DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 256 CS 509 839

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TITLE Recall of Television Advertising Messages as Influenced by Commercial Pod Position and Commercial/Program Affect Congruity or Dissonance.
PUB DATE 1997-06-04
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Communication Association (St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, June 4, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Mass Media; Persuasive Discourse; Programming (Broadcast); *Recall (Psychology); Tables (Data); *Television Commercials; Television Research; Television Surveys; *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS *Advertising Effectiveness; Variables

ABSTRACT

A study examined viewer recall of television commercial content as influenced by both commercial spot positioning within breaks and the congruence or dissonance of the affective (emotionally evocative) formats of the program contexts and commercials. Objectives were to determine whether commercials will have greater rates of viewer recall if: (1) the commercials are positioned in the first or last "bookend" positions in a break; or (2) the commercials have production treatments or affective appeals that are congruent with that of the programming within which they are placed. The study also sought to determine if there are any correlations between these two variables. The survey methodology employed a naturalistic laboratory setting, and subjects (all were students at a midwestern university participating as volunteers outside of scheduled class time) viewed either a half-hour comedy or police drama, each containing two commercial breaks comprised of four to five spots each. Results indicated that neither the hypothesis that spot position within a pod will influence recall of the commercial message or of associated visuals or brand/service names nor the hypothesis that affective congruity or dissonance with program context would influence recall were supported. Findings suggest that inherent product interest and message content variables play roles in recall that are more significant and influential than pod position or affect congruity. (Contains 8 tables and 19 references.) (CR)

RECALL OF TELEVISION ADVERTISING MESSAGES AS INFLUENCED BY COMMERCIAL POD POSITION AND COMMERCIAL/PROGRAM AFFECT CONGRUITY OR DISSONANCE.

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This survey project measured viewer recall of television commercial content as influenced by both commercial spot positioning within breaks and the congruence or dissonance of the affective (emotionally evocative) formats of the program contexts and commercials. Existing research in spot positioning suggests that commercials in the first or last position within a break, or pod, will obtain higher rates of recall by viewers. Also, advertising placement practices show an expectation that commercials which are consistent in production treatment, audience address, and affective format with the programming leading into and out of the break make a stronger, more memorable impression on viewers. One hypothesis, therefore, is that commercials positioned in the first or last "bookend" positions in a break will have measurably greater rates of viewer recall. A second hypothesis is that commercials with production treatments or affective appeals that are congruent with that of the programming within which they are placed will have greater rates of viewer recall. The objectives of this study were to determine if these two variable effects could be found through the experimental survey design, to look for any correlations that might exist between these two variables, and to determine if one variable might be more significant than the other.

To summarize the experimental design, within a naturalistic environment, student subjects viewed either a half hour comedy or half hour police drama. Each program contained two commercial breaks comprised of five spots each for

a total of ten, including four commercials specifically screened and selected to be congruent with either the humorous or the dramatic affective formats of the programs. One break presented an affect-congruent commercial in the hypothesized higher-recall first or last break position while the other break had the second congruent commercial in the weaker-recall middle position. Two affect-dissonant commercials were also placed in first/last and middle positions within the two pods. Through a post-viewing written survey, subjects responded to questions that predominantly elicited responses to and recall of the programs. Two questions asked for unaided recall of product/service names or types. Additionally, prompted recall of program and commercial content was afforded through a list of character, actor, location, and product names which subjects could select from. Lastly, thirty-six key frames from both viewed and unviewed spots and program episodes which subjects could check off provided another prompted recall opportunity.

Review of Literature

This project measured television commercial message recall as influenced by both placement within breaks and by the congruence between program and commercial message affective style (comedy or dramatization). As such, this was partially a replication of existing research, but with the additional objectives of testing for possible interactions and differing levels of effect for these two variables.

• Existing Research in Pod Position Effects

Customarily, the cost of placing a spot (the purchase price of the airtime for the commercial) is related to the number of viewers being attracted and delivered to the advertiser by a particular program. Rating, share, cost-per-thousand, and other methods of computing and describing this program's audience size, are the bases for determining its commercial rate. The purchase of time in this program at this rate gives the buyer a spot time. Exactly where this

spot time will be, first position in the first pod or middle position in the last, etc., is usually at the discretion of the network or local outlet selling the time. A buyer may request, but cannot expect, a particular pod or position in a pod. Typically, the only spot scheduling considerations given to a buyer are assurances that their commercial will not be adjacent to a competitor's commercial. All positions are priced the same, and are to be considered randomly assigned and of equal value. However, if spot placement within breaks has a measurable influence on spot effectiveness, than placement should be a legitimate factor in determining appropriate advertising rates.

