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# Creative vs. Traditional Media Choice: Effects on Word-of-Mouth and Purchase Intention

*Verena M. Wottrich and Hilde A. M. Voorveld*

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays, consumers are daily confronted with dozens of advertising messages due to an explosive media and advertising growth during the past decades. Compared to the 1970's, where consumers were daily exposed to about 500 ads, today they are faced with approximately 5,000 ads a day (Johnson, 2006). Taking into account this enormous mass of advertising messages, which is also known as advertising clutter, it is only logical that consumers protect themselves by selectively paying attention to the advertising jungle they are living in.

In fact, existing research shows that consumers increasingly avoid traditional advertising (Speck & Elliot, 1997). As a result, advertisers have to do or die in order to obtain consumers' attention to their message and to stand out of all other advertising messages. An important way of catching the eye of consumers and distinguishing from competing advertising messages is using guerilla marketing, which is defined as an unconventional way of performing marketing activities on a very low budget in non-traditional media (Levinson, 1984; Levinson and McLaughlin, 2005). Although the term "low-budget" is essential to this definition, the last few years have witnessed "an increased use of expensive non-traditional media campaigns" (Dahlén, Granlund & Grenros, 2009, p. 156). Campaigns containing a creative media choice, that is "employing a novel medium that makes a statement in itself" (Dahlén, Friberg & Nielson, 2009, p. 121) are an example for these sort of campaigns.

Until now, only a few studies have empirically compared the new advertising phenomenon creative media choice with traditional ads. Creative media choice has a number of potential advantages. First, building on associative learning theory, it is known that due to an associative overlap between the brand and the novel medium (e.g. a park bank that looks like KitKat chocolate with the slogan "Have a break, have a KitKat" on it), the medium in itself communicates the message rather than the logo or slogan on it (Dahlén et al., 2009). Second, the creative medium produces more persisting brand associations than ad placement in a traditional medium (Dahlén et al., 2009), and it may even become "a cue that evokes the brand in consumers' mind at future exposures, even when the brand is no longer featured in the medium" (Dahlén et al., 2009, p. 121). Third,

using a creative medium enhances the perception of target brand associations and it increases ad credibility and ad and brand attitudes (Dahlén, 2005).

In spite of these promising findings regarding the effectiveness of a creative media choice, still unanswered is the question to what extent a creative media choice has an effect on consumers' intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (i.e. "informal communication among consumers about products and services" (Liu, 2006, p. 74)) and on their intention to purchase the advertised product. Obviously, this is a gap in existing scientific literature which has to be filled, because WOM and purchase intention are important constructs for both researchers and marketers due to two reasons: First, WOM can play a significant role in influencing consumers' purchase behavior (Arndt, 1967; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Chakravarty, Liu & Mazumdar, 2008) and it may even have the most influence among all the sources of information that consumers use before making a purchase decision (Day, 1971; Lazarsfeld & Katz, 1955). Second, purchase intention is the most widely used conative measure in advertising effectiveness research (Andrews, Akhter, Durvasula & Muehling, 1992; Beerli & Santana, 1999). Flowing from this, the first aim of this study is to investigate whether and how a creative media choice (vs. traditional media choice) influences consumers' WOM and purchase intention.

Moreover, earlier research on creative media choice did not yet show for which type of brands, familiar or unfamiliar ones, creative media choices work best. However, consumers' familiarity with the advertised brand may play an important role in consumer behavior, as it is "one of the most differentiating features among brands" (Delgado-Ballester, Navarro, Sicilia, 2012, p. 31) and since it has been found that familiar brands have communicative advantages over unfamiliar brands (Lange & Dahlén, 2003). Therefore, examining the effect of a creative media choice on consumers' WOM and purchase intention also requires scrutinizing the extent to which consumers' familiarity with the brand moderates this effect, because it could be that the effect is more pronounced for familiar than unfamiliar brands. Examining this is the second aim of this study.

## 2 Theoretical Background

### 2.1 *Effects of Creative and Traditional Media Choices on Consumers' Positive WOM Intention*

Until now, existing literature on the effectiveness of creative media choices demonstrates that a creative medium produces more persisting brand associations than ad placement in a traditional medium (Dahlén et al., 2009a) and that it may even become "a cue that evokes the brand in consumers' mind at

future exposures, even when the brand is no longer featured in the medium” (Dahlén et al., 2009a, p. 121). Moreover, research has shown that using creative, non-traditional media enhances consumer-perceived value (Dahlén, Granlund, Grenros, 2009b), that is “a cognitive assessment of the value consumers derive from the ad” (Dahlén et al., 2009b, p. 156).

