

Attitude Toward the Viral Ad: Expanding Traditional Advertising Models to Interactive Advertising

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Abstract

As a form of advertising, viral video (VV) advertising is distinct in that its communication medium is the social connections between individuals instead of formal media. After viewing VV advertising, people are engaged in two independent but interrelated processes, i.e., video sharing and embedded brand information processing. Previous research has not examined the interaction between the two processes. This study expands on the mediation of attitude toward the advertisement model proposed by MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986). Experimental results from three viral video advertisements show that attitude toward the VV advertisement is the major factor affecting video sharing, but attitude toward the brand also has a significant impact on sharing activity. Affect transfer hypothesis (ATH) and its extended models are optimal in explaining viral video advertising, which is different from prior research on non-viral advertising that suggests dual mediation hypothesis as the optimal explanatory theory.

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Introduction

With the explosive growth of social media (e.g., YouTube and Facebook) in recent years, viral video (VV) advertising, which involves video-based messages released through interactive, network-based channels, has been used by companies to disseminate their product and brand information. A survey by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) showed that half of marketers used VV advertising for marketing purposes in 2009 (McCullum 2009), and this usage reached 70% in 2010 according to another survey (Web Video Marketing Council, Flimp Media and ExactTarget 2010). In spite of rapid adoption of the VV advertising by advertisers, how VV advertising

accomplishes desired advertising effects remains unclear to academic researchers and practitioners.

VV advertising stands in contrast to mass media advertising (such as television advertising) in that it is delivered in an interactive, Web-based environment characterized by viewer pull and control rather than sponsor push. Interesting video content and embedded brand information are two critical components of VV advertising that differ from traditional TV advertising (Carlin 2007; Hinz et al. 2011). Interesting content enhances the possibility of video sharing, or the formation of sharing intention (SI) (Huang, Lin, and Lin 2009), while embedded brand information affects the marketing effectiveness of VV advertising, especially the formation of brand attitudes (A_b). Thus both the viewer's reaction to the video and to the embedded brand are important for understanding the ultimate effects of a viral video advertisement. Because of this, questions worthy of systematic investigation arise. What effects emerge when processing of video content occurs simultaneously with the processing of brand information embedded in the video?

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How are sharing intention and the formation of brand attitudes interrelated?

Some academic studies have examined SI (e.g., Belk 2010; Bock et al. 2005; Huang, Lin, and Lin 2009) as well as antecedents and consequences of A_b in the traditional advertising context (e.g., Homer 1990; MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986; Mitchell and Olson 1981). Others have investigated areas tangential to VV advertising, such as e-WOM (e.g., Duan, Gu, and Whinston 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Lee and Song 2010), social media (e.g., Agiichtein et al. 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), and viral marketing (e.g. Brown, Bhadury, and Pope 2010; De Bruyn and Lilien 2008; Ho and Dempsey 2010; Phelps et al. 2004). To the best of our knowledge, no research has explored the interrelationship of video sharing and brand information processing in the context of VV advertising. As an attempt to fill this gap, this study examines the interaction between people’s intention to share a viral video and their processing of information related to the brand embedded in the video.

We posit that attitude toward the VV advertisement (A_v) plays a critical role in integrating intention of video sharing and formation of brand attitudes. When exposed to a VV advertisement, people will form a positive or negative attitude toward it, and then generate an intention to share or not share the video with others. At the same time, VV advertising contains brand information, and its mechanisms resemble those of traditional advertising. Therefore, A_v equates attitude toward the advertisement (A_{ad}) when we regard VV advertising as a unique form of advertisement. In this light, A_v may influence the formation of A_b and purchase intention (PI) when people are exposed to VV advertising, similar to how attitudes toward traditional advertising directly or indirectly affect the formation of A_b and PI, as suggested in previous advertising literature (e.g., Brown and Stayman 1992).

