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Marknadsföring på Internet

En studie om användarnas attityder i relation till Bloggar och Forum

Magisteruppsats inom Marknadsföring

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Online Marketing

A study of users' attitudes in the context of
Blogs and Communities

Master's thesis within Marketing

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Preface

This thesis was written at the Department of Entrepreneurship, Marketing and Management at Jönköping International Business School and was finished in June 2008. During the 20 weeks of writing, we have increased our knowledge within the process of completing a thesis at a master's level, as well as the chosen subject. Throughout the writing process, several individuals has contributed to the process and thereby helped make the finished thesis better, and therefore we would like to thank them;

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Magisteruppsats inom Marknadsföring

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Sammanfattning

Internet har öppnat upp nya möjligheter för företag att marknadsföra sig på, samt sälja sina produkter den elektroniska vägen. Under den tidiga fasen av marknadsföring på Internet, och även nu på senare tid, var Pop-up och Banner reklam de två mest använda metoderna. Tidigare studier samt akademisk forskning har bevisat att dessa metoder uppfattas som irriterande och blir mer eller mindre ignorerade. Med detta som grund, har marknadsförare börjat söka efter nya och alternativa marknadsföringsmetoder, utöver de traditionella metoderna. När trenden med Bloggar och Forum började växa, började även företagen få upp ögonen för dem. På grund av dessa nya elektroniska marknadsföringsformer, samt att företagen försöker få så mycket värde från sin marknadsföringsbudget som möjligt, är syftet med denna uppsats att undersöka om marknadsföring på Bloggar och Forum har en mer positiv uppfattning bland Internetanvändare, i vissa fall i relation till traditionella marknadsföringsmetoder. Dessutom undersöker vi om reklam som är anpassade efter konsumenternas intressen har större inverkan, samt om det är olikheter bland uppfattningen om reklam på Internet mellan manliga och kvinnliga användare.

De empiriska data som behövdes, samlades in kvantitativt med hjälp av en elektronisk enkät, baserat på Internetanvändarnas åsikter i denna fråga. Då det var svårt att erhålla någon respons från blogganvändare, blev studien mer fokuserad på Forum. Enkäten placerades på tre utvalda forum inom aktuella områden såsom; Hemelektronik, Sport samt Familjeliv. De empiriska data som insamlades, sammanställdes i en referensram som sedan användes för att analysera den insamlade datan.

Våra resultat visar att större delen av respondenterna är mer positiva gentemot annonser på Bloggar och Forum i helhet, såväl som skraddarsydda annonser på dessa sidor. Det visade sig vidare att annonser på dessa medium inte stör användarnas flöde, till lika hög grad som traditionella marknadsföringsmetoder. Därutöver stod det klart att majoriteten är medvetna om Internetbaserat reklam, och lika många hade även utvecklat ett missnöje gentemot dem. Dock så hade de manliga respondenterna en mer positiv syn än kvinnorna gentemot annonser i Bloggar och Forum. Samma resultat uppenbarade sig i relation till anpassade annonser; samtidigt som männen ansåg dessa som mer acceptabla, var kvinnorna likgiltiga i deras åsikter. I frågan om varför annonsering på dessa medier var accepterade var den vanligaste responsen att dessa ansågs vara mer relaterade till användarnas intressen. Slutligen visar vår studie att marknadsföring som är anpassat efter användarnas preferenser och i relation till sidan där de är placerade har en större effekt på Internetanvändare än sådana som är planlöst skapade.

Master's thesis in Marketing

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Abstract

The Internet has opened up new opportunities for companies to market and sell their products online. In the early days of internet marketing and still some of the more widely used methods are Pop-ups and Banners. Earlier research and academic studies have proven these methods of being perceived as irritating and more or less ignored. With this in mind, marketers have been searching to find new and alternative ways of marketing, in addition to the traditional methods. Eventually, when the trend of blogs and communities began growing, so did the companies interests towards them. Because of the new possible forms of marketing online, and due to the companies increasing effort of receiving better value regarding their advertisement budget, the purpose of this thesis is to examine if marketing on sites such as blogs and communities are more positively perceived upon among internet users. In some cases, this has been examined in relation to the more traditional means of online marketing. Furthermore, we examined whether or not the tailoring of advertisements had more effect on users, and if there were any differences in the general perception of blog- and community advertisements among male and female consumers.

The empirical data needed was gathered quantitatively through an online survey, based on the consumer point of view of this matter. As it became difficult to attain any response from users of internet blogs, the study became more focused on communities and forums. The survey was placed on three communities within current areas of interest; Home electronics, Sports and training, and Family life. Furthermore, a conceptualization was made out of the theoretical chapter, and was used for the analyzing of the data.

The results indicate that a majority of the respondents are more positive towards advertisements on blogs and communities, as well as customized advertisements within these mediums. It was further found that these advertisements did not disrupt the surfer's flow as much as traditional mediums. The findings also show that a majority of the respondents are aware of online advertisements in general, and just as many have developed a dislike towards them. However, the male respondents have a more positive view of advertisements on blogs and communities, than the female. The same finding appeared in regard to tailored ads; while male consumers consider these as more acceptable, the female respondents have an indifferent opinion. To the question of why advertisement on these mediums were more regarded upon, the most common response was due to these ads being considered as more related to their interests. Conclusively, tailored ads that are developed and placed in relation to the website and its content have a larger effect on internet users, than do random advertisements.

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1 Introduction

This first chapter presents our introduction to the birth and growth of online marketing, and the problems associated with it. The background will be presented first, followed by a problem discussion and problem statement, and will be concluded with the purpose and delimitations.

1.1 Background

The internet as we know it took off during the early 1990s, when the World Wide Web (WWW) protocol was invented, and has since then become incorporated as the backbone of advanced economies such as North America and major parts of Europe and Asia. Around 1.3 billion people were estimated to use the Internet at the end of 2007 (Internetworldstats, 2008). In relation to the world's population, this gives 20 % as a total amount of the world's Internet users. While the less developed countries show a very low percentage, the developed countries have shown a 120 % annual growth in Internet use during the past seven years (Internetworldstats, 2008).

Ever since the creation of the Internet, the world of business has changed greatly with a redefinition in areas like marketing and customer relations (Taylor quoted in Wright, 2006). This medium opened up the doors for the conditions of conducting business through electronic methods (Dholakia et al, 2002). The growth of the internet eventually led to hundreds of thousands of companies setting up shops online, gaining millions of consumers worldwide as their customers. In the early days, the average computer user might not have been able to use the Internet as we use it today. With the arrival of easy-to-use web browsers, this medium went from being an advanced, text-oriented, and specialized application into a massive multimedia tool on a global scale (Dholakia et al, 2002). Some early speculators like Hein and Rich (1997) quoted in Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) suggested that advertising on this medium would be more effective due to its interactive nature. At that time, the most used marketing channels were banner advertisements. Although the Internet users click through-rate of this marketing method went from 30 % in 1994 to 0.3 % in 2002, marketers still spent many billions of dollars each year on internet advertising with banners (Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2002).

Kotler et al (2005) point out Marketing as a process in understanding and satisfying customer needs. In the pre-industrial era, this process was achieved through Relationship Marketing, during which a close relationship was created between the customer and the company. The customers made their everyday purchases locally and a natural bond was created between the seller and the buyer (Allen et al, 1998). However, with the introduction of the industrial age, the focus on marketing went from individual- to mass marketing. The company's attention turned to reaching out to as many consumers as possible. This method was dominant during the past decades, but with the birth of the commercial Internet, companies have discovered the possibilities of recreating relationship marketing. By keeping the information flow of their products and service available online, companies can create suited offerings to customers while satisfying their needs (Doyle, 2002). This sort of marketing method is considered to be more acceptable, and at the same time more effective (Mandelli, 2005).

However, a web site purely presenting the business will not add any value for the potential consumer (Bradshaw and Brash, 2001). According to Cronin (1994), traditional marketing e.g. sending out raw advertisements through e-mail accounts, is not the online way of reaching out to the customers. Online marketing is just like its regular offline counterpart

about sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing to customers, mainly through advertising. Online advertising has the crucial role of persuading and informing consumers of the available selection of products and services (Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2002). During the past decade, companies have learned this procedure to be difficult without information about the consumers. Through the use of various customer databases and the location of surfing habits, firms have been able to evolve their marketing strategy, becoming more customized and personalized for each user. As a result, they are adapting products and messages through the study and analysis of each user's demographics, preferences and purchases (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). A great knowledge of the clients is of essential use for a firm's success.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Companies who have chosen to enter the field of online marketing have automatically entered a race with the purpose of developing a strong marketing strategy with attractive advertisements as a result. According to Taylor, quoted in Wright (2006), one major issue for companies has been the question of reaching the unreachable customers through the use of online marketing channels. Although there are numerous ways of performing marketing on the internet, the most common ones have been the use of Banners, Pop-ups, E-mail marketing, Search-engine marketing, Blogs and Communities (Allen et al, 1998). However, during the past years, there has been a number of issues related to the effectiveness of the most common marketing methods.

According to Rettie (2001), a consumer's Internet use consists of a flow, which she explains as the "experience people feel when they act with total involvement". In this session, the users have narrowed awareness and they feel in control of their environment and what they are occupied with. A disruption of this flow due to various marketing advertisements creates a negative attitude towards the ad itself and the marketing company. The results Rettie (2001) found were confirmed in previous studies by Gustavsson and Krüss (2006). They state that traditional online marketing methods like banner-ads and pop-ups have lost their value since their entrance on the online market, and are the least effective form of online marketing since they are considered as irritating while bothering the users in their surfing flow (Gustavsson and Krüss 2006). In addition, Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) gave reasons to traditional online marketing methods of being uninformative, unfocused and forgettable. Instead, Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) pursue the importance of that the consumer must like the web site on which the advertisement appears in order for the advertisement to be liked, remembered and therefore effective. They also explained that irritation towards an ad directly affects the value of the chosen marketing method while decreasing the effects of the advertisement (ibid).

Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) talk about the best indicator for effective advertising as a positive emotional response towards the ad. The term attitude-towards-the-ad has been defined as "...the tendency to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a particular advertisement..." (Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2002, p.319). This term has however been modified by Bruner and Kumar (2000) into attitude-towards-the-site, which is associated with the attitude-towards-the-ad, the brand and purchasing intentions. The emotions towards the site where these ads are found positively affect the consumers' attitude towards the advertisement. The more a web site is liked and accepted, the more the users develop a liking and acceptance for the ad (Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2002). In addition, Gustavsson and Krüss (2006) talk about making the consumers noticing ads in a positive manner. The more a customer notices an ad, the less unfriendly they become

towards it. In order for companies to gain consumers positive response to an ad and increasing its effectiveness, the advertisements should be as tailored as possible. Customized ads are believed to give the consumers a sense of value, developing a liking towards the ad (Zhifeng et al, 2006 and Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2002). It has also been understood that the more time a person spends on a chosen site, the greater the chance that he or she will be caught up with the marketing efforts of that site, and as an outcome, the advertised offering “sticks” (Dholakia et al, 2002).

Previous studies by Thersthol and Lövgren (2007) talk about online marketing as a process for reaching out to as many existing and potential customers as possible. In order to do so, Jobber (2004) states that it is of uttermost importance to have knowledge of the existing- and potential customers, as it in the end can affect the company in its long-term success. To actively and frequently collect information about the customers to further understand them is important in order to build the marketing concept of the company. Furthermore, companies are motivated in reducing the costs of marketing while increasing the effectiveness of their advertising due to the overall rising costs and higher competition within the markets (Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) further explains that this can be done if the company and its marketers gain a better understanding of their targeted consumer’s behaviour. This knowledge can be used to make better decisions considering definitions on target market of choice and how to position the products or services.

In their search for new marketing methods, marketers have recognized blogs and communities as possible marketing channels. These mediums have therefore gained an increasingly greater role in online marketing, since a high rate of all blogs and communities on the internet have been created by private consumers, which companies consider as existing or potential customers (Wright, 2006). Taylor (quoted in Wright, 2006) further states that blogs are among the more recognized virtual networks of our time, where an unlimited number of users meet. Blogging has become a revolutionary alternative marketing channel with a new way of reaching out and communicating with potential customers and the marketplace, seeing as they are the best targets for future growth (Wright, 2006). With around 100 million bloggers communicating on the Internet about products and sharing information, the blogging medium is now a worldwide forum.

Among other more known marketing channels on the Internet, one can find online communities. The Internet is a global way of connecting consumers to other consumers, and consumers to organisations nearby, instantly (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). This purpose is well achieved through a Community. The prerequisites of an online community are based on these benefits; convenience, accessibility, asynchronicity and specificity (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). Communities as a marketing channel can take many forms, but regardless of structure type, they are characterized by groups of people with common norms, rules and values, sharing information through the community channels, e.g. forums. However, each community has its own culture and sense of identity, creating a unique collection of members existing solely in the concerned community. What communities offer firms is the possibility of customized offerings in their marketing. This possibility exists due to the characteristics of a community in the sense that they have their own niche for each market segment (Allen et al, 1998). Since forums are the prime definition of online communities, they are the main focus regarding ‘communities’ in this thesis (Pitta and Fowler, 2005).

1.3 Problem Statement

As companies are trying to make their advertising more effective in terms of acceptance among consumers, we consider it important to find out if consumers have a greater acceptance towards marketing in familiar or liked sites such as blogs and communities compared to non-focused web sites. In addition, some companies are using more tailored ads to achieve their goals, and we will examine this issue in relation to users attitudes towards customized ads. Moreover, there has been no consensus in previous research concerning the difference between men and women in these cases. Blogs and communities are mostly created by private consumers, for specific causes. While some sites have a majority of male visitors, others are more popular among women.

Based on the statements in the problem discussion, we have reached the following research questions;

RQ1: Do consumers have a greater acceptance towards advertisement on blogs and communities, compared to non-focused web sites, and why?

RQ2: How and why is consumer's attitude towards the advertisements affected by their degree of customization?

RQ3: Is there a difference on the perception of advertisement on blogs and communities between men and women?

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine if marketing in blogs and communities are more accepted among consumers. Furthermore, we would like to find the reasons to why blogs and communities are more accepted relative to other means of online marketing.

1.5 Delimitations

In this thesis, we will limit the scope of our research to the area of business-to-consumer marketing and thus leaving the business-to-business marketing aside. This decision was made considering that the phenomena of blogs and communities are usually started and built up by private consumers. Because of the focus on business-to-consumers, we also decided to only look at regular, non-company related blogs and forums which facilitate a larger reach and a more open setting for use in the marketing context. Furthermore, this thesis will concentrate on communities and blogs originating from Sweden due to the fact that both authors and our respondents are Swedish residents. It will be easier for us as researchers to understand the blogs and communities, and the culture prevalent will not cause confusion.

1.6 Definitions

Browser	Most often used as the term for web browser; a computer software application used for accessing any kind of information located on the World Wide Web, or preferably, the Internet.
Relationship marketing	A form of marketing, formed to enhance the direct marketing process. The purpose is to offer targeted offerings to a specific audience or group.
Banner ads	One form of Internet-related marketing method. Banners are usually graphical and square formed, and are located on web sites. They contain links to the product- or service-offerings.
Pop-up ads	Another form of internet marketing, similar to Banners, with the characteristics of popping up when the users logs on or leaves hosted web sites, hence the name Pop-up.
Blogs	Web sites, usually created and maintained by individuals (some companies as well) with the trait of having regular entries and comments on chosen subjects. Blogs have become very popular tools of communication in recent times.
Blogging	The term for initiating, replying or maintaining entries or comments on a blog.
Blogosphere	As the name suggests, it is the world of all blogs and their interconnections. Created as a meaning of describing the blogs as a co-existing community; a social network.
Community	Defined and created as a place of assembly for groups of people with similar interests. The medium works as the communication between these groups for social, educational or professional purpose. The digital, computer-related version is called virtual or online community.
Forum	The “heart” of the community, created to illustrate and enhance the discussion and communication between community members.
Non-focused web site	A web site that is not related to any specific target group. Advertisements on these web sites are general in nature, and are usually not associated to the content of the web site. E.g. Aftonbladet, Facebook, Google, etc...
Customization	Tailoring a product or service in order to fit the interests, taste or preferences of online users.
Attitude-towards-the-ad	Just as the term implies, the subject is evolved around the online user’s attitudes towards web marketing, and specifically the advertisements. Depending on their attitude

towards the company or brand, the effect of the advertisement varies between the users.

