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THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF WEB-BASED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS FOR CONSUMERS' IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT BRAND ATTITUDES: A CALL FOR RESEARCH

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The Potential Implications of Web-Based Marketing Communications for Consumers' Implicit and Explicit Brand Attitudes: A Call for Research

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ABSTRACT

Two developments in the last two decades frame the importance of Web-based marketing communications for firms. First is the phenomenal growth of the Internet as a viable commerce and communication option and second is the clear shift in attitude research toward recognizing the pervasive role of automatic processes in almost all the social psychological processes. Therefore, this article discusses the potential implications of Web-based marketing communications for consumers' implicit and explicit attitudes. In doing so, first, this article reviews the emergence of research on implicit attitudes, distinguishes implicit attitudes from explicit attitudes, and discusses research on explicit and implicit attitudes relative to branding. Second, a brief discussion of marketing research on attitude is provided. Third, five empirically testable research propositions are developed and presented. Finally, given the potential implications for research and practice, the article concludes with a call for research.

Two developments in the last two decades frame the importance of Web-based marketing communications for firms. First is the phenomenal growth of the Internet as a viable commerce and communication option. Specifically, online retail sales are estimated at \$100 billion for 2006, with travel bringing in an additional \$70 billion (Comscore, 2006). In keeping with the growth of the retail e-commerce, firms have begun to spend more on Web-based marketing communications. For example, ZenithOptimedia projects that the Internet's share of worldwide total ad spending will increase from 5.8% in 2006 to 8.6% in 2009 (eMarketer, 2006). Thus, the Internet as an advertising medium is becoming prominent in the marketing communication mix. Specific to the U.S., Internet ad spending is estimated at \$23.8 billion in 2008. Given the pace at which the Internet is changing and is becoming accessible to consumers worldwide, firms will have to continue to invest in Web-based marketing and marketing communications.

However, firms' efforts to make their Web-based marketing communications more efficient and/or effective will entail staying current with cutting-edge research investigating Web-based marketing communications. There have been several significant contributions over the last decade (e.g., Briggs & Hollis, 1997; Burke, 2002; Chatterjee, Hoffman, & Novak, 2003; Day, Shyi, & Wang, 2006; Elliot & Speck, 2005; Karson & Fisher, 2005a, 2005b; Kim & Lennon, 2008; Kimelfeld & Watt, 2001; Luk, Chan, & Li, 2002; Manchanda et al., 2006; Park, Lennon, & Stoel, 2005). Among other things, these research studies have established relationships such as the influence of Web-based marketing communications on attitude toward an ad, attitude toward a Web site, brand attitude, brand awareness, brand image, mood, purchase intention, and selling performance. Recently, Kim and Lennon (2008) found that, on the Internet, verbal (descriptive) marketing communication may be superior to visual marketing communication in influencing attitudes. Furthermore, some of the research studies established the relationships between attitude toward the Web-based ad and attitude toward the brand (Karson & Fisher, 2005a; Kimelfeld & Watt, 2001) and between attitude toward the Web site and attitude toward the brand (Karson & Fisher, 2005b).

This brings us to the second development in the last two decades that has implications for Web-based marketing communications: research on implicit attitude. Recent theories in psychology recognize the existence of two different attitudes toward the same object at the same time, one that is explicit and one that is implicit (Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Implicit attitudes are evaluative responses toward social objects that, unlike explicit attitudes, are not necessarily subject to introspection (Wänke et al., 2002); that is, individuals may not be aware of their implicit attitudes. However, such implicit attitudes hold great potential to guide spontaneous behavior (Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Furthermore, Greenwald and Banaji (1995) assert that such implicit attitudes could have a valence quite different from that of the explicit attitudes of the actor. Such disassociations highlight the value of examining implicit attitudes and, hence, could potentially be useful in explaining the low predictive validity of explicit attitudes.

