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Article

Does co-brand placement work on ad recall? Exploring the impact of co-brand placement in storytelling animated advertising

¿Funciona la colocación de marcas conjuntas en la retención de anuncios? Explorando el impacto de la colocación de marcas conjuntas en la publicidad animada con narrativas

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Abstract: This study explored the effect of storytelling familiarity and co-branding on ad recall. This study used the "Jack Be Nimble" popular character used by Geico advertisements to study the effect of brand and co-brand on ad recall. First, the study explored the impact that consumers' familiarity with the storytelling character (Jack Be Nimble) had on the ad recall. Subsequently, it studied how consumers' involvement with the product category (fashion) influenced ad recall of the co-sponsored brand (Banana Republic). The results showed that the ad recall was significantly higher when participants indicated being highly familiar with the storytelling character (Jack Be Nimble) and with the brand (Geico). In the case of the co-brand effect, the results showed no significant relationship between brand familiarity (Banana Republic) and ad recall. However, the results revealed that participants who remembered the co-brand (Banana Republic) said being highly involved with the product category (fashion).

Keywords: Storytelling familiarity, co-branding, ad recall, consumer involvement.

JEL Classification: M31; M37.

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Resumen: Este estudio examinó el efecto de la familiaridad con la narrativa y el co-branding en la retención publicitaria. Se utilizó al popular personaje "Jack Be Nimble," empleado en anuncios de Geico, para analizar el impacto de la marca principal y la marca conjunta en la retención del anuncio. Primero, el estudio investigó cómo la familiaridad de los consumidores con el personaje de la narrativa (Jack Be Nimble) influía en la retención del anuncio. Posteriormente, se evaluó cómo el nivel de involucramiento de los consumidores con la categoría de producto (moda) afectaba la retención del anuncio de la marca co-patrocinadora (Banana Republic). Los resultados mostraron que la retención publicitaria fue significativamente mayor cuando los participantes indicaron un alto nivel de familiaridad tanto con el personaje de la narrativa (Jack Be Nimble) como con la marca principal (Geico). En cuanto al efecto del co-branding, no se encontró una relación significativa entre la familiaridad con la marca conjunta (Banana Republic) y la retención del anuncio. Sin embargo, los resultados revelaron que los participantes que recordaron la marca conjunta (Banana Republic) reportaron un alto nivel de involucramiento con la categoría de producto (moda).

Palabras clave: Familiaridad con la narrativa, co-branding, retención publicitaria, involucramiento del consumidor.

Clasificación JEL: M31; M37.

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1. Introduction

In a world cluttered with advertisements, it can sometimes take time to successfully differentiate a brand from others in a way that is meaningful enough to establish a strong connection with consumers. The challenge for marketers is constantly discovering new ways to stand out from the clutter and capture the consumer's attention. An advertising avenue yet to be more empirically explored is cartoon storytelling as a humor appeal for product placement, which is expected to lead to higher brand recall and purchase intention (Moriarty, 1996, Hitchon & Jura, 1997). Numerous scholars have identified animated storytelling as an execution form that positively affects memory and attitudes toward the brands (Hitchon & Jura, 1997). However, more research is needed to measure its effect on brand recall (Lai et al., 2007).

One of the more successful cartoon storytelling campaigns using animation and humor appeal in the United States is the series of Geico's "Short Stories and Tall Tales" ads started in 2010 (Geico, 2016). Geico employed a series of televised storytelling cartoons that showcased a man reading a classic children's story with characters that required Geico insurance to cover the accidents they were involved in. As expected, the Geico brand placement is explicitly introduced at the beginning and end of the stories. Nevertheless, Geico's stories spontaneously interject another brand placement for a particular product in the final remarks of the advertisements, such as a "Sleep Number" bed, Crate & Barrel, and Banana Republic. Campaigns like Geico's raise the concern of how effective a co-brand placement in a story-telling cartoon ad concerns consumers' brand recall. Thus, this paper explored the effect of co-branding in animated story-telling ads.

