

The Adoption of Persuasive Internet Communication in Advertising and Public Relations Curricula

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the diffusion of Internet communication into the curricula of advertising and public relations programs. While the establishment of any new medium is a process that develops over time, the Internet has taken hold faster than other mass media. This explosion has caused many scholars to ask whether advertising and public relations curricula have kept pace. An online survey administered to a sample of advertising and public relations educators (n=253) explored the perceived attitude, adoption, and innovation attributes associated with persuasive Internet communication. The results indicate that educators have integrated persuasive Internet communication into their curricula, and many have adopted specialized courses in this topic. Compatibility, observability, and trialability predict the rates of adoption.

Introduction

As the Internet continues to evolve and spread throughout society, advertising and public relations professionals are questioning which discipline is better suited to handle its persuasive communications content in the future. Advertisers emphasize the similarities between the Internet and traditional advertising media, such as magazines and television, to support their claims to the medium. In contrast, public relations practitioners state that the Internet represents a tremendous opportunity for companies to build relationships with their publics and assert that they are better able to design effective content for the Internet (Krauss 1999). Regardless of the perspective, there has been little debate between advertising and public relations professionals concerning the significance of the Internet, with both agreeing that the medium will continue to change and will have a strong impact on consumers in the future.

The significance of the Internet has also caused scholars to question whether advertising and public relations curricula are keeping pace (Gustafson and Thomsen 1996; Rust and Oliver 1994). Considering that media education is intended to produce graduates who are critical thinkers and have practical skills (AEJMC 1996), academic programs in advertising and public relations are faced with the task of teaching students how to use the Internet as a persuasive communication vehicle. In fact, preparing students to work with and understand the Internet is an important industry issue facing advertising education (Murphy et al. 2001). The integration between the Internet and education curricula has begun, and the need to have a

thorough understanding of this process has emerged (Siu and Chau 1998). However, there is little empirical research systematically investigating this issue as it pertains to the future of advertising and public relations education.

This study investigates the diffusion of persuasive Internet communication in the curricula of advertising and public relations programs. This is an important issue because the results could help the advertising and public relations industries to identify the type of programs preparing students for the future (e.g., advertising, public relations, marketing, etc.). In addition, the results may suggest important attributes that affect the adoption rate of persuasive Internet communication instruction in advertising and public relations programs. This information could benefit advertising and public relations programs exploring the possibility of offering training in persuasive Internet communication. Finally, the study will determine if there is a difference in the diffusion of persuasive Internet communication between advertising and public relations programs.

Literature Review

Diffusion of Innovations

An effective tool for understanding the spread of the Internet in advertising and public relations curricula is the Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers 1995). This theory explains the adoption of an innovation via communication channels to members of a social system over time. Rogers (1995) defines an innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new" and can "be expressed in terms of knowledge, persuasion, or a decision to adopt" (p. 11). As the Internet continues to diffuse throughout society, the task of instructing students how to develop persuasive messages using this new medium rests on academic institutions. In this study, the innovation is the idea that the strategy and tactics of persuasive Internet communication must be included in the curricula of academic programs teaching advertising and public relations.

One difficulty facing the diffusion of persuasive Internet communication for many scholars is the lack of agreement on terminology. Leckenby and Li (2000) use the broader term interactive advertising instead of persuasive Internet communication, and they define it as "the paid and unpaid presentation and promotion of products, services, and ideas by an identified sponsor through mediated means involving mutual action between consumers and producers." This is not to be confused with interpersonal or group communication, but is intended to reflect the far-reaching breadth of the Internet as a medium for delivering persuasive communication from a company to consumers via advertising, public relations, and marketing executions.

The introduction of a new course designed to teach persuasive Internet communication, or the integration of this topic into an existing course, by advertising and public relations programs, is simply the diffusion of an information technology. Information technologies are changes that introduce a tool, technique, physical equipment, or system that extends an organization's capabilities (Schon 1967). The diffusion of the Internet as a new persuasive medium should result in advertising and public relations programs instructing students in how to use this new communication tool and develop alternative communications techniques. Chen and Bankston (1998) examined the diffusion of computer skills in communication curricula and concluded that the diffusion process for information technologies in higher education needs to be promoted at both the individual and organizational level. Individually, college students need to be educated about information technologies; and, at the organizational level, universities must integrate information technologies into the curricula (Chen and Bankston 1998).

Richards (2000) acknowledged the importance of adopting persuasive Internet communication into a university advertising curriculum and called the implementation "inescapable." Indeed, with over 182 million Internet users in the United States and Canada (NielsenNetRatings 2002) and Internet advertising revenue reaching \$8 billion (Internet 2001), few media scholars would disagree. However, the decision many programs will face is whether to integrate persuasive Internet communication into existing courses or to develop unique courses specializing in the topic (Richards 2000). The decision when and how to adopt will of course depend on a number of factors.

Diffusion Process

The basic nature of the diffusion process is the exchange of information about a new idea through communication channels,

within a social system, and over a period of time (Rogers 1995, p. 5). This information exchange can occur either through mass media or interpersonal channels. The identification and understanding of how advertising and public relations faculty communicate information regarding new course ideas would help explain the adoption of a new Internet course.

