

SEARCH ENGINE ADVERTISING: TO CLICK OR NOT TO CLICK ON SPONSORED ADS

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Abstract: : The search on the web is an important area of research which, among other aspects, approaches the improvement of pages with results on a search engine (search engine result pages - SERPs), improving both the user's interface and the results' relevance. In order to design the search engine algorithm, it is important to understand how people interact with SERP. To obtain such knowledge, the researchers used techniques such as direct observation, analyses and surveys applied on the users in order to make an analysis of how the user decides to click or not to click on a link.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Online advertising gains more and more ground and attracts more and more budgets for TV, OOH, radio or print. Online advertising is the only environment for which a development is expected in 2014 and especially a very big one, of up to 25%. Since Facebook and Google buy up more and more of the online advertising market, it remains to see how much will manage to attract the publishers and the autochthonous online overheads.

Advertising involves economic and social effects, covering two main functions - the supply of information and persuasion. The companies see more and more Internet as an important environment wherewith advertising messages may be oriented to consumers (Aziz and Ariffin, 2010).

According to Gauzente and Roy (2012) and Jansen (2010), for 70% of the Web surfers, the use of a search engine is a daily routine.

2. SEARCH ENGINE ADVERTISING

Nowadays, there are different forms of Internet advertising, some of them more subtle, other more obvious (Becker-Olsen, 2003). Many types of websites, such as news

sites, blogs, socialisation sites, have sponsored content (Tutaj and Van Reijmersdal, 2012).

The search on the web is an important area of research which, among other aspects, approaches the improvement of pages with results on a search engine (search engine result pages - SERPs), improving both the user's interface and the results' relevance. In order to design the search engine algorithm, it is important to understand how people interact with SERP. To obtain such knowledge, the researchers used techniques such as direct observation, analyses and surveys applied on the users in order to make an analysis of how the user decides to click or not to click on a link (Gonzales-Caro and Marcos, 2011).

While the previous researches proved the existence of a correlation between the user's intention to search and his searching behaviour (Gonzales-Caro and Marcos, 2011), the majority of these works concentrated only on keywords. The advantage of keywords is that they are easy to collect and access by means of search engines. The disadvantage is that in order to fully understand the user's intention and his satisfaction, more data is necessary than the one which is available in the interrogation journals. Such data may be possible to be obtained from other sources, such as the devices for monitoring the area where the regard stops on the computer's screen. (Gonzales-Caro and Marcos, 2011).

Modern web search engines usually present at least two categories of lists in the result page of the search engine. A set contains non-sponsored links (e.g. organic), links that the search engine determines using its own algorithm. Another set contains the sponsored links which appear because a company, an organisation or an individual made an offer on the keyword which was used by the surfer (Jansen and Resnick, 2005).

The search engines separate the two categories of results, the sponsored links appear the first ones on the list with the search results (generally the first 3-4) and another list with the sponsored results appear in the right side, with a little bit shorter description (Agarwal et al. 2012).

In case of the two big search engines, Yahoo! and Google, the companies may place a sponsored link by means of Yahoo! Search Marketing and Google Adwords services.

Sponsored search is the predominant business model for search engines and for more Web online commerce sites. The majority of main search engines adopted the sponsored search almost universally and some specific sites began to use the sponsored search model. Google and Yahoo!, each one with its own independent process, which serve these sponsored links to the Web surfers. The three main search engines, Google, Yahoo and AOL reported that the sponsored ads represented 99%, 84% and 12% of the annual incomes. (Jansen and Resnick, 2005)

Search engines such as Yahoo! and Google significantly modified online commerce. The unique characteristics of Web for online commerce and online retail are fundamentally transformed according to how the consumers and suppliers interact (Jansen et al. 2007).

Sponsored search is a valid model of long term business, which eventually depends on if Web surfers perceive the sponsored links as relevant. If the users of Web search engines consider the sponsored content as being relevant for their need, they may click on the sponsored links (e.g. generating incomes for the search engine or

specific sites). If these links are not perceived as relevant, the surfers will ignore them. There are milliards of dollars at stake in the industry of sponsored search and which depends on the relevance of sponsored ads. In the foreseeable future, the sponsored search may certainly be the main source of revenues for Web search engines. (Jansen and Resnick, 2005). Surely, for the foreseeable future, paid search seems to be the predominant source of income for Web search engines, even if some critics called in question the sponsored links as a long term business model (Rooney, 2004).

3. ATTITUDE TOWARDS INTERNET ADVERTISING

Attitude is an important concept in marketing research and information systems. Fishbein defines attitude as "a learned predisposition of human beings". Based on this predisposition, "an individual responds to an object (or idea) or a number of things (or opinions)". Kotler said that "attitude is a favourable or unfavourable assessment of a person, and action tendencies toward an object or idea" (Tsang et al, 2004).

