

Public Abstract

Anca Cristina Micu

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Testing for a Synergistic Effect Between Online Publicity and Advertising in an Integrated Marketing Communications Context

Advisor: Dr. Esther Thorson

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What is more likely to make us like or even purchase a product: publicity or advertising? Do women prefer the latest L'Oreal hair dye because they have read an article about it in Cosmopolitan? Or because they have seen Heather Locklear wearing it in an ad? Or, reading the article first and seeing the ad later did the trick?

This dissertation compared these four exposure conditions (only ad, article-ad, ad-article, and only article) in terms of which would be more likely to make consumers prefer a product over another. The study tests two theoretical concepts for the first time. First, integrated marketing communications, which argues for the use of a combination of marketing communication tools such as publicity and advertising, as opposed to just one. Second, the concept of third-party endorsement, which praises the superiority of publicity over advertising in terms of effectively informing consumers about a product.

Over 600 students participated in an online experiment that exposed them to either ads, articles or both. Ads and articles were designed for four different products: an MP3 player, candy, a DVD player, and sports shoes. The brands were made up so that attitudes toward the four products were not influenced by prior knowledge.

Results show that the pure publicity exposure condition and the two combination conditions, which included an ad-article or article-ad exposure, were more effective in terms of brand communications impact than the pure advertising condition. The pure publicity condition was found to be more effective than any of the other three.

Hence, the integrated marketing communications concept was confirmed in terms of advertising being more effective when used in combination with public relations than when used alone. The third-party endorsement concept was also confirmed, findings suggesting that pure public relations is more effective than any communication campaign that includes advertising. So, brand communications managers are encouraged to include publicity in their strategic communication campaigns.