

Investigating the Effects of Gender Differences on the Attitudes and Perceived Values of Internet Users

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ABSTRACT

In the literature of Internet advertising, many studies have been done on the factors affecting the users' attitudes toward Internet advertising. However, few studies have examined the effect of gender in the attitudes of the users. On this basis, this study evaluated the impact of Internet advertising on the users' attitudes regarding gender's role in Ferdosi University of Mashhad City, using the model of Sunet al(2010). A sample of 256 M.A and PHD students was selected using classified random sampling in Ferdosi University of Mashhad. To gather data, standard questionnaire of Ducoffe (1996), Sunet al(2010), and Zhang and Wang (2005) was used and analyzed by SPSS software. The results showed no direct correlation between the perceived values of used strategies in Internet advertisements and gender but mediating effect of it was confirmed. The results showed that cumulative effect of perceived value of Entertainment and informativeness on attitude is different for men and women and is also higher for women.

Key words: Internet advertisements, Entertainment and informativeness strategies, attitude, perceived value, gender differences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet advertisements appeared by selling the first ad banner by hot wire company in 1999. Annual revenue from Internet advertisements in America was 7.1 billion \$ in 2001 and about 3.1% of its total income. At this time, many main Internet players weakened and demands for Internet advertisements and services decreased. In 2004, this industry bloomed with the advent of Web 2 and created many jobs, facilitating web space advertisements (Mahajan 2000). In the early 2007, advertisers spent over 10 billion \$ on web advertisements in America which included 14% of total advertisement cost. Now, internet advertisements have revolved traditional businesses by web-based technologies, data gathering mechanisms for targeting and following users, and personalizing sent messages and automating sale/purchase processes (Evans 2008). From the other hand, significant growth in Internet and PC adoptions with it has increased on-line activities. In 2001, there were 88 million Internet users in America who rose to 143 million people till the end of 2004 (Gilbert and Lee-Kelley 2004). People use Internet to send e-mails (52%), read news (22%), search web for entertainment (21%), buy products (4%), attend tenders (3%), and make friends (2%) (Bureau Report 2001). Among the studies on the users' attitudes toward Internet advertisements, the study of Ducoffe (1996) is of great importance. Since the role of gender in Internet advertisements is less regarded, this study first investigates mediating effect and then direct effect of gender on Internet advertisements.

2. LITERATURE

1.2. Internet advertisements

Now, Internet has become the most important advertisement medium for its low cost and more global accessibility. Advertisers can divide markets and target customers' needs more accurately and increase brand equity, improving the interactions of customer-company (Wua et al 2008). In a simple definition, Internet advertisements promote goods, services and ideas by an introduced supporter by mediating tools between the advertisers and customers (McFarland et al 2004). Internet advertisements use Internet as a channel and communicative tool for sending advertisements in web space by showing names, marks, mottos, and pictures in highly visited sites. Examples of Internet advertisements include strong search motors, advertisement banners, and e-mails (Kamran et al 2008). Internet advertisements have different forms that include e-mails, SMS, and web-based advertisements which will be referred here in brief.

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2.2. Advertisements through E-mails

Internet advertisement by e-mail is more common than other techniques (Kamran et al 2008). E-mail marketing is also growing fast. According to Pavlov et al (2008), e-mail marketing duplicates capital return in comparison with other techniques like, using banners. It is an important medium for the companies looking for closer relations with the customers (Chadwick and Doherty 2011). Marketers use e-mail for sharing information, improving products, brand building, conducting users to the company's website or warning customers (Ghazali et al 2007). Wide adoption of e-mail as a message-promoting medium with low costs of establishment and distribution has been used by small and Intermediate enterprises (Sundar and Kim 2005). Despite many similarities, e-mail marketing is more complicated than advertisements in magazines or newspapers. According to a selected combination, an e-retailer may consider interactional properties to attract and retain customers. In general, e-retailers notice the importance of executive tactics in e-mail marketing (Chadwick et al 2011). In Table 1, some tactics are recommended by the managers.

