

Banner ads work -- Even if you don't notice them at all

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The majority of advertising exposure occurs when the audience's attention is focused elsewhere, such as while flipping through a magazine or browsing a web site. However, a new study reveals that even this incidental exposure to advertising may have a positive effect on consumer attitudes. Forthcoming in the June issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, the study revises existing theories of exposure advertising, specifically repeated views of web-based banner ads.

"Effects of mere exposure are expected to grow in a marketplace where consumers' attention is often focused elsewhere," write Xiang Fang (Oklahoma State University), Surendra Singh (University of Kansas), and Rohini Ahluwalia (University of Minnesota). "Regardless of measured click-through rates, banner ads may still create a favorable attitude toward the ad due to repeated exposure."

The researchers investigated whether "mere exposure effect," a condition in which people develop a positive perception of stimuli not presented to them on a noticeable level, was also applicable to incidental advertising. In a series of experiments, the researchers discovered that even if people could not recall the content of the ad, repeated exposure led to familiarity, which then led to positive feelings.

"Our research could have important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it enhances our understanding of the process underlying the mere exposure effect. Practically, it provides some useful guidelines for advertisers to develop more accurate measures of banner

ad effectiveness," the authors write.

Participants had more positive evaluations toward the target banner ad as exposure frequency increased. Surprisingly, participants also showed high levels of tolerance for banner ads on which they were not directly focused. According to the researchers, even after twenty exposures, common wear-out effects were not apparent.

"Our results suggest that the fluency resulting from frequent passive exposure and the consequent spontaneous affective reaction provide a crucial link between exposure and positive impressions," write the authors. "Such spontaneous affect influenced evaluative judgments through a more complex process, likely by coloring the interpretation of the fluency experience and the nature of resulting metacognitions relating fluency with liking."

Source: University of Chicago

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