"Don't fall for the advertisement trap!: Impulsive online shopping experiences of college students."

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Abstract: Shopping has become more convenient and possible without having to make time to go to a physical store with the emergence and prevalence of technology, the Internet, and Social Networking Sites (SNS). Not only this, but advertisement of products online and online shopping has become a significant way through which people are exposed to, find, and shop products. In order to study how digital advertisements effect impulsive shopping behaviors in college students, an online survey was distributed to several college students at the University of Washington who shop online. Results from the research show that advertisements on the Internet and Social Networking Sites not only positively influence shopping behaviors of college students, but also positively impact specifically unplanned and unnecessary shopping behaviors.

Keywords: College Students, Advertising, Online Shopping Behavior, Impulsive Shopping

Introduction

With the emergence and prevalence of the Internet and Social Networking Sites (SNS), shopping has become more convenient and possible without having to make time to go to a physical store. Not only this, but advertisement of products online and online shopping has become a significant way through which people are exposed to, find, and shop products. Digital advertisements are ever more customized and specifically targeted to each individual customer's interests. Online shopping behaviors of college students and specifically impulsive shopping behaviors of college students have been studied. Relationship between digital advertisements and shopping behaviors have also been studied. However, digital advertisements' impact on impulsive shopping behaviors on college students has not been studied yet, which is what our research will address. We wanted to find out whether consumption of advertisements and products on the Internet and SNS lead to more impulsive shopping behaviors. We created an online survey to distribute to college students to collect data on their experiences with digital advertisements, online shopping, and impulsive buying. Although from a small sample with the pilot test, key findings were that digital advertisements on the Web and SNS do lead to more impulsive shopping behaviors

among college students. This research will contribute and help college students become more aware of effects that advertisements have on people's impulsive buying behaviors and how they can shop wiser by reducing unplanned and unnecessary purchases.

Literature Review

Even before the emergence of the Internet and SNS, shopping behaviors of consumers have been of a great interest to many researchers. Physical space, display and placement of items, and more all contribute to the shopping environment that consumers experience which furthermore are associated with the responses of consumers which can be measured by their actual buying behaviors. And with the emergence of the Internet and SNS, online shops have been rising in parallel and people's online shopping behaviors are of a great interest to researchers as well.

There are many different factors that could guide consumers' behaviors when they are shopping: they can be internal and personal qualities of the consumer such as emotional response and individual differences, or external factors such as shopping environment at offline shops, personal finance, credit attitude, money attitude, and how they have been taught to use money by their family, or hedonic/recreational shopping, value consciousness, and impulsiveness (Coward & Ronald, 2007; Lai, 2010; Lin & Chuan, 2013). Typically, these factors that could be observed in consumers do not differ much from offline to online shopping; however, how these factors can be measured and the specific factors that significantly influence consumers' shopping behaviors online versus offline do differ. Kim (2012) chose to observe different categories of shoppers both offline and online by dividing into four categories: non-web shoppers, web-store visitors, internet browsers, and internet buyers. With these four different categories of shoppers, Kim (2012) studied factors of attitudes, intention, and purchasing. Furthermore, they found that consumers of the four different categories all had different attitudes, intention, and purchasing when shopping

(Kim, 2012). Therefore, we, in our research, chose to specifically focus only on online shoppers as their attitudes and intentions of shopping differ from those of offline shoppers and we found it best to solely focus on only one group of shoppers. Also within the category of online shoppers, we chose to focus on impulsive shopping behaviors of consumers. Many of the current researches also observe impulsive shopping habits both offline and online, provide possible factors that contribute to impulsiveness, and even provide solutions to decrease impulsiveness. In Lin and Chuan's (2013) research, they were able to conclude that emotional responses, individual differences, and information quality impact how consumers buy impulsively, which are internal factors of the individuals as human beings.

