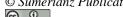
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**Original Article** 

# The Effect of E-Communication on the Visit of the Store: An Exploratory Study

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to present new mediating and moderating variables in the relationship between online advertising and the store visit. To this end, a qualitative study of 17 Tunisian Internet users was conducted. Results allowed developing the proposition that the disposition to visit the store is an intermediate variable between electronic advertising and the visit to a store. In addition, the proposal that the implication with the product is the moderating variable between e-advertising and the disposition to visit the store was developed. The realization of a quantitative study among 500 Tunisian Internet users is very useful to confirm the the research proposals. Thus, the disposition to visit the store is found to be a significant precedent of the off-line realization of a visit to store. This disposition is influenced by the dissemination of online advertising of the product taking into account the consumer's involvement to the product in question. This research made it possible to propose a new structure of the different variables scales of measurement based on the Chirchill (1979).

**Keywords:** Online advertising, Visit to the store, Mediating variables, Moderating variables.

## 1. Introduction

E-advertising is a *«form of promotion that uses the Internet and the World Wide Web for the expressed purpose* of delivering marketing messages to attract customers» (Kim et al., 2011). In 2017, the increment rate of worldwide advertising spend on the Internet will reach 32.4% vs 31.6% for television and this media will be the largest for advertisers in the world. In Tunisia, online advertising is a relatively new means of marketing communication, it is a tool in full growth and online advertising spending continues to increase, from 1.6 million dinar in 2007 to 7 million in  $2016^2$ .

In these circumstances and referring to the review of the literature regarding electronic advertising, almost the majority of researchers have concluded that e-advertising allows the improvement and enhancement of cognitive responses such as memorization (Tanveer and Changhyun, 2014), attention (Hamborg et al., 2012) and the unconscious (Yoo, 2008). Similarly, the emotional consequences are the attitudes towards advertising and the brand (Yoo, 2008). Further, online advertising causes behavioral effects counting the click-through rate (Aksakallý, 2012) online buying intentions (Yoo, 2008) strengthening.

Therefore, it seems that managers will tend to focus on increasing investments in e-marketing and online advertising. Nonetheless, e-commerce performance results do not match the importance of Internet advertising spending. Data remain unsatisfactory for companies in terms of e-commerce developments, especially in developed countries where Internet users actually practice e-shopping. Indeed, according to the study of E-Market agency, 91% of sales are made from physical sales points against 9% from the web in 2016<sup>3</sup>, which will reach 14.6% of in 2020<sup>4</sup>. In the US, online sales will account for 10% of total retail sales in 2018, as well as France<sup>5</sup>. In Tunisia, electronic sales are weak or almost non-existent because e-commerce is still struggling. Only 951 companies have merchant sites in 2015<sup>6</sup>, which is not enough compared to the electronic market in developed countries. Similarly, the consumer is not yet accustomed to buying online.

Consequently, online communication does not only involve an increase in electronic purchases, but it can increase sales in the usual stores (physical point of sale). In France, around 64% of "cyber shoppers" think it is better to remove the product at the point of sale following a purchase from the company's website (Prigent, 2010). In 2020,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> \$ 544 billion, + 4.4% for global advertising in 2015 according to Zenith Optimedi. Retrieved from: <a href="http://www.viuz.com">http://www.viuz.com</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Media: 219 million dinars of advertising investments in 2016. Retrieved from: <a href="http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com.publicitaire-medias-">http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com.publicitaire-medias-</a> investissement

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Sales of e-commerce in the world. Retrieved from: http://www.journaldunet.com/ebusiness/ commerce/1009561-chiffre-d-affaires-e-commerce-

Sales of e-commerce in the world. Retrieved from: http://www.journaldunet.com/ebusiness/commerce/1009561-chiffre-d-affaires-e-commerce-

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<sup>5</sup>E-commerce will account for 10% of retail sales in France in 2018. Retrieved from: <a href="http://www.journaldunet.com/ebusiness/commerce/l-e-">http://www.journaldunet.com/ebusiness/commerce/l-e-</a> commerce-pesera-10-des-ventes-de-detail-en-france-en-2018.shtml

