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ABSTRACT

Even if they use it, consumers devote limited attention to promotional merchandise. In two experiments we show that even incidental encounters with promotional merchandise can affect reactions to unfamiliar brands. Moreover, we find that at similar level of exposure promotional merchandise outperforms billboards.

BACKGROUND

Stimuli that are not consciously perceived can affect attitudes (e.g. Ferguson & Zayas, 2009; Janiszewski, 1988; Murphy & Zajonc, 1993) and influence behaviors (e.g. Strahan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2002). However, mere exposure is unlikely to produce a change in existing attitudes; it rather enables (unconscious) attitude formation (Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary, & Petty, 1992; Crano & Prislin, 2006).

STUDY I

Method

Promotional pen (unfamiliar brand bmobile) vs. promotional pen (familiar brand T-Mobile) vs. unbranded pen (control); n=128

2 presumably unrelated parts:

1. Decoy task:

Writing a shopping list with assigned pen



2. Survey:

Evaluation of brands (incl. promoted brands)



Results

Unfamiliar brand vs control:

- Positive effect of promotional pen on
- Brand attitude ($t(78)=1.96, p=.029$)
- Preference ($U=601.00, z=-2.12, p=.017$)
- WTP ($t(62.255)=2.85, p=.003$)

Familiar brand vs control:

No effect of promotional pen (all $p's > .05$)

STUDY II

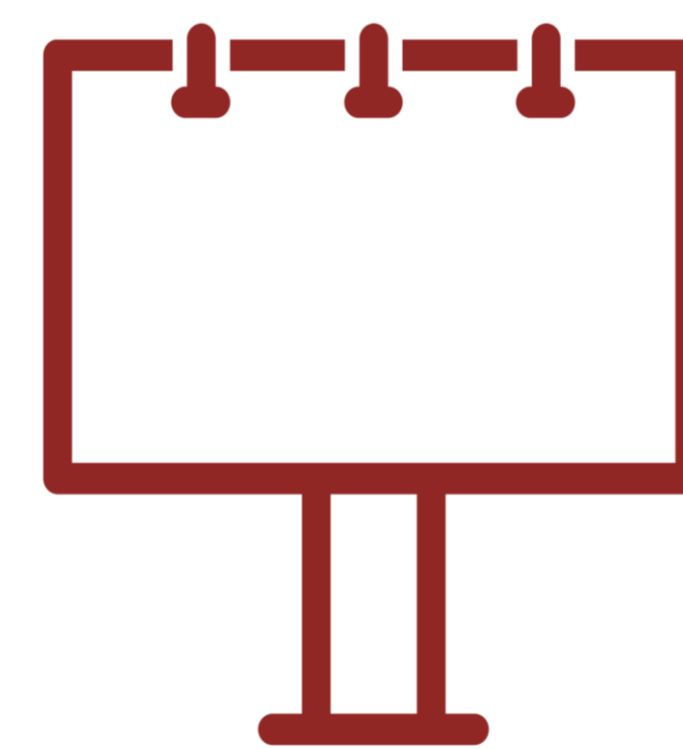
Method

2 (promotional pen: yes vs. no) x 2 (billboard: yes vs. no) per brand (unfamiliar brand Aerius vs. familiar brand Panasonic); n=253

2 presumably unrelated parts:

1. Decoy task:

Paper-pen questionnaire with assigned pen and exposure to billboard



2. Survey:

Evaluation of brands (incl. promoted brands)



Results

Unfamiliar brand vs control:

- Positive main effect of promotional pen on
 - Brand attitude ($F(1,141)=9.62, p=.001$)
 - Preference ($b=-1.26, \text{Wald } X^2(1)=3.26, p=.036$)
 - PI ($F(1,141)=6.04, p=.008$)
- No main effects of billboard (all $p's > .05$)
- Interactions effects for all dvs → combination of pen and billboard yields the best results

Familiar brand vs control:

No main effects of promotional pen or billboard, no interaction effects (all $p's > .05$)

CONCLUSION

Even though only a small fraction of those using a promotional pen later recalled doing so (30% in study 1, 11% in study 2), a single incidental encounter was able to affect brand reactions. Notably, this only holds for unfamiliar, but not for familiar brands. Small inconspicuous pens even outperformed attention-seeking billboards. The findings demonstrate the nuanced ways in which incidental exposure affects consumers.

REFERENCES

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