Increasing Persuasion While Decreasing Recognition: Exploring the Interactive Effects of Product Placements on Consumers in a State of Ego-Depletion

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The present study explored the impact of ego-depletion on responses to product placements. Participants watched a sitcom with multiple product placements. Results showed that ego-depletion increased brand attitudes toward and reduced recognition of placed products with a low plot connection, a pattern consistent with past research on ego-depletion and persuasion.

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Multitasking is not always inefficient and sometimes can actually help memory, particularly in low-involvement conditions. Future studies will examine in more depth the role of mind-wandering and stimulus independent thought as well as the limits of the effect in terms of task load, the role of goals in multitasking, as well as individual differences such as attentional control.

Selected References
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The majority of people who watch television, watch during evening “primetime” hours. While they watch, they are frequently exposed to product placements stemming from a $3.36 billion dollar industry (PQ Media 2007). Importantly, before people sit down to watch primetime television, most spend their day regulating their behavior (e.g. being at work when they would rather be golfing, or working to put their kids to bed when it would be easier to just let them stay up). Past research suggests that engaging in such tasks is likely to lead to a state of “ego-depletion” (Baumeister 2002). This is important because past research shows that ego-depletion interferes with cognitive functioning on challenging intellectual tasks (Schmeichel, Vohs and Baumeister 2003). Furthermore, past research has shown when cognitive resources are limited and individuals have no motivation to process a message, the message is processed peripherally and persuasiveness (positive impact on attitudes) increases (Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983).

This suggests two hypotheses. First, when viewers are in a state of ego-depletion, they may be more positively influenced by lower plot connection (LPC) product placements—products that are subtle and not connected to the plot in a meaningful manner—because LPC placements offering no motivation for the viewer to process the placement. Motivation to process higher plot connection (HPC) product placements—products that are blatant and connected to the plot in a meaningful manner—does exist, so no differences between conditions are expected. Second, the lack of cognitive resources available will interfere with ego-depleted viewers’ ability to recognize LPC placements. HPC placements, however, are so blatant that all individuals will recognize them. This reasoning led to the following two hypotheses:

H1: For LPC product placements, individuals in an ego-depleted condition will experience a significant increase in brand attitudes. There will be no difference for HPC product placements.

H2: For LPC product placements, individuals in an ego-depleted condition will experience a significant decrease in brand recognition. There will be no difference for HPC product placements.

Method
Participants were 50 undergraduate students participating for course credit. Two participants’ results were dropped due to their inability to follow instructions. Participants arrived and participated in the study individually. The experimenter was blind to participants’ condition.

Upon arrival, half the participants were given instructions designed to result in ego-depletion. We used a standard attention regulation based ego-depletion manipulation (Schmeichel et al. 2003). Following the ego-depletion manipulation, participants watched an episode of a popular 30 minute primetime comedy television show from a major television network. The episode used in this study was chosen because pilot testing—on a different group of participants—indicated that participants liked the show, recognized the brands involved.

References
in the product placements, and had neutral brand attitudes toward those products. After participants watched the show, they reported their attitudes toward brands that were and were not placed in the show using a 7-point likert scale (1=strongly dislike to 7=strongly like). After participants evaluated the brands, they completed a recognition task in which they indicated the brands they recognized seeing in the show.

Major Findings

Manipulation Checks. After the ego-depletion manipulation, participants rated the difficulty of the video-viewing task. As expected, participants in the ego-depletion condition reported that the task was significantly more difficult than participants in the control condition (p=.001). To rule out mood as an alternative explanation, participants also completed a mood scale. Results showed no significant difference between the conditions in negative or positive mood (p>.58). These results suggest a successful ego-depletion manipulation that is not confounded with mood.

Hypothesis Tests. To begin the analysis, we first standardized the participant’s reported brand attitudes and recognition using z-scores. We did this for two reasons. First, in standardizing scores, we were able to control for previous participant attitudes toward products. Second, in standardizing the data, we were able to compare brand recognition and brand attitudes on the same scale.

A 2 x 2 x 3 (Control vs. Ego-depletion, Attitudes vs. Recognition, LPC vs. HPC vs. Not placed) mixed model ANOVA, revealed a significant three way interaction, F(2,45)=6.14, p<.01. We followed this up by examining the simple 2 x 2 (Control vs. Ego-depletion, Attitudes vs. Recognition) interaction within each level of “plot connection” (low, high, not placed).

The 2 x 2 interaction was not significant within either the not placed or the high plot connection conditions. However, in the LPC condition, there was a significant interaction between conditions, F(1,46)=7.42, p<.01. We further explored the simple effect of ego depletion on attitudes and recognition. Consistent with hypothesis 1, brand attitudes were higher among those in the ego depletion condition (M=.24) than those in the control condition (M=.24), F(1,46)=2.77, p=.05 (one-tailed). Also, consistent with hypothesis 2, recognition was higher among those in the control condition (M=.29) than those in the ego depletion condition (M=.29), F(1,46)=4.18, p<.05 (one-tailed).

Conclusion

To date, most product placement research has focused on either the nature of the placement, such as its connection to the plot (Russell 2002), or pre-existing differences between viewers such as viewers’ connection to the show (Cowley and Barron 2008) or its actors (Russell and Stern 2006). The current paper expands product placement research by exploring whether the effectiveness of product placements depends on temporary variations in viewers’ self-regulatory strength. Assuming that there is little motivation for individuals to process LPC product placements, we hypothesized (and found) that ego-depletion increased brand attitudes toward LPC product placements while at the same time decreasing recognition of those same brands. These effects suggest that while ego-depleted individuals are less aware of LPC placements than non ego-depleted individuals, they are more positively persuaded by those placements. The present results underscore the importance of ego-depletion for research on product placement.

References


**True Lies in Online Research: How to Determine Accuracy in Web Surveys**

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Extended Abstract

The growth and diffusion of the Internet have led to a rapid development of surveys on the World Wide Web (WWW) by opening new opportunities for collecting and disseminating research information. Existing research on web surveys has mainly focused on comparing internet-based and traditional mail surveys or on combining existing evidence into a meta-analysis (Cook, Heath, and Thompson 2000; Ilieva, Baron, and Healey 2002; Sheehan 2001; Shermis and Lombard 1999). Main focus has thereby been placed on response rates. While methodological research around response quality in online surveys is still limited (O’Neil and Penrod 2001; Deutskens et al.