<sup>6</sup> Presentation of the e-commerce environment in Tunisia. Retrieved from: <a href="http://www.commerce.gov.tn/Fr/presentation-de-l-environment-du-">http://www.commerce.gov.tn/Fr/presentation-de-l-environment-du-</a>

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53% of point-of-sale purchases in Europe will include Web searches (Dever, 2015). Therefore, it will be interesting to study the consequences of electronic communication in the context of off-line (real) purchase. Nevertheless, the literature review does not seem to carry enough attention to the impact of electronic advertising on the offline behavior of the consumer. Starting from and in the light of the hierarchy of effects model, the relationship of online advertising and the real visit of the store can be highlighted.

Accordingly, some hypothetical relationships are dependent on the impacts of mediating phenomena. New variables like the willingness to visit the store seems to temper the link between online advertising and the actual store visit. In the literature, the mediating variables of online advertising effect on online shopping behavior are attitudes (Wang and Sun, 2010). The variables moderating the effect of online communication on the behavior of Internet users presented in the literature are gender and experience (Sun *et al.*, 2010). In this line, the available literature allowed us proposing the implication with the product as a moderator variable. Results of previous researches showed that the involvement with the product plays a moderating role between advertising (in the media such as TV, radio) and its consequences such as attitudes (Merabet and Benhabib, 2014).

In conclusion, the present work is a part of academic research on measuring the effects of online communication, to overcome the following general question: What is the effect of online advertising on the behavioral reactions of Internet users in terms of real visit of the point of sale? For more precision, this question can be divided into three sub-questions: What is the effect of e-advertising on the willingness to visit the point of sale? What is the effect of the willingness to visit the store on the real visit of the store? What is the effect of involvement with the product on the relationship between online advertising and the willingness to visit the store?

## 2. Materials and Methods

## A. The Qualitative Study

This research will include a trial of building new moderators and mediators of the effect of online advertising on consumer behavior in the offline setting. However, regarding this framework, the literature present a lack obvious, hence the need for an exploratory qualitative approach. The individual interview will be privileged to other qualitative investigation techniques, presenting indeed itself as the tool most used and favored by management researchers and more particularly in marketing. In this research, the number of retained interviews is seventeen, taking into account the saturation principle. In fact, the diversification in the profile of the respondents will focus on the following criteria: age, gender and socio-professional category. The only common trait that each participant must have is that he is an Internet user. Finally, the last step is the choice of the data analysis method. The most appropriate method for this search was found to be the approach of content analysis, based on the following stages: the transcription of the interviews, choice and precision of the unity of the analysis, construction of the grid, thematic analysis, quantification and elaboration of a synthesis report (Giannelloni and Vernette, 2012).

#### B. The Quantitative Study

After the achievement of the qualitative study and a synthesis review of the literature, a quantitative study was conducted to verify the structure of measurement scales and validate research proposals.

#### i) Scales of Measurement

For online adverting, in this research, the one-dimensional measure used by researchers was used (Wu et al., 2008). The relevance of this choice is founded on the fact that there are items dealing with information, format and animation as indicated in the participants' claims (Table 1). Thus, the structure of the online advertising scale, derived from the results of the qualitative (three-dimensional) study, was adopted by adding the items of the scale identified in the literature.

Regarding the visit of the store, taking into account the objectives of this research, where it is necessary just to know if the consumer can realize or not visits to the point of sale after the distribution of online advertising, two options for measuring this construct could be applied. The first is the measure used by Martinez-Lopez *et al.* (2005) in their research, which is a dichotomous scale with two modes: yes / no. The second relates to construct a measure from the responses of the participants in the qualitative study, who, questioned, will respond using the Likert scale five points. Therefore, this latter solution was chosen, where consumers' responses will be measured with the Likert scale, exhibiting thereby several advantages (Trabelsi, 2002). In fact, this scale is the most preferred and used in marketing researches at the expens of other scales measuring skills and consumer reviews. Moreover, it is *«applied in lifestyle areas of psychographics and behavioral ones»* (Trabelsi, 2002). Similarly, regardless the method of data collection, it is easily applied and understood by the participants in the quantitative surveys.