Attitude-towards-the-site This term evolves around the online user's attitude towards the sites where the advertisements are located. The effect of the liking or disliking of the ad is related to the user's attitude towards the site.

Flow Individuals who spend a long time online will fall into a stage of total involvement, concentration and enjoyment. This is called the users flow.

APPU Average Posts Per User. Defines the average number of posts that each user has written within the community.

2 Methodology

This chapter shows how the study has been carried out. The discussion is focused on matters regarding the purpose of research, research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, data collection, data analysis, and quality standards. The outline of the chapter is displayed in figure 1 below.

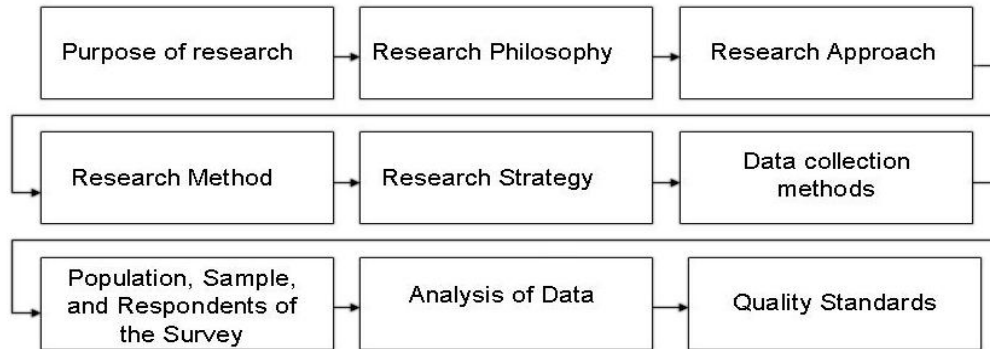


Figure 1: Outline of the thesis .

2.1 Purpose of Research

There are three different types of research, and Yin (2003) writes that these are exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. The purpose of the thesis determined which one of these to use in order to be able to fulfil this purpose.

Saunders et al (2000) describe exploratory research as a way to find or look for new insight or to see what is going on. They further state that it is especially good to use if the purpose of research is to increase the understanding of a problem. Ghauri and Grönhaug (2005) complement the characteristics of exploratory research by adding that this type of research calls for flexibility, since new information can change the direction of the research. Ghauri and Grönhaug (2005) conclude that descriptive research is characterized by that the problem is clear and well structured. Saunders et al (2000) writes that it is necessary to have a good picture of the problem before the data collection. The focus of an explanatory study is to find interrelations between the variables in the studied situation or problem (Saunders et al, 2000). Saunders et al (2000) also states that analysis of quantitative data can show correlations between factors which gives the researcher a picture of the relationships involved.

The overall purpose of this thesis was to investigate the area of online advertising and marketing through blogs and communities. The goal was to seek out if marketing in these specific media channels are more accepted among consumers, and why this is the case, in order to gain a better understanding of their effectiveness compared to other means of online marketing. This led us to use a both exploratory and explanatory approach. In the data collection and in the analysis we explore, and in the findings and conclusions we begin to explain.

2.2 Research Philosophy

The development of knowledge can be seen in two different ways, and these are positivism and hermeneutics (Patel and Davidson, 2003). Patel and Davidson (2003) write that the main difference between the two is that hermeneutic research aims to understand and interpret, while positivistic research aims at absolute knowledge with the concept of confirming or falsifying theory based on empirical data. Even though these two might look as two completely contrary concepts, this research was not only one of them, but rather a mixture of the two. Williamson (2002) explains that a positivistic approach mainly is associated with a quantitative approach. This thesis used a quantitative approach, but at the same time, it aimed to understand and interpret the behaviour of the respondents as done with a hermeneutic approach.

2.3 Research Approach

There are two different approaches to research, and these are deduction and induction. (Saunders et al, 2000) This thesis does not clearly fit with only one of these categories as one seldom does. Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (2006) describes an inductive approach as research based on empirical data, and a deductive approach as research based on existing theory. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) ads that inductive reasoning is systematically a process based on observation to set up a common suggestion. They also write about deductive reasoning and that it should obtain a finding from existing literature and theory (ibid).

The base of this thesis was existing theory, but it also aimed at generating new ideas and concepts based on the empirical data gathered and therefore it uses a mixture of the two.

Deduction emphasizes	Induction emphasizes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific principles • Moving from theory to data • The need to explain casual relationships between variables • The collection of quantitative data • The application of controls to ensure validity of data • The operationalisation of concepts to ensure clarity of definition • A highly structured approach • Researcher independence of what is being researched • The necessity to select samples of sufficient size in order to generalize conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining an understanding of the meanings of the humans attach to events • A close understanding of the research context • The collection of qualitative data • A more flexible structure to permit changes of research emphasis as the research progresses • A realization that the researcher is part of the research process • Less concern with the need to generalize

Table 1: Differences between deductive and inductive approaches to research (Source: Saunders et al, 2000)

Table 1 deals with the most common research approaches, but another approach exists; Abductive, which is defined by Thagard and Shelly (1997) as reasoning in which explanatory hypotheses are formed and evaluated. This was not used to a large extent in this thesis due to that this approach did not fit with the purpose.

2.4 Research Method

A quantitative research approach uses numbers as a base for the analysis instead of words like a qualitative would do (Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson, 2006). Blaxter et al (2006) adds to this explanation by describing that quantitative research uses a large-scale set of data. Qualitative research is more exploratory and focuses on smaller numbers and depth (Blaxter et al, 2006). Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) write about the main characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research. For qualitative these are; data is mostly collected using conversation, and unstructured and semi-structured interviews. For quantitative, the corresponding are; structured observations, interviews and surveys, and attitude scaling (ibid).

For this thesis, the fit with a quantitative study is better because of the need for several different views on the questions and to decrease the factor of that different people think differently. If only ten people were interviewed in depth, there might have been difficulties with finding a pattern of how the general majority feels.

2.5 Research Strategy

The decision of which strategy to use can be guided by the form of research question, the degree of control needed of behavioural events and if the focus is on current or historical events (Yin, 2003). The different choices of strategies available are; experiment, survey, case-study, grounded theory, ethnography and action research (Saunders et al, 2000).

Experiments are commonly used in natural sciences and psychology, and are characterized by for example the introduction of planned changes on the variables in the experiment, and control of the other variables (Saunders et al, 2000). Surveys allow for the gathering of large quantities of data from a population in an economically efficient way (Saunders et al, 2000). Saunders et al (2000) also describe this method as having the advantage of that the analysis of the data will allow for easy comparison between the respondents. A case study is especially useful for gaining rich and detailed data (Saunders et al, 2000). They also state that case-studies are particularly good to use when asking how, what and why questions (ibid).

Grounded theory is based on that a data collection is performed without the previous construction of a theoretical framework (Saunders et al, 2000). The initially gathered data is then used to make predictions that then are tested in the later stages of the data collection (Saunders et al, 2000). Moreover, the purpose of ethnography is defined by Saunders et al (2000) in the following way; “The purpose is to interpret the social world the research subjects inhabit in the same way in which they interpret it” (Saunders et al, 2000, p.95). They also state that ethnography is not commonly used in business research (ibid). Action research is however dedicated to researching the management of change, and the researcher often must participate in the setting where the change occurs. (Saunders et al, 2000).

At first, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and experiments were discarded from the planning because of the mismatch between these methods and the purpose of research. After this, the search for a method with a match between the purpose of research and the characteristics of the method started. In table 2 below, these different criteria for the use of a survey are presented.

Strategy	Form of research question	Requires control of behavioural events?	Focuses on contemporary events?
Survey	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes

Table 2: Relevant situations for the use of a Survey (Source: Yin, 2003, p.5)

As can be seen in the table, a match between the research questions and theory is leading towards the use of a survey. The meaning of the question and not the exact words should be thought of. An example of this is RQ3; “Is there a difference on the perception of advertisement in blogs and communities between men and women?” The meaning of the question can be reformulated to; “What is the difference between...”. That formulation would match the theory guiding towards the use of a survey, but that formulation is not as good as the one chosen for research question three.

To fulfil the purpose of this thesis and the research questions, there is no need of any control over the behavioural events. Any form of control might in fact distort the results acquired. The research in this thesis will also concentrate on current events to be able to get results that are relevant today.

2.6 Data Collection Methods

This thesis aims at finding out people’s attitudes and intentions, and Ghauri and Grönhaug (2005) write that only primary data can provide answers to such questions. There was a need to collect data from private citizens and then the following choices are available; Personal interviews, telephone interviews or sent out surveys (Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson, 2006). To collect the data necessary for this thesis, it was decided to conduct a survey.

The decision to use a survey was based on the advantages and disadvantages of a survey, listed by Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (2006), as displayed in table 3 below.

Weaknesses	Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection often requires a long time • There is often a low frequency of answers • The answering situation is uncontrollable, you can not be sure of who has actually answered • If a clarification is needed, it is hard to do a follow-up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful for questions with long answers • Low cost • No “interviewer effect” • Sensitive and private questions can be asked since anonymity can be guaranteed • Pictures and scales can be shown

Table 3: The weaknesses and strengths with sent out surveys as Data Collection Method (Source: Wiederheim-Paul and Eriksson, 2006, p.99)

As seen in table 3, there are both positive and negative characteristics but two of the more important negative characteristics of a send out survey will be less important in this work; namely the low frequency of answers and the long time. This will be offset because of the use of an electronic variation of the survey. Thus, the time will be shorter because of no need to wait for the post, and the frequency will not matter as much since the potential participants are so many. Beside this difference between an ordinary survey, and a web-based survey, the other characteristics are seen as applicable. Williamson (2002) adds that web-based surveys are characterized by fast responses, low cost, the ability to target a very geographically spread group, and that with the help of software, it is easy to process the data gathered. One large positive factor is also that in a web-based survey, a function controlling that all of the answers is dealt with can be used and this raises the usability of the data (Trost, 2007). Trost (2007) also writes about timesaving aspects of a web-based survey and the main help for the researcher is that the respondents themselves register all the data. This also simplifies the analysis since the compilation of the data is already done (ibid). When using email as a distribution channel, it is very similar to a regular postal survey, except from the fact of faster responses and lower costs which are shared with a web-based survey (Trost, 2007).

A survey was chosen because of its benefits, but Denscombe (2000) also lists a few disadvantages such as; an tendency towards a focus on empirical data rather than its significance, a lack of depth and detail in the data, and finally the precision of the data is not controllable.

All of the respondents answered the same survey with the same questions within the same timeframe of two weeks.

2.7 Population, Sample and Respondents of the Survey

This section explains how the sample and respondents of the survey were chosen. A description of how the population and sample are viewed in relation to the rest of the world can be seen in figure 2 below.

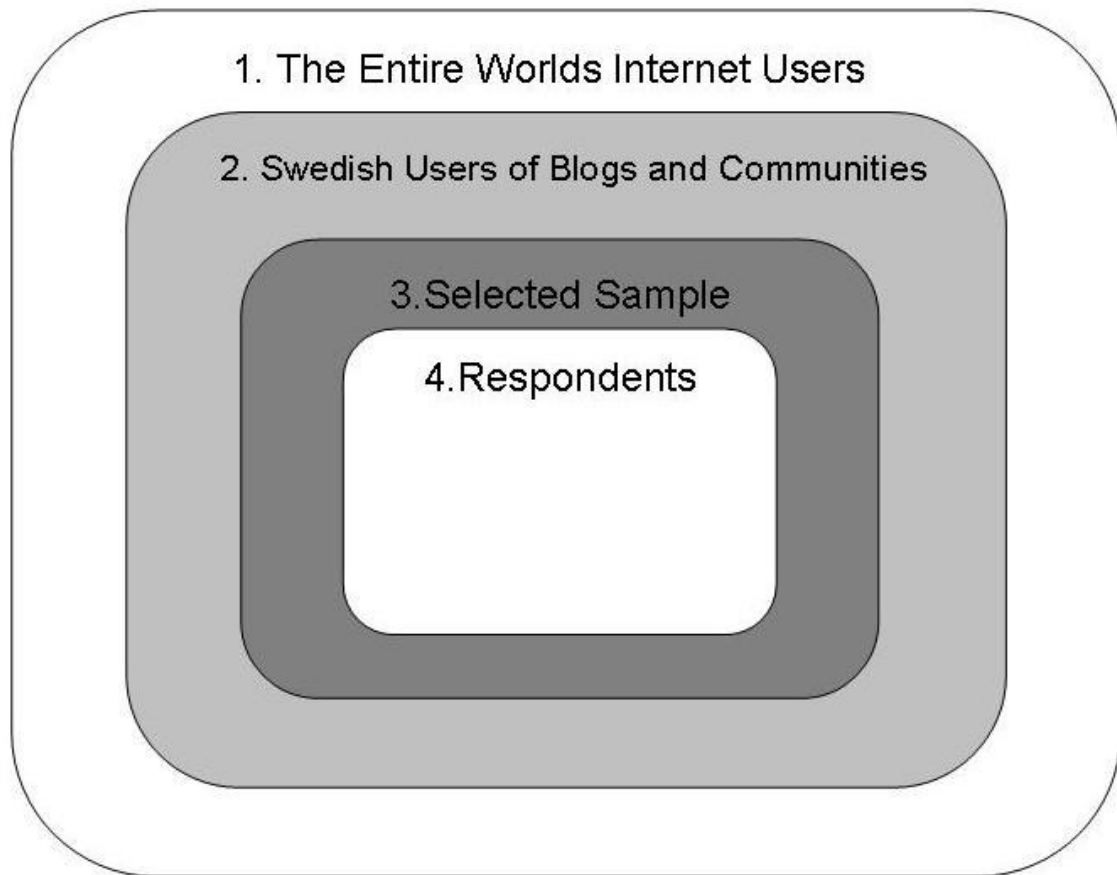


Figure 2: The relationships between the Worlds Internet Users, the chosen Population and the Sample.

In figure 2, the sizes does not correlate to the amount of people in the groups, but rather to that the first was largest and the last smallest.

2.7.1 Population Selection

As stated in our delimitations, this thesis has concentrated on communities and blogs originating from Sweden. The fact that both authors and most of our respondents are Swedish residents makes it easier for us as researchers to understand the blogs and communities, and the culture. Thus, the population selected for our data collection was Swedish-speaking private citizens who frequently use Internet and the communities and blogs featured online. The size of this population is very hard to measure, and this could make it harder to redo this study.

2.7.2 Sample Selection

There is no more specified definition or limitation of our sample than that for our population, but the chosen ways to spread the survey limited the sample to users of these web sites. As seen in figure 2, the entire sample was not expected to answer, but the size of the circles does not correlate to the actual respondents. We chose the following web sites with communities as a means to spread the survey; www.kolozzeu.com/kolozzeum, www.minhembio.com and www.familjelycka.se. The first community is a Swedish

community for people involved with training, and is owned by a company selling topic-related products, but it is moderated by regular users rather than employees. The second community is also Swedish, and related to home entertainment. The community is owned by a company that runs a popular site for price-comparisons. The last community used is targeted towards families and parents. The community is owned and controlled by a small company that mostly works with communities. In table 4 below, a summary of the communities can be found.

Community name	Number of members	What is it about?	Numbers of total community posts written	Average posts per user
Kolozzeum	27 687	Training	2 622 500	94.72
Minhembio.com	110 000	Home entertainment	1 800 000	16.36
Familjelycka.se	5 758	Family life and children	360 000	62.52

Table 4: Information of the chosen communities (Source: Kolozzeum.com, Minhembio.com and Familjelycka.se)

The number of members of the web sites could be used to define the size of the sample, but it is possible to read posted messages on the communities without being a registered user. A link to the survey was posted in a thread, and thus, the potential number of people exposed to the survey is impossible to know exactly. The number of users reading the thread until the survey became inactivated was used as a measurement. Even though the number of members is very important for the size of the population and sample, the activity of the members is also very important. Thus, as can be seen in table 4, the members of Kolozzeum are very active compared to the members of Minhembio.com. The members of Kolozzeum has written 94.72 posts per member in average, while the members from Minhembio.com has written 16.36 posts in average. These average's explains the larger total number of posts on Kolozzeum. The members on Familjelycka have written an average of 62.52 posts per member, and this places them in the middle on the activity list.

