

# Corporate Advertising Web Sites as Integrated Relationship Marketing Media

Fotini Patsioura, Maro Vlachopoulou, Eleonora-Ioulia Malama

Department of Applied Informatics, University of Macedonia, 156 Egnatia Str., 540 06 Thessaloniki, Greece

[fotpat@uom.gr](mailto:fotpat@uom.gr), [mavla@uom.gr](mailto:mavla@uom.gr), [malama@uom.gr](mailto:malama@uom.gr)

## Abstract

Over the last decade corporate advertising web sites have evolved from simple advertising content carriers to advanced interactive multimedia applications that incorporate multiple promotional, advertising and communication strategies. This study focuses on their role as integrated relationship marketing mediums. Specifically, communication, feedback and customer service are examined as key relationship marketing policies of this unique advertising format. Data from 160 undergraduate and graduate students within the department of Applied Informatics were used to analyse their perceptions and requirements towards the three factors in question. Correspondence Factorial Analysis (AFC) was used to examine their contribution to “attitude toward the site” and identify differences of consumers’ behaviour across informational and transformational website advertising.

**Keywords:** Corporate Advertising, relationship marketing, effectiveness, consumer behaviour

## 1. Introduction

According to Hwang, McMillan and Lee (2003) Corporate Advertising Web Sites remain the key format of Internet advertising and the main interactive medium of an organisation to inform and promote products and services, build brand images and finally influence in order to enhance purchase intention. However, so far academic

research has been focused on their performance as advertising content carriers. Little attention was given on their ability to effectively support communication interactions between organisations and consumers, provide valuable feedback and enhance customer service policies (Barker & Gronne, 1996; Novak & Hoffman, 1996; Peppers & Rogers, 1999; Wang, Head & Archer, 2000; Pavlou & Stewart, 2000; Azzone, Bianchi, & Noci, 2000). This research aims at understanding consumers’ behaviour within the environment of Corporate Advertising Web Sites towards three key relationship marketing factors communication, feedback and customer service. Do consumers use Corporate Advertising Web Sites to communicate with the organisation? Are they willing to “communicate” their complaints and opinions using online communication tools? Do they require pre-sale and after-sale customer service? Finally, this study focuses on identifying the contribution of the factors in question towards the intermediate advertising effect “attitude toward the site”.

## 2. Relationship Marketing Factors in question

Each factor was analysed to features and functions, which define their concept and describe their application in order to better understand consumers’ behaviour during their visit and determine their way of evaluating the site’s performance toward each criterion (table 1). This enabled the capture of the impact of the main quality dimensions of each criterion based on the consumers’ requirements and intentions.

Relationship Marketing Policy		
actor	Definition	Related Features & Functions
Communication	the capability to operate as a communication channel between consumers and the company	Communication Information
		Communication Intention
		Communication Motives
		Communication Methods
Feedback	the capability to collect information regarding the consumers’ needs, preferences, attitudes and behaviour within the site	Participation to Marketing Research
		Visitors’ Complaining Intention
		Marketing Research Methods
Customer Support	the capability to provide services to facilitate visit and purchase	Pre-sale services
		After-Sale services

Table 1. Definitions and Analysis of Factors

The validity and importance of each factor were also examined in relation to their contribution to creating or influencing intermediate effects of advertising (figure 2). Intermediate effects refer to

reactions and actions that represent a positive or negative response to the advertising web site such as: “attitude toward the site” (Chen & Wells, 1999, Bruner & Kumar, 2000) which was measured in terms of “revisiting intention”, “word of mouth intention” and “overall opinion of the site”. It should be mentioned that so far, effectiveness measurements for Corporate Advertising Web Sites

were based on the analysis of variables and factors strictly related to advertising objectives (Ducoffe, 1996, Chen & Wells, 1999) or factors closely related to the medium’s characteristics such as interactivity and navigation (Novak & Hoffman, 1997; Ghose & Dou, 1998; Coyle & Thorson, 2001, Liu & Shrum, 2002, Macias, 2003).

