

## ROMANIAN CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD ONLINE ADVERTISING

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*In recent years the use of the Internet in Romania has grown dramatically. As a transitional economy and a member of the European Union, Romania presents new opportunities for both domestic and international firms. This study is an initial, exploratory effort that examines the beliefs and attitudes of Romanians toward Internet advertising. Among the findings based on data from 366 Internet users, (1) Internet use patterns appear to be a significant factor influencing Romanian consumers' attitudes toward online advertising, (2) respondents indicated that one of the most important functions of advertising is to provide information, (3) while Romanian consumers believe that online advertising is fun and interesting they have doubts about its credibility, and (4) Romanian consumers with pro, ambivalent, and critics' attitudes toward online advertising were significantly different in their online advertising behavior. Practical implications for managers are explored.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Advertising on the Internet and World Wide Web has become an important component of marketing communication worldwide. Global marketers and advertisers are turning to online advertising because of the unique and versatile capabilities of the Internet. These capabilities include interactivity, global reach, multimedia capacity, and audience involvement (Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund 2002). Even with the weakening U.S. and global economy, online advertising continues to grow. According to AdAge (2008), Zenith expected Internet ad sales to reach \$44.6 billion in 2008 (23.9 percent increase from \$36 billion in 2007) and the Internet's share of the global ad market to rise from 8.1 percent to 9.4 percent during the same time period.

With its rapid diffusion, online advertising has received a great deal of attention in both business and academic arenas. Consumers' attitudes toward online advertising (ATOA) are

one of the foci of existing literature relating to this new research domain. A number of published articles have explored ATOA in the United States, indicating that ATOA may influence consumers' response to online advertisements and online purchase intention (e.g., Karson, McCloy and Bonner 2006; Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund 2002). Despite the significant impact of online advertising on global marketing and commerce, little research has been conducted in countries outside the United States.

The purpose of this study is to investigate ATOA among Romanian consumers and the relationship between ATOA and Romanian Internet users' online advertising behavior. During the past two decades, Romania has undergone a dramatic political and economic transformation. Although reform has been slow and difficult, Romania is now catching up to the other transitional economies of Central and Eastern Europe. In recent years Romanian Internet use has grown rapidly. According to the Internet World Stats (2008), during 2000-2008, Romania Internet usage increased as much as 1,400 percent. As of March 2008, its 12 million Internet users make up 53.9 percent

of the country's entire population. Nearly one third of Internet users from Romania use online stores or auction portals as a place for purchasing various goods.

Little attention has been given to the subject of online advertising in Romania, even though it is the second largest country (with a population of over 21 million) in Central and Eastern Europe (The World Bank 2008) and is experiencing rapid economic growth. Therefore, this study fills a gap in existing literature relating to online advertising across cultural and national boundaries, especially in Eastern Europe. Global marketers can benefit from understanding how consumers from a transition economy perceive the Internet as a source of advertising. Thus, the study will enable businesses and organizations to use online advertising more effectively in their global marketing efforts.

This paper proceeds in the following order. First, we discuss previous work that has examined attitudes toward online advertising. We then describe the current state of Internet advertising in Romania. This is followed by several research questions and a methods and findings sections. The paper concludes with implications for practitioners and suggestions for future research activities.

### **ATTITUDES TOWARD ONLINE ADVERTISING**

Consumers' beliefs and attitudes toward advertising are believed to be an important indicator of advertising effectiveness (Mitchell and Olson 1981). Past studies have examined consumers' general attitudes toward advertising in the traditional media environment. Bauer and Greyser (1968) first identified economic and social conditions as two dimensions underlying consumers' attitudes and beliefs. Later research recognized the complexity of consumers' attitudes and beliefs about advertising and proposed more complex models. Among them, Pollay and Mittal's model (1993) is the most influential. The researchers proposed seven factors underlying attitudes toward advertising,

including product information, social role and image, hedonic/pleasure, value corruption, falsity/no sense, good for the economy, and materialism.

