The Nonanalytic Influence of Memory on Product Placement Consequences

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In these studies, fluency-based perceptual processing was found to nonanalytically influenced participants’ brand choice ratings after viewing brands during a product placement. Despite manipulating engagement and the activation of persuasion knowledge, which altered the deliberate assessment of the brand, brand choice ratings were guided by the nonanalytic influence of memory.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Despite the enthusiastic use of product placements, researchers have not determined whether or not this form of advertising produces profitable outcomes for featured brands. In a comprehensive review, Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan (2006) proposed that outcomes of product placements fall into three broad categories: cognitive, affective, and conative/choice effects. Although cognitive outcomes, or memory effects, such as product recognition and recall, have received the most attention from consumer researchers, research that has examined the relationship between the different effects, have revealed an inconsistent association. Most consistent, however, appears to be a negative association between memory effects and evaluation and choice measures (Cowley and Barron 2008; Law and Braun 2000; Matthes, Schemer, and Wirth 2007). To accommodate the complex associations that have been found in previous studies, the current framework emphasizes how the interaction between memory processes and task features give rise to measurable outcomes of product placement.

In past frameworks, memory has been treated as being used more analytically to guide brand preferences. Mainly, if viewers remember a brand being featured during a product placement event, this is thought to instigate a negative response toward the brand through the activation of persuasion knowledge (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Fristad and Wright 1994). Contrasting this analytic use of memory, we examine how nonanalytic influences, meaning processes that are irrelevant to the current task (Jacoby and Brooks 1984), contribute to consequences observed for brands that are featured during a product placement event. As has been emphasized in other studies (Whittlesea and Price 2001), the nonanalytic influence on subjective judgments is expected to arise out of perceptual fluency that occurs for brands that are presented during a product placement event.

Methodology

Participants were presented with a narrative, which was an adapted excerpt from a novel (Footner 1940). Embedded within the narrative were 20 different brands that varied across a number of different product categories (e.g., bottled water, electronics, clothing). Each of the brands were presented either once or five times within the narrative. Four versions of the passage was created so that, one of two brands from a certain product category appeared during the narrative.

Participants then completed a filler task before completing a recognition task and then a brand choice task. In both the recognition and brand choice task, participants were presented brands that appeared in the narrative and new brands and were asked to judged their recognition for those items (1 = low and 4 = high on both familiarity and recollection following Higham and Vokey 2004) and their likelihood to select a brand for a close friend (1 = Definitely would not select to 9 = Definitely would select).

Summary of Main Findings

Study 1

Participants’ performance on the recognition task indicated that they were better able at recognizing brands that were presented five times in the narrative, compared to brands that were presented once in the narrative. Despite the fact that participants were better able to remember brands that were presented five times, participants reported higher choice ratings for brands that were presented once (5.70 vs. 6.20), F(1, 90) = 11.83, MSE = 0.96, p = .001, and five times (5.70 vs. 6.31), F(1, 90) = 14.16, MSE = 1.18, p < .001, compared to brands that were not presented in the narrative.

Studies 2 and 2a

A possible alternative explanation for the findings observed in study 1 is that participants experienced narrative transportation (Green and Brock 2000), or were highly engaged with the narrative, which lead to a positive response to featured brands (Escalas 2004, 2007). If this were the case, then disrupting the extent to which participants were engaged with the narrative (by presenting the narrative in a random order to some participants) should result in a more negative response to the featured brands. Although participants reported being more engaged in the sequential narrative, compared to the randomly presented narrative, (3.23 vs. 2.71), t(80) = 3.51, p = .001, choice ratings were only influenced by the prior presentation of the brand, F(2, 160) = 7.75, MSE = 0.59, p = .001. Overall, participants reported higher brand choice ratings for brands that were presented once, compared to brands that were new (6.30 vs. 5.84), F(1, 81) = 17.28, MSE = 0.50, p < .001, and to brands that were presented five times (6.30 vs. 5.99), F(1, 81) = 6.06, MSE = 0.67, p = .016. However, this effect only occurred when the brand’s prior presentation in the narrative was not made salient (study 2a).

Study 3

If the presentation of a brand within a narrative activates persuasion knowledge and that information is used analytically when completing the choice task, then altering the activation of persuasion knowledge (by presenting brands blatantly or subtly) should moderate influence of a brand’s prior presentation on choice ratings. Although the blatant presentation of the brand resulted in higher persuasion knowledge ratings, compared to when the brand was subtly presented for brands that were presented five times, (5.68 vs. 4.62), t(121) = -3.02, p = .003, and once, (4.20 vs. 3.29), t(121) = -2.67, p = .015, analyzing the choice ratings indicated only a main effect of brand presentation number, F(2, 238) = 3.92, MSE = 0.72, p = .02. Overall, participants reported significantly higher choice ratings for brands that were presented five times in the narrative, compared to brands that were new (6.11 vs. 5.81), F(1, 122) = 6.03, MSE = 0.91, p = .015, and compared to brands that were presented once during the narrative (6.11 vs. 5.92), F(1, 122) = 4.23, MSE = 0.52, p = .042.

Concluding Comments

Together, these studies provide evidence in support of the nonanalytic influence of memory. Since choice ratings were not influenced by the level of engagement nor the activation of persuasion knowledge, the nonanalytic influence of memory, and not a more deliberate influence of memory, appeared to influence choice ratings. More broadly, these findings suggest that product placements do result in positive outcomes for featured brand, based on the nonanalytic influence of memory.

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