Factors Affecting Attitudes and Purchase Intentions Toward Branded Content on Webisodes

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This study investigates the factors affecting attitudes and purchase intentions toward branded content in the Webisode format, based on the theory of reasoned action, technology acceptance theory, and social influence concepts. The research is based on data collection from questionnaires distributed to 400 respondents who had previously viewed a Webisode. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling, which revealed that perceived usefulness, perceived playfulness, perceived ease of use, and peer communication positively impact attitudes toward Webisodes. Additionally, perceived usefulness, perceived playfulness, peer communication, and attitudes toward the Webisode also have positive impacts on purchase intentions.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing communication is a very important means for businesses to deal with fierce competition by communicating useful information to the consumers to assist them with product and service selection. However, studies of consumers' media consumption behaviors reveal that consumers ignored or were unlikely to pay attention to advertisements (Boush, Friestad, and Rose, 1994). Marketers have therefore tried to develop new means to improve communication with consumers. One popular channel at present is branded content (Hudson and Hudson, 2006), which focuses on combining entertainment with content about the brand in such a way that consumers do not perceive direct advertisements. Webisodes, or internet-broadcast movies or series, is a popular medium for branded content (Peirce and Tang, 2012). For instance, research from iMedia Connection in 2002 showed that BMW's 8 webisode series, "The Hire," increased sales by 12% year on year, and 85% of this increase came from this series' audience.

However, research directly studying factors affecting attitudes and purchase intentions toward branded content on Webisodes is lacking. Therefore, marketers face challenges in developing strategies to better suit the target groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Webisode Communication
As a branded content strategy, Webisodes provide hidden communication, wherein the content and communication methods can be designed and created freely, and perfectly match the program, plot, or theme, thus harmonizing advertisement and entertainment.

Webisodes are popular as they provide the ability to create a perception of the products and services. Therefore, consumers may develop a positive attitude toward the brand, and decide to purchase the products or services in the future.

Webisodes are generally released through an online channel. Online videos can be categorized by the entity generating them (Cheong and Morrison, 2008) as either User-Generated Content (UGC), in which the content is generated by the public at large, not marketers, and the generators are the end users of such products or services; and Producer-Generated Content (PGC), which are videos generated by brand marketers.

Although there are no studies directly related to Webisodes and purchase intentions, some studies in the past have examined attitudes and purchase intentions for products or services with hidden advertisements and other studies focused on video advertisements. Kwon (2012) studied consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward hidden advertisements on television, and found that communication with people around and viewing frequency greatly influences attitudes toward hidden advertisements and purchase intentions.

Huarng et al. (2010) studied the influence of online video advertisements on consumers' purchase intentions and found that perceptions of usefulness positively influenced attitudes towards video advertisements and on consumers' purchase intentions. Meanwhile, perception of entertainment had a positive influence on video advertisements, but not on consumers' purchase intentions. In addition, perceptions of ease of use did not positively influence attitudes toward video advertisements.

Rune and Vinberg (2009) studied factors causing viral videos to influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors and found that content was the most important factor affecting consumers' attitudes and behavior of sharing video clips. In a more recent study, Lee, Han, and Kim (2013) investigated the factors influencing consumers' intention to share online videos using two main theories: the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Interpersonal Communication Motives (ICM), which measure why consumers share videos with others, finding that attitudes toward advertisements in online videos and subjective norms are positively related to the intention to share messages. Additionally, of the 6 factors used in the ICM evaluation, satisfaction, preference, acceptance, avoidance, relaxation, and control, it was found that online videos' ability to create satisfaction and avoidance in consumers positively influences attitudes. Moreover, normative beliefs influence subjective norms.