The interest in and need for policies dealing with position-recall advantage has been reported by Lipman (1989) and Sacharin. Sacharin in particular argued for more oversight on the part of advertisers of seller-discretionary positioning and "equitable rotations" and recommended that guaranteed pod positions should be obtained through negotiations, an option tentatively suggested by CBS-TV (1983). Webb and Ray have also attested to increasing advertiser concerns regarding pod position advantage and its significance in the countering of "clutter", the obscuration of individual commercial messages due to greater numbers of spots being jumbled together into longer pods (1979). Ongoing rollbacks by the FCC on advertising time apportionments has led to growing commercial traffic with attendant clutter. Webb and Ray's research, while directed primarily at ascertaining the effects of variable levels of clutter density (pod length) on commercial message recall, also found that the greatest frequencies of recall were obtained for commercials in the first position across all pod variables. The middle position had recall levels that were an average of 14% lower than first position in all pods. The last position had slightly greater recall levels than the middle position.

Web and Ray's findings confirmed earlier industry studies and surveys on pod position effects. Both first and last positions within pods yielded higher

recall levels according to one telephone survey of viewers who were contacted immediately after telecasts of specific commercial breaks. As reported by the Newspaper Advertising Bureau ("Viewer Recall of Last Commercial", 1986), commercials in first position accounted for 48% of the total number recalled, while those in the middle position accounted for 16% of the total. Last position accounted for 36% of the total. It is interesting to note that for this reported data collection and method, only 1.6% of all commercials aired were recalled.

Marney's summary of Burke Marketing Research surveys from the 1970s suggest that a mid-position commercial will average 14% fewer viewer recalls than will a first-position commercial (1982). Burke Day-After Recall Tests of television commercials in 1980 and 1983 continued to show at least a 6% difference in recall rates between first and middle positions (Burke Marketing Research, 1983).

Some industry surveys, however, have not found the "book-end" position advantage to be this pronounced or reliable. In one study by BBDO (1969), a day-after telephone survey of women viewers found that the last position in a broadcast four commercial pod had been only slightly advantageous, and that the first and second positions actually shared the lowest recall levels. There was, however, only a 6% difference between the highest and lowest levels of recall for commercial awareness. (In this study, the four test commercials were arranged into pods with four different position rotations, with one pod each being telecast in Portland, Maine, Oklahoma City, Wichita, and Omaha. This is one of the few instances where experimentally controlled material has been delivered by actual broadcast.) In other cases, the last position can be the strongest, especially when position differences between pods are accounted for. Paul Donato of R.D. Percy has noted occurrences of "downtrending pods and uptrending pods" wherein the first pod in a program shows the first commercial position to be strongest while the last pod shows the last position to be strongest (and first position weakest).

("Where To Be In Pod Seems To Depend Upon Which Pod",1988). It would appear that "book-end" positioning is not necessarily a guarantee of higher recall, and these factors are not as uncomplicated in function and effect as might first be expected. Web and Ray found in their analyses that individual commercials varied greatly in the extent to which they suffered or benefited from clutter and position treatments, and as Marney notes, "while mechanical features can have a bearing on the performance of advertising, inherent product interest and message content variables play important roles".

• Existing Research in Affect Congruency in Television Advertising

The affective constituents to be found in any television commercial message are manifold, complex, and interacting. In addition to the emotional cues that are generated through basic production variables such as direction, talent choice and performance, graphic design, music scoring, and editing technique, there can be a wide range of affective elements contributed by the language, cultural ideologies, and iconography related to targeted audience address. In many cases, television messages can evoke, through oppositional or negotiated readings, emotional responses distinct from the intended dominant affect (Fiske, 1989, p.62-7). As Dillard and Wilson caution, "it does seem quite unlikely that so complex a stimulus as a commercial message or feature-length film would induce one and only one emotion (1993, p.639).

