

THAT DRUG TREATS WHAT?  
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

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ABSTRACT

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.