Concepts of Perception and Attitudes
Perception is the process of selecting, collecting, and interpreting market stimuli in the consumer's mental environment. Market stimuli are physical stimuli or types of communication that can influence consumers' purchase decisions, including color, logo, packaging, text, etc. (Assael, 1998). There are three stages of perception:
1. Perceptual selection occurs when consumers are open to and interested in only the stimuli of interest and that are useful. They tend not to pay attention to and avoid uninteresting or useless stimuli to ensure that they receive only the information that they are really interested in.
2. Perceptual organization occurs when consumers organize information into groups for ease of understanding. They try to put similar and connected information together.
3. Perceptual interpretation occurs when consumers interpret meaning by linking the stimuli with other information.

Attitude refers to the tendency of perception to make the behavior satisfactory or unsatisfactory for a certain thing (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994). Attitude consists of three components:

1. The cognitive component is beliefs resulting from perceptions of information and experiences, which directly influence attitudes. That is, if a person possesses knowledge and believe that it is good, he/she will have positive attitudes towards it.
2. The affective component reflects the consumer's emotions or feeling toward a certain thing, which will be evaluated using the criteria of good or bad, and like or not like.
3. The behavioral component reflects the probability or tendency consumers might express through certain behaviors that are the outcome of their attitudes toward the thing. In marketing, this refers to consumers' intention to buy.

Generally, humans express their attitudes in three ways. In the first, a positive attitude is a reflection of positive feelings or emotions toward a certain thing, for instance, products and advertisements, among others. In the second, a negative attitude reflects feelings of dislike or loss of trust. Finally, a passive attitude is expressed by those who do not express opinions and develop indifference towards a thing. A person may have one or more kinds of these attitudes depending on their stability, beliefs, or values. Different attitudes result in each person's different behaviors.

Social influence can greatly affect changes in attitudes and decision-making. In terms of decision-making, social influence and pressure can influence humans to defer to subjective norms, though influence of the subjective norms depends on the person's belief about these norms.

Additionally, communication from peers, such as family members, classmates, friends, and colleagues, has a high level of influence on attitudes, behaviors, and decision. The expectations a person's peer group influences attitudes, choices, and decisions to take or not take certain actions. Consumers learn and develop their ideas, beliefs, and norms, which finally become attitudes and behaviors. The transmission of concepts, beliefs, and norms occurs during interpersonal communication, leading to imitative behaviors.

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) proposed that the TRA affects human behavior. Such behavior is based on intentions resulting from attitudes and subjective norms.

There are two factors affecting attitudes toward behavior: behavioral beliefs, which states that any behavior has a result; and outcome evaluation, in which a person who believes and predicts a positive outcome from a behavior will tend to have positive attitudes toward the behavior. In contrast, if the person believes in and predicts a negative outcome, that person will have negative attitudes toward the behavior.

Subjective norms are a person's belief about others' attitudes toward his/her behavior, and whether they expect others to behave the way he/she does. These are in turn generated by normative beliefs and motivation to comply, with the behavior and the tendency toward the behavior subject to the person's interpretation of the importance of subjective norms.

Both factors affect behavioral intentions under the hypothesis that people have reason and can systematically adopt useful information to make decisions. People first consider the effects of their decisions, and then choose whether to express the behavior. Thus, intention is the factor determining whether to express a behavior.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Davis (1989) introduced the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), a theory based on the TRA to explain and predict users' acceptance of technology under the hypothesis that technology acceptance is influenced by two factors:
(1) Perceived Usefulness or the extent of the perceptions of usefulness gained from a technology that can increase working effectiveness.
(2) Perceived Ease of Use, or the extent of a person's belief that the technology does not require much effort to use, or that it is easy to use.

However, perceived playfulness is another factor to account for (Moon and Kim, 2001), as it is one of the interactions between users and the Internet that adds to the user's motivation and amusement, and affects their attitudes and purchase intentions.   Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research model derived from the above literature review.

