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LEVERAGING NEWS AND ADVERTISING TO INTRODUCE NEW BRANDS ON THE WEB

Anca Cristina Micu, Esther Thorson

ABSTRACT: Previous studies using the integrated marketing communications framework have examined the increased effectiveness of combining either multiple media or different tactics when promoting a brand. This study considers integrating advertising and publicity to promote an unknown brand on the Internet. Experiment results indicate that when exposure to advertising combines with exposure to objective news about a new brand, effectiveness increases in terms of both brand attitudes and behavioral intentions. For sequencing exposures for technical brands, the news-then-advertising condition offers more effectiveness than the reverse sequence. When introducing non-technical brands on the Web though, using advertising first is more effective in terms of brand attitudes.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communications, Internet advertising, news.

The idea of integrated marketing communications (IMC) quickly won over brand managers, as it promised a unified brand image and superior effectiveness for marketing communications efforts. The difficulty rested with its implementation. Whether considered just a philosophy or an actual process, IMC has been understood and interpreted differently by scholars and practitioners who have studied it for either academic or industry purposes (Duncan and Everett 1993). The definition of IMC adopted in this study comes from Kitchen and Schultz (1998, p. 469): "IMC is a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communications disciplines (for example general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations) . . . and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact."

The notion of synergy is central to most arguments for integrating marketing communications tactics (Duncan and Everett 1993). While searching for previous studies that tested for synergistic effects in an IMC context, we found that more studies addressed the effects of integrating media rather than the "disciplines" that Kitchen and Schultz (1998) mention in their definition of IMC. Various studies from the public relations field consider publicity superior to advertising, in terms of credibility (Cameron 1994; Hallahan 1999), but few studies investigate brand communications synergy that integrates advertising and publicity (Stammerjohann et al. 2005). Furthermore, we find no other studies that consider a synergistic effect resulting from combining advertising and publicity on the Internet.

Noting the growing popularity of the Internet as a promotional medium, Putrevu and Lord (2003) stress the need to examine the effects of Internet marketing communications. They list three Internet brand communication sources: advertisements, Web sites, and viral messaging (banners and pop-up ads fall under the advertisement category). Pop-up ads occur less frequently online due to blocking software, but banner ads remain common online and appear in various standardized sizes. Banner ads increase brand recognition and intention to purchase, even when the user does not click on the banner to access the brand's Web site (Briggs and Hollis 1997; Manchanda et al. 2006).

Banner ads are highly visual and feature little text (copy), whereas news stories or publicity are largely verbal and often feature only or mostly text. When comparing the effects of online brand exposure to banner ads, news stories, or both, we therefore must consider the difference between visual and verbal content. Shank and Abelson (1995) stress that stories are crucial for people to acquire and memorize information. According to social comprehension theory, people spontaneously construct a mental simulation to comprehend information about a stimulus (Wyer and Radvansky 1999), called an event model (Wyer, Adaval, and Colcombe 2002), which represent subsets of what cognitive psychologists call mental or situational models (Johnson-Laird 1983; Kintsch 1998; Zwaan and Radvansky 1998). Mental models contain both verbal and nonverbal components. According to Wyer and Radvansky (1999), the image components of a mental model are obligatory, but verbal components are optional. They further state that people who see images or visuals are unlikely to assign verbal labels to their observations, whereas

people who read a story may spontaneously form mental pictures of the events described and thereby elaborate features of the events that were not specified in the verbal description. Therefore, exposing consumers to brands through news articles may generate a more extensive mental model that includes both the information provided in the text and additional information inferred by the reader.

In a study of how consumers generate their own narratives about brands after being exposed to narrative promotional messages, Escalas (2004) concludes that mental models created in consumers' minds help them interpret brand meaning and generate positive brand attitudes through self-brand connections. In turn, we expect exposure to a news story only or to both news and advertising about the brand (regardless of the order) to generate more positive brand attitudes and behavioral intentions than would repetitive exposure to banner ads only.

HYPOTHESES

Third-Party Endorsement

In addition to their superiority over banner ads because of their narrative format, news stories should benefit from the endorsement of the news outlet, which makes them appear more credible than advertising. According to the third-party endorsement concept, publicity adopts a news format and therefore borrows the credibility from which news stories benefit (Cameron 1994; Hallahan 1999; Linning 2004). Consumers exposed to brand messages in a news format know that a third party, namely, the news outlet through journalists and editors, has checked the accuracy of the publicity message before publishing it. Scarce empirical research suggests that a news format enhances learning and recall (Cameron 1994), more positive attitudes (Salmon et al. 1985; Straughan, Bleske, and Zhao 1996), and behavioral intentions (Straughan, Bleske, and Zhao 1996). Positive publicity for a brand in the form of a news release is likely to influence consumers' attitudes toward ads and brands, because consumers use the most credible information available (Stammerjohann et al. 2005).