Most studies on attitude towards Internet advertising discussed about advertising largely and generally, with no distinction between the different Internet advertising formats (Schlosser et al, 1999). The findings of researchers until now were merged, but it seems that there is a tendency of the Internet users' attitude towards Internet advertising, in general, which is more and more negative (Yuan, 2012, Schlosser et. al 1999).

Given the fact that researchers studied this subject for a very long time, there are in specialised literature several articles approaching the consumers' attitude towards advertising in general and towards Internet advertising (Tsang et al. 2004).

Attitude is also an important construct for information systems' research. For example, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) predicting the use of information systems is formed of five major constructs: perceived utility, perceived ease of use, attitude, intention and usage. The relationships between attitude, intention and behaviour were studied and confirmed in numerous studies. The attitudes of consumers towards advertising, in general, were a long while found as being negative (Tsang et al. 2004).

The debut of Internet as a new communication and promotion environment motivated a lot of researchers to concentrate on the Internet. Because of the interactive nature of Internet, some studies report that respondents see Internet advertising as being more informative and reliable than a similar demographic sample found in general advertising (Tsang et al. 2004).

Several factors may influence the consumer's decision from the initial exposure to a behavioural response, of clicking or not clicking a certain link (Yun Yoo, 2012).

Perceived information level. Bauer and Greyser (1968) defined the information level attribute as being useful somehow because of the information provided (Yuan, 2012).

Ducoffe (1995, 1996) elaborated that the information level will generate value for consumers, because advertising intends to provide them information about products and procurements. The perceived information level indicates us the exhaustive character of information about the product, involving its actuality, relevance and trustworthiness. The consumers approve advertising when its information about the

product meet their needs and want such for procurement to be able to generate a big satisfaction (Lin and Hung, 2009).

Perceived Entertainment. Bauer and Greyser (1968) defined the entertainment attribute as being funny, attractive, pleasant for watching or listening to or for whatever reason (Yuan, 2012).

Ducoffe (1996) summarised the entertainment as having the following properties:

1. The entertainment meets the audience's needs of escapism, diversion, esthetical bliss or emotional freedom.

2. Media advertising entertains the consumers so that experience improves the advertising exchanges for consumers.

The entertainment effect of sponsored links may be generated from two aspects, the superficial text or/and the site indicated by the advertising. If the text of the sponsored links may touch the main idea of products or services with limited words, there is a larger opportunity to gain the attention of Internet surfers. An interested surfer clicking on the URL address will be then directed to the site of the trader which contains information or effects, which are meant to impress possible customers and to trigger their purchasing intention.

Perceived Irritation level. Bauer and Greyser (1968) defined the annoyance attribute as being unpleasant or irritating from different reasons.

Sponsored links similarly to any announces may cause irritations. They may cause negative effects to the perceived value of sponsored links due to the following reasons:

1. The aspect of the ads perceived as being irritating: There are critics who assert that advertising draws away consumers' attention (Ducoffe, 1995, 1996). Since Internet surfers intend to find information, sponsored links may irritate the searchers.

2. Appeal of advertising. Sometimes, the tactics adopted by advertising agencies may generate only negative effects to advertising. The consumers may perceive the advertisements as irritating when advertising agents use bothering, offending, insulting or exaggeratedly manipulating techniques. Even if sponsored links simply appear on the screen with limited words, in order to draw searchers' attention, advertising agents may write affective sentences or terms which may cause negative emotions. For example, advertising agents may exploit their creativity and use different tactics to draw attention, such as controversial arguments, irony or even frightening words (Lin and Hung, 2009).

3. The feeling towards sponsored links: there are preconceptions of users towards sponsored links. Some users click only on organic links and do not try sponsored links. In an experiment, Jansen and Resnick (2006) noticed that the main reason for which the users do not click on the sponsored links is a matter of reliability. The researchers discovered that users do not understand the discipline of sponsored search traffic or do not trust the search results.

Perceived Credibility. The credibility attribute was defined as being credible or honest (Yuan, 2012).

Credibility was an important issue for the researchers. Considering the absence of knowledge, structural credibility is the perception of the components of websites, such as the name of the domain, the site map, online privacy policies, approval third parties' seals or advertising with banners or links (Hong 2006).

Credibility was defined as "how much the consumer perceives the assertions made about a brand in the ad as being sincere and credible" (Li and Hung, 2009). It may be transferred to the credibility of the sponsored links to replace the "mark" with the "URL" or to the site attached at the end of the sponsored link. The main credibility is the confidence offered to the advertiser and the credibility towards the advertising the consumers worry about, regarding the credibility and the convictions towards advertising. Credibility will generate values for consumers, because they may trust the descriptions presented on the sponsored links and they click on the URL in order to connect with the advertising site.