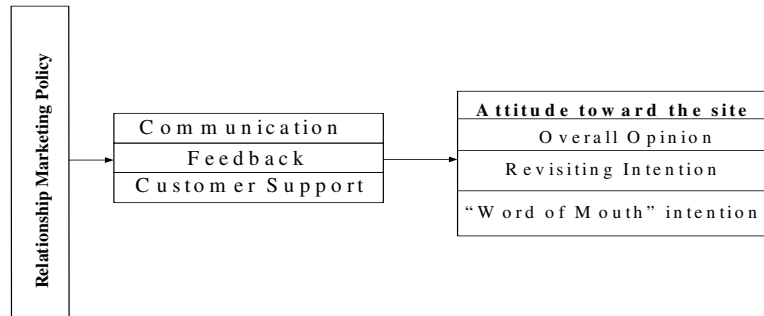


Figure1. Relationship Marketing Factors towards “attitude towards the site”

### 3. Methodology

Data were collected through a questionnaire-based survey. Real domain web sites were chosen as advertising stimulus and representatives of the two main categories of web site advertising (informational and transformational advertising)

(table2). This was necessary in order to address issues like product involvement impact and hedonic and utilitarian dimensions towards consumers’ behaviour and advertising effectiveness based on prior research (Rossiter & Bellman, 1999; Rodgers, 2002; Zhou & Bao, 2002; Hwang et al, 2003 ).

	Site A	Site B
<b>Company</b>	Greek	Multinational
<b>Site Type</b>	Brand Web Site	Corporate Web Site
<b>Products</b>	Chocolate products	High Technology products
<b>Product type</b>	low-involvement	high-involvement
<b>Communication / Message Strategy</b>	transformational	informational
<b>Main Objective</b>	to “Entertain”	to “Inform” and provide service

Table 2. Advertising Stimulus

A total of 160 undergraduate and graduate students within the department of Applied Informatics of University of Macedonia participated in the survey. A student sample was selected opposed to general population based on their predictive and analytical validity of consumer behaviour analysis in traditional and Internet marketing and advertising research under specific circumstances (Hampton, 1979; Yavas, 1994; Rosner, 1996; Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999; Danaher & Mullarkey, 2003).

Subjects were between the ages of 21-30 and matched the average profile of Greek Internet User & Shoppers (National Statistic Service of Greece, 2005). All participants stated to be familiar with both brands of the selected web sites.

The survey took place at a university’s computer laboratory. Participants were divided in groups of four and were randomly assigned to browse for at least five minutes one of the two web sites (80 participants review site A and 80 participants

review site B). After their brief exposure to the specific site, participants were asked to fill in the same questionnaire containing 37 questions. The participants were supervised in order to ensure that each subject completed the survey at the indicated time and way, and handed in a qualified questionnaire.

#### 4. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive Statistics and Correspondence Factorial Analysis (AFC) (Papadimitiou, Hadjikonstantinou, Drymbetas, & Karagiannis, 1998, Papadimitriou & Koutsoupas, 2000; Markos, Menexes & Papadimitiou, 2006; Papadimitriou, 2007) were used for the questionnaires' statistical analysis. The AFC was run using CHIC software.

In order to define the importance of contribution for each factor, COR and CTR (Relative and Absolute Contribution) indices were used that reproduced factorial axes and first factorial planes (formed by the two first factorial axes). The AFC was applied to selected Burt Tables (Generalised Contingency Tables) in order to identify differences across subjects' perceptions and intentions that were exposed to either informational or transformational advertising stimulus. Also, the method enabled the examination and identification of the three factors' relation and contribution towards to the depended variable of "attitude toward the site".

#### 5. Results

##### *Descriptive Statistics*

The outcomes revealed significant dimensions of the participants' behaviour based on their actions, activities and preferences during their visit. General assumptions were drawn in relation to the three factors in question by analysing results independently to the website's category (upon the whole sample of 160 subjects).