In addition, the use of indirect measures avoids the need to assume that the subjects have the ability and motivation to report attitudes accurately (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) and also have the potential to reveal unique components of attitude that reside outside conscious awareness and control (Banaji, 2001). Therefore, the

assessment of implicit attitudes could not only improve prediction of behavior but could also bring out dimensions that are not identifiable while examining explicit attitudes. In the context of marketing, implicit attitude is just beginning to attract some attention (Dempsey & Mitchell, 2004; Gibson, 2008; Herr, Mitchell, & Dempsey, 2004; Maison, Greenwald, & Bruin, 2004; Perkins et al, 2007; Vargas, Sekaquaptewa, & Von Hippel, 2006; Wänke et al., 2002). However, more is warranted in researching implicit attitude in the context of marketing communications in general and Web-based marketing communications in particular.

In summary, two important issues guide this paper: (1) the recent theories in psychology that recognize the existence of two different attitudes toward the same object at the same time, one that is explicit and one that is implicit (Wilson et al., 2000); and (2) the assessment of implicit attitudes could not only improve prediction of behavior but could also bring out dimensions that are unidentifiable while examining explicit attitudes. Therefore, this paper focuses on potential implications of Web-based marketing communications for consumers' implicit and explicit brand attitude. In discussing the potential implications of Web-based marketing communications for implicit and explicit attitudes, we present several propositions. First, this article reviews the emergence of research on implicit attitudes, distinguishes implicit attitudes from explicit attitudes, and discusses research on explicit and implicit attitudes. Second, a brief discussion of marketing research on attitude is provided. Third, five empirically testable research propositions are developed and presented. Finally, this article concludes with implications for research and practice and a call for research.

ATTITUDES—EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT

Attitude refers to a favorable or unfavorable disposition toward social objects (Sarnoff, 1960). For a long period, social psychology viewed its core concepts such as attitude as the result of conscious processes (Dijksterhuis, 2004) and hence, in most disciplines, the use of the term attitude refers only to explicit attitudes. By definition, explicit attitudes operate in a conscious mode and hence are measurable through the use of direct (instructed self-report) measures (Dijksterhuis, 2004; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). The validity of this construct lies in its ability to predict behavior which is expressed in terms of correlations between the two (Festinger, 1964).

Contrary to expectations, a number of studies reported weak correlations between attitude and behavior (Wicker, 1969). This led to a series of studies examining the conditions under which attitudes predict behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fazio, 1986; Zanna & Fazio, 1982). These studies clearly established that attitudes can predict behavior only when (1) attitudes are strongly activated, (2) the actor perceives a strong link between attitude and behavior (Myers, 1990), (3) the actor is conscious of the attitude at the time of the behavior, and (4) the actor perceives the attitude to be relevant to the behavior (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Despite these findings, the prominence of the attitude construct was clearly declining due to its low predictive validity.

In the last two decades, there has been a clear shift toward recognizing the pervasive role of automatic processes in almost all the social psychological processes (Bargh, 1984; Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Dijksterhuis, 2004; Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Spence & Townsend, 2008;

Wegner & Bargh, 1998). In an attempt to restore the prominence of the attitude construct, Greenwald and Banaji (1995) asserted that attitudes of which the actor is not conscious at the moment of action (implicit attitudes) are also strongly predictive of behavior. According to Greenwald and Banaji (1995, p. 8), "implicit attitudes are introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought or action toward social objects." The social object of interest in this study is the *brand* being advertised. Recent work in this area has established that attitudes are often activated outside conscious attention and affect our day-to-day activities in a variety of ways (Bargh et al., 1992; Greenwald, Klinger, & Liu, 1989). Furthermore, researchers have also developed well-validated techniques such as "evaluative priming," which was validated by Fazio et al. (1995), and "implicit association test" (Lane et al., 2007) for measuring implicit attitude.