Research on attitudes toward advertising has naturally extended into the Internet arena. Ducoffe (1996) for example, investigated whether and how advertising values such as informativeness, entertainment, and irritation were related to consumers' attitudes toward online advertising. He found that consumers viewed online advertising as somewhat valuable and informative, not particularly irritating, but lacking in entertainment value. More recent studies indicate that online advertising is perceived to be intrusive (Li *et al.* 2002) and disturbing (Reed 1999). Using Pollay and Mittal's model, Karson, McCloy and Bonner (2006) examined consumers' attitude toward Web site advertising. The researchers found that consumers have become less positive about the "hedonic/pleasurable" aspects of Web site advertising. Brackett and Carr (2001), using a college student sample, compared students' ATOA to the attitudes of people familiar with the Web in Ducoffe's 1996 study. They found that contrary to Ducoffe's results, the sample made up of students found online advertising to be irritating, annoying, or insulting to people's intelligence.

Advertising scholars disagree on the relationship between consumers' beliefs about advertising and their general attitudes toward advertising. Some view beliefs about advertising as perceptual antecedents that predict attitudes toward advertising (e.g., Brackett and Carr 2001; Ducoffe 1996; Pollay and Mittal 1993) whereas others used and measured both constructs interchangeably (Schlosser 1999; Mehta 2000). Ducoffe (1996) and Shimp (1981) argued that attitude toward advertising has both cognitive and affective antecedents. Beliefs about advertising, which is a result of the benefit and cost consumers derive from advertising, is primarily a cognitive predictor of attitude toward advertising. Such beliefs play a more important role in forming attitudes toward advertising when consumers

centrally process (more deliberate, effortful and thoughtful) advertising information than in situations of peripheral processing (low involvement, less thoughtful, and more emotional) (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). This distinction is an important one. Therefore, in this study, belief about advertising is viewed as a different construct from ATOA.

### **Antecedents and Impact of ATOA**

People's beliefs and attitudes are influenced by a number of social and psychological characteristics (Seitel 2007). Previous research has linked ATOA to variables such as demographics, lifestyle, and Internet experience. Yang (2004), for example, examined the relationship between lifestyle segments and people's ATOA. He categorized consumers into three distinct lifestyle groups: 'experiencers', 'traditionalists' and 'selfindulgents', and found that the lifestyle clusters partly predict Internet users' attitudes toward Internet advertising. Korgaonkar and Wolin (2002) explored the differences between heavy, medium, and light Web users in terms of their beliefs about online advertising, attitudes toward Web advertising, and online purchasing patterns. They found that heavy Internet users tended to have more positive attitudes toward online advertising than those of medium and light Internet users. Karson, McCloy and Bonner (2006) explored the relationship between Internet use and ATOA from a different angle. They segmented consumers into three groups based on beliefs about Web site advertising: (1) pro Web site advertising (WSA), (2) ambivalent toward WSA, and (3) critics of WSA. The researchers found that the pro group showed greater tendencies of computer and Internet use than the ambivalent group and the critics.

As mentioned above, beliefs about advertising have been investigated as antecedents of ATOA. Ducoffe (1996), for example, found that informativeness and entertainment were positively related to ATOA whereas irritation was negatively related to advertising value. Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund (2002) tested

Pollay and Mittal's (1993) belief model. The results supported the hypotheses that several belief factors influence Web users' attitudes toward online advertising which in turn have an impact on users' behavioral intention. The researchers found that the belief factors – product information, hedonic pleasure, and social role and image – were positively related to subjects' attitudes toward Web advertising, whereas materialism, falsity/no sense [false or nonsensical advertising claims] and value corruption were negatively related to their attitudes toward Web advertising. In addition, the more positive Web users' attitudes toward Web advertising were, the greater the likelihood that they would respond favorably to Web ads.