Animation or cartoons used with a humor appeal in advertising are used to entertain and persuade both children and adults (Leiner et al., 2004). In addition, videogames, television, and Internet productions use animated cartoon productions extensively (Nasir & Jalbani, 2009). However, more research appears to be needed on how cartoons in advertisements using humor appeal affect brand and co-brand recall in adult consumers. Therefore, this study aims to measure the effect of co-branding on a storytelling humor appeal cartoon advertisement by exploring the relationships of brand/character familiarity, product involvement on consumers' ad recall, and co-brand recall. Specifically, this study uses the case of the "Jack Be Nimble" commercial from Geico's short cartoon stories to accomplish two objectives: first, to test the relationship between consumers' familiarity with the brand (Geico), and to test the impact that consumers' familiarity with the story-telling character (Jack Be Nimble) has on ad recall. Second, to explore how consumer involvement with fashion brands and familiarity with the co-brand relates to the co-brand recall effect.

This study is important for empirical contributions and managerial implications for account planners and creative directors in the advertising industry. Recognizing the impact that a humor appeal in cartoon advertising has for a sponsored brand and co-brand across segments could be beneficial in identifying secondary brands, partnerships, and alliances in marketing communication.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Humor appeal in cartoon advertising

In terms of cartoon advertisements, for the most part, the existing research tends to focus more on the effect of utilizing cartoons for advertisements targeting children. For example, in the health and wellness field, researchers use cartoon advertisements on children to test whether they influence the child to eat healthier food (Kelly et al., 2008). However, further research on the influence of the use of cartoons on brand recall and purchase intention in adult consumers would be beneficial for marketers, considering it may reveal new avenues for persuasion in advertising.

Humorous advertising has been found to impact consumers' attention, memory, and positive attitude toward desirable products (Chung & Zhao, 2011; Heiser et al., 2008; Lee & Mason, 1999). A humor appeal also elicits desirable responses, making ads more likeable and further memorable (Belch & Belch, 1984; Rossiter & Percy, 1997). In addition to the likability of the ad, studies of humorous appeals have suggested that this form of advertising increases liking for the brand (Gelb & Pickett, 1983), which relates positively to advertising recall (Chung & Zhao, 2011). It is expected that consumers who find a message funny may very well transfer that positive emotion and attitude toward the product and the brand (Aaker et al., 1986; Batra & Stayman, 1990; Lee & Mason, 1999). The same can be true for children; research has shown that the use of fun spokes-characters in ads, and repeated exposure to such ads, makes the transfer of positive affect towards the product or brand more likely (Kelly et al., 2008). While others have shown that humorous ads may not necessarily lead to a positive brand attitude or purchase intention (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992), most of the advertising research as well as marketing practitioners believe that humor is superior to non-humor in gaining observer attention and recall (Heiser et al., 2008; Madden & Weinberger, 1982).

Concerning animated or cartoon forms of advertising, the literature has documented that animated figures in advertising can significantly influence TV advertisement effectiveness via enhancement of viewers' attention and impact on respective attitudes towards the advertised brand (Heiser et al. 2008). According to Leiner et al. (2004), advertisements that include animated cartoons are particularly versatile and successful in overcoming barriers of culture, age, time and literacy; these can be utilized in other countries with minimal language and context adaptations.

In the "Jack Be Nimble" commercial of Geico's Short Stories campaign, the storyteller begins to tell the classic story until suddenly Jack knocks over the candle and lights his own pants and all his belongings on fire. The ad states, "since Jack had Renter's Insurance from *Geico*, he got full replacement on his belongings, and he even has new pants he ordered from *Banana Republic*" (see Geico, 2016). This is supposed to be a humorous assertion, but is it even recognized in the story? If so, will it lessen the recall of the sponsored brand? Unfortunately, there is a lack of research in understanding the impact of a co-branded humor appeal in advertising using animated storytelling.

According to Heiser et al. (2008), animated spokes-characters in advertising exceed the impact of human spokespersons in terms of TV advertisement efficacy, as they are highly adaptable, easily controllable and clearly identified as a product symbol. Huang et al. (2011) investigated the advertisement effectiveness of endorsements from animated spokes-characters and found that animated figures enhance brand impression, improve advertisement communication affects and attract viewers' attention, suggesting that they are a very valuable tool for increasing positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions

Tversky et al. (2002) argued that animation facilitates several psychological effects, influencing human cognitive processing and attention. Animated characters, in particular cartoons and spokes-characters, have been shown to be associated with children's recognition of, and positive attitudes towards, food products (Neeley & Schumann, 2004), creating long-term brand recognition and loyalty from an early age. When children have repeated and food-specific exposures to cartoons and spokes-characters, such as when they are used for a limited range of products, they are more likely to transfer positive effects associated with the character to the advertised product (Mizerski, 1995). Spokes-characters act as visual cues to represent a brand's attributes (Garretson & Burton, 2005), such as fun and fantasy, that are appealing to children. In the same way, celebrities and sports people add credibility to the branded product and attract attention to the advertisement (Nelson & Deborah, 2017).

