Chapter 49
Advertisements on the Internet:
Ethics, Involvement, and Product Type

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to provide some insights into advertisements on the Iranian websites. Firstly, in publisher side, is the ethic a matter of fact in accepting Internet advertisements to publish? Second, to provide a preliminary insight into the advertising of pleasant and objectionable products, which one is more? Third, what kind of the involvement (rational or emotional) used more to publish Internet advertisements? In pursuing these goals, the content of 649 ads through 205 websites and 751 ads through 138 weblogs was analyzed. Content analysis was used to verify the data. The authors found that (1) all 649 analyzed ads in Iranian websites are belonged to ethical ads and no unethical advertisement found at websites, (2) the majority of published advertisements are belonged to "high involvement product with rational appeal," (3) the "objectionable product ads" at Iranian weblogs (%68) was more "pleasant product ads" (%32). This study by analyzing 1400 advertisements gives managers some insights and solutions regarding to advertising on the Iranian Internet domains.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to *Itproportal.com* (2013), the number of currently registered domains has reached 252 million. It is a matter of fact while the number of Internet users worldwide reached 2 billion that shows a growth equal to 566.4 percent from 2000 until 2012. The 1 millions of these users are connecting from the Asia. Middle East with seventeen countries has nearly 90 million users

in which, Iran with 42 billion users ranked at the second country, Bahrain with 900 million ranked at the first place, and Iraq with 2.2 million placed at the third position (Internetworldstats.com, 2013).

As a new active in adopting Internet advertising (Hanafizadeh *et al.,* 2012), Iran by developing websites with high efficiency, user-friendly contents, and appropriate e-business models could acquire high traffic and launch many relevant channels of advertising. Despite advances in

online channels available to Internet advertisers, and a shift in spending towards these interactive venues, measuring the impact of Iranian online promotional efforts continues to be a challenge. On the other hand, the Internet as a personalized medium, has still some technically and theoretically difficulties to understand. Doing business through this medium, has a persuasive potential determined by the interactive possibilities of the web sites (Voorveld et al., 2010), a high level of trust of consumers in Web sites (Nielsen, 2009), the opportunity they provide to consumers at all stages in the sales cycle (Voorveld et al., 2010), and make consumer hands free to select and go through his/her options (Hanafizadeh & Behboudi, 2012a). It pushes consumer into condition that switches to his/her another mode of behavior –"Serious vs. Playful"- (Rogers and Thorson, 2000), and does not act in accordance with his/her goal-oriented (serious) mode. In this mode, and by considering nobody is there (a private medium), he/she is expected to react to clues and hits that has never ever had a click. In comparison to offline media, this is a natural behavior, because consumer may has some hesitations or feels shame to do those works when he/she realize that other people are watching him/her.

On the other hand, the marketers, specifically marketers of objectionable product who are aware of this invisible behavior, are expected to redirect their advertisements to the Internet. In Iran, it can be true, because of both governmental regulations in which advertisements of objectionable products is prohibited in mass media, and Islamic culture that do not permit promotion of unconventional images and texts through the society. Notwithstanding Islamic principles and rules, the Internet as a highly personalized medium is expected to turn into the main channel of advertising for these types of products. This idea can be seen true, if we consider two following reasons. First, the Internet provides private channel of advertising which occurs at the individual level not social level (Dahlen, 2004). Second, keeps Islamic so-ciety away from social concerns and hesitations regarding to objectionable product advertisements.

Therefore, it is vital to learn more about the ethics and the objectionable product advertisements in Iranian websites. Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate the current advertisements situation in Iranian websites and weblogs from an ethics standpoint, as well as to provide some insights into the nature of current Internet advertisements of Iranian websites and weblogs. Three key questions and one secondary question are designed to pursue above-mentioned goals as following:

1. Is ethics a matter of fact in accepting online advertisements to publish in Iranian website?
2. Do the number of objectionable products advertisements are more than the pleasant ones?
3. What kinds of appeals are used to publish online advertisements (rational or emotional?).

The secondary question:

-   Which types of advertising (Product/service, PSA, Issue, Political, and Corporate) can be seen more in Iranian websites?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there has been a significant amount of researches into Internet advertising, however, there is still no consensus about its definition and dimensions (e.g., Schlosser et al., 1999; Ha, 2008). Recently, some researchers attempted to update the definition of advertising. For example, after a series of interchanges with advertising experts, Richards and Curran (2002, p.74) developed the following definition: "Advertising is a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action now or in the future." Consequently, the purpose of advertising can be summarized as

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