More online searches for TV advertisers with viewer multi-tasking

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Browsing the Internet while watching TV is a great way to kill time during commercial breaks, but are advertisers losing out if consumers surf while the commercials roll?

Not according to a researcher at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, who found commercials influence the terms people use to search on websites like Google and Bing.

"Advertising on television changes what people search for. We use more branded keywords and fewer generic keywords," said Ken Wilbur, a marketing professor at Duke.

If a viewer is looking for a financial planner and sees a TV advertisement for Fidelity, he or she is more likely to search for a branded term such as "Fidelity" than for a generic term such as "financial planning." However, advertising doesn't increase the number of searches in a product category, nor does it make people more likely to click through on the results.

These findings come from a new mining-query technique developed by researchers to identify a set of branded and generic financial services. Brand names in this category are relatively unique, such as eTrade or Merrill Lynch. The team devised a method to sift through 35 million searches and identify those that included generic financial services keywords, as opposed to simply brand names.

The report, presented Dec. 8 at the Cross-platform and Multi-channel Consumer Behavior conference at the Wharton School of Business in Philadelphia, is available on the Social Sciences Research Network at papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cf … ?abstract_id=1720713 . Co-authors are Mingyu Joo, a doctoral student at Syracuse University's Whitman School of Management, and Yi Zhu, a doctoral student at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business.

According to a recent study by Nielsen and Yahoo!, three out of four Americans surf the web while they watch television and half of those do so every day.

"The news regarding consumers is we have this general inclination to search on a brand name whose TV ad we've seen recently," Wilbur said. "That limits our options. Generic search terms give us more information in the results.

"On the other hand, the biggest implication for marketers is they need to account for these effects when setting TV and search advertising budgets. Otherwise, companies will miss out. They will spend too much on search, and too little on TV."

The findings highlight the need for companies to integrate television and search advertising campaigns.

"Right now, most marketers have one agency for TV, and a different agency for online searches. They should seriously consider integrating those two functions," said Wilbur. "In elasticity terms, the effect of TV advertising on consumers' choice of branded keywords is about as large as its effect on sales."

Depending on the campaign, marketers could target their advertising budgets to the times when television advertisements appear. Wilbur even advises companies competing with a brand with extensive television advertising to buy search ads on the competing brand's keywords.

Additionally, television campaigns can be adjusted to maximize when advertising searches take place, the researchers say. This could include selecting networks, programs, markets and times of day to maximize impact on web usage.

"TV ads should be scheduled during or shortly before consumers search," Wilbur said. "This effect tends to dissipate in hours, not days." For example, people tend to search for financial services during standard business hours, but most financial services advertising is done at night.

Provided by Duke University

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