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## Original Article

# E-mail advertising: A study of consumer attitude toward e-mail advertising among Indian users

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## Zia ul Haq

is presently working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Management and Commerce, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India. In addition to teaching assignments, Zia is also involved in research on the topic 'Effectiveness of Online Advertising'. For the past 2 years, Zia has been guest faculty at National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Hyderabad, India, and has also written a book on marketing management, which will be published shortly in India.

**ABSTRACT** E-mail marketing offers great opportunities for businesses. Marketing activities supported by e-mails allow companies to directly communicate with their consumers without time or location barriers. The topic of advertising via e-mails is of major interest. It addresses consumers with individualized advertising messages via e-mails. This paper discusses its relevance and investigates antecedents of consumer attitudes toward advertising via e-mails. The analysis is based on a consumer survey. For this purpose, a quota sample of 800 Internet users in India has been interviewed. The results indicate that the content and the frequency of advertising message have the largest impact on attitude toward advertising via e-mails. By understanding consumers, attitude toward advertising, designers and marketers can better strategize their advertising designs. A better understanding of interactivity can also help to improve the effectiveness of interactive media such as the Internet. A methodology for studying the factors that contribute to consumers' perceptions of ads is proposed, and implications for Internet-based advertising are discussed.

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**Correspondence:** Zia ul Haq  
Department of Management and  
Commerce, Maulana Azad National  
Urdu University, Hyderabad,  
500032, India  
E-mail: zia@manuu.ac.in,  
managementmaster25@yahoo.co.in  
Web: www.manuu.ac.in

## INTRODUCTION

The appeal of e-mail communication is evident today, because e-mail is both cost effective and time efficient. There is no doubt that e-mail is becoming one of the major direct channels for marketers. As the use of e-mail increases, it is more and more important for direct mail marketers to understand the process through which e-mail campaigns influence

consumer attitudes and behavior. In this context, we would like to address the following questions:

- What are the antecedents of attitudes toward e-mail advertising?
- Which dimensions underlie and to what degree do they contribute to e-mail advertising attitudes?

A traditional approach consists of testing the influence of many different mailing characteristics. Another less common approach is oriented toward understanding the perceptions of e-mail receivers. With the latter goal in mind, this study examines first whether attitudes toward a company website, consumer trust, intention to visit the site and low-perceived privacy risk affect attitudes toward an e-mail campaign. Second, the consequences of an e-mail campaign were investigated in order to understand the process through which e-mail campaigns influence purchase intention.

Literature in advertising and information systems suggests that advertising in both traditional media and the Internet is either easily ignored by the audience or is perceived to have little value. Bogart (1985) argued that chances of careful processing of advertisements (ads) are lowered by the high number of ads competing for individuals' attention on a daily basis. Limited time and mental resources make it difficult for the audience to dedicate sufficient attention to most ads. The development of the Internet is resulting in great growth of online advertising. This makes the competition for attention more intensive.

The intrusive tactics advertisers employ when competing for consumers. Attention can be annoying to the audiences (Sandage and Leckenby, 1980; Zhang, 2000; Rettie *et al*, 2001). Consequently, studies tend to show a generally negative public attitude toward advertising. (Zanot, 1981; Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1994). However, the above findings are not sufficient to deny the value of advertising as a vehicle of conveying information to the intended audiences. Ducoffe (1996) argues, 'The vast majority of advertising exposures reach individuals when they are not shopping for the product or service being advertised, so most messages are simply not relevant to consumer concerns at the time of exposure'. (p. 22). Therefore, the importance of an advertising strategy that caters to consumers' needs has emerged.

