

TEXT MESSAGE COPY IN PRINT ADS AND CONFIDING IN THE BRAND: A COMMUNICATION TRUST THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Although text messaging in society is rampant and its determinants and effects have been studied in wireless and interactive marketing contexts, outcomes of its application to traditional media (i.e., print advertisements) is lacking. Via its contemporary and hip communicative nature, text messaging may lead receivers to respond favorably toward the text message source. To examine this notion, our research applies communication trust theory, which suggests that trust arises from effective communication, using a text message-embedded print ad in two between-subject experiments. Study 1 reveals that using text message copy compared to traditional language copy (i.e., the text message spelled out) in a print ad leads to heightened levels of consumer trust in the advertised brand. Using a different product category, ad design, and text message, Study 2 shows that a print ad with text message copy compared to traditional language copy leads to heightened levels consumer trust in the advertised brand, and more favorable attitude toward the ad and purchase intention responses.

INTRODUCTION

As ads continue to disseminate across media, advertisers must pursue strategies that address the intended target market and stand out among the ad clutter, leading viewers to notice, consider, recall, and act on the ad's message. To help initiate such effects, advertisers use a host of ad-related features (e.g., creativity, differentiation) (Barwise and Strong 2002; Stanton and Burke 1998). For example, in wireless or mobile ads, short message service (SMS) or text messaging is a communication strategy used to effectively and succinctly communicate a distinct ad message.

The popularity of text messaging is unprecedented. For example, in the United States, over 5 billion text messages were sent each month in 2005 (Maney 2005); this figure has risen to 4.1 billion text messages per day in 2009 (Van Grove 2009). Whether SMS is used to chat with a friend, confirm a meeting, submit a vote, participate in a survey, or post an opinion on a blog (Bailey 2007; Balabanis, Mitchell, and Heinonen-Mavrovouniotis 2007; Busk 2007), its widespread use is evident with adolescents and adults.

Equity-laden brands have jumped on the SMS band wagon by rolling out SMS-based social media and mobile marketing campaigns (Maney 2005).

SMS communication is unique in that there are only 160 alpha numeric characters available to the text user. Because of these communicative limitations (Merisavo et al. 2007), a novel dialect has surfaced. In fact, SMS dictionaries have been created (e.g., netlingo.com). If such vernacular is prominently used, readily embraced, and easily understood among text users, would non-mobile advertisers benefit from using such lingo as ad copy? Using a print ad context, our research examines this question.

TEXT MESSAGING IN ADVERTISING

Advertising research on text messaging has explored SMS acceptance and outcome effects. Regarding the former, mobile advertising risks (e.g., privacy issues) serve as a negative correlate, (Merisavo et al. 2007), whereas utility, context, trust, motivation, norms, and control are positive correlates of SMS mobile advertising acceptance (Merisavo et al. 2007; Nysveen, Pedersen, and Thorbjørnsen 2005). For outcome effects, entertainment, information content, and the credibility of an SMS mobile ad positively influence attitudes toward the ad (Tsang, Ho, and Liang 2004). Researchers have found that mobile advertising leads to an increase in sales (Merisavo et al. 2006), boosts advertising awareness and recall, and has the capacity to positively influence responses toward the advertising source and brand (Trappey and Woodside 2005; Wouters and Wetzels 2006). Collectively, these findings indicate that mobile advertising can lead to favorable advertising outcomes. Because text messages can produce positive advertising effects, it is plausible that incorporating a component of mobile advertising (e.g., SMS) as copy in print media may lead to favorable advertising outcomes (Aylesworth and MacKenzie 1998).

Although the use of SMS advertising has steadily increased over the past several years, research regarding text messaging in ads has lagged this trend; thus, our knowledge pertaining to the effectiveness of SMS copy in print ads is deficient. As a result, researchers have called for additional study on text messaging effects in advertising (Drossos et al. 2007; Merisavo et al. 2007; Wouters and Wetzels 2006). To heed this call, we devise two experiments. Study 1 examines viewer responses (i.e., Per_{TRUST} – perceived trust in the advertised brand) to a print ad with SMS copy compared to the same ad with traditional language copy (i.e., the text message spelled out). Using a different product category, ad design, and text message, Study 2 examines viewer responses (i.e., Per_{TRUST} , A_{AD} – attitude toward the ad, and PI_B – intentions to purchase the advertised brand) using the same experimental design as Study 1.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Dimensions of trust include credibility, benevolence, reliability, honesty, virtuousness, integrity, ability, and reliance (Ganesan 1994; Jarvenpaa and Leidner 1999; Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995; McCroskey 1966). When these factors are present in the marketplace, constituents begin to trust each other (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995). Of particular importance regarding trust, it is needed when the situation at-hand involves some risk, doubt, or uncertainty (e.g., Lewis and Weigert 1985). Because most marketing transactions involve some degree of uncertainty, matters of trust readily surface for those involved in the exchange. Applied to consumer responses to advertising, this notion is not excluded.