On the Internet, people have become expert, skeptical processors of advertisements. The moment they classify a communication message as an advertisement, without any conscious effort, they either extract from it what is useful or abandon it (Gallagher, Foster, and Parsons 2001). Alternatively, if people classify a communication as a news article rather than an advertisement, they may process it more attentively. Therefore, an integrated campaign should benefit

from the synergistic effect between publicity and advertising and generate more positive brand attitudes than a campaign that solely uses advertising.

Synergy in Marketing Communications

A synergistic effect occurs when a campaign uses a combination of tactics to yield more positive brand attitudes than the sum of individual efforts' effects. Synergies exist among brand messages conveyed through different media (Chang and Thorson 2004; Confer and McGlathery 1991; Edell and Keller 1989, 1999; Naik and Raman 2003) and among marketing communications tactics such as sales promotions and retail advertising (Lemon and Nowlis 2002) or personal selling and advertising (Gopalakrishna and Chatterjee 1992). Whether across media or tactics, synergistic effects occur because of the variation in exposure to the brand message, caused by using either different media (Chang and Thorson 2004; Pechmann and Stewart 1989) or different message formats that correspond to the tactics employed (Stammerjohann et al. 2005; Unnava and Burnkrant 1991). People pay equal attention to the different messages and then process the messages carefully to reach an integrated conclusion (Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994).

According to encoding variability theory, variation in exposure leads to increased processing of the message by consumers, because each message generates a different memory trace (Stammerjohann et al. 2005; Unnava and Burnkrant 1991). Hence, the network of memory traces that relate to a brand (Zaltman 2003) or the mental model of the brand (Wyer and Radvansky 1999) expands, increasing brand recall likelihood through the wealth of items in memory that might act as recall triggers. Not only do they have the brand message more accessible in their memory, but people exposed to an integrated campaign are more motivated to attend to the varied (source or format) brand messages than they would be if exposed repetitively to the very same brand message (Chang and Thorson 2004; Unnava and Burnkrant 1991).

Deficient processing theory makes the same predictions regarding the superior effectiveness of exposure to varied rather than repetitive brand messages. This alternative explanation relies on the inferior effectiveness of repetitive exposure to a single message, because the strong mental representation from the first exposure creates the false belief that the person already has learned information about the brand (Appleton-Knapp, Bjork, and Wickens 2005). Additional (synergistic) effects result when people encounter a "new" brand message during each exposure and therefore

attend to it more carefully than they would if they encountered the same message repetitively.

Advertising and Publicity Synergies

Both academics and practitioners believe in the advantages of synergy between advertising and publicity, but demonstrating these effects in a laboratory or field study has proven difficult (Chang and Thorson 2004). A few studies compare advertising and publicity by assessing the effectiveness of each separately (see Loda and Carrick Coleman 2005), and even fewer studies consider the synergistic brand communications effect of advertising and publicity being used together. Using an experimental design, Stammerjohan and colleagues (2005) ask student participants to read news stories and view print ads or read news stories and listen to radio ads for two existing brands: Amex and Oreck. The participants reviewed both positive and negative news stories for both brands. Yet for Amex, the authors found no effect of news story valence on either attitude toward the ad or attitude toward the brand, whereas for Oreck, which was considered less familiar to college students, they recorded significantly more positive attitudes toward both the ad and the brand among the group exposed to a positive news story. These authors conclude that for unfamiliar brands, a synergistic condition—namely, positive print publicity followed by radio advertising—results in improved attitude toward the ad and brand. Furthermore, examining the effects of brand familiarity on repetition effectiveness, Campbell and Keller (2003) find that attitude toward the ad influences attitude toward the brand, especially for unfamiliar (fictitious) brands. In two experiments using both television and Internet ads, the repetition of advertising attributed to a fictitious brand provides decreased effectiveness compared with a situation in which the ads tout familiar brands.

In turn, we formulate our first two hypotheses pertaining to the promotion of new/unfamiliar brands online on the basis of (1) the superior effectiveness (attitude toward the ad and toward the brand) of publicity compared with advertising because of its format (narrative) and credibility and (2) the poorer effectiveness of repetitive advertising compared with a combination of publicity and advertising.

H1: When promoting new brands on the Internet, publicity followed by advertising results in greater attitude toward the ad than does advertising followed by publicity or advertising alone.

H2: When promoting new brands on the Internet, publicity alone and publicity followed by advertising result in greater attitudes toward the brand than does advertising followed by publicity or advertising alone.

