

The effects of brand experience and an advertisement's disclaimer speed on purchase: speak slowly or carry a big brand

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Research on disclaimers (messages intended to fully disclose all information that could affect decision making and elucidate possibly misunderstood statements) in radio advertisements has drawn little attention. Using the same words in the disclaimer, the speed with which the disclaimer was read at the end of a food advertisement, and whether the product had a well-known or unknown (established via a pilot study) brand was manipulated and the resulting effects on purchase were assessed. Though the speed with which a disclaimer is read does not have an effect on purchases of well-known branded products, when the product is unknown to consumers, the speed with which the disclaimer is read is very important. Specifically, a slow disclaimer (read in six seconds) engenders significantly more purchasing than a fast disclaimer (read in three seconds). In other words, if people are not familiar with a product, and thus have little experience consuming it, it is best to read a disclaimer slowly. If, on the other hand, the product is well known and experienced by the consumer, disclaimer speed matters less as people already have first-hand experience using the product and thus rely less on the content of the disclaimer to affect purchase.

Introduction

Turn on the radio on any given day and you will hear commercials with disclaimers. Disclaimers have become an important executional cue in advertising used to satisfy the consumer's need for clarification and information, and the company's need for legal compliance and protection. Despite the amount of time and money many companies spend on advertising on the

radio, very little research has examined disclaimers in radio advertisements and their effectiveness in engendering purchase. There has been some research examining disclaimers in television advertising (Stern & Harmon 1984; Stutts & Hunnicut 1987; Morgan & Stoltman 2002) and the non-disclaimer content of television advertising (Aaker & Bruzzone 1985; Abernethy & Franke 1996; De Pelsmacker & Geuens 1997; Janssens & De Pelsmacker 2005).

Morgan and Stoltman (2002) found what appears to be a disconnection between the purpose of disclaimers in television advertisements (i.e., giving consumers necessary information to be able to weigh the positives and negatives of a product) and the ways in which they are often presented. In their research on television disclaimers, they found that disclaimers may not execute their intended purpose well because they are often mentioned by the voiceover or placed on the screen in a way that does not allow consumers to have control over the way in which they encode the information. In the end, they found that disclaimers on television do not fulfil their mission to be informative and comprehended. We feel that the same is true of disclaimers heard on the radio in that the stated information is often difficult or impossible to understand, undermining the well-known or unknown branded product's promotional efforts.

Branding and disclaimer effects

The degree to which disclaimers make a difference in terms of the advertisement's credibility could depend on whether the product being advertised is a well-known branded product or an unknown branded product. With increased use and experience, individuals tend to be less sceptical about a particular product's effects because some or all of their five senses have been associated with the product first-hand. Kotler and Armstrong (2005) discuss that brands add value and credibility to a product by ensuring that customers will get a consistent product each time they purchase it. Perhaps, then, the information in a disclaimer for a well-known branded product is less meaningful to a consumer than the information in a disclaimer promoting a product with which the consumer has very little experience. In the present research, we test the impact of disclaimer speed for both a well-known branded product and an unknown branded product to examine this difference.

Involvement level and the Elaboration Likelihood Model

Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (1986) posits that there are two routes to attitude change: a central and a peripheral one. In cases in which individuals are highly involved (i.e., they have the ability and motivation to process the various alternatives in fine detail), the central route to attitude change is taken. In this case, new attitudes emerge from effortful cognitive activity and, as a result, the newly formed attitude is likely to be long-lasting.

If, on the other hand, a consumer lacks either the ability or motivation to process the differences between product offerings, the peripheral route to attitude change is taken. The peripheral route to attitude change results when persuasion stems from non-issue-relevant concerns (e.g., attractiveness of the source). In the peripheral route, there is no effortful cognitive activity and, therefore, change in attitude lasts as a function of the salience of the cues.

Thus, the degree on which the advertisement is elaborated plays a significant role in whether any attitude change will be enduring. Elaboration is less likely if the message does not have an extensive amount of personal relevance to the individual. In addition, people tend to have an easier time processing a message to the extent that the message is written rather than presented in an audio-only manner (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). We think that manipulating the speed with which the disclaimer is read in the radio advertisement is yet another method to distinguish between that which is more or less easily comprehended. This research presents a situation in which involvement should be fairly moderate. The situation does not demand that participants take time to sift through all alternatives to select the best option. At the same time, however, because they are stating the degree to which they would be apt to purchase the product, they should listen carefully and decide whether the advertisement, with its fast or slow disclaimer, is persuasive enough to induce purchase of the product.

We predict a significant main effect of brand knowledge on purchase. That is, it is hypothesised that more people will purchase the well-known branded cereal (i.e., Cheerios Whole Toasted Oats) than the unknown branded cereal (i.e., Health Valley Whole Toasted Oats) across both disclaimer speed conditions. Well-known brands, as shown in the branding literature, are more recognisable than unknown brands and the disclaimer

speed should therefore matter less than if the product were unknown in the market.

