Persuasive Marketing: An Investigation of the Persuasive Effectiveness of Differing Media to Attract Individuals to Advertised Events at the University of Central Florida

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Introduction

Persuasion is commonly seen in everyday life and appears in many forms. Persuasion is presented in various methods and the underlying principles and cognitive effects of persuasion generate a desired result. Persuasive advertisements are the primary method utilized by professionals to influence consumers towards a company or institution's intended results. This paper will examine persuasive event advertisements at UCF, and uncover the most persuasive medium to promote events.

Two important theories in persuasion are Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence. ELM explains two mental routes of persuasion. Individuals participate in receiving persuasive messages either actively (the central route) or passively (the peripheral route). Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence are reciprocity, commitment, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity, which are the primary means to persuade consumers. Chang-Hoan Cho expanded the original ELM into the Modified Elaboration Likelihood Model. Cho's new model addresses what medium is being used to persuade. Yet Cho brings attention to how "it would be valuable to study actual clicking behaviors of the general population" (Cho 49), calling for further research in the field of web advertisement.

Marshall et al. discovered how effective the promotion of physical activity is using either print or web formats. Their results yielded no significant difference between reported physical activity. Individuals appeared to be more interested in web-based material than print, though "recall and use of print materials were higher than for the website" (Marshall et al. 93). Yet individuals still had no greater desire to actually utilize the web format.

Bezjian-Avery, Calder, and Iacobucci compared the effectiveness of interactive advertisements to traditional linear ads. Visual-ness versus verbal-ness within the ads played an

important role in persuasion. The researchers found that interactive systems were not always superior in persuasion, and visual consumers who viewed the ads in a linear format were more persuaded to purchase the products shown. The authors write, "The most important implication of this research is that sometimes interactive is not better! Under certain conditions, interactivity interrupts the process of persuasion" (31).

Past studies have provided different results in terms of which medium is the most effective, but these results each suggest different media to be more persuasive or are unclear when it comes to effectiveness. Research into the influence persuasion has on whether or not people attend events is extremely underdeveloped, and the importance of persuasion in garnering attendance is a factor determining an event's success. This lack of research is problematic for event promoters because without this information accumulating a large crowd can be difficult. By understanding the persuasive characteristics of advertisements, the mental processes consumers experience, and comparing this information to research of my own, I will be able to uncover the most successful method for advertising an event at UCF. Is the promotion of an event more persuasive if advertised through web-based, print-based, or face-to-face communication? And what characteristics of the advertisement contribute to creating the most influence?

Method

This study focused on the most effective medium for promoting an event. The Elaboration Likelihood Model and Cialdini's Influence Techniques were two theories taken into account, and the effects of these theories were applied to better understand the means by which consumers experienced persuasion.

I observed four event ads around campus and took photographs of each. I located the ads on the web and also screen captured images. The visual-ness and verbal-ness of an ad, discussed by Bezjian-Avery, Calder, and Iacobucci were used as lenses while examining the ads. Hanzaee and Haghgooei's discoveries about high-imagery words paired with coinciding images were also considered when analyzing the event ads. Cho's Modified Elaboration Likelihood Model aided in evaluating these ads for important persuasive qualities.

A survey was administered via the website SurveyMonkey to accumulate quantitative and qualitative data on consumer's beliefs and experiences towards persuasive event advertising. The survey was posted on two Facebook group pages, and sent through text message to individuals 18 and over. This group consisted primarily of UCF students. Participants were asked:
1. Have you ever gone to an event because of an advertisement? If so, what event?
2. How did you hear about this event?
3. Which method of advertisement do you find the most persuasive?
4. Have you heard of or attended this event previously?
5. What do you believe would make the advertisements more persuasive?

I also conducted an interview with the Area Coordinator of Lake Claire, Jacob Bonne. Mr. Bonne was selected as an interviewee because he often promotes events to residents in his community at UCF and generates large crowds at the events. He was asked:
1. Which of the three methods of advertisement do you find to be the most persuasive?
2. Why do you prefer that method?
3. Which type of advertisement is used most often in the Lake Claire housing community?
4. What design elements are always incorporated into an ad?
5. How many people work on an ad?
6. If there are any other factors you have found to attract a large crowd to events?

