

Public Abstract

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THE EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL TONE AND NARRATIVE STYLE ON THE MEMORY LINK BETWEEN BRAND NAME AND MEDICAL CONDITION TREATED IN DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER PHARMACEUTICAL ADVERTISING

This study examined how emotional tone and narrative style in direct-to-consumer (DTC) pharmaceutical advertising affect the memory link between the brand name advertised and the medical condition treated. For this study, emotional tone was defined as either positive or coactive (containing both positive and negative aspects) and narrative style was operationalized by two levels, high or low presence of narrative style.

The design was a 2 (emotional tone) x 2 (narrative style) x 3 (advertisement) within-subjects repeated-measures experiment. Participants viewed 12 direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements. A multiple choice recognition test and open-ended cued-recall test were administered to measure memory.

Memory, both recognition and cued recall, were tested by submitting the data to a repeated-measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Findings suggest that narrative style has a stronger effect on coactive advertisements than positive advertisements. However, that impact is negative, meaning that when narrative style is used, recognition for coactive ads is decreased.

Since DTC advertising is here to stay, it is imperative to fully understand how to convey the information effectively to the patient. While testing memory in general is important, this study tests for very specific variables making it critical to the mass media research field. This thesis expands on previous research in the field of memory, specifically how narratives and emotional tone can affect patients and consumers ability to link the brand name of the drug with the appropriate medical condition; however, as with an study, further research is needed. As one of the first glimpses into the relationship between narratives, emotional tone and memory, this thesis will provide a foundation for future exploration of how to effectively communicate information in DTC pharmaceutical advertising.