect to female online consumers as they indicate that women are more difficult to satisfy compared to men. Women in the society are generally known for their shopping. In the online world, it is important to consider the personality of women when developing advertisements targeted towards this group. Since women have a tendency of feeling more pleasant when treated exclusively, companies should also take

this into consideration when forming their marketing strategy. Results from the findings of this study can provide the company and marketers with knowledge on making the advertisements more effective.

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