In addition, when they study intention to purchase in addition to attitude toward the brand, Loda and Carrick Coleman (2005) specifically consider whether the sequence of advertising and publicity matters. Using print ads and magazine articles for tourist destinations in four exposure conditions (i.e., advertising only, advertising then publicity, publicity then advertising, and publicity only), they find no conclusive results for attitude toward the tourist destination (brand). However, the publicity-only and publicity-then-advertising conditions yield significantly greater intention to purchase. Thus, we further consider behavioral intentions as a potential result of the different exposure situations involving advertising, publicity, or both.

H3: When promoting new brands on the Internet, publicity alone and publicity followed by advertising result in greater intentions to purchase than does advertising followed by publicity or advertising alone.

Finally, examining advertising and publicity online, Wang (2006) asks tennis players to evaluate ads and articles promoting tennis racquets in terms of trust, attitude toward the ad/article, and message believability. Although this study provides a relevant example of research conducted on the Internet, Wang fails to record the combined or synergistic effect of advertising and publicity on dependent variables, such as attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Perceived trust appears higher for and attitudes more positive toward the articles than the ads in Wang's study, but message believability is not higher when the respondents evaluate articles rather than advertisements. This counterintuitive finding suggests our third hypothesis. That is, we consider Wang's finding an exception, limited to his study, and use third-party endorsement theory and Stammerjohan and colleagues' (2005) findings to hypothesize that advertising message believability is greater when advertising and publicity are integrated than when advertising is repetitive.

H4: When promoting new brands on the Internet, advertising message believability is greater with a combination of publicity followed by advertising and advertising followed by publicity, in that order, than when using advertising alone.

METHOD

We create a 4 (experimental condition, between-subjects) \times 4 (product, within-subjects) mixed-design experiment to assess the differences among four exposure conditions to a new brand on the Internet, using advertising, publicity as objective news, or both. Specifically, to examine the synergistic effects that result from combining advertising with publicity, as opposed to repetitive exposure, and control for order effects, we employ the following exposure conditions: ad-ad, ad-then-article, article-then-ad, and article-article. We select four product categories for this experiment (MP3 player, candy, DVD player, and sports shoes) because of their relevance for college students.

When designing the stimuli, we developed fictitious brand names for each product to control for any preexisting attitudes that might confound the results had we used known brands. We also created ads and news articles for each of the four fictitious brands.

Stimulus materials. The banner ads feature simple visuals and minimal copy that mentions the product category and the brand name. The articles for the publicity treatment are similar in length and adopt an objective news tone. The articles start with the date, a headline, and a fictional reporter name and mention the product category and brand name in the main text. We provide both the ads and the articles in the Appendix. Manipulation checks in a pretest with 36 participants who viewed the stimulus items from a list of ads and stories verify that all stimulus materials represent typical banner ads ($t(35) = .61, p = .572$) or news stories ($t(35) = .78, p = .442$). Filler ads and articles with other fictional brands appear on the same pages with the target ads and articles. In addition, cartoons serve as fillers between the Web pages that contain ads or articles.

Experimental design. A professional computer programmer created the experimental Web site, which underwent usability testing before being made accessible online. The participants accessed the experimental site from a computer terminal of their choice (i.e., where they would normally browse the Internet) and saw one of four versions (corresponding to the four exposure conditions), determined by random order. To ensure sufficient participants per condition, we use forced random assignment, such that each of the four groups includes at least 32 participants, after which we randomly assign additional participants to the four groups without restrictions. As counterbalances, the four ads and four articles within the

treatments were programmed to appear in random order as participants accessed the site.

To ensure active participation, we ask subjects to vote for specific articles or ads according to predefined criteria (i.e., newsworthiness of the articles and design-brand name match for the ads). To detect participants who might skip reading the articles, the Web site and its corresponding database record the time each respondent spent on each page.

After viewing the ads and reading the articles, participants reached a page with a questionnaire that asked about their attitudes toward the ads and brands they saw, their intention to purchase those brands, and questions about message believability and demographic information. Participants in the repetitive advertising condition answered a version of the questionnaire without questions about the articles, and those exposed only to the publicity condition did not receive any questions pertaining to ads.

Sample and data collection. Subjects were 634 students from a large Midwestern U.S. university. This convenience sample comes from a homogenous population of students interested in the online environment. Participants were recruited via e-mail from three large classes. According to a power analysis table, which indicates sample size as a function of power, effect size, and significance level (Keppel 1991), the minimum sample size needed for a power level of .90, an effect size of .06, and a significance level of .05 is 57 participants. More than 100 participants appear in each treatment group that corresponds to the four exposure conditions.

Dependent variables. The dependent variables used to measure brand communication effectiveness are attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, intention to purchase, and message believability. As we show in Tables 1 and 2 respectively, we gather the attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand measures using a factor analysis for all four brands and obtain a Cronbach's alpha of greater than .8 for each. The three semantic differential scales that measure attitude are bad/good, pleasant/unpleasant, and favorable/unfavorable.