In addition, we predict a significant main effect of disclaimer speed on purchase. Specifically, we hypothesise that products with slower disclaimers will be purchased significantly more than products with fast disclaimers. This will be evident across how well known the branded product is in the market.

Lastly, we predict a significant interaction between brand knowledge and disclaimer speed on purchase. We hypothesise that disclaimer speed will not affect purchase of a well-known branded product. When the branded product is unknown to the consumer, however, the disclaimer speed will have an impact on purchase as people will be more reluctant to purchase an unknown branded product when a fast disclaimer closes the advertisement.

Method

Participants

A total of 105 undergraduate and graduate students (58 males and 47 females) from a northeastern university in the United States participated in a 2 (brand knowledge: well-known brand versus unknown brand) \times 2 (disclaimer speed: fast versus slow) factorial design.

Procedure

Via a pilot test to establish which brands were most well known and unknown, we determined that Cheerios Whole Toasted Oats was a well-known branded product and Health Valley Whole Toasted Oats was an unknown branded product. Both products were sold in multiple locations near the university at which the study was conducted.

All participants listened to a cereal radio advertisement and a disclaimer read by a local professional (unknown to the participants) radio announcer.¹

¹ We wanted an unknown celebrity reading the ads in light of findings by Erdogan (1999) and Lafferty *et al.* (2002), which revealed that advertisements with celebrities often increase the extent to which individuals claim that they will purchase a good. We did not want this confound in our research. (For celebrity effects, see Wood & Herbst (in press)).

The content of the message in the radio advertisements and disclaimers was the same throughout all four conditions except for that which we manipulated, namely the name of the product (i.e., the well-known branded product (Cheerios Whole Toasted Oats) or unknown branded product (Health Valley Whole Toasted Oats)). In addition, the speed with which the disclaimer was read varied (i.e., the fast disclaimer was read in three seconds and the slow disclaimer in six seconds).

Purchase

After listening to the commercial and its disclaimer, participants completed the purchase measure. Specifically, on a seven-point scale where 1 = not at all and 7 = very much, participants indicated how likely they were to purchase the product.

Did the commercial contain a disclaimer?

In order to determine whether the participants did in fact hear a disclaimer, we asked participants to indicate whether they heard a disclaimer (i.e., yes or no) in the food advertisement to which they just listened.

Estimated length of disclaimer

Next, we asked participants to estimate how long the disclaimer lasted at the end of the advertisement. We wanted to verify that participants in the fast disclaimer condition thought that the disclaimer lasted for fewer seconds than did those in the slow disclaimer condition.

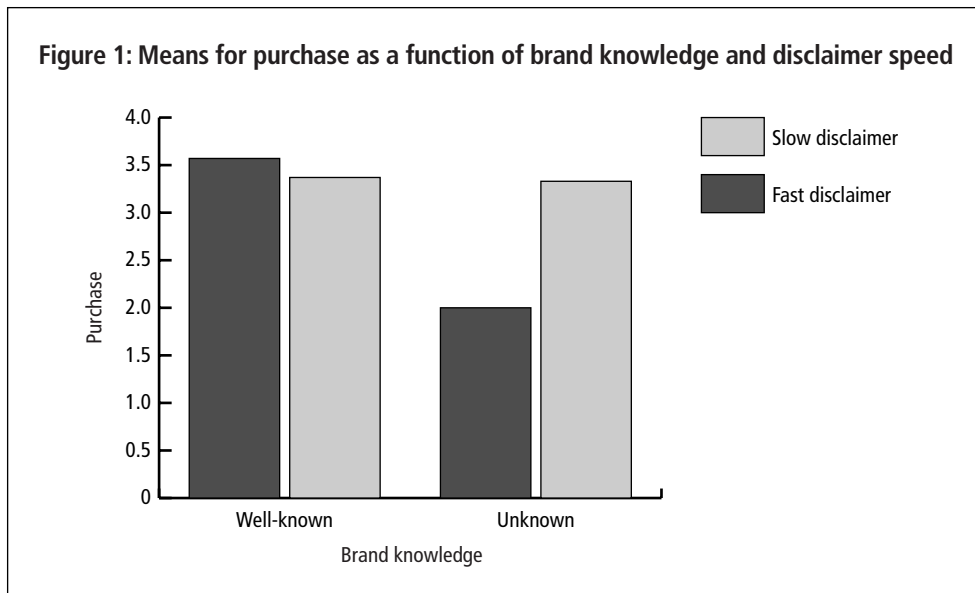
Results

Tests on all dependent measures broken down by age and sex revealed that there were no effects of these two variables and so they will not be discussed in the analyses that follow.

