

THE EFFECTS OF MORTALITY-SALIENCE INDUCING DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER  
PRESCRIPTION DRUG COMMERCIALS ON VIEWER ATTITUDE TOWARD  
HIGH AND LOW STATUS BRANDS

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ABSTRACT

This research sought to understand whether or not direct-to-consumer prescription drug ads (DTC ads) made people think about their own death (referred to as mortality salience) and what effects these thoughts had on people's opinions of brands of varying status.

Study 1 used a free-writing questionnaire to collect brands. Study 2 used scales to rate participant attitude toward 12 DTC ads. Study 2 showed the the ads for Cymbalta and Plavix made people the most anxious; the ads for Detrol LA and Crestor made people the least anxious. Study 3 used word completions to measure for mortality salience. Study 3 also provided additional brand ratings. Study 4 used a lexical decision task to measure for mortality salience; results showed that participants who watched the ads for Cymbalta and Plavix responded faster to death words. The status of brand had no effect on how participants rated the brand. Additional signal detection analysis showed participants to be less sensitive to death words after watching the Cymbalta and Plavix ads. Participant criterion bias did not vary across word type or between condition.