A social system can be individuals, informal groups, organizations, and/or subsystems engaged in problem solving to accomplish a common goal (Rogers 1995, p. 23). Because social structures, norms, and opinion leaders can affect the diffusion of an innovation, the social system for advertising and public relations faculty is important in explaining the adoption rate. For instance, the social structure of academic departments could play an important role in the adoption of any new curriculum change. The number of faculty members, departmental or sequence affiliation, and/or program status could influence whether certain programs have accepted the Internet and begun instructing students how to communicate with this new medium.

The change in characteristics of Internet users illustrates how an innovation is adopted by members over time. While it is too early to characterize how Internet demographics will change next, the typical adoption pattern consists of innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers 1995, pp. 263-266). The classification of adopter categories for advertising and public relations programs could explain how the Internet is diffusing through the academic curricula and provide a better understanding of the importance placed on the Internet by the various advertising and public relations programs across the country.

Another element important to consider when examining the Diffusion of Innovations theory is the decision process through which people pass. Adopters will pass through five stages (knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation) as they learn about, form attitudes toward, and then use the innovation (Rogers 1995, p. 20). The time-ordered sequence of these steps can be complicated when an innovation decision is made by an organization. Information about this aspect of the diffusion process could signify whether advertising or public relations programs are at different stages regarding the teaching of Internet communications.

Finally, the rate or speed at which an innovation is adopted is an important component of the diffusion of any innovation. This is generally measured by the length of time required for a certain percentage of members to adopt an innovation (Rogers 1995, p. 23). The majority of innovations will follow an S-shaped curve, with very few individuals adopting in the beginning followed by increasing numbers. This element of the diffusion process could indicate which advertising and public relations programs are innovators. For instance, programs at large universities may be leading the way in preparing students for careers in Internet communication, or they could be restricted by organizational barriers that prevent change.

Innovation Attributes

Since all innovations are not equally appealing, the user's perceptions of the attributes of an innovation affect its rate of adoption. According to Rogers (1995, p. 206), from 49% to 87% of the variance in the rate of adoption of an innovation can be explained by five innovation attributes: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. While there are other factors that can influence the rate of adoption, these five attributes seem to have the most influence. Table 1 summarizes these attributes and illustrates how they might be applied to the adoption of persuasive Internet communication: into academic programs.

Table 1. Diffusion of Innovations Attributes

<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Example</u>
<u>Relative Advantage</u> The degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the previous idea.	A program providing instruction in Web communication could be perceived as being better than other programs.
<u>Compatibility</u> The degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with existing values, experiences, and needs of adopters.	Faculty and students are already familiar with the norms of instruction and having the expertise among faculty members could ensure compatibility.
<u>Complexity</u> The degree to which an innovation is perceived to be difficult to understand and use.	The lack of faculty expertise or view that creating Web communication is too complex could prevent instruction.
<u>Trialability</u> The degree to which an innovation may be tested or experimented with on a limited basis.	Special topics seminars or workshops could be offered to test the demand for Web communication.
<u>Observability</u> The degree to which the outcomes of an innovation are visible to others.	Starting salaries and demand for students trained in Web communication may be higher than traditional graduates.

According to Rogers (1995, Chapter 6), the extent to which attribute is present can either encourage or inhibit the rate of adoption. Relative advantage, often expressed in terms of economic profitability, low initial cost, decreased discomfort, social prestige, savings in time, and/or a reward, can speed diffusion. The more compatible an innovation is with sociocultural values, ideas, and needs, the more likely it will be adopted. Generally, complexity is negatively related to the adoption rate of an innovation. Trialability of an innovation is positively related to its rate of adoption, as is observability.

Research Questions

Because it was unclear whether advertising and public relations programs have recognized the importance of and adopted the task of instructing students in persuasive Internet communication, this study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the attitudes held by advertising and public relations educators towards persuasive Internet communication?

RQ2: Have advertising and public relations educators adopted the Internet as a critical communication medium in their curricula?

RQ3: How do the perceived attributes of an innovation affect Internet adoption in advertising and public relations curricula?

RQ4: Do advertising and public relations educators perceive persuasive Internet communication in their curricula differently?

Research Metho

Participants

A systematic sample of advertising and public relations educators was generated from the membership directories of the American Academy of Advertising (AAA) (n=313) and the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) (n=438). Because previous research has indicated online surveys are effective when the topic is salient to the audience (Sheehan and McMillan 1999) and because of the numerous benefits of these surveys, such as increased reply speed and cost (Bachman, Elfrink, and Vazzana 1996), an e-mail list of 751 members was generated.

Measures

A 39-item questionnaire was developed using WebSurveyor and pre-tested on a small sample of academic professionals to insure clarity. Because the Internet can encompass various types of communication, such as interpersonal and mediated, a definition was provided framing the concept of persuasive mass communication via the Internet within the domain of advertising and public relations. Thus, survey recipients saw the following conceptual definition of "Internet communication" in order to help them interpret the questionnaire:

Internet communication is any paid or non-paid mass mediated function designed to deliver persuasive communication between a company and its various target audiences via the Internet (i.e. World Wide Web, E-mail, LISTSERVs, Usenet, etc.).