The choice of these communities was based on that they cover a wide array of common interests for the Swedish citizens. We were unfortunately unable to spread the survey by using blogs because the private nature of the content of most blogs, and also because a lack of willingness from the owners to post the link to the survey. These communities were not chosen randomly, but rather by purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is when the sample was selected because of its typical or interesting content (Blaxter et. al, 2006).

The minimum return rate of the research was set to 100 responses, in order to be able to draw any conclusions. Since three different communities were selected, with a vast number of members combined, we expected at least 150 answers. It was also decided that there would be a maximum of 100 answers from each forum, which in turn limited the maximum to 300 answers. This was partly made because of the limitations at the

web site where the survey was placed. Given the limited time frame, more than 300 would have made the analysis more difficult.

2.7.3 Selection of Method for Survey Spread

To ensure that a large proportion of the responded surveys are answered by private citizens who are included in the sample, certain web sites were chosen as the medium through which the survey has been spread. These web sites included discussion communities, and in a thread in these communities, a link to the survey was posted.

2.8 Analysis of Data

To be able to find patterns and try to make sense of the data, an analysis of it must be done. According to Trost (2007) a non-response analysis needs to be done unless there is a very high frequency of received answers.

2.8.1 Non-response Analysis

To do a non-response analysis, the researcher should compare the gathered responses with the chosen population (Trost, 2007). This is a problem in this study since there are no definite numbers of the people possibly exposed to the survey. The best measure found was the number of views of the thread in which the link to the survey was posted, in relation to the number of responses:

- For Kolozzeum, this was 867 compared to a number of 100 responses, which gives us a 8.7 % response rate.
- For Minhembio, this was 710 compared to a number of 53 responses, which gives us a 13.4 % response rate.
- For Familjelycka, this was 316 compared to a number of 52 responses, which gives us a 6.1 % response rate.

These numbers were collected on the 9th of May 2008, when the final number of respondents was finished. One of the reasons for the large differences between views in the thread, and responses was that there also were a discussion in the thread and same users visited the thread several times. The numbers of responses in relation to the number of views was low, but the important part is that the total number of answers was large enough to be able to draw conclusions.

On a few of the multiple choice questions where the respondents were supposed to make more than one choice, a few of the respondents did not choose two alternatives. The reason for this is unknown, but the respondents who missed these choices probably did not understand the question properly, or found the decision to hard to make. This was a very small percentage of the total number of replies, and was therefore not considered during the analysis.

2.8.2 Quantitative Analysis

In order to analyze the data collected through the survey, the numbers were first statistically sorted to facilitate the surveys different ways of thinking, and then further

analyzed to find possible significant patterns. This process of making sense of the raw data was made with the help of the statistical computer software Excel, from which we could generate different tables and diagrams. The raw data, together with an overview of the results can be found in chapter four. The analysis found in this chapter had two purposes; initially to help the readers to understand, and secondly help us as researchers. In order to make the gathered data more clear, it was coded with the help of Excel and made fit in a spreadsheet, as suggested by Saunders et al (2000).

2.9 Quality Standards

This section is discussing the Reliability and the Validity of the thesis.

Reliability is defined by Williamson (2002, p.128) as “... the consistency of results produced by a measuring instrument when it is applied more than once in a similar situation; or, the stability, consistency and dependability of measures.” Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (2006) conclude that this is very important for the generalisability of the research. One question to be asked is if another researcher could come to the same conclusion if using a similar approach (ibid). Validity of research is defined by Williamson (2002, p.128) as “...the capacity of a measuring instrument to measure what it purports to measure, or predict what it was designed to predict; or, the accuracy of observations”.

Validity is divided in three different areas of validity, and these are; internal, external, and construct validity (Williamson, 2002). Internal validity is related to the certainty of that the results have been seen because of what has been studied, and not due to unknown factors (Williamson, 2002). The External validity relates to the generalisability of the results, thus to which degree the results can be used on, or in other environments and populations (Williamson, 2002). The construct validity is to which degree a measurement in reality measures what it was supposed to measure (Williamson, 2002). Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (2006) also states that if the measurement is not measuring what it is supposed to measure, it does not matter if the measurement was accurate or not.

The generalisability of the results is largely affected by the sample selection and because of the non-random selection of the communities. The choice was made to get as widely generalizable results as possible. The generalisability is though limited to users of communities since all of the respondents are regular visitors of these. Because of the nature of these communities and the Internet in general, we expect that the majority of the responses will be from people ranging from 21-30 years of age. This also limits the generalizability to within the majority age group.

To ensure a high level of construct validity, the survey was carefully formulated in line with what information was needed.

2.9.1 Validity of the Survey

This section covers the reasons for each question in the survey, and the validity of the survey as a whole. A summary can be seen in table 5 below.

Question	Why?	Validity
1 and 2	To be able to see how knowledgeable the respondents are in the area.	The question is important for the validity of our research because of that if the respondents are less knowledgeable, the responses can be seen as less valid.
3	To see to which degree the respondent is aware of advertisement and what they think of it.	This is very important and serves as a comparison with later questions to see if it is better or worse.
4	To find out the view of the respondent.	Used to find patterns.
5 and 6	Important to find out what is the case, and to find linkages.	Used to find patterns, and to be able to answer the research questions.
7	To find linkages with theory.	If the responses fit with existing theory, our validity is increased.
8	To be able to find if there are any disadvantages with using the methods in question 5 and 6.	It increases the validity if the data on a certain phenomena is available from more than one angle.
9	To relate back to questions 5, 6 and 7	It increases the validity if the data on a certain phenomena is available from more than one angle.
10	To be able to answer our research questions and to specify the area of generalization.	Increases the validity of the research by providing the opportunity to divide the respondents in to more groups and therefore showing more possible patterns.

Table 5: The validity of the survey.

As seen in table 5, all research questions are there for a reason; to make it possible to draw better conclusions and find better linkages.

3 Frame of References

This section will present the relevant literature for this study, and to the questionnaire. A introduction of Internet marketing will be made, followed by the meanings of blogs and communities. Furthermore, information regarding acceptance theory and relationship marketing will be given, followed by previous studies regarding consumer perception of Internet marketing. Relevant demographic variables and consumer behaviour will also be presented, finishing with a conceptualization of the literature.

3.1 Internet Marketing

The Internet has become the fastest growing medium of all time (Eighmey and McCord in Dahlén, 2001) and as customers move online, so do advertisers. Marketing professionals have learned the use of Internet marketing tools in order to move closer to the customers while adding value to products. This online medium provides several marketing communications channels, informing customers of e.g. new products and services (Chaffey et al, 2003). It has been argued whether the internet is to be considered as another form of traditional advertising as in TV, on Posters or in the Radio where the marketing is one-to-many, or if it leans towards more direct marketing with one-to-one basis (Zeff and Aronson, 1999). This discussion ended with the following conclusion; “Internet advertising is the convergence of traditional advertising and direct response marketing” (Zeff and Aronson, 1999, p.21). Most types of web-marketing channels are all about attracting traffic to the web site in question. The more visitors a web site gains, the more traffic it generates (Rowley, 2004). This process of attracting customers can be done through a number of marketing methods; Banners, Pop-ups, Newsletters, Search-engine marketing (Allen et al, 1998) and in recent times, through Blogs and Communities (Dawson and Dawson, 2007).

Turban et al (2004) talk about banners as a graphical display for advertising on the web. There are various types of banners; keyword banners are considered as a one-to-one marketing method that functions in collaboration with search engines. When a specific word is typed, the banner automatically displays relevant advertisements. The second form of banners; random banners appear randomly with no regard to the web site they appear on. A random banner is a one-to-many marketing method and they function well for companies wanting to introduce new products (ibid). Pop-up advertisements automatically launch themselves, opening a new browser window over the active window where the advertisement appears, hence the name “pop-up” (Turban et al, 2004). Pop-up as a marketing method is in most cases regarded as a one-to-many system. Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) argue for the decreasing value of banners and pop-ups due to their low click-through rates and since consumers perceive them as confusing and ‘irritating’. Newsletters and search-engine marketing are more popular since they are both consumer generated (Chaffey et al, 2003). Customers receiving newsletters have chosen to do so and search-engine advertisement is more of use as the user is searching for the subject of matter.

The primary research area of this thesis is Blogs and Communities as they are the new and more current methods of marketing on the web (Fallenius and Karlsson, 2007). Blogs and communities is described in section 3.2 and 3.3. Thus, this study is not focused on banners, pop-ups, newsletters or search-engine advertising as marketing methods.

3.1.1 Advantages of Internet Marketing

Depending on the choice of literature, the opinions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of Internet marketing are very scattered. The selection of year, author and geographic preferences provide various results. However, in this section and the next, we have chosen to include the most mentioned and the most recent beliefs regarding the advantages and disadvantages of Internet marketing.

Recent studies by Benediktova and Nevosad (2008) argue for targetability as a benefit of online marketing. The targetability of an Internet advertisement is very different from the traditional media. This method can target language, geographical area, time and demographical characteristics. Previous research by Hoffman and Novak (2000) also mentions targeting as an important aspect of online marketing. With various tools, marketers can design the content of the advertisement in order to fit their audience, making it more personalized. Personalized and customized advertisements increase the value of relationship marketing. With the help of databases, companies can collect data regarding the surfing habits of a specific user and use this data to create a personalized promotional offering to that user (Jobber, 2001). Previous research by Khokhar and Adiobi (2007) mention promotion as a benefit for web advertisements. They argue for promotion as an advantage in reaching out to the customers. In physical stores, product promotions are very common and these are meant to stimulate customer traffic into the store. Online promotions have the task of attracting users into visiting a specific web site with the use of special offers. Depending on the marketing method, these promotions are often linked to the user's Internet habits. They are built to recognize the subject of interest and the offers are automatically made to fit the user preferences (Lim and Dubinsky, 2004).

As previously mentioned, traditional marketing media and the earlier versions of internet marketing only provided marketers with a one-to-many marketing model, where the product or service were marketed towards a mass market of customers with none or limited feedback from the customers (Hoffman and Novak, 2000). In the recent times however, with the help of search-engines, blogs, communities and some forms of banner marketing, the messages are more personal and have gained a more one-to-one form of marketing (ibid). Moreover, marketing on the web is the most cost-effective way of marketing out there. The use of Internet for marketing is the least expensive method with a fraction of the cost of any other traditional marketing method (Yan and Po, 2006), and besides it is also environmentally friendly. Compared to regular offline marketing, companies contribute to the environment with up to 62 % in savings (Hoffman and Novak, 2000).

3.1.2 Disadvantages of Internet Marketing

Regarding the shortcomings of web marketing, there are some areas that are worth mentioning. Lim and Dubinsky (2004) talk about the lack of interactivity, the degree of interaction that customers have with the store personnel in case they are interested in a certain product. In a physical store, the amount of interaction is much higher and very instant compared to the online store. The online version of interactivity is almost non-existent compared to its physical counterpart. FAQ's and feedback systems are some alternative ways of increasing this sort of activity with the customer (ibid).

Another disadvantage with web marketing is the shortage of stimuli. Laroche et al (2003) state the lack of stimuli in an online environment as the need for touch, smell and taste, resembling the offline environment. This inadequacy is what most marketers consider as

one of the major differences between the online and offline marketing environment (Nelmapius et al, 2005). Moreover, reliability has in the later days become a drawback in web marketing. As companies have realized the role of blogs and communities in marketing, they have also come up with ways for marketing in these mediums (Fallenius and Karlsson, 2007). Although blogs and communities are new phenomenons with a sudden rise in attention, their users have already discovered the apparent marketing comments, with their persuading characteristics. At the same time as members notice these marketing messages, the advertisements will be increasingly boycotted (ibid).

3.1.2.1 Automaticity

The issue of automaticity evolves around attention, and is important for marketers as it influences the effect of advertising (Dahlén, 2001). During automaticity, users tend to ignore information that is not related to the task at hand. In web environments, consumers have their surfing patterns clear as they are familiar with the Internet layout. Research has shown that advertisements are usually located in the periphery of the screen, while the content is placed in the middle. Users that are experienced or somewhat familiar with the web tend to ignore the marginal areas (ibid). As online marketing methods are increasing, bringing crowded web sites, so is the ability of users screening out these advertisements. As a result, a decrease in ad recognition and ad recall is created (Dahlén, 2001).

3.2 Blogs

The definitions of what a blog truly is are many. If one would search the word, several explanations would appear. The eminent online search-engine, Google, displays the most common ones as:

- Slang for Weblog.
- An online journal or diary that is frequently updated.
- A specialized site that allows an individual or group of individuals to share a running log of events and personal insights with online audiences.
- A mixture of what is happening in a person's life and what is happening on the web or in the media.

No matter the various definitions, blogs are places where readers go to receive experiences or information they do not have. In addition, they are strong mediums where people who read them expect to be engaged with the author of the blog or with other visitors (Drezner and Farrell, 2004). In turn, the string of blogs creates the blogosphere, a massive virtual community, based on blogs and bloggers, the authors of blogs (Gill, 2004).

Wright (2006) argues about the use of blogs from the company viewpoint as a new medium and a potential new source of marketing based on three things; information, relationships and knowledge management. With this medium, the business can provide the blog with information regarding their products or services while expecting feedback. Secondly, if the company provides the reader or customer with positive experiences from their business or their products, it will start a buzz among the readers or bloggers, creating a strong relationship towards the readers. Finally, it is vital to have large stores of knowledge within the company available to the right people at the right time in order to reflect a "real" image on the business (Wright, 2006).

3.2.1 Blogging

Blogging leads to authentic feedback from customers, relating to potential new marketing strategies, innovative product ideas or even new concepts (Wright, 2006). However one might wish to describe it, blogging most often has different meaning to various parts. While civilians might see it as their everyday diary where they discuss incidents or experiences with an audience, companies should see blogs as a communication tool, a marketing technique and a way to interact with customers on a global scale (ibid). According to Wright (2006), studying blogs can give businesses priceless information about what their customers and non-customers, competitors, partners and the media think of their business, their marketing process, their advertising and their products. This information can be used to determine what the customers want, how they want it and what they are willing to pay for it. This is the result of the post-blog era, whereas the business can have a two-way communication with the customers, compared to the pre-blog era where most of the corporate communication with customers was one-way as the company transmitted information to customers, with the aid of banners and pop-ups (Wright, 2006).

Horton (2003) writes about three ways of blogging for marketing purposes; writing a blog yourself, marketing through bloggers or advertising on blogs. Either way, no matter what approach the marketer decides to use, they must focus on targeting the right audience, the credibility of the offering and reader relevance (Horton, 2003). Whether the marketer writes its own blog or market through bloggers, finding the right audience is quite easy through the use of digital customer databases which can be found in-, or bought from various servers (Gilbert, 2008). This subject will be discussed further down in the thesis. Marketing through reader-trusted blogs regularly contributes to the rise of interest towards the company among existing or potential customers. This marketing strategy will eventually lead to blog readers thinking of them first, and a greater chance of them trying their new product or service (Horton, 2003). Furthermore, when marketing an offering in blogs, it is important to be credible. A reader chooses to visit a company blog, and it is therefore essential to be honest towards the customers about what the company is offering. Not all products can be finest and best. If there are better products on the market, the readers will know this and the blog will be known as an advertising copy with the result of becoming boycotted (Horton, 2003).

Even though blogging and blogs have become vital tools for companies wanting to provide and receive information to existing and potential customers (Wright, 2006), not all blogs become successful. There are some important points to consider when marketing products or services in a company blog, in order to gain or increase traffic to that blog. Primarily, targeting a community of interest is of utmost importance in order for an audience to gather around the blog (Horton, 2003). Horton further writes about two cases where a beverage company with a new soft-drink flavour and a cell-phone company with a new camera-phone, who marketed their products towards selected blogs in order to receive feedback from readers and other bloggers. The cell-phone company was discussed in various blogs at a faster rate and at a much larger scale than the beverage company. This was due to the reason that there is a larger interest for electronic devices than for new beverage flavours.

As written earlier, blog readers and customers or potential customers choose to visit the company blog, compared to e-mail marketing where advertising copies drop in the mailbox. The reason a reader chooses to click its way to the company blog is based on relevant information. The blog provides the reader with information they need or want, while maintaining interest. Press releases, web links, real-time updates and new product

information are some examples of reaching out to the reader in need, and it is on this level that the marketing efforts make the difference (Horton, 2003).