Trust is a pertinent factor in the development and execution of successful marketing transactions (Bradach and Eccles 1989). In sales contexts for example, it leads to heightened levels of buyer-seller cooperation, agreement, and procurement (Schurr and Ozanne 1985) and, it contributes to the likelihood of future sales opportunities (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990). Also, trust is highly relevant in mobile marketing

contexts where SMS is a prevalently used communication tool (Okazaki, Katsukura, and Nishiyama 2007). As such, trust is essential for relationship building (Morgan and Hunt 1994) both for business-to-business (Ganesan 1994) and business-to-consumer (Ball, Coelho, and Machás 2004) contexts. Importantly, trust plays an important role during a customer's first experience with a brand (McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany 1998), such as seeing a company's print advertisement for the first time, which is in line with our experimental design.

Communication trust theory is grounded in the notion that in order to achieve a desired and seemingly risky or uncertain outcome, reliance on another's communication is requisite; when such communication is deemed effective, receiver perceptions of reliability and confidence in the message source intensify (Giffin 1967). Applied to advertising, targeted viewers may perceive communication strategies effective when they are in line with their cultural makeup; for example, inner city youth may grow fond of an ad that uses *hip hop* lingo as copy, as this type of dialect is prominently used among these cultural members. In this sense, and as communication trust theory predicts, these consumers will trust the message source more than they will a comparable ad lacking *hip hop* copy. We posit that similar effects will be operating within print ads embedded with SMS copy, as targeted viewers deem such communication as *up to date* and appropriate for their lifestyle.

STUDY 1 – HYPOTHESIS

Consumers identify with groups, places, things, and time periods based on their uniqueness. As marketers recognize these distinctive traits in their promotional campaigns, favorable consumer responses may ensue. For example, ethnically identifying with an ad based on a model's apparent ethnicity in the ad generates favorable attitudinal and behavioral responses toward the ad and advertised brand (Sierra, Hyman, and Torres 2009). Extending this notion, the manner in which marketers communicate with targeted viewers also can lead to favorable advertising outcomes. For example, ads that use *Spanglish* (e.g., incorporating English and Spanish within sentences) may elicit favorable responses in targeted consumers (Triandis et al. 1984). The same can be said of how a coach communicates with his/her players and how a mentor communicates with his/her pupil. In each instance, the receiver of information may grow to trust the source of information more as communication effectiveness improves (Giffin 1967).

Because the use of SMS in society is widespread, especially among younger consumers, and is a contemporary and modish communication method, we surmise marketers that use SMS in print ads will increase viewer perceptions of trust in the advertised brand. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Print advertisements with text message copy will generate higher levels of Per_{TRUST} than identical ads with the text message written out (i.e., traditional ad language copy).

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

Millennials between the ages of 18-24 text on average 790 messages per month (Nielsenwire 2008); therefore, 134 undergraduate business students from a southwestern U.S. university were solicited during regularly scheduled classes as experimental participants. Carry-over effects were controlled for by counterbalancing the order of presentation of the stimulus ads (Smith 2000). We checked for carry-over effects by asking study participants to document their best guess of the experimental hypothesis subsequent of stimuli exposure. Five participants suggested ideas approximating the experimental hypothesis; their responses were eliminated from the analysis, leaving a final sample of 129 respondents.

In terms of respondents' age, 64% are between 18-25 and 26% are between 36-55. Females (53%) outnumber males. Regarding class standing, all levels are well represented; i.e., freshman (18%), sophomore (36%), junior (13%), senior (18%), and graduate (15%) comprise the sample. Fifty-four percent of respondents are single and 38% are married. Whites (49%) and Hispanics (38%) are the main ethnic groups queried, and 97% of the sample is employed.

DESIGN

The print ad experiment used a randomized subject assignment of two different creative executions (i.e., text message copy vs. traditional language copy) within a between-subjects design. To boost external validity, a real athletic shoe advertisement was used and digitally modified to vary the SMS-based creative execution. Four different text message executions were pretested with 43 respondents who did not participate in Study 1. Each creative execution was rated for likeability and credibility (Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg 2001). One creative execution was identified as having the highest rating by all respondents; the text message "BFF" (Best Friends Forever) was chosen for the experimental treatment.