Understanding consumers' beliefs about and attitudes toward online advertising is helpful in explaining consumers' behavior regarding online advertising and online shopping intention. Some studies went beyond description of ATOA and explored the impact of ATOA. Karson, McCloy and Bonner (2006) segmented consumers into Pro, Ambivalent, and Critics groups. They found that critics of WSA used computers and the Internet less for information search, and found the Internet to be less utilitarian and hedonic than the other two groups. Similarly, Korgaonkar and Wolin (2002) found that a more positive attitude toward online advertising is likely to lead to more frequent online purchasing and more dollars spent on these purchases.

### **INTERNET ADVERTISING IN ROMANIA**

According to IDC (2008), Central and Eastern Europe will experience the fastest growth in Internet ad spending during 2008-2011 with a compound annual growth rate of 42.1 percent. As a country bordering between the east and the west, Romania has much in common with its Central and Eastern European neighbors such as Russia and Poland. The economic transition and Internet development in Romania are also representative of this region.

Despite developmental barriers associated with transitional economies, Romania has a number of positive characteristics which facilitate the adoption of e-commerce, including a high level of general education, the rapid growth of Internet users, computer literacy, good English skills, and an abundance of human capital in the IT field (Guarău 2007). Its recent entry into the European Union has provided the country with the incentive to undertake needed regulatory and economic reform, as well as an influx of funds to aid in the development of its infrastructure.

Along with the rapid adoption and use of personal computers and the Internet in Romania, Internet advertising expenditures have grown significantly in recent years. The Romanian Internet advertising sales is estimated at 8.4 million Euros in 2007, up 52.8 percent from 5.5 million Euros in 2006 (ARBOmedia 2007). Major advertisers include banking, personal care/beauty, IT, auto, telecoms, real estate, and insurance. According to online research company Gemius SA (2007), many Romanians believe that advertising on the Internet is efficient and informative. However, in terms of online shopping, Romanians have tended to be cautious about online purchases partly because of the perception of high risk associated with making financial transactions on the Internet.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This study is guided primarily by research questions since it is an initial effort to understand Romanian consumers' ATOA. One of the main goals is to explore different belief dimensions underlying ATOA among Romanian consumers. Therefore, the first research question asks:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** What are the beliefs about online advertising among Romanian consumers?

The relationship between belief factors and ATOA has been examined by several past studies. Some belief factors such as product

information, hedonic, and social role have been found to be positively related to people's ATOA. Materialism, falsity/no sense and value corruption were found negatively related to ATOA (Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund 2002). It would be interesting to investigate the relationship in the Romanian environment. Thus, we propose the second research question:

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** What is the relationship between beliefs about online advertising and ATOA among Romanian consumers?

Previous research has shown that heavy Internet users tend to have a more positive attitude toward online advertising than light Internet users and are more likely to make online purchases (Korgaonkar and Wolin 2002). In this study, we would like to see whether this relationship holds up among Romanian Internet users. Therefore, the following hypotheses posit:

**H<sub>1a</sub>:** Heavier Internet users have a more favorable attitude toward Internet advertising than do light Internet users.

**H<sub>1b</sub>:** Heavier Internet users make more online purchases than do light Internet users.

According to Karson, McCloy and Bonner (2006) consumers can be segmented into three groups based on their ATOA including 1) pro Web site advertising, 2) ambivalent toward WSA, and 3) critics of WSA. Exploring differences among these three groups in terms of their online behavior will provide some evidence for the impact of ATOA. Therefore, our third and fourth research questions ask:

**RQ<sub>3</sub>:** How do people with different ATOA (pro, ambivalent, and critics) differ in their reported behavior toward online advertising and the reported likelihood of online purchase as a result of online advertising?

**RQ<sub>4</sub>:** How do people with different ATOA (pro, ambivalent, and critics) differ in their reported past online shopping behavior?

## METHODS

### Procedure and Sampling

To examine the research questions and hypotheses proposed in this study, a questionnaire was developed first in English and later translated into Romanian. That version was re-translated back into English by a bilingual third party to ensure translation equivalency.

