

The Effects of Fear Appeal Messages and Factual Information on Individual Attitudes towards e-Learning Service

Her-Sen Doong, Wen-Chun Lin, and Hui-Chih Wang

Abstract—The rapid growth of education technology and Internet usage has facilitated the implementation of e-learning services. However, without the successful promotion strategy, it is widely reported that the potential adopters may refuse to accept the e-learning services despite its advantage of enhanced learning performance. As such, past scholars have investigated this phenomenon via the personal cost-benefit viewpoint such as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness base on the Technology Acceptance Model. This study argued that, unlike other information technologies, the rationale behind the e-learning service usage may be distinct from the cost-benefit analysis only. In contrast, this study proposed that the motivation to use the e-learning service may due to the prevention of a threat, a risk or the fear related to the harmful result of not using this service. The current study proposed a theoretical research model to present the effects of fear appeal messages and factual information on individual attitudes towards e-learning service. Findings will be able to indicate interesting research areas for future studies and help managers in evaluating their current e-Learning advertising strategies and future promotion implementation.

Index Terms—Education technology, e-learning, individual attitudes, factual information.

I. INTRODUCTION

E-Learning includes learning process of digital content and service (Riad, El-Minir and El-Ghareeb, 2009). For individual, e-Learning is a popular learning media. Government, higher educational institutions, and private firms have all invested significant resources in e-Learning in order to enhance the learning performance (Govindasamy, 2002). In the competitive educational market, e-Learning service providers have planned various marketing strategies to fight for market share. Advertising is one of the favourable integrated marketing strategies. Thus, the persuasion effect of advertising is the key factor on consumers' attitude and behaviour.

In the era with exploded advertising information, individual cannot memorize all advertising messages. By different advertising appeals, marketers draw the individual attention and stimulate their interest. Chandy, Deborah, and Thaivanich (2001) suggested that advertisers can frame the uses of a product in a positive manner, highlighting the potential of the product to provide gains (or obtain benefits), or a negative manner, highlighting its potential to avoid loss (or solve problems). Among negative appeals, fear appeal is

the approach commonly used by public welfare and commercial advertising. Fear is treated as the emotion with persuasion. By creating fear, the advertising draws people's attention on information or products and results in their motives (Janis, 1967; Ray and Wilkie, 1970). Besides advertising appeals, advertising content is also a significant factor. Advertising content includes many characteristics, such as colour, sound and text. Factual information is the cues related to fact and logic (Puto and Well, 1984). More factual information can enhance supplement the intangibility of service and reduce consumers' perceived risk (Cutler and Javalgi, 1993).

E-Learning have become an important tool to serve individual learning activities on the Internet (Rosenberg, 2001). No studies in the past have discussed the effect of different types of advertising appeals on individual attitudes towards e-Learning service. Many social psychologists and communication studies suggest that the appropriate use of fear appeal messages can effectively change individual attitude and behaviour (Ray and Wilkie, 1970). Moreover, low and high level information cues will influence individual attitude toward the e-Learning advertising. Therefore, the current study proposed a theoretical model to present the effect of fear appeal messages and factual information on individual attitudes towards e-learning service. Findings will be able to indicate interesting research areas for future studies and help e-learning service providers in evaluating their current e-Learning advertising strategies and future promotion implementation.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

Based on the research purpose and above discussion, the research model shown in Figure 1 is proposed.

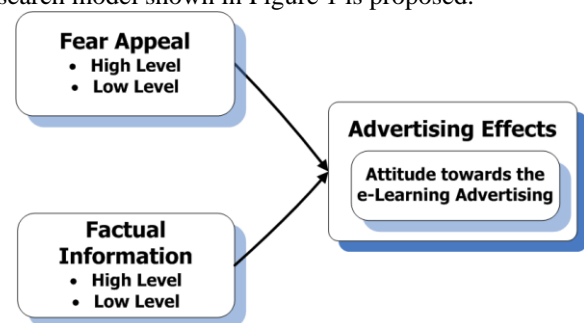


Fig. 1. Research model.

A. Effects of Fear Appeal Messages

According to past literatures in marketing, low or high level fear appeal has been proven to positively influence consumers' behaviour or persuasion (Keller and Block, 1996). E-Learning advertising informs individuals of the result after using e-Learning or risk without using e-Learning. Thus, advertising messages in e-Learning will allow individual to make decisions, and influence their

Manuscript received May 22, 2012; revised June 15, 2012.

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attitude toward e-Learning advertising and intention to use e-Learning. By measurement on attitude toward the advertising, individual affection and evaluation toward e-Learning advertising can be known. This study delivers fear appeal messages to individuals to enhance their affection. When fear appeal messages in advertising results in threat or anxiety (Rogers, 1975), individuals will change their attitude or have preventive behaviour. That is, fear appeal messages in e-Learning advertising have significant effects on individual attitude toward advertising. Thus, the current study proposed the following proposition.

- P1: The higher the degree of fear appeal messages, the greater the likelihood of individual attitude towards the e-Learning advertising.

B. Effects of Factual Information

Service marketers attempt to create abstract association and enhance “realities” by manipulating tangible cues and then link these abstractions to physical items (Shostack, 1977). Advertising content not only introduces e-Learning information, but also includes factual information such as prices, guarantees, guarantors, certificates and approachability. Causes of individual attention on factual information are below: individual will try to recognize the services of e-Learning; before making purchase decision, individual will try to evaluate the products. Combination of fear appeal and factual information will result in individual different attitudes toward the e-Learning advertising according to their past experience or personal cognition. Thus, high degree of factual information in e-Learning advertising has stronger effects on individual attitude toward the e-Learning advertising. Therefore, the following proposition was proposed.

- P2: The higher the degree of factual information, the greater the likelihood of individual attitude towards the e-Learning advertising.

III. EXPECTED RESULT AND CONTRIBUTION

Past researches (Henthorne, et. al., 1993; LaTour and Pitts, 1989) suggested that after receiving more specific fear appeal, individual would have specific attitude toward the advertising. Grove, Pickett and Laband (1995) indicated that advertising of service marketing aims to avoid too much abstract and confusing information, and advertising strategy emphasizes on factual information. They argued that “high fear appeal” could enhance persuasion of advertising effect; “factual information cue” could reduce consumers’ perceived risk. Thus, the current study expects that when receiving e-Learning advertising with high degree of fear and factual information, individual will have higher degree of attitude toward the e-Learning advertising.

Previous studies have investigated the determinants of e-Learning acceptance via the cost-benefit viewpoint approach such as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness when

using e-Learning. The current study argued that unlike other information technologies, the rationale behind the e-learning service acceptance may be distinct from the cost-benefit analysis only. Therefore, this study proposed that fear appeal messages and factual information will enhance individual attitudes towards e-learning service.

The research findings and implication of this study is two-fold: first, influencing factors of e-Learning acceptance via the viewpoints of fear appeal messages and factual information were proposed. Second, according to the research model as shown in figure 1, practical implications of e-Learning advertising strategies can be developed. For example, the current study argued that fear appeal message and factual information will enhance individual attitude towards e-Learning advertising. The e-Learning service providers may use fear appeal advertising on the television, newspaper, and Internet to lead to potential adopters’ acceptance of e-Learning.

Our study provided crucial insights by comprehensively examine the important topics of e-Learning service that are most concerned by managers and researchers. Findings will be able to indicate interesting research areas for future studies and help e-Learning service providers in evaluating their current e-Learning advertising strategies and future promotion implementation.

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