As mentioned before, the prevalence of the Internet and SNS has not only changed the way in which people shop, but also changed the way in which consumers are exposed to, find, and purchase products. Not only so, but how different companies reach out to their possible customers have also been changing. Advertisements are now accessible at the hands of the consumers and are even distributed by consumers themselves. SNS offer interactive methods of advertising and retargeting is a strategy that allows for customized advertisements for each consumer. These new possible ways of advertising through Facebook was found to enhance brand image and equity, which furthermore was found to positively influence consumers' intention to purchase products (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015). Fatima and Lodhi (2015) similarly found that advertisements did affect consumers' awareness and perception which ultimately affected consumer buying behaviors.

Technology, the Web, and SNS provide novel ways in which they have impact on consumers' shopping behaviors. And despite all previous researches that contribute to knowledge in these areas separately, not much current researches have studied all of these factors

at work together: how external factors, more specifically advertisements on the Internet and across SNS, could attribute to impulsive shopping behaviors among college students, which is why we have chosen to study and contribute to this intellectual discussion.

Method Description

Instrument/Procedure description

To answer the research question, we want to collect data from current college students. The most accessible way for us to reach out to as many students as we can within low budget and the given time frame was to send out a survey through an online platform such as Facebook. This method will help us receive broad responses and get both qualitative and quantitative data: quantitative data will be used so that we will be able to understand participants' backgrounds about their shopping behaviors and impulsive shopping behaviors and qualitative data will be used to get feedback about how something or someone can prevent themselves from impulsive shopping.

The reason we chose to use survey to collect data was developed based on the literature reviews. In section 1, we collect participants' email addresses to know whether they are currently students. In section 2, based on terms: Non-Web Shopper, Web-Store Visitors, Internet Browser, and Internet Buyer from "Developing an Empirical Model of College Students' Online Shopping Behavior" (Kim, 2012), we ask respondents to self-categorize their online-shopping identification. It would help us to know the current participant's usage of online shopping. However, in case a participant does not consider himself a non-web shopper, we included an open-ended question: "If you are a non-web shopper, why do you choose not to shop online?" to find why he does not shop online and potential factors that can help people prevent themselves from impulsive online shopping.

Questions in Section 3 (Convenience), 4 (Financial and Tactile Security), 5 (Enjoyment), and 6 (Willingness) measure the respondents' thoughts and feelings about Internet shopping. These

questions will help us understand current participants' shopping behaviors and learn the factors that encourage or discourage them from online shopping. For questions that are not included in section 6 are measured on a Likert six-point scale (0 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). Although designed to be a Likert-scale, we used Likert five-point to give a neutral opinion.

Section 7 (Affection) measures how different types of advertisements (e.g Facebook, TV, and Youtube) affect consumers to buy using Likert five-point scale. Section 8 (Online Advertisements) measures opinions of whether online advertisements led participants to buy some product and caused them to buy a product impulsively. This question uses simple three categorical answers (Yes, No, Maybe). The last section measures whether participants experienced impulsive shopping. Based on their experiences, we ask two open-ended question to understand what factors made them shop impulsively and get feedback on what factors can prevent them from impulsive shopping. These three questions will help us understand how advertisement is affecting them and thoughts from the participants about impulsive shopping.

Pilot testing

For the pilot test, we sent out the survey to six participants who are college students and whom we know personally. In order to ask them to complete the survey, we simply sent them the link to our survey and most of them replied that they took about 10 minutes to finish this survey. Overall, the test itself went well. No one was confused about the process of this survey, and the understood what they were supposed to do.

Results

The survey serves two goals for our research question. The first goal is to make sure that the participants are appropriate for the study by making sure that they have experience shopping online. Since we are focusing on learning college students' online shopping habit, we would not

want to include students who have no experience of shopping online. Also, gathering data about how often participants' shop online would also help categorize and further help clean the data in the analysis part. The second goal is to learn about college students' online shopping experience and how online advertisements could affect their shopping habit. We had 6 college students pilot test the survey in order to make sure our survey questions were clear and the length was appropriate. The main feedbacks that we received from our participants were on the types of questions, clarification on some terms, addition of some extra questions, and the length of the survey.