Analysis

Specific physical characteristics observed in the ads stood out as key evidence explaining in the ads' efficiency. Examining the advertisements in both print and web formats helped me discover prominent influential physical qualities each ad possessed. Comparing these observations to responses from my survey, interview results, and information from journal articles aided in discovering the most persuasive medium to market events at UCF.

Persuasive Characteristics Event Promoters Use at UCF:

Java Jives was an event advertisement I came across both in print and web formats. Both versions of these ads were exactly the same except for the location in which audiences viewed them. This ad utilized an eye-catching image of the woman performing at the event, large white text with a unique font, contrasting colors, and important descriptive information about where and when the event would be occurring (see Figure 1). Smaller text at the bottom included a website and a phone number. The placement of both the print and web version of the ad and the insertion of creative visuals is an effective method of producing more influence to attend according to Mr. Bonne. He explained, "[I]f you are going to give students flyers [or] if you are going to send out a flyer electronically, send it to a place or post it on a place where students are going to see it …. Place of advertisement is really important." The image of the woman and the coffee cup combined with the text "Java" used the persuasive method of high-imagery text discussed by Hanzaee and Haghgooei to more effectively influence consumers. By relating the image to the text, the audience will experience greater recollection of the ad.
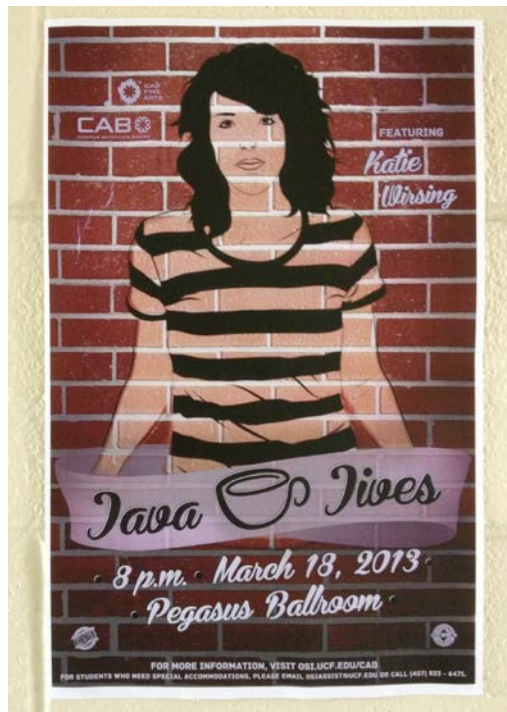
Figure 1: Java Jives advertisement

This ad also attempted to persuade individuals with the incorporation of the "CAB" (Campus Board of Activities) logo located on the ad. Mr. Bonne voiced how he believes it's important to "include departmental logo or area counsel logo just to make sure that the flyer or web ad … has that official message behind it so residents … realize that it's sponsored by the community." The inclusion of the official "CAB" logo allows viewers of the ad to recognize its authenticity, validating the source of who is promoting the event. What separated the web version from the print version was the web version was located on the UCF Office of Student Involvement Facebook page where users had the ability to click upon the image to enlarge it. Because the advertisement is displayed in an interactive system, there is the possibility for an individual to experience less persuasion if they are a visual processor. Bezjian-Avery, Calder, and Iacobucci found that visual consumers who viewed ads in a linear format where they were unable to move through the ads freely experienced less persuasion to purchase products shown to them. It was discovered users in an interactive system spent less time viewing the ads than participants of the linear system. Because of this, users viewing ads for shorter time periods were not as persuaded as users who spent more time viewing the ads. So, if a visual consumer is exposed to an interactive ad where they are able to freely roam, there is more of a probability they will not be as effectively persuaded.