FIGURE 1
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES
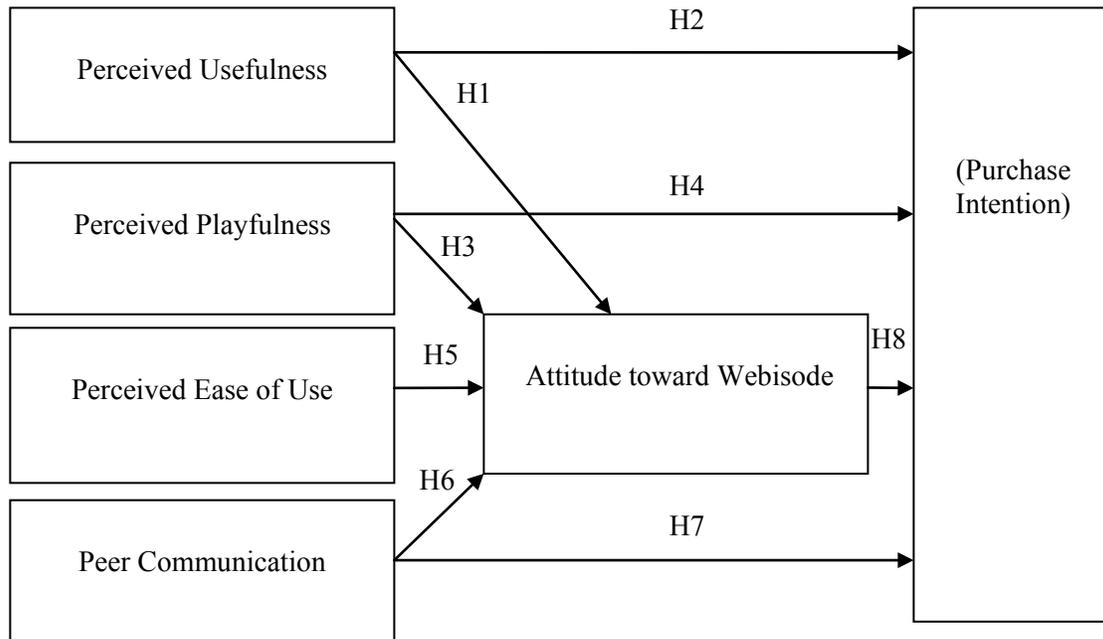
METHODOLOGY

This study uses quantitative research based on a survey. The data were collected from online questionnaires distributed to 400 sample respondents. The respondents were between 18-35 years of age and have previously viewed a Webisode. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, the first related to consumers' behavior in viewing the Webisode, the second related to factors influencing consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions, and the third related to the respondents' demographic information.

The questionnaire was tested to ensure validity and reliability before it was distributed. Content validity was checked by asking for advice from experts to ensure completeness, and reliability was validated through a test of the questionnaire design with a sample of 30 people who had viewed a Webisode using Cronbach's alpha. The results were between .762 and .908, which is greater than .70 and therefore acceptable (Sekaran, 2000).

The analysis was divided into two parts. The first part of the analysis determined the frequency, percentages, and means for the questions related to general information and consumers' behavior in viewing Webisodes. The second part analyzed the influence of the independent variables on attitudes and purchase intentions for products or services using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses.

FINDINGS

Respondents' Demographic Data

Of the respondents, most are female (60.7%), and 156 are between 23-26 years of age (39.0%). In terms of education, 290 have a bachelor's degree (72.5%). In terms of employment, 200 are students and 200 are employed; for those who are employed, 160 work at private companies (40.0%), and 182 respondents earn an income of 10,000-20,000 baht/month (45.5%).

Respondents' Webisode Viewing Behaviors

Most of the respondents view online videos 1-2 times a day (55.5%), and 301 respondents like to watch music videos. As for the Webisodes viewed, 316 respondents (33.7%) watched Samsung "Love at First Sight," 172 respondents (18.3%) watched Samsung "Seoul in Love," and 118 respondents (12.6%) watched Sunsilk 2 "Choed Roed Suai."

