How captive is your audience? Defining overall advertising involvement

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Abstract

This article aims to reconcile some inconsistencies on the three constructs of advertising involvement, advertising relevance and media engagement. Then it develops a scale to holistically measure overall advertising involvement. Three previously measured types of involvement (message, media, and creative) are regrouped into one multidimensional structure with three correlated dimensions. The scale is then used to show that overall advertising involvement is capable of shaping attitudes leading to various consumer outcomes. Contributing to the literature on advertising involvement, this research confirms that overall advertising involvement is both situational and enduring. From a professional perspective, the research proposes a measurement tool better suited to understanding the scope of overall consumer involvement with advertising.

Keywords:
Overall advertising involvement
Media involvement
Message involvement
Creative involvement
Scale development

1. Introduction

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan stated: “The medium is the message” and mass media was not about “the size of the audience, but of the fact that everybody becomes involved” (p. 349). McLuhan meant that consumers are not immune to advertising stimuli; rather, they react to various components of advertising, and message, and creative execution may all together work to influence consumers. For example, would Super Bowl ads for Doritos be as involving if they were in print rather than on television, about nutritional facts rather than the pleasure of snacking during a great game, presented in a bland rather than a humorous execution?

The advent of new formats, media convergence and diversification of consumer target markets is forcing advertisers to reconsider and reconfigure campaign metrics in order to better understand why advertising works, not just if it does (Rappaport, 2007; Woodard, 2006). Thus, the ad industry wants to define involvement with media, subject, and advertiser, and this has led to the desire to shift from impression-based models to what advertisers are calling engagement-based models (Abdul-Ghani, Hyde, & Marshall, 2011; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Skerik, 2011). Unfortunately, advertisers have various definitions of what are involvement, relevance, and/or engagement. The same is true of researchers, e.g. Wang (2006) considers it contextual relevance whereas Heath (2009) considers it to be the result of stimulation of emotions.

This article seeks first to review and reconcile some inconsistencies on the three constructs advertising involvement, relevance and engagement, and to introduce the concept of overall advertising involvement. Then, we develop a scale to holistically measure overall advertising involvement. Three types of involvement (i.e., message, media, and creative) are regrouped into one second-order construct with three correlated dimensions. The new measure is used to show that overall advertising involvement is able to shape attitudes leading to several consumer outcomes.

Contributing to the literature on advertising involvement, this article confirms that overall advertising involvement is both situational and enduring. From a managerial perspective, we propose a measure better suited to understanding overall advertising involvement.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining advertising involvement

A literature review reveals that since 1960, the topic of involvement has been widely discussed. For Krugman (1965), consumers can be in low involvement and change their attitudes after ad repetitions and only if their perceptions are influenced. Alternatively, consumers in high involvement experience rapid changes in cognitions and beliefs post ad exposure, leading to attitudinal and behavioral changes. Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) discuss four levels of audience involvement: preattention, focal attention, comprehension, and elaboration. Ray et al. (1973) claim that different levels of involvement lead to different sequences of impacts on cognitions, affect and behavior. Zaichkowsky (1986) showed that different consumers can be involved with an ad, i.e., more involved consumers respond...
Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert (2002) discuss media context as involving one, regardless of the content or the advertiser. De (1965), television is a low involvement medium, and print is a high involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1994). Other than product, media can involve politics (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, & Burton, 1990), or product messages, and their surrounding environments (Zaichkowsky, 1986). It is argued that artificially manipulating involvement creates situational involvement whereas classifying respondents based on their existing levels of involvement gauges enduring involvement (Laczniak & Muehling, 1993). As such rather than examining involvement as a state variable, researchers look at the antecedents of involvement as a means to explain the outcomes of involvement (Bloch & Richins, 1983; Zaichkowsky, 1986).

2.3. Involvement as an antecedent: one or many dimensions?

Several studies show the value of involvement as a marketing variable. For example, Laczniak and Muehling (1993) compare brand related beliefs across varying levels of message involvement. Others sought to create measures for involvement types, for example product involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985). While some proposed scales of involvement, others caution against generalizing the concept of involvement (Laczniak & Muehling, 1990). Day et al. (1995) state: “Because the object of involvement ranges from activities and issues to advertisements and purchases, no single scale can measure all kinds of involvement” (p.72). Similarly to Zaichkowsky (1986), for Day et al. (1995) while it is known what types of involvement there are and how the intensity of involvement can impact marketing variables, little is known about the combination of these involvement constructs in advertising and what involves consumers overall. It could be that an advertisement is involving because the media format in which it is presented, the product that is shown and the messages in the ad are all together captivating. Few studies combine involvement with other variables, for example, product involvement and media format in order to examine consumer outcome behaviors (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002). However these studies model involvement and context as opposing factors rather than as related dimensions of an overall concept.

2.4. Is engagement the same as overall involvement?

The various involvement measures used in academic research can make understanding what involvement means confusing and difficult to apply in professional contexts. Recently, both practitioners and academicians tried to understand how integrated marketing communications work (Calder & Malthouse, 2005) and examined a new concept called engagement. Wang (2006) defines engagement as a “critical measurement of when consumers are strongly engaged in brands, brand messages, and their surrounding environments” (p. 356). Rappaport (2007) defines engagement as brand relevance and an emotional relationship between the consumer and the brand, all occurring within a quality context (see also, Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Fasen, 2011). Briefly, Wang (2006) makes the link between engagement and involvement by claiming that once contextual relevance is achieved, engagement drives message involvement.

Empirically, engagement is rarely operationalized. In some designs, engagement is manipulated with or without contextual relevance between a primary task and an online advertisement (Wang, 2006). When engagement is tested it is identified at the focal attention stage (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984), and it is only possible to...
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