Based on the results of the qualitative study, a one-dimensional measure of the construct *«the disposition to visit the store»* could be proposed as a new concept in our research.

Concerning the implication with the product, the scale of measurement of Strazzieria (1994) which has been proven in several recent researches in the field of advertising, was chosen, especially as it excludes the notion of perceived risk.

Table-1. Items for measuring variables

Constrcuts	Items
The items of the measurement of the construct "Information"	The information contained in the online advertising presented is about novelties; I find the information contained in the relevant and recent online advertising; Online advertising communicates the appropriate information for shopping; The information contained in online advertising is relevant because it helps a lot in my decisions to visit the sites; The information contained in online advertising helps me know what I want about
The items of the measurement of the construct "Format"	Online advertising presents an original format in its presentation will be very attractive; Online advertising with a wide variety of colors attracts me more; In electronic advertising, images with well-chosen colors appeal to me more.
The items of the measurement of the construct "Animation"	Online advertising is all the more attractive because it contains many animation actions; An advertisement that contains several movements is more attractive.
The items of the measurement of the construct "The visit of the store"	It is rare that I visit the stores after the knowledge of Internet advertising; I automatically visit the points of sale after the spread of advertising on the Internet; It is very useful to visit a store after the spread of advertising on the Internet; I frequently visit the store after the spread of advertising on the Internet.
The items of the measurement of the construct "The disposition to visit the store"	After the knowledge of Internet advertising, my desire to move towards the point will be stronger; I tend to go to the points of sale after knowing the electronic advertising; After the spread of advertising on the Internet, I put first the idea of visiting the store; After the Internet advertising, I seriously thought about the visit of the store; After the spread of advertising on the Internet, I have the desire to visit the store.

## ii) Data Collection

The collection of data is based on a questionnaire administered face to face to 500 people. The sample, characterized by 51.8% of the male gender, is founded on the convenience sampling method. The most dominant age group is between 30-39 years old, and 51.2% of respondents have used the Internet for more than 4 years. Further, 80.8% of participants use the Internet more than 4 hours a day.

## 3. Results

In this section, the steps for the confirmation of the structure of measurement scales will be presented, and followed by the hypothesis testing and the discussion of the results.

## A. Propositions of the Research

Based on results of previous researches and comparing them with the results of the qualitative study, the consequences of the e-advertising could be proposed as follows: the visit of the store and the disposition to visit the store.

#### i) The Visit of the Store

The literature offers different ways of frequenting points of sale, namely browsing, shopping, and window-shopping. This variety of fashion can be explained by different motivations. Indeed, the consumer can visit the store to find information, for pleasure or to make a purchase. The choice of a point of sale and the method of attendance will be exercised according to the personality traits of consumers. For some researches, these traits are antecedents of the visit of a point of sale while others prove that they are moderating features of the visit of a store (Derlund *et al.*, 2014). Constructs such as the motivation cognitive/affective, perceived risk, optimal level of stimulation and expertise in the product category are moderators of the way in which the points of sale are used. The innovative trend of the consumer is another personal trait proposed by many authors as an antecedent of the choice of a point of sale. Likewise, some sociodemographic constructs such as gender, age, religion, and education are determinants of the visit (Helme-Guizon, 2001).

#### ii) The Disposition to Visit the Store

In marketing, the disposition has often been an explanatory construct of consumer behavior. For example, the disposition to satisfaction is a precedent of satisfaction (Kuo and Thompson, 2014). Thus, and taking into account results of the qualitative study, it seems interesting to present a new construct *«the disposition to visit the store»* and to study its effect on consumer behavior. In fact, as previously stated, there are different ways of frequenting points of sale. This variety of fashion can be explained by behavioral divergence, indicating that there are more sensitive consumers than others in terms of making a decision to visit the point of sale. Otherwise, a group of individuals can easily make the decision to visit the store, while other individuals cannot. It all depends on the particular trends of

each other to invest in the activities of visiting the stores. Thus, it could be considered that some people are simply predisposed to make this decision while others are less likely or not (Lee *et al.*, 2008).