Attitude

Single-item seven-point semantic differential and Likert-type scales were used to identify educators' attitudes toward the Internet. Two measures were employed to determine their opinions regarding the effectiveness of the Internet at delivering persuasive communication (extremely effective/extremely ineffective), and their level of agreement (strongly agree/strongly disagree) towards a statement indicating the effectiveness of their departments at instructing students in persuasive Internet communication. In addition, four measures assessed the importance (extremely important/extremely unimportant) of various skills (writing/verbal, design/visual, research, and strategic planning) in developing effective persuasive Internet communication.

Adoption

A variety of questions were used to evaluate whether advertising and public relations programs have adopted Internet communication into their curricula. Adoption was measured using dichotomous questions indicating either the adoption (yes) or non-adoption (no) of Internet communication through integration into existing courses or as a separate, specialized course (Tornatzky and Klein 1982). To interpret the extent of integration into existing courses, participants were asked to indicate the percentage of their time spent in instruction of persuasive Internet communication (1%-20%, 21%-40%, 41%-60%, 61%-80%, 81%-99%, 100%). Similarly, the adoption rate of persuasive Internet communication was assessed from the self-reported initial academic year respondents began instructing students in persuasive Internet communication.

Innovation Attributes

The innovation attributes of persuasive Internet communication were assessed through the use of an established scale designed to analyze the individual perceptions of the qualities associated with adopting an information technology (Moore and Benbasat 1991). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement (strongly agree/strongly disagree) with 15 statements representing each of the five common innovation attributes linked to adoption rates.

Procedure

The survey was posted online with a unique URL. While respondents were not required to identify themselves or their institutions in the questionnaire, a secure server was used restricting the access and protecting the privacy of each participant. An introductory e-mail was sent in order to notify sample members of their selection, introduce the purpose of the study, and emphasize the importance of the results. Three days following the initial contact, a formal e-mail letter was sent requesting participation; it provided the URL of the survey and an explanation of the study. As an incentive to increase participation (Kaye and Johnson 1999), upon completion of the questionnaire, participants received an automated URL

enabling them to view the cumulative frequency data. Finally, a third e-mail was sent one week after the second mailing to serve as a reminder and again encourage participation. The first e-mail containing the URL produced 223 responses, followed by an additional 30 one week later. Thus, a total of 253 completed questionnaires were collected, resulting in a response rate of 34% (253 out of 751).

Results

The majority of respondents were between the ages of 35 and 54 ($M = 47.52$) and had taught an average of fourteen years. Eighty-four held the academic rank of professor (33.2%), 70 associate professor (27.7%), and 63 assistant professor (24.9%) with all teaching relevant mass communication courses ranging from campaign management (51%) and research (45.1%), to writing (45.1%) and creative strategy (19.4%). The reported college enrollment was fairly evenly distributed across various sizes, except that there were about twice as many respondents at colleges of 30,000 or more students (22.5%) than at colleges of 5,000 or less (9.9%). Nearly 80% of the respondents were from publicly-funded institutions. The most common category for number of undergraduate majors was between 101 and 300 (31.6%).

The fact that advertising and public relations industries are interdisciplinary fields results in a variety of academic disciplines teaching these subjects. The majority of respondents were from traditional mass communication departments, such as communication (27.7%), journalism (22.1%), and advertising (11.9%). However, there were also respondents from marketing (20.9%) and other fields holding membership in the AAA and PR Division of AEJMC and teaching advertising and public relations. While the purpose of the study was to explore the impact of the Internet on advertising and public relations disciplines, all analysis will incorporate the additional areas reported by respondents given they also teach mass communication subjects. For a complete profile of the sample characteristics see the appendix.

Research question number one focused on investigating the attitudes held by educators towards persuasive Internet communication. The results reveal that 71% (179) of the respondents believe the Internet is at least somewhat effective at delivering persuasive communication with only 3.6% (9) characterizing the medium as extremely ineffective. In contrast, when asked about the effectiveness of their department at instructing students in persuasive Internet communication, only 55% (141) report it is at least somewhat effective, with 30% (75) indicating that it is at a minimum somewhat ineffective (see Table 2). As a whole, the educators sampled tended to agree that writing ($M = 6.38$, $SD = .98$), design ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 1.01$), research ($M = 6.20$, $SD = 1.05$) and strategic planning ($M = 6.21$, $SD = 1.06$) are equally important skills needed to develop effective persuasive Internet communication (see Table 3).

Table 2. Perceptions of Internet Effectiveness at Delivering Persuasive Communication

	Effective Mass Medium		Program Effectively Instructs	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
Advertising	5.04	1.29	4.42	1.73
Public Relations	4.69	1.34	4.49	1.66
Marketing	4.17	1.73	4.51	1.46
Communication	4.78	1.28	5.04	1.68
Journalism	4.56	1.24	5.00	1.22
Overall	4.69	1.43	4.55	1.62

Table 3. Perceptions of the Skills Required to Develop Effective Internet Communication

	Writing & Verbal		Graphic Design & Visual		Consumer Research		Strategic Planning	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
Advertising	6.36	1.11	6.22	1.17	6.25	1.13	6.20	1.16
Public Relations	6.49	.86	6.30	.89	6.19	1.03	6.37	.93
Marketing	6.15	1.16	6.11	1.19	6.28	1.15	6.06	1.25
Communication	6.33	.68	6.33	.78	6.07	.92	6.07	.99
Journalism	6.33	.78	6.33	.75	5.67	.50	6.11	.33
Overall	6.38	.98	6.24	1.01	6.20	1.05	6.21	1.06

Research question number two explored whether advertising and public relations programs have adopted the Internet into their curricula. The results demonstrate 79.5% (195 out of 245) of the respondents currently cover persuasive Internet communication in their existing courses. However, this coverage is rather limited, with 80.5% reporting that they devote between 1 and 20% of their course time to persuasive Internet communication (see Table 4). This integration adoption began in 1993 with eighteen respondents and gradually increased until 1999 when the number of new adopters declined (see Table 5).

