

HOW DO WE EVALUATE THE RELIABILITY OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN MAGAZINES AND ON THE INTERNET? TRUST VERSUS ASSURANCE

Miki YOSHITAKE^a, Shinichi KOYAMA^{°a}, Kento NAKAJIMA^a, Toru SHONO^b,
Yoshihide NAGAO^b, Ritsuya OKU^b, and Haruo HIBINO^a

^a *Design Psychology Unit, Department of Design Science, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan.*

^b *Media Business Innovation Department, Dentsu Institute, Dentsu Inc. Tokyo, Japan.*

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine how we evaluate the reliability of advertisements in magazines and on the Internet on the basis of the trust vs. assurance theory (Yamagishi 1998). We hypothesized that consumers' relationship with the Internet is based on trust (i.e., examination and exploration), whereas that with magazines is based on assurance (no-risk assumption). We conducted a web-based survey of 300 consumers. First, we asked them to write the names of their favorite web site and magazine and their preference levels for the same. Next, we asked them how important they felt it was for them to refer to other sources of information to verify the information in the advertisements that featured in their favorite magazine and web site and how accurate they expected those advertisements to be. Further, we asked them what criteria they relied on to judge whether the advertisements were accurate. The results demonstrated that with respect to the Internet, the consumers' need to verify increased with their preference for a particular site; however, this was not the case with magazines. On the other hand, we found that as the consumers' preference for a particular magazine grew stronger, they expected more accuracy in the content; this was not the case with web sites. In addition, the consumers relied on different criteria to evaluate the accuracy of the advertisements in the magazines and on the Internet. The results supported our hypothesis that our relationship with the Internet is based on trust and that with magazines, on assurance.

Keywords: *advertisement, internet, magazines, trust, assurance*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet and magazine advertisements can have different impacts on consumers even if they contain the same content. This suggests that consumer behavior is influenced by not only information in the advertisement but also our emotional bond with the advertising media. Thus it is important for us to examine emotional bond between consumers and advertising media from psychological viewpoint. In this study, we attempted to compare the emotional impact (e.g., preference, favor, and trustworthiness) of the advertisements on the web and in magazines, in relation to the theory of trust vs. assurance [1, 2].

According to Yamagishi [1, 2], *trust* implies to acquire something good from a mixture of good and bad things under uncertain and risky circumstances. In this context, trust does not mean “believing blindly”; it is something that requires examination and exploration. Thus, a trusting person is less likely to be deceived [1].

Assurance, on the other hand, implies a situation where there is no uncertainty and risk. Citing an example of assurance, Yamagishi & Yamagishi [2] presents the following situation: “Suppose I have a special tie with the Mafia, and my trading partner knows this. I am certain that he will not cheat on me; he knows that if he does, he will be quickly sent to a mortuary. My expectation of the partner’s ‘honesty’ is based on the fact that acting ‘honestly’ is in his own interest, not on the belief that he is a benevolent person. Here, assurance exists but not trust.” Interestingly, assurance destroys trust [1]. When we believe there is assurance, we assume that there are no risks. Thus, we stop further examination, upon which trust is based.

In this regard, we hypothesized that our relationship with the Internet is based on trust, whereas our relationship with magazines is based on assurance. The information available on the Internet can be both useful and harmful, and hence, it needs to be verified carefully. Information in magazines, however, is verified by the editors and publishers. If a magazine prints erroneous information, there are chances that it can be discontinued.

On the basis of this hypothesis, we propose a “mode-switching hypothesis” where consumers choose between two psychological modes, namely, the exploration mode and reliance mode (Figure 1). In the exploration mode, consumers make decisions based on their own examination. In contrast, in the reliance mode, they make decisions on the basis of another’s recommendations. Every consumer possesses both psychological modes and switches between them. For example, consumers may switch to the exploration mode when buying a high-involvement item [3, 4] such as a house, although they may opt for the chef’s recommendation at a restaurant without much consideration. Although both these modes are present in all individuals, the exploration mode is dominant in some consumers, whereas the reliance mode is dominant in others. In this model, we hypothesized that the Internet has the power to switch consumers’ psychological mode from reliance to exploration because it is a trust-based medium. On the other hand, magazines influence a switch in consumers’ psychological mode from exploration to reliance because they are an assurance-based medium.