Thereafter, the disposition to visit the point of sale could be defined as the tendency of a consumer to visit a point of sale in order to achieve specific goals. In this context, taking into account the results of the qualitative study, attention to online advertising may incite for some consumers the idea of visiting the store and adopting one of the ways of frequenting identified in the literature. Indeed, the more people are paying attention to e-advertising, the more it stimulates their interests, the more they will have a favorable predisposition to make a visit to the point of sale. This visit will be essential to confirm the information presented in the advertisement and possibly make an act of purchase. For example, «I consider the visit of the point of sale very useful to check the information published online» (Responding 8). «I have the will to direct me to the point of sale because I am convinced by advertising» (Responding 4). Accordingly,

**Proposition 1**: Online advertising seems to influence the consumers' disposition to visit the store (or the point of sales) to verify the information content in this communication.

The review of the existing literature reveals that no research has confirmed or invalidated this relationship. Nevertheless, the researchers theoretically validated the effect of the provision on the choice and attendance of a point of sale. For example, the environmental disposition, along with the personality traits, direct the consumer to make certain reactions in his daily life. The physical environment refers to the chosen house, visited shopping center, etc. Thus, this provision is a determinant of the behavior of an individual in the choice of a specific point of sale and influences his attitude and manner of use. In fact, consumers who are highly predisposed are those who behave in a recreational way and form positive attitudes (Taylor, 1979). Therefore, founded on this theory, it is possible to propose a relationship between the decision and the willingness to visit the store. This latter seems to be confirmed, following the qualitative study of the present work, as responses of the participants to the seventeen interviews leads to deduce the existence of this relationship. Indeed, the more the user has a favorable aptitude for the idea of visiting the store, the easier to make the decision to go to the point of sale to buy or to carry out a leisure activity. *«Visiting the store is very useful for me because I have the will from the beginning to visit and see the product in real»* (Questioned 4). *«The visit of the store is required to satisfy my need and also I have will early»* (Asked 5). Consequently,

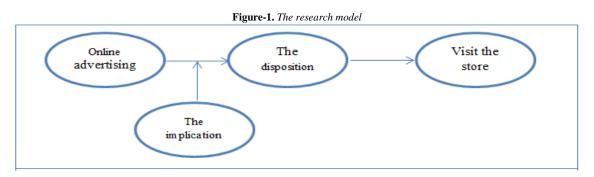
**Proposition 2:** The disposition to visit the store seems to influence the decision to visit the store, especially as the propensity to visit exists beforehand.

## iii) The Implication with the Product

In marketing, previous researches has shown that the implication with the product is a moderating effect of the same relationship (Merabet and Benhabib, 2014). Consumers with strong involvement will be very interested in the advertising campaigns and in the information presented in the messages (the ELM model) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). Therefore, the implication has a significant effect in the treatment of information by the consumer, where the latter will be able to better receive the information presented in the message, especially if it is about a novelty. It is easy for him to make a good decoding and treat the information more appropriately because he knows more about the products and their efficiencies. This easy treatment makes consumers more sensitive to changing their attitudes and increasing the chances of making a purchase decision. Nonetheless, low-engagement customers are only interested in the peripheral elements of the message such as color and music. They do not use several elements and several principles of evaluation and judgment in order to choose a well-defined mark (Merabet and Benhabib, 2014).

Based on all these results, in this research, the moderating effect of the implication on the relationship between online advertising and the willingness to visit the store will be investigated. According to this angle of analysis and taking into account the responses of the participants in the qualitative study, the more the consumers are involved, the more they are interested in the information presented in the advertisement on the Net. This interest will encourage them to visit the stores to see a physical sample so that they remain users of their favorite products. «Yes, my willingness to change will be more favorable. In addition, to visit the store where my favorite product is located will be stronger. I always like to use more of my favorite products. I need to know all the news on these products» (Responding 12). Therefore,

**Proposition 3**: The relationship between exposure to online advertising and the disposition to visit the store is influenced by the involvement with the product.