3.3 Communities

At the same time as companies and their marketers are focused with customized offerings and one-to-one communications, they are in danger of overlooking the internet as a many-to-many communications tool where their customers also interact with one another (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). This virtual meeting and the exchange of information taking place between an immense number of online users, creates a form of community, and the characteristics of this can be seen in figure 3 below. If one would define a community, the definition would state that a community is “a set of interwoven relationships built upon shared interests, which satisfies members’ needs otherwise unattainable individually” (Mohammed et al, 2002). Most of the online communities are specialized with focus on specific markets or market segments (Kozinets, 2000, quoted in Maclaran and Catterall, 2002).

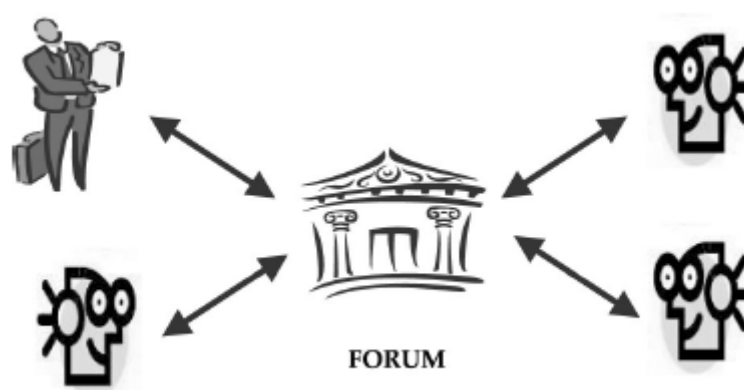


Figure 3: The characteristics of a forum's many-to-many system (Source: Pitta and Fowler, 2005)

Online communities can be built up in two fundamentally different forms and these are Real-time systems or Asynchronous systems. The difference is that real-time systems are based on Chat's, such as Internet relay chat (IRC) or through web-based chat, where the users read and reply to messages from each other instantly. In an asynchronous system such as forums, newsgroups or a web-based message board, the messages are not always responded directly on and this is called delayed communication (Mohammed et al, 2002). Asynchronous systems are advantageous in the way that these communities can flourish without consideration to geography and time zones (Szmigin et al, 2005). Pitta and Fowler (2005) write that asynchronicity also increases the number of participants in a community due to the ability of participating online during the full 24 hours of the day. Since forums are the prime definition of online communities, they are the main focus regarding 'communities' in this thesis (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). The characteristics of a forum are the many topic areas that the user can find. Each area has its own "thread", which is the current subject under discussion. Most forum-sites have an archive where these discussions and threads are saved for many years, while still being active for discussion (ibid). Although some topics may go on for several periods of time without anyone responding to them, most subjects are highly current with users replying almost instantly. Most forum users are online simultaneously due to their interest for the subject under discussion (Pitta and

Fowler, 2005). Members in a community feel comfortable and understood in the forum environment. Furthermore, the community is a place of privacy, where the users can discuss any subject of choice between themselves and so creating their own culture, rules and certain sort of behaviour within it (Bohling and Twiefel, 2007). Szmigin et al (2005) present a table, displaying four different ways of organising an online community.

	Non-profit Maximisation Organisation	Profit Maximisation Organisation
Dialogue focused	HELP GROUP Content focused	VALUE EXCHANGE Customer focused
Information focused	FAN CLUB Hobby focused	DEFENCE ORGANISATION Vendor focused

Table 6: Four possibilities of organising an online community (Source: Szmigin et al, 2005, p.487)

As seen in table six above, Szmigin et al (2005) also provides a description of the characteristics of these different types of communities. A help group revolves around a special area of interest, and around this interest the members answer each other's questions. The focus of the community is on the created content and it is dependent on continuing dialogue, but without any focus on economic profit. A fan club is usually run by a company or other commercial interests, but the focus is on the interest of the users and to provide information and amusement. Examples of organisations running fan club communities are sports clubs or artists (ibid). A value exchange community relies on widespread consumer interaction and discussions. They are focused on the customers of something specific, but are not always run by the provider of the product or brand of which the community revolves around (Szmigin et al, 2005). Throughout the writing of this thesis, there has been a focus on the value exchange communities and specifically their forums. Lastly, the defence organisation is focused on the vendor providing the community or web site. It features information and FAQ sections, but few possibilities for an interactive dialogue (ibid). Mohammed et al (2002) state that many of the company-run forums are not run on the base to generate substantial revenue, but to provide a

supplement for their ordinary business to create additional value for the consumers and thereby increase the value of the entire offering.

As community members become more familiar with each other, they naturally build an online relationship, creating a consumer-to-consumer (c-to-c) network (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). The vital c-to-c relationship is the one marketers focus on, since it is this kind of networking which influences brand choice among the members (ibid). This level of influence is in many cases also affected by brand communities (Flavián and Guinalú, 2005). These communities are created around the appreciation and interest of a specific brand. Among the advantages of a brand community is the increase in brand equity, which is important for products with intangible and emotional attributes, e.g. the online fashion industry. Furthermore, these forms of communities are vital due to their contribution towards brand awareness (ibid). The increase in this matter is mostly due to the word-of-mouth effect that a c-to-c relationship brings. Marketers are in the position of gaining large benefits from these c-to-c networks as they can observe the consumer interests directly, with the possibility of gathering data from targeted market segments, such as (Pitta and Fowler, 2005):

- Customers satisfaction with a specific service or product
- Customers desires or undesirable features on a future product
- Customers perceptions of competitors
- Consumers attitude towards the company

The benefits and values created and transferred in a community can take both financial and non-economic forms. Among the financial benefits one can find advertisements. This kind of community marketing can take the form of promotions in a thread, links to web site or simply banner advertisement (Bohling and Twiefel, 2007). Mohammed et al (2002) state that financial value cannot be created if there is no value created for the individual users. The value created for individual users can stem both from other users and from the administrators. The user-to-user creation of value stems from user-generated content that could not have been done individually since it requires contributions from several users in the form of written opinions or facts. The administrators of the forum can also create value for the individual user by contributing with special content such as articles or arranged chats with people of interest within the field of the community (ibid). When the two other forms of value creation exist, the community flourishes and the third form of value creation can occur because of that it requires members who create it. The user-to-administrator value in the form of revenue can be based on either a kind of fee for using the community and its contents or by sales of advertising (Mohammed et al, 2002). The creation and transfer of value mentioned above is exemplified in figure 4 below.

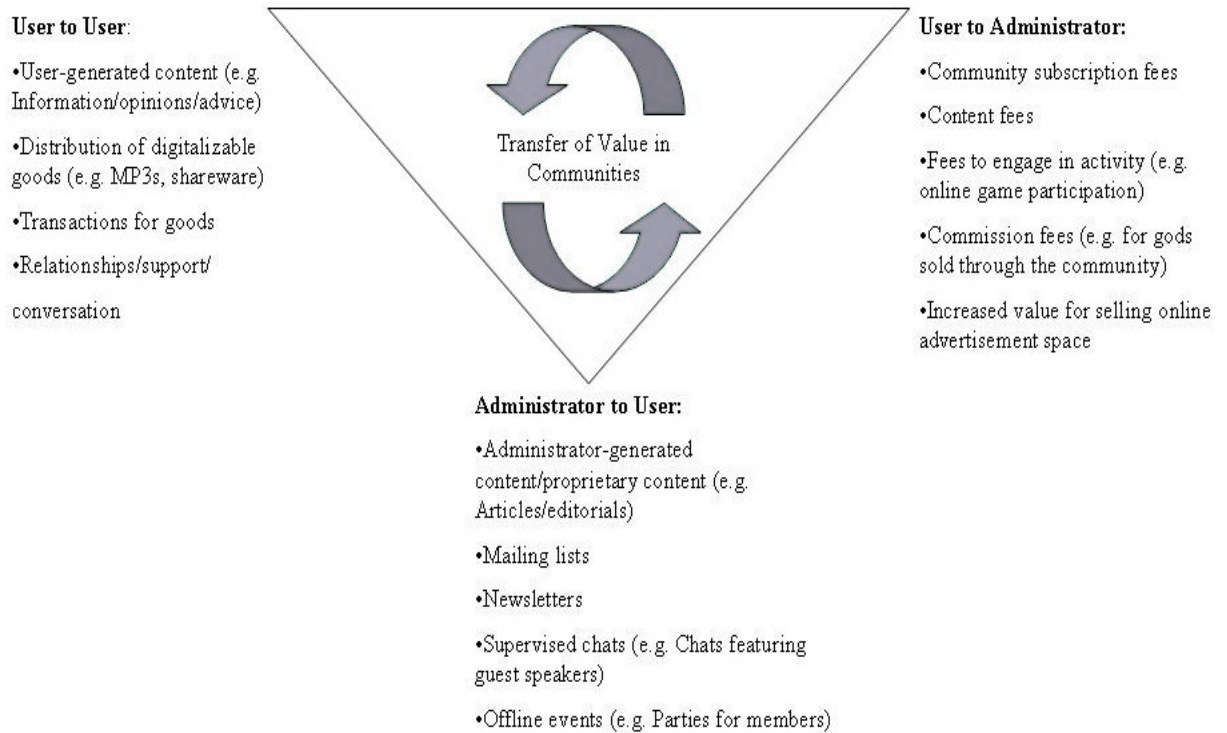


Figure 4: Transfer of Value Triangle (Source: Mohammed et al, 2002, p.438)

3.4 Acceptance Theory

In order for any new technology to be implemented on to society, there must some sort of an acceptance towards it (Venkatesh et al, 2003). Dillon and Morris (1996) define user acceptance of any new medium as the willingness to employ this form of technology and its purpose. Although, some users may claim that they do accept new medium, but there is a difference between claiming and actually doing. For companies and marketers, it is very important to investigate user acceptance in order to evaluate, design and recreate their methods, as they are user-centred (ibid). As online technology is growing and spreading in various forms, organizations and managers alike are dependent on designing their systems in order to fit the society and the needs of the user.

In their research, Dillon and Morris (1996) have studied a variety of issues related to user acceptance. User characteristics such as online relationships, beliefs and demographic variables such as age and gender influence their choices and decisions. However, they could not state any definite results as no single variable is likely to give a valid explanation of user acceptance. Dillon and Morris (1996) further argue for the theory of reasoned action, created by Fishbein and Ajzen's in 1980, regarding the psychological implications that could influence users, such as the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. These variables can in many cases determine the user's perception towards the matter at hand, in this case web advertisement.

3.4.1 User's Flow

If companies and marketers wish to gain acceptance and positive attitudes from Internet users, it is of outmost importance not to disrupt these consumers Internet “flow” (Chen et al, 2000). There are many definitions of what constitutes the “flow” and the following definition by Chen et al (2000) grab it quite well; an optimal, extremely enjoyable experience when an individual engages in an activity with total involvement, concentration and enjoyment. New users of the World Wide Web will eventually learn of the occurrence of flow, as it is the ‘glue’ holding the consumer in their computer mediated environment (ibid). Rettie (2001) further argues for a positive experience of flow due to repeat visits, causing ‘stickiness’ of a web site. She also states for the fact that researchers can study the variables causing stickiness during user’s flow-state, since the results can be used for marketing purposes. However, there are some online features with the ability of interrupting/disrupting user flow:

- Long times for pages to load
- Limited stimulation and boring sites
- Slow responses
- Navigational links that fail to connect
- Irrelevant advertising (Banners)
- Annoying Pop-up marketing

The experience of flow can occur during several types of Internet activities like e-mail communication, chat rooms, transactions or entertainment purposes. However, a majority of the respondents from Chen et al’s (2000) study gave ‘information search’ and ‘research’ as the most common activities under which flow occurred. During these web activities, the users recognized some elements that disrupted their flow (listed above). Long loading times made the users bored and took away their concentration. Limited stimulation and slow responses decreased their involvement and reduced perceived control (Rettie, 2001). Most importantly, the users gave advertisements as an extremely negative influence as they found them very disturbing when in flow. Banner advertisements were ignored completely while Pop-up’s were classified as ‘flashing’ messages, which are unwanted and non-interesting. Rettie’s (2001) study also states that Internet advertising in general creates great irritation while contributing to the disruption in flow amongst users.

3.5 Relationship Marketing

The concept of Relationship Marketing has existed for a long time, starting with consumers making their purchases in the local stores, creating a bond with the merchant (Allen et al, 1998). This model has not changed significantly since those days, as it is still about interacting with customers and satisfying their needs. This process is one of the most central points to marketers now, than ever before (Wang et al, 2000). In order to be-, and stay competitive, companies must create relationships with their customers as it is easier and cheaper to keep your customers, than it is acquiring new ones (Schoenbachler et al, 1997). Customer satisfaction is one of the key terms when relating to relationship marketing (Jobber, 2001). The issue regards the consumer expectations of the product or service in relation to his or her expectations. If the users consider the offerings as of high

quality, over what they have expected, then the marketer has managed to reach a high level of satisfaction. As most managers already know, it is not enough with only satisfying the consumer; they have to exceed their expectations (ibid).

In the earlier days, companies had a mass-marketing structure in their promotional efforts, with the objective of reaching out to as many customers-, with as many products as possible. However, with the birth of the Internet this process developed into the one-to-many structure. Organizations searched to find a way of using this new medium as a marketing tool, and thus was the one-to-many marketing model born, with the exposure of advertisements on a web site which in turn transmitted it to as many users as possible, with one and the same broadcast to all as can be seen in figure 5 (Pitta and Fowler, 2005).

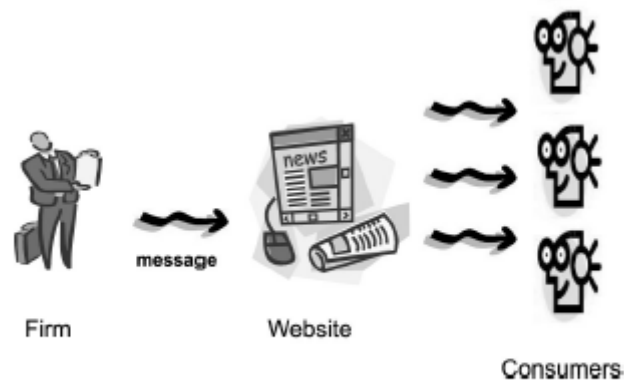


Figure 5: The characteristic of the one-to-many marketing model (Source: Pitta and Fowler, 2005)

After several years of using the method seen in figure 5, the companies and their marketers learned of a revolutionary new way of marketing (Hanson, 2000). Their desire was to make the contact with customers direct, interactive and more personalized, and so the one-to-one marketing form was created. With customized ads, the marketers could transform their marketing into specialized solutions for the user, moving closer to the individual consumer's satisfaction (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). With one-to-one marketing companies can build long-term, sustainable customer relationships that add value to the user and the company itself, as they can prioritize their efforts and gain the most advantage with the most valuable customers.

With the birth of one-to-one marketing and customization came the process of digital mass-customization. With the help of databases, this marketing form provided the ability of developing unique and dynamic offerings to a large population simultaneously (Hanson, 2000). Wang et al (2000) argue for the success of relationship marketing in the online environment as in many cases being dependent on the gathering and analysing of customer information. One of the more widely known methods for collecting information for the purpose of relationship marketing to marketers is in fact the use of customer databases (Schoenbachler et al, 1997).

3.5.1 Customer Database

During the past decade, as the world of marketing has gone from traditional many-to-many to a narrower internet-based one-to-one marketing model, the companies have learned to adapt to the change (Schoenbachler et al, 1997). With this new approach, marketers have

realized the advantages of building databases, storing customer attributes. The database as a system is defined as “a collection of data, stored for computerized retrieval” (Schoenbachler et al, 1997, s. 5). However, a marketing database is described as “a collection of data, gathered and saved with the purpose of providing maximum useful knowledge about your customers, to their benefit and your profit” (ibid). Further, it is the growth in relationship marketing that has been the prime reason for the development of customer databases (O’Leary et al, 2004). In order to be competitive, organizations must build individual relationships with each user, enhancing the one-to-one marketing form. The purpose is to make the users feel that they are being recognized with attention (ibid).

For companies and its marketers, the role of database marketing indicates an increase in customer information, and an increase in long term profitability. For consumers, databases will have a significant role in decreasing the exposure of unwanted advertisement, while increasing contact with interest-related marketing (Schoenbachler et al, 1997). However, database marketing and the collection of data is not always met with positive attitude from the users. The issue of privacy worries the Internet population, as many consider these methods an invasion of their privacy, which provides the marketers with too much information about them (ibid).