MANIPULATION CHECK

Prior to data collection, focus group participants were solicited to evaluate the manipulations used in the test ads (i.e., a print ad with SMS is noticeably distinct from the same print ad with traditional language). Results from the focus group (i.e., 11 of 11 subjects, including 3 MBA students, and 8 undergraduate business students), where each participant viewed both test ads, corroborate these assumptions. To further validate the text message versus traditional ad language manipulation, two seven-point Likert scale items (ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree) assessing ad uniqueness were tested using Study 1's sample. Using independent samples *t*-tests, significant differences between mean scores were found for the items "I would have to say that the Advance tennis shoe ad is innovative" – SMS: $M=5.22$ ($SD=1.51$), traditional language: $M=2.91$ ($SD=1.90$), $t(127)=7.62$, $P<0.01$ and "I believe that the Advance tennis shoe ad is imaginative" – SMS: $M=4.49$ ($SD=1.28$), traditional language: $M=3.88$ ($SD=2.00$), $t(127)=2.08$, $P<0.05$. Hence, the manipulation was effective.

STIMULI

Each study participant was exposed to one of the treatment ads and two filler ads randomly sequenced. To avoid bias associated with using ads for existing products, a fictitious athletic shoe brand—*Advance*—appeared in the test ads (Heiser, Sierra, and Torres, 2008). To ameliorate internal validity, only the creative execution differed among ads; the same copy (and its position) was included in all ads, and the model and featured product were positioned similarly. Two filler ads were included to mask the purpose of the experiment. The products used in these ads (i.e., athletic shoe and soft drink), were chosen because of their relevance to the sample population. Stimuli consisted of full-page color photographic advertisements randomly sequenced. One of the two advertising types was placed in a binder along with the filler ads. Each subject was randomly assigned a binder containing only one of the two advertising types: BFF ($n=65$) or Best Friends Forever ($n=64$).

PROCEDURE AND MEASURES

After examining the ads, the researcher asked each respondent to return the ads and then complete the questionnaire. Pertaining to the test ad they received, respondents answered a four-item, seven-point Likert scale measuring Per_{TRUST} , which is defined as a reliance on, and an overall disposition toward a brand based on the brand's ability to carry out its purpose (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001) and its intentions to operate in the consumer's best interests (Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán, and Yagüe-

Guillén 2003). The multi-faceted nature of Per_{TRUST} , involves such dimensions as overall trust, benevolence, integrity, and competence (Li et al. 2008; Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995). Leaning on scales used by Li et al. (2008) and Büttner and Göritz (2008), we measure Per_{TRUST} with a four-item scale capturing each of the four dimensions previously mentioned. Specifically, the items are: *I feel like I can trust the [insert brand name] brand* (overall trust), *I can count on the [insert brand name] brand to do what is right* (benevolence), *I would have to say that the [insert brand name] brand has integrity* (integrity), and *[insert brand name] is a company that will deliver on its promises* (competence). Factor structure (using MLE) for the Per_{TRUST} multi-item scale ($\alpha=0.86$) was sufficient.

RESULTS

MANOVA was used to test the response differences to the SMS and traditional language conditions collectively. Consumers in the SMS group yielded more positive responses toward each of the four items comprising the outcome variable Per_{TRUST} . The MANOVA exhibited a positive overall effect, with Hotelling's $T^2=1.66$, $F(4, 124)=51.63$, $P<0.01$, Wilks' $\lambda=0.375$, $\eta^2=0.625$. Specifically, participants who viewed the advertisement with SMS showed higher levels for each of the Per_{TRUST} items: "*I feel like I can trust the Advance brand*" SMS: $M=5.21$, $SD=1.60$, Traditional language: $M=3.53$, $SD=1.94$; $F(1, 127)=28.83$, $P<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.185$; "*I can count on the Advance brand to do what is right*" SMS: $M=5.90$, $SD=1.11$, Traditional language: $M=2.93$, $SD=1.78$; $F(1, 127)=129.41$, $P<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.505$; "*I would have to say that the Advance brand has integrity*" SMS: $M=5.53$, $SD=1.28$, Traditional language: $M=3.01$, $SD=1.77$; $F(1, 127)=85.42$, $P<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.402$; and, "*Advance is a company that will deliver on its promises*" SMS: $M=5.89$, $SD=1.23$, Traditional language: $M=2.78$, $SD=1.56$; $F(1, 127)=156.56$, $P<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.552$). These data offer support for H1.

