

Digital Ad Engagement: Perceived Interactivity as a Driver of Advertising Effectiveness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consumers increasingly demand a newfound control over their media experiences because the technology and media industries are obliging them. Digital formats now allow readers to interact with and navigate through magazine content. On one hand, publishers are able to retain the design fidelity of a print magazine and add the interactivity dimension that captivates reader attention and creates a more engaging experience. On the other hand, advertisers can enhance the engagement of their advertisements because of this digital solution. However, many questions that have not been addressed remain whether ads featured in a digital magazine can engage readers more and elicit greater message effects. Thus, this study examines the following research questions:

1. Can interactive ads in a digital magazine generate stronger engagement, message involvement, attitude, and overall brand awareness than static ads in a print magazine?
2. Can higher interactivity initiated by an interactive ad generate stronger brand recall, engagement, message involvement, attitude, and purchase intention than a static ad?
3. What are the relations among interactivity, engagement, message involvement, attitude, and purchase intention?

This study employed a post-test only experimental design that manipulated two ad conditions. The two conditions exposed either static or interactive ads featured in the May 2010 issue of WIRED Magazine by print format (static condition) and iPad (interactive condition) to participants. Participants were invited to complete this study in a conference room and randomly assigned to either condition. Participants in either condition were asked to read several sections of the magazine including seven advertisements and review a specific advertisement. After reviewing, participants filled out online surveys that asked participants about their overall evaluation of the advertisements and the specific advertisement.

Results

Interactive ads tend to generate stronger engagement, message involvement, and attitude toward the advertisements than static ads in general. The results based on testing the specific advertisement also show that the interactive ad tends to generate stronger engagement, message involvement, attitude toward the ad, and purchase intention than the static advertisement. Participants rated these variables using a 9-point scale (9 being the strongest); the results are shown below.

	Overall ads		The specific ad	
	Static ads	Interactive ads	Static ad	Interactive ad
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Perceived interactivity	6.03	7.38	3.96	6.81
Perceived engagement	5.38	6.67	4.16	6.67
Message involvement	5.36	6.36	5.07	6.45
Attitude toward the ad	5.50	6.63	3.75	6.36
Purchase intention	–	–	2.50	3.98

In examining the relations among all the variables, engagement transfers the interactivity effect into stronger message involvement. Consequently, attitude toward the ad transfers the message involvement effect into stronger purchase intention.

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Introduction

The use of interactive media in advertising may be one way for advertisers to break through advertising clutter in magazines. Interactivity may be the key ingredient to successful implementation of advertising as information about a product is provided by mediated means involving interaction between consumers and advertisers (Leckenby and Li, 2000). In essence, interactive ads in digital magazines may include expandable, rollover, transitional, and over-the-page and games (Vasquez, 2008). Interactive ads in digital magazines enable motion, sound, animation and sophisticated technology that exploit readers' sensory traits (Shaw, 2004). The objective of this present study aims at examining the following research questions:

1. Can interactive ads in a digital magazine generate stronger engagement, message involvement, attitude, and overall brand awareness than static ads in a print magazine?
2. Can higher interactivity initiated by an interactive ad generate stronger brand recall, engagement, message involvement, attitude, and purchase intention than a static ad?
3. What are the relations among interactivity, engagement, message involvement, attitude, and purchase intention?

Study Design

This study employed a post-test only experimental design that manipulated two conditions. The two conditions exposed either static or interactive ads featured in the May 2010 issue of WIRED Magazine by print format (static condition) and iPad (interactive condition) to participants. The first part of this study used a realistic exposure condition since there was no coaching about paying attention to any specific magazine content or ads. The second part of this study used a forced exposure condition as participants were asked to review a specific advertisement. There was also no coaching about how participants should review the advertisement.

Participants

Generation Y consumers represent an important segment of the consumer market because they are early adopters of digital technologies and extensive users of the Internet and digital media (Kumar and Lim, 2008). Thus, the study population included people who were familiar and not familiar with using iPad and between 18-32 years old. The study population was also representative of WIRED Magazine readers based on demographics. This study used a convenience sample. Sixty-five participants were invited to complete the study. There were 32 participants in the static ad condition and 33 participants in the interactive ad condition.

The study sample included males and females with various ethnic backgrounds. There were 29 male participants (45%) and 36 female participants (55%) with an average age of 22 years. Among the participants, 72% of them made less than \$25,000, whereas 14% of them made more than \$50,000. In terms of education, 76% of them had at least some college education. In terms of ethnicity, 45% of them were Caucasian, whereas 26% of them were Hispanic. While 14% of them were African American, 5% of them were Asian.

What did Participants Review?

At the beginning of the first part of this study, participants in the interactive ad condition were given the instructions on browsing the magazine by the Adobe Content Viewer. They read the sections from 'The Ultimate Blockbuster' to the cover story, 'How Pixar Works.' In the static ad condition, participants read the same sections of the magazine by print format. In either condition, there were five articles and seven ads that were the same.