To better understand the mechanism and effects of VV advertising, we extend the mediating model of A_{ad} proposed by MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) to investigate the interrelationship between video content sharing and brand information processing, and explore the reciprocal effects among A_v , A_b , SI, and PI. This paper is organized as follows. First, a conceptual model for the interaction of video sharing and brand information processing, as well as hypotheses about it, are proposed. Then we test the goodness of fit for the model and examine the relationship between video sharing and formation of brand attitude by using data from experiments involving three video clips. In conclusion, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

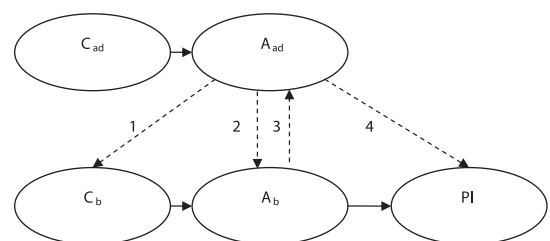
The Conceptual Model

The mediating role of A_{ad} can be traced to two sources. One source is explained using the cognitive response model (Lutz 1977; Olson, Toy, and Dover 1982; Wright 1973). This model posits that people’s exposure to certain information first induces a cognitive response, which will affect attitude formation, and the attitude will in turn influence the formation of intentions. Therefore, a chain

reaction of “cognitive response → attitude → intention” ensues after exposure to advertising. The other source is explained in the work of Mitchell and Olson (1981) and Shimp (1981). They found that besides Fishbein’s beliefs, A_{ad} , treated as affective reaction toward an ad (Lutz 1985), can also mediate A_b . A large number of subsequent studies began investigating the role of A_{ad} and suggested that A_{ad} is a critical indicator of advertising effectiveness (Brown and Stayman 1992).

Based on the two sources above, MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) identified the “brand-related cognitions (C_b) → A_b → PI” and the “ad-related cognitions (C_{ad}) → A_{ad} ” linkages based on the cognitive response model, and postulated four alternative causal models to explain the mediating effects of A_{ad} on A_b and PI (see Fig. 1). The first one is affect transfer hypothesis (ATH) which postulates that A_{ad} exerts a one-way influence on A_b . The dual mediation hypothesis (DMH) specifies that A_{ad} has a direct effect on A_b and an indirect effect on A_b through brand cognition (C_b). The reciprocal mediation hypothesis (RMH) posits an interactive relationship between A_{ad} and A_b . The fourth, the independent influences hypothesis (IIH), assumes no causal relationship between A_{ad} and A_b , and instead A_{ad} will be an independent determinant of PI. MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) found that DMH is the most robust fit to their experimental data; their results were also supported by other studies (e.g., Homer 1990; Karson and Fisher 2005a; Karson and Fisher 2005b).

In the current study, the causal models proposed by MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) will be used in conceptualizing the effect of VV advertising. This is appropriate for several reasons. First, as VV advertising is a unique form of advertising and A_v is a representation of A_{ad} in this unique context, theories and models from previous research on A_{ad} are applicable to the study of VV advertising. Second, according to the cognitive response model (Lutz 1977; Olson, Toy, and Dover 1982; Wright 1973), the pattern of cognition → attitude → intention can be demonstrated not only in the context of brand information processing, but also by the formation of an intention to share. Therefore, the hypothetical model proposed by MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) can be extended to fit the two processes of VV advertising. Third, video sharing intention and brand attitude formation may occur at the same time in the context of the VV advertising, and the MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) causal



Where:

C_{ad} = advertising cognition; A_{ad} = attitude toward advertising; C_b = brand cognition; A_b = brand attitudes; PI = purchase intention

Fig. 1. The mediating model of A_{ad} . The labeled linkage exists when the following hypothesis is verified: Affect Transfer Hypothesis (ATH): 2; Dual Mediation Hypothesis (DMH): 1, 2. Reciprocal Mediation (RMH): 2, 3; Independent Influences Hypotheses (IIH): 4. Source: MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986).

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