Table 1. Some tactics in advertisement messages based on e-mail (Chadwick et al 2011)

Executive factor	Recommendations	Executive factor in general
E-mail size	Message goal should determine its length. Different tests are needed for identifying its length. Its length is the most effective factor on its efficiency.	Page size is important for all e-mails but some differences have been found in size.
Frequency of sending e-mails	Sent e-mails frequency is important in communicating with the customers. Sending too many e-mails may cause boredom and not attract customers.	5-30% frequency of sent e-mails is different. 35% of e-mails use targeted time-tabling.
Explanation with a picture	Pictures help reader's involvement and retaining him.	Over 90% of marketing e-mails use explanation with pictures differing from a full page to many small pages with the product.
Message content	Body and content of e-mail should relate to its topic and header.	In over 75% of marketing e-mails subject can be found by correlating the header to content.
Mark logo	The location of mark logo should be permanent.	99% of marketing e-mails have a mark logo on their above left corner.
Animation	Animation has enough potential for attracting customers' attention.	Only 2% of marketing e-mails use animations.
Personalization	Personalization should increase click rate. Personalization depends on the interaction of customer and customer's data, represented by them voluntarily.	Only 35% of marketing e-mails has been personalized.

3.2. Advertisements by mobiles

Recently, fast growth of mobiles has created many chances for companies to inform about goods/customers, develop their relations with the customers, and receive direct responses from them (Sultan 2005). The factors raising mobile use including, loading a mass amount of video, music, and data in them, flexibility in communication and sharing information have been possible by mixing Internet and mobiles (Patet 2011). In this way, SMS has got much popularity (Merisavo et al 2007). Many leading countries like BMW, McDonald, Nike, and Adidas have recognized these potentials and used mobiles for advertisements (Scharl et al 2005).

4.2. Value and attitude toward Internet advertisements

Internet advent as a new medium in advertisement arena has stimulated many researchers (Papacharissi and Rubin 2000). But, there are few studies on users' attitudes toward Internet advertisements (Schlosser 1999). Attitude refers to what is said, heard, or understood about a product (Patet 2011). Attitude is the mentality of people about shaping their perceptions from their environment (Chen and Wells 2000). People's feelings directly affect people's attitude toward a product. However, in general, attitude is a multi-dimensional structure with many definitions. It is also a response to the advertisements as a valuable index for measuring advertisement efficiency (Ducoffe 1996). Potentially, value comes from users' expectation from an order, experiences of transactions, behaviors, and obligations for achieving a transaction. Value can be interaction-related experiences. Values are as a basis for activities, attitudes, and judgments toward Internet advertisements as well as one of the aspects of social life (Houston and Gassenheimer 1987).

5.2. Internet advertisements strategies

Informativeness Strategies. Ducoffe (1996) and Bracket and Carr (2001) stated that informativeness is a prevalent strategy of Internet. Providing wider information about the products yields value and satisfaction for a website. According to Shukla et al (2010), informativeness refers to sharpness, being information source and update. For example, car websites include some details about cars, motorcycles, tools, performances, security properties, costs, and data about the companies and investors and chances for comparing different models. Other information may include the conditions of by-post purchase, Internet and availability of the models (Barker and Groenne 1996).

Entertainment. Final strategy of Internet advertisements is Entertainment. As suggested in TV advertisements, Entertainment is also used in Internet advertisements for less-complicated advertisements, needing less explanation (Rettie et al 2003). According to Shukla et al (2010), Entertainment refers to the properties of being enjoyable, exciting, imaginative, and flashy. Suggested Entertainment models by researchers include different incentives for customers to visit and keep up with a website. The more time a user spends on a website, the more successful it will be. Since Entertainment focuses on entertaining customers with less stress on information, it can be used for almost every product (Putrevuetal 2002). Richard et al (2010) believe that people tend to experience shopping in an amusing and enjoyable way. McMillan et al (2003) found that users have more positive attitudes toward advertisements with Entertainment aspects.

6.2. Gender differences

Internet is becoming a platform for selling products while there is little knowledge about the ways Internet affects the searching behavior of the users or if Internet space has different impact on men and women (Richard et al 2007). Gender is a basis for dividing products and services. According to this classification, market is partitioned easily, providing easy access to each part (Moss 2008). Differences of men and women in many societies are accepted and revolve around biologic, social, or information processing styles (Friman 2010). To send proper products for each sex, knowing their psychological differences is essential. So, some theories and concepts in this field will be regarded in the next section.