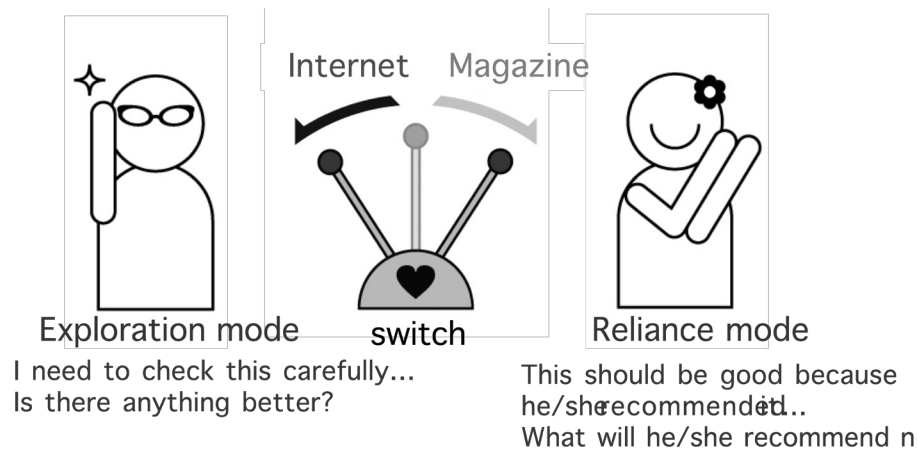


Figure 1. Mode-switching hypothesis. Consumers possess two modes—the exploration and reliance modes—and switch between them. In the exploration mode, they make decisions based on their own examination. In the reliance mode, they make decisions based on another’s recommendations.

By using the mode-switching model, we first predicted the relationship between the preference levels and the consumers’ expectations of the Internet and the magazines. The Internet influences the consumers’ shift to the exploration mode, and this influence strengthens as the consumers’ awareness of the risks of the Internet grows. Thus, consumers will deem it even more necessary to verify the information on various web sites. On the other hand, a stronger preference for a magazine increases a consumer’s reliance on the content. Therefore, rather than actively verifying the information provided in the magazine on his/her own, the consumer will simply expect the magazine to be accurate and loyal.

Then, we predicted the different criteria consumers rely on to evaluate the accuracy of the advertisements appearing in the magazines and on web sites. On the Internet, the consumers switch to the exploration mode and gather information regarding the product and services described in the advertisement. For example, they will verify the content by comparing word-of-mouth information with the advertised product (service) information. In contrast, because magazines bring about the switch toward the reliance mode, consumers will attempt to gather information regarding the magazine *per se*. For example, they will verify the credibility of the editor and publisher. In the present study, we conducted a web-based survey to assess these predictions.

2. METHODS

2.1. Participants

In the present study, we conducted a web-based survey of 300 consumers. The participants comprised 150 females and 150 males in the age group of 20–69 years. The participants watched TV for 1–4 hours a day, used the computer for 0.5–2 hours a day, and read 1–5 magazines a month. Their monthly income ranged from 20,000 to 100,000 yen (approximately 200 to 1,000 US dollars).

2.2. Questionnaire

In the questionnaire, we first asked the participants to write down the names of their favorite web site and magazine. Then, we asked them to answer items pertaining to the preference for their favorite web site and magazines, as listed below.