STUDY 2

In this study (as compared to Study 1), we examine two additional outcome variables and vary in the test ad: product category, gender of the ad model, text message copy and placement, color scheme, and scenery. Specifically, Study 2 examines if a print ad with SMS copy leads to more favorable Per_{TRUST} , A_{AD} , and PI_B responses than the same ad with the text message written out (i.e., traditional ad language copy). We suggest that using SMS in print ads compared to traditional ad language is a more appropriate means to communicate with targeted ad viewers (as grounded in communication trust theory) and therefore, will lead to more favorable responses from viewers. Here, this communicative strategy will lead to higher Per_{TRUST} perceptions (H2) and more favorable A_{AD} (H3) and PI_B (H4) responses.

H2: Print advertisements with text message copy will generate higher levels of Per_{TRUST} than identical ads with the text message written out.

H3: Print advertisements with text message copy will generate more favorable A_{AD} than identical ads with the text message written out.

H4: Print advertisements with text message copy will generate more favorable PI_B than identical ads with the text message written out.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

Business students ($N=137$) from a southwestern U.S. university were solicited as experimental participants during regularly scheduled classes. We controlled for the prospect of carry-over effects by counterbalancing the order of the stimulus ads. We examined the possibility carry-over effects by asking

participants to specify their best guess of the experimental hypothesis following exposure to the ads. Seven participants suggested ideas akin to the experimental hypothesis; their responses were eliminated from further analysis, resulting in a final sample of 130 for the experiment.

Age cohorts are well represented with 18-25 year olds comprising 45% of the sample and 26-55 year olds comprising 51% of the sample. Males (55%) outnumber females. In terms of class standing, sophomore (31%), graduate (31%), and senior (22%) students comprise the majority of the sample. Fifty-nine percent of respondents are single and 37% are married. Whites (47%) and Hispanics (42%) are the main ethnic groups queried, and 98% of respondents are employed.

DESIGN

The print advertising experiment employed a randomized subject assignment of two creative executions (i.e., text message – DND vs. traditional ad language – Do Not Disturb) within a between-subjects design. An advertisement for a fictitious sleeping pill brand (i.e., Dormecil) was used and digitally modified to vary only the presence of the text message copy or the presence of traditional ad language copy.

MANIPULATION CHECK

Using Study 2's sample, the manipulation (i.e., a print ad with SMS copy is noticeably distinct from the same print ad with traditional ad language copy) was evaluated using two seven-point Likert scale items (ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree) measuring ad uniqueness. Using independent samples *t*-tests, significant differences between mean scores were found for the items "I would have to say that the Dormecil ad is innovative" – SMS: $M=4.98$ ($SD=1.51$), traditional language: $M=3.28$ ($SD=1.96$), $t(128)=5.35$, $P<0.01$ and "I believe that the Dormecil ad is imaginative" – SMS: $M=4.73$ ($SD=1.31$), traditional language: $M=3.40$ ($SD=1.86$), $t(128)=4.53$, $P<0.05$; these data confirm manipulation effectiveness.

STIMULI

Each study participant was exposed to one of the treatment ads and two filler ads randomly sequenced. To avoid bias associated with using ads for existing products, a fictitious sleeping pill brand—*Dormecil*—appeared in the test ads and was employed with either "DND" or "Do Not Disturb" copy. To ameliorate internal validity, only the creative execution differed among the test ads; the same copy (and its position) was included, and the model was positioned similarly. Two filler ads (athletic shoe and soft drink) were included to mask the purpose of the experiment. Using full-page color photographic ads, one of the two advertising types was placed in a binder along with the filler ads. Each subject was randomly assigned a binder containing only one of the two advertising types: DND ($n=56$) and Do Not Disturb ($n=74$).

PROCEDURE AND MEASURES

Respondents were given a binder (either with an ad containing SMS copy or an ad with traditional language copy), two filler ads, and a questionnaire. After reviewing the ads, the researcher asked each respondent to return them and then complete the questionnaire. Per_{TRUST} was measured with a four-item, seven-point Likert scale comprised of the items used in Study 1. PI_B were measured with a two-item, seven-point semantic differential scale (i.e., would not seek out/would seek out, would not consider/would consider) used in Holmes and Crocker (1987). A_{AD} was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale (i.e., overall disliking/overall liking) from the instrument used in Holmes and Crocker (1987). Factor structure (using MLE) for the two multi-item scales was sufficient.

