When More Might Be Less:
Can Advertisements Improve the Impact of Positive Media Content on a Brand?

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Imagine…

...you were in the position of an advertising manager of a small company. You are approached by a print media company offering you a favorable news story as context for an ad you could place in the same magazine. Of course, at an extra charge.

Given your small advertising budget – how would you decide?

And, considering the media company, facing a “double market” with the ad space customers and the media consumers, would such a coupling be acceptable for the readers of the magazine?
Empirical Relevance

- Germany: Baerns and Feldschow (2004: 139f.) found that 44% of all editors in chief reported that favorable editorial reports to support advertising efforts of advertisers are **standard practice**

- Mostly, media publishers and advertising departments – and not journalists – are willing to boost **advertising space sales pressure** journalist to offer couplings

- Media economical background: media companies’ target of “two thirds of total returns from ad sales” (BDZV 2006: 6) → content-plus-ad packages as ad sales argument
Prior Research

- Positive news stories about companies or brands more effective in influencing attitudes than advertisements (Chaiken, & Maheswaran, 1994; Jo, 2004)

- Effect of higher credibility of editorial content strongest under low involvement conditions (Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken, & Maheswaran, 1994), but...  

- ...most experiments under **forced exposure conditions** known to possibly raise task involvement

- Research gap: effects of direct coupling of editorial content (e.g., news stories) and ads in the same media
Effects on Consumers’ Memory for the Brand

• The more often information is repeated, the better it is remembered (D’Souza, & Rao, 1995: 37ff.; Hawkins, & Hoch, 1992)

• Effect of repetition is supplemented by different executions of the ad (Unnava, & Burnkrant, 1991)

• “Super Bowl Ads-Study” (Jin 2003-04): Newspaper articles about TV ads coming up later can increase viewers’ recall after ad exposure
  → Different sources leave different memory traces, thus improving consumers’ recollection
  → “memory trace refreshment” (Pham, & Johar, 1997)
Hypothesis 1: Brand Recall

If a positive editorial report about a brand appears in the same medium as an advertisement for the brand – i.e. there is “article/advertisement coupling” – then consumers’ recall of the brand will be higher than if the editorial report appears alone.
Positive Effects on $A_{\text{Brand}}$

- Repetition (news story + ad) might trigger mere exposure effect (Zajonc 1968)

- Truth effect (validity effect): repeated statements are rated as more valid than statements heard or read for the first time (Arkes, Hackett, & Boehm, 1989; Hasher, Goldstein, & Toppino, 1977; Hawkins, & Hoch, 1992; Roggeveen, & Johar, 2002: 81)

- Subjective familiarity and thus believability (Roggeveen, & Johar, 2002) of the claim in the ad might be increased by having it read before in the news story

- Effects more pronounced under natural reading conditions, since then consumers should pay less attention to the editorial vs. ad nature of the content
Inferring Manipulative Intent

What happens if consumers actually notice the connection between ad and editorial content?

Three possibilities:

1. No motives assumed (“product is just interesting enough for writing about it”)

2. Bribery by company assumed (“placing an ad in exchange for positive coverage”)
   → consumer devalues company ($A_{Brand} \downarrow$)

3. Editorial content assumed to be ploy to win advertising customers
   → consumer devalues news content (perceived objectivity of the medium $\downarrow$)

Consumers possess persuasion knowledge about persuasion strategies (Friestad, & Wright, 1994)
Competing Hypotheses 2a vs. 2b: Positive vs. Negative Effect on $A_{\text{Brand}}$

If a positive news story about a brand appears in the same medium as an advertisement for the brand,

H2a) then consumers’ attitude toward the brand will be **more positive** than if the news story appears alone.