- (1) How strong is your preference for your favorite web site?
1. Not much 2. A little 3. Quite strong 4. Very strong
- (2) How strong is your preference for your favorite magazine?
1. Not much 2. A little 3. Quite strong 4. Very strong

Next, we asked the following questions:

- (3) How important is it for you to refer to other sources of information to verify the information in advertisements that appear on your favorite web site?
1. Not important 2. A little 3. Quite important 4. Very important
- (4) How important is it for you to refer to other sources of information to verify the information in advertisements featuring in your favorite magazine?
1. Not important 2. A little 3. Quite important 4. Very important
- (5) How accurate do you expect the advertisements appearing on your favorite web site to be?
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
- (6) How accurate do you expect the advertisements featuring in your favorite magazine to be?
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
- (7) What are the criteria you rely on to judge whether the advertisements on your favorite web site are accurate? (Check all applicable options.)
1. Manufacturer of the advertised product 2. Brand of the advertised product 3. Product information contained in the advertisement 4. Name of the company that owns the site 5. Information from the other web sites 6. Information from magazines 7. Information from newspapers 8. Information from TV 9. Information from friends 10. Design of the site 11. Brand image of the site 12. History and age of the site 13. The accuracy of the advertisements appearing on the site thus far 14. Editor's name 15. Articles on the web site 16. Overall impression from the articles 17. Comments from visitors on the site 18. Others 19. I don't make such judgments.
- (8) What are the criteria you rely on to judge whether the advertisements featuring in your favorite magazine are accurate? (Check all applicable options.)
1. Manufacturer of the advertised product 2. Brand of the advertised product 3. Product information in the advertisement 4. Author 5. Publisher's name 6. Information from various web sites 7. Information from other magazines 8. Information from newspapers 9. Information from TV 10. Information from

friends 11. Paper and print quality (of the magazine) 12. Brand image of the magazine 13. Design and layout of the magazine 14. Price of the magazine 15. History and age of the magazine 16. The accuracy of the advertisements in the magazine thus far 17. Credibility of the publisher 18. Editor's name 19. Articles in the magazine 20. The overall impression from the advertisement 21. Comments/letters to the editor from the readers 22. Others 23. I don't make such judgments.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Favorite web sites and magazines

The list of favorite web sites and magazines for both male and female participants are shown in Table 1. The favorite web sites for the participants included portal sites such as Yahoo! (male 44%; female 32%), shopping sites such as Amazon (male 23%; female 32%), and word-of-mouth sites such as kakaku.com (male 14%; female 15%). On the other hand, favorite magazines for men included lifestyle magazines such as Nikkei Trendy (23%) and business magazines such as Nikkei Business (23%), whereas favorite magazines for women included lifestyle magazines (35%) and fashion magazines such as More (38%).

Table 1: Favorite magazines and web sites

Favorite Sites				Favorite Magazines			
Category	Example	Male (%)	Female (%)	Category	Example	Male (%)	Female (%)
Portal	Yahoo!	44	32	Lifestyle	Nikkei Trendy	23	35
Shopping	Amazon	23	32	Business	Nikkei Business	23	8
Word-of-mouth	kakaku.com	14	15	Sports	Marine Diving	13	1
Corporate	SONY	5	7	General Interest	Yomiuri Weekly	12	8
News	Nikkei Net	4	1	Computer	Mac Fan	12	0
Blog	FC2ID	1	1	Fashion	More	7	38
SNS	mixi	0	5	Other		9	10
Other		10	6	Total		100	100
Total		100	100				

3.2. Emotional bond and expectations

The results demonstrated that with respect to the Internet, the consumers' need to verify the information increased with their preferences for a particular web site; however, this was not the case with magazines. A regression analysis showed that the preference levels for the favorite web site were positively correlated with the importance the consumer attached to verifying the information from the site (Figure 2A). The correlation was found to be statistically significant. The strength of the emotional bond with their favorite magazines, however, did not correlate with the importance to verify information from the magazine.

On the other hand, the consumers demanded greater accuracy in the contents of their favorite magazines as their preferences became stronger, although this was not the case with web sites. The regression analysis showed that the strength of the preferences for the favorite magazine was positively correlated with the demanded accuracy of the magazine (Figure 2B). The correlation was statistically significant. The strength of the preferences with the favorite web site, however, did not correlate with the demanded accuracy of the web site.