ATTITUDINAL RESEARCH IN MARKETING

Brand attitude, defined as positive or negative predisposition toward a brand, has been an important concept in marketing research for over five decades (Grossman & Till, 1998). The concept has remained popular primarily due to the relatively stable and enduring nature of this construct and the well-developed theoretical models and scales related to it (Fishbein, 1963; McGuire, 1968; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Recognizing the important role of brand attitudes in influencing choice behavior, researchers have focused on the causal determinants of brand attitude formation and change (Olson & Mitchell, 1975; Lutz & Bettman, 1977; Rossiter & Percy, 1980). One important causal determinant that has attracted a great deal of attention from the advertising industry and researchers is the attitude toward the advertisement (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Derbaix, 1995; Muehling, 1987; Nan, 2006; Phelps & Hoy, 1996).

According to advertising theory, attitudes toward advertisements mediate brand choice through their effects on brand attitudes (Baker, 2001; Gresham & Shimp, 1985; Mitchell, 1986). The attitude-toward-the-ad theory, based on marketing communications and advertising research, is one of the most dominant theories in the field (e.g., Bruner & Kumar, 2000). The literature on attitude toward the ad has primarily focused on two major areas: inferential belief formation (based on beliefs regarding the product features) and direct affect transfer (based on background music, colors, jingles, people, etc.) that tend to arouse positive feelings (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989; Allen & Madden, 1985; Blair & Shimp, 1992; Brown, Homer, & Inman, 1998; Stuart, Shimp, & Engle, 1987). However, the research in the area of attitudes toward the ad and brand attitudes has not (1) examined in detail the impact of ad formats, which is an integral part of attitudes toward the ad, on brand attitudes (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000), and (2) has failed to keep up with the current research on psychology that has identified a different type of attitude known as the implicit attitude, which often guides spontaneous behaviors (Wänke et al., 2002).

Although there has recently been some research on implicit attitudes in the context of marketing, there is an opportunity for more systematic research. The few studies that have focused on implicit attitudes suggest several benefits of implicit attitudes. For example, for Wänke et al. (2002), implicit attitudes may be useful in predicting brand choice and evaluating the effect of persuasive communications.

For Maison, Greenwald, and Bruin (2004), there are strong correlations between implicit attitudes and explicit attitudes, and implicit attitudes have the potential to predict brand preference, product usage, and brand recognition. For Dempsey and Mitchell (2004), potentially, there are relations between implicit and explicit attitudes and spontaneous choice. Therefore, it is important to study how marketing communications influence implicit attitudes.

Furthermore, given the growth of the Internet as a viable commerce option and as a favored destination for advertising, it is essential to investigate the implications of Web-based marketing communications for implicit and explicit attitudes. Also, a variety of ad formats are available at the disposition of ad sponsors (Gao, Koufaris, & Ducoffe, 2004). However, recent surveys have revealed that Web surfers hold different opinions about different ad formats. For instance, Web surfers consider pop-ups as more intrusive and untrustworthy than banner ads and paid search engine listings (PlanetFeedback, 2003). Therefore, it is critical to examine how the affect generated by such valenced ad formats could influence brand attitudes. It is important to note that given (1) the low level of involvement in viewing these ads (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989) and (2) the growing recognition of consumers' passive or uninvolved approach toward many consumption decisions (Assael, 1984; Kassarijian, 1981; Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979), it is unlikely that potential customers are going to be aware of the influence of the valenced ad formats on their brand attitudes at the time of purchase. Hence, it might be more appropriate to consider implicit brand attitudes (attitudes about which the individual is not consciously aware) rather than explicit brand attitudes, which have been the sole focus of consumer behavior research. Therefore, this article draws attention to the effect of Web-based marketing communications on implicit and explicit brand attitudes of individuals.

As discussed earlier, research on brand attitudes has not addressed the potential impact of Web-based marketing communications, ad formats on the Internet, or the manner in which the ads are presented to the potential customer on implicit and explicit brand attitudes. Therefore, in the next section, several propositions are developed and presented.

WEB-BASED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AND IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT ATTITUDES

There are several available options for firms interested in Web-based marketing communications. Putrevu and Lord (2003) note banners, pop-ups, pop-unders, company home pages, and sponsorship as different ways in which firms can communicate with their customer segments. Banner ads are short promotional messages that appear, usually, at the top of a Web page. Sometimes, ads can appear unsolicited on the screen in windows in front of (pop-ups) or behind (pop-unders) the active page. While company home pages provide opportunities to provide comprehensive, interactive, and relational communication to prospective customers, sponsorships provide firms the opportunity to be less intrusive and to communicate with prospective customers based on content.