Despite the problematic nature of both affect categorization and isolation in research, there do exist a number of established schemes for categorizing television advertising emotional treatments and affective formats. Some treatment categorizations tend to differentiate on the bases of production formats (Hilliard, 1991, p.157), persuasive appeal, audience address, and other non-affective articulations, but certain affective inducements such as humor, threat, invitation, assurance, etc. can find their place within all of these varied forms of categorization. In this study, humor and dramatized threat were the affect

categories chosen, partly because of their clear distinction apart from each other, and also because they are commonly invoked and depicted emotional states in both advertising and fictive programming.

Specific research on affect in television advertising communication is quite limited, even when compared to the modest body of research on position effects. However, the emotional dimensions of television and film products have been an essential consideration throughout decades of research in media violence and viewer aggression, uses and gratifications, persuasion and propaganda, rhetorical analysis, and other well established areas of mass media study. Media violence research in particular has examined closely both the priming effects of screened aggression on viewer behavior and cognitions and the preference for and approval of media violence exhibited by both persons predisposed towards aggression and subjects experimentally aroused to anger. Affect has always been a fundamental aspect of humans and human communication requiring research attention or control.

In the behavioral sciences, mood congruity (eg. happy - sad) has been explored experimentally by a number of researchers, particularly in connection with learning. It has been found in some studies that subjects' recall of information is higher when their mood during both learning and testing are the same (Mecklenbrauker and Hager, 1984) and that subjects will have higher levels of recall for material that is affectively congruent with their emotional state (Gilligan and Bower, 1983; Perrig and Perrig-Chiello, 1985). More recent studies, however, suggest that mood congruity does not reliably aid recall of specific memories and cognitions, but does continue to influence the attitudes of learners towards subject matter (Finegan and Seligman, 1993; Roediger and McDermott, 1992). It would seem then that the factor of mood congruity may be of questionable value in educational design but of sound utilitarian value in persuasion. In research focusing more directly on consumer behavior, congruity

between self-concept and product-image (Sirgy, 1982), actual self image and ideal self image (Sirgy, 1985), brand name and retailer image (Pettijohn, Mellott, and Pettijohn, 1992), and utilitarian or value-expressive appeals and consumer self-image (Johar and Sirgy, 1991) appears to hold significant persuasive power.

Television advertising research, however, is not only interested in what results from the affect of the commercial message, as a discrete influence in and of itself, but also what results from affect clutter and affect congruity or dissonance with programming contexts. The consequences of both chosen and unchosen contexts are of unique concern here. Congruity between programming and advertising has been examined by Celuch and Slama on the basis of cognitive or affective approaches to audience involvement. It was found that congruency between programming and advertising did not result in increased advertising effectiveness, although affective appeal was generally more effective than the cognitive approach (1993). In this study, however, congruity or dissonance between affects was not tested.

Method

Our recall survey methodology employed a naturalistic laboratory setting similar to that recommended by Webb and Ray in their studies on commercial clutter. In our study, subjects viewed either a half hour comedy (Blackadder) or a half hour police drama (N.Y.P.D.), each containing two commercial breaks. These breaks were comprised of four to five spots each and included one specific humorous commercial (Duck Race) identified to be closely matched in affect with the comedy program and one dramatic testimonial (PSA) closely matched in affect with the dramatic program. These were rotated together with twelve other spots to create four different commercial viewing treatments:

N.Y.P.D. dramatic program context -- Pod rotation version A

Duck Race | *Stephens :10* | **PSA :30** | *Hersheys :10* | Monroe :30
HIP Cop :40 | Mrs Grass:30 | *Arts :30* | Combat :30 |

N.Y.P.D. dramatic program context -- Pod rotation version B

Monroe :30 | *Arts :30* | HIP Cop :40 | Mrs Grass:30 |
PSA :30 | *Stephens :10* | **Duck Race** | *Hersheys :10* | Combat

Blackadder comedy program context -- Pod rotation version A

Com Fed :30 | Bud :10 | NYNEX :30 | *Stephens :10* | *Arts :30*
Duck Race | *Hersheys :10* | **PSA :30** | Car City :30 | Don's :30

Blackadder comedy program context -- Pod rotation version B

PSA :30 | *Hersheys :10* | **Duck Race** | Car City :30 | *Arts :30*
NYNEX :30 | Bud :10 | Com Fed :30 | *Stephens :10* | Don's :30

Note: Primary test spots in **boldface**. Secondary test spots in *italics*.