Regarding "communication":

- 25% of the subjects stated as most valuable and important information within the website, communication information. Practically, this could indicate that in consumers' mind a corporate advertising website is considered to be a way to directly communicate with the company
- 27% of the respondents "communicated" with the company during their visit using communication practices and tools that required

limited time and effort (such as answering by "clicking" on multiple choice predefined questions or filling in a form). This is an important percentage taking into account a main limitation of this research, which is the lack of specific visiting motives by the subjects

- 92% of the subjects reported that would use the website to communicate with the company in the future
- 74% of the subjects stated that would select interactive communication channels such as email, real-time communication, online forms over traditional ones (free-toll telephone) to communicate with the company

With regards to "feedback"

- 64% of the respondents stated that would fill in a questionnaire provided on the website as part of a marketing research conduction by the company
- also 37% reported that participated in the past in similar research methods when visiting e-commerce and advertising web sites
- 92% of the subjects stated that the website should have a "complaining form" and 89% stated that they would fill in a complaining form to communicate problems and dissatisfaction.

Finally, regarding "customer service":

- 72% of the subjects stated the importance of problem solving policies apart from communication policies
- and 67% of the respondents supported the idea of pre-sale services (such as problem solving and gathering information) being more important than after sale services such as return police

##### *AFC Results*

The application of the AFC method provided a graphical representation of the main correspondences and differences of the variables examined across the two groups of subjects. Specifically, it is evident from the results of AFC application that the participants' requirements and beliefs should not be studied independently to the website's communication and advertising message strategy, which is mainly formed by the product category. Figure 2 and 3 provide some of the results produced by the application of the AFC method for the factors in question and illustrates their graphical representation (first factorial planes).

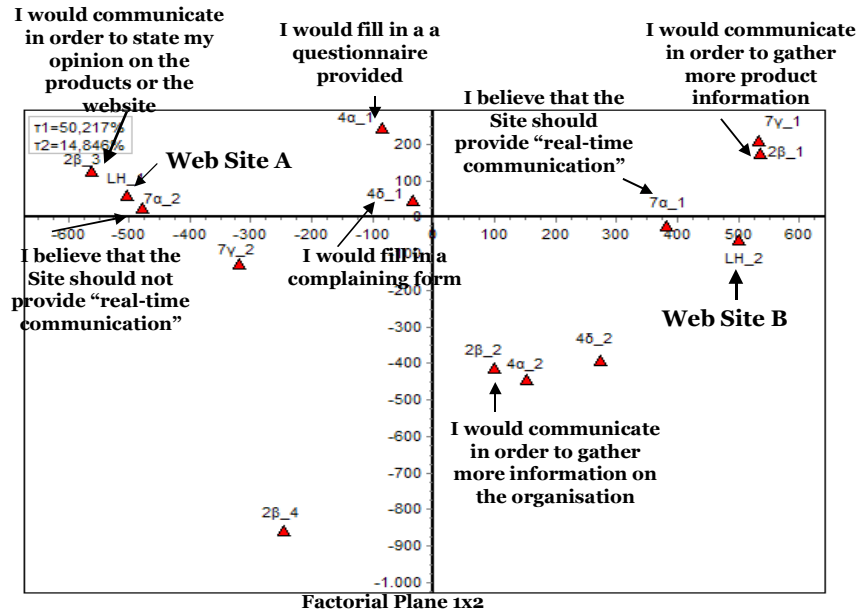


Figure 2. AFC Application on “communication” and “feedback” factors

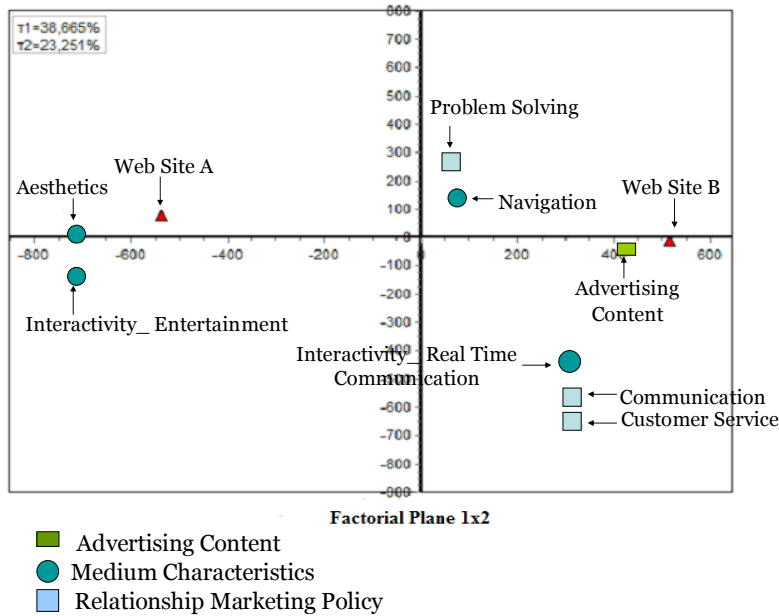


Figure 3 AFC Application on “Overall Opinion” (Intermediate Advertising Effect)