According to a meta-analysis of de Matos and Rossi (2008), perceived value is an important driver of positive or negative WOM. In the marketing literature, WOM refers to the “informal communication among consumers about products and services” (Liu, 2006, p. 74). Many organizations have re-visited positive WOM as a powerful marketing tool (Brand Science Institute, 2005; Kilby, 2007) and several studies have even cited WOM as “the most effective form of communication in influencing consumers” (Yang, Hu, Winer, Assael & Chen, 2012, p. 952). This is because interpersonal communication has a strong influence on consumers’ purchase decisions as it is perceived to be more credible and as it acts as a promotional attraction (Swanson & Kelly, 2001; Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol, 2008).

Flowing from this, it seems as if there would exist a relationship between the effects of a creative media choice and the drivers of positive WOM intention, which is based on consumer-perceived value: Therefore we hypothesize: *Consumer-perceived value will mediate the positive effect of media choice (creative vs. traditional) on positive WOM intention (H1).*

## 2.2 *Effects of Creative and Traditional Media Choices on Consumers’ Purchase Intention*

Next to influencing consumers’ positive WOM intention, exposure to a creative medium could also affect consumers’ purchase intention, which is defined as “a transaction behavior consumers tend to exhibit after evaluating a product” (Wang, Cheng, Chu, 2012, p. 359). According to the theory of reasoned action, behavior is caused by behavioral intention, which is in turn determined by the consumer’s attitudes toward purchasing or using a brand and by a normative value or subjective norm (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In line with this theory, several studies (e.g. Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1990; Bush, Smith, & Martin, 1999) found that consumers’ attitude influences their purchase intention, meaning that when consumers possess a positive attitude toward an ad, brand, product or service they will be more willing to buy the product than if they have a negative attitude toward it.

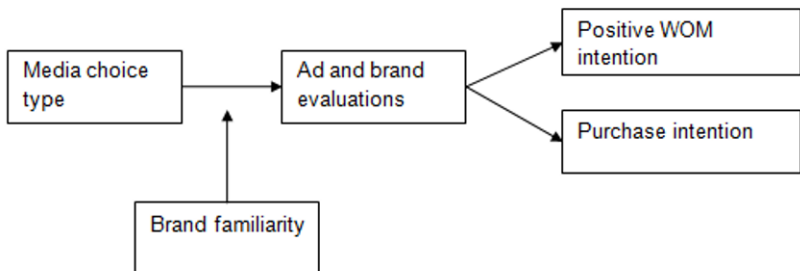
Research on the effectiveness of creative media choices has demonstrated that using a creative media choice enhances consumers’ ad and brand attitudes more than a traditional medium (Dahlén, 2005). Hence, we hypothesize: *Ad and*

*brand attitude will mediate the positive effect of media choice (creative vs. traditional) on purchase intention (H2).*

### 2.3 The Moderating Role of Brand Familiarity

In this study we expect that the effect of employing a creative medium enhances consumer-perceived value and ad and brand evaluations (hereafter referred to as ad and brand evaluations) which, in turn, positively influence positive WOM and purchase intention. Based on human associative memory theory (Anderson & Bower, 1973), creative media are effective when consumers have built an associative network between the medium and the message in their minds. This associative network is more limited or weaker for unfamiliar brands and stronger, more sophisticated and accessible for familiar brands (Campbell & Keller, 2003). This is because when a brand is familiar to a consumer, then he or she has already stored some associations or knowledge about the brand in memory, whereas this is not the case when a brand is unfamiliar to the consumer. Research has shown that familiar brands are commonly better liked, because due to their stronger associative networks, consumers have to put less effort in processing information about familiar brands and brand information is more easily retrieved and stored (Kent & Allen, 1994; Dahlén & Lange, 2004). Based on this, we hypothesize: *Brand familiarity moderates the mediation effect of media choice on positive WOM intention and purchase intention via brand and ad evaluations (H3).*

The model proposed here is depicted below.