How the Internet should be differentiated from more traditional means of advertising is currently under study (Eighmey, 1997; Bezjian *et al* (1998); Chen and Wells, 2000). The Internet has become a proven medium for advertising and has become a viable alternative to traditional media, such as television and billboards. Of interest is the continuing and steady rise of online traffic well after the subsiding of enthusiasm associated with the dot-com craze. Although current figures fail to meet previous expectations, the online environment has established itself as a unique venue for commerce that has high growth potential. This places researchers and practitioners in the position of refining their understanding of online advertising in order to better utilize the strengths of the Internet environment.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Except for the work by Chittenden and Rettie (2003) and Dufrene *et al* (2005), there are very few studies on Internet users' attitudes toward commercial e-mails. In fact, little research looks at psychological variables in order to account for users' attitudes toward direct mail (Dufrene *et al*, 2005). Thus, it seems interesting to gain insight into the antecedents of consumer attitudes toward e-mails. Vriens *et al* (1998) were the first to dissect the process of responding to a direct mail offer. According to these authors, the content of the mailing influences the probability of taking notice of the offer made and the attractiveness of the offer increases the probability of responding. In continuation of this type of research, our study takes into account the consequences of attitudes toward an e-mail campaign in which we introduce variables, such as entertainment, informativeness, irritation and credibility.

Ducoffe (1996) applied his original framework (1995) to the web environment. Ducoffe (1996) confirmed previous results and found that attitudes toward Web advertising were directly dependent on advertising value and perceived levels of entertainment. Furthermore, advertising value was dependent on perceived levels of entertainment, informativeness and irritation. Ducoffe (1995, 1996) identifies entertainment, informativeness and irritation as factors contributing to consumers' evaluations of ad values and thus attitudes toward ads. Brackett and Carr (2001) further validate Ducoffe's model, and extend the model to include credibility and consumer demographics. Credibility is shown to be directly related to both advertising value and attitude toward advertising. Demographic variables, such as college major, age and gender are shown to affect only attitudes toward advertising. Fernandez (2000) intended to understand goal-oriented consumers. Responses toward directional advertising within the context of Yellow Pages. Informativeness is defined as relevant to a purchase situation. Findings suggest that advertising with more specific information that matches consumers' purchase situations is more likely to be processed and will result in a proactive response (for example, consumers calling the advertisers or marketers).

Attitude toward ad is defined as a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure situation (Mackenzie *et al*, 1986).

Needs and advertising value is to take the use and gratification perspective. This approach assumes audience members to be active gratification seekers who interact with the media rather than become passive recipients of media content (Williams, Phillips and Lum, 1997). Their media use is considered a conscious effort to fulfill either cognitive or affective needs, or psychological motives, such as information learning, entertainment, personal identity, Parasocial interaction, companionship and escape (Katz *et al*, 1974; Blumler, 1979; Rubin, 1981, 1983). The merit of this approach is in explaining users' continuing media exposure by answering the questions of why people choose to attend to particular media or types of content/messages, what satisfaction they expect and get, and to what uses they put the results of their attention to media (McGuire, 1974). It also helps explain varying viewing levels

and viewing gratifications (Levy and Windahl, 1984). Palmgreen and Rayburn (1985) has related it to the expectancy-value approach, which proposes that a particular kind of media content will have attributes, which derives a negative or positive valuation for the audience.

According to Baker and Lutz (1988), Ad may contain both affective reactions (ad-created feeling of happiness) and evaluations (an ad's credibility or informativeness). The advertising function for ad is not directed at specific products' attributes/benefits, and the objective is not to influence consumers' beliefs toward the brand *per se* (Shimp, 1981), but instead directed toward creating a favorable attitude toward the ad in order to leave consumers with a positive feeling after processing the ad (Shimp, 1981). There are two distinct dimensions of ad, one cognitive and the other emotional (Shimp, 1981). Emotionally, consumers form attitudes toward the ads by consciously processing exceptional elements (components found in ads, such as the endorser, presentation style, color lose and title/font presentation) (Shimp, 1981). Cognitively, consumers form attitudes resulting from the conscious processing of specific exceptional elements in the ad, such as the endorser, the copy, the presentation style and so on (Shimp, 1981). Simply stated, ad may result because the ad evokes and emotional response, such as a feeling of love, joy, nostalgia or sorrow, without any conscious processing of exceptional elements (Shimp, 1981). These two dimensions may have different impacts on consumers' attitudes.