1.6.2. Biological explanations. Men and women have different chromosomes. Men have one sexual chromosome called X and lack the second chromosome which can be either X or Y (Wanga and Sun 2010). Medical researches show that harmonic differences between two genders lead to some differences in their characters and behavioral patterns (Berenbaum 1999). More aggressive spirit of men has been proved in different studies and age groups (Brill 1999). The results of the studies show more emotional dependence of women. In this way, women are emotional in inter-personal interactions and men are emotional in achievement context. Empirical studies on intelligence abilities show that women are superior in oral skills and men are better at spatial skills (Xie et al 2006).

2.6.2. Social explanations. In socialization literature, gender differences are basic concepts considered in developing behavioral differences. On this basis, first children are introduced with a specific sex and then actualize this identity with matching their personal behaviors, motivations, and standard feelings proper to their sex (Wanga and Sun 2010). Studies show that men are output- based and women are affiliation-based. The former includes reaching outside goals like, achievements, independence, and being self-centered; while, the latter includes concerns for others' feelings, getting permission of the others, communicating with others and keeping equilibrium in inter-relations.

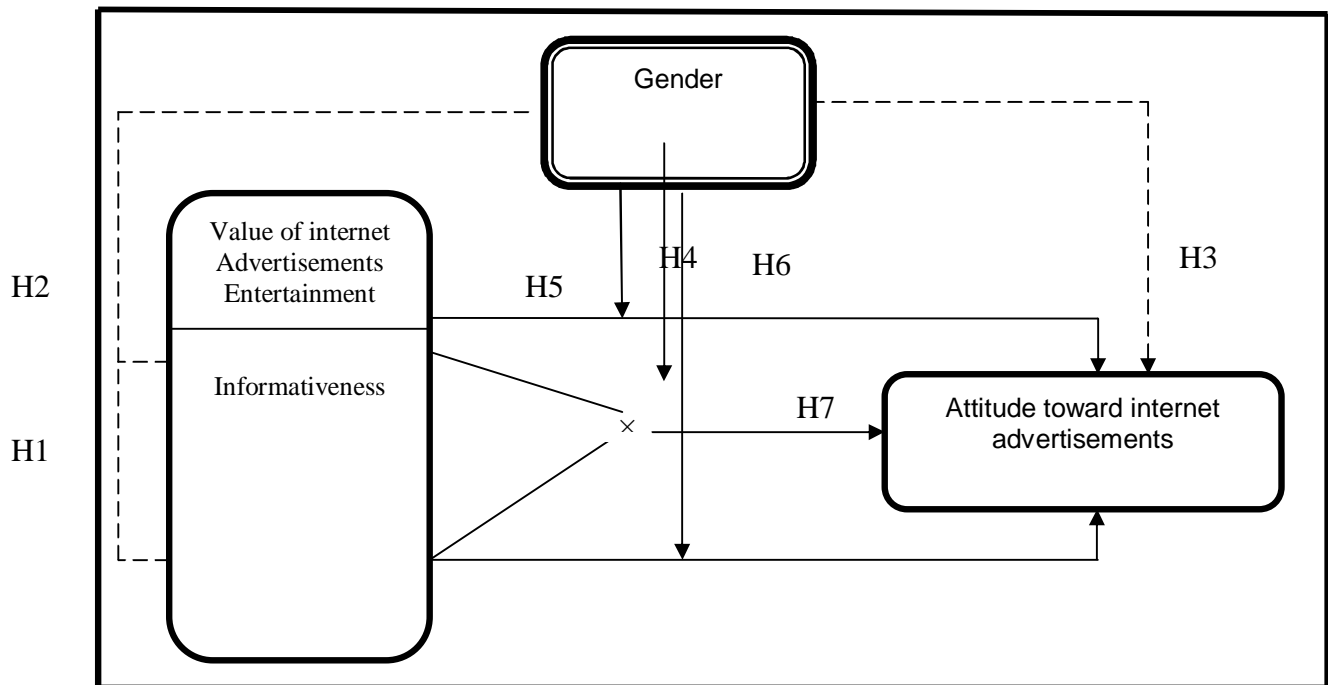
3.6.2. Selectivity theory. This theory states that gender differences manifest in the information processing in specific conditions. Men involve in general subjects of the message and women go through the details of a message. Men have optional processors, relying on a set of important information. But, women have comprehensive processors considering all existing information (Wanga and Sun 2010).