Table 1. Factor Analysis Loadings and Reliability for Attitude Toward the Ad Variables

| Item ^a | Loading | Alpha | Variance Explained (%) |
|---|---------|------------|------------------------|
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward Sonex MP3 Player Ad | | .81 | 72.76 |
| Sonex Ad Bad/Good | .869 | | |
| Sonex Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .871 | | |
| Sonex Ad Unpleasant/Pleasant | .818 | | |
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward Sweeteez Candy Ad | | .86 | 78.86 |
| Sweeteez Ad Bad/Good | .898 | | |
| Sweeteez Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .925 | | |
| Sweeteez Ad Unpleasant/Pleasant | .839 | | |
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward RoVision DVD Player Ad | | .82 | 73.37 |
| RoVision Ad Bad/Good | .911 | | |
| RoVision Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .883 | | |
| RoVision Ad Unpleasant/Pleasant | .770 | | |
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward Talpa Sports Shoes Ad | | .87 | 79.66 |
| Talpa Ad Bad/Good | .896 | | |
| Talpa Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .907 | | |
| Talpa Ad Unpleasant/Pleasant | .875 | | |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| ^a Extraction method: principal component analysis. | | | |
|---|--|--|--|

Table 2. Factor Analysis Loadings and Reliability for Attitude Toward the Brand Variables

| Item ^a | Loading | Alpha | Variance Explained (%) |
|--|---------|------------|------------------------|
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward Sonex MP3 Player | | .89 | 82 |
| Sonex Ad Bad/Good | .949 | | |
| Sonex Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .964 | | |
| Sonex Ad Unpleasant/Pleasant | .794 | | |
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward Sweeteez Candy | | .86 | 78.86 |
| Sweeteez Ad Bad/Good | .904 | | |
| Sweeteez Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .913 | | |
| Sweeteez Ad Unpleasant/Pleasant | .830 | | |
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward RoVision DVD Player | | .80 | 73.44 |
| RoVision Ad Bad/Good | .880 | | |
| RoVision Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .874 | | |
| RoVision Ad Unpleasant/Pleasant | .815 | | |
| | | | |
| Attitude Toward Talpa Sports Shoes | | .88 | 80.59 |
| Talpa Ad Bad/Good | .921 | | |
| Talpa Ad Unfavorable/Favorable | .919 | | |

| | | | | |
|---|----|------|--|--|
| Talpa Unpleasant/Pleasant | Ad | .852 | | |
| | | | | |
| aExtraction method: principal component analysis. | | | | |

Analysis. We use multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to test the hypotheses. Furthermore, we apply a repeated measures MANCOVA to compare the four exposure conditions for each of the four dependent variables.

RESULTS

Of the 634 participating students, only 583 remained for our analysis after data screening. Of these, 43% are men and 57% are women. We split the participants evenly split among conditions, with 142 (24.36%) seeing ads only, 143 (24.53%) viewing ads followed by articles, 148 (25.39%) being exposed to articles then ads, and 150 (25.73%) reading articles only.

Attitude Toward the Ad Across Conditions

With our first hypothesis, we propose that participants who read news stories first and then see ads should have a more positive attitude toward the ad than those who see ads, followed by news articles, as well as a higher attitude than participants who view repetitive advertising only. The results indicate that participants differ significantly ($F(2, 353) = 6.85, p < .00$) in their attitude toward the ad when exposed to advertising, whether in combination with publicity or not. Pairwise comparisons among the three groups (i.e., see repetitive ads, read news stories and see ads, and see ads and then read news stories) reveal that participants in the repetitive advertising condition have a significantly less positive attitude toward the ad than do participants in the two synergistic conditions in which both an ad and a news article appear. No significant difference emerges between the two integrated conditions in terms of participants' recorded attitude toward the ad. Thus, our first hypothesis receives partial support.

Attitude Toward the Brand Across Conditions

Our second hypothesis proposes that participants who read only news stories about the brands and those who read news stories first and then see ads should have more positive attitudes toward the brand than those who see the ads first followed by news articles or view repetitive advertising only. We find significant differences among the four conditions in terms of attitude toward the brand ($F(3, 573) = 10.52, p < .000$). As Table 4 shows, participants exposed to news stories

only score significantly higher on attitude toward the brand than do the participants in any of the other conditions. In addition, participants in the ad-then-article and article-then-ad synergistic conditions score higher than do participants in the repetitive advertising condition (see Table 3). As Table 5 reveals, pairwise comparisons do not indicate the significant superiority of either synergistic condition. Thus, we find support for H₂. Participants' attitude toward the brand also differs among the four brands. As we show in Figure 1, the pattern across conditions remains similar for the two more technical brands (Sonex MP3 player and RoVision DVD player) and for the two less technical brands (Sweeteez candy and Talpa sports shoes).