Regarding the 'latest viewed' videos, 134 respondents (33.5%) watched Samsung "Love at First Sight," 69 respondents (17.3%) watched Sunsilk 2, "Choed Roed Suai." In terms of discovery, 308 respondents (77.0%) viewed the Webisode based on suggestions from friends, other people, social network sharing or posts, or forwards from friends. Most respondents, 342 (85.5%) viewed the Webisode once, with 187 respondents (46.8%) having positive attitudes toward the Webisode, and 138 (34.5%) liking it very much.

Analysis of the Means of Factors Affecting Attitudes and Purchase Intentions

The means of the factors affecting attitudes and purchase intention, including perceived usefulness, perceived playfulness, perceived ease of use, peer communication, attitude toward the Webisode, and purchase intention are analyzed based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) and 5 (totally agree). Table 1 reports the means for each of these factors.

TABLE 1
MEAN OF EACH FACTOR AFFECTING ATTITUDES AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS

Factor	Mean
Perceived Usefulness	3.63
Perceived Playfulness	3.64
Perceived Ease of Use	3.58
Peer Communication	3.62
Attitude toward Webisode	3.80
Purchase Intention	3.54

Model Testing

In analyzing the model fit, the proposed model was verified by considering the indicator used to evaluate conformity. However, it was found that the model did not conform to the empirical data, so the model was adjusted in accordance with principles and theories. Table 2 shows that most of the indicators for conformity were in accordance with or close to the set standard after the model was adjusted.

After all five indicators were verified, AGFI and RMSEA are in accordance with the criteria, which accounted for 0.80 and .05 to .08, respectively, as shown in Table 2. Meanwhile, although GFI did not pass the criteria, it was close to 0.90. The analysis shows that the Chi-Square p value is sensitive to the sample size, that is, for a large sample size, the Chi-Square p value tended to refute the hypothesis, so the evaluation should consider CMIN/DF instead. According to the criteria, CMIN/DF should be lower than 3, with the resulting value of 1.996 is within the acceptable range.

TABLE 2
CONFORMITY VALUES OF THE EMPIRICAL DATA MODEL

Indicator	Criteria	Statistical Value from Analysis	Reference
Chi-Square p value	p value > 0.05	0.000	
CMIN/DF	< 3	1.996	Hair, Black, Babin,
GFI	> 0.90	0.880	Anderson, and Tatham
AGFI	> 0.80	0.857	(2006)
RMSEA	.05 - .08 (0=Perfect Fit)	0.050	

From the indicators above, it can be concluded that the model for evaluating the factors affecting attitudes and purchase intentions for products or services promoted through Webisode marketing is consistent with the criteria. Table 3 summarizes the results, given that the model fit the empirical data.

TABLE 3
ANALYTICAL RESULTS

Path	Hypothesis	Standardized Regression Weight	P-Value
Attitude toward Webisode R-Square = .507			
Perceived Usefulness → Attitude toward Webisode	H 1(+)	.298	***
Perceived Playfulness → Attitude toward Webisode	H 3(+)	.198	.03*
Perceived Ease of Use → Attitude toward Webisode	H 5(+)	.213	***
Peer Communication → Attitude toward Webisode	H 6(+)	.342	***
Purchase Intention R-Square = .581			
Perceived Usefulness → Purchase Intention	H 2(+)	.200	***
Perceived Playfulness → Purchase Intention	H 4(+)	.228	***
Peer Communication → Purchase Intention	H 7(+)	.190	.03*
Attitude toward Webisode → Purchase Intention	H 8(+)	.376	***

*** *Significant at 0.01 level*
* *Significant at 0.05 level*

Factors Affecting Attitudes Toward the Webisode

The analytical results reveal that there are four factors affecting attitudes toward Webisodes. The most influential factor is peer communication, which affects attitudes positively (.342). In other words, the better the peer group attitudes towards the Webisode, the more the respondent had a positive attitude toward the Webisode.

In addition, perceived usefulness also affects attitudes positively (.298). This shows that the more useful a Webisode is in the viewer's opinion, the more positive their attitudes are toward the Webisode.