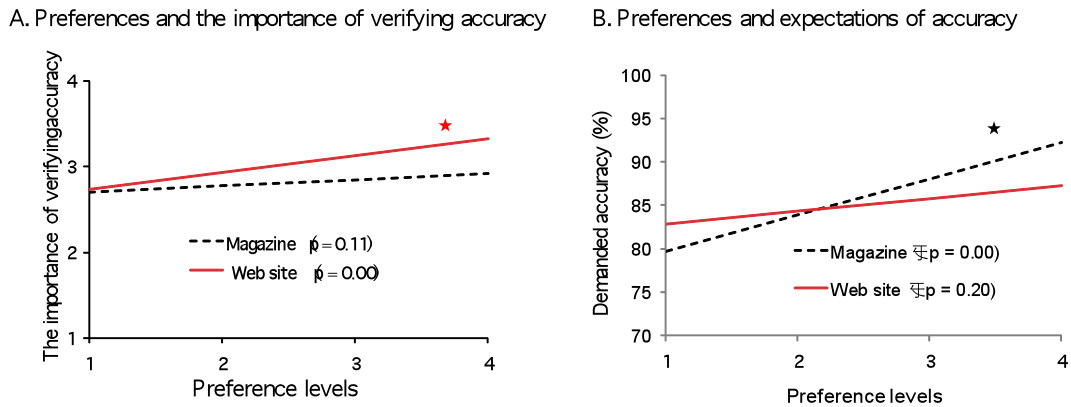


Figure 2: The preference levels and the expectations from the web site and magazines. The star (*) indicates $p < .05$.

3.3. Criteria to evaluate the accuracy of the advertisements

As expected, the participants used different criteria to evaluate the accuracy of the advertisement appearing on the Internet and in magazines. In the case of advertisements that appeared on the Internet, we found that the participants checked the product information, the name of the company that owned the site (magazine), and comments from frequent visitors than they did for advertisements that featured in the magazines ($p < .05$). On the other hand, they checked the editor's name for the advertisements that featured in the magazines more frequently than they did for advertisements that appeared on the Internet ($p < .01$).

4. DISCUSSION

The results supported our mode-switching hypothesis that the Internet facilitates consumers' investigative behavior, whereas the magazines facilitate consumers' assurance-gear behavior. In the case of the Internet, as the consumers' preferences for a particular web site grow their awareness of the risks of the Internet also increases and makes them more careful in examining the available information. In other words, preferences for a favorite web site are based on stress ("I need to protect myself..."). On the other hand, with respect to magazines, as consumers' preference for a particular magazine grows, they will rely on it more strongly and expect more accuracy and loyalty ("The magazine needs to protect me..."). In other words, the preference for a favorite magazine is based on consumer's sense of security.

Because of the difference in the relationships involved, consumers use different types of pointers to evaluate the accuracy of the advertisements. For advertisements that appear on the Internet, consumers attempt to gather information regarding the product per se (e.g., product information and word-of-mouth information), whereas those featured in magazines, they attempt to gather information regarding the magazine (e.g., editor's name). The

difference in our attitudes toward the Internet and magazines can be explained well by Yamagishi's theory of trust vs. assurance [1, 2].

Regarding consumer behavior, the present study suggests that the Internet advertisements will be effective for products and services for which consumers seek information (e.g., used cars). On the other hand, the magazines advertisements will be effective for products and services for which consumers seek endorsement (e.g., new types of cosmetics).

REFERENCES

1. Yamagishi T., *Trust*. Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 2000.
2. Yamagishi T. and Yamagishi M., "Trust and commitment in the United States and Japan." *Motivation and Emotion*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 129-166, 1994.
3. Vaughn R., "How advertising works: A planning model." *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 20, No. 5, pp. 27-33, 1980.
4. Vaughn R., "How advertising works: A planning model revisited." *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 57-66, 1986.