In the second part of this study, participants in both conditions were asked to review a specific ad from Qwest. In the interactive ad condition, the ad enabled higher interactivity as the ad invited participants to play a game to solve business problem. Participants in this condition were able to interact with the ad by links. Participants in the static ad condition reviewed the same ad in the print issue of the magazine.

What was Asked of Participants?

This study measured several dependent variables during each part of this study. This study used a 9-point scale for all measures. In the first part of this study, brand awareness, perceived interactivity, perceived engagement, message involvement, and attitude toward the ads in general were measured.

In the second part of this study, brand recall, perceived interactivity, perceived engagement, message involvement, attitude toward the ad and purchase intention were measured. The results based on statistical analyses confirmed that all measures were reliable. As a result, the values of the constructs were computed as the mean of the ratings of the items associated with each construct.

This study measured several controlling factors for data analysis. Gender, age, education, income and ethnicity were asked, whereas frequency of reading magazines was measured.

Results

Part I: Realistic Exposure (browsing the magazine)

1. The participants in the interactive ad condition had stronger engagement, message involvement and attitude than the participants in the static ad condition.
2. The participants in the interactive ad condition also perceived stronger interactivity than the participants in the static ad condition.
3. Higher ad interactivity could generate higher brand awareness.

	Overall ads	
	Static ads	Interactive ads
	Mean	Mean
Perceived interactivity	6.03	7.38
Perceived engagement	5.38	6.67
Message involvement	5.36	6.36
Attitude toward the ad	5.50	6.63
Purchase intention	-	-

Part II: Forced Exposure (reviewing a specific advertisement)

1. The participants in the interactive ad condition had stronger engagement, message involvement, attitude, and purchase intention than the participants in the static ad condition.
2. The participants in the interactive ad condition perceived stronger interactivity than the participants in the static ad condition.
3. The participants in the interactive ad condition were unlikely to recall the brand more than the participants in the static ad condition.

	The specific ad	
	Static ad	Interactive ad
	Mean	Mean
Perceived interactivity	3.96	6.81
Perceived engagement	4.16	6.67
Message involvement	5.07	6.45
Attitude toward the ad	3.75	6.36
Purchase intention	2.50	3.98

Mediation Effects

1. Engagement transferred the interactivity effect into stronger message involvement since a perfect mediation effect between perceived interactivity and engagement on message involvement existed.
2. There was also a perfect mediation effect between message involvement and attitude toward the ad on purchase intention as attitude toward an ad transferred the message involvement effect into stronger purchase intention.
3. As depicted in Figure 1, two important mediators, engagement and attitude toward the ad emerged from the examined relations among the dependent variables.

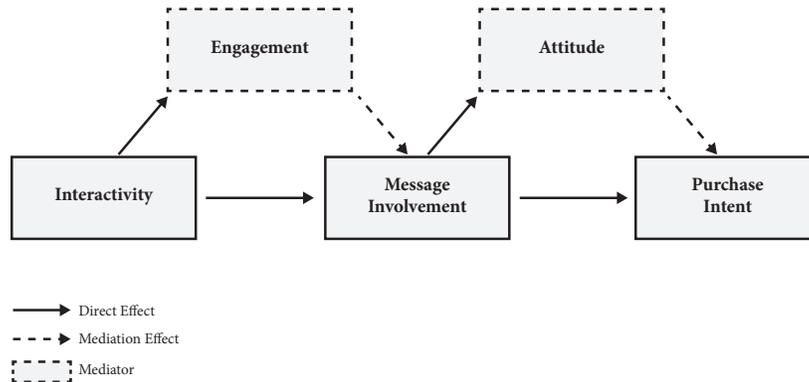


Figure 1 - Mediation Effects

Implications

Advertisers should be encouraged by the results since the digital magazine format appears to be a very promising advertising vehicle based on the interactive nature. Since leveraging interactivity in a digital magazine can enhance advertising engagement and message involvement, it can also facilitate consumer interest in the product featured in an advertisement (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

Interactivity best deals with the extent to which consumers can participate in a mediated environment in real time as consumers seek product information (Rosenkransa, 2010). Advertisers can effectively utilize digital marketing solutions to reach their target audiences. In particular, the digital magazine format has the capacity to create a specific set of contacts that involve the media plan, managed in an integrated way over time to enhance the media experience dictated by interactive advertising messages (Wang, 2006; 2010)

Going Forward

The essence of the digital magazine format is to enhance engagement based on interactivity. Engagement enhanced by interactivity should be collaborated with ad exposure, attentiveness and retention (Ephron, 2005). Therefore, advertisers should strategize to enhance engagement by integrating interactivity and creativity. This integration should have the following characteristics to maximize user experience in digital magazine advertising: 1) Interface; 2) Interactivity; 3) Intelligent computing (Vatanparast and Butt, 2010). A suitable user interface such as the Adobe Content Viewer may maximize user experience and enable effective communication between advertisers and readers. As media interactivity and intelligence technologies will play the complementary enablers role, interactivity will become a necessary element of a successful digital magazine advertising promotion. On a related note, image recognition opt-in, speech input and consolidation of messages and advertising offers may also be some of the areas in which interactivity can help increase the effectiveness of digital magazine advertising (Wang, 2010).

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