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ARTICLE

Expert vs. novice users: Comparative analysis of the effectiveness of online discounts and gifts



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Abstract This study analyzes whether experienced and new Internet users react differently to online discounts and gifts. The results obtained in a multi-group SEM analysis show that experienced users are more influenced by online sales promotions and have a greater purchase intention than new users. However, although both groups of Internet users show a predisposition to purchase the promoted service, experts form an opinion about the Web advertisements when they see an online discount and they change their attitude toward the brand when they see an online gift, while no significant differences are observed in the novice users' response to promotional incentives. The findings of this research help us understand better the way Internet users process different types of promotional incentives communicated through banners, and to what extent the experience in the use of Internet affects that process.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Descuento on-line;
Procesamiento de la información;
Regalo on-line;
Experiencia de uso con Internet

Los expertos vs los noveles: análisis comparativo de la efectividad de los descuentos y los regalos online

Resumen Esta investigación analiza si los expertos y los noveles en el uso de Internet reaccionan de igual o diferente forma ante los descuentos y los regalos on-line. A través de un análisis SEM multigrupos se obtiene que los expertos se ven más influidos por las promociones de ventas on-line, generando una mayor intención de compra que los noveles. Sin embargo, aunque ambos grupos de internautas presentan una predisposición a comprar el servicio promocionado, a los expertos los descuentos les sirven más para generar una opinión acerca del anuncio Web y los regalos on-line para cambiar su actitud hacia la marca, mientras que no se observan diferencias significativas en la respuesta de los noveles en función del incentivo promocional. Los

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hallazgos de esta investigación ayudan a comprender mejor la forma en que los internautas procesan diferentes tipos de incentivos promocionales comunicados a través de banners y en qué medida la experiencia de uso Web afecta a dicho procesamiento.

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Introduction

Among the online marketing communication tools with the highest growth in recent years, it is worth mentioning the sales promotion (Valassis.es, 2012). Sales promotion has been considered by some marketing managers in the industry as the most valuable communication tool for their business (ANA, 2012). Concerning the consumer's perspective, the "Trends in online Shopping" study determines that 30% of Internet users make their purchases online driven by special offers seen on the Internet, while only 18% of them are driven by online advertising (Nielsen, 2008). It is estimated that 32.5% of European users have used Groupon coupons at least once, while in 2012, 95.5 million Europeans used online incentives in 2012 (eMarketer.com, 2012). In Spain, 7.4 million Internet users have used discounts on portals such as Groupon and Grouponia, 25% of which are active seekers of online coupons (Nielsen, 2012). All these figures show the current importance of online sales promotion in the corporate marketing strategies and explain the effort directed by academia toward understanding how this communication instrument works in the online environment. Therefore, it is worth considering the following issues: What variables affect or precede consumer behavior in the face of an online sales promotion? Are all types of sales promotions on the Internet equally efficient? Do online sales promotions affect all Internet users in the same way? Another question that arises in connection with the previous ones is whether the proliferation of different online promotional incentives will solely and exclusively affect the consumer behavior variables or they will have an impact on its antecedents, such as attitude toward the brand and, therefore, on the brand equity.

The traditional (offline) means have proven that one of the key moderating variables of the impact of a sales promotion is precisely the type of incentive offered in it (monetary vs. non-monetary) (Buil, De Chernatony, & Martinez, 2011; Büttner, Florack, & Göritz, 2015; Mittal & Sethi, 2011; Reid, Thompson, Mavondo, & Brunso, 2015). The different ways of integrating the promotional information related to every type of incentive will possibly affect the global processing of the incentive itself and, therefore, its impact on the consumer behavior (Montaner, De Chernatony, & Buil, 2011).

Literature has also highlighted that user's prior experience with the Internet is one of the moderating variables with the greatest impact on the user's final response to corporate marketing actions. This variable affects the decision making process and the information processing (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Flavián-Blanco, Gurrea-Sarasa, & Orús-Sanclemente, 2012; San José-Cabezudo, Gutierrez-Arranz, & Gutierrez-Cillán, 2007). According to the general studies

about experience with the technology, this variable is a strong predictor for both attitude and behavior regarding technology (Thompson, Higgins, & Howell, 1994). Several studies have proven that expert and novice use the information systems differently (King & Xia, 2007), determining the nature of their searches, their frequency of use and their online purchase behavior.

We can therefore affirm that prior experience with the Internet influences consumers' online behavior and their preferences and assessments of online brands and products (Thorbjørnsen & Supphellen, 2004). This paper seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge about the functioning of online sales promotion, focusing on the banner format as a transmitter of promotional incentives, for being one of the most common promotion methods used by companies on the Internet (eMarketer.com, 2013; IABEurope, 2013; IABSpain, 2013). In spite of the recent developments in alternative advertising formats, the traditional banner keeps being one of the most usual formats even today. The report published in September 2012 by eMarketer about the evolution of online advertising spending in the USA highlighted that banners or display ads were the most widespread format after the search engine ads. In 2012, it accounted for an overall advertising spending of \$8.68 billion, being expected to reach \$11.29 billion in 2016 (eMarketer.com, 2012).

The situation is very similar in Europe, as shown by some studies carried out by the IABEurope (2013). In Spain, which is the geographic region of this research, advertising spending on display ads accounted for 25.56% of the overall online advertising spending in 2012, according to IABSpain (2013).

In short, the main purpose of this study is to analyze how online discounts and gifts communicated through banners affect the formation of attitudes toward online purchases and the purchase intention, as well as to find out to what extent users' level of Web experience moderates such relationship.

An interesting theoretical contribution of this paper is the integration of the theories of information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986), sales promotion processing (Inman, McAlister, & Hoyer, 1990) and online information processing (Hershberger, 2003), within a single theoretical framework including the main developments introduced by each of these theories to date. This way, the theories are simplified in a single theoretical framework gathering their synergies and including the key differences of each of them. This paper represents a progress in the theory of information processing by adding the particular case of the information related to promotional incentives found on the Internet by users with different Web experience levels. A series of conclusions are driven from its development, deepening the knowledge about how promotional incentives are processed

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