3.6 Consumer Perception of Online Advertisements

In order to succeed in online marketing, it is of vital importance to know your customers and their perceptions towards advertisement on the Internet (Newman et al, 2004). Early research by Gordon and Lima-Turner (1997) implicates that users have different opinions on web advertisement depending on its characteristics; if their online activity is information based, the ads should be entertaining and if their purpose is transaction based, the ads should be more informative. Their early studies also shows that users are more positive towards relationship marketing with targeted ads rather than randomly selected profiles. Korgaonkar and Wolin (2002) state that, depending on the type of user; they believe Internet advertising of being enjoyable or boring. In their research, they had divided their respondents into heavy, medium and light users, depending on the time these users spent on the Internet. The heavy users were the ones with a more positive approach towards online ads, while the light users were mostly annoyed or bored by them. The users considered as medium had a neutral attitude towards online ads; they were neither bothered by them, or considered them as enjoyable (ibid).

However, more recent research shows that internet user’s perception of online advertisements and their level of interest is highly correlated with their attitude towards the site where these advertisements appear, increasing the attitude and response towards the advertisement itself (Bruner and Kumar, 2000; Korgaonkar and Wolin, 2002). It has also been argued that demographic variables and customization of advertising can in some cases decide consumer’s attitudes towards advertisement (ibid).

3.6.1 Attitude Towards the Ad

Dahlén (2001) recognizes in his study, some characteristics of consumer’s response to advertisements depending on the level of involvement. Depending on whether the involvement levels were high or low, the responses changed noticeably. Users who spent time on devoted sites had a more positive response towards subject-related advertisements (ibid). These users had a larger concern in receiving information about their interests, while being a better and more active audience towards advertisements in ‘their’ area. Dahlén’s

(2001) results also showed that high involvement users developed a stronger brand attitude, and intention of purchase. Likewise, when the level of involvement was low, as in random surfing behaviour, the users cared less for the information made available to them. These users had neither a more favourable brand attitude nor a higher level of purchase intentions (ibid).

As a result, Dahlén (2001) suggested that advertisement placement is important. Ads should be exposed at the right place, whether the user is searching for relative information or on interest-sites. Furthermore, Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) claim that consumer who develop a positive attitude towards an ad, tend to recall it more often than those with a negative attitude. For users in low involvement sites, advertisements should be more interactive with as much information as possible, served directly in the ad. Although Internet users might not see some ads as relevant to their current purpose, it might nevertheless result in an increase of brand awareness due to the ads qualities (Wang et al, 2002). Conclusively, it has been stated that a positive emotion towards an ad, gives a positive emotion towards the brand (ibid).

3.6.2 Attitude Towards the Site

As early as 1996, Ducoffe stated that advertisements placed in more credible mediums such as newspapers were perceived as more informative, reliable and believable. Advertisements in less credible mediums such as TV were considered less informative. More recent studies by Brackett and Carr (2001) developed Ducoffe's model with more modern medium variables. While attitude-towards-the-ad states the consumer's positive or negative emotions towards the advertisement and brand attitude itself, attitude-towards-the-site argues for the emotions towards the site where these advertisements can be found (Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2002). Bruner and Kumar (2000) showed in their study that there is a positive relation between attitude towards web sites and attitude towards advertisement. This relation is visualised in figure 6 below.

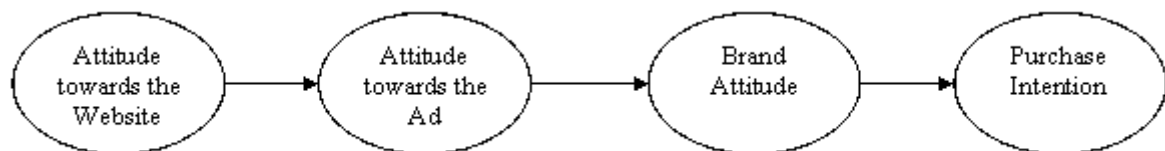


Figure 6: The relation between Attitude-towards-the-site and Attitude-towards-the-ad (Source: Bruner and Kumar, 2000)

If the users have developed a liking for the web site, there is a much larger likelihood of gaining an increase in the liking of the ads on that specific site (Bruner and Kumar, 2000).

In contrast, Goldsmith and Lafferty's (2002) research with over 1200 respondents perceptions from liked sites indicated that the attitude towards advertisements on liked sites compared to random internet pages were neutral, rather than liked or disliked. However, irritations towards an advertisement will in many cases negatively affect both advertisement value and the attitude towards the site. If the ads are perceived as disturbing, they will most likely increase the frustration levels (ibid).

3.6.3 Demographic Variables

Since the Internet is more mainstream than ever before, it is interesting to investigate and study previous research regarding the demographic differences between Internet users (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 2002). Variables such as education, age and gender are shown to have an effect on the attitude towards web sites and advertising (Wang et al, 2002). Knowledge of these variables offers the marketers the possibility of spending marketing money in targeted, gender-specific advertisements (Wolin and Korgaonkar, 2003). Hanson (2000) claims that the majority of Internet users are perceived as quite young, while middle-aged persons and seniors are minorities among the people spending time online. This difference reflects itself in e.g. work and education. While most companies and in the modern times provide computers and the possibility of using the Internet at work, this generation of our population are the ones most likely to have been exposed to the Internet medium. The same goes for all educational institutions.

In the western world, the Internet is available for every person who desires to use it, regardless of gender. Nonetheless, in the young-adult ages, male users tend to be over-represented in the online environment (Hanson, 2000). In the teenager-segment, users have shown to be equally male and female, while the majority of new users in all ages are shown to be female (*ibid*). Further, Wolin and Korgaonkar's (2003) study argues for the results from previous research, showing apparent differences between genders and their online behaviour. Their own study enhances these results further, as they show male users of being more positive towards online ads, considering them as enjoyable, useful and more informative. On the contrary, female consumers considered web advertising as annoying, offensive and deceptive (*ibid*).

3.7 Consumer Behaviour

The traits of the Internet are not considered as very different from the offline world (Hanson, 2000). Many of the fundamental marketing methods do cross over from the real- to the online world. The same goes for the users and their relation to marketing (*ibid*).

However, when addressing Internet marketing, one of the fundamental issues to consider is how to attract the consumers in this highly competitive environment (Constantinides, 2004). It has further been known that variables such as demographic, social, informational, psychological and other personal factors play a role on consumer behaviour, some more than other. Lack of social interactivities and communicational preferences makes the user more fastidious with their online activities (Hanson, 2000). Moreover, information seeking is considered as important for any user due to its value. Users need to have access to information on demand, and they have access to a much higher amount of information through this medium than offline. As previously mentioned, the psychological factors that influence the online users behaviour is also the lack of stimuli, not being able to feel, smell or touch the product of interest. Further aspects influencing users are the lack of shopping experience and the ability of immediate possession (Laroche et al, 2003).

Other factors shaping the online behaviour of users are the 4 P's of marketing; Product, Price, Place and Promotion (Constantinides, 2002). In this case, the product is the online advertisement with the objective of developing an interest for the company while persuading the user of looking into the offering more closely. The price is considered by the user as a cost element towards time, connectivity and opportunity. If there are substitutes, the chances are high that the consumer will compare the offerings. The web site where the product is available is also the promotional medium, and the most important

part of the user's attitude and web behaviour. In online marketing, the web site is the place where the interaction takes place between marketer and user (ibid).

However, studies made by Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) argued for a difference in consumer online behaviour depending on the type of web site:

- Shopping sites – sites primarily developed with shopping in mind, drawing the user into finalizing a purchase.
- Function sites – made for web users to review, extract and reference information. Among the sites listed in this section are financial, educational, technical, news, health and governmental sites.
- Entertainment sites – these sites are used for hobbies, games, sports, and movies. They interact the user with their preferences.
- Communication sites – in this area, users communicate with each other and others. Among these sites, one can find boards, blogs, chat rooms, forums, and similar web sites.

The results showed that male users behaviour were more fit with function and entertainment sites, while the female behaviours preferred shopping sites. When it came to communication sites, both parts showed the same tendency in usage.

3.8 Conceptualization

This section describes and conceptualizes the third chapter and the theories needed to answer the research questions. The conceptualization is made to explain the most important theories in regard to the research questions. The process is based on previous research listed earlier in this chapter.

3.8.1 Conceptualization for RQ1

The first research question of this study involves online consumers, and whether they have a greater acceptance towards advertisements on blogs and communities compared to non-focused web sites, and why this is the case. There are several different theories concerning the importance of the type of web site that the advertisement is placed on. These are presented by researchers such as; Bruner and Kumar (2000), Korgaonkar and Wolin (2002), and Dahlén (2001). Contrasting to their views, Goldsmith and Lafferty's (2002) research of respondents' perceptions indicated that the attitude towards advertisements on liked sites compared to random Internet pages were neutral, rather than liked or disliked. Out of these researchers, Bruner and Kumar (2000) and Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) are the most commonly referred to within this field.

Figure 7 below is adapted from Bruner and Kumar (2000) and shows the relationship between the web site and the advertisement, which they propose.

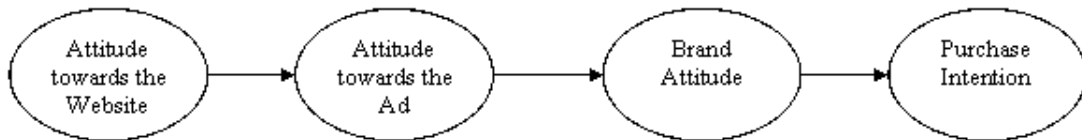


Figure 7: The relation between Attitude-towards-the-site and Attitude-towards-the-ad (Source: Bruner and Kumar, 2000)

Related to the attitude towards the ad, is the theory suggested by Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) about consumers' irritation towards an advertisement will in many cases negatively affect both advertisement value and the attitude towards the site (*ibid.*). Dahlén's (2001) results also showed that high involvement users developed a stronger brand attitude, and intentions of purchase.

A few researchers write about the concept of flow in relation to positive attitudes towards the advertisement. Two of these authors are Chen et al. (2000) and Rettie (2001). Moreover, the concept of asynchronous systems can increase the number of visitors to communities and blogs devoted to a narrow field of interest because of its characteristics of no consideration to geography and time zones (Szmigin et al, 2005; Pitta and Fowler, 2005).

3.8.2 Conceptualization for RQ2

Research question two is about the customization of advertisements and its affect on consumer's attitude towards them.

Early research by Gordon and Lima-Turner (1997) implicates that users are more positive towards relationship marketing with targeted ads rather than randomly selected ads. Later on, Bruner and Kumar (2000), and Korgaonkar and Wolin (2002) have argued that customization of advertising can affect the consumer's attitudes towards advertisement. Dahlén (2001) found that users who spent time on devoted sites had a more positive response towards subject-related advertisements. In his study, these users had a larger concern in receiving information about their interests and developed a stronger brand attitude and intension of purchase (*ibid.*).

Jobber (2001) also suggested that personalized and customized advertisements increased the value of relationship marketing. Horton (2003) took it one step further and emphasized a focus on targeting the right audience, and to be reader relevant.

One way of finding user information in order to develop customized advertisement is to use databases. Schoenbachler et al, (1997) found that database marketing and the collection of data is not always met with positive attitude from the users. This issue worries the Internet population, as many consider these methods an invasion of their privacy. Contrasting, it can also be positive since it would decrease the exposure of unwanted advertisement while increasing contact with interest-related marketing (*ibid.*). Hoffman and Novak (2000) stated as early as 2000 that it was more common then to personalize messages in a one-to-one way, partly for the reason of growth in blogs and communities.

Rettie (2001) found that Internet advertising in general creates great irritation while contributing to the disruption in flow amongst users. This research further develops this

fact to facilitate if this irritation is lower when the advertisement is customized towards the web site where it is located.

3.8.3 Conceptualization for RQ3

For the third research question, the authors of this thesis have chosen to look into the male and female difference on the perception of advertisements on blogs and communities. Bruner and Kumar (2000) have stated that demographic variables such as age and gender can in some cases have an impact on the attitude towards online marketing. Their results were further enhanced by Wang et al (2002) when they noticed a relation between user demographics and their attitude towards web sites in regard to the amount of advertisement. The same is shown by Dillon and Morris (1996) about the role of gender as one of the main issues when focusing on user acceptance. They explain how choices and decisions can be influenced by demographical variables.

Hanson (2000) talked about consumer demographics as one of the variables affecting consumer behaviour. Three years later, Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) enhanced Wang et al's (2002), Hanson's (2000) and Bruner and Kumar's (2000) results when their findings showed that male users tend to be more positive towards online ads, while female consumers found them less optimistic. The male respondents considered web advertisements as enjoyable, useful and informative while the females regarded them as annoying, offensive and deceptive (ibid). For a clear overview of the results from previous studies/research regarding the demographic variables on web advertising, see table 7 below.

Research results	Demographic findings
Dillon and Morris (1996)	Variables such as age and gender have been found to have an influence on user acceptance.
Hanson (2000)	Consumer behaviour has been found to be affected by demographic variables
Bruner and Kumar (2000)	The attitude towards web advertisements is related to user's demographics.
Wang et al (2002)	Demographic variables such as gender have an impact on consumer's attitudes towards the web site where the ads are located.
Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003)	Enhanced the results from Wang et al (2002), Hanson (2000) and Bruner and Kumar (2000) as they found consumers behaviour, attitude towards the ad- and site to be affected by gender variables.

Table 7: Demographic framework regarding the findings from previous research and studies.

One of the intensions with this thesis is to investigate and present the new findings in relation to the theories and previous results within this research area.

4 Analysis of Empirical Data

The previous chapter clarified how the data has been collected, and this chapter will present the data gathered to fulfil the purpose of the thesis. The collection of the empirical data has been done by the use of a survey from three different Communities (The content of the survey's can be found in appendix 2). The first section of this chapter introduces the reader to the chosen communities, and to how the coding of the results has been done. In the third section, all the responses and relations between them is presented. Lastly, the data related to the three different research questions will be shown in three separate sections.

4.1 Presentation of the Communities

First, the community Kolozzeum.com will be introduced. This community is built up around the interest of training. A large part of the members are young males, while the rest represent all of the other segments. There are 27 687 members on Kolozzeum.

The second community used is Minhembio.com, and it is built up around the interest in home entertainment. The composition is not very mixed, consisting of mostly male members. There are 110 000 members on Minhembio.com.

Last and smallest of the communities used is Familjelycka.se which revolves around the topic of children and other family issues. Within this community, there is a majority of women, but they have a lot of male members as well. There are 5 758 members on Familjelycka.se.

4.2 Coding System

To be able to fit the data into a spreadsheet, it had to be coded. The coding used one number, and a letter or word. An example of how this has been done is displayed with Survey question 1, in table 8 below.

Question one	
Yes	= 1 Yes
No	= 1 No
A blog is a web site where you can read advice from an expert.	= 1 a
A blog is a web site where you can interact with other members and share knowledge.	= 1 b
A blog is a web site where someone writes about their own life or current events etc.	= 1 c

Table 8: An example of the design of the coding system.

To make the most common choices more clear, the option with the highest percentage of choices has been highlighted. The complete responses after being compiled in Excel can be seen in table 9 below.

Total n = 205													
Question 1	1 Yes	1 No	1 a	1 b	1 c								
Number of respondents	177	2	5	2	186								
Percentage	86.3	0.9	2.4	1.0	90.7								
Question 2	2 Yes	2 No	2 a	2 b	2 c								
Number of respondents	173	3	11	183	9								
Percentage	84.4	1.5	5.4	89.3	4.4								
Question 3	3 Yes	3 No	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5						
Number of respondents	142	34	19	33	48	36	52						
Percentage	69.3	16.6	9.3	16.1	23.4	17.6	25.4						
Question 4			4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5						
Number of respondents			13	19	59	63	46						
Percentage			6.3	9.3	28.8	30.7	22.4						
Question 5			5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5						
Number of respondents			33	59	69	20	19						
Percentage			16.1	28.8	33.6	9.8	9.3						
Question 6			6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5						
Number of respondents			28	62	63	27	21						
Percentage			13.6	30.2	30.7	13.2	10.2						
Question 7			7.1	7.2	7.3	7.4	7.5	7 a	7 b	7 c	7 d	7 e	
Number of respondents			25	60	66	25	21	41	24	39	86	16	
Percentage			12.2	29.3	32.2	12.2	10.2	20.0	11.7	19.0	41.9	7.8	
Question 8			8.1	8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5						
Number of respondents			16	37	53	27	68						
Percentage			7.8	18.0	25.8	13.2	33.2						
Question 9	9 Yes	9 No						9 a	9 b	9 c	9 d		
Number of respondents	76	115						14	59	22	17		
Percentage	37.1	56.1						6.8	28.8	10.7	8.3		
Question 10	Women	Men						10 a	10b	10 c	10d	10e	
Number of respondents	45	160						48	110	41	9	4	
Percentage	21.9	78.1						23.4	53.7	20.0	4.4	1.9	

Table 9: A compilation of the results obtained from all of the respondents.