4.6.2. The role of gender's differences in Internet advertisements. Men notice non-verbal information (like pictures, music, and etc) about a product in advertisement messages. So, provided advertisements for men should be simple and focused on one subject while the content of advertisements sent for women should include much detailed information about a product. Two item-based and relation-based processing systems suggest that men tend to attitude-based messages and women look for category-based messages (Putrevu 2001).

7. Conceptual model of the research

Due to previous studies, Internet advertisement values include the variables of motivation, reliability, Entertainment, informativeness, and boredom adopted from Sun et al (2010). Since informativeness and Entertainment, perceived value by the users, were proved by previous studies, they were included in the conceptual model of this study. Then, the value of Internet advertisements including informativeness and Entertainment were regarded as independent variables, gender was a mediating and dependent variable, and attitude toward Internet advertisements was the dependent variable. Full lines show mediating relations of gender and dotted lines show direct relations.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research (adopted from model of sun et al 2010)



8. Research hypotheses

- H1. Women receive more informativeness from Internet advertisements in comparison with men.
- H2. Women receive more Entertainment from Internet advertisements in comparison with men.
- H3. Women have more positive attitudes toward Internet advertisements compared with men.
- H4. The correlation of informativeness and attitude toward Internet advertisements is higher for men.
- H5. The correlation of Entertainment and attitude toward Internet advertisements is higher for men.
- H6. Cumulative effect of informativeness and Entertainment on attitude toward Internet advertisements is positive.

9. METHODOLOGY

Based on massive studies on Internet advertisements, the youth adopt themselves with new technologies sooner than old people. Most Internet users are 18-29 years old (Patet 2011, Kiani 2000) and educated (Kamran 2008). Study population included M.A and P.H.D students of Ferdosi University of Mashhad City. This study was of survey type with applied goals, using descriptive and analytic methods. Using Cochran formula, 262 people were selected by classified random sampling method in two groups of men and women.

10. Measuring validity and reliability

To measure the validity of the study, a standard questionnaire of Zhang and Wang (2005) and Ducoffe (1996) was used whose face and content validity was tested by confirmatory factor analysis. To measure the consistency, Cronbach α was used whose value was 0.8, confirming the consistency of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Cronbach α coefficients

Items	Cronbach alpha
Informativeness	0.71
Entertaining	0.84
Attitudes to webadvertisment	0.83
questionnaire consistency	0.8

11. Demographic variables

Sample size of this study was determined using Cochran formula and classified random sampling. Sample members were M.A and PHD students and mostly over 26 years old, entering college in 2010. Demographic qualities of sample members are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographic qualities of sample members

Characteristics	Responses	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Cumulative Frequency percentage
Gender	Female	120	47%	47%
	Male	133	53%	100%
Education level	M.A	190	81.5%	81.5%
	P.H.D	43	18.5%	100%
Age	24 and below	13	26.4%	42.9%
	24-25	57	42.9%	69.3%
	25-26	59	26.4%	95.7%
	Over 26	104	4.3%	100%
	Entrance of 2008 and below	22	9.4%	9.4%
Entrance year	Entrance of 2009	30	12.9%	22.3%
	Entrance of 2010	118	50.60%	73%
	Entrance of 2011	63	30%	100%

12. Hypothesis analysis

The results of testing H1 in Table 4 show no significant difference between informativeness value men and women receive at 5% error level. So, H1 is rejected at 5% error level.

The results of testing H2 in Table 4 show that there is no significant difference in Entertainment value of men and women. Then, H2 is rejected at 5% level.

H3. Considering significance value of 0.05%, H3 is rejected. So, it can't be said that women have more positive attitude toward Internet advertisements.