In addition to the primary test spots Duck Race and PSA , the commercials for Stephens, Arts, and Hersheys also received both bookend and middle position treatments in both program contexts, and were therefore included in our analyses as secondary test spots although their affective appeals were not as powerful as those of the primaries. Stephens and Hersheys could be considered moderately amusing, but they did not elicit observable reactions of amusement, such as smiles or laughter, from students who had served as material screeners. (Duck Race did evoke clear responses from screeners.) Arts was a paid promotional spot for professional theater and dance that employed a visual montage with classical music bed structure. Hersheys was the only test spot with an established product/service identity.

All the commercials used to construct the pods were acquired from out-of-market advertising agencies, and so were seen by the test subjects for the first time during this study. All subjects were students enrolled at a midwestern university participating as volunteers outside of scheduled classtime. Subjects were recruited through class announcements, flyers, and campus newspaper ads soliciting their assistance in the evaluation of television programs.

The primary viewing environment was a casually (student) decorated living room in an off-campus, university owned house. The room had a capacity of five, and was furnished with several easy chairs, a couch, coffee table with reading material, television with stand, and a cooler stocked with free soft drinks (one of the inducements to participation). A second viewing location on-campus, similarly furnished, was used on a few occasions when the house was not available. Screenings times were made available several times during each day of the week for two months to accommodate volunteers' schedules.

On arrival at the screening site, subjects were told that surveying interest levels in the program on view was the objective of this study, and that they were free to pay no more or less attention to the program than it merited. They were encouraged to talk amongst themselves during the session, but not to discuss what was being viewed until after they had completed the opinion survey. They were also free to read the available print materials, do their homework, eat lunch, etc. The only restrictions were: remain in the room except for restroom breaks (none were taken), do not turn the volume on the set off, and do not discuss the program on view.

The survey form was completed by subjects immediately after the screening, and took an average of fifteen minutes to complete. The first page requested basic personal data such as age, gender, race or ethnic origin, hours of television watched per week, and the titles of police and comedy programs followed during the last two years. Following this section were twelve questions

asking for reactions to and assessments of the program. After this section, two questions asked subjects to 1. list the names of any of the products or services in the commercials that they could recall, and 2. describe the types of products or services that they could recall. Responses to these two questions measured the frequency of unprompted recall of commercial messages. In coding, a product or service that was recalled by name in the first question was not included as an additional recall if it was described in the second question.

Prompted recall was then measured using a list which provided both correct and incorrect names of program characters, actors names, program locations, and product/service names. Subjects were instructed to circle all names that they remembered hearing or seeing during the screening session. Finally, prompted recall was collected a second time using thirtysix key frame images captured from both the viewed and unviewed program episodes and commercials. Subjects once again were asked to circle images that they remembered seeing during the screening session. The ratio of incorrect to correct name and image choices provided was approximately 2 to 1. This survey, then, ascertained recall of two primary and three secondary test spots on the basis of pod position and affect congruity using four recall frequency counts: unprompted name recall, unprompted type recall, prompted name recall, and prompted image recall.

Results

The data were tested for significance using the *chi square* procedure. As shown in the following tables, of the eight measures employed only one appeared to collect data that showed a significant difference for recall; Table Three shows the comedy spot affected by a combination of affect context and pod position in keeping with the hypothesis under study. Combining the four different measurements methods together for each spot for additional *chi square* testing did not result in any significance. However, data analysis is still underway as of this writing.