RESULTS

MANOVA was used to test the response differences to the SMS and traditional language conditions collectively. Consumers in the SMS group yielded more positive responses toward all three outcome variables. The MANOVA exhibited a positive overall effect, with Hotelling's $T^2=0.902$, $F(3, 126)=37.88$, $P<0.01$, Wilks' $\lambda=0.526$, $\eta^2=0.474$. Specifically, participants who viewed the advertisement with SMS showed higher Per_{TRUST} (SMS: $M=5.59$, $SD=0.77$, Traditional language: $M=3.47$, $SD=1.60$; $F(1, 128)=82.75$, $P<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.393$), and showed more favorable A_{AD} (SMS: $M=4.42$, $SD=1.29$, Traditional language: $M=3.89$, $SD=1.52$; $F(1, 128)=4.50$, $P<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.034$) and PI_B responses (SMS: $M=4.29$, $SD=0.87$, Traditional language: $M=3.45$, $SD=1.18$; $F(1, 128)=20.02$, $P<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.135$), offering support for H2, H3, and H4, respectively.

DISCUSSION

Through creative design strategies advertisers can grab viewer attention, increase ad recall, and enhance persuasive appeals that eventually drive consumption behavior (Bell 1992). In this sense, advertising creativity is a key cog in constructing effective promotional stimuli. Facets of creativity include novelty, resolution, and elaboration and synthesis (O'Quin and Besemer 1989). Applied to advertising design, novelty is viewed as the originality of the ad; resolution is the logical component of the ad; and elaboration and synthesis pertain to the construction and craft of the ad. Although practitioners agree of creativity's significant role in effective ad design, a challenge faced by advertisers is choosing the appropriate type of creative stimuli to incorporate into ad campaigns. One type of apt creative approach, as our research suggests, may be to incorporate SMS copy in print ads.

Acceptance of SMS continues to grow, evidenced for example in its prevalent use as a means to communicate on social media and blogging websites. Consequently, marketers will be compelled to integrate SMS copy into their promotional programs, creating the need for additional media research on SMS usage (Okazaki and Taylor 2008). As suggested by communication trust theory (Giffin 1967), perceptions of reliability and confidence in a message source may intensify when the receiver recognizes such communicative efforts as effective. Hence, text message users that see text message copy in print ads may perceive such ads as effective and in turn, show trust toward this message source, giving further impetus for advertisers to incorporate SMS copy into their print media.

We investigated one creative execution by examining response differences between print ads with SMS copy and print ads with traditional language copy. Our findings indicate that incorporating SMS copy in print ads leads to more favorable consumer responses. In particular, our research is an initial attempt to probe the effect of SMS copy in print ads on Per_{TRUST} . We explored whether consumer trust in brands arises from first-time exposure (McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany 1998) to appropriate communication (e.g., contemporary) from the advertising source (Giffin 1967). Our experiments show that using SMS copy in print ads leads to higher Per_{TRUST} than ads with traditional language copy; hence, viewers that recognize advertisers' efforts to communicate to them in *their* language (i.e., up-to-date and modish) compared to traditional ad copy, show higher levels of perceived trust in the advertised brand. Additionally, Study 2's findings reveal that using SMS copy in print ads compared to traditional language copy leads to more favorable A_{AD} and PI_B responses. These findings help to bolster the *distinctiveness effect* in advertising (McGuire 1984) when SMS copy is used in print ads.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest that advertisers can incorporate SMS copy into print ads to generate favorable viewer responses. For example, respondents' Per_{TRUST} is higher when they are exposed to a print ad with

SMS copy compared to the same print ad with traditional language copy; also, respondents' A_{AD} and PI_B are more favorable for a print ad with SMS copy than the same ad with traditional language copy. Hence, marketers may opt to embed SMS copy in various advertising media, resulting in favorable cognitive and behavioral viewer responses toward the ad and advertised brand. Additionally, to encourage consumer identification with ads and increase trust perceptions in the brand, advertisers could tailor SMS copy to distinct consumer groups, based on ethnicity and brand tribalism.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Our research is not without limitations. For example, caveats concerning the use of a single medium pertain; therefore, additional SMS copy research with non-print media is needed to further establish generalizability. Also, the instruments used for data collection may not be equally valid across all samples and exchange settings, which could affect the measurement properties of the constructs and their interrelationships.

Our studies offer insightful avenues for future SMS-related research. For example, because the test ads used contained epigrammatic SMS copy, additional research is needed to investigate if the amount of SMS copy used in ads influences viewer responses. Also, examining SMS copy effects across a host of media with various product types and SMS-related executional elements (e.g., humor, fear) (Stanton and Burke 1998) merits inquiry. Additionally, as perceived trust in brands may be more prominent in some cultures compared to others (Abramson 2005), research is needed to examine if cultural differences lead to response variations in brand trust based on advertisers' SMS communication efforts.

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