As seen in table 9, the responses are not sorted in relation to men or women, as two separate tables differentiating these two variables has been provided in Appendix 5 and 6.

4.3 Data Related to RQ1

This section contains data gathered to answer the first research question; Do consumers have a greater acceptance towards advertisement in blogs and communities, compared to non-focused web-sites, and why? A graphical summary of the data can be seen in diagram 1 below.

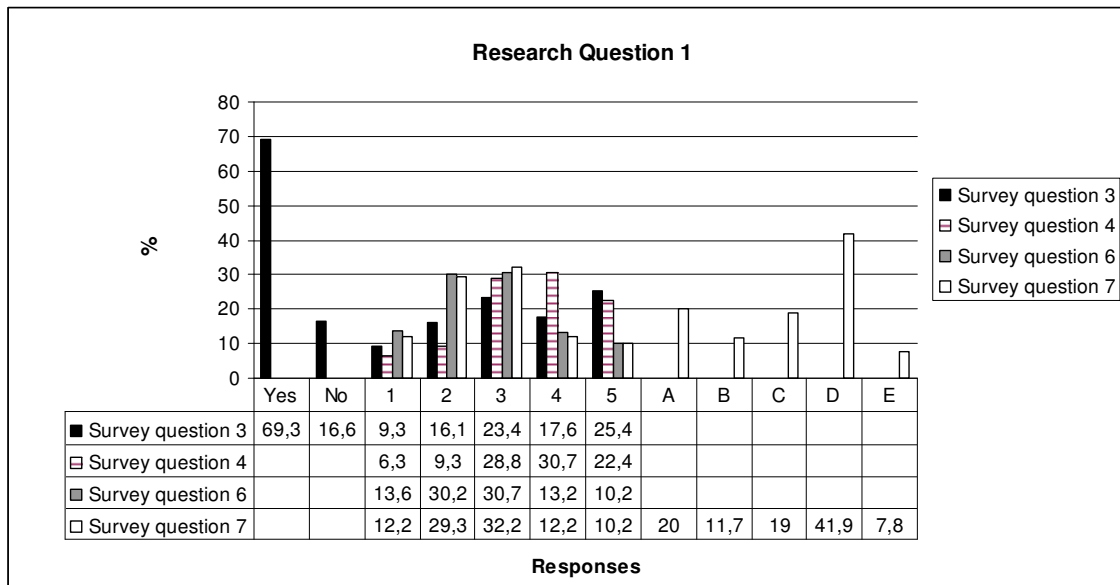


Diagram 1: Graphical summary of the responses from Survey questions related to Research Question 1.

As seen in diagram 1 above, most of the respondents usually see advertisement online, and they generally dislike it. The respondents also think that advertisement on communities and blogs are affecting their surfing experience in a negative way. Related to the last question, they think that it is generally better when advertisements are adapted to the context of the community or blog where they are located. On question seven, which is the last question in this section, the majority of the respondents chose option 3, which is the same as no difference. However, a large part of the minority was more positive towards advertisement on a blog or community as it is regarded to relate to their interests.

4.3.1 Analysis of the Data Related to RQ1

The question is if consumers do have a greater acceptance towards advertisement on blogs and communities, compared to non-focused web sites, and why? In this section, the data will be analysed with the use of the conceptualization for this question, and the analysis is based on diagram 1 above.

To start with, a general view will be presented on advertisements online, regarding if the respondents usually notice online advertisement, and what they think of them. A large majority (69.3%) of the respondents answered that they usually see advertisements online, but quite many (25.4%) chose to rate is as a 5, which in turn is the worst rating possible. The tendency of the rest of the respondents were that the majority was in the direction of a

negative attitude. Thus, most of the respondents usually see advertisement online, but they generally dislike it. This view can be compared to the answers received in survey question six which is about the respondents different looks on advertisements tailored to the content of the blog or community, where the majority of the respondents have answered that they are more positive towards advertisement which is related to the contents of the blog or community. Approximately a third of the respondents (30.2 %) chose option 2, which indicates that they are more positive towards tailored advertisement. About the same amount (30.7 %) chose option 3, which means that they are indifferent. Thus, when adding the 13.6 % who answered 1, a vast majority was either more positive or indifferent towards tailored advertisement on communities and blogs. One way of applying this to the first research question is the concept of flow, proposed by Chen et al (2000) and Rettie (2001). Both of these authors discuss the concept of flow in relation to positive attitudes towards the advertisement. So, if the advertisement is related to the users preferences, it will cause a decrease in the disruption of the users flow, which is not possible in the case with a non-focused web site (Chen et al, 2000; Rettie, 2001). Adding to the advantage of communities and blogs, Szmigin et al, (2005) and Pitta and Fowler (2005) write that the concept of asynchronous systems can increase the number of visitors to communities and blogs devoted to a narrow field of interest because of its characteristics of no consideration to geography and time zones. Also this is an ability missed by non-focused web sites.

In question seven, the respondents answered that they see advertisement more positively when it is placed on a blog or community compared to a random web site. One third (30.2%) of the respondents were indifferent to this issue, while a total of 41.5 % chose either 1 or 2, indicating that they see advertisement more positively when placed on a blog or community, compared to another random web site. There are several theories concerning the importance of the type of web site that the advertisements are placed on. These are presented by researchers such as; Bruner and Kumar (2000), Korgaonkar and Wolin (2002), and Dahlén (2001). These theories show a linkage between the attitude-towards-the-site and the attitude-towards-the-ad. The respondents have a better relation and an increased liking for blogs and communities than other random web sites, and therefore towards the advertisement there. Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) found in their research that the attitude towards advertisements on liked sites compared to random Internet pages were neutral, instead of liked or disliked. Our results are more in line with the results of the other researches than those of Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002).

The reason for the respondents being more positive towards advertisements placed on blogs or communities were the relation to their interests, and 41.9 % were of that view. With the second highest percentage rate (20 %) came the question; that it gives the consumer knowledge about good offers, and with 19 %, the respondents stated that it was because it gave them knowledge about new products or services. In line with this, one can make the connection to the results from Dahlén (2001), who concluded that users with a higher degree of involvement in the web site developed a stronger brand attitude, and intentions of purchase.

The respondents also think that advertisements on communities and blogs are affecting their surfing experience, or flow, in a negative way. More than half (53.1 %) saw it as negative (30.7 % chose option 4, 22.4 % chose option 5), while around a third (28.8 %) saw it as indifferent. Goldsmith and Lafferty (2002) proposed that irritation towards an advertisement can or will negatively affect both advertisement value and the attitude towards the site. Related to the sixth survey question, asking if the respondents look differently on advertisement when it is tailored to the content of the blog or community

where it is located, they think that it is generally better when advertisements are adapted to the content of the community or blog where they are located.

4.4 Data Related to RQ2

This section contains data gathered to answer our second research question; how and why is consumer’s attitude towards the advertisements affected by their degree of customization? A graphical summary of the data can be seen in diagram 2 below.

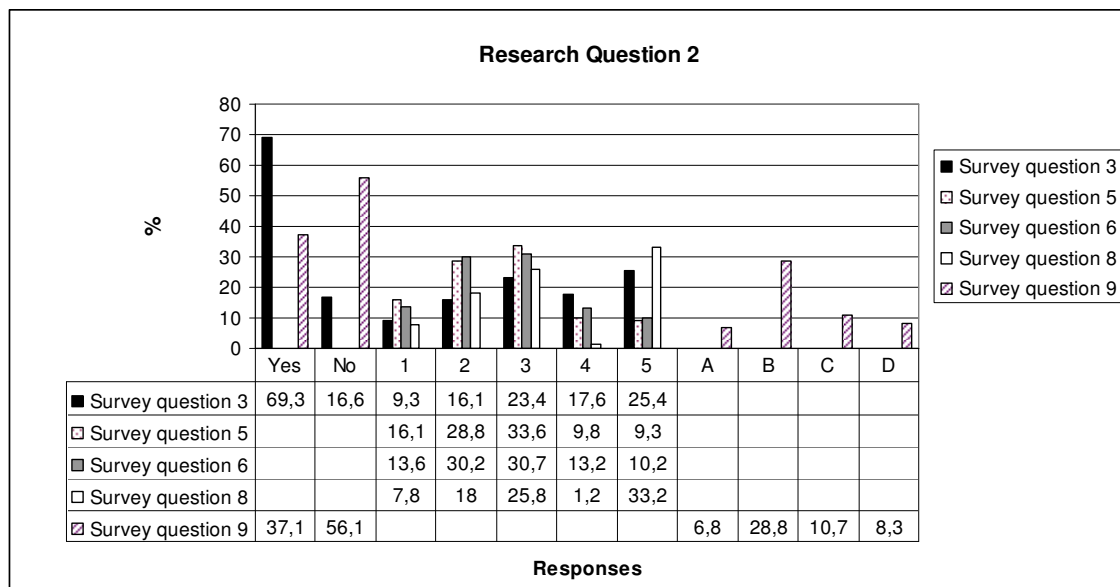


Diagram 2: Graphical summary of the responses from Survey questions related to Research Question 2.

As presented in diagram 2 above, a large part of the respondents see advertisement online, but they do not like it. Compared to the former question, the majority of them are located in the middle, with a higher number of respondents with more positive views. Related to the first question, they believe that it is better when the advertisement is adapted to the context of the community or blog where it is located. It is a quite wide spread of the respondents regarding the question of data collection, but the majority chose that it is negative. Most of the respondents do not remember a certain advertisement from a blog or community more than other advertisement, but those who do believe it to be a result of the advertisements relation to their interests.

4.4.1 Analysis of the Data Related to RQ2

Data from the previous section illustrates Internet users and their awareness of online advertisements. Survey question three is a good starting point when analyzing the respondent’s perceptions towards online advertising. A majority of the users (69.3 %) are clearly conscious of the ads, and most of them have developed a disliking towards them. This fact is in comparison with Goldsmith and Lafferty’s (2002) findings as their respondents found ads to be annoying and irritating. This point-of-view has been shared by many online users during the past years, with the growth in web based marketing methods. The most common mediums of matter in regard to users disliking have been Banners and Pop-ups (Chaffey et al, 2003). The reasons have been different, but they most likely fall into Reties’ (2001) theory regarding an interruption in the users ‘flow’. When interrupting

users with various commercials and advertisements, as they are in their surfing flow, could be devastating for the company in questions. In worst case, the consumer could develop a disliking towards the brand itself (Dahlén, 2001). The results from survey question three are most likely related to these theories regarding user's attitudes towards the advertisement.

The interesting results for research question two began revealing themselves with survey questions five and six, as a large part of the respondents were either indifferent (30.7 % – 33.6 %) or considered the online advertisements to be more acceptable (28.8 % - 30.2 %) if they are customized, e.g. related to their hobbies or to the site where they are located. This is in direct relation with earlier research by Gordon and Lima-Turner (1997) as well as Dahlén's (2001) statement of users having more positive feelings towards advertisements, which are targeted, compared to the ones appearing on random web sites. Users who spend time online, searching for information regarding their interests, whether it is on devoted sites or search-engines, have a higher level of involvement in 'their' area. Moreover, these users had a more positive attitude towards online advertisements in those cases the ads were related to their interests, hence the name customized ads (Bruner and Kumar, 2000; Korgaonkar and Wolin, 2002). The answers from this investigations response for survey questions five and six enhance these theories even further. In addition, these users will in turn develop a stronger brand attitude, since users attitude towards the ad is positively related to user's attitude towards the site (Bruner and Kumar, 2000). Hence, the respondents from this research considered ads (attitude-towards-the-ad) to be more acceptable if they were related to their interests or to the content of the blog or community they were visiting (attitude-towards-the-site).

As previously mentioned, users tend to have a negative responses towards online ads if they interrupt their surfing flow (Rettie, 2001). In this case however, another reason for the consumers having more acceptance towards customized advertisements is the decrease in interruption of their surfing flow (Rettie, 2001). Rettie's (2001) theory was implemented both in regard to users negative feelings towards online ads in survey question three, as well as for the users positive attitudes from survey questions five and six.

In order to offer these customized advertisements, companies had to develop the earlier mentioned process of one-to-one marketing (Hanson, 2000). One of the major topics in this matter is the gathering of customer info with the use of databases. Question eight in the survey evolves around this issue as to user's attitude towards the companies gathering of customer info for developing targeted ads. Although this method would decrease the appearance of unwanted and non interest-related advertisement and increase customized ads (Schoenbachler et al, 1997), most of the respondents had surprisingly enough, chosen option 5 which implicates a unified dislike (33.2 %) in their feelings towards the company's use of customer databases. This result is unexpected in contrast to the user response from survey questions five and six where the respondents had a more positive attitude towards customized ads. According to Schoenbachler et al (1997), although most Internet users are indifferent towards the company's use of customer databases, there are still a large number of consumers with a negative view upon this matter. The reason for this view, which also reveals itself in the results for question eight, is the fact that users consider the gathering of customer information for advertising purposes as a trespass in their privacy and an examination of their surfing habits (Schoenbachler et al, 1997). This is the most common academic finding when referring to user's attitude in regard to customer databases.

One of the important aspects for companies to consider when advertising, is making the ad stick, and the viewer's ability to recall those advertisements and most importantly the brand

itself. Dahlén (2001) suggested that in order to be successful in advertising, not only should the ad be customized, but it should also be located in the right place. He further clarified this as placing the ad on interest-related sites where the users will have more use of the information given to them. Survey question nine raised this matter, asking the respondents whether they could recall advertisements from blogs or communities more than other non-focused commercials. More than half of the respondents (56.1 %) replied that they could not recall these ads more than other online advertisements. These results are not unanticipated in regard to survey question three and the number of respondents with a negative attitude towards the various online mediums for advertising. The attitude towards and ad is in direct relation with the users ability to recall those ads (Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2002). However, there are other reasons for the consumers not recalling these ads; their level of involvement. Most community members are experienced, and experienced Internet users are familiar with their surfing patterns, making them focused on the task at hand while ignoring the rest of the browser environment. This process of automaticity is very common among these skilled users as they tend to ignore the periphery of the screen where the advertisements are usually located (Dahlén, 2001). Out of the 205 responses from this research, around half of them came from Kolozzeum. The members of this community have 95 Average Posts Per User (APPU), making them very active users. In addition, more than half of these members could not recall ads placed on communities or blogs any more than the other kinds. The same pattern is apparent in the responses from Minhembio and Familjelycka.

However, there were still a high number of respondents (37.1 %) that could recall ads more often depending on their location. A majority of these respondents gave the advertisements relation to their interests as a reason for their ability to recall them. These users are also in relation to the number of respondents with a positive attitude towards online advertisements and a higher acceptance towards customized ads. The results fall under Goldsmith and Lafferty’s (2002) research where they stated that consumers with a positive attitude towards advertisements, or the site where these advertisements appear tend to recall them more often than those with a negative attitude.

4.5 Data Related to RQ3

The third research question is different in comparison with the two previous ones, as the data compares and relates the answers from the previous questions in regard to demographic variables. The variable under study is gender; men and women, and this data is presented in table 10 below.