Mitchell and Olson (1981) conducted an innovative study that posed the question 'are product attributes the only mediator of brand attitude?' They found that brand attitudes are not solely functions of the attribute beliefs that are formed about the brand, but also may be influenced by consumers' general liking for the ad itself or the visual stimulus presented in the ad.

## ATTITUDE TOWARD E-MAIL ADVERTISING

Attitude toward an ad is defined as 'a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner toward advertising in general' (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989, p. 54). In this context, it is important to note that attitude toward e-mail advertising pertains to consumers' attitude toward this advertising type in general and not to the exposure to one particular ad. In general, attitudes are 'mental states used by individuals to structure the way they perceive their environment and guide the way they respond to it' (Aaker, Kumar and Day, 1995; p. 254). A significant correlation between favorable attitudes toward advertising and respondents' rating of specific ads as being annoying, likeable, enjoyable and so on has been observed (Bauer and Greyser, 1968). Consequently, our research interest focuses on the antecedents of consumer attitudes toward e-mail advertising. In this paper, the attitude toward e-mail advertising is measured along various dimensions.

In contrast to attitudinal findings toward e-mail advertising (Mehta and Sivadas, 1995), the interviewed executives found Web advertising to be useful, valuable and important. Although these previous findings on attitudes toward e-mail and Web advertising shed light upon the Internet population's attitudes toward specific types of Internet advertising,



a larger and more representative sample as well as an examination of Internet advertising in general would be useful. Indeed, both Ducoffe (1996) and Mehta and Sivadas (1995) call for broader sampling frames. Understanding the factors that underlie Internet advertising attitudes would also be important for both theory development and applied goals. Ducoffe showed that entertainment, informativeness and irritation influenced attitudes toward Web advertising. The idea that affective (entertainment and irritation) and cognitive (informativeness) experiences with Web advertising contribute to people's judgments on Web advertising is consistent with other attitudinal models such as the tripartite theory of attitudes. Yet, the tripartite theory proposes third factor, behavioral experiences, which may contribute to people's attitudes (Katz and Scotland, 1959; Rosenberg and Hovland, 1960; see Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, for a theoretical and historical overview of this model). Hence, the utility of Internet advertising for making decisions (a behavioral experience) may also drive people's attitudes toward Internet advertising.

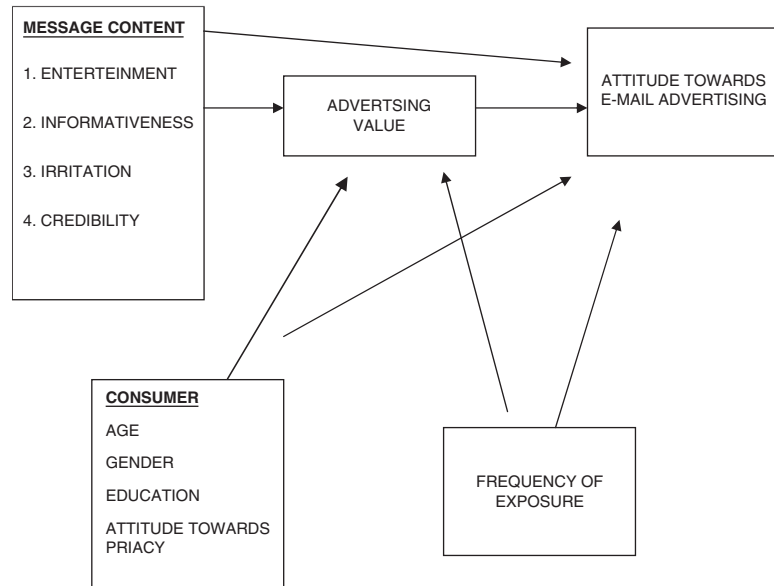
Some have assumed that the underlying structure of Internet advertising attitudes reflects the structure of attitudes toward advertising in general (Ducoffe, 1995; Eighmey, 1997). Yet, it is also plausible that the unique characteristics of the Internet might cause the underlying structure of attitudes toward Internet advertising and general advertising to differ. For instance, because it is used primarily as an information-providing medium (Schlosser and Kanfer, 1999), Internet advertising might elicit attitudes that are mostly comprised of cognitive factors – especially in comparison with attitudes toward advertising in general. Such variance has implications for how practitioners alter Internet ads (as opposed to traditional advertising) in order to improve Internet advertising attitudes. Thus, one goal of the present research is to determine which dimensions underlie (and to what degree they explain variance in) attitudes toward Internet advertising.