Over the years, there have been some additions to firms' Web-based marketing communication options. For example, Morris (1999) provides mailing lists and newsletters, keyword advertising, and coupon deals as additional marketing communication options. Mailing lists and newsletters solicit permission

from current and prospective customers so they can be targeted with more customized marketing communication. With reference to keyword advertising, firms often pay search engines to appear in response to prospective customers' queries. Coupons can be targeted to specific customers through e-mails and snail mail and can be placed on other Web sites for a charge. Also, there have been some recent additions such as sidebar ads, floating ads, unicast ads, and mobile banner ads. Sidebar ads, also called skyscraper ads, are similar to banner ads but are vertical, floating ads that move on the Web page in random or nonrandom manner. Unicast ads are similar to TV ads and run, often, in a small window. Mobile banner ads are sent to mobile phones from the Internet and often are sent from registered lists.

The Web-based marketing communication alternatives listed above can be categorized as intrusive and nonintrusive. Intrusive and nonintrusive marketing communication alternatives are so categorized based on whether or not the target customers consciously seek out information. Therefore, while company home pages, sponsorship sites, mailing lists and newsletters, keyword advertising, and coupon deals can be considered nonintrusive, banners, pop-ups, pop-unders, sidebar ads, floating ads, unicast ads, and mobile banner ads can be considered intrusive. However, it should be noted that some Web-based marketing communications such as mobile banner ads and unicast ads can be intrusive to some customers and nonintrusive to others.

In a seminal article on attitudes, MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) note that consumers' attitudes toward ads influence their attitudes toward the brand following a cognition based "think-feel-do" model drawn from research on psychology and consumer behavior. For Karson and Fisher (2005a, p. 335), this model is particularly adaptable to on-line contexts as "on-line consumers play an active role in their exposure to advertising content: First, they call up a site (either by typing a URL or clicking some type of link), then they process and evaluate the site's content, finally they decide whether to place an order or request further information (arguably the goal of most sites)." That is, consumers' attitudes that result from nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications where they consciously seek out information is based on deliberate, cognitive processes and, therefore, are explicit. As Karson and Fisher (2005b) note, site cognition, brand cognition, and attitude toward the site influence consumers' explicit attitude toward the brand.

In the case of nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications, the audience often creates a multiplicity of individual text, choosing and combining the elements supplied by firms in the virtual environment (Kimelfeld & Watt, 2001). As Luk, Chan, and Li (2002) suggest, as Web-based marketing communications, unlike traditional marketing communications, can provide more comprehensive and pertinent information of their market offerings to target audiences, they can be more effective in helping consumers form explicit brand attitudes. Specifically, for Elliott and Speck (2005), Web site factors such as ease of use, product information, entertainment, trust, customer support, and currency can influence consumers' explicit brand attitudes.

For Peterson and Merino (2003), Web-based marketing communications, including intelligent agents such as shopping bots and recommendation agents, and search engines can help consumers to acquire desired information. When consumers' information search is characterized by extrinsic motivation, instrumental orientation, situational involvement, utilitarian benefits, directed search,

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and focus on goal-directed choices (Peterson & Merino, 2003), it can influence their explicit brand attitude formation. Furthermore, as the Internet (1) provides a nearly limitless repository of information that is accessible at all times and on demand from anywhere; (2) possesses a powerful capacity for efficiently and effectively searching, organizing, sharing, and disseminating stored information and dynamically generated information; and (3) possesses the capability to support and facilitate several forms of interaction, Web-based marketing communications that are nonintrusive can help consumers form explicit attitude toward brands.

Using a national survey that involved 2120 online consumers, Burke (2002) notes that (1) 88% of respondents felt that a Web site must or should have detailed product information, (2) shoppers were receptive to receiving e-mail notifications, and (3) shoppers were consistently more positive about shopping features that provided a tangible benefit, such as a price discount. Burke (2002) also suggests that shoppers want information from Web-based marketing communication only when they seek it. Therefore, we propose:

- P1:** Firms that primarily focus on nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications influence the consumers' explicit brand attitudes more than their implicit brand attitudes.