## iv) Confirmation of the Structure of Measurement Scales

The majority of marketing researchers use the paradigm of Chirchill (1979) to propose very reliable and valid measures of identified phenomena. Subsequently, all the steps proposed in this paradigm will be followed in the present study. Based on the literature and the results of the qualitative study, the different items of each scale of measurement are specified, and it is useful to carry out a first data collection (125 participants). In this step, two tests were performed, namely the Exploratory Factor Analysis (AFE) and the Reliability Test (Cronbach Alpha). Thus, in order to validate the primary structure of the scales of measurement, a second collection (130 participants) was realized to carry out three essential analyzes, the confirmatory factorial analysis, the reliability test by the use of Rhô of Joreskog and the verification of the validity of the scales of measurement.

All the results are satisfactory according to the standards and the new structure of each measurement scale is presented in Table 2.

<b>Table-2.</b> Structure of measurements according to	o Chirchull's p	paradigm (	(1979)
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A pre-test conducted with 31 Internet users:								
Construct	Initial structure		Corrected structure					
Online advertising	Information	6 items	Information	5 items				
	Format	4 items	Format	3 items				
	Animation	3 items	Animation	2 items				
Visit the store	4 items		3 items					
Disposition	5 items		4 items					
First collection: 125 Internet users								
Online advertising	Information: 4 items							
	Animation : 2 items							
Disposition	3 items							
Visit the store	3 items							
A second collection: 130 Internet users								
Online advertising	Information: 4 items							
	Animation : 2 items							
Disposition	3 items							
Visit the store	3 items							

## v) Exploratory Analysis

For the verification of research proposals, a third collection (final survey: 500 Internet users) was carried out. The survey data were subjected to the entire process of verifying the psychometric characteristics of the measurement scales. An exploratory factorial analysis was identified for the different constructs: online advertising (3 items), the willingness to visit the store (3 items) and the store visit (3 items).

#### vi) Confirmatory Analysis

In this phase, applying the structural equations method, the fitting quality of the measurement model and the structural model were tested. For the measurement model, the Mardia coefficient has a value of 12,767 (c.r = 10,144) which is greater than 3, making it impossible to verify normality. To remedy the lack of multinormality, the «Bootstrap» method (Roussel *et al.*, 2002) was applied, allowing us going on to study the quality of fit of the measurement model. In fact, results show that the values of the quality adjustment indicators of the model are satisfactory (Chi2 = 85.694, Dl = 24, Adjusted Chi2 = 3.571, P = 0.000, GFI = 0.964, AGFI = 0.933, TLI = 0.955, CFI = 0.970, RMSEA = 0.072, RMR = 0.075), indicating that all the measurements have a Rho value greater than 0.6. Hence, the confirmation of the reliability of the different scales of measurement. All items have a CR > 1.96 and the VME of all constructs reveals values greater than 0.5, and thereby the convergent validity is verified. Discriminant validity is corroborated by proving that the square of the structural link (the correlation link) between each pair of constructs is less than the value of the VME of each trait (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Regarding the structure model, the values of the model's fit quality indicators are all satisfactory (Chi2 = 27.216, Dl = 9, Adjusted Chi2 = 3.024, P = 0.000, GFI = 0.983, AGFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.978, CFI = 0.987, RMSEA = 0.064, RMR = 0.084). Thus, the research proposals can be verified, knowing that the structural links between the latent constructs must be significant. Indeed, *«when the C.R value exceeds 1.96, the regression link is significantly different from zero at a risk of error of 5%»* (Akrout, 2010).

#### 4. Discussion

The structural link between online advertising and the disposition to visit the store is significant with a C.R of 2.653 (p = 0.008) and a regression coefficient of 0.124. Consequently, the first proposition is confirmed.

Advertising on the Net attracts the attention and interest of the surfer and leads him to think about the usefulness of visiting the store. This result is consistent with previous literature indicating that online advertising is an antecedent of attitudes, either to brands or to messages. In fact, the concepts of attitude and disposition can be considered as converging from the point of view of definitions. The attitude is «an emotional feeling attached and a tendency of actions towards objects or ideas» (Kotler et al., 2009). The disposition represents «trends to respond to situations or categories of situations in a particular predetermined manner» (House et al., 1996). Thus, these two

notions seem very similar, representing both individual tendencies to act (Li, 2014). They suggest that as interest in online advertising increases, the attitude becomes more favorable and the willingness of the consumer to visit the store will experience higher propensities.