The following subsections present the components of the model as can be seen in Figure 1 beginning with the dependent variable 'attitude toward e-mail advertising'. An intensive literature review was used to establish content validity, that is, whether the items represent all situations we sought to measure.

## **ANTECEDENTS OF ATTITUDE TOWARD E-MAIL ADVERTISING**

### **Advertising value of e-mail marketing**

Advertising value is a measure for advertising effectiveness and 'may serve as an index of customer satisfaction with the *communication products* of organizations'. It is defined as 'a subjective evaluation of the relative worth or utility of advertising to consumers' (Ducoffe, 1995, p. 1). A value can be described as an enduring belief that a specific conduct or state is personally/psychologically or socially/culturally preferable to a converse mode of conduct or an opposite end-state of existence (Levi, 1990). Value potentially derives from the expectations about an offering



**Figure 1:** Antecedents of attitude toward e-mail advertising.

itself, from experiences accompanying the exchange, and from the residual of having engaged in behaviors necessary to achieve the exchange. Hence, value can reflect the worth of the element itself as well as the experience associated with the transaction (Houston and Gassenheimer, 1987). Values are the basis of actions, attitudes and judgments in advertising as well as in other aspects of social life (Beatty *et al*, 1985). Advertising value of web advertising has shown to have a significant influence on attitude toward web advertising (Ducoffe, 1996).

We thus conclude that a highly perceived value of advertising via e-mails also reflects positively on the consumers’ attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 1:** A high advertising value is positively correlated with a ‘positive’ attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF MESSAGE CONTENT

Advertising theorists have been describing the critical stimulus features of various advertising media and their content (Rodgers and Thorson, 2000).

#### Entertainment

Entertainment of advertising information is significantly related to advertising value of traditional advertising (Ducoffe, 1995). A high degree of pleasure and involvement during interaction with computer-based media leads to concurrent subjective perceptions of positive affect and mood of the consumer (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). People’s feeling of enjoyment associated with ads play the greatest role in accounting for their overall attitudes toward them (Shavitt *et al*, 1998). Entertainment



denotes its full ability to fulfill consumers' needs for 'escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment or emotional release' (McQuail, 1983).

Entertainment is also a crucial factor for e-mail marketing. It is essential that the message is concise and funny, and thus immediately captures consumers' attention (Katterbach, 2002). Entertainment services can increase customer loyalty and add value for the customer. As most people have a natural playfulness, providing games and prizes via e-mails yields high participation. Delivering games and prizes to the customer's via e-mails is successful way to attract and keep customers. Interactive games for example can also be played via Internet. These features can be used to involve customers more deeply and make them more familiar with the advertised service or product (Lehmkuhl, 2003). Therefore, we conclude that an entertaining advertising message is being perceived more positive by the recipient.

**Hypothesis 2a:** A high entertainment factor of an advertising message is positively correlated with 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 2b:** A high entertainment factor of an advertising message is positively correlated with a high advertising value.