Table 4. Percent of Course Time Dedicated for Instruction in Internet Communication

	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-99%	100%	Row Percent
Advertising	48	12	3	-	-	-	63 32.3
Public Relations	57	6	1	-	-	-	64 32.8
Marketing	37	2	3	-	-	-	42 21.5
Communication	10	6	-	-	-	1	17 8.7
Journalism	4	1	-	-	1	1	7 3.6
Other	1	1	-	-	-	-	2 1.0
Column Percent	157 80.5	28 14.4	7 3.6	-	1 0.5	2 1.0	195 100.0

Table 5. Integration of Persuasive Internet Communication into Existing Course(s)

	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	Row Percent
Advertising	5	4	9	9	17	12	4	3	63 32.3
Public Relations	5	9	10	9	7	18	4	2	64 32.8
Marketing	4	2	1	9	3	10	12	1	42 21.5
Communication	3	4	5	1	1	1	1	1	17 8.7
Journalism	1	-	3	1	-	-	2	-	7 3.6
Other	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	2 1.0
Column Percent	18 9.2	19 9.7	29 14.9	29 14.9	28 14.4	41 21.0	23 11.8	8 4.1	195 100.0

Surprisingly, 63.6% of the respondents report their program currently provides one or more unique courses specializing in persuasive Internet communication. However, the adoption of a specialized course into existing curricula has occurred more slowly than instruction in existing courses. For example, only six respondents indicated their program offered a unique course in persuasive Internet communication in 1993, yet by 1997 the rate of increase had equaled integration adoption (see Table 6). In fact, both the integration and unique course adoption of persuasive Internet communication has followed closely the adoption curve outlined by Rogers (1995) (see Figure 1).

Research question number three was designed to explore the relationship between the perceived innovation attributes and adoption of persuasive Internet communication in advertising and public relations curricula. Relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, observability, and trialability were measured using established innovation attribute scales for information technologies. Table 7 presents the standardized Cronbach alpha coefficients with all exceeding the generally accepted minimum of .70 (Hair et al. 1998, p. 118). As the correlation matrix presented in Table 8 illustrates, there is no significant multicollinearity among the variables since none of the squared correlations exceed the .80 threshold (Hair et al. 1998, p 189)

Table 6. Unique Course Offered in Persuasive Internet Communication

	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	Row Percent
Advertising	2	5	7	6	4	14	5	3	46 28.6
Public Relations	-	1	2	4	15	13	7	5	47 29.2
Marketing	-	1	2	5	6	5	6	8	33 20.5
Communication	3	1	4	1	4	5	2	-	20 12.4
Journalism	-	-	-	1	2	3	1	1	8 5.0
Other	1	1	-	2	-	2	1	-	7 4.3
Column Percent	6 3.7	9 5.6	15 9.3	19 11.8	31 19.3	42 26.1	22 13.7	17 10.6	161 100.0

Table 7. Innovation Attribute Scale Reliability

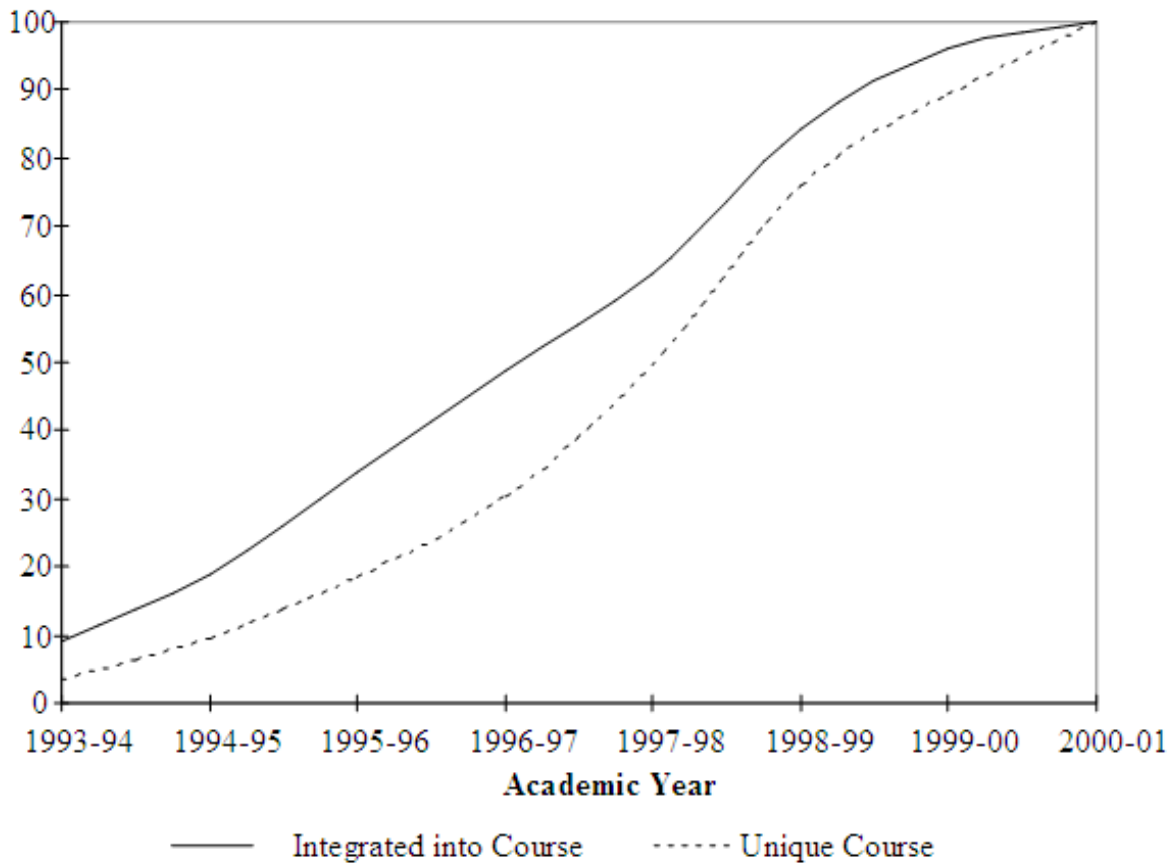
Attribute	Mean	Std. Dev.	α
Relative Advantage	5.59	1.06	.80
Compatibility	5.86	.88	.75
Complexity	4.33	1.32	.88
Observability	5.57	1.04	.81
Trialability	4.26	1.46	.81

