

# The Role of Gender in Syrian Consumers' Beliefs about and Attitudes towards Online Advertising

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## Abstract

Gender is considered one of the top segmentation factors that the targeting of the advertising message is based on. Consumers' beliefs about and attitudes towards advertising is considered as an indicator to advertising effectiveness. Previous research has suggested that gender influences both beliefs about and attitudes towards online advertising. These influences, however, need to be investigated within the Syrian context, as relationships among those variable could vary over different cultures. This research aims at investigating the differences between males and females in their beliefs about and attitudes towards online advertising. That is, a survey resulted in (432) valid questionnaires, had been conducted in Damascus in Syria. The findings indicate that males have more positive beliefs about online advertising. Those beliefs are "Information", "Entertainment", "The Social Role", "Falsity", and "Value Corruption". Moreover, males are found to hold more positive attitudes towards online advertising than females do.

**Keywords:** Consumer Behavior, Gender, Online Advertising, Beliefs about Online Advertising, Attitudes towards Online Advertising.

## 1. Introduction

Advertising is considered one of the most important promotional tools adopted by companies and individuals in their marketing communications with the targeted consumers, and this happens through different advertising mediums that internet is considered one of them.

Managing advertising effectively will lead to achieving the goals behind using it. One of the tools to enhance advertising effectiveness is to target consumers according to segmentation variables that let advertisers to reach the right segment of consumers that the advertising message is sent to. Gender is considered one of the demographic variables that used in segmentation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012), so it is not rear when some researchers have started using the term of *gendered ads* as a refer to the segmentation of advertising on the basis of gender (e.g., Alreck, Settle, & Belch, 1982). This research aims at investigating the differences between males and females regarding beliefs about and attitudes towards online advertising in Damascus.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Gender

Consumers' differences according to gender have always been an interest to marketers (Cho & Jialin, 2008), so having known the differences between males and females regarding their beliefs about and attitudes towards advertising, will allow marketers to spend money on advertising in more targeted way (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2005). That is, many studies that have investigated the differences between males and females, have revealed the existence of significant differences in beliefs about and attitudes towards advertising that were explained by gender (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2005). Those results are consistent with what Darley & Smith (1995) have reached, that males differ from females in processing the promotional information delivered by advertising.

The importance of gender as a market segmentation variable lies on the fact that gender is one of the few variables that meet the criteria required for an easily successful application of market segmentation. Those criteria are (Darley & Smith, 1995):

- a. Identifiability;
- b. Accessibility: especially for the internet, that facilitates approaching gender classes so easily.
- c. Profitability: gender classes are big enough to make profits.

With a variable meeting the above mentioned criteria, gender is considered a main variable that can be used in marketing analysis for many variables including advertising effectiveness which represented with consumers' attitudes towards advertising (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2005).

Along the way to defining gender, and though the existence of masculinity and femininity levels, it does not necessarily make sense to evaluate gender as a continuous variable, because research in this field have indicated that results would be the same whether gender is operationalized as a binary construct or as a continuous construct (Alreck, Settle, & Belch, 1982; Garst & Galen V., 1997). Consequently, I am going to define gender as a binary construct which entails that gender will have two values: "male" and "female". I am also going to use the term of "gender" instead of "sex", because gender is viewed as both biological and sociological process (Babin & James S., 1998). Consequently, advertisers should recognize and understand the gendered patterns regarding beliefs about and attitudes towards advertising, so advertisers can use those gendered patterns to produce "gender-specific" advertisements (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2005). Cramphorn (2011) has found that advertising directed to just males or just females is more effective than advertising directed to both males and females. Though some authors (e.g. Thayer & Ray, 2006) have found no differences between males and females regarding few factors (e.g. time spent on online social networks), differences are, however, present between males and females regarding many factors within the internet context. Examples of these differences:

- a) Females use the internet less than males do (Ono & Zavodny, 2003);
- b) Goals behind using the internet are different between males and females. Males use the internet for purposes related to entertainment and leisure. While females are more interested in using the internet for interpersonal communication and educational assistance (Weiser, 2000);
- c) Males and females are different in making purchase decisions (Yang & Wu, 2007);
- d) Females indicate a strong dislike for not being able to savor a physically fulfilling shopping experience online (Hui & Wan, 2007);
- e) Males have more positive beliefs about and attitudes towards online advertising (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2005).

All the above mentioned examples support the importance of differences between males and females in the marketing process, and consequently in the targeting process within the industry of online advertising.

## **2.2. Beliefs About Online Advertising**

In general, beliefs are typically conceptualized as estimates of the likelihood that the knowledge one has acquired about a referent is correct or, alternatively, that an event or state of affairs has or will occur (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Consequently, I can define beliefs about online advertising as all knowledge that perceived to be correct for online advertising.