Perceived ease of use also affects attitudes positively (.213). That is, if viewers think it is easy and convenient to search for information about the Webisode, including seeing better pictures or learning product benefits faster, the consumers tend to have more positive attitudes toward the Webisode.

The last factor is perceived playfulness, which is the least influential factor affecting attitude toward Webisodes (.198). If a Webisode provides the viewers with a perception of playfulness, the viewers tend to have positive attitudes towards the Webisode.

Factors Affecting Purchase Intentions

The results indicate that there are four factors affecting purchase intentions. The most influential factor is attitude toward the Webisode (.376), showing that the more positive the viewer's attitude toward the Webisode, the greater their purchase intentions.

The next factor is perceived playfulness, which affects purchase intention positively (.228). Therefore, if a Webisode can provide entertainment to the viewers and create motivation and positive feelings which lead to interaction between the viewers and the media, viewers tend to have higher purchase intentions.

Perceived usefulness also positively affects purchase intentions. If viewers perceive usefulness from viewing a Webisode, for instance, recognizing usefulness from either the product or the Webisode, viewers tend to have higher purchase intentions.

The last factor is peer communication, which positively affects purchase intentions (.190). If peers have positive attitudes towards a Webisode, for instance, by finding that viewing a Webisode is interesting, or having an increased interest in the story from the attraction of the Webisode products, or having positive attitudes towards the products or brands, viewers tend to have higher purchasing intentions.

Figure 2 summarizes the hypotheses and data from the SEM data analysis.

FIGURE 2
RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES TESTS
AND SUMMARY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF ALL VARIABLES
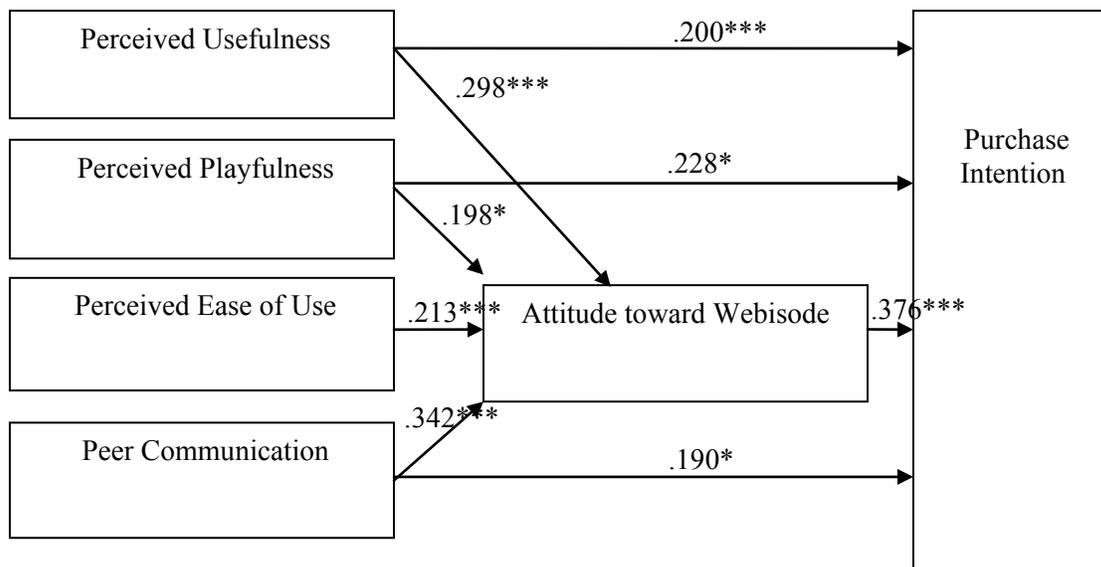
*** *Significant at 0.01 level*
* *Significant at 0.05 level*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section discusses important issues and answers the research questions, including the factors affecting attitudes towards Webisodes, and factors affecting purchase intentions for products and services promoted through Webisode marketing.