Table 8. Correlation Matrix of Innovation Attributes Associated with Adoption of Persuasive Internet Communication

	Relative Advantage	Compatibility	Complexity	Observability	Trialability
Relative Advantage	1.000				
Compatibility	.595**	1.000			
Complexity	.263**	.383**	1.000		
Observability	.696**	.514**	.145*	1.000	
Trialability	.194**	.080	.450**	.130*	1.000

*p < .05 **p < .01

Figure 1: Integrated and Unique Adoption Curves for Persuasive Internet Communication



Multivariate discriminant analysis was used to assess the difference between adopters and nonadopters of persuasive Internet communication because the dependent variable is nominal and the independent variables interval (Hair et al. 1998, p. 244). The simultaneous estimation method was utilized in deriving the discriminant function because the five innovation attributes have been identified as explaining the largest amount of variance according to the Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers 1995). The results of the discriminant analysis indicate the overall model for integration (Wilks' lambda of .89, $F(5, 27.89) = 17.00$, $p < .01$) and unique course adoption (Wilks' lambda of .93, $F(5, 17.00) = 17.00$, $p < .01$) of persuasive Internet communication are significant. In addition, the discriminant function for adoption of integration into an existing course correctly classified 79% (hit ratio = 64%) and adoption of a unique course correctly classified 64%, (hit ratio = 53%). The discriminant loadings reflect the amount of variance shared by the innovation attributes and demonstrate the contribution of each variable to the discriminant function (see Table 9). Generally, discriminant loadings greater than or equal to .30 are considered significant (Hair et al. 1998, p. 294).

Table 9. Discriminant Analysis for Adoption of Internet Communication

Adoption Variable	F-Value	p <	Standardized Weights	Discriminant Loadings
Integration into Course				
Relative Advantage	20.46	.01	.527	.827
Compatibility	11.63	.01	.227	.623
Complexity	6.32	.05	.034	.459
Observability	12.61	.01	.132	.649
Trialability	11.64	.01	.513	.624
Unique Course				
Relative Advantage	9.74	.01	.280	.739
Compatibility	5.41	.05	.239	.551
Complexity	1.62	n.s.	-.198	.301
Observability	9.29	.01	.370	.722
Trialability	8.15	.01	.668	.676

In view of the discriminant analysis results, multiple regression was used to expand the understanding of the relationship between the innovation attributes and adoption rate of persuasive Internet communication in advertising and public relations curricula. The analysis indicates that perceived compatibility and trialability are the only significant predictors associated with the rate of adoption when integrating persuasive Internet communication into existing courses. In contrast, observability and trialability significantly predicted the rate of adoption for unique courses specializing in persuasive Internet communication (see Table 10).

Table 10. Significant Determinants of Adoption Rate for Persuasive Internet Communication

Instruction	Beta	F - Value	p <
Existing Courses^a			
Relative Advantage	.163	2.52	n.s.
Compatibility	-.187	3.53	.05
Complexity	.068	.62	n.s.
Observability	-.092	.99	n.s.
Trialability	-.375	21.72	.01
Specialized Course^b			
Relative Advantage	.166	1.90	n.s.
Compatibility	-.068	.40	n.s.
Complexity	.021	.04	n.s.
Observability	-.199	3.15	.06
Trialability	-.201	4.76	.05

^aR² = .14

^bR² = .06

Finally, research question number four sought to examine whether educators perceive the adoption of Internet communication across disciplines differently. The results indicate that advertising (M = 5.04, SD = 1.29), t (121) = 3.20 p. < .01, and public relations educators (M = 4.69, SD = 1.34), t (135) = 2.00 p. < .05, perceive the Internet to be significantly more effective as a mass medium for delivering persuasive communication than marketing educators (M = 4.17, SD = 1.73). However, there were

no significant differences for advertising ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.73$), public relations ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.66$) and marketing educators ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.46$) across perceived program effectiveness at teaching persuasive Internet communication.