Figure 1. Group Means for Attitude toward the Brand

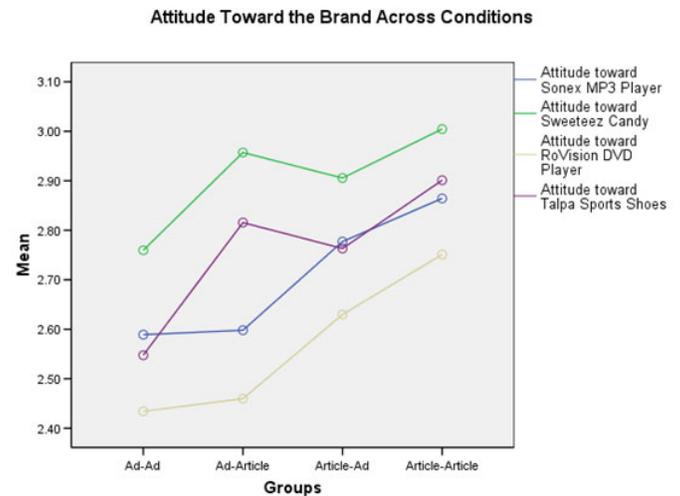


Table 3. Attitude Toward the Brand across Four Groups

| | Groups | Mean | SD | N |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|------|------|-----|
| Attitude toward Sonex MP3 player | Ad-Ad | 2.59 | 0.71 | 139 |
| | Ad-Article | 2.60 | 0.49 | 141 |
| | Article-Ad | 2.78 | 0.53 | 147 |
| | Article-Article | 2.86 | 0.54 | 150 |
| Attitude toward Sweeteez candy | Ad-Ad | 2.76 | 0.79 | 139 |
| | Ad- | 2.96 | 0.70 | 141 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------|------|-----|
| | Article | | | |
| | Article-Ad | 2.91 | 0.71 | 147 |
| | Article-Article | 3.00 | 0.60 | 150 |
| | | | | |
| Attitude toward RoVision DVD player | Ad-Ad | 2.43 | 0.71 | 139 |
| | Ad-Article | 2.46 | 0.62 | 141 |
| | Article-Ad | 2.63 | 0.58 | 147 |
| | Article-Article | 2.75 | 0.55 | 150 |
| | | | | |
| Attitude toward Talpa sports shoes | Ad-Ad | 2.55 | 0.74 | 139 |
| | Ad-Article | 2.82 | 0.73 | 141 |
| | Article-Ad | 2.76 | 0.76 | 147 |
| | Article-Article | 2.90 | 0.72 | 150 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| | RoVision DVD player | | | | | |
| | Attitude toward Talpa sports shoes | 9.94 | 3.00 | 3.31 | 6.14 | 0.00 |
| | | | | | | |
| Gender | Attitude toward Sonex MP3 player | 0.55 | 1.00 | 0.55 | 1.67 | 0.20 |
| | Attitude toward Sweeteez candy | 8.92 | 1.00 | 8.92 | 18.59 | 0.00 |
| | Attitude toward RoVision DVD player | 1.17 | 1.00 | 1.17 | 3.05 | 0.08 |
| | Attitude toward Talpa sports shoes | 3.34 | 1.00 | 3.34 | 6.20 | 0.01 |

Table 4. Multivariate Tests of Between-Subject Effects Across Participants for Attitude Toward the Brand

| Source | Dependent Variable | SS | Df | MS | F | Significance |
|--------|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|--------------|
| Groups | Attitude toward Sonex MP3 player | 8.31 | 3.00 | 2.77 | 8.43 | 0.00 |
| | Attitude toward Sweeteez candy | 5.05 | 3.00 | 1.68 | 3.51 | 0.02 |
| | Attitude toward | 9.41 | 3.00 | 3.14 | 8.20 | 0.00 |

Table 5. Group Comparisons for Attitude Toward the Brand

| Condition | Condition | M Diff. | (SE) | p |
|------------|-----------------|---------|-------|------|
| | | | | |
| Ad-Ad | Ad-Article | -0.17 | (.07) | .02* |
| | Article-Ad | -0.22 | (.07) | .00* |
| | Article-Article | -0.39 | (.07) | .00* |
| | | | | |
| Ad-Article | Ad-Ad | 0.17 | (.07) | .02* |
| | Article-Ad | -0.06 | (.07) | .41 |
| | Article-Article | -0.22 | (.07) | .00* |
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-------|-------|------|
| Article-Ad | Ad-Ad | 0.22 | (.07) | .00* |
| | Ad-Article | 0.06 | (.07) | .41 |
| | Article-Article | -0.16 | (.07) | .02* |
| | | | | |
| Article-Article | Ad-Ad | 0.39 | (.07) | .00* |
| | Ad-Article | 0.22 | (.07) | .00* |
| | Article-Ad | 0.16 | (.07) | .02* |
| | | | | |
| *Mean difference is significant at the .05 level. | | | | |

Furthermore, gender represents a significant overall covariate ($F(1,573) = 6.17, p < .03$), as are interest in MP3 players, candy, DVD players, and sports shoes for each of the four repeated measures. The more interested our respondents are in the product category, the higher they score on attitude toward the newly presented brands.