The largest of the print ads I examined promoted a volunteer fair. The advertisement displayed, "Passion in Action – Volunteer Fair," in large yellow text, and was highly contrasted against a blue background. Use of advertisements of unusual size is explained to attract greater attention according to Mr. Bonne. He claimed not to enjoy the standard 8 ½ x 11" sheet of paper because "we all probably see thousands of sheets of papers in any given week …. So anytime you can include … unusual sizes of paper … that can tend to attract attention." At the very bottom of the ad, both the "OSI" (Office of Student Involvement) and "SGA" (Student Government Association) logos were displayed. Connecting the event to an official organization helps students assess the event's credibility based on who is promoting it. The web version of this ad displayed different information and visuals than the print version. When accessing the web page, a person was provided with more descriptive information about the event, such as what the organization is advocating and what will be occurring. The web version also attempted to promote attendance with the offer of free commodities, which some of my survey participants claimed to enjoy and said may generate more persuasion. A verbal processor would experience the most persuasion viewing the advertisement via the web because of the large amount of textual information presented on the site. As Bezjian-Avery, Calder, and Iacobucci state, "Verbal persons are not seeking photos, but rather information via text" (28). A verbal processor would also experience more influence viewing the print ad than a visual processor because the print version does not employ the use of imagery to attract attention. Placing the advertisement on the "OSI" website was a wise decision because people exploring the site would most likely discover the ad. Placement of the print ad outside the Student Union would draw in interested individuals passing by, generating influence to attend.

The "2013 English Symposium - Consuming Objects" event flyer employed large text and an image of a shocked man in the ad (see Figure 2). Information on the ad included when, where, and what time the event was occurring and a web site URL. When accessing the site, a user was taken to a page displaying no attractive images, little color, and a large amount of descriptive text. A verbal processor would experience more persuasion through the web version due to the large amount of textual information. A visual consumer would be more influenced by the print version of the ad

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were located in Colburn Hall, the primary location of English studies, individuals interested in writing would be more likely to view the ad. The web version of the ad was located on the UCF Department of English website making the placement of the web version also favorable. The event promoters' use of proper location is the largest persuasive attribute of this ad.
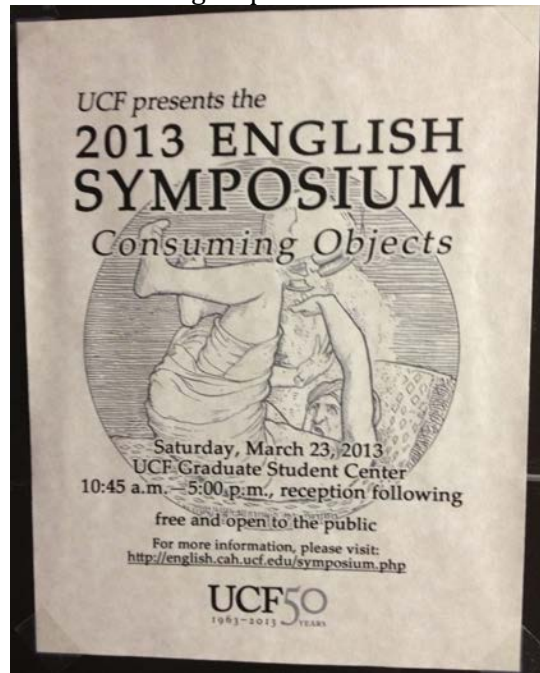