The importance of beliefs about advertising lies in the previous research findings that beliefs are predictors of attitudes towards advertising (Wang & Sun, 2010; Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002; Ramaprasad, 2001; Yang C.-C. , 2000; Kak, 1995). The role of gender in beliefs about advertising has been investigated in several studies. Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner (1998) have found that males report more favourable beliefs about advertising in general, and this finding is valid for online advertising as Wolin & Korgaonkar (2005) have indicated. The most common dimensions of beliefs about advertising are as follows:

- a) Information: as advertising provides consumers with product-related information (Ju-Pak, 1999).
- b) Entertainment: online advertising could offer the availability of interactivity and multimedia, so it could be perceived by consumers as a source of pleasure and entertainment (Watson, Akselsen, & Pitt, 1998).
- c) Social role: as a form of mass media communication, online advertising can be used for promoting specific lifestyles through the advertised brands and products (Pollay & Mittal, 1993).
- d) Irritation: online advertising could be annoying. For example consumers might perceive online advertising as an insult to their intelligence, or even abusive. Also online advertising could be confusing to consumers when they are exposed to large amounts of advertising messages (Ducoffe, 1996).
- e) Materialism: when consumption is viewed as a way for people to achieve satisfaction (Pollay & Mittal, 1993).
- f) Falsity: like other forms of advertising, online advertising sometimes do not tell the truth in their claims about products advertised, therefore falls into the trap of giving deceptive claims (Nadilo, 1998).
- g) Values corruption: online advertising has the ability to shape internet users' values (Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002), therefore online advertising has the chance to corrupt those values.

## **2.3. Attitudes Towards Online Advertising**

Attitudes toward advertising in general are defined as 'a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to advertising in general' (Lutz, 1985, p. 53). So I can define attitudes towards online advertising as a general predisposition to like or dislike advertising messages delivered online.

The importance of attitudes towards advertising comes from their role in predicting consumers' responses to online advertising when they are exposed to it (Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002; Ying & Shaojing, 2010).

The role of gender in attitudes towards advertising has been investigated several times. Mahmoud (2010) has found that gender has no significant influence on attitudes towards both TV and Billboard advertising. However, It was found that males have more favorable attitudes towards advertising in general (Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998), and advertising delivered online (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2005) in comparison with females.

### 3. Hypotheses

Previous research have indicated that gender has an influence on consumers' beliefs about and attitudes towards online advertising, in other words males have more positive beliefs and attitudes than females do. This influence of gender, however, has not been investigated in the Syrian context. Therefore, this research tests the following hypotheses for Syrian consumers:

**H1:** Male consumers will have more positive beliefs about online advertising than females do.

**H2:** Male consumers will have more favorable attitudes towards online advertising than females do.

### 4. Research Method

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data for the present study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section of this questionnaire contained the questions of demographic data (i.e. gender, education, age, and income). The second section held the items measuring the dimensions of beliefs about online advertising questions (see table 1), whereas section three contained the items measuring attitudes towards online advertising (see table 1). Section two and three were designed on five-point Likert scale form, with responses ranged from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree".

Convenience sampling was used in selecting the subjects of the present study. This method of sampling is found to be used commonly in similar studies (e.g., Pollay & Mittal, 1993; Yoon, Muehling, & Cho, 1996; Yang C.-C., 2000). So a 500 distributed questionnaires to Syrian interent users in Damascus city had yielded in 432 valid questionnaires, with a 86.4% response rate.

**Table 1:** The Measures of the Present Study

Dimension	Source
Information	(Ducoffe, 1996; Brackett & Carr Jr., 2001)
Entertainment	(Wang & Sun, 2010)
Social Role	(Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002)
Materialism	(Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002)
Falsity	(Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002; Burnett, 2000)
Irritation	(Ducoffe, 1996)
Values Corruption	(Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002)
Attitudes	(Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 2002)

Since the measures of this study were developed in cultures that could differ from the Syrian context. So the present study held a validation process for the measures of beliefs and attitudes through the following steps:

- Double translation (English  $\leftrightarrow$  Arabic);
- Factorial validity (see table 2);
- Reliability (see table 3).

Table 2 shows the results of the factorial analysis. Items measuring beliefs and attitudes load on 9 factors, with loading values higher than .3 and eigenvalues greater than 1 (Mahmoud, 2010).