Purchase Intentions Across Conditions

In our third hypothesis, we predict that participants who read news stories about the brands and those who read news stories first and then view ads will record a higher intention to purchase the brands than those who see ads first followed by news articles or those exposed only to repetitive advertising. Our third MANCOVA indicates that participants in the four conditions differ in terms of their inclination to purchase the brands ($F(3,575) = 4.33, p < .005$), such that those in the two synergistic conditions indicate higher purchase intention scores than those in the advertising alone condition. That is, for our sample of participants, repetitive advertising is less effective in generating behavioral intentions than is a combination of publicity and advertising.

With publicity alone, the participants score significantly higher on intention to purchase only for the Sonex MP3 player ($F = 3.528; p = .015$) and RoVision DVD player ($F = 6.284; p = .000$), compared with the situations in which we combine advertising with publicity or feature ads only.

Moreover, gender again emerges as a significant covariate for our sample of respondents, such that women are more likely to purchase the two nontechnical brands than are men (candy $F(1,580) = 23.48, p < .000$; sports shoes $F(1,580) = 3.258, p < .07$). No gender differences appear for the two technical brands in terms of intention to purchase. Interest in MP3 players, as well as in candy, DVD players, and sports shoes,

again provide significant covariates for each of the four repeated measures. The more interested students are in the product category, the more likely they were to purchase the brands we presented.

Ad Message Believability Across Conditions

Our fourth and last hypothesis posits that ad message believability should be higher when we combine exposure to banner advertising with exposure to brand publicity, rather than when only banner ads appear, such that viewing publicity first should generate higher ad message believability scores than will viewing ads before the news article. Surprisingly, yet consistent with Wang's (2006) findings, our analysis reveals no significant differences across conditions for ad message believability (see Figure 2). Therefore, our fourth hypothesis does not receive support. Ad message believability follows a similar pattern for the two more technical brands, and the two less-technical brands also trace similar ad message believability paths across conditions (see Figure 2). For the two technical brands, the computed means for ad message believability are greatest when publicity is followed by advertising, whereas for the two non-technical brands, the means for ad message believability are higher when advertising is followed by publicity (see Table 6).

Figure 2. Ad Message Believability Across Conditions

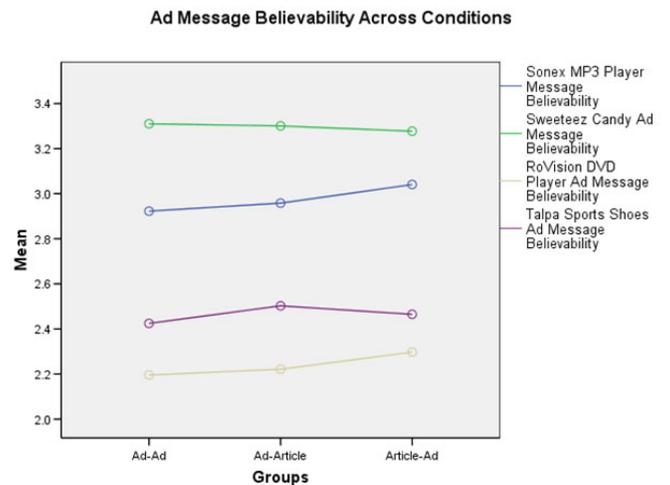


Table 6. Ad Message Believability Across Conditions

| | Groups | Mean | SD | N |
|---|------------|------|------|-----|
| Sonex MP3 Player Ad Message Believability | Ad-Ad | 2.92 | 1.05 | 142 |
| | Ad-Article | 2.96 | 1.00 | 143 |

| | | | | |
|--|------------|------|------|-----|
| | Article-Ad | 3.04 | 0.90 | 146 |
| | | | | |
| Sweeteez Candy Ad Message Believability | Ad-Ad | 3.31 | 1.09 | 142 |
| | Ad-Article | 3.30 | 1.00 | 143 |
| | Article-Ad | 3.28 | 1.04 | 146 |
| | | | | |
| RoVision DVD Player Ad Message Believability | Ad-Ad | 2.20 | 0.66 | 142 |
| | Ad-Article | 2.22 | 0.57 | 143 |
| | Article-Ad | 2.30 | 0.56 | 146 |
| | | | | |
| Talpa Sports Shoes Ad Message Believability | Ad-Ad | 2.42 | 0.68 | 142 |
| | Ad-Article | 2.50 | 0.65 | 143 |
| | Article-Ad | 2.47 | 0.69 | 146 |

