

ANTECEDENTS TO EFFECTIVE IMPLANTABLE ADVERTISING ON NEW MEDIA TARGETED AT CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

We conducted the current grounded theory research to investigate the factors that influence the effectiveness of implantable advertising on new media on the consumer behavior of Chinese college students. Toward this end, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 32 college students in China. We found that implantable advertising on new media is more effective than implantable advertising on traditional media, and we found that the exposure of the advertised product and sex of viewers also have an influence on the effectiveness of influencing the consumer behavior of the viewers.

Keywords: *Implantable advertising; college student; new media; grounded theory.*

Introduction:

Marketers believe that consumers go through a staged consumption process to arrive at the final decision of buying a product (Liu & Chen, 2013); (Solomon, Lu, & Yang, 2009). According to the AIDMA model (Attention – Interest – Desire – Memory – Action), the decision process usually begins with the consumer having their attention drawn to a product, become interested in the product, have the desire to own the product, cast the image of the product in their memory, and the process will end when the consumer finally buys the product (Liu & Chen, 2013). The role that advertisement plays in this process is to draw the attention of the consumer to the product in order to increase the probability of them eventually buying it. Given that the drawing of consumer attention forms the first stage of the consumption process, many practitioners and scholars believe advertising plays very important role in influencing consumer behavior, and they believe that that sales can be improved by increasing the organization's advertising expenditure (Mo, 2013).

However, as more and more marketers attempt to improve their company's sales by making more

advertisements, the market has become overloaded with both information that consumers desire and information that they have no interest. Thus, to avoid wasting their time on receiving unwanted information, many consumers have started to engage in sifting behaviors that help them to block information from marketers. For example, 92.8% of consumers approached in a study reflected that they would usually switch channels whenever the television channel that they were watching started to play advertisements (Mo & Liu, 2006). Thus, many companies are now exploring the means to better utilize the advantages of the new media in their attempt to search for better means to reach effectively their targeted consumers (Zhuo, 2007).

One popular means that many marketers use to advertise their products is implantable advertisement on new media (Teng, 2013). Implantable advertising refers to the mode of advertisement that involves the placing of a product in a screened show. For example, placing the logo of a product on a scene in a movie, or having a host holding a product during a broadcast. Essentially, implantable advertising is a form of advertising that involves the direct or indirect

appearance of a product in a screened show. The intention of the marketer is to attract the attention of viewer to a product in hope that they would become interested in the product and eventually buy it after they have watched the show.

Nevertheless, despite the popularity of this relatively new mode to advertise, there is a lack of research on this topic hitherto. Thus, we conducted the current research in attempt to understand implantable advertisement on new media better. We adopted a grounded theory approach to this study, and we targeted college students as our focal group because college students tend to be more sensitive to the new media (Qian, 2010).

Literature Review:

Media has been a very important medium of communication since its inception. Traditional media such as newspaper, magazine, television and radio can disseminate information effectively to a large group of audiences in a short time conveniently (Yu & Gao, 2014); (Zhai, 2013). The potency of such traditional media has allowed it to become one of the pillars of advertising (Li, 2010).

As technology progresses, new forms of media that can better connect individuals has also emerged. In contrast to the traditional media, new media allow individuals to connect real-time and to receive open and personalized information at lower cost (Kuang, 2012). The introduction of new media to the marketing industry has renovated the strategies that marketers used to advertise, and allowed them to reach their target consumers more efficiently (Feng & Jin, 2007). For example, by using implantable advertising.

Implantable advertising is a form of profit-oriented marketing strategy that is usually sponsored by a profit-marketing company (Balasubramanian, 1994). Nevertheless, different from the traditional marketing strategies that usually involve a distinct focal subject, implantable advertising can also be conducted using more subtle strategies such as by placing the focal object for marketing in a show.