As discussed earlier, in the last two decades, there has been a clear shift toward recognizing the pervasive role of automatic processes in almost all the social psychological processes. Reflecting this shift, there has been an increase in research on implicit attitudes. For example, for Kimelfeld and Watt (2001), users sometimes make automatic and momentary decisions regarding information content that, in turn, can affect users' functional interaction and attitudes. For Peterson and Merino (2003), sometimes information search can be characterized by intrinsic motivation, ritualized orientation, enduring involvement, seeking hedonic benefits, non-directed search, and a focus on navigational choices. Under such circumstances, consumers may be inclined to notice intrusive Web-based marketing communication efforts that, in turn, can influence consumers' implicit brand attitudes. Therefore, we propose:

- P2:** Firms that primarily focus on intrusive Web-based marketing communications influence the consumers' implicit brand attitudes more than their explicit brand attitudes.

Again, as noted earlier, recent work on implicit attitudes has established that attitudes are often activated outside conscious attention and affect day-to-day activities in a variety of ways (Bargh et al., 1992; Greenwald, Klinger, & Liu, 1989). This research finding has implications for an area of research that has, hitherto, not been associated with attitudes: impulse buying. In fact, Donthu and Garcia (1999) profiled Internet shoppers and found that Internet shoppers are more impulsive than in-store shoppers. In addition, Hausman (2000) established that impulse buying is a common method of product selection, in part because it provides hedonic rewards. For Spears (2006), consumers sometimes actively place themselves in situations that can lead to impulse purchases. Potentially, Web-based marketing communications could encourage such consumers.

In the context of online impulse buying, Madhavaram and Laverie (2004), in their exploratory study, found that images, banner advertisements, price, and special offers can all be stimuli for impulse purchases. In addition, Dholakia (2000) suggests that the process of consumption impulse formation has implications for how firms can manage their online shopping environments. As implicit attitudes are evaluative responses toward social objects that, unlike explicit attitudes, are not necessarily subject to introspection (Wänke et al., 2002)—that is, individuals may not be aware of their implicit attitudes—such implicit attitudes hold great potential to guide spontaneous behavior (Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Therefore, consistent with Friese, Hoffman, and Wänke (2008), we propose:

- P3:** Firms that primarily focus on intrusive Web-based marketing communications positively influence the consumers' impulse purchases through consumers' implicit brand attitudes.

More recent research has recognized that marketing communication formats could influence brand attitudes, but no study has examined this phenomenon in detail (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). Given the increasing popularity of the Internet as a medium for marketing communications, there is a possibility that intrusive Web-based marketing communication formats could influence consumers' implicit attitudes. A popular, well-researched, intrusive marketing communication option is the controversial ad format known as pop-ups. Taking pop-ups as an example of intrusive Web-based marketing communication options, the following section discusses how pop-ups, a negatively valenced ad format, could potentially influence implicit brand attitudes.

Pop-Ups—Negatively Valenced Ads

The last decade has witnessed the growth of Internet as an efficient medium for advertising. Rich media ads used on the Internet are increasing in popularity and their use is growing at an annual rate of 53% (Bowen, 2001). Rich media ads are available in a variety of formats (format refers to the manner in which the ad is presented to the Web surfer). One popular format for delivering rich media ads is through pop-ups. Formally known as interstitials, pop-ups refer to a form of rich media ads that are automatically launched in a new browser window when a Web page is loaded (Edwards, Li, & Lee, 2002). Such interstitials can be programmed to appear when the Web page is entered or exited, when a link on the Web page is clicked, or after a certain amount of time on a Web page. The window can then be preprogrammed to remain on the screen for a predetermined length of time or until the user chooses to close the window.

