The Role of Activation in Advertising

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This research examines the direct and indirect effects of activation, which is defined as engaging in physical action in order to reveal the conveyed message, on advertisement evaluations and product attitudes. Findings reveal that when the action is highly compatible with the message, ad processing is facilitated and ad and product evaluations are enhanced. However, when the action is less compatible with the advertisement message, activation impairs both evaluations. Implications of these findings for advertising are discussed.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The current research explores the relationships between action, advertisement evaluation, and attitudes toward the product presented in the advertisement.

Actions in the context of advertising can be considered a “foot in the door” technique, in which the advertiser initially promotes the viewer to attend to the advertisement, although the advertiser’s ultimate goal is to generate a favorable attitude toward the product. Therefore, the present research examines direct and indirect effects of actions on attitudes toward the product via the mediating variable of advertisement evaluation.

The proposed research examines physical activities that are strongly associated with the advertisement message. This type of action is labeled as the Activation technique. The activation technique includes a physical action, which can be executed immediately upon viewing the ad, and the action’s results highlight the message conveyed in the advertisement.

The effect of activation on advertisement and product evaluations is proposed to be based on the extent of compatibility between the type of action and the content of the message conveyed in the advertisement. When the physical action is congruent with the content message, activation is proposed to enhance not only the evaluation of the advertisement but also generate a favorable attitude toward the product. On the other hand, when the physical action is not congruent with the content of the message, activation is anticipated to indirectly elicit a negative attitude toward the advertised product.

The underlying mechanism for the activation effect is proposed to rely on the advertisement processing fluency. That is, ease of processing contributes to the formation of an overall impression of an advertisement. In the case of compatible activation, the action is expected to facilitate advertisement processing since the performance of the action bolsters the punch-line of the advertisement. In this situation, it is proposed, activation will increase the overall advertisement evaluation. On the other hand, in the case of a less compatible action, the action is expected to increase processing difficulty. That is, it will be harder to form an impression of the advertisement, leading to lower advertisement evaluations compared to a condition in which the same ad does not instigate an action.

The research comprises three studies all of which focus on a single physical action (i.e. turning a page upside-down) that was related either to a call to reverse the situation of the needy by donating the cost of meals, or a call to reverse the viewer’s situation by purchasing a dinner card that constitutes a routine breaker.

The first study examines the compatibility between the action and the advertisement message. Its results support the fluency of processing mechanism, which either facilitates or inhibits advertisement comprehension and consequently influences overall advertisement evaluation. The second study explores the direct effect of activation on advertisement evaluation as a function of action compatibility. The final study investigates the direct and indirect effects of action compatibility on the attitude toward the advertised product via the mediating variable of advertisement evaluation. Its findings pointed out the direct effect on attitude formation in the case of action and message compatibility. When activation was less compatible with the message, activation influenced the attitude toward the advertised product indirectly via the advertisement evaluation.

To sum, this research highlights the possible “cost” of implementing the activation technique in advertising as a function of its compatibility to the messages conveyed in the advertisement. Specifically, the effect of activation on both advertisement evaluation and attitude formation was found to be contingent upon the messages of the advertisement.

Future research may examine the compatibility between different types of actions (such as scratching or folding a page) and different types of messages. This would enable to further generalize the phenomenon.