Specifically, the outcomes revealed significant differences regarding consumers’ requirements and intentions:

- communication motives differ across subjects that visited “Brand Image” Web Site (A) and those visited “Informative” Web Site (B).

Specifically, subjects’ motives that were exposed to Web Site A are related to feedback dimensions (“communicate” their opinion about the products and the Web Site), while subjects’ exposed to Web Site B stated as main communication motives the gathering of product information

- pre-sale and after-sale customer service are more important for subjects exposed to Web Site B.

- other qualitative factors incorporated in the effectiveness measures such as advertising content, navigation, aesthetics and interactivity contributed more “attitude towards the site”

Regarding the contribution of the factors in question to the depended variable:

- marketing relationship factors contribute differently with the reference of the two types of Advertising Web Sites

- communication and feedback contribute the least to “attitude toward the site” because they are considered to be implicit processes by the participants

- customer service dimensions (such as problem solving policies, return policies, real time communication) contribute the most “to attitude toward the site” for the informative web site

In the aggregate, the results provide insight on the participants; behaviour and identify how it is differentiated across the two main website advertising types.

## 6. Discussion

This study supports the idea that Corporate Advertising Web Sites are established not only to communicate advertising content but also to meet specific relationship marketing objectives. Communication, feedback and customer service Three key relationship were examined and analysed as key relationship marketing factors, based on consumers’ behaviour. The data provided insights into the subjects’ perceptions and requirements regarding specific features and dimensions applied in corporate advertising web sites to support relationship marketing policies.

Another contribution concerns the identification of their relation to “attitude toward the site” effectiveness indicator. Primary research results advocate that relationship marketing factors are both contributors to intermediate advertising effects under specific circumstances. In addition, the factors in question differ in contribution across different types of Corporate Advertising Web Sites. The results involve important implications for the practitioners as the study demonstrated consumers’ use and intended use regarding communication and feedback features and policies incorporated by Corporate Advertising Web Sites. It is evident that subjects feel comfortable to communicate their opinion and complaints to the company through the Web Site using specific methods. In addition, their requirements regarding pre-sale and after-sale customer service supports the role of Corporate Advertising Web Sites as integrated marketing tools.

## References

- Azzone, G., Bianchi, R. & Noci, G., (2000). The Company’s Web Site: Different Configurations, evolutionary path. *Management Decision*, vol.38, no.7, pp.470-479
- Barker, C. & Groenne, P., (1996), “Advertising on the World Wide Web”, *Master Thesis, Copenhagen Business School*, Ανάκτηση 20/06/2001 από <http://www.samkurser.dk/advertising/research.htm>
- Bruner, G. & Kumar, A. (2000). Web Commercials and Advertising Hierarchy-of-Effects. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 40 (2), 35-42
- Chen, Q. & Wells, D. (1999). Attitude toward the Site. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 39 (5), 27-37
- Coyle, J. & Thorson, E. (2001). The Effects of Progressive Levels of Interactivity and Vividness in Web Marketing Web Sites. *Journal of Advertising*, 30 (3), 65-77
- Danaher, P., & Mullarkey, G. (2003). Factors affecting online Advertising Recall: A Study of Students. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 41(4), 252-267
- Ducoffe, R. (1996). Advertising Value and Advertising on the Web. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36(5), 21-35
- Ghose, S. & Dou, W. (1998). Interactive Functions and Their Impact on The Appeal of Internet Presence Sites. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 38 (2), 29-43
- Hampton, G. (1979). Students as Subjects in International Behavioural Studies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 10 (2), 94-96
- Hoffman, D.L. & Novak, T.P. (1996). Marketing in Hypermedia Computer-Mediated Environments: Conceptual Foundations. *Journal of Marketing*, 60, 50-68
- Hwang, J., McMillan, S. & Lee, G. (2003). Corporate Web Sites as Advertising: An Analysis of Function, Audience, and Message Strategy. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 3(2), 12-32
- Korgaonkar, P. & Wolin, L. (1999). A Multivariate Analysis of Web Usage. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 39(2), 53-68
- Liu, Y. & Shrum, L. (2002). What is Interactivity and is it Always Such a Good Thing? Implications of Definition, Person, and Situation for the Influence of Interactivity on Advertising Effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 31 (4), 53-64
- Macias, W. (2003). A Beginning Look at the Effects of Interactivity, Product Involvement and Web Experience on Comprehension: Brand Web Sites as Interactive Advertising.

- Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 25 (2), 31-44.
- Markos, A., Menexes, G. & Papadimitiou, I. (2006). Η παραγοντική Ανάλυση μέσω του Λογισμικού C.H.I.C Analysis [The Correspondence Factorial Analysis (AFC) with the Utilization of C.H.I.C Analysis Software]. *Paper Presented in 19th Panhellenic Conference in Statistics of Greek Statistical Institute*. Kastoria, Greece 2006 (in Greek)
- Novak, T. & Hoffman, D. (1997). New Metrics for New Media: Toward the Development of Web Measurement Standards. *World Wide Web Journal*, 2 (1), 213-246
- National Statistical Service of Greece (2005). National Survey Regarding the Use of Information Technology and Communication. *General Secretariat of National Statistical Service of Greece*. Retrieved May 2006 from <http://www.statistics.gr/>
- Papadimitriou, I. (2007). *Data Analysis: Factorial Correspondence Analysis, Hierarchical Cluster Analysis and other Methods*. Topothito. Athens, 1<sup>st</sup> edition.
- Papadimitriou, I., Hadjikonstantinou, G., Drymbetas, E. and Karagiannis, S. (1998). La convergence Européenne. L' application de la methode de l' A.F.C. sur l' evolution des principales variables monetaires et réelles des pays-membres de l' union Européene. *In Proc. 47eme Journées sur l' Aide Multicritere à la Décision*. Thessaloniki, 1998
- Papadimitriou, I. & Koutsoupas, N. (2000). Correspondence Factorial Analysis (AFC) Software. *In the proceedings of the 13rd Panhellenic Conference in Statistics of Greek Statistical Institute* (pp.417-426). Florina, Greece
- Pavlou, P. & Stewart, D. (2000). Measuring the Effects & Effectiveness of Interactive Advertising: A Research Agenda. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 1(1), 5-25
- Peppers, D., Rogers, M. (1999), *The One to One Manager: Real-World Lessons in Customer Relationship Management*. Doubleday, New York, NY
- Rodgers, S. (2002). The Interactive Advertising Model Tested: The Role of Internet Motives in Ad Processing. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 2 (2), 27-43. Available at: [jiard.org/vo2/no2/rogers](http://jiard.org/vo2/no2/rogers)
- Rosner, H., (1996), "Trapping Students in the Web". *Brandweek*, vol.37 (16), 50-52
- Rossiter, J. & Bellman, S. (1999). A Proposed Model for Explaining and Measuring Web Ad Effectiveness. *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 21(1), 13-31
- Yavas, U. (1994). Research Note: Students as Subjects in Advertising and Marketing Research. *International Marketing Review*, 11(4), 35-43
- Wang, F., Head, M. & Archer, N., (2000). A Relationship-Building Model for Web retail Marketplace. *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications & Policy*, 10(5), 374-384
- Zhou, Z. & Bao, Y. (2002). Users' Attitudes toward Web Advertising: Effects of Internet Motivation and Internet Ability. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 29, 71-78

Copyright © 2008 by the International Business Information Management Association (IBIMA). All rights reserved. Authors retain copyright for their manuscripts and provide this journal with a publication permission agreement as a part of IBIMA copyright agreement. IBIMA may not necessarily agree with the content of the manuscript. The content and proofreading of this manuscript as well as any errors are the sole responsibility of its author(s). No part or all of this work should be copied or reproduced in digital, hard, or any other format for commercial use without written permission. To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: [admin@ibima.org](mailto:admin@ibima.org).