Table One: Comedy Spot - Unprompted Recall by Name

	No Recall	Recalled	Total
Dramatic Show/First Position	15	2	17
Dramatic Show/Mid Position	28	2	30
Comedy Show/First Position	18	1	19
Comedy Show/Mid Position	10	2	12

x^2=1.55, 3 d.f., p=.67 (ns)

Table Two: Comedy Spot - Unprompted Recall by Content/Product Description

	No Recall	Recalled	Total
Dramatic Show/First Position	15	2	17
Dramatic Show/Mid Position	27	3	30
Comedy Show/First Position	18	1	19
Comedy Show/Mid Position	8	4	12

x^2=5.72, 3d.f., p=.13 (ns)

Table Three: Comedy Spot - Recall by List Selection

	No Recall	Recalled	Total
Dramatic Show/First Position	11	6	17
Dramatic Show/Mid Position	24	6	30
Comedy Show/First Position	9	10	19
Comedy Show/Mid Position	4	8	12

x^2=10.0, 3 d.f., p=.018 (significant)

Table Four: Comedy Spot - Recall by Video Frame Selection

	No Recall	Recalled	Total
Dramatic Show/First Position	8	9	17
Dramatic Show/Mid Position	12	18	30
Comedy Show/First Position	5	14	19
Comedy Show/Mid Position	3	9	12

x^2=2.52, 3 d.f., p=.47 (ns)

Table Five: Dramatic Spot - Unprompted Recall by Name

	No Recall	Recalled	Total
Dramatic Show/First Position	13	4	17
Dramatic Show/Mid Position	21	9	30
Comedy Show/First Position	18	1	19
Comedy Show/Mid Position	8	4	12

x^2=4.91, 3 d.f., p=.177 (ns)

Table Six: Dramatic Spot - Unprompted Recall by Content/Product Description data test not available

Table Seven: Dramatic Spot Recall by List Selection

	No Recall	Recalled	Total
Dramatic Show/First Position	9	8	17
Dramatic Show/Mid Position	14	16	30
Comedy Show/First Position	13	6	19
Comedy Show/Mid Position	7	5	12

x^2=2.31, 3 d.f., p=.51 (ns)

Table Eight: Dramatic Spot - Recall by Video Frame Selection

	No Recall	Recalled	Total
Dramatic Show/First Position	13	4	17
Dramatic Show/Mid Position	14	16	30
Comedy Show/First Position	15	4	19
Comedy Show/Mid Position	7	5	12

x^2=6.92, 3 d.f., p=.07 (ns)

Discussion

Since, as was noted in the review of existing research, the advantage of first or last position in a pod has not been consistently shown, it was not very surprising that this study did not find substantial significance. Regarding affect,

research has yet to find a positive influence in program and spot congruity, and this study also fails to find measurable advantage or disadvantage.

Regarding possible internal weaknesses in the design of this study, it must be acknowledged that the number of survey participants was uncomfortably low considering the
number of data cells required to test both position and affect context variables in interaction. Combined with the design requirement that subjects view the material in very small groups or individually and participate voluntarily, these factors resulted in lean data. To obtain richer data, this particular survey design requires a very lengthy administration calendar.

Recall rates were also intentionally attenuated by the steps (procedural instructions and statements about the "goals" of the survey) put in place to direct our subjects' attention away from the commercial messages and towards the programming context. Combined with the task of completing preliminary sections in the survey on program appeal (an activity intended to displace short term memory), these mechanisms certainly may have penalized our spot recall rates in the
pursuit of a more naturalistic outcome, where as few as 1.6% of viewed commercials may be recalled ("Viewer Recall of Last Commercial", 1986).

Summary

The results of this study do not support the hypothesis that spot position within a pod will influence recall of the commercial message or of associated visuals or brand/service names. The hypothesis that affective congruity or dissonance with program context will influence recall was also not found. In light of the limited amount of research in this area, these hypotheses require additional testing before they can be comfortably regarded as either valid or discounted. It is also obvious that these two factors are interactive in the real world of broadcast advertising, and that any study design attempting to account

for their influences completely and reliably will necessarily need to be extensive, naturalistic, and either long-term or on a vast scale (as in the BBDO study). The selection or creation of controlled affect in both program context and spot content also promises to be extremely problematic and challenging, vulnerable to confounding variables.

The fundamental assumptions and underlying pragmatic concerns of both of these hypotheses have emerged from within the advertising and broadcasting industries. It could be conjectured that incidences of pronounced and aesthetically tangible position and affect effects are often observed, and legitimate concerns will always exist that these factors may be consistent and always present and bear influence on all advertising messages. At this point, however, it still appears that Marney's view that "inherent product interest and message content variables" play roles in recall that are more significant and influential than pod position or affect congruity.

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CS509839

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