### **Informativeness**

The quality of information placed on a company's web site shows a direct influence on the customers' perceptions of the company and the company's products. Accordingly, information delivered to them via e-mails also needs to show qualitative features, such as accuracy, timeliness and usefulness for the consumer (Siau and Shen, 2003). Apart from this, the user needs quick access to the information(s) he is looking for his/her current content of use. There is even the possibility that information may be delivered automatically to the consumer (Kaasinen, 2003).

In any event, consumers want the content of e-mail services to be tailored to their interest (Robins, 2003). On top of this, they are interested in getting messages that are relevant for them (Milne and Gordon, 1993). Information is thus considered a very valuable incentive in e-mail marketing because recipients react very positively to ad that transfers incentives (Varshney, 2003). Not surprisingly, informativeness of advertising information is therefore strongly related to the advertising value when it is transferred via traditional media vehicles (Ducoffe, 1995).

**Hypothesis 3a:** High informativeness of an advertising message is positively correlated with a 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 3b:** High informativeness of an advertising message is positively correlated with a high advertising value.

### **Irritation**

Indignity people feel when being addressed by ads has a very great influence on people's attitude toward advertising (Shavitt *et al.*, 1998). 'When advertising employs techniques that annoy, offend, insult or are overly manipulative, consumers are likely to perceive it as unwanted and irritating influence' (Ducoffe, 1996, p. 23). E-mail advertising may provide an array of information that confuses the recipient and can be distracting and overwhelming the consumer with information (Stewart and Pavlou, 2002). Consumers may feel confused about them and react negatively. Another point of possible annoyance is unwanted messages, commonly known as spam. Spam intrudes into consumers' privacy and stifle consumer acceptance. Therefore, we conclude that irritation caused by an incomprehensive or unwanted e-mail advertising message may reflect negatively on the perceived advertising value of e-mail marketing.

**Hypothesis 4a:** Irritation of an advertising message is negatively correlated with a 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 4b:** Irritation of an advertising message is negatively correlated with a high advertising value.

### **Credibility**

Advertising credibility turned out to be significantly relevant to advertising value of web advertising (Brackett and Carr, 2001). Mackenzie and Lutz (1989, p. 51) define advertising credibility as 'consumers' perception of the truthfulness and believability of advertising in general', whereas Pavlou and Stewart (2000) refer to it as 'predictability and fulfillment of implicit and explicit requirements of an agreement' (online document). Credibility of an ad is influenced by different factors, especially by the company's credibility and the bearer of the message (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2000; Lafferty *et al.*, 2002). But, it is also influenced by the advertising medium. It has been found out that a message on the Internet achieves less credibility than a printed message unless the message is communicated by strong brand. There is no empirical evidence on the overall credibility of messages transferred to e-mails and their influencing factors. Considering the findings cited above, we conclude that the credibility of an e-mail-advertising message has a positive influence on consumers' attitude toward advertising via e-mails and on the perceived advertising value of the consumer.

**Hypothesis 5a:** High credibility of an advertising message is positively correlated with 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 5b:** High credibility of an advertising message is positively correlated with a high advertising value.





## FREQUENCY OF EXPOSURE

The number of advertising messages received via e-mails is an important factor that influences the advertising value for the consumer (Haghirian and Dickinger, 2005). Ducoffe states that informativeness and entertainment of advertising information should decline with repetition because the information will be learned by the audience and thereby lessening its value (Ducoffe, 1995). As the quantity of promotional message rises, the attitude of the individual toward the promotional vehicle also worsens and leads to tedium from consumers' point of view (Ha, 1996); (Tellis, 1997). In our model, the impact of informativeness is already analyzed on behalf of the Hypothesis 2; therefore we investigate the relationship between the frequency of exposure and the dependent variables.

**Hypothesis 6a:** Frequency of exposure of an advertising message is negatively correlated with a 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 6b:** Frequency of exposure of an advertising message is negatively correlated with a high advertising value.