2.2. Co-branding Recall

The literature in branding strategies "focuses on investigating how far a *single* brand can extend and shows little interest in co-branding that involves more than two established brands" (Ahn & Sung, 2011). Further, the existing research on co-branding seems to focus more on how respondents perceive the associations between two brands, and their affective response toward said association, than on brand recall.

According to Romaniuk (2013), there are two main challenges with co-branded advertising: brand linkage and consumer attention. Research shows that viewers have a hard time remembering advertised brands, if they even pay attention to the advertisement instead of trying to avoid it. Having two brands in the same advertisement might make the process even more difficult, with the risk of losing the consumers' attention altogether (Romaniuk, 2013).

Romaniuk (2013) states that there are occasions when one brand can benefit from using co-branding strategies, such as when the goal is to attract greater attention, tapping into a different audience, or to facilitate a positioning message. Yet, the author warns of potential negative outcomes of co-branding: risk of losing consumer attention, the message of the ad being attributed to the other brand, or potential negative consequences of the ad creating a positive impact for the other brand (Romaniuk, 2013). In general, placing two distinct brands in one single advertisement creates competition for consumer attention, and thus requires careful execution to avoid fragmenting the attention of consumers (Romaniuk, 2013).

According to Ahn and Sung (2011), one way to account for this is to ensure an appropriate fit between the two brands to be used in the same ad. Research demonstrates that "between-partner fit significantly influences co-branding evaluations, and that this fit is a function of both functional and symbolic dimensions. Similarity between symbolic meaning between partners is important to leveraging the success of co-branding activities," more so than functional fit (Ahn & Sung, 2011, p. 421-424). Eye-tracking studies demonstrate that consumers focus on one item at a time, even when multiple items are present. More vivid items can draw and hold consumer attention disproportionately.

In the case of online advertisements, Nguyen et al. (2017) found that the presence of a second brand does not have a positive effect on ad recognition, and in fact has a negative effect on brand recall; this effect becomes worse when the ad's context focuses on the other brand within the partnership. The authors reference consumers' selective attention theory to explain the phenomenon, which states that, regardless of whether they are brand users or not, if consumers do not pay enough attention to the second brand, then it will not get processed into their memory (Nguyen et al., 2017).

Prior research in co-branding shows that the fit between partner brands is a fundamental factor in determining the success of co-branding and finds that co-branding is evaluated more positively when consumers perceive high between-partner fit, rather than low between-partner fit (Dickinson & Heath, 2006; Park et al., 2004; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). The authors suggest that between-partner fit significantly influences co-branding evaluations and that this fit is a function of both functional and symbolic dimensions. In particular, symbolic fit may have a greater effect on evaluations than functional fit, which suggests that similarities in symbolic meaning between partners are important to leveraging the success of co-branding activities. In this regard, it is suggested that symbolic fit provides more appropriate cues to evoke favorable attitudes than does functional fit.

About the second brand or co-brand, it is said that adding a second brand to online advertising does not positively affect ad recognition; one explanation is that both brand users and non-users do not attend to the second brand sufficiently for it to get processed into memory (Ahn & Sung, 2011). Consistent with previous theories of selective attention (e.g., Taylor et al., 1978), if the second brand fails to be noticed, then its presence has no opportunity to attract attention to the advertisement. Consequently, the presence of a second brand does not impact an audience's memory of the advertisement. For example, in the context of online banner advertisements, the presence of another brand has a negative effect on brand recall. Such effect is worsened for brands when the context of the advertisement focuses on the other brand in the partnership (Ahn & Sung, 2011).

Within the scope of online banner advertisements, findings establish that promoting two brands (as opposed to one) has no positive effect on the consumer's memory of the ad (Nguyen et al., 2017). Consumers also have a lower propensity for retrieving co-advertised brands from memory. Combined, these two findings indicate that the net effect of co-branded advertising on memory-related outcomes is the same or lower than that for single-brand advertising (Nguyen et al., 2017).