Data were collected primarily from college students in Romania. However, a small percentage of the sample constitutes general consumers. Using a student sample in this study was justified in two grounds: first, college students are the most likely users of the Internet in Romania. In addition to age, the biggest predictor of Internet usage is education. A college education increases rates of Internet access by 40 percent (Nie and Erbring 2000). Second, compared with the general population, college students are more homogeneous on external factors that may influence their attitudes and beliefs.

A total of 366 questionnaires provided usable data and were analyzed using SPSS. The sample was 50 percent male and 50 percent female. Respondents ranged in age from 14 to 67 years ( $M = 22.85$ ,  $SD = 7.39$ ).

### Measurement

The questionnaire measured Internet use patterns, beliefs about online advertising, general attitudes toward online advertising, behavioral response toward online advertising, online purchasing intention, and past online buying experiences. In addition, demographic data, such as age and gender, were collected to describe the characteristics of the sample.

Subjects' Internet usage was measured using questions adapted from Korgaokar and Wolin's (2002) study. This section included questions about how long participants had been using the Internet, estimated amount of Internet usage (e-mail is not included), locations of access to

the Internet, and stability of web site choice. To measure subject's beliefs about Online advertising, a 33-item scale was adapted from previous studies (Pollay and Mittal 1993; Yang 2000). The scale includes several dimensions of beliefs about online advertising, such as whether or not respondents considered online advertising to be informative, materialistic, irritating, good for consumers, hedonic, credible, and manipulative. Participants indicated their agreement with the statements about their beliefs about online advertising on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Factor analysis was used to identify belief factors.

Respondents' general attitudes toward advertising were measured using a scale adapted from Korgaonkar and Wollin's (2002) study. They were asked to indicate their agreement on 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) regarding the following statements: "Overall, I consider Internet advertising a good thing" and "Overall I like advertising on the Internet." They were then asked to consider the statement "I consider Internet advertising...", and were asked to respond with a 4-point scale ranging from (1) "not essential at all" to (4) "very essential". Finally, the respondents were asked to rate their attitudes toward online advertising on a scale ranging from (1) "very unfavorable" to (5) "very favorable." The reliability coefficient alpha for the scale was .71. Responses of the five items were summed and averaged to create an overall ATOA index ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .69$ ).

Behavioral response toward online advertising was measured by whether respondents were likely to click on online advertising. Subjects were also asked to estimate the likelihood of making online purchases as a result of online advertising. Finally, online shopping experience was measured in terms of online shopping history, frequency of purchase, and product categories.

## RESULTS

### Internet Usage Pattern

Respondents on average had used the Internet for 5.35 years. Not including e-mail, 62.5 percent of the respondents reported that they used the World Wide Web daily. In a typical day, participants spent an average of 3.25 hours on the Web. Among them, 18.3 percent of respondents used the Web less than an hour, 23.2 percent used it 1-2 hours, 12.8 percent used it 2-3 hours, 23 percent used 3-4 hours, and 6.3 percent used the Web for 4-5 hours. The majority (75.1 percent) often or always visited a known site. At the same time, many respondents (51.9 percent) surfed the Internet to search for new or better sites on a regular basis.

The click rate among Romanian Internet users was medium ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ). In terms of past online shopping experience, 57.1 percent of the respondents have purchased something online whereas 42.9 percent have never bought online. Thirty-two percent of the respondents made less than 5 purchases during the previous 12 months, whereas 6.3 percent made between 5 to 10 purchases and 4.4 percent made more than 10 purchases.

### Beliefs Factors about Online Advertising

To examine beliefs about online advertising among Romanian Internet users we used principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation on the 33 beliefs items. The criteria for extracting factors were: (a) a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0, (b) at least two loadings, and (c) a .60/.40 loading rule was applied. This factor solution generated seven factors that accounted for 65.7 percent of the total variance after rotation. Responses to items that loaded on each factor were summed and averaged to create belief indexes. Table 1 presents a summary of the factor analysis. Correlations between factors were shown in Table 2.