In terms of adoption, there was a significant effect between the integration of persuasive Internet communication into existing courses and academic discipline, $\chi^2(3) = 10.93$, $p < .01$. For instance, 91.3% of the respondents who primarily teach advertising have adopted and integrated persuasive Internet communication into their existing curricula compared to only 77.1% of public relations, and 79.2% of marketing (see Table 11). Despite this finding, Figure 2 illustrates the similar pattern of adoption of Internet communication for advertising, public relations, and marketing.

Table 11. Adoption of Internet Communication into Existing Course(s)

	Adopter		Nonadopter		Total
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Advertising	63	91.3	6	8.7	69
Public Relations	64	77.1	19	22.9	83
Marketing	42	79.2	11	20.8	53
Communication	17	63.0	10	37.0	27
Journalism	7	77.8	2	22.2	9
Other	2	50.0	2	50.0	4
Total	195	79.6	50	20.4	245

Note: The Journalism and Other cells were omitted from the Chi-Square test due to inadequate cell counts for the analysis

While 65.2% of advertising programs have adopted a unique Internet communication course compared to only 57.5% of the public relations programs, no overall significant effect was detected, $\chi^2(3) = 2.52$, $p > .05$ (see Table 12). Similarly, there were no significant perceived differences among the innovation attributes associated with adoption (see Table 13). However, across time advertising and public relations programs have almost followed a cyclical adoption of specialized courses. In contrast, marketing respondents have reported a consistent increase of unique courses adopted in persuasive Internet communication (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Adoption of Persuasive Internet Communication into Existing Course(s)