Figure 2: English Symposium advertisement

The Pi Day advertisement for the Lake Claire housing community was another flyer displayed both in print and web formats. The print version of the ad was located within every dorm hallway and accompanied by smaller print ads attached to each resident's door (see Figure 3).
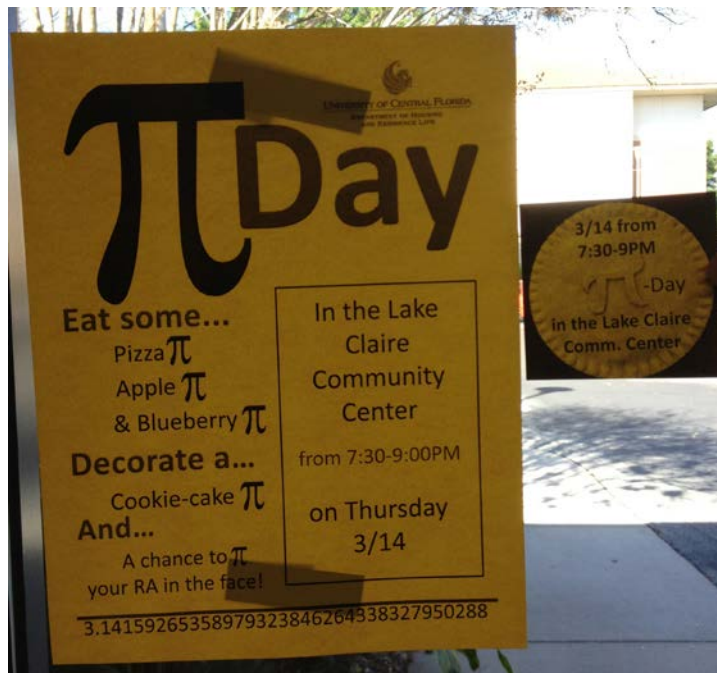

Figure 3: Pi Day print advertisement

Because this was an event for residents of Lake Claire, placing the ad in the community was wise so the intended audience could view it. The larger advertisement was printed on a yellow sheet of paper with large black text, and displayed an image of a mathematical pi symbol with digits of the number pi. The smaller print ads used contrasting colors of black text on a yellow background, an image of a pie and the pi symbol, and were 1/6th the size of the normal 8½ x 11" ad. The interesting size of this ad would produce more attention according to Mr. Bonne because "anytime you can include color, again interesting graphics, or even unusual sizes of paper . . . that can tend to attract attention." The incorporation of the pie image on the small flyer and pi symbol on the large flyer paired with the textual reference of consumption of real pie helped to produce the effect of high-imagery text.

The web version of the ad was located on the Lake Claire Community Facebook page (see Figure 4). It was exactly the same as the 8½ x 11" print advertisement except for the coloring of the ad. Important information was highlighted in red so viewer's attention would be focused on these areas. The ad posted on the Lake Claire housing Facebook page was a large advertisement, and according to Cho's Modified Elaboration Likelihood Model people in low-involvement situations "are more likely to click a banner when it has a larger size than average banner ads" (43). Since the advertisement is located on the Lake Claire housing group page, viewers will also be more likely to click the image because "the banner ad with higher relevance between its product category and the contents of the site where the ad is place will generate more clicking of the banner" (Cho 43). The "University of Central Florida Department of Housing and Residential Life" logo helps students recognize the host of the event, creating credibility.

Figure 4: Pi Day Facebook advertisement

Examining these ads has helped me to discover the most persuasive qualities event promoters are using at UCF. These qualities include interesting sizes, eye-catching images, verbal and visual information, creativity, proper placement of ads, high imagery text with correlating images, and official logo incorporation. The web versions of these ads were similar to their print versions, but some provided a bit more information for visual or verbal processors and were presented on differing sites. The ads examined all possess unique characteristics discovered to more effectively influence viewers, and by combining these influential elements a more effective ad for event promotion can be constructed.

UCF Student's Inclination of Web Advertisements:

What became clearer as I analyzed the ads and compared those results to my survey data were aspects of the medium consumers enjoyed and aspects deemed not as effective. The survey participants provided important information on qualities of event ads they believed would make them more persuasive. Many individuals in the study claimed if an ad displayed appealing images, color, and information on what will be happening at the event they would be more inclined to attend. Marshall et al. discovered individuals enjoyed gaining information via a web site. This researcher's discovery, paired with my own data collection, demonstrates consumer's preference of web-based ads. However, the researchers also claimed that "recall and use of print materials were higher than for the website," yet individuals weren't necessarily more interested to use the website (Marshall et al. 93). These findings suggest print ads provide more persuasion and greater cognitive retention. Bezjian-Avery, Calder, and Iacobucci explain "the traditional linear advertising format of conventional ads is actually better than interactive advertising for certain kinds of consumers and for certain kinds of ads" (23). Yet 20 out of 46 survey participants reported to have received information about an event through the web, primarily through Facebook. It was also discovered that over 30 percent of the survey participants preferred the web-based event ads. But what is the cause of the survey participant's preference to web-based event advertisements?