Factor 1, Entertainment (Cronbach alpha = .88,  $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) accounted for 14.95

percent of the total variance after rotation. It consisted of six items such as enjoyable, entertaining, pleasing, reflecting that Romanian consumers believe online advertising is fun and interesting. Interestingly, two of the "irritation" items also loaded negatively on this factor, indicating that Romanian consumers believe that entertainment and less irritation are linked together. Factor 2, Information (Cronbach alpha = .79,  $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ), accounted for 11.98 percent of the total variance after rotation. It included five items related to the information function of online advertising. This factor suggests that Romanian consumers view online advertising as an important source of information. The mean for the informative factor was the highest among the seven factors, indicating that it was the strongest belief about online advertising among Romanian consumers. Factor 3, Believability (Cronbach alpha = .91,  $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) accounted for 11.61 percent of the total variance after rotation. The factor includes three items such as trustworthy, credible and believable. Factor 4, Negative Social Impact (Cronbach alpha = .64,  $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), accounted for 7.93 percent of the total variance after rotation. This factor reflects that Romanian consumers perceive online advertising as misleading, insulting people's intelligence, and distorting social values. Factor 5, Materialism ( $r = .72$ ,  $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) accounted for 7.57 percent of the total variance after rotation, suggesting that Romanian consumers believe online advertising promotes a materialistic society. Factor 6, Economy ( $r = .65$ ,  $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ), accounted for 6.21 percent of the total variance after rotation. This suggests that Romanian consumers perceive online advertising as having a positive impact on the economy. Factor 7, Persuasion ( $r = .63$ ,  $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) accounted for 5.50 percent of the total variance after rotation. The factor indicates that Romanians perceive online advertising as persuasive and effective.

RQ<sub>2</sub> asks about the relationship between beliefs about online advertising and ATOA. Multiple regression was used to address this question. Entertainment ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Believability

**TABLE 1**  
**Factor Loadings for ATOA**

Belief Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Factor 1: Entertainment</b>							
Is enjoyable	.82	.23	.22	-.03	-.04	.10	-.01
Is pleasing	.80	.21	.09	-.10	-.10	.05	.07
Is entertaining	.78	.32	.07	-.11	-.12	.07	-.14
Is interesting	.66	.44	.17	-.08	-.12	.14	-.01
Is irritating	-.63	.07	-.12	.43	-.16	.01	.05
Is annoying	-.61	.12	-.14	.48	-.17	-.07	.11
<b>Factor 2: Information</b>							
Helps me keep up to date with products/services available in the marketplace	.40	.69	.16	-.03	-.03	.15	-.18
Is a good source of product/service information	.12	.66	.40	-.15	-.03	.40	.02
Helps companies become more profitable	.05	.65	-.04	-.07	-.03	.08	-.13
Provides timely info	.33	.63	.30	-.05	.01	.01	.17
Provides info on what is cool	.18	.62	.17	-.20	.09	-.05	-.34
<b>Factor 3: Believability</b>							
Is credible	.21	.25	.83	-.10	-.10	.03	-.11
Is believable	.11	.22	.83	-.14	-.04	-.02	-.09
Is trustworthy	.27	.18	.82	-.07	-.09	.06	-.18
<b>Factor 4: Negative Social Impact</b>							
Promotes undesirable values in our society	-.18	-.16	-.05	.75	.26	.08	.03
Is deceptive and misleading	-.11	.00	-.31	.62	.09	-.16	.19
Insults people's intelligence	-.17	-.25	.03	.60	.16	-.07	.08
<b>Factor 5: Materialism</b>							
Encourages people to buy to impress others	-.07	.12	.09	.00	.81	.14	.12
Promotes a materialistic society	-.02	.13	-.17	.23	.76	-.02	.06
<b>Factor 6: Economy</b>							
Has positive effects on the economy	.07	.22	-.09	.07	.05	.77	.21
Raises our standard of living	.11	.08	.13	-.13	.21	.75	-.05
<b>Factor 7: Persuasion</b>							
Persuades people to buy things they should not buy	-.11	-.09	-.21	.19	.28	-.05	.69
Is an interpersonal way of selling	-.14	-.01	-.31	.19	.21	.01	.65