## CONSUMER

### Consumer attitude toward privacy

Privacy refers to the degree to which personal information is not known by others (Rust *et al.*, 2002). Customer privacy has always been a critical issue in marketing, but has assumed a greater significance in recent years with the rise of Internet-based commercial transactions (Rust *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, advertising via electronic communications media, such as telephone, fax or e-mail is prohibited by law in several Western European countries unless the consumer agrees explicitly to receive the message. Privacy issues are therefore very important when using electronic devices in addressing the consumers. This calls for application of permission marketing (Krishnamurthy, 2000; Tezinde *et al.*, 2002; Kent and Brandal, 2003). Before receiving advertising messages via e-mail, consumers need to empower a marketer to send promotional messages in certain interest categories to them. Typically, this is done by asking the consumer to fallout a survey indicating his or her interest when registering for a service. After that, the marketer can match advertising messages with the interests of the consumer (Krishnamurthy, 2001). These processes allow a new kind of about customers (Stewart and Pavlou, 2002).

**Hypothesis 7a:** Relevance of privacy is negatively correlated with a 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 7b:** Relevance of privacy is negatively correlated with a high advertising value.

## RELEVANT DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Besides the above-mentioned influencing factors that are mainly related to the message and its attributes itself as well as to related privacy issues, we also assume that demographic variables also can affect perceived advertising value and attitude toward advertising. Demographic characteristics also appear to affect attitudes toward advertising. That is, earlier research has shown that gender, age (Shavitt *et al.*, 1998), education and income (Alwitt and Prabhakar, 1992; Shavitt *et al.*, 1998) impact consumers' judgments of and beliefs about advertising.

For instance, according to a recent survey, better-educated, wealthier consumers hold less favorable attitudes toward advertising than less-educated, lower-income consumers do (Shavitt *et al.*, 1998). Based on demographics alone, this would suggest that the Internet population would judge advertising (in general and on the Internet) relatively unfavorably. Because of the lack of availability of enough of research findings regarding demographic variables, the following hypotheses have been set regarding age, gender and education.

### Age

**Hypothesis 8a:** Age of the consumer is negatively correlated with a 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 8b:** Age of the consumer is negatively correlated with a high advertising value.

### Gender

**Hypothesis 9a:** Attitudes toward advertising via e-mails differ between men and women.

**Hypothesis 9b:** Advertising value differs between men and women.

### Education

**Hypothesis 10a:** A high level of education is negatively correlated with a 'positive' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

**Hypothesis 10b:** A high level of education is negatively correlated with a high advertising value.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Jan 2009 over a 3-week period during which 800 e-mail account holders were interviewed. For this study, a pretested

**Table 1:** Properties of purified measures

<i>Measures</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>Alpha</i>
Attitude toward ads						
Attitude toward advertising via e-mails	8	1–5	3.88	1.17	1.37	0.85
Advertising value						
Perceived value of advertising via e-mails	3	1–5	3.7	1.3	1.69	0.77
Message content						
Entertainment	6	1–5	3.61	1.34	1.8	0.88
Informativeness	7	1–5	3.3	1.16	1.36	0.81
Irritation	6	1–5	2.5	1.23	1.53	0.81
Credibility	4	1–5	3.2	1.43	2.04	0.84
Message exposure						
Frequency of exposure (ads received per week)	1	—	1.4	0.50	0.25	—
Consumer						
Attitude toward privacy	2	1–5	1.53	0.99	0.99	0.65
Age of consumer	1	—	41.03	14.25	203	—

standardized questionnaire has been applied for the face-to-face interviews. The interviewed persons have been selected on the basis of a quota sample that is representative for the Indian population. These quotas are related to gender, age and education. The Indian market shows one of the highest penetration rates of Internet users in Asia and is therefore very suitable for study on e-mail advertising. Currently, India has over 39 million Internet users and is expected to emerge as one of the top online markets in Asia, along with China, Korea and Taiwan (SIRC, 2006).