FINDINGS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this study, we attempt to compare the effectiveness of exposure to an unknown brand on the Internet using banner ads, news articles, or a combination of the two. We measure brand communication effectiveness with three dependent variables: attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and intention to purchase. We also measure ad message believability to assess whether exposure to both news and advertising about a brand on the Internet has a beneficial effect on the believability of the advertising message. Our hypotheses are based on the idea that a synergistic effect occurs when advertisers integrate two brand communication tactics: advertising and publicity. We draw additional theoretical support for our hypotheses about the superiority of a banner ad-news article combination from consumer information processing and public relations literature.

Our results show that exposing students to a combination of banner ads and news articles is more effective in generating positive ad and brand attitudes on the Internet than is showing them banner ads only. In addition, combining advertising with objective news about the brand generates higher intentions to purchase than does exposing participants to advertising alone.

We also observe a difference between technical and nontechnical brands for this sample of participants with regard to attitude toward the brand across the four conditions. Publicity followed by advertising is more effective for generating positive brand attitudes in the case of the two technical brands (Sonex MP3 player and RoVision DVD player), whereas for the two nontechnical brands (Sweeteez candy and Talpa sports shoes), advertising followed by objective news appears to work better.

Our findings thus support the idea of combining advertising with publicity when trying to maximize brand communication effectiveness in an online environment. The sequence of brand publicity and advertising is especially important for the online environment, where consumers can easily access both. We caution practitioners, however, that this research does not examine established brands, which carry the baggage associated with preexisting meanings, and therefore, our findings are most relevant for new brands.

We also find support for the superiority of a synergistic advertising-publicity condition compared with the use of advertising alone. Testing for a synergistic effect has been an ongoing endeavor for many scholars who have embraced the IMC framework (e.g., Chang and Thorson 2004; Naik and Raman 2004). Our findings encourage managers to coordinate their Internet advertising with news about the brand for a more successful brand communications plan.

In addition to this synergistic effect, we offer a possible explanation for why the news article-banner ad synergy works best for generating higher brand attitudes, namely, combining a visual Internet advertisement format with a narrative about the brand. Exposing participants to a news story about the brand, in addition to a banner ad, may have generated the more positive brand attitudes, because the articles in our study feature only text that provides newsworthy information about the brand in a sequential fashion. In contrast, the banner ads are highly visual and feature little copy. In her study of how consumers generate narratives about brands after exposure to narrative ads, Escalas (2004) concludes that narrative structures help consumers interpret brand meanings and generate positive brand attitudes. Thus, the exposure

conditions for the news story should have generated more positive brand attitudes and behavioral intentions than those without the narrative. Further study is warranted to distinguish between the effects of news articles as opposed to those of narrative advertisement formats. In addition, in the print media environment, readers appear to have a hard time distinguishing advertorials from editorial content (Cameron and Ju-Pak 2000). Given the versatility of the Internet, news articles and narrative advertisements may be even harder to distinguish between for consumers.

To assess whether exposing students to news and banner advertisements about new brands on the Internet has a beneficial effect on the believability of the advertising message, we also measure ad message believability. The third-party endorsement theoretical concept (Cameron 1994; Hallahan 1999) explains why publicity, especially objective news, may be the best tactic to combine with advertising. That is, publicity benefits from the credibility of news stories, which is vital for advertising in an Internet environment in which users likely process messages that they deem not to be advertising more closely. Advertisers should address this aspect of consumer behavior on the Web by developing ads that work well in a low attention processing condition (Heath and Hyder 2004) or designing integrated campaigns that combine advertising with other brand messages, such as publicity.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

One limitation of this study relates to the sample of participants. A homogenous population, experienced with the Internet, students are not representative of the general population. To extend the findings beyond college students to the wider Internet-browsing population, further studies should draw a sample of the general population.

As a second limitation, this study uses only fictitious brands as stimuli. Similar to other studies that employ fictitious brands to evaluate brand message effectiveness (e.g., Ang and Lim 2006; Lee and Faber 2007), we consider this approach necessary to prevent the confounding effects of differing levels of prior knowledge and brand experience on participants' responses. However, to evaluate the predictions developed in this study more fully, additional research should examine established brands as well as new ones.