Two of our participants talked about the types of questions we provide for the survey. We had a few open-ended questions, couple multiple choice questions, and mostly scale questions. One participants pointed out that she prefers to have more multiple choice questions because she found it difficult to decide how likely she agrees with the specific statement, and she thinks that she might change her mind in different circumstances. So she would like to have more multiple choice questions. In addition, another participant really liked the scale problems to have 6 point, which has no middle point. In addition, participant wanted us to change the "Have you experienced impulsive shopping" to be a scale problem like how often do you experience impulsive shopping.

While we are doing the pilot study, participants had questions and even misunderstood a problem because of the word choice. For instance, one of our participants was confused about the scale problem "I want to see and touch products before I buy them", and asked how to see and touch the products since it's for online shopping. She found the description to be a bit strange when she was imagining herself online shopping. In addition, for the willingness section, one of the participants didn't understand the problem of "I would be more likely to shop online if the pictures of the items were clearer". She was confused by the word clearer. There are also couple confusions

about the word "fitting model" and suggestions were given to change it to be "Picture of someone wearing". In addition, one of our participants wanted us to change the word "affects" to be "influences" because it was unclear. She also pointed out the word "Youtube" is not clear enough because she was not sure if it meant Youtube advertisements or the content created by people which influence viewers to buy. And one of the participants mentioned that "fast delivery" has different meanings to different people, so it would help the participants if that word was more specified with times or days.

Lastly, most of our participants mentioned that the length of our original survey was very long and certain questions repetitive. For instance, the question of "I prefer to compare products by seeing and touching before I buy" and "I want to see and touch products before I buy them" is repetitive and one could be deleted. Some of our participants seemed to get a little impatient towards the end of our survey by choosing the answer really fast.

Even though we had a couple confusions and misunderstanding for our pilot study, we still received some insightful results for our research questions. All of our participants were Internet buyers, and they have all experienced impulsive shopping. Four participants somewhat agreed to strongly agreed that Facebook or Instagram advertisements caused them to make purchases, and think that shopping on the Internet is one of their favorite leisure activities. However, five people chose somewhat disagree to disagree on how TV advertisements could affect them to buy. Some of these data helped us to learn that online advertisement do have some effect on college students into impulsive shopping.

Discussion

Based on our pilot testing feedbacks, we removed the self-identification about online-shopping from the participants since we only want to get feedback from college students who shop online.

To make our survey cleaner and concise, instead of asking them many categorical questions that we put in section 3, 4, 5, and 6, and we tried to ask numerical value to understand participants' shopping behaviors. So, we removed all questions in these sections and added the question: "How often do you shop online in a month?".

For section 8 and 9, we combined them and did not change the questions about how social media and TV caused them to buy, because these questions support us to understand how current media are affecting them from impulsive online shopping. However, we removed the question about how the fitting model is affecting them from buying since this question was more specific for online apparel shopping rather than broad online shopping. Also, we removed an open-ended question that asks about what made participants do impulsive shopping. Based on the feedback, we decided that this question was unnecessary, and it overlaps with other existing questions. However, we added one more question in our survey: "Have you ever bought an item that you wanted, but didn't necessarily need, because you saw an advertisement of it show up on a social networking site?" in order to get a better understanding of participants experiences with impulsive shopping. We also deleted many questions that seemed repetitive and made the survey into only two sections: basic demographic section and online impulsive shopping experience section.

In this paper, we covered how often college students shop online in a month and how they experienced impulsive online shopping. This research would help others to understand how much college students are affected by online advertisements to do impulsive shopping. Based on this research, future researchers can come up with a potential solution to prevent college students' impulsive shopping habit.

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Appendices

Appendix A- https://goo.gl/forms/UmqOT8y6soxi5YHU2

Appendix B- https://goo.gl/forms/aQzuLciENzx73SqI3