*Figure 1: Tested moderated mediation model: Effect of media choice type on positive WOM intention and purchase intention via ad and brand evaluations and brand familiarity.*

### 3 Method

#### 3.1 *Participants and Procedure*

To test the model we conducted a field experiment with a 2 (Media choice: creative vs. traditional) x 2 (Brand familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar) between-subjects factorial design, that resembled Dahlén et al.'s (2009a) fire-extinguisher experiment. Participants ( $N = 89$  students,  $M_{\text{age}} = 21.10$ ; 76.4 % female) were recruited during 11 lectures given at the University of Amsterdam. To allow for a natural variation in attention, respondents were incidentally exposed to the stimulus material (either a fire extinguisher or a poster ad) before the start of each lecture. The material was arranged in the participants' visual field next to the entrance of the respective lecture hall. At the end of the first half of the lecture, respondents were encouraged to participate in the study which was masked as a study on media and brands. After having signed an informed consent, participants filled in the questionnaire, which measured ad recognition, purchase intention, positive WOM intention, attitude toward the ad, brand attitude, perceived value, manipulation checks concerning media choice, brand familiarity, perceived realism, and control questions on product use, product involvement, and demographics. After completing the questionnaire, the researchers thanked the participants and they explained that they will receive an e-mail by the end of the next day in which they will be debriefed.

#### 3.2 *Stimulus Materials*

Media choice served as the first between-subjects factor and it could take on the value creative media choice or traditional media choice. As in Dahlén et al. (2009), in the creative media condition only the label of a salsa sauce bottle and the slogan 'Burning Sensation' were glued on a fire extinguisher so that it resembled a salsa sauce bottle. In the traditional medium condition the same label and slogan were printed on an A3 poster. The format and size of the label on the fire extinguisher and on the poster ad were kept equal among all conditions (see figure 2).

Brand familiarity was the second between-subjects factor which could take on the value familiar or unfamiliar brand. The factor was manipulated by depicting in the creative and the traditional medium condition either an unfamiliar or a familiar brand. The unfamiliar brand was the brand 'Jeff's Hot Sauce' and the familiar brand was 'Mc. ILHENNY & CO. Tabasco Sauce'.



Figure 2. Stimulus material. Traditional vs. creative medium and familiar vs. unfamiliar brand.

### 3.3 Measures

*Purchase intention* was measured using three items on a seven-point semantic differential scale adapted from Smith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz and Darley (2007) ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ). *Positive WOM intention* was measured through a reliable combined scale consisting of three items taken from Alexandrov, Lilly and Babakus (2013) and three items from Babin, Lee, Kim and Griffin (2005) which were all measured on a seven-point Likert-scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*;  $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ). Moreover, a reliable measure for ad and brand evaluations was constructed from eight *ad attitude* items adapted from Ajzen (2002), three *brand attitude* items adapted from Dahlén (2005) and three *consumer perceived value* items adapted from Ducoffe (1995) ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). Brand familiarity was assessed with one item on a

seven-point Likert scale (1 = *absolutely not*, 7 = *absolutely*): 'I am familiar with the advertised brand'. To check for a successful manipulation, questions on realism, perceived congruence between the brand and the media choice and brand familiarity were posed. Finally, control variables such as recognition, product use and product involvement and demographics were assessed.

#### 4 Results

Manipulation checks revealed that there was no significant effect between the type of media choice and the degree of perceived congruency, ( $t(86) = 1.23$ ,  $p = .22$ ). However, there were significant effects of media choice on respondents' ad and brand evaluations ( $t(84.10) = 2.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Participants who were exposed to the creative medium evaluated the ad and brand more positively ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) than participants who were exposed to the traditional medium ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ), indicating that the media choice manipulation was successful after all. Moreover, there was a significant effect between the type of brand familiarity and perceived familiarity ( $t(66.39) = 10.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Respondents who were exposed to the familiar brand experienced more familiarity ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) than respondents who were exposed to the unfamiliar brand ( $M = 1.45$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), suggesting that the type of brand familiarity manipulation was successful, too.

Confound checks revealed that product use was significantly related to positive WOM intention ( $r(88) = .41$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and purchase intention ( $r(88) = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, perceived realism was significantly related to purchase intention ( $r(88) = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and positive WOM intention ( $r(88) = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, product involvement had a significant relation with positive WOM intention ( $r(88) = .70$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and purchase intention ( $r(88) = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). All three variables were therefore included as covariates in subsequent analyses.