Question 1	1 Yes	1 No	1 a	1 b	1 c								
% Men	85.6	0.6	2.5	0.6	89.4								
% Women	88.9	2.2	2.2	2.2	95.6								
Question 2	2 Yes	2 No	2 a	2 b	2 c								
% Men	83.7	0.6	5	88.7	5								
% Women	86.7	4.4	6.7	91.1	2.2								
Question 3	3 Yes	3 No	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5						
% Men	71.2	16.2	8.7	16.2	25.6	22.5	25.6						
% Women	62.2	17.8	11.1	15.6	15.6	28.9	24.4						

Question 4				4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5					
% Men				7.5	10	29.4	30	20					
% Women				2.2	6.7	26.7	33.3	31.1					
Question 5				5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5					
% Men				19.4	30.6	29.4	9.4	8.1					
% Women				4.4	22.2	48.9	11.1	13.3					
Question 6				6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5					
% Men				15.6	33.1	28.7	11.2	8.7					
% Women				6.7	20.0	37.8	20.0	15.6					
Question 7				7.1	7.2	7.3	7.4	7.5	7 a	7 b	7 c	7 d	7 e
% Men				13.7	32.5	28.1	11.2	10.0	21.2	12.5	19.4	46.2	6.9
% Women				6.7	17.8	46.7	15.6	11.1	15.6	8.9	17.8	26.7	11.1
Question 8				8.1	8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5					
% Men				9.4	17.5	25.6	11.9	33.1					
% Women				2.2	20.0	26.7	17.8	33.3					
Question 9	9 Yes	9 No							9 a	9 b	9 c	9 d	
% Men	38.1	53.1							6.2	32.5	11.2	8.1	
% Women	33.3	66.7							8.9	15.6	8.9	8.9	
Question 10	Nr.	%							10 a	10b	10 c	10d	10 e
Nr. Of Men	160	78							27.5	48.7	20.0	2.5	1.2
Nr. Of Women	45	22							8.9	62.2	20.0	11.1	4.4

Table 10: Presentation of data related to Research question 3.

On survey questions one, two, eight and nine, both men and women responded in a very similar distribution. On survey question three, the answers from men had a larger spread compared to the women who answered more uniform. Question four shows a similar pattern to question three, but not to the same extent. The answers have a large spread in both cases. Continuing with a similar pattern, the women were more uniform than men on question five as well, and most of the men answered with a different alternative than the women. On survey question six, men and women answered more in different ends of the scale. The same pattern as for question six also occurs on question seven.

Survey question ten was related to gender and age. The most common age group was the same for both genders; 21-30 years of age. However, there was a higher percentage of older women in this survey.

4.5.1 Analysis of the Data Related to RQ3

Research question three concerns the possible differences between male and female perceptions in the aspect of advertisements on blogs or communities. The goal with this analysis is to present the new findings in relation to the theories and previous results presented within this research area.

General findings from the survey shows smaller differences than expected, compared to previous theory. On the first two survey questions concerning if the respondents know

what communities and blogs are, both genders answered with a very similar distribution of the choices. The largest notable difference is that 2.2 % of the female respondents answered that they do not know what a blog is, and 4.4 % do not know what a community is. This can be compared to the numbers for men, where only 0.6 % answered that they do not know, regarding both mediums.

Survey question eight, regarding what the users thought about companies gathering of consumer information in order to customize advertisements, was very similarly answered. The variance in the alternative most frequently chosen by both men and women was as low as 0.2 %.

Moreover, survey question nine concerned the respondents' memory of an advertisement, and whether they remembered it more if it was located on a blog or community. The majority of both genders provided a negative answer, with a higher rate from the women (66.7 % women, compared to 53.1 % men) . For those who answered that they do remember an ad more from a blog or community, the alternatives was again the same for both men and women, and it was because of the relation to their interests. However, there was a difference in the percentage, and the women had chosen this alternative in a minor rate than did the men (15.6 % compared to 32.5 %). This can be related to the theory proposed by Hanson (2000) who argued that differences between men and women affect their consumer behaviours. The theory by Hanson (2000) is missing the notion of why there are any differences. The study made by Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) showed that male users tend to be more positive towards online ads than female consumers. Male consumers also considered web advertisements as enjoyable, useful and informative while the females regarded them as annoying, offensive and deceptive (ibid). A possible link can be seen between the theory by Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) and the results from this survey, since women to a lower extent remembered advertisement from blogs and communities, and also had a lower response rate on the reason to why they did remember it.

Question three asked if the respondents usually see advertisements online, and what they think of it. The answers from men had a larger spread compared to the women who answered more uniform. Both a clear majority of men and women answered that they generally see advertisement online, but the difference was mainly seen in how they perceived these advertisements. The answers from men are distributed over a larger part of the scale than the women, who are more concentrated on the negative side of the scale. Thus, the results gathered from this question confirm the results from a study made by Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) to some degree. Their study showed that male users tend to be more positive towards online ads, while female consumers are less positive. But in their study, the male respondents considered web advertisements as enjoyable, useful and informative. Contrasting, about half (48.1 %) of the males in our survey categorized their attitude towards online advertisement as a 4 or 5, which means that they do not like it. So partly this also contradicts the results by Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003). They also found that females regarded them as annoying, offensive and deceptive, which again is more in line with the results from this survey.

Question four asked the respondents if advertisements on blogs or communities affect their surfing experience. It shows a similar pattern to question three, and the answers have a large spread in both cases. The female respondents also saw themselves more negatively affected than the male respondents. Around half (46.9 %) of the male respondents answered that it did not affect them negatively nor positively. For the females on the other hand, the same percentage that chose alternative 3 was lower (35.6 %). Similarly, the

percentage of both genders that answered that it affects them very negatively differed between male and female respondents (31.1 % compared to 20.0 %). Again, this is in line with the results of Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003).

The fifth question asked the respondents if they think differently of advertisements when they are related to their hobbies or interests. The majority of the female respondents (48.9 %) were agreeing quite well on that it did not matter for them, and chose option 3. But the results were leaning in the direction of being perceived as better since 22.2 % chose option 2, compared to 11.1 % choosing a 4. The male respondents showed a clearer pattern towards that they perceive the advertisements more positively when related to their hobbies or interests. As many as half (50 %) of the men chose a 1 or 2 which means that they perceive it more positively. Option 3 was chosen by a third (29.4 %), and together with the 50 % that perceived it more positively, we get that there was as much as 79.4 % of the men that perceived it neither differently or positively.

Wang et al (2002) found a relation between user demographics and their attitude towards web sites in regard to the amount of advertisement, and the results from this question builds on this and can add that men are more positive while women are more negative. Dillon and Morris (1996) also see gender as one of the main issues for user acceptance. If applying these results to their theory, this shows a higher degree of acceptance from the male consumers than from the female. Also the theory from Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) can be linked to these new results from the survey. Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) found that the male users tend to be more positive towards online ads, while female consumers found them less optimistic. This survey on the other hand finds their results correct, but in the context of advertisement related to the respondents interests.

The sixth survey question was asking the respondents if they think differently of advertisement that is tailored to the content of the blog or community where it is located. On this question, a majority of the female respondents (37.8 %) answered, by choosing alternative 3, that it does not matter to them. More interestingly, there were only 6.7 % of the females who chose alternative 1, and thereby stated that they thought much more positively of tailored advertisement. The percentage of males that chose alternative 1 was 15.6. Similarly, 20.0 % of the females chose alternative 4, while 33.1 % of the men also chose 4. Consequently, females were less positively affected by advertisement tailored to the content of the blog or community where they are located. Dillon and Morris (1996) found that the role of gender is an issue for user acceptance, and in this survey it seems that female respondents have lower acceptance towards advertisements regardless of how they are adapted to fit. Also for this question, the theory by Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) fits quite well together with the results as they found males being more positive towards online advertisement than females. They also found that females have a larger likelihood of seeing online advertisement as annoying, offensive and deceptive (ibid).

The respondents of survey question seven were asked if they think differently of advertisement on blogs or communities that they like compared to a random web site, and further in contrast to their response in question three. The answers to this question also follows what seems to be a pattern throughout this analysis, and the male respondents were more positive towards advertisement in blogs or communities they like compared to random web sites. As many as half of the male respondents (46.2 %) chose option 1 or 2, indicating that they think more positively of ads when placed on a blog or community they like. The percentage for the same alternative was almost half for the women (24.5 %). Being on a blog or community, which the respondent like is not making the female

respondents more positive towards them, and this further validates the findings of Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003).

Survey question ten was related to gender and age. The age group most common was 21-30 for both genders. The clear difference was that there were more women than men in the study between the ages 41-50 and 51+. Among the men on the other hand, there were more than women in the group between the ages 10-20. These differences in age might of course also affect the different result found from men and women, but it is very hard to know how.

5 Findings and Conclusions

This section will present a conclusion to the findings that have been made, in order to answer the research questions and fulfil the purpose of the thesis. A small introduction to the findings will be made followed by our conclusion for each research question.

Throughout the report, one general finding is the fact that most consumers are aware of the advertisements online, and they have a negative attitude towards them. This is also the case with several of the findings from previous academic research and studies. These results are also in relation with the reasons why marketers are looking into alternative methods for displaying their ads online. As has been discussed, advertising on blogs and communities have become some of the more current marketing methods for these companies. Well, is marketing in these mediums more accepted, and if they are, why is this the case?

5.1 RQ1: Do consumers have a greater acceptance towards advertisement on blogs and communities, compared to non-focused web sites, and why?

Our results indicate that a majority of the respondents are more positive towards advertisements on interest-related sites such as blogs and communities, compared to non-focused web sites such as Aftonbladet, Facebook, etc. This implies that a user from e.g. Minhembio is more positive towards an advertisement regarding home electronics appearing on their site, than is a person with no interest in the subject surfing on e.g. Aftonbladet, being exposed to the same commercial ad. The common denominator is “relating”, which is the general issue from our findings. Marketing, related to the content of the Website where it appears makes the difference. As the respondents were presented with several choices to why they regard these advertisements as more positive, 41.9 % of them gave the reason of “related to their interest” as the most common cause. This finding enhances the degree of involvement, as users with a high level of interest towards a certain matter develop a stronger attitude towards issues related to that topic, whether it is a product, service, hobby or a general interest. This attitude-towards-the-site is what affects the attitude-towards-the-ad; as our results have shown that the relation users have towards the Website positively influences their attitude to the advertisement, which is further discussed in the next section. Furthermore, another reason for the user’s positive attitude towards marketing on interest-specific sites such as blogs and communities is most likely the decrease in the interruption of the users flow. As the consumers are in the state of finding themselves on a blog or a community, they are not as bothered by these ads as they would be in a non-focused site consisting of traditional marketing methods such as Pop-ups and Banners. Their response is what enhances this theory.

5.2 RQ2: How and why is consumer’s attitude towards the advertisements affected by their degree of customization?

It has been known that users attitude towards online advertisement is related to their attitude towards the Website. In our first research question, we examined the user’s attitude towards the Website, whilst in this section we will discuss the relation to advertisement on these sites and present the effects of customized ads. The results, gathered from our survey, reveal that a majority of our respondents consider online advertisements to be

more acceptable if they are customized. Also in this case, a majority of our respondents gave the “relation to their interest” as the main reason for their acceptance. Also in this case is the level of involvement a reason to their positive attitude. As the users surf the web, searching for a specific subject of interest, it is likely that they are more acceptable towards advertisements that are targeted and directly related to their activity. Furthermore, the concept of flow could also be related to this case. It is apparent that tailored ads interrupt the user flow to a much lower degree than would be the case with non-focused advertisements, as the first do not seem to bother them as much, compared to the latter. In addition, customized ads are found to be more accepted if they are related to the user interests or to the content of the Website, which further enhances the results from our previous research question as the attitude towards these customized ads positively affects the attitude towards the site where they are located. However, it is also quite apparent that although the respondents appreciate customization, they are negative towards customer databases, which is vital for the marketers and their ability for offering customized ads. It is known that the users consider the gathering of information as an intrusion of their privacy.

5.3 RQ3: Is there a difference on the perception of advertisement on blogs and communities between men and women?

One of the vital prerequisites for this research question is our respondent’s knowledge of blogs and communities. In order to gain as correct results as possible, we asked the question of whether our respondents had an idea of what a blog or a community is; and the responses were very similar from both groups, stating that they are well aware of the concepts and meanings of a blog or a community. Moreover, regarding the question of whether the respondents see online advertisements and, more importantly, their reflections towards them gave us somewhat diversified results. Both men and women stated that they do see advertisements online, but their approach towards them were different; whilst almost all women disliked online advertisements, only half of the men were of the same opinion. These diversified results further continued into the responses from our first research question, whether the respondents had a greater acceptance towards ads on respected sites compared to random sites. Approximately half of our male respondents stated that they were more positive towards ads appearing on interest-related websites such as communities or blogs, compared to non-focused site. Only a quarter (24.5 %) of the women appeared to be of the same viewpoint. Being exposed to advertisements on an interest-related site compared to a non-focused site did not make any difference for the majority of the women.

Furthermore, the responses we received from research question two regarding consumers’ attitudes towards tailored ads, also showed an apparent difference within the two groups. Almost half of our female respondents stated that this fact did not make any difference to them, making them indifferent in their choice. Whilst the female users did not seem positively affected by this process, most of our men respondents showed a more accepting approach, making them more positive towards advertisement being customized and related to their hobbies or interests. Although both groups regarded the gathering of customer information through databases as a negative activity, it is likely that only the female respondents hold more strongly to their view, making them uninterested in targeted ads. In addition, a majority of the women considered advertisements on blogs and communities as disturbing, in regard to their surfing experience. From the male point of view, most of them had an indifferent opinion in regard to the effect that these ads have on their web

experience. Moreover, these results reflect themselves in the user’s ability of recalling advertisements that they have been exposed to on these mediums. Although the majority of both groups replied that they do not recall these ads more than others, it was still apparent that the rating of the female respondents not being able to recall these ads was higher than those of the male. The amount of respondents from both groups, who stated that they could recall ads on blogs and communities more than other mediums, gave the same reason; that it was related to their interests. Conclusively, it is quite apparent that there is a relation between user demographics and their attitude towards web advertisement. The male respondents, although not a majority, consider web advertisements as more enjoyable and informative, whilst the female respondents consider them as annoying and deceptive, making them a harder group to persuade.

An overview figure of the findings and conclusions regarding the research questions can be seen in figure 8 below.

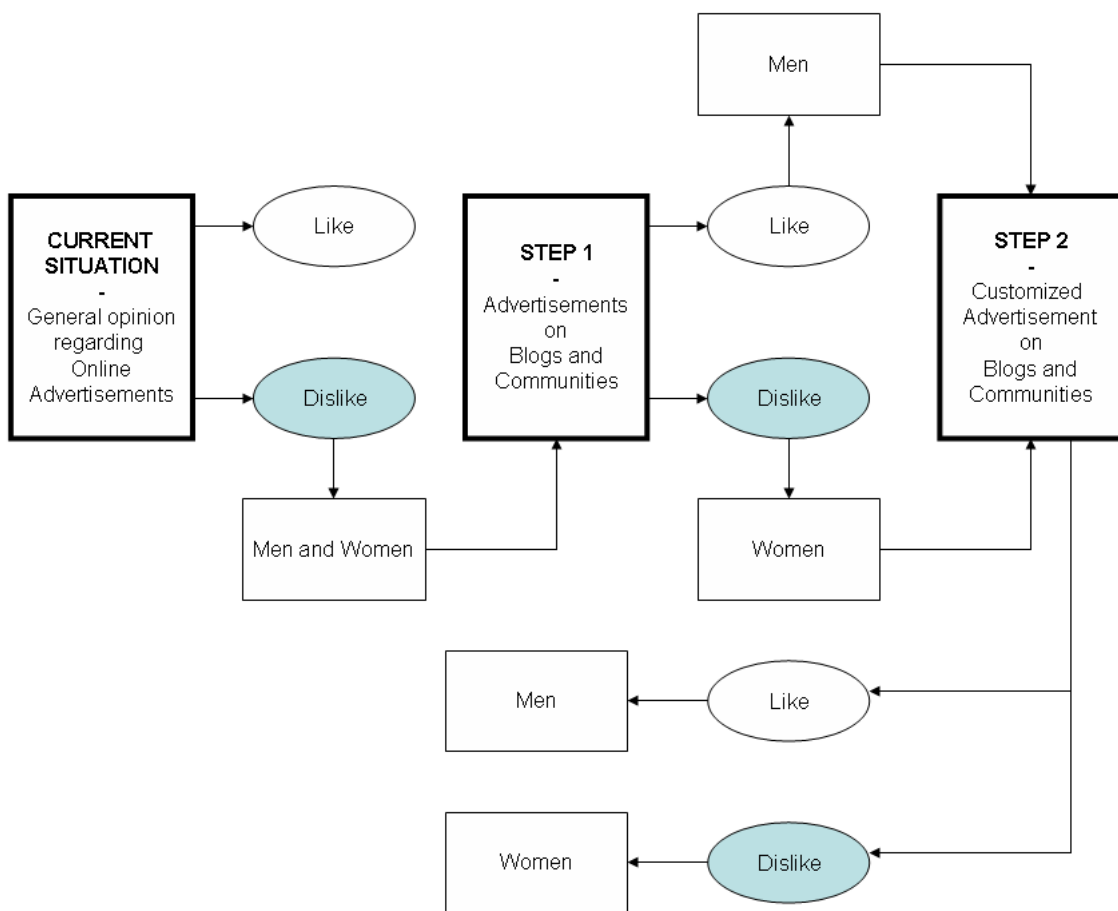


Figure 8: Overview of the findings and conclusions.