According to Romaniuk (2013), there are two main challenges with co-branded advertising: brand linkage and consumer attention. Research shows that viewers have a hard time remembering advertised brands, if they even pay attention to the advertisement instead of trying to avoid it. Having two brands in the same advertisement might make the process even more difficult, with the risk of losing the consumers' attention altogether. Among co-branding strategies considered, pulsing the brand throughout a television advertisement helps attract attention (Teixeira et al., 2010). For example, eye-tracking studies demonstrate that consumers focus on one item at a time, even when multiple items are present. More vivid items can draw and hold consumer attention disproportionately (Romaniuk, 2013). It is said that there might be situations where the brand benefits from the presence of another brand, such as through attracting more attention, sourcing a different audience, or facilitating a position or message (Romaniuk, 2013).

However, it is claimed that the presence of a second brand in an advertisement means advertisers should also consider the possibility of losing consumer attention to the other brand, risking misattribution of the message to the other brand, and any negative consequences of the advertisement having a positive impact on the other brand (Romaniuk, 2013). In general, Romaniuk (2013) suggested that the presence of a second brand in a single piece of advertising creates more competition for consumer attention, and it runs the risk of stealing the brand's spotlight. Thus, dual-branding scenarios require careful execution to ensure that consumer attention is not so fragmented that neither brand is appropriately noticed.

2.3. Brand familiarity and Brand Recall

The literature in advertising (Burke & Edell, 1986; Pae et al., 2002) supports the premise that brand familiarity plays a significant moderating role in advertisement effectiveness. Brand familiarity affects the relationship between consumers' attitudes toward the ad and the brand (Burke & Edell, 1986), which simultaneously impact brand recognition (Brennan & Babin, 2004) and brand recall (Kent & Allen, 1994).

Brand familiarity measures the "share of mind" that a consumer poses about a particular brand as a result of a direct or indirect experience with the brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Kent & Allen, 1994). The strength of brand familiarity is determined by the kind of associations that the brand produces in consumer memory (Campbell & Keller, 2003). The likelihood of remembering a familiar brand is higher than when consumers are exposed to the unfamiliar (Brennan & Babin, 2004; Campbell & Keller, 2003).

Based on the framework of the effect of product involvement and brand familiarity on brand recall, relationships between brand familiarity and ad recall and product involvement and ad recall were hypothesized in a humor appeal animated-storytelling ad. This study uses the animated series of Geico's "Short Stories and Tall Tales" ads started in 2010, which uses a product placement (Banana Republic) as an advertised co-brand.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are presented:

H1: Consumer's brand familiarity with the sponsored brand (Geico) affects consumers' ad recall.

H2: Consumer's familiarity with the storytelling character (Jack Be Nimble) affects ad recall.

H3: Consumer's brand familiarity with the co-brand (Banana Republic) affects consumers' co-brand recall in advertising.

2.4. Product Involvement and Brand Recall

Consumers' involvement with the products is a determinant of consumers' attention (Pitta & Prevel Katsanis, 1995). The literature indicates that when consumers are engaged with certain products, they automatically access their prior information, making advertising messages more viable for them (Baker et al., 1986). Schmitt (2012) suggested that psychological engagement is reliant on consumers' needs, motives and goals, which led them to become active recipients of information. Evidence suggest that product involvement facilitates brand awareness and thus brand recall, facilitating purchases (Mohr, 2013).

A consumer's involvement level can have significant effects on consumer attitudes towards the product being advertised. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) suggests that attitude formation via the central or peripheral route depends on the degree of engagement exhibited by the receiver in processing the information (Bhutada et al., 2017). Attitude change under high-involvement situations will occur as a result of careful elaboration of the content of the persuasive message using the central route (Bhutada et al., 2017). Consumers who are more involved with fashion are more prone to have more interaction with brands, increasing their awareness, and thus facilitating co-brand recall (Mohr, 2013). Therefore, it is expected that consumers involved with fashion brands will be more prone to pay attention to the co-brand (line: "Jack has a new pair of pants that he ordered from Banana Republic"). The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Consumer's involvement with fashion brands affects co-brand recall in advertising.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The data was collected using an online survey conducted through a national panel in collaboration with Dynata Research, using a non-random sampling method. The data was collected using a quota sampling technique, controlling for ethnic representation of Non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and African Americans. A validation verification question was included in the questionnaire. After the data was cleaned, a total sample of 3,179 was used in this study to measure the impact of familiarity with the sponsored brand and familiarity with the storytelling character on consumers' ad recall.

