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# *Rich Media, Poor Media: The Impact of Audio/Video vs. Text/Picture Testimonial Ads on Browsers' Evaluations of Commercial Web Sites and Online Products*

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*There has been some debate among advertisers concerning the practicality, necessity, and effectiveness of using multimedia on Internet Web sites. Most companies have been slow to use multimedia features on their site, and it seemed worthwhile to test whether this behavior is warranted by testing the impact of multimedia ads on a commercial Web site. In particular, this study attempted to test whether browsers' responses to multimedia like audio/video testimonial ads on a commercial Web site would significantly differ from their responses to either a commercial Web site with text/picture testimonials or a commercial Web site with no testimonials. The findings indicated that Internet browsers were more likely to believe a site was targeting them, rate a site more favorably, and rate the product more favorably when the site contained audio/video testimonials than they were when the site contained either text/picture testimonials or no testimonials. Vividness effects of media modality and the availability-valence theoretical framework are discussed. (Key Words: vividness effects, modality, availability-valence, multimedia, online shopping)*

Rich media refers to visual effects that contain complex animations or instantly playing audio and video that exist on a Web page (Elkin 2002c). The use of rich media, particularly rich media testimonial ads, may enhance the customer experience and lead to satisfied customers who have more favorable attitudes toward the product and the site. Despite the increasing ability of the Internet to include a variety of multimedia features on Web sites, most marketers and large companies have been slow to adopt the use of multimedia features such as animation, video and audio (Bannan 2003; Cho and Leckenby 1997).

Many companies have been reluctant to use multimedia features on their sites because high-speed broadband technology is required to best view the rich-media effects (Elkin 2002b). This rich-media viewing limitation is particularly troubling to companies doing consumer business online because nearly half of Internet browsers use slow-speed dial-up modems (Elkin 2002a), which make downloading audio and video features from a site very slow and nearly impossible.

This has led to some debate among proponents and opponents of rich-media about the practicality and

necessity of using rich-media on Web sites. Some critics argue that web users are not ready for rich media because many users depend on dial-up modems with slow connection speeds and lack patience for timely downloads of ads that incorporate both audio and video (Bannan 2003; see Zeff and Aronson 1999 for a review). Moreover, there is some concern that the cost of serving and creating rich media is higher than the cost of serving ad campaigns using standard formats (Harwood 2004). These critics are reluctant to believe that brand advertising is hindered by not using audio/video, and they claim consumers may be just as effectively persuaded by the use of simple text graphics as they can by rich media (Zeff and Aronson 1999).

On the other hand, proponents maintain that rich media creative costs are declining (Harwood 2004) and connection speed is no longer an issue for Internet users since broadband users outnumber dial-up users and comprise a growing proportion of the overall online population (Elkin 2002a; Vauhini 2004). Additionally, according to the Online Publishers Association, broadband users vis-à-vis dial-up users are not only online in greater numbers but are more likely to be affluent, and spend more time researching and

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