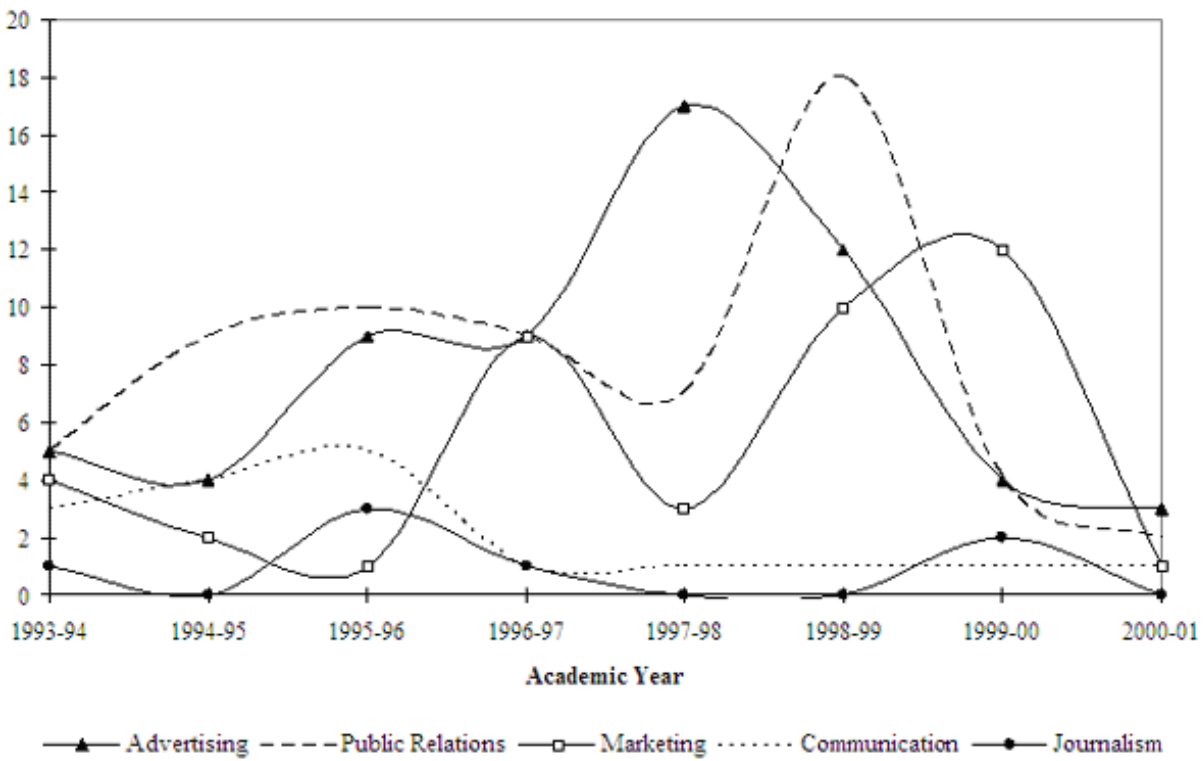


Table 12. Adoption of a Unique Specialized Course on Internet Communication

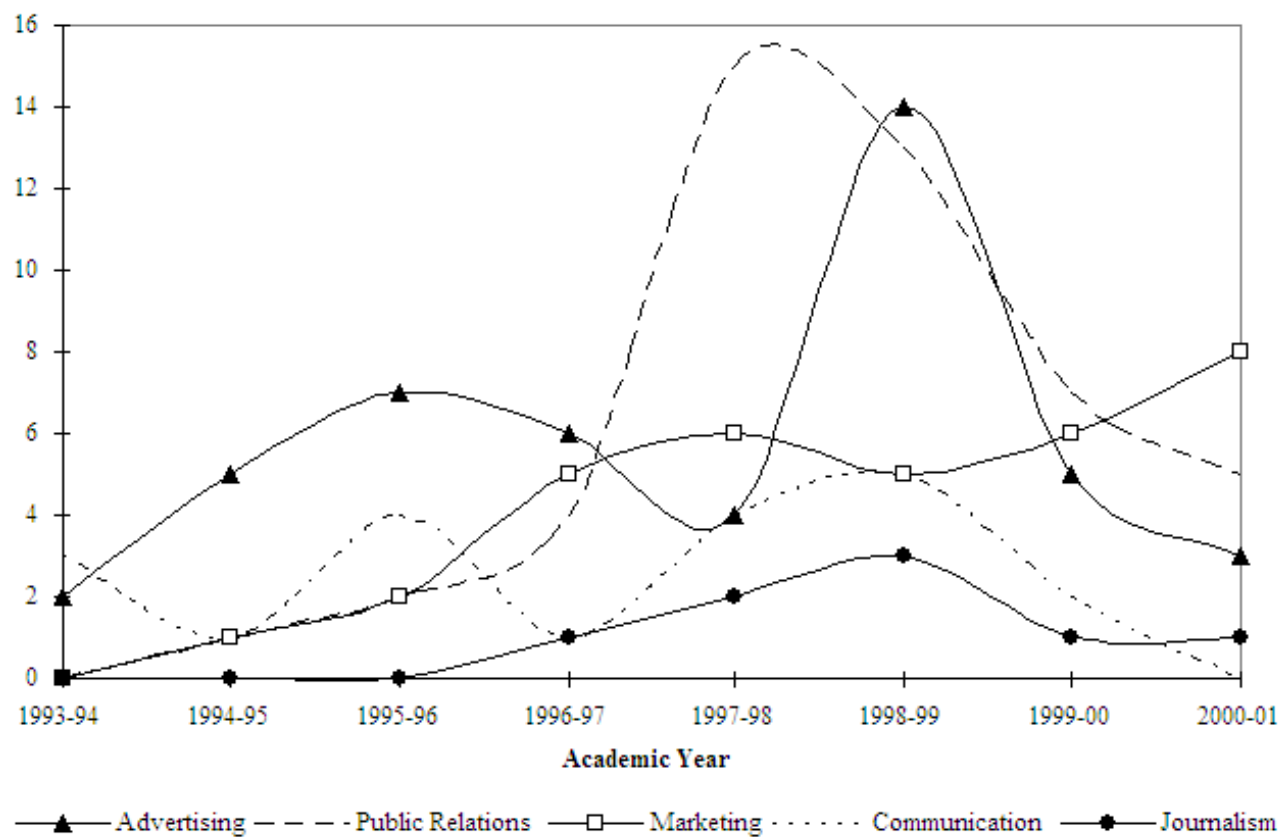
	Adopter		Nonadopter		Total
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Advertising	45	65.2	24	34.8	69
Public Relations	48	57.8	35	42.2	83
Marketing	33	62.3	20	37.7	53
Communication	20	74.1	7	25.9	27
Journalism	8	88.9	1	11.1	9
Other	7	58.3	5	41.7	12
Total	161	63.6	92	36.4	253

Note: The Journalism and Other cells were omitted from the Chi-Square test due to inadequate cell counts for the analysis

Table 13. Mean Scores for Innovation Attribute Across Academic Discipline

	Relative Advantage	Compatibility	Complexity	Observability	Trialability
Advertising St. Dev.	5.65 (1.16)	6.03 (.91)	4.43 (1.40)	5.67 (1.10)	4.45 (1.55)
Public Relations St. Dev.	5.59 (.97)	5.95 (.74)	4.20 (1.19)	5.67 (.91)	4.00 (1.39)
Marketing St. Dev.	5.49 (1.04)	5.45 (.96)	4.11 (1.31)	5.11 (1.06)	4.16 (1.52)
Communication St. Dev.	5.51 (1.24)	5.95 (.94)	4.51 (1.44)	5.88 (1.04)	4.46 (1.26)
Journalism St. Dev.	5.81 (.88)	6.15 (.75)	4.96 (1.25)	5.81 (.87)	4.81 (1.54)
Other St. Dev.	5.83 (.83)	5.58 (.50)	5.66 (.47)	5.42 (1.10)	4.91 (1.13)

Figure 3: Adoption of a Unique Course in Persuasive Internet Communication



Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly indicate that educators' perceptions of the Internet as an effective mass medium at delivering persuasive communication are generally favorable. As a result, advertising and public relations educators, among the reporting sample, have adopted persuasive Internet communication into their curricula. However, there appears to remain some skepticism regarding how well advertising and public relations programs are instructing students in persuasive Internet communication.