According to Edwards, Li, and Lee (2002), when faced with such pop-ups, Web users are interrupted and forced to react to commercial messages. In some cases, the viewers have the option to “zap” the advertisement by closing the pop-up window, but newer formats expand with the Web page and do not offer such an opportunity. Web surfers are forced to view the ad if they wish to use the Web site. In either case, interruptions force the users to respond cognitively, affectively, and/or behaviorally, resulting in positive or negative attitudes toward the brand being advertised. However, few studies have examined in detail the cognitive, affective, and behavioral impacts of pop-ups (McCoy et al., 2004).

Research in this area so far has concluded that pop-ups have quickly gained notoriety. They are considered to be intrusive, disturbing, and annoying by the customers of Web sites that host pop-ups (Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002). However, potentially, pop-ups could enhance the recall for the brand so advertised. According to a survey conducted by Johnson, Slack, and Keane (1999), 69% of those surveyed considered pop-ups annoying. Wegert (2002) found that some customers not only feel "violated" but also feel "molested" by the presence of such online ads. Such feelings lead online customers to develop negative attitudes toward the advertisements (Eighmey, 1997) and build up intentions not to return to the site hosting such advertisements (Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002). The negative attitude of Web surfers toward a specific ad format, pop-ups, is evident from the literature on pop-ups and hence it is appropriate to consider pop-ups as an example of a negatively valenced ad format. Theoretically, such negative attitudes have been posited to negatively affect brand perceptions (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

However, there is little empirical research on the impact of valenced ad formats. Also, the existing research on brand attitudes has primarily focused only the explicit attitude of Web surfers, which is evident through the near universal operationalization of attitudes using direct measures. Such an approach relies on the assumption that the Web browsers can accurately introspect and respond in an unbiased fashion to the direct measures used in such studies, an assumption that is questionable (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Further, consumer research finding that there is low-involvement ad processing by potential customers is very common (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989), and on a number of occasions consumers approach even their consumption decisions in an uninvolved or passive fashion (Assael, 1984; Baker, 2001; Kassarian, 1981; Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). Therefore, the impact of pop-up ads on brand attitudes is more likely to be at the subconscious level (due to low-involvement ad processing), and examining the effect of ad format on implicit brand attitudes might prove to be more useful.

The first theoretical alternative considered to predict the direction of influence of pop-ups (negatively valenced ad formats) on implicit brand attitudes is the mere exposure effect. Exposure effect refers to the increase in attractiveness of a stimulus object as a result of mere exposure to it. Zajonc's (1968) original thesis suggested that repeated exposure enhances attitudes. That is, sheer repetition of a stimulus may induce positive changes in an individual's attitude toward that stimulus (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Using a variety of stimuli, exposure methods, and outcome measures of stimulus attractiveness, research on exposure effect has revealed that both humans and animals are subject to the exposure effect. According to Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc (1980, p. 557), "in addition to its effects on preferences, exposure experience also allows the individual to learn a great deal about the stimulus object, so that the ability to recognize, discriminate, and categorize the object generally improves. . . . [A]s the individual comes to know the stimulus better, his affective reaction to it is likely to become increasingly positive." Exposure to the stimulus object increases an individual's familiarity with regard to the stimulus object, which in turn mediates the growth of positive affect. Extending this body of research, Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc (1980) found that exposure effects could be obtained when recognition of the stimulus object was drastically reduced. The results of this study revealed that subjects had clear preferences for exposed stimuli, even though subjects in a recognition test could not discriminate them from novel stimuli.

In sum, despite considerable controversy over the necessary conditions and theoretical basis for the mere exposure effect (e.g., Matlin, 1970; Sawyer, 1977), there is substantial evidence in support of the existence of an exposure effect (e.g., Bornstein, 1989; Yuhmiin & Esther, 2004). Subsequent research has found that exposure to a stimulus affects attitudes even when subjects are unaware of being exposed to the stimulus (Wilson, 1979). Therefore, we propose:

- P4:** Despite holding negative (explicit) attitudes toward intrusive Web-based marketing communications, for a particular product category, online customers will have positive (implicit) attitudes toward a well-known brand when compared to brands to which the online customers have not been exposed.