4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDE AND THE INTENTION TO CLICK

The relationship attitude - behaviour where behavioural intention may be predicted by attitudes was identified in different contexts and in different conditions, including in the area of technology (Davis, 1986; Kim, Chun and Song, 2009), the advertising on mobile phones (Chiou, 1998; Xu, 2007), online purchasing behaviour (Shim et al., 2001) and in traditional advertising (Brown and Stayman, 1992).

This attitude and behavioural intention was initially supported by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). Several recent advertising studies validated this theory concerning the fact that consumers' attitude towards an object (in this case towards sponsored search ads - SSA) will influence their intention to use the object (the intention to click on SSA) (MacKenzie et al., 1986). More precisely, this relationship was found in certain Internet advertising studies, which reported a significant effect of the attitude towards Internet advertising, regarding the intention to click on an Internet advertising (Burns and Lutz, 2006; Cho, 1999; Jin and Jun, 2007).

Nonetheless, some studies examined such a relationship in the SSA context. Considering the discussion above, it seems plausible the fact that consumers' attitude towards SSA is connected to their behavioural intentions to click on an ad in sponsored search.

5. SCEPTICISM TOWARDS ADVERTISING

The researches regarding the traditional mass-media advertising showed that many times, the consumers will avoid the advertisements when they get the possibility to. Speck and Elliott (1997) summarised that the strategies to avoid an advertising may be cognitive (for example, ignoring the advertising), mechanical (for example, changing the channel) and behavioural (for example, leaving the room during the commercial break). The current consumers are surrounded by commercial messages by means of several channels. This plurality of options empowered the consumer to be selective in his responses and has the capacity to avoid irrelevant messages (Yuan, 2004).

The new technologies facilitate also the behaviour of avoiding the advertisements. The TV's remote control allows to people to change the channels during the commercial breaks. Video Recorders allow to people to erase the commercials during the record or to jump them during replay. The debut of Internet brings to consumers more control on what they want to see, when, where and how they want. Empowered by the new technologies, they may easily select the commercial they want to see (Ducoffe, 1996).

A free market is characterised by an easy access to information about goods and services, but access is not sufficient if the consumers believe that the advertisements are not adequate and useful. It is probably a paradox that the nature of a free market encourages the exaggerations in advertising which, in turn, may cause the consumer's scepticism and the advertising regulation requirements. The market tolerates and is based on a certain level of scepticism of consumers. At the same time, its value of information is diminished as long as the consumers are sceptical regarding the sincerity of the ad and the market is less efficient (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998).

We define scepticism towards ads in general as the tendency to treat commercials as unreliable. We consider scepticism towards ads in general (we also refer to scepticism towards the commercial) as a stable, generalised belief of the market, one of the fundamental proposals which compose the default theory of a consumer, of how the market operates (Moore-Shay & Lutz, 1988). Generally speaking, we refer to advertising as non-personal paid commercial communication. We expect for scepticism of ads to generalise influences between natural entities, even if we recognise that the environment may exercise a situational influence on scepticism towards a certain commercial. Thus, extremely sceptical consumers may be more or less sceptical towards printed commercials than towards radio commercials, but they should be more sceptical regarding both environments than their less sceptical homologues (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998).

The term of scepticism has more meanings, and Ford, Smith and Swasy (1990) asked for research the dimensionality of commercial's scepticism. Some of them may be sceptical not only at the literal truth of the commercial's demand, but also because of advertisers, the value of information for oneself or for the society; or the advertising adaptation for a specific audience, such as the children, or for specific products, such as cigarettes or alcohol. Moreover, the term of scepticism may suggest other advertising criticisms, such as the image of low or intrusive culture. Our definition limits us to consider only the first one of these meanings, the tendency to consider the advertising demands more or less credible. The use of the word scepticism and of its forms in this debate is limited to the unreliability feeling.

The previous knowledge and experiences were identified as an influence on the consumer's reaction towards the commercials (Khasawbeh, 2009; Berger and Smith, 1998).

The results obtained by Jansen et al. (2007) indicate the fact that the users have preconceptions against the sponsored links, even when the content is controlled. Nonetheless, when viewing the content of web pages with sponsored links, web surfers assess sponsored results as relevant as organic results.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As the budgets invested in online advertising increase there is the need to understand users' behaviour regarding sponsored ads on search engines. Since Google is, nowadays, the most used search engine, advertisers allocate more money into this type of promotion. However, who clicks on sponsored ads is definitely an interesting subject to study, more specifically the reasons that make the consumers to click or not to click. If they do not click then how else can we reach them? What other means of advertising can help?

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