The questionnaire included previously validated scales (Sprott et al., 2009). Brand familiarity was measured using three items initially developed by Laroche et al. (1996). The product involvement scale of Kapferer and Laurent (1993) was adapted to measure product involvement in this study. Participants responded using a 7-point semantic differential scale. Ad recall was measured using a single ad including 10 brands in each category (insurance and apparel) to avoid bias. An item labeled "I don't recall" was included. Cronbach's alphas were run to test the internal consistency of the responses. The results showed alphas higher than 0.90, indicating a good reliability.

3.2. Data analysis

To measure the relationship between these two variables on ad recall, a logistic regression was performed. Logistic regression was used to investigate if it was possible to predict whether consumers who were familiar with the story of Jack Be Nimble and with the Geico brand would be likely to remember the ad. The binary group for the dependent variable was defined as 0 for "did not recall the ad" and 1 for "yes recalled the ad." The results showed positive significant coefficients indicating significant differences between those who were familiar with Geico ($\beta = 0.561$, sig. = 0.000) and with Jack Be Nimble ($\beta = 0.719$, sig. = 0.10). Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported. The predictive power was 64 percent, with a chi-square of 170.85 (sig. = 0.000) and R^2 of 0.072. This is as expected, considering that more factors, which were not taken into consideration in this study, might affect consumers' ad recall. Thus, out of 3,179 participants, 2,201 indicated they did recall the ad. The likelihood to recall the ad increased when participants were familiar with the story and the brand.

To measure the impact of brand familiarity and product involvement on consumers' co-brand recall, a logistic regression was run with selected data. A total of 2,201 participants, those who indicated they recalled the ad, were included in the data analysis. The binary group for the dependent variable was defined as 0 for "did not recall the co-brand" and 1 for "yes recalled the co-brand." The results indicated that the overall equation was significant to 0.003, but brand familiarity was not significantly affecting the likelihood to recall the co-brand in the ad ($\beta = 0.039$, sig. = 0.881). Thus hypothesis 3 is not supported.

However, participants who indicated they were highly involved with fashion brands were more likely to remember the co-brand ($\beta = 0.193$, sig. = 0.001). The overall predictive power was 88.7 percent, but with a chi square of 11.41 (sig. = 0.003). The overall percentage of participants who recalled the co-brand was 11 percent, and the test indicated that those who were more likely to remember it were more likely to be those who perceived themselves as being highly involved with fashion brands. Thus, hypothesis 4 is supported.

4. Discussion, Managerial implications, and Limitations

The findings indicated that the ad recall was significantly higher when participants indicated being highly familiar with the story character (Jack Be Nimble) and with the brand (Geico). In the case of the co-brand effect, the results showed no significant relationship between brand familiarity (Banana Republic) and ad recall. However, the results revealed that participants who remembered the co-brand (Banana Republic) stated being highly involved with the product category (fashion).

Finally, there are several contributions attained by this study that provide critical insights to advertisers. First, it provided evidence to support the contention that using a popular and well-known story-telling character effectively affects ad recall. Second, it provided evidence that brand familiarity predicts brand recall in animated humor appeal advertising. Lastly, it demonstrated that co-brand placement in advertising is effective when the audience has a considerably high level of involvement with the product category of the co-brand. Yet further statistical analysis is needed to test the moderating effect.

Finally, despite the contribution made by this study, some limitations are identified. First, this study employed a one-ad message experimental design, limiting the generalizability of the results. A multiple message design is recommended for future studies. Second, the category of the sponsored and cosponsored brands was limited to Geico and Banana Republic, and subsequently to two industries, insurance and fashion. Future research can test if congruent or incongruent categories of the product can have an effect on the results. Lastly, the storytelling character used in the Geico campaign (Jack Be Nimble) might be unknown across groups, such as low acculturated minority consumers for example.

Therefore, future research should be conducted in testing differences among cultural groups, ethnicities, age, and gender.

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