Some students claimed print and face-to-face ads to be less effective because they are bothered by these two types of ads regularly. Some individuals stated how they dislike having to carry around printed handouts. There is a possibility consumers enjoy web ads over the other two forms because a web event ad is not forced upon the consumer. Bezjian-Avery, Calder, and Iacobucci state that with interactivity in an ad "a customer can control the presentation order of the information and unwanted options may be deleted" (23). This aspect of interactivity demonstrates how consumers viewing web ads possesses the ability to traverse the site as they please, view ads they are interested in, and receive persuasive information from these ads. Some survey participants indicated a preference for web ads because they are more engaging, yet this contradicts Bezjian-Avery, Calder, and Iacobucci's findings. The researchers found that "in the interactive system users spent less time viewing the advertisements, and they were less likely to purchase target products" (30). During our interview, Mr. Bonne stated, "I think that in a lot of cases students ignore flyers because they are so bombarded with flyers." He continued to state, "And I've even seen a trend where students start to ignore Facebook groups and Facebook invites." However, the use of interactive social media sites was the primary web-based format individuals claimed to influence attendance. Perhaps researchers and other investigators need to reexamine their current beliefs of persuasive event advertising. Promotion of events at UCF seems to work most effectively when they are advertised through web formats.

Social Media's Effect on Event Advertisement:

The reason behind UCF students' preference of web ads is not fully clear, as the survey did not accumulate responses about why students found this form of marketing is more persuasive. By comparing the web ads to the print ads I observed around campus and considering my interview results, survey data, and other researchers' contributions, I've been able to draw some conclusions about why the web versions might be more effective.

The "Java Jives" advertisements were identical except for the locations in which audiences observed them. The print version was located in areas such as the Student Union and dorm hallways while the web version was located on the CAB Facebook page. The "2013 English Symposium - Consuming Objects" web event promotion was substantially different than its printed version. The website displayed no attractive images, relatively little color, and a large amount of descriptive text. The Lake Claire "Pi Day" web ad was located on the Official Facebook page of the housing community while the flyer ads were located in dorm hallways. The "Passion in Action - Volunteer Fair" event ad was another web ad in which users had the ability to roam the site. The

site provided more information to visitors, benefiting verbal processors, and how far visitors wished to travel into the site depended upon that individual visitor's interest.

The ads I observed demonstrated how Internet sources can engage or disengage users making them either passive or involved consumers. The "2013 English Symposium - Consuming Objects" and "Passion in Action – Volunteer Fair" flyers did not present their information through social media sites. Though they successfully promoted their events on the web, primarily to verbal processors, my survey results indicated Facebook event ads generate more influence. The two mental routes of persuasion defined in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) can be applied to the Internet ads to possibly explain why the social media sites are more successful. For these two ads, students interested in the events would have to go out of their way to search for the site and acquire more information about the event versus the other two ads, which distributed their information to hundreds of users through social media. With this method users could easily view the ads on their Facebook walls without having to actively engage in researching information. Students who went out of their way to gather more information would be engaging in central processing and would require "motivation and the ability to think about the message and its topic" (Benoit). It appears the peripheral route to persuasion used by the Facebook event ads is simpler and preferred by students. In the peripheral route the student does not examine the message carefully, passively absorbing information from the ad, and is "unable or unwilling to engage in much thought on the message" (Benoit).