The alternative theoretical explanation considered in this article draws from the literature on classical conditioning as a source of attitude formation (Staats & Staats, 1967; Till & Priluck, 2000; Tom, 1995). According to this perspective, when an unconditioned stimulus (US) spontaneously provokes a positive or negative affective response, the systematic pairing of a conditioned stimulus (CS) and a US causes a transfer of affect from the US to the CS (Allen & Madden, 1985; Kim, Allen, & Kardes, 1996; Till & Priluck, 2000). Much of the prior research in marketing on classical conditioning as a source of attitude formation has argued for the need for contingency awareness (conscious awareness of the systematic pairing of CS and US) for conditioning to occur (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989; Shimp, Stuart, & Engle, 1991). However, more recently, Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p. 403) reported that “classical conditioning procedures can lead people to form attitudes toward objects without any conscious deliberation about those objects’ attributes.” Making further headway in the debate on the role of contingency awareness in classical conditioning, Olson and Fazio (2001) found that the attitudinal conditioning effect was found not only for explicit attitudes but also for implicit attitudes, which operate outside the conscious control of an individual. Therefore, we propose:

- P5:** When an unknown brand (CS) is repeatedly paired with intrusive Web-based marketing communications (e.g., pop-ups) that evoke negative feelings, the association might cause the negative feelings evoked by the ad format to become conditioned to the brand name and, hence, use of negatively valenced communication formats could cause the formation of negative implicit attitudes toward the brand.

DISCUSSION

This article draws on recent advances in attitudinal research in psychology and develops propositions pertaining to the potential implications of Web-based marketing communications for consumers’ implicit and explicit brand attitudes. In doing so, it makes several contributions to the marketing and psychology literatures. First, it is perhaps the first article to link Web-based marketing communications and implicit attitudes. Second, this article categorizes intrusive and nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications and proposes corresponding influences on consumers’ implicit as well as explicit brand attitudes.

Third, this is, again, the first article to link Web-based marketing communications, implicit attitudes, and impulse purchases on the Internet. Specifically, here, the article contributes to the psychology literature by proposing a relationship between implicit attitude and impulse buying. Fourth, drawing from research on mere exposure effect and classical conditioning, this article proposes influences on consumers' implicit attitudes for well-known versus unknown brands. Furthermore, through the five propositions that were developed, this article has several implications for research and practice. Next, a discussion of the theoretical implications and managerial implications corresponding to each of the five propositions is developed in this article. In discussing the theoretical implications, the focus is on how the propositions developed can guide future research in Web-based marketing communications and implicit attitude.

First, if nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications such as company home pages, sponsorship sites, mailing lists and newsletters, keyword advertising, and coupon deals influence consumers' explicit brand attitudes, it could be interesting to investigate the effectiveness of individual communication options. Also, within each option, how design considerations and elements influence consumers' explicit brand attitudes can be a future research area. If, for example, keyword advertising influences consumers' explicit brand attitude, then investigating the influence of Web sites that support and host the keyword advertising could be an important research consideration. Furthermore, because of the rapid changes in technology, often the nature and execution of nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications also changes. It is essential that researchers include such considerations in their research efforts. The results of such research studies can have far-reaching implications for practice and could assist decision makers with reference to the appropriate mix of nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications, resources necessary for developing and maintaining the different nonintrusive Web-based marketing communications options, and supporting efforts from the firm that reinforce Web-based marketing communications.

Second, if the firm's intrusive Web-based marketing communications such as banner ads, popups, popunders, sidebar ads, floating ads, unicast ads, and mobile banner ads influence consumers' implicit brand attitudes, it could be a good idea for researchers to investigate individual communication options. Also, comparing and contrasting the characteristics of communication options and their influence on implicit attitudes could be useful. However, sometimes intrusive Web-based marketing communications can slow down the loading of Web pages and cause discomfort to consumers. Therefore, it could be interesting to find out if access to broadband, cheaper and faster computers, and better quality monitors has any influence on consumers' implicit brand attitudes. Currently, research on attitudes suggests that, by definition, once feelings are consciously felt and are reported, they inform explicit attitudes. However, researchers could investigate whether consciously felt and reported feelings of *violation* and *animosity* inform implicit attitudes to a greater extent than explicit attitudes. Also, researchers could investigate whether or not, where, and when the intrusion occurs have any influence on implicit attitudes. Furthermore, the question of whether unicast ads, which are similar to TV ads, have similar influence on consumers' attitudes can be an important research area. On similar lines, given the growing popularity of mobile banner ads, investigating these may be inevitable in the future. Again, the results of such research studies can be useful for intrusive Web-based marketing communication mix strategies.