H2b) then consumers’ attitude toward the brand will be **more negative** than if the news story appears alone.
Media Genre Credibility as Moderator

- Media Genre (e.g., special vs. general interest magazines) serves as contextual cue: preconception about the validity of the information contained in the magazine before reading it (Hallahan, 1999)

- Contextual cue “credibility of media genre” might moderate the negative coupling effect:
  - Less credible genre: “coupling = manipulation” logic might be triggered
  - Credible genre: repetition of the information might not be considered as persuasive attempt – truth effect might be triggered
Hypothesis 3

If a positive news story about a brand appears in the same example of a medium genre with high credibility as an advertisement for the brand,

- then consumers’ attitude toward the brand will be more positive and
- the objectivity of the editorial reports will be perceived more positively than in an example of a less credible media genre.
Experimental Design

- Participants: 246 Students (valid n=216) randomly assigned to one of our experimental conditions

- Fictional brand and magazines: no prior attitudes

- Product: fictional brand “SuperFast TFT” for a flatscreen (TFT) monitor → students’ involvement can be expected

- Medium: dummies of two fictional magazines from two media genres:
  - popular (general interest) magazine of boulevard style “Tempo! Tempo!” (less credible genre)
  - special interest computer magazine “PC Klar!” (credible genre)
### Experimental Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility of the Media Genre</th>
<th>Forced Exposure</th>
<th>Natural Exposure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low (General Interest Magazine)</td>
<td>News Story only: (n = 37)</td>
<td>News Story only: (n = 32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News Story plus Ad: (n = 32)</td>
<td>News Story plus Ad: (n = 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (Special Interest Magazine)</td>
<td>News Story only: (n = 29)</td>
<td>News Story only: (n = 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News Story plus Ad: (n = 18)</td>
<td>News Story plus Ad: (n = 32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 (positive news story only vs. positive news story plus advertisement) \(\times\) 2 (credible genre vs. less credible genre) with involvement as covariate under two experimental exposure conditions
The Problem of Realistic Experimental Designs

• Typical designs:
  – Lack of realistic contexts for ad and news story: typically only the target ad, one single news story, and few distraction ads are presented in a booklet
  – Lack of realistic media contacts: forced exposure designs create the risk of informants being alerted to the experimental situation (hypothesis guessing)

• Call for realistic media use designs (Bronner, & Neijens, 2006; Derbaix, 1995; D’Souza, & Rao, 1995)

  Comparing the impact of forced exposure vs. natural media contact (reading) situation in our experimental design
Stimulus Story and Ad

Target News Story

SuperFast TFT: Flachbildschirm im Temporausch

SuperFast TFT bringt die Display-Innovation des Jahres auf den Markt: Ein superschnelles 19" Display mit nur 8ms Reaktionszeit. Von Markus Lehmann


Target Ad

Superschnelle LCD-Displays.


Infotest: www.fastresponsetime.com
Makeup of the Dummy “Tempo! Tempo!”
(General Interest Magazine)
Makeup of the Dummy “PC Klar!” (Special Interest Magazine)

Typical Reading Direction

Distraction Stories and Ads | Target Article SuperFast TFT | Distraction Stories and Ads | Target Ad/Alternative Ad

(...)

SuperFast TFT: Flachbildaufschirm im Temporäusch

120 Dauobol. 5402 Watt. Der Velocity XPe 460.

(...)

(...)

(...)
Experimental Situation

Respondents in Waiting Area

Disguised Observer

Reading the Magazine Dummy
Controlling Experimental Conditions

- Only students who picked up the magazine dummies and read/ flipped through completely for at least 30 seconds remained in the sample

- Mean reading time: 3:48 minutes for natural reading conditions, 4:46 minutes for forced exposure

- Realistic willingness to pay for a “normal” issue with 140 pages of the magazine the test persons read:
  - General interest: $M = 1.70 \text{ €}$
  - Special interest: $M = 2.98 \text{ €}$
### Manipulation Check Genre Credibility

#### Free Elicitation Procedure: Key Features of the Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Special Interest</th>
<th>General Interest</th>
<th>Chi square</th>
<th>Sign.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>credible/serious</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>59.842</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unreliable</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Associations elicited relate closely to the newspaper credibility index (Meyer, 1988)
H1: Brand Recall Under Forced Exposure