Table 4. Statistical tests

Statistical tests	Results of testing H1	Results of testing H2	Results of testing H3
Man Witney test	7238/500	7461/500	7190/100
Wilkakson test	16283/50	14601/50	16283/50
Z	1.268	0.884	1.356
Significance	0.205	0.377	0.175
Result	rejected	rejected	rejected

As shown in Table 5 and 6, the correlation value for informativeness and attitude in women is 0.209 and it is 0.252 for men. These values show a significant correlation of two variables which confirms H4. So, at 5% error level, perceived informativeness for men is more than women.

Table 5. Correlation coefficient of attitude toward informativeness for women

		informativeness	Attitude toward advertisements	Result
informativeness	Spearman correlation coefficient	1.000	0.209	H5 Confirmed
	P-valuesignificance		0.023	
Attitude toward advertisements	Spearman correlation coefficient	0.209	1	
	P-value significance	0.023		

Table 6. Correlation coefficient of attitude toward informativeness for men

		informativeness	Attitude toward advertisements
informativeness	Spearman correlation coefficient	1.000	0.252
	P-value significance		0.03
Attitude toward advertisements	Spearman correlation coefficient	0.252	1
	P-value significance	0.03	

As seen in table 7 and 8, the correlation value for Entertainment and attitude toward Internet for men is 0.147 and the correlation value for informativeness and attitude toward Internet for women is 0.256 that confirms H5.

Table 7. Correlation coefficient of attitude toward Entertainment for men

		Entertainment	Attitude toward advertisements
Entertainment	Spearman correlation coefficient	1.000	0.147
	P-value significance		0.011
Attitude toward advertisements	Spearman correlation coefficient	0.147	1
	P-value significance	0.011	

Table 8. Correlation coefficient of attitude toward Entertainment for women

		Entertainment	Attitude toward advertisements
Entertainment	Spearman correlation coefficient	1.000	0.256
	P-value significance		0.03
Attitude toward advertisements	Spearman correlation coefficient	0.256	1
	P-value significance	0.03	

As seen in Table 11, correlation of Entertainment and informativeness with attitudes toward Internet is positive and their effect is 0.082, describing 8.2% of changes in attitude toward Internet advertisements. Regression coefficients also show a positive correlation of Entertainment and informativeness with attitude toward Internet. So, H6 is accepted at 5% error level.

9. Path coefficient of attitude toward Internet advertisements considering Entertainment

Path Coefficient Of Attitude Toward Internet Advertisements					
Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	T	Significance	Results
Entertainment	0.087	0.041	2.130	0.034	Confirmed
Informativeness	0.120	0.039	3.035	0.03	

Table 10. Regression coefficients of attitude toward cumulative effect of Entertainment and informativeness

Regression Coefficient				
Model	Sum	Degree Of Freedom	F	Significance
Regression	155.796	2	11.158	000
cumulative effect	1745.323	250		
Total	1901.119	252		

Table 11. Determination coefficient of attitude toward cumulative effect of Entertainment and Informativeness

Regression Coefficient					
Model	Correlation coefficient	Determination coefficient	Correlation justified	Standard Error	Result
cumulative effect of Entertainment and Informativeness	0.286	0.82	0.075	2.64221	confirmed

11. Conclusion

Through the history of advertisement literature, many studies have been done on the effective factors in forming users' view toward Internet advertisement (Ducoffe 1996, Bracket et al 2001, Sun et al 2010, Zhang and Wong 2006). These studies have been done with the purpose of developing knowledge and perceptions of the people toward Internet advertisement. However, few studies have investigated mediating role of gender in forming users' views while gender differences are applied and fundamental issues in Internet marketing. According to Sun et al (2010) and Okazaki and Tailor (2007), who related the attitudes with purchase behavior, creating favorable attitudes in users is of high importance. Then, gender should be regarded as an effective factor in users' views during designing and sending Internet