Table 3 shows the results of reliability test using the statistic of cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency for the measures used in this study, since they are multi-item scales. We notice that all cronbach's alpha values are acceptable, since they are higher than .6 (Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 2:** Factor Analysis

item	information	entertainment	social role	materialism	falsity	irritation	values corruption	attitude
good source of product information	0.579							

**Table 2:** Factor Analysis - continued

supplies relevant product information provides useful information for new products helps people make wise purchase decisions entertaining pleasing I learn what is in fashion and what I should buy for keeping a good social image tell me what people like myself are buying and using helps me know which products will or will not reflect the sort of person I am make you buy things you don't really need increases dissatisfaction among consumers by showing products which some consumers can't afford is making us a materialistic society – interested in buying and owning things makes people buy unaffordable products just to show off makes people live in a world of fantasy I don't trust online advertised products	0.795	0.707	0.499	0.87 0.877	0.798	0.662	0.494	0.767	0.569	0.648	0.692	0.448	0.487		
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**Table 2:** Factor Analysis - continued

reassures me that I am not doing the right thing in using online advertised products helps the consumer buy the best brand for the price I don't believe it is never objective Is annoying is irritating is confusing Insults people's intelligence takes undue advantage of children leads children to make unreasonable purchase demands on their parents There is too much sex overall, I like online advertising To me, online advertising is essential thing To me, online advertising is important thing					0.36	0.607	0.697	0.75	0.808 0.659 0.793 0.672	0.752	0.805	0.572	0.562	0.793	0.569	
Eigenvalue	2.138	2.131	1.813	2.817	2.337	3.136	2.157	2.163								
% of Variance	7.372	7.349	6.252	9.715	8.06	10.814	7.437	7.458								
Cumulative %	50.856	58.205	64.457	20.529	28.5888	10.814	43.484	36.046								

**Table 3:** Reliability Test:

Dimension	Number of items	Alpha
Information	4	.661
Entertainment	2	.866
Social Role	3	.660
Materialism	5	.731
Falsity	5	.663
Irritation	4	.803
Values Corruption	3	.671
Attitudes	3	.735

## 5. Data Description

As table 4 exhibits, the sample consisted of slightly more men (56.9%) than women (43.1%). According to the educational level, the majority of the respondents were a bachelor degree holder (43.1%), with age ranged between 20 to less than 30 (66%), and a monthly income of less than 10,000 SYP.

**Table 4:** Data Description

Variable	Values	Frequency	Frequency %
<b>Gender</b>	Male	246	56.9
	Female	186	43.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Education</b>	High School	39	9
	Some College	132	30.6
	Bachelor	186	43.1
	Postgraduate	75	17.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>	Less than 20 Years	96	22.2
	20- 30 Years	285	66
	31 Years and above	51	11.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Income</b>	Less than 10,000 SYP	240	55.6
	10,000- 30,000 SYP	135	31.3
	More than 30,000 SYP	57	13.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>100</b>

## 6. Hypotheses Testing

**6.1. H1:** we can notice from table 5 that males reports significantly more positive feelings than females do regarding most of the beliefs about online advertising, i.e. “Information” ( $t = 5.11$ ), “Entertainment” ( $t = 2.733$ ), “Social Role” ( $t = 2.23$ ), “Falsity” (-2.857), and “Values Corruption” (-6.202). So we concluded that H1 was partially supported. This result is consistent with Wolin, Korgaonkar, & Lund (2002) and Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner (1998).

**6.2. H2:** Table 5 exhibits that males have more favorable attitudes towards online advertising than females do ( $t = 3.772$ ). Therefore, H2 was supported. This result is consistent with Wolin & Korgaonkar (2005), Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner (1998), and Marinov, Petrovici, & Marinova (2008).

**Table 5:** Results of Hypotheses Testing

Variable	Mean		T-test	P-value
	Males	Females		
Information	4.2	>	5.110**	0.000**
Entertainment	3.32	>	2.733**	0.007**
social role	3.39	>	2.230*	0.026*
Irritation	2.11		-0.524	0.600
materialism	2.91		0.674	0.501
Falsity	2.64	<	-2.857**	0.004**
values corruption	2.93	<	-6.202**	0.000**
Attitude	3.57	>	3.772**	0.000**

\*\* significant at 1%

\* significant at 5%

## 7. Discussion

This study found that Syrian males held more positive beliefs and attitudes regarding online advertising. These results represent a great support to the need of applying the technique of gendered ads, though Mahmoud (2010) found that gender didn't play any role in Syrian consumers' attitudes towards two types of traditional advertising, i.e. TV commercials and billboard ads. So it is apparent that results regarding the role of gender in beliefs about and attitudes towards advertising will differ between online media and the other traditional advertising media. This variance could be regarded to the advertising medium type as some research have found that consumers' attitudes towards advertising differ according to the type of the advertising medium that delivers the advertising message (e.g., Mahmoud, 2010). So there is a need for further investigations about the moderating role of advertising medium type to the relationships among gender, beliefs about, and attitudes towards advertising.

Online advertising is a good promotional tool to reach internet-using male consumers in Syria. For females there is a much need to use more feminine features in designing online ads targeting Syrian internet-using female consumers in a way that could enhance their beliefs about and attitudes towards online advertising.

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