**Forced Exposure:**
high recall, but no significant difference between “news only” and “news + ad” condition
\(F(1, 111) = 1.003, p = .319\)

→ High recall caused by artificially high attention to the experiment at work?
H1: Brand Recall Under **Natural Exposure**

- **News Story Only**: 60.40%
- **News Story plus Ad**: 88.10%

$p = .001$
Testing H2a vs. H2b: A_{Brand}

• Under both forced exposure and natural exposure conditions: No significant main effect of coupling news story and ad on attitude toward the brand
  \[ F(1, 111) = 1.003, p = .319 \]

• But: under forced exposure, we found a significant interaction between coupling and credibility of magazine genre
  \[ F(1, 111) = 4.101, p = .045 \]

→ Single effect analysis to further investigate the moderating role of media genre
Genre Effects on $A_{Brand}$ (Forced Exposure)

![Graph showing the effect of media genre on attitude toward the brand. The x-axis represents different media genres: News Story Only and News Story Plus Ad. The y-axis represents the attitude toward the brand. The graph illustrates that less credible media genres lead to a decrease in attitude toward the brand, while credible media genres lead to an increase. The correlation coefficients are 0.244 and 0.123 for less credible media genres, and 0.438 and -0.520 for credible media genres.](image-url)
Genre Effects on $A_{Brand}$ (Natural Exposure)

Model not significant:

$$F(4, 103) = 2.253, \ p = .068$$
Main effect of the coupling not significant:

\[ F(1, 123) = 3.042, p = .084 \]

Interaction media genre * coupling not significant:

\[ F(1, 123) = 2.665, p = .105 \]
Genre Effects on Perceived Objectivity of Coverage (Natural Exposure)

- Credible Media Genre: Perceived Objectivity of News Coverage
  - News Story Only: 0.067
  - News Story Plus Ad: 0.660

- Less Credible Media Genre: Perceived Objectivity of News Coverage
  - News Story Only: -0.366
  - News Story Plus Ad: -0.676
Discussion

• Under natural reading conditions, coupling leads to higher brand recall → effect would have been overlooked in a “classical” forced exposure study

• No effect of coupling news stories and ads on attitude toward the brand – neither positive nor negative

• Media genre effect under natural reading conditions:
  – in less credible media genres, coupling triggers the “manipulative intent heuristic”
  – in credible genres, however, familiarity and truth effect even lead to increased perceived objectivity in case of a coupling between ad and news story → if at all, ads and news stories should be coupled in credible magazine genres
Limitations

- Long term effects of coupling ads and news stories:
  - Positive effect of recall on attitude toward the brand over time?
  - Decreasing devaluation of the medium over time (sleeper effect)?

- Brand knowledge: results valid also for brands already known to the consumer?

- Further media context effects on ad and news story effectiveness (e.g., Malthouse, Calder, & Tamhane, 2006; Wang, & Calder, 2006)

- Age effects: older consumers more affected by familiarity effects (Bieri, Florack, & Scarabis, 2006: 23)
Thank you!
Outline

Effects of Media Reports on Brands

- Anchoring the Brand in Consumers’ Memory
- Mere Exposure and the Truth Effect
- Inferring Manipulative Intent: Boomerang Effects
- Media Genre Credibility as Moderator

Experiment

Discussion and Implications
### Factor Structure $A_{\text{Brand}}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Factor $A_{\text{Brand}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend products of SF TFT to my friends</td>
<td>+.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand “SF TFT” is very credible</td>
<td>+.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products of SF TFT are absolutely high-grade</td>
<td>+.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I buy a computer monitor next time, SF TFT is my first choice</td>
<td>+.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand SF TFT is really important to me</td>
<td>+.721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>3.531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Variance Explained</td>
<td>58.855%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s $\alpha$</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listwise $N = 224$