Factors Affecting Attitudes toward Webisodes

There are four factors affecting attitudes toward Webisodes. The most influential is peer communication, though this alone might not generate high enough positive attitudes, because the viewers also need to perceive usefulness from viewing a Webisode as the results showed that viewers' perceived usefulness can enable viewers to better understand the products and services. Thus, they will have more positive attitudes towards a Webisode.

In addition, perceived ease of use and perceived playfulness both affect attitudes towards Webisodes, both of which enable viewers to perceive product data faster and more conveniently, which helps viewers in decision-making. Meanwhile, perceived playfulness helps create pleasure and imagination among the viewers, contributing toward their development of a positive attitude towards the Webisode.

Factors Affecting Purchase Intentions in Webisode Marketing

The research findings show that positive attitudes towards Webisodes affects purchase intention the most. Since the factors contributing to positive attitudes are perceived usefulness, perceived playfulness, perceived ease of use, and peer communication, they must be considered by content marketers in creating a Webisode. These factors are also directly related to purchase intention among viewers.

The findings of this research will be useful for businesses wishing to use Webisodes as a channel to introduce new products, both in terms of usefulness or usage, as well as communicating images and brands to the consumers. The findings revealed factors affecting attitudes and purchase intentions, which can be applied to formulate a more appropriate strategic plan so that Webisodes can be used as an effective communication channel.

To communicate detailed content, which requires time, Webisodes are a good channel to build perception as it can better introduce product usefulness and demonstrate its use compared to other online channels by combining audio and visual information. Webisodes function much the same way as advertisements hidden on television, but are more cost effective. Moreover, consumers are more open to this type of media than direct advertisements as they do not perceive a direct advertisement.

To use Webisodes as a communication channel, companies should encourage word of mouth advertising, leading to viral videos. Passing and sharing videos between peers is an important means to introduce a Webisode to viewers. Furthermore, viewers can share their opinions and discuss the product or service, thereby creating more positive attitudes towards a Webisode. The findings show that if the viewers talked with their peers or if their peers have good attitudes towards the Webisode, the viewers are likely to have better attitudes towards the Webisode, which affects their purchase intentions. Thus, creating a Webisode as a viral video can create extensive perceptions and good attitudes towards a Webisode. Viral videos are usually passed among friends, through email, blogs, or social networks, for their friends to view, read, listen, or respond, and the receivers always rely on their peers' message. They are reliable and have become major factors leading to purchase intentions.

In addition, marketing communication through Webisodes can build consumers' attitudes toward the brand. The consumers tend to respond positively and are open to advertisements through Webisodes and do not feel like they are viewing advertisements. Consumers can enjoy the information provided on Webisode better than through other channels. Webisodes also improve the product image, so any product in need of a change in consumers' minds could be advertised through this channel.

Moreover, to build positive attitudes towards a Webisode, useful and entertaining content should be communicated so viewers will not feel like they are forced to learn the information, and they can be part of the content. Useful content attracts viewers' interest and encourage them to want to know more about the product and service and searching for more information. Meanwhile, entertainment can is a pleasurable experience for viewers, so they tend to follow the advertisement until the end. The insertion of these elements should be related and consistent with the content so viewers develop more positive attitudes towards the Webisode.

Future research should focus on other related factors generating positive attitudes and purchase intentions to add to this study's findings. In addition, the study scope could be extended through studies of a wider variety of samples in different contexts, including studying behaviors of Webisode viewers by

looking into viewing frequency, or setting the criteria based on Webisode access channel, types of products or services, Webisode video title, or communication purposes of the Webisode. Further research could also investigate the effects of these factors on attitudes and purchase intentions. Other factors worthy of investigation include the effects of content focusing on joy, impressiveness, sorrow, or excitement, which may impact attitudes and purchase intentions differently.

Moreover, consumer behaviors related to Webisode channels could also be studied. For instance, researchers might attempt to find how viewers access a Webisode, what behaviors viewers have after viewing a Webisode, or whether viewers post or share the Webisode, and the proportion of video posts or shares could also be explored.

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