Apart from the items investigating the age of the interviewee and the number of his/her advertising messages received via e-mail, all measures were assessed by a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 'strongly agree' (1) to 'strongly disagree' (5). These scales were reverse-coded where appropriate. Results are shown in Table 1.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results of hypotheses tests 2

Hypothesis 1 stated the perceived value of advertising via e-mails influences consumers' attitudes toward advertising via e-mails (Table 2). This hypothesis could be supported. It shows that the correlation between these variables is positive and highly significant. The results reflect Ducoffes results of 1996, which showed that the same relationship between value and attitude occurs in web advertising.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b as well as 3a and 3b predict that entertainment and informativeness are positively associated with advertising value when addressing consumers via e-mails. Both hypotheses were supported by data. The high correlation coefficients indicate that there is a strong relationship with advertising value as well as consumers' attitudes toward it. These results are confirmed by other studies (Ducoffe, 1996; Brackett

**Table 2:** Hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Perceived advertising value	Attitude toward e-mail advertising
Hypothesis 1: Perceived advertising value	—	0.626**
Hypotheses 2a and 2b: Entertainment	0.761**	0.606**
Hypotheses 3a and 3b: Informativeness	0.692**	0.654**
Hypothesis 4: Irritation	—	-0.13**
Hypotheses 5a and 5b: Credibility	0.660**	0.640**
Hypotheses 6a and Hypothesis 6b: Frequency	-0.099**	-0.62
Hypothesis 7a and 7b: Privacy	-0.138**	-0.116**
Hypotheses 8a and 8b: Age	-0.051	0.001
Hypotheses 9a and 9b: Gender	$P = 0.72$	$P = 0.84$
Hypothesis 10a and Hypothesis 10b: Education	0.074*	0.035

\*  $P < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $P < 0.01$ .

and Carr, 2001) as well, who come to the same results investigating web advertising.

Entertainment has turned out to increase advertising value in different empirical investigations. For example, Ferrazzi, Chen and Li (2003) found that entertaining games in combination with sales messages can encourage dialogs with customers and project product images. Online advertising that is enriched with entertaining elements achieves a more positive evaluation by recipients and leads to higher intent to revisit the homepage than web sites without entertainment features (Raney *et al*, 2003).

Informativeness of the advertising message turns out to be the second strong influencing factor on consumers' perceived advertising value, but shows the strongest influence on consumers' attitude. The advertising message is perceived as valuable as long as it provides information and thus creates some benefit for the consumer. Providing information via e-mails is obviously another dominant influencing factor on attitude. Stewart and Pavlou (2002) point out the importance of interactive media, such as the Internet, as an information broker that allows 'the customer to acquire real-time account information that was previously not available' (p. 384). They further conclude that this may be perceived as an added value the consumer may even be willing to pay for in some cases.

Hypothesis 4 predicts irritation to be negatively associated with virtual advertising value. Results indicate that irritation does negatively influence the value of e-mail advertising. A low correlation coefficient indicates that influence of irritation is not as strong as the influence of the variables entertainment and informativeness. Irritation is a phenomenon that is similar to reactance, that is, consumers tend to refuse ads if they have the feeling that the ad is too intrusive (Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg, 2003). In the context of web-based advertising reactance, consumers tend to avoid web sites that show interrupting ads like pop-ups. The perception of intrusiveness can, however, be decreased if the ads are relevant to the target group and if they provide value to the recipient (Edwards *et al*, 2002). Thus, perceived irritation can be influenced by an ad's message.

Hypotheses 5a and 5b indicate that a high credibility of the advertising message is positively associated with advertising value. These hypotheses



could also be confirmed. The correlation coefficient shows a strong relationship between the advertising value and perceived credibility. Credibility is based on the extent to which consumers believe that the marketer has the expertise and honesty to perform a transaction effectively and reliably (Ganesan, 1994). Building this trust is a complex process that involves technology and business practices, but it is crucial for growth and success of e-mail commerce (Siau and Shen, 2003). Experience with a channel partner increases trust (Ganesan, 1994). As communication with consumers via e-mails is a very young phenomenon, marketers are requested to build and breed trust. It is therefore advisable to build awareness via other media as well.