6 Discussion

This concluding chapter will present the criticism found against the thesis, followed by implications for theory, practitioners and finished with implications for future research.

6.1 Thesis Critique

The survey could have featured more questions, and perhaps also open ended questions with a possibility for the respondents to write their own thoughts. The choice to make it as it was were based on that the authors did not want the risk of too few respondents. There were also more questions that could have been asked in order to get a larger picture of the consumer's attitudes and the reasons for them, but it was not possible within the timeframe of this thesis. Further critique towards the thesis and its survey respondents is the relatively low amount of female responses (22 %) in relation to the male. This result is however due to the characteristics of the Internet. The World Wide Web as a medium is known to be overrepresented by male users, explaining to some extent the rate of female users answering our survey. Because of this, the generalizability of the results for research question number three is weakened, but within the area of the survey it should be quite valid.

The respondents were asked if they know what a blog and community is, but that is the only knowledge related thing we know of them. There could be differences between people with different educational backgrounds and experiences. There are also a large number of other demographic factors that could influence the respondents' different answers. But within the timeframe available for this thesis, it was not possible to look at all of them. The three communities used for the survey was chosen because of that their direction was towards three very different fields, and the reason for this was to ensure that the respondents should be as diverse as possible concerning demographics. However, what was not thought of was that there were large differences in community size, and this affected the number of respondents with different demographics. As an example, there were 22 % female respondents.

6.2 Implications for Theory

This thesis aimed at finding if marketing in blogs and communities are more accepted among consumers. It also tried to find the reasons to why blogs and communities are more accepted relative to other means of online marketing. This involved finding if there were different attitudes towards advertisement tailored to the consumers and if the consumers attitude towards the site where the advertisement was placed affected the consumers perception of it. When answering the research questions, this thesis has commenced to explain what of the different theoretical concepts which are in line with our results.

The concept of that attitude towards the site makes consumers more positive towards advertisement there seems to be correct. Other researchers have previously come with contradictory results, and these were falsified in the context of Swedish communities and blogs. The theory of flow proposed that irrelevant advertisements and Pop-ups were bad as advertisement methods due to the annoyance they caused, and this was in line with our results. But the females were seemingly more negative. Tailored advertisements were found to be less negatively considered upon in comparison with regular advertisement, and within the scope of this study that is affirming the results of previous theory. Previously published

theory was stating that male consumers were more positive towards online advertisements, and our results showed that female consumers are more negative towards it.

6.3 Implications for Practitioners

In this section we will present suggestions, advice and recommendations for professionals working with online advertisement and marketing. These implications are built on the findings from this study.

For professionals working with online marketing, it is very important to consider that the female consumers generally are more negative towards advertisement regardless of customization or relatedness to the community or blog. So, if one works with products targeted specifically towards women, one should think extra carefully and do more research before advertising online. Our results contribute to a higher understanding in regard to the female consumers in the online world, as they indicate that women are more difficult to satisfy than men. Women in society are generally known for their shopping habits and the characteristics needed in order to persuade them of making a purchase. In the online world, it is important to consider the personality of women when developing advertisements targeted towards this group. Since women have a tendency of feeling more pleasant when treated more exclusively, companies should also take this into consideration when forming their marketing strategy.

Furthermore, if directing online advertisement to female consumers, one should think about that a quarter of the females will be more positive towards the advertisement if it is placed on a website related towards their interests. Also, female consumers tend to think that advertisement in communities and blogs disturb their surfing experience, and because of the negative effects on attitude towards the ad, such advertisement towards female consumers should be carefully considered before launched.

According to our survey, the best way seems to be to both place the advertisement on a blog or community directed towards the target groups' interests, and to tailor the advertisement itself to the blog or community. Applying the knowledge derived from the findings of this thesis can provide the company and marketers with knowledge on making the advertisements more effective, and therefore save more money for the company. Another important advice would be to read more on this area from relatively new sources, since this is an area which has changed plenty during the last decade. It is also important to consider the differences in attitude towards online advertisement between the genders, and to find to what extent the targeted consumers consist of men or women. Looking at the results of this study, advertisement campaigns mainly based on Internet advertisement will be more efficient for the company if targeted mainly towards male consumers.

6.4 Implications for Future Research

During the writing of this thesis, other interesting ideas and subjects came up for which there were no time or place to include here. These ideas and subjects are presented as implications for future research.

In this research, we found that there are differences between how the different genders perceive advertisement. However, within the scope of this thesis, we were unable to find more detailed reasons for this cause. It would be very interesting to know what lies behind

these differences. Furthermore, this thesis was done completely without contact with companies using online advertisements. If one would also involve such companies, a broader and more complete picture might be possible to attain.

The respondents of this study consisted only of Swedish-speaking consumers. There are probably cultural variations around the world concerning the perception of online advertisement. It would be interesting to do a study with samples from different parts of the world. It is not impossible that the differences between female and male consumers found in this thesis will be even larger in some regions, while smaller in others. In addition, the study did not involve practitioners, so therefore we do not know to what extent they think about the issues of this area, and how knowledgeable they are. It could be very interesting to do a further study with companies based on the results from this and other similar studies. In such a research, linkages might be found between different ways of tailoring the advertisement, where it is placed, and how successful the campaign is.

Since this study did not focus on whether perceptions of advertisement online differ depending on age, one might ask the question if older men are as positive towards online advertisement as the younger male population. Are older females even more negative towards online advertisement or perhaps even the opposite? These and many more of similar kinds of findings would be very interesting, and should be researched. It is not unlikely that there are differences in the perception of online advertisement between users who spend different amounts of time online. Do people who spend plenty of time online get bored of advertisement and become increasingly negative towards it them? We believe that it would be an interesting issue to regard in further research.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Covering Letter



JÖNKÖPING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL

JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

Jönköping 2008-04-25

Hello!

We are two students from Jönköping International Business School, who are in the process of writing our Master's thesis within the area of Marketing, concentrating on online marketing. Our study is specified on Blogs and Communities, where we will investigate the user's attitudes towards marketing on these mediums. This process is largely done with the help of the users and members from different Blogs and Communities answering a number of questions on an electronic survey. As a line within this quantitative study, we are asking for your help by answering the survey and assisting us with the completion of our study.

We would very much appreciate if you could take some time answering the survey. If you would like to take part of our finished report, you are welcome to provide us with an e-mail address where the thesis can be sent.

Please help us with our report by answering the survey no later than 9th of May 2008.

Thank you for your participation, and your contribution to our study.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Link to the survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=zlWiR979xVE9uHVA6_2buKug_3d_3d

With kind regards;

Farshad Rahavard

(BBAF03RaFa@ihh.hj.se)

&

Lars Andreasson

(BBAM04AnLa@ihh.hj.se)

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

The following questionnaire consists of 10 questions. All of these questions have different alternatives consisting of e.g. Yes/No, scales from 1-5 or alternatives where you choose the option that best fits your opinion. Please choose the option which you consider fits your opinions best!

Please observe that some of the questions consist of two questions that are put together as one! These can be recognized through their opening Yes/No alternatives followed by 3-5 alternatives. (These questions are nr. 1, 2, 3, 7, 9 & 10)

1. Do you know what a Blog is?

Yes No

- *A Blog is a web site where you can read advice from an expert.*
- *A Blog is a web site where you can associate with other members and spread/share knowledge.*
- *A Blog is a web site where somebody writes about their own life or current events, etc...*

2. Do you know what a Community is?

Yes No

- *A Community is a web site where you can read advice from an expert.*
- *A Community is a web site where you can associate with other members and spread/share knowledge.*
- *A Community is a web site where somebody writes about their own life or current events, etc...*

3. A: Do you generally notice advertisements online?

Yes No

**B: What do you think about advertisements on the Internet in general?
(Answer on a scale between one and five, where one is good and five is bad)**

1 2 3 4 5

4. Do you find advertisements on blogs/communities to affect your surfing experience in any way? (Answer on a scale between one and five, where one is good and five is bad)

1 2 3 4 5

5. Do you think differently of advertisements when they are related to your hobbies? (Answer on a scale between one and five, where one is good and five is bad)

1 2 3 4 5

6. Do you think differently of advertisements when they are tailored to relate to the content of the blog/community which you are visiting? (Compared to

question 3) (Answer on a scale between one and five, where one is good and five is bad)

1 2 3 4 5

7. A: Do you think differently of advertisements on blogs/communities that you like compared to random web sites? (Compared to question 3) (Answer on a scale between one and five, where one is better and five is worse)

1 2 3 4 5

B: If you find it better than worse, why? (Please choose among the alternatives)

- *Because it provides me with knowledge about good offerings*
- *Because I regard it as informative*
- *Because it provides me with knowledge of new products and services*
- *Because it is related to my interests*
- *Other reasons than the ones provided*

8. How do you find it that companies gather information about online users in order to customize advertisements for blogs and communities? (If we exclude the use for pop-ups and SPAM)

1 2 3 4 5

9. A: Do you remember certain advertisements from blogs and/or communities more than others?

Yes No

B: If Yes, why?

- *Because I regard it as informative*
- *Because it is related to my interests*
- *Because it is tailored to fit the content of the blog/ community*
- *Other reasons than the ones provided*

10. A: Are you male or female?

Male Female

B: How old are you?

10-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51+

Appendix 3 – Följebrev



INTERNATIONELLA HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN

HÖGSKOLAN I JÖNKÖPING

Jönköping 2008-04-25

Hej!

Vi är två studenter från Internationella Handelshögskolan i Jönköping som skriver vår Magisteruppsats inom marknadsföring, med inriktning mot marknadsföring på Internet. Vår studie riktar sig specifikt mot Bloggar och Forum, där vi undersöker användarnas förhållningssätt gentemot marknadsföring på dessa sidor. Detta utförs till större del genom att användare på Bloggar och Forum besvarar ett antal frågor på en elektronisk enkät. Som ett led i denna kvantitativa studie ber vi om Er hjälp att besvara frågorna och assistera oss med att slutföra vår studie.

Vi skulle vara väldigt tacksamma om Ni tog Er tid att besvara enkäten. Skulle Ni vilja ta del av vår färdiga uppsats så får Ni gärna ange en e-post adress dit vi kan skicka det.

Vänligen besvara enkäten senast fredag 9 Maj 2008.

Tack för Er medverkan och Ert bidrag till vår studie.

Kontakta oss gärna vid eventuella frågor.

Länk till enkäten:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=zlWiR979xVE9uHVA6_2buKug_3d_3d

Med vänliga hälsningar;

Farshad Rahavard

[\(BBAF03RaFa@ihh.hj.se\)](mailto:BBAF03RaFa@ihh.hj.se)

&

Lars Andreasson

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Appendix 4 – Enkät

Följande enkät består av 10 frågor. Alla frågor har olika svarsalternativ bestående av exempelvis Ja/Nej, skalor från 1-5 eller svarsalternativ där man väljer det alternativ som passar bäst. Vänligen välj det alternativ som passar bäst enligt Era åsikter!

Observera även att vissa frågor består av två frågor som är sammanslagna till en! Dessa känns igen genom sina inledande Ja/Nej-alternativ följt av 3-5 valbara svarsalternativ. (Dessa frågor är nr. 1, 2, 3, 7, 9 & 10)

1. Vet du vad en Blogg är? (Om Ja, välj den definition som enligt dig stämmer bäst)

Ja Nej

- *En Blogg är en webbsida där du kan läsa råd från en expert.*
- *En Blogg är en webbsida där du kan umgås med andra medlemmar och dela/sprida kunskap.*
- *En Blogg är en webbsida där någon skriver om sitt eget liv eller aktuella händelser etc.*

2. Vet du vad ett Forum är för något? (Om Ja, välj den definition som enligt dig stämmer bäst)

Ja Nej

- *Ett Forum är en webbsida där du kan läsa råd från en expert.*
- *Ett Forum är en webbsida där du kan umgås med andra medlemmar och dela/sprida kunskap.*
- *Ett Forum är en webbsida där någon skriver om sitt eget liv eller aktuella händelser etc.*

3. A: Märker du vanligtvis reklam på Internet?

Ja Nej

- B: Vad tycker du generellt sett om denna reklam? (På en skala mellan ett till fem där ett är bra och fem är dåligt)

1 2 3 4 5

4. Tycker du att reklam på bloggar/forum påverkar din surfupplevelse på något sätt? (På en skala mellan ett till fem då ett är bra och fem är dåligt)

1 2 3 4 5

5. Uppfattar du reklam på ett annorlunda sätt när den är relaterad till dina hobbies? (Jämfört med fråga 3) (På en skala mellan ett till fem då ett är bra och fem är dåligt)

1 2 3 4 5

6. Uppfattar du reklam på ett annorlunda sätt när den är anpassad till innehållet på/i bloggen/forumet som den finns? (Jämfört med fråga 3) (På en skala mellan ett till fem då ett är bra och fem är dåligt)

1 2 3 4 5

7. **A:** Uppfattar du reklam på ett annorlunda sätt när den finns på en blogg eller ett forum som du tycker om jämfört med en annan slumpmässig webbsida? (Jämfört med fråga 3) (På en skala mellan ett till fem då ett är bättre och fem är sämre)

1 2 3 4 5

- B:** Om du tycker mer åt det bättre hållet än sämre, varför? (Du kan välja flera alternativ)

- *För att den ger mig kunskap om bra erbjudanden*
- *För att jag uppfattar den som informativ*
- *För att den ger mig kunskap om nya produkter eller tjänster*
- *För att den är relaterad till mina intressen*
- *Annat än ovan*

8. **Vad tycker du om att företag samlar in information om internetanvändare för att kunna anpassa webbsidans reklam? (Om vi utesluter SPAM och pop-up-fönster) (På en skala mellan ett till fem då ett är bättre och fem är sämre)**

1 2 3 4 5

9. **A:** Kommer du ihåg viss reklam från en blogg eller ett forum mer än annan reklam?

Ja Nej

- B:** Om Ja, varför?

- *För att jag uppfattar den som informativ*
- *För att den är relaterad till mina intressen*
- *För att den är anpassad till ämnet för bloggen/forumet*
- *Annat än ovan*

10. **A:** Är du kvinna eller man?

Kvinna Man

- B:** Hur gammal är du?

10-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 50+

Appendix 6 – Male Respondents

Men n=160														
Question one	1 Yes	1 No	1a	1b	1c									
Number of responses	137	1	4	1	143									
Percentage	85.6	0.6	2.5	0.6	89.4									
Question two	2 Yes	2 No	2a	2b	2c									
Number of respondents	134	1	8	142	8									
Percentage	83.7	0.6	5	88.7	5									
Question three	3 Yes	3 No	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5							
Number of respondents	114	26	14	26	41	36	41							
Percentage	71.2	16.2	8.7	16.2	25.6	22.5	25.6							
Question four			4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5							
Number of respondents			12	16	47	48	32							
Percentage			7.5	10	29.4	30	20							
Question five			5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5							
Number of respondents			31	49	47	15	13							
Percentage			19.4	30.6	29.4	9.4	8.1							
Question six			6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5							
Number of respondents			25	53	46	18	14							
Percentage			15.6	33.1	28.7	11.2	8.7							
Question seven			7.1	7.2	7.3	7.4	7.5	7a	7b	7c	7d	7e		
Number of respondents			22	52	45	18	16	34	20	31	74	11		
Percentage			13.7	32.5	28.1	11.2	10.0	21.2	12.5	19.4	46.2	6.9		
Question eight			8.1	8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5							
Number of respondents			15	28	41	19	53							
Percentage			9.4	17.5	25.6	11.9	33.1							
Question nine	9 Yes	9 No						9a	9b	9c	9d			
Number of respondents	61	85						10	52	18	13			
Percentage	38.1	53.1						6.2	32.5	11.2	8.1			
Question ten	10 Women	10 Man						10 a	10 b	10 c	10 d	10 e		
Number of respondents	0	160						44	78	32	4	2		
Percentage	0	100						27.5	48.7	20.0	2.5	1.2		