**TABLE 2**  
**Correlations Between Belief Factors**

	ENTER	INFOR	BELI	NEG	MATE	GOECO	PERSU
ENTER	1	.53**	.47**	-.41**	-.048	.24**	-.29**
INFOR	.53**	1	.51**	-.30**	.047	.33**	-.23**
BELI	.47**	.51**	1	-.34**	-.12*	.12*	-.44**
NEG	-.41**	-.30**	-.34**	1	.29**	-.038	.43**
MATE	-.05	.05	-.12*	.29**	1	.19**	.32**
GOECO	.24**	.33**	.12*	-.04	.19**	1	.07
PERSU	-.29**	-.23**	-.44**	.43**	.32**	.07	1

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Economy ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Information ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ ) are significant positive predictors of overall attitudes toward online advertising. Materialism ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) is a significant negative predictor of attitude toward online advertising. In other words, people who believe online advertising is entertaining, credible, informative, has a positive impact on the economy, and promotes less materialism, have a more positive attitude toward online advertising than do their counterparts. The five significant predictors explain 52 percent of variance in ATOA ( $R = .72$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

H<sub>1</sub> posits that heavier Internet users have a more positive attitude toward online advertising and make more online purchases compared with light Internet users. Hypothesis 1 was supported. K-mean cluster analysis was used to classify respondents into heavy and light Internet users. A t-test was then applied to test the impact of amount of Internet use on ATOA. Attitudes toward online advertising among heavy Internet users ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $S.D. = .70$ ) were significantly different from that of light Internet users ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $S.D. = .65$ ) ( $t = 2.92$ ,  $df = 359$ ,  $p < .01$ , two-tailed). A cross-tab was used to test the difference between heavy and light Internet users in their reported past online shopping experience. There was a significant relationship between the amount of Internet usage and respondents' past online purchasing behavior (Chi square = 17.55,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

RQ<sub>3</sub> asks about differences between pro, ambivalent and critics in their responses toward online advertising and the likelihood that they would purchase online as a result of online advertising. K-mean cluster analysis was used to classify respondents as pro, ambivalent and critics. A MONOVA test was then conducted to assess behavioral responses toward online advertising and the likelihood of being influenced by online advertising between the groups. The result was statistically significant (Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.754$ ,  $F(4, 628) = 23.798$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Romanian consumers with pro, ambivalent, and critics' attitudes toward online advertising were significantly different in their online advertising behavior and the likelihood they would make online purchases as a result of online advertising. The post-hoc Scheffe's test further revealed that all three groups are significantly different from each other in terms of ad clicking. Pros were more likely to make online purchase as a result of online advertising than critics (Mean difference = .85,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and ambivalent (Mean difference = 1.33,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

RQ<sub>4</sub> asks about whether people with different ATOA (pro, ambivalent and critics) differ in their online buying behavior. Cross-tabs were used to test the differences between these three groups. There was a significant relationship between Romanian consumers' ATOA and their past online purchasing behavior (Chi square = 15.52,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that

people with different ATOA differ in their online shopping behavior.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In recent years Romania has experienced fast growth in Internet usage and has increasingly become linked with the rest of the world, especially other EU countries. As more advertisers incorporate new media, such as the Internet, to reach international consumers, understanding Romanian ATOA will benefit global businesses.