Marketers got the inspiration for implantable advertising from organ transplant operation (Mo & Liu, 2006). In organ transplantation, the transplanted organ must blend into its new environment and integrate well with the receptor's other organs in order for the receptor to survive. Likewise, marketers believe that a product implantable in a show must blend in well with the original content of the show to make it look natural for it to be successful. Marketers believe that such "natural" appearance of an object can attract the attention of the viewers, influence their attitude, and subsequently cause them to buy the product (Yu & Ding, 2011).

In general, implantable advertising can take three forms: visual implantation, audio implantation, and both (Balasubramanian, 1994). Researchers have

found that implantable advertising that utilized both visual and audio elements have the most significant effect (Gupta & Lord, 1998). In addition, scholars have also found that the visibility of the implantable product and the strength of its brand also have a significant influence on the effectiveness of the implantable advertisement.

For example, (Zhou & Wang, 2014) suggested that the visibility of product has a curvilinear relationship with the effectiveness of the implantable advertisement i.e., lower product visibility will only improve the effectiveness of an implantable advertisement up to a limited extent. When the subtlety of the product has gone too far, lower product visibility will cause the effectiveness of the implantable advertisement to decrease. In addition, given that consumers tend to pay more attention to branded products and process its related information more efficiently (Janiszewski, 2001), scholars have found that the strength of the brand of a product that appeared in an implantable advertisement has a positive relationship with the advertisement's effectiveness (Jin & Villegas, 2007). Thus, we started our current research by focusing our interviews on the participants' opinion on the visibility of products that appeared in implantable advertisements, and the strength of their brands.

Methodology:

We adopted a grounded theory approach for the current research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); (Locke, 2001); (Ng, Huang, & Liu, 2016). We approached 41 college students in total. Since nine of them reflected that they had not paid attention to implantable advertising when they were watching shows, we did not include them in the final sample used for data analyses. Out the 32 participants interviewed, 17 of them are females, and 15 of them are males. Their average age was 21 years, and they came from different parts of China, including Hubei province, Hunan province, Hebei province, Beijing city, Shandong province, Henan province, Heilongjiang province, Zhejiang province, Jiangsu province, Shanghai city, Fujian province, Gansu province, Yunnan province, and Guangdong province.

We collected our data using semi-structured interviews. Samples of the guiding questions that we used include what is your opinion on products implantable in a show, and did you ever buy the products that you saw in an implantable advertisement and why. The data collection phase ended when we reached data saturation.

Results:

In this section, we will discuss the main findings of our research from the following three aspects: effect of implantable advertisement in traditional media and new media, the influence of the exposure to focal

product on the effectiveness of implantable advertisement, and the influence of sex on the effectiveness of implantable advertisement.

Effect of implantable advertising in traditional media and new media:

We found that implantable advertising tends to be more effective when it is conducted using the new media than when traditional media is used because our participants tended to perceive the intention of the host of advertisement on social media more favorably, and they also believed that they had chosen to watch the advertisement.

We found that our participants tended to be hostile to implantable advertising conducted on traditional media. For example, whenever our participants saw a celebrity used a product in a movie, or whenever the celebrity expressed positive opinions about it, they tended to feel annoyed and they would remind themselves that the producer of the product must have sponsored the movie in order to get the product implantable in the scene.

However, when our participants received similar messages from the social media, they tended to have more positive opinions about the product. For example, one of our participants shared her experience for watching a video-clip filmed by a woman to teach viewers how to make up. Whenever the host recommended the viewers, some makeup brands that she personally liked, our participants believed that she was sincerely recommending quality tried products.

Our participants were more accepting toward the recommendations of the host because they believed that the host's opinion was independent from the influence of sponsoring company. In addition, our participants also believed that the moment they choose to watch the video-clip on new media, they have become ready to receive to implantable advertising message. This is because other than the obvious reason of our participants knew that the host must use makeup products in the show, and thus will definitely involve implantable advertisement, many of them commented that part of their reasons to choose to watch such video-clips was to search for tried quality makeup products.