The results indicate that attitude toward advertising via e-mails strongly depends on message characteristics. The message characteristics need to be developed carefully. Marketers cannot only rely on the fact that an advertising message sent via e-mails will be read and remembered automatically. The e-mail may be an attention getter, but an attention getting device that is unrelated to the message will not attract consumers' interests in the message or the product (Ogilvy, 1963). This creates new challenges for marketers in the future. Cyriac Roeding, the European chair of the E-mail Marketing Association indicates that 'as bandwidth increases, advertisers will have to be innovative in their campaigns to overcome the limitations of handsets with small screens' (DeZoysa, 2002).

Hypothesis 6a states that frequency of exposure is negatively associated with perceived advertising value. This hypothesis was supported by data, whereas hypothesis 6b referring to a negative influence on attitude toward advertising via e-mails was not. A high frequency of exposure seems to decrease the value of advertising. This result is also supported by scientific literature (Ducoffe, 1995), which assumes that consumers who are confronted with ads repeatedly are less informed since they are already familiar with the content. Apparently, a high frequency of exposure does not reflect negatively on consumers' attitude toward advertising via e-mails.

Hypotheses 7a and 7b suggest that customers who consider privacy very valuable are less likely to attribute a high value and a positive attitude toward advertising via e-mails. These hypotheses were also supported. This result is not surprising since numerous studies have indicated similar results for other permission marketing tools, for example, e-mails. According to Ackerman *et al* (2001), a trade-off between perceived privacy intrusion and user benefit is also possible. They assume that consumers accept a certain degree of privacy loss if benefit is considered being sufficient and satisfying (Ackerman *et al*, 2001). But still, privacy concerns cannot be dismissed.

The sharing of user information will be a major issue of discussion in the near future (Varshney, 2003). Unauthorized resale of personal information, intrusion and theft of customer databases, and unauthorized use of lost or stolen e-mails present threats to the successful usage of e-mail advertising (Rao and Minakakis, 2003).

Hypotheses 8 to 10 dealt with relevant demographic variables of the consumer. Hypotheses 8a and 8b state that the age of the advertising

recipient reflects on the perceived advertising value and on their attitude toward advertising via e-mails. Surprisingly, these hypotheses could not be supported. Age does not influence the advertising recipients' perception of e-mail marketing significantly. These results are supported by Brackett and Carr's (2001) findings who showed in their study investigating web ads that age did not influence the attitude either (Brackett and Carr, 2001). Hypotheses 9a and 9b indicated that gender influences both of the dependent variables. Neither of the hypotheses could be supported. There were no significant differences found in neither perceived value nor in attitude toward advertising via e-mails. The results are similar to those of Brackett and Carr (2001) who also report gender to be relevant for consumers' attitude toward the advertising type, but not for their perceived value.

Hypotheses 10a and 10b proposed that a higher education level is positively associated with the dependent variables. Only hypothesis 10a could be supported. Interviewees with higher education did not show a more positive attitude toward advertising via e-mails, but did perceive it as more valuable. These results are also contradicted by Brackett and Carr's study Brackett and Carr (2001) who report different results for web advertising, namely no influence on advertising value but on attitude toward web advertising.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presents antecedents of advertising value integrating e-mail marketing into the marketing activities of a company. Specifically, the effectiveness of e-mail advertising is investigated. The focus of the study is influencing factors on consumers' perceived advertising value of e-mail marketing. The results show that the consumers' attitude toward advertising via e-mails and advertising value are strongly related to the content and the frequency of the advertising message sent via e-mails. Most surprisingly, consumers' attributes (apart from the educational level) do not play such a dominant role regarding advertising value and attitude toward e-mail advertising. As a consequence, it is mainly the advertising message itself that influences its value and consumers' attitude. Hence, advertising companies are well advised to design their e-mail advertising messages carefully and also plan their e-mail advertising campaigns and target groups thoroughly.

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