Purchase

As predicted, there was a significant main effect of brand knowledge on purchase. Participants indicated that they would be more apt to purchase the well-known branded product (i.e., Cheerios Whole Toasted Oats) ($M = 3.47$) than the unknown branded product (i.e., Health Valley Whole Toasted Oats) ($M = 2.64$), $F(1, 101) = 8.97$, $p < 0.01$ (see Figure 1). In addition, as predicted, there was a significant main effect of disclaimer speed on purchase. Participants hearing slow disclaimers were more apt to purchase ($M = 3.35$) than those hearing fast disclaimers ($M = 2.81$), $F(1, 101) = 4.45$, $p < 0.05$ (see Figure 1).

Lastly, as predicted, there was a significant interaction between brand knowledge and disclaimer speed, $F(1, 101) = 8.17$, $p < 0.01$ (see Figure 1). Follow-up tests revealed that, in line with expectations, there was a significant difference on purchase between fast ($M = 2.00$) and slow ($M = 3.33$) disclaimers in the unknown brand condition, $t(48) = -3.71$, $p < 0.001$. Examined from another angle, fast disclaimers led to significantly less purchase in the unknown brand condition ($M = 2.00$) than in the well-known brand condition ($M = 3.57$), $t(52) = 4.52$, $p < 0.001$. If the branded product is unknown, then the speed with which its disclaimer is read is vital to induce purchase behaviour.



Also, as predicted, there was not a significant difference on purchase between fast ($M = 3.57$) and slow ($M = 3.37$) disclaimers in the well-known brand condition, $t(53) = 0.51$, $p > 0.05$. If a company is promoting a branded product, the speed with which the disclaimer is read does not seem to be as important.

Did the commercial contain a disclaimer?

A total of 104 of the 105 participants answered correctly that the commercial contained a disclaimer. One individual did not answer the question incorrectly, but simply failed to answer the question.

Estimated length of disclaimer

On the measure asking participants to estimate the amount of time each disclaimer lasted, participants in the slow disclaimer condition ($M = 6.23$ seconds) estimated that the disclaimer lasted significantly longer than those participants in the fast disclaimer condition ($M = 3.78$ seconds), $F(1, 98) = 45.74$, $p < 0.001$. There was not a significant main effect of brand knowledge $F(1, 98) = 0.04$, $p > 0.05$, and the interaction was not significant, $F(1, 98) = 2.62$, $p > 0.05$.

Discussion

Disclaimers in food advertisements on the radio have largely been understudied. From a legal perspective, companies write disclaimers to provide necessary information for the consumer. One of the implications of this research is that, when advertising unknown branded products, the speed with which a disclaimer is delivered could be more important than the content in the advertisement.

We also found that, as expected, well-known branded products were purchased more readily than unknown branded products. Well-known branded products have experience and time in the market and so information disclaiming their stated positive effects could be weighed less heavily in the purchase decision.

It is important to note, however, that unknown branded products with slow disclaimers were purchased just as readily as well-known branded

products with slow disclaimers. In fact, as long as the unknown branded product had a slow disclaimer, then purchase remained as likely as if the product had a well-known brand. Thus, disclaimer speed matters, especially when the branded product is unknown in the market and is one with which consumers have less experience.

Conclusion

If a company is marketing a well-known branded product using the advertising component of the promotion mix to induce adoption and repeat purchase, or to simply remind consumers of the product's presence, then the speed with which the disclaimer is read is not as important in terms of engendering purchase. On the other hand, in cases in which a branded product is unknown and the company is attempting to increase awareness and interest in the product, the speed with which the disclaimer is read seems to play a much more crucial role than simply appeasing the judicial system. Consumers, lacking familiarity and experience with an unknown branded product, listen carefully to the disclaimer and note the ease with which it can be comprehended. Purchase, in the present research, was significantly greater to the extent that the disclaimer for an unknown branded product was slow.

In future research, we would like to examine the role that product trust plays in the present model (see Stanton & Herbst 2005 for implications of trust in branded products). Perhaps the greater purchase frequency of unknown branded products with slow disclaimers as opposed to fast disclaimers is explained by a higher trust level. In addition, we would like to manipulate the content of advertisements and disclaimers in other food and non-food categories. Perhaps disclaimer speed is more important in health-related unknown branded products but less important in non-health-related unknown branded products (e.g., ticket packages for a new local sports team, or a sales promotion at a local paint store). The advertisement and disclaimer in this research dealt with health aspects of toasted whole grain cereal and, though disclaimer speed mattered little for the well-known branded product (i.e., Cheerios Whole Toasted Oats), it played a very important role in the purchase of the unknown branded product (i.e., Health Valley Whole Toasted Oats).

Finally, we would like to measure the extent to which people are

involved in the potential purchase decision or, perhaps, manipulate involvement by creating a scenario that encourages, rewards and motivates a deep level of processing of the alternatives. We think that involvement may moderate the interaction between brand experience and disclaimer speed on purchase. If one is heavily involved in the promoted product's purchase, and the product is unknown in the market, then disclaimer speed should matter in terms of predicting purchase. If, on the other hand, one has no involvement in the purchase of the promoted product, then perhaps disclaimer speed is less of a factor in predicting purchase of well-known and unknown branded products.

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