Third, this article proposes an unexplored but interesting relationship between implicit attitude and impulse purchases. If implicit attitudes indeed influence impulse purchases, they need to be investigated further. This research area has great potential and could redefine impulse buying research. Also, such investigations could benefit from new developments in impulsivity research. For example, some recent psychopharmacological studies (Evdenden, 1999; Monterosso & Ainslie, 1999) have reviewed different types or varieties of impulsivity. Some of the issues that are addressed in these reviews are: (1) there is not one unitary “impulsivity” or only one type of impulsive behavior; (2) most people, at some time or another, have engaged in impulsive behavior—including such banal examples as taking one more drink or stopping and chatting to a friend met unexpectedly on the street; (3) there could be something such as “socially acceptable impulsive behavior”; and (4) impulsivity could be associated with rationality. Also, following Dickman (1990), Madhavaram and Laverie (2009) argue that there are indeed two types of impulse buying: functional impulse buying and dysfunctional impulse buying. Therefore, the influence of Web-based marketing communications on functional impulse buying should be investigated further. This can have tremendous impact, and practitioners need to integrate such knowledge into marketing communications in general and Web-based marketing communications in particular. For example, practitioners could redesign in-store as well as Web-based sales promotion strategies in order to encourage consumers’ functional impulse purchases.

Fourth, drawing from research on mere exposure effects, this article proposes that intrusive Web-based marketing communications positively influence implicit attitude for well-known brands. This could provide initial support for mere exposure effect in the context of implicit attitudes. However, further research will be required with reference to the ideal number of exposures and the point after which further exposures will yield undesirable consequences. Also, researchers could investigate the impact of implicit attitudes on brand choice behaviors. Furthermore, examining the conflicting goals of pop-up sponsors and pop-up hosts could be beneficial for researchers and practitioners. While the use of pop-ups would be beneficial for sponsors, since pop-ups positively influence implicit attitude, prior research has shown that use of pop-ups negatively influences Web surfers’ intentions to revisit the Web site that hosts such pop-ups. This could have important implications for pricing strategies and frequency of display of such pop-up ads.

Fifth, drawing from research on classical conditioning, this article proposes that Web-based marketing communications (e.g., pop-ups) negatively influence implicit attitudes for unknown brands. Researching this area could potentially contribute to the 40 years of debate regarding whether attitudes can be formed via classical conditioning without awareness. Perhaps pop-up sponsors need to reexamine the use of pop-ups to promote relatively unknown brands, since the negative valence attached to the ad format has the potential to negatively influence their potential customers’ implicit brand attitudes. Hence, practitioners will need to do a cost–benefit analysis for their intrusive Web-based marketing mix strategies. Given that the use of pop-ups has negative implications for both sponsors and hosts, further research is warranted on ways of enhancing such ads and on implementation of pop-up caps.

Overall, there is much to be done to draw from research on implicit attitudes with reference to conceptual and methodological issues and to integrate it into

marketing communication strategies in general and Web-based marketing communication strategies in particular. This article is an attempt to uphold the long-standing tradition of applying concepts and theories from psychology for marketing's benefit. By showing that theories in psychology can be used to develop empirically testable propositions in the context of the influence of Web-based marketing communications on consumers' implicit and explicit brand attitudes, this article calls for theory informed research. It is hoped that this article, as a call for research, acts as a catalyst for further exploration of implicit and explicit attitudes in the context of Web-based marketing communication strategies.

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