Influence of exposure to focal product on effectiveness of implantable advertising

We found that implantable advertising usually appears in the new media in two forms. We call the first form "indirect implantable advertising", and the second form "direct implantable advertising". Indirect implantable advertising refers to the advertising of products by making it appear in show indirectly. For example, by having the host wearing a particular brand's clothes, or by placing the focal products on are noticeable to the viewers when the show was

filmed. Direct implantable advertising refers to the advertising of products by having the host making statements that they have used the product, or by repeating the product's slogan.

We found that as the use of implantable advertisement in new media increases, consumers have become more aware and knowledgeable about implantable advertising, and marketers have become more inclined toward using direct implantable advertising over indirect implantable advertising. Interestingly, we found that while high frequency of direct implantable advertising in a show tends to annoy our participants and cause them to have negative opinions about the brand, they would nevertheless buy the product when they see it in the supermarket to try it out of curiosity. Some of our participants even had experiences of going to the supermarket intentionally to search for product of the brand that had "annoyed" them so much when they were watching shows on the new media. Thus, we found that while our participants tended to have better impression about brands that were advertised through indirect implantable advertising, they tended to buy products that were advertised through direct implantable advertising.

Influence of sex on the effectiveness of implantable Advertising:

We found that implantable advertising has different effects on individuals of different sex. Essentially, implantable advertising is more effective as a form of marketing strategy to females than males. The cause of this phenomenon is two-fold.

First, we found that the type of shows that individuals of the different sex tended to watch, and thus the way these individuals tended to get exposed to implantable advertisement, is different. We found that while males tend to watch shows on war and game, females tend to watch shows on fashion and food. While many female participants watched their shows on the new media with the intention of knowing where they can buy fashion and food products, male participants tended to be genuinely interested only in the content of the show. Thus, many of them did not pay much attention to the implantable advertisements showed in these shows, and some of them were not even aware of the advertisements made.

Second, we also found that the male participants we interviewed tended to have more trust in established brands and products sold in official outlets that they tended to patronize. This lies in stark contrast with the attitude of our female participants who were willing to buy products from sources introduced by in implantable advertising.

Discussion and Conclusion:

We conducted the current grounded theory research to investigate the factors that influence the effectiveness

of implantable advertising on new media on the consumer behavior of Chinese college students. We found that implantable advertising on new media is more effective than implantable advertising on traditional media, and we found that the exposure of the advertised product and sex of viewers also have an influence on the effectiveness of influencing the consumer behavior of the viewers.

In this research, we found that although the repetitive use of direct implantable advertising in a show tended to annoy the viewer and cause them to have bad impressions on the advertisement, however, the use of such marketing strategy tended to be effective in motivating the viewer to search and buy the product advertised later. This finding lies in stark contrast to the traditional belief in the marketing literature that a successful marketing strategy needs to be one that can make the viewer think positively both about the marketing strategy and the product. Our finding suggests that a viewer's attitude toward a marketing strategy and the product advertised need not to be the same, and it is possible for a person to become interested in a product despite the fact that they might be annoyed by the marketing strategy.

In addition, we also found that many of our participants tended to have better impression about implantable advertisements on new media. They seemed to believe that implantable advertisements showed on traditional media tended to provide a biased view of the product because the advertisement must be sponsored by the producer of product, and implantable advertisements showed on new media tended to be more trustable because it is likely for the host to have received no benefits from the producer. Due to the limitation of the design of this current research, we are not sure whether the accuracy of the belief of our participants. Nevertheless, based on our personal experiences, it is totally possible for an implantable advertisement on new media to be sponsored by the producer of a product. Future research should further investigate the cause of this belief.

Lastly, because we had only interviewed 32 college students from China in this research, this study might have limited generalizability. Future quantitative research should be conducted with a statistically significant sample size in the context of another country in order to verify the generalizability the findings of our research.

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