### Belief Factors and ATOA

Exploring Romanian consumers' beliefs about online advertising, this study identified seven factors: entertainment, information, believability, negative social impact, materialism, economy, and persuasion. Among them, the information factor has the highest mean, indicating that for many Romanians one of the most important functions of advertising is to provide information. Information was also a significant positive predictor for ATOA. This is consistent with past online research. Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund (2002), for example, found that product information was positively related to ATOA. Ducoffe (1996) also found a strong correlation between informativeness and Internet advertising value. It is not surprising that those consumers who perceive online that advertising provides needed information have a more favorable ATOA.

Following information, entertainment has the second highest mean, indicating that Romanian consumers believe that online advertising is fun and interesting. The entertainment factor was also the strongest positive predictor for ATOA. This result is consistent with previous research (e.g., Ducoffe 1996; Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund 2002). An interesting finding from this study is that two irritating items were loaded on the entertaining factor whereas other studies have found that irritation emerged as a separate factor (e.g., Ducoffe 1996; Brackett and Carr 2001). This result suggests that marketers may consider reducing ad irritation by improving the

entertainment element of online advertising, which will ultimately increase advertising effectiveness.

Believability has the lowest mean among the seven belief factors in this study, indicating that Romanian consumers have doubts about the credibility of online advertising. The believability factor is also the second strongest predictor for ATOA. This makes sense because to the extent that consumers believe online advertising is credible and trustworthy, their positive attitudes toward online advertising increase. Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund (2002) found that *falsity/no sense* negatively predicted ATOA, which lends support for this result. The researchers suggested that to establish credibility, advertisers may consider strategies such as money-back guarantees, 24-hour customer services, and affiliations with credible organizations (Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund 2002).

The materialism factor negatively predicted ATOA, which was consistent with previous studies (Wolin, Korgaonkar and Lund 2002). According to Pollay and Mittal (1993), materialism is a set of belief structures that sees consumption as the route to satisfaction. The results indicate that Romanians' positive attitude decreases when they perceive advertising promoting an overly materialistic society. The materialism variable is also significantly correlated with the negative social impact, economy, and persuasion factors.

Economy is another significant positive predictor for ATOA. As mentioned before, economic growth is the most important issue in Romania. It makes sense that people who believe online advertising contributes to economic development had a more positive attitude toward online advertising.

In summary, the above discussion suggests that entertainment, believability, information, economy, and materialism factors play an important role in predicting Romanian consumers' ATOA. In order to cultivate a positive ATOA among Romanian consumers,

advertisers need to avoid the overt promotion of materialism as they aggressively position online advertising as an entertaining, credible provider of information.

### Antecedents and Effects of ATOA

The results of this study accord with the previous observation that the amount of Internet use affects people's ATOA and online shopping behavior (Korgaonkar and Wolin 2001). Internet use patterns appear to be a significant factor influencing Romanian consumers' ATOA and online shopping experience. Heavy users tended to have a more positive ATOA and made more purchases online than light Internet users. These results indicate that advertisers may need to consider different advertising strategies and tactics to reach heavy Internet users and light users.

We also found that the three attitude groups (pro, ambivalent, and critics) were significantly different in their behaviors toward online advertising, the likelihood to make online purchases as a result, and actual online purchase behavior. These results lend support for the classic advertising effect model: cognition – affect—behavior intention, which suggests that beliefs are likely to lead to attitudes, which in turn have an impact on behavior.

This study explored the beliefs and attitudes toward online advertising among Romanian consumers and the relationships between different components in consumer response sequence. Findings enhanced our understanding about ATOA in the Romanian environment and provided useful indications for global marketers. However, there are several limitations associated with the study. First, it used a sample of college students, thereby limiting generalization of the results. Secondly, due to the fact that online advertising is still a new phenomenon, consumers' beliefs and attitudes toward online advertising are still evolving and changing (Karson, McCloy and Bonner 2006). The cross-sectional design of the current study only provides a snapshot of

Romanian consumers' ATOA. A longitudinal study would provide more insights on the relationships among different factors. Lastly, this study only investigated ATOA in Romania. Future investigation may include other countries. A comparison study of consumers' ATOA in different countries would shed some light on whether cultural background makes a difference in people's ATOA.

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