Beyond the effects of brand familiarity, further studies might test different executions of advertisements and news articles that could differ in their argument strength and type. Building

on previous findings about effectiveness, we study banner ads, but Internet advertising appears in various formats, ranging from blogs to viral advertising. Therefore, researchers might examine the brand communications effectiveness of combinations of any of these formats. Several recent studies examine new formats individually (e.g., Chu and Kamal 2008; Porter and Golan 2006). For example, Chu and Kamal (2008) investigate the potential of blogs to influence brand attitudes and find that blogger trustworthiness plays a significant role in the effectiveness of the brand message. Thus, when blogs serve as a promotional medium, exposure to blogs as supplements to news (e.g., by placing links on news sites) should yield increased blogger trustworthiness and therefore more effective brand-related blog postings. Similar to our investigation of the combination of banner ads with news articles, further studies could examine whether the number of news sites that link to a blog increases the blogger's trustworthiness and consequently brand message effectiveness.

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APPENDIX: STIMULUS MATERIALS

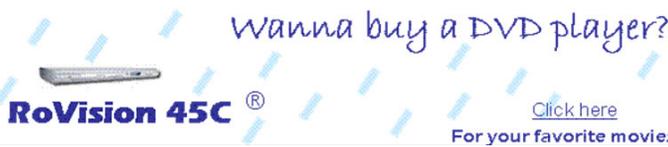
Ads

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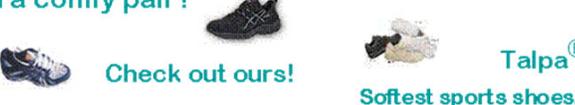
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Grab some candy



Sweeteez[®]

Need a comfy pair?



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News articles

Sonex MP3 player

March 5, 2005 - Technology Section

First Look: Sonex Scores with New MP3 Player

Eric Dahlen, Tech News

Everyones seems to be gunning for MP3 players. Joining competitors like the Rio Carbon and the Creative Zen Micro is Sonex's \$230 P20. I tested a shipping model of the 6GB, color-screen player. The highlight of the P20 is a 1.5-inch display combined with a hardware-and-software interface. Navigating your music library is easy with the touch-sensitive slider control. You can browse by artist, album, genre, or song title. The player lets you add individual songs to an on-the-go playlist.

More Features: The P20 does more than play music: You can also listen to and record FM radio, record audio with a built-in microphone, display text files, and view JPG photos. The P20's battery is replaceable and rechargeable. The company rates the battery's run time between charges at about 12 hours.

RoVision DVD player

February 17, 2005 - Technology Section

RoVision Announces New DVD Player Line

Mike Stern, Tech News

The new RoVision DVD player lineup is available in a choice of silver or black and designed with a new ultra-slim profile. A broad range of features highlight the players' ease of use. These include Variable Speed Playback with sound and subtitles that allows the viewer to watch a DVD one-and-a-half times faster while audio and subtitles play at normal speed, 11 visual effects during still image (JPEG) playback, and the option to save any desired image to the player to use as a custom start-up screen. Two step-up models feature a dimmable illuminated disc tray, a RoVision original design solution.

Other available features include 10-disc memory and one-touch replay that instantly recalls the last seven seconds of video viewed. In addition, RoVision DVD players offer playback compatibility with a full range of formats.

Sweeteez candy

February 23, 2005 - Social Section

Candy of the week: Sweeteez Caramilk Maple

Joe Mochrie, Toronto News

With Caramilk Maple, Sweeteez adds a hint of maple to its popular chocolate bar. As with other "fusion" bars, the company is hoping that the combination of two sweet ingredients will spell success. In terms of packaging, instead of employing the swirls of color the competition has resorted to in this chocolate bar war, Sweeteez continue to rely on their trademark deep green wrapper, accented, in this variation, with a gentle streak of maple brown. The highlight of this wrapper is the candied maple leaf.

They say "Sweeteez Caramilk Maple brings together two Canadian icons - Caramilk and the flavor of maple syrup. With creamy, melt-in-your mouth chocolate pockets and the natural flavor of sweet maple syrup, it's one hundred percent Sweeteez quality," says John Killip, VP of Marketing at Sweeteez. "By bringing maple to its centre, you might just say that the Sweeteez Caramilk secret just got a little sweeter..."

Talpa sports shoes

March 20, 2005 - Sports Section

Talpa launches MyShoe

Mike Perkovski, Fashion News

Launched at the Romanian Tennis Championships, and firmly placing their footprint in sports shoe history, local brand Talpa introduces MyShoe. Using a revolutionary computer-aided system to measure your feet, MyShoe will not only ensure you get the perfect fit from your sports shoe, but allows you to choose your own design as well. The three step process to MyShoe, carried out by a Talpa fitting expert, ensures customized shoes fit specific needs, regardless of individual foot make-up.

Talpa utilizes a dynamic foot scan system to measure your feet's weight distribution and pressure when running, and what technological features will provide the best support. For MyShoe, Talpa determines the exact size of each foot and the support required for the perfect fit. MyShoe ensures the best possible fit for your running shoe, football boot or tennis shoe.