advertisements for it highly attracts customers. Considering the ways gender impresses perceived values of the users and the people comprehending different advertisement strategies, this study tries to meticulously investigate the role of gender in users' evaluation from Internet advertisement. 3 primary hypotheses investigated the direct effect of gender on the attitudes toward Internet advertisement (Bracket and Carr 2001, Okazaki and Tailor 2007); 4th and 5th hypotheses studied the mediating role of gender in Internet advertisement (Morris et al 2005, Venkatesh and Morris 2003) and 6th hypothesis examined gender's mediating role in cumulative effect of amusement and informativeness on users' attitudes (Sun et al 2010). According to the results of testing first 3 hypotheses, they were rejected; so, gender didn't have a direct effect on the perceived values of the users toward amusement and informativeness. This result agreed with the studies of Sun et al (2010), Siau- Lai (2010) and Okazaki and Tailor (2007) but disagrees with the results of Bracket and Carr (2001). The reason for this disagreement can be the effect of national culture on peoples' evaluation from Internet advertisements (Niazahmad 1996, Brettel et al 2010, Wong et al 2010) or newness of it in the countries like Iran (Roosta et al 2010, Siavashi et al 2010). In social explanation theory, it was stated that women are more willing to communication than men. This implies that broadcasting an advertisement message for men while reviewing webs leads to their anger while this is not true for women since they are looking for more communication and amusements through ads. Direct effect of gender on the perceived values of users to amusement and informativeness was rejected, implying that generalizing the concepts of socialization theory for Internet advertisement should be with caution; because, the basis of first and second hypotheses of this paper lied in that theory. So, the belief that while reading web pages, sending an Internet advertisement for women won't cause their anger or annoying is rejected and sending Internet advertisement for both men and women should be caution.

Fourth and fifth hypotheses regarding the mediating role of gender in perceived value of the users toward amusement and informativeness were confirmed implying that informativeness for men and amusement for women are more important. This result agrees with the studies of Fleton et al (2003), Phillip and Suri(2004), Gilbert et al (2005), Dittmar et al (2004), Sun et al (2010), Siau- Lai (2010), Okazaki and tailor (2007), Graham et al (2010), Kim et al (2011). It also agrees with the results of Chielo (2007) who found that gender differences impact virtual world of Internet. Due to the different theories on gender differences between men and women like selection theory, item-based processor theory, selective processors, and socialization theories which refer to different styles of information processing and decision-makings of men and women, the importance of gender's role in forming users' attitudes toward Internet advertisements becomes clearer. This result consists with selection theory of Mayers (1991). According to Mayers (1991), men have item-based processors and women have comprehensive processors, showing that men use significant information for decisions and women use comprehensive information for it. This means that women tend to examine every detail of an issue while men just care about the important factors. This finding consists with the study of XU et al (2007) who found more importance of amusement for women rather than men. On this basis, advertisers can use different strategies for female and male users according to their needs (XU et al 2007). Ducoffe (1996) correlated two factors of value and users attitudes. On this basis, the users who evaluate Internet advertisements valuable have more favorable attitudes toward them. Studies on Internet advertisements showed that for an effective strategy, focus should be on the factors forming values and favorable attitudes of users (Chen and Wells 2000, Bracket and Carr 2001, Sun et al 2010). Then, designing Internet advertisements, informative principal for women and amusement principal for men should be regarded.

Testing sixth hypothesis showed a positive and significant correlation between perceived cumulative effect of amusement and informativeness and attitudes to Internet advertisements. This effect was proved to be stronger for women. So, designing advertisement strategies for women, a mix of both strategies with more concentration on amusement should be regarded. Sent messages should include the contents with more aesthetic and grammatically correct points as well as pictures and posters. While sent advertisements for men should include full information about a product with a general subject. Patet (2011) found that people evaluate advertisement's content as useful when it provides time-taking information without time and place limitation. Then, it is suggested that usefulness of information related to the product and accessibility of it should be considered while sending advertisement for men. . The results of this study can increase people's perceptions from Internet advertisements.

From the other hand, it is suggested that other demographic qualities like age, education, and etc. should be regarded while considering Internet advertisement. Some researchers believe that although cultural and demographic qualities agree with each other, some contradictions are also observed (Bem

1981, Eagly 1987, niazahmad 1996, Siau- Lai 2010). So, the effects of cultural and demographic qualities on user's attitudes can be studied in further surveys.

Although young population is of great importance, its results can't be generalized to the whole population. It is suggested that other populations should be examined and their results get compared with present results.

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