Findings also suggest the web ads are more persuasive because students feel less bombarded by the ads, and not as strongly pressured as when event promoters distribute flyer handouts or face-to-face promotions. This type of persuasive advertisement falls into Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence. When promoters advertise events in such a manner they are applying the influential principle of commitment. This principle hopes to influence consumers by having them pledge to follow through with a request. However, there is a possibility students may not enjoy this pressure. This principle could be causing a decrease in the number of attendees due to a dislike towards this method of advertisement. Cialdini's principle known as social proof could be another factor causing students to prefer web versions. Social proof is essentially "safety in numbers" or the idea that people will try to conform and fit in with what others are doing or deem acceptable (Hallett). If students determine many others will be participating in an event by viewing such information on social media sites, the sensation of "safety in numbers" may influence greater attendance. Liking is the last of Cialdini's principles which could be a rational explanation as to why UCF students prefer web event advertisements. The persuasive principle known as liking is the influence of individuals by people which the individuals value or have developed a good relationship with. This principle suggests if an event promoter is someone consumers are familiar with or if the performer is a notable individual many enjoy then persuasion to attend will increase. What appears to separate preference for the three forms is that in social media the user who displayed the ad will be most easily observed. For example, if the ad were displayed on a site such as Facebook, individuals viewing the ad would immediately recognize the host of the event by viewing the promoter in the upper left hand corner above the ad. This medium does not require users to search through the ad to determine who is the promoter; rather, they just look above to identify them, increasing persuasion through liking.

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Positive Implications of Web Event Advertisement:

There are many positive implications of promoting events through the web. The ability for event promoters to post the image of the ad on social media sites is an effective method of distributing the ad to many individuals. As Mr. Bonne explained, "When students are invited directly to an event in person they are more likely to show up [and] a little bit of a hybrid method where we talk face-to-face and you get a flyer or get a reminder of some sort" helps to create greater persuasion. Though his examples referred to print and face-to-face event ads, perhaps there is a new generation of persuasion coming from the younger audience because of social media. Similar to his ideas of being "invited directly to an event" or by providing handouts as a reminder, the Facebook event invitations could be operating in the same manner. The advantages of promoting through these social media sites are similar to those of promoting events through print or face-to-face ads. By sending invitations or posting event ads, promoters can accumulate information on how many people will likely attend the event and can receive feedback about the event through comments, likes, and messages. This creates interactivity that connects the promoter and consumer. "Information processing in the Internet is more action-oriented and more interactive than that in traditional media," Cho states, explaining important persuasive contributions of placing ads on social media sites (36). Web event ads are easier for event promoters to create because promoters are assumed to understand technological advances created for designing the ads and can create them quickly.

Promotion of events through web based ads also assists event promoters by saving time properly locating the ads in areas where many will view them. With the click of a button they have the ability to post to hundreds of consumers - unlike print and face-to-face contact - which requires much more time spent searching for proper placement locations. Face-to-face advertisements also require more time spent promoting because advertisers must introduce the event to many individuals. With one post through social media promoters can reach hundreds of people.

Rationale

I constructed a video to present the information I learned in an entertaining manner, and to communicate the results of my research more effectively. A video would be positively received by the audience because of their preference towards web-based material. Filming actual advertisements observed around campus, screen capturing web event advertisement, filming face-to-face interactions of event advertisements, and editing them into an informational video helped to demonstrate persuasive qualities of advertisements and explain my discoveries. This video can be found here: http://youtu.be/TJb_B-5hsyk.

Conclusion

As a result of the research I conducted I have discovered persuasion through web-based advertisement to be the most effective. Uniqueness of an ad and placement of an ad plays an important role in attracting an audience. The survey participants provided important information on physical qualities of ads they believe make them more persuasive. These qualities included eye-catching colors, unusual shapes of the ad, important information, and entertaining graphics. Data from the survey revealed students' preference for web-based advertisements. They suggested promotion of events advertised through Facebook, or other social media sites provided the greatest persuasion. It appears social media may be the primary factor contributing to the effectiveness of web event advertisements.

New questions on the examination of past ads on present audiences and the effectiveness of these past ads would be beneficial for future research. This aspect of advertising would help promoters discover positive persuasive qualities in the ads they are currently using. This research

could also help them discover new characteristics that should be incorporated to generate more persuasion. The understanding of persuasive effects of different advertising media provides important information to individuals about generating influence; however, many questions remain about which medium provides the most persuasion in other circumstances.

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