The hypotheses were tested using Hayes' PROCESS macro (2012), which uses 10,000 bootstrap samples for estimating the bias corrected confidence intervals for the moderated mediation models specified in this study. To test the effect of each media choice type a dummy variable was created for this variable.

In total, two moderated mediation analyses were conducted, in which media choice always served as the independent variable, ad and brand evaluations as the mediator and brand familiarity as the moderator. Purchase intention functioned as the dependent variable in the first model and positive WOM intention in the second model.

Table 1 shows the results for the moderated mediation models. In both models, the creative media choice had a marginally positive effect on ad and brand evaluations. Moreover, the effect of employing a creative media choice on purchase intention was positively mediated by ad and brand evaluations, confirming H2. However, ad and brand evaluations did not mediate the effect of



media choice on positive WOM intention, rejecting H1. Finally, brand familiarity did not moderate the mediation effect of media choice on positive WOM and purchase intention, rejecting H3, but brand familiarity had a direct positive effect on positive WOM intention.

*Table 1: Effects of media choice on ad and brand evaluations (mediator), purchase intention (dependent variable) and positive WOM intention (dependent variable) and of the through brand familiarity moderated mediator ad and brand evaluations.*

<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Mediator: Ad and brand evaluations</i>		<i>Dependent variable: Purchase intention</i>	
<u>Predictors:</u>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Independent variable: Media choice	.35 <sup>†</sup>	.19	-.27	.28
Moderator: Brand familiarity	-.01	.04	.09	.07
Mediator: Ad and brand evaluations			.34 <sup>†</sup>	.19
<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Mediator: Ad and brand evaluations</i>		<i>Dependent variable: Positive WOM intention</i>	
<u>Predictors:</u>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Independent variable: Media choice	.35 <sup>†</sup>	.19	-.09	.21
Moderator: Brand familiarity	-.01	.04	.13**	.04
Mediator: Ad and brand evaluations			.22	.13

Unstandardized *b*-coefficients with boot *SE*; *n* = 89; † *p* < .10, \*\* *p* < .01.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the effects of creative or traditional media choices on consumers' purchase and positive WOM intention and the role ad and brand evaluations and brand familiarity play in this relationship. The results of the field experiment show that ad and brand evaluations mediate the effect of media choice on purchase intention. Employing a creative medium leads to higher ad and brand evaluations, which leads, in turn, to a higher intention to purchase the advertised product. This conclusion extends the results of Dahlén et al. (2009a), Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard (1990), and Bush, Smith, & Martin (1999); whereas Dahlén et al. (2009a) showed that using a creative medium enhances brand and ad evaluations, Engel et al. and Bush et al. demonstrated that consumers' attitude influences their purchase intention. To our knowledge, it was never empirically proven that creative media choice influences purchase intentions and through which mechanisms this effect took place.

In addition to that, brand familiarity did not moderate the expected mediation effects, but it had a direct effect on consumers' positive WOM intention. The more familiar consumers were with the advertised brand, the more likely they were to engage in positive WOM intention. An explanation for this finding could be that consumers are not familiar with the novel advertising tool used by the familiar brand, which surprises them and which influences therefore their intention to talk positively about the brand.

Apart from that, this study also has some limitations, which are induced by its field experimental design: the most important one is probably that only one fourth of the participants indicated having seen the material in front of the classroom, which means that the majority had seen the material only on a black and white picture that was depicted in the survey. This might have had a negative effect on the study's results, because seeing the material on a photo is something different than seeing it in reality. Future research could try to avoid these problems by presenting the material more prominently so that it is guaranteed that everyone is exposed by it or by conducting the same experiment in a laboratory setting in order to control for possible confounding factors.

Until now, only a limited amount of research has focused on the new advertising phenomenon 'creative media choice'. Despite its limitations the current study contributes to this knowledge by demonstrating that using a creative media choice has a positive effect on purchase intention, which is mediated by ad and brand evaluations. This finding is not only essential for scientists working on this phenomenon but also for advertisers and marketers, because it shows that using a creative medium might be more profitable than using a traditional medium.

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