Nevertheless, two levels of adoption were identified with the fastest and most prevalent simply representing an integration of instruction into existing courses. While the percent of time dedicated to instructing persuasive Internet communication remain

low, this is understandable given instruction time is more than likely divided among all mass media. Furthermore, the confirmation that the majority of advertising and public relations programs in this sample have adopted a unique course specializing in persuasive Internet communication also signifies the adoption of this information technology into the curricula. Therefore, some educators believe the Internet warrants independent instruction in developing effective techniques outside traditional mass media.

While the debate over which disciplines are best suited for preparing students to develop effective persuasive Internet communication continues, advertising programs are significantly more likely to provide instruction in persuasive Internet communication based on this sample. However, the findings also indicate that advertising and public relations educators value many of the same skills required for producing effective persuasive Internet communication as with traditional advertising and public relations skills, such as verbal, visual, investigative, and strategic planning. This illustrates the apparent compatibility with incorporating persuasive Internet communication into existing advertising and public relations curricula.

The confirmation of the relationship between adoption and some of the innovation attributes provides modest support for the existing Diffusion of Innovations theory. For integration into existing courses, compatibility and trialability were the only two attributes to significantly predict the rate at which adoption occurs. This suggests integration of persuasive Internet communication is more likely to result when educators perceive the innovation as consistent with established mass media instruction and are able to adequately experiment with implementation. While trialability was found to be a significant predictor for adoption rate of a unique specialized course, observability was also identified as a moderate predictor. Thus, when the perceived benefits are visible and provide an added value, adoption of a unique Internet communication will occur faster.

Theoretically, this study supports the existing model of diffusion of innovation and provides implications for advertising and public relations educators to consider. For instance, the results emphasize the importance of some of the established innovation attributes in diffusion research, yet suggest additional variables should be explored when predicting the rate of adoption. Future research can extend this study by identifying additional determinants associated with the adoption of persuasive Internet communication in advertising and public relations curricula.

Inherent within any study are limitations that affect the overall validity and reliability of the results. With regard to this study, some care should be taken when interpreting the research findings. The first concern involves error resulting from the sampling method. When a purposive sample is utilized, the research results may not be generalizable. Taking this into consideration combined with the use of an on-line survey suggests the need for caution. A second concern involves the possibility of measurement error. Because a survey was used, several assumptions were made regarding the terminology of the questionnaire. For instance, a conceptual definition of Internet communication was used as a reference for persuasive paid and non-paid forms of mass communication via the Internet, but there is no guarantee that respondents interpreted the questions correctly. A third concern includes the large number of respondents indicating they primarily teach marketing or communication courses (31.6%). As previously stated, the advertising and public relations fields are considered multi-disciplinary with a wide range of mass communication disciplines instructing principles of both. While the AAA and PR Division of AEJMC represent appropriate sampling frames for advertising and public relations educators, additional organizations could be more appropriate for marketing and communication educators. Despite these limitations, the study was successful in advancing the understanding of the diffusion of persuasive Internet communication throughout advertising and public relations curricula.

Appendix Respondent Profile

Respondent Characteristics	Frequency	Percent	Institution Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Academic Rank			Institution		
Professor	84	33.2	Public	200	79.1
Associate Professor	70	27.7	Private	53	20.9
Assistant Professor	63	24.9			
Instructor	17	6.7	Enrollment		
Graduate Assistant (teaching)	11	4.3	5,000 or less	25	9.9
Graduate Assistant (non-teaching)	8	3.2	5,001 - 10,000	30	11.9
			10,001 - 15,000	32	12.6
			15,001 - 20,000	45	17.8
			20,001 - 25,000	30	11.9
			25,001 - 30,000	34	13.4
			30,001 or more	57	22.5
Primary Discipline Taught			Academic Department		
Public Relations	83	32.8	Communication	70	27.7
Advertising	69	27.3	Journalism	56	22.1
Marketing	53	20.9	Marketing	53	20.9
Communication	27	10.7	Advertising	30	11.9
Other	12	4.7	Advertising & PR	23	9.1
Journalism	9	3.6	Other	13	5.1
			Public Relations	8	3.2
Courses Taught^a			Number of Undergraduate Majors^d		
Principles / Introductory	139	54.9	100 or less	37	14.6
Campaign Management	129	51.0	101 - 300	80	31.6
Research	114	45.1	301 - 500	42	16.6
Writing	94	37.2	501 - 700	19	7.5
Theory	73	28.9	701 or more	47	18.6
Media Planning & Strategy	61	24.1			
Creative Strategy	49	19.4	Graduate Degree Offered in Related Area		
Consumer Behavior	46	18.2	Yes	157	62.1
Other	30	11.9	No	96	37.9
Graphics & Design	21	8.3			
Media Production	11	4.3	Institutional Support for Course Development		
			Yes	140	55.3
			No	85	33.6
			Did not know	28	11.1
Number of Years Teaching^b					
5 or less	51	20.2			
6 - 10	61	24.1			
11 - 15	37	14.6			
16 - 20	31	12.3			
21 or more	65	25.7			
Gender					
Male	150	59.3			
Female	103	40.7			
Age^c					
25 - 34	24	9.5			
35 - 44	66	26.1			
45 - 54	87	34.4			
55 - 64	52	20.6			
65 and older	9	3.6			

^aRespondants were able to select more than one course; ^bM = 14.47, SD = 9.46; ^cM = 47.52, SD = 9.82, 15 respondents elected not to answer; ^dM = 444.23, SD = 386.86, 28 did not respond.

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