The structural link between the disposition to visit the store and the visit to the point of sale is significant with a C.R of 4.177 (p = 0.000) and a regression coefficient of 0.194. Therefore, the second proposition is confirmed. The greater the disposition to visit the store, the stronger the decision to visit the store of the customer's interest. In fact, the tendency of individuals to invest in shop visit activities makes some people easily realize the decision to visit, while others do not get so easily. Internet users with a particular interest in an electronic advertisement on a new product (a new Smartphone for example) will be easily predisposed to visit specialized store of this category of products in order to better inform themselves about their new features. At this level, the results obtained are perfectly in line with conclusions given in the literature. Many researchers find that disposition is a predictive construct of consumer behavior (Burns and Bowling, 2010), where the environmental disposition, along with the personality traits, direct the consumer to make certain reactions in his daily life. Thus, the disposition is a determinant of the behavior of the individual in the choice of a particular point of sale, as it influences its mode of attendance (Taylor, 1979).

Applying the method of Baron and Kenny (1986) and Roussel and Wacheux (2006), the disposition to visit the store is a built-in mediator between online advertising and visiting the store. Online advertising has a significant effect on the consumer's decision to visit the point of sale only through the existence of a disposition to visit it. Indeed, the e-advertising that attracts the attention and interest of the user makes it easy to make the decision to visit the point of sale all depending on its predisposition to carry out purchasing activities or for fun. Such results are in the same line with observations made in literature, in this context. Within the literature, the variables mediating the effect of online advertising on online shopping behavior are the attitude towards online advertising and the attitude towards the brand.

By applying multi-group analysis, the moderating role of involvement with the tested product between electronic advertising and the disposition to visit the store is defined as positive and meaningful. Highly involved consumers will immediately be interested in the information presented. This strong involvement will significantly boost their desire to know the new collections of their favorite products. Thus, they will be highly predisposed to visit the outlets for reasons of leisure or purchase (Ben Miled–Chérif, 2001).

At this level, obtained results from the present study converge with the conclusions presented in the literature. Several researchers showed that involvement with the product plays a moderating role in the relationship between advertising and its consequences such as attitudes (Merabet and Benhabib, 2014).

#### 5. Conclusion

The present work can be considered theoretically interesting at least for two essential points. The first is related to the presentation of a new feature called the disposition to visit the store. Indeed, the notion of disposition is an affective reaction similar to the notion of attitude that is most studied by marketing researchers in the field of online communication. The accuracy of all the consequences of online advertising in the offline context represents our second theoretical contribution. This research on the study of these consequences is an unprecedented investigation that sought to resolve strictly such a question.

On the managerial level, managers can increase the effect of online advertising by focusing on the content trait (information, captivating), the animation feature and taking into account the moderating role of the involvement with the product. Indeed, an attractive advertisement for a Tunisian consumer must contain several movements and concepts Flash. Researchers have shown that banners are the most used forms in developed countries in terms of advertising spend. Thus, it will be better for Tunisian managers to orient themselves to use this form with an effective combination between content and animation. Internet users who will be attracted are those who have little involvement because they are interested only in the devices of the advertising message.

By focusing on these factors, the effect of this communication tool will be directed towards increasing consumer willingness to visit the store to ensure information and collect a real sample of the product. The manager guaranteed, in all cases, the visit of the consumer to the store.

This work has deepened well in the field of online communication, however, there are some limitations that can constitute as many future research paths. It lacks the integration of different forms of attitude as mediating variables of the effect of online advertising on the visit of the store. Likewise, it will be interesting to test the moderating effect of sociodemographic variables. In addition, the effect of e-advertising on purchase decisions and sales is missing. Thus, conducting group interviews is more appropriate than semi-structured interviews.

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