

Covert product placements in TV shows increase consumers' memories and brand attitudes, says study

(Phys.org) —Consumers who watch television sitcoms and see product placements through covert marketing have better memories of the products and better attitudes toward the brands, according to three joint studies led by the University of Colorado Boulder.

"Frankly, we were a bit surprised at the power of covert marketing across a variety of studies," said Margaret C. Campbell, professor of marketing at CU-Boulder's Leeds School of Business and lead author of the article appearing online this month in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. "Even though most U.S. consumers know that marketers pay to surreptitiously get their brands in front of consumers, consumers are still influenced by covert marketing efforts."

However, the studies also found that the disclosure of paid product placements in a sitcom decreased the influential effects, especially when the disclosure occurred after the consumer was exposed to the marketing.

In one of the studies, people watched a sitcom including a few seconds of exposure to a breakfast cereal. Later, when asked to list the first cereals that came to mind, people who had seen a brand name cereal during the sitcom were more than three times as likely to include that cereal in their top three, as compared with those who had seen a fictitious cereal. They also reported a much higher preference for the brand.

However, if prior to watching the show people saw a disclosure that sponsored product placements were included, they were not more likely to list the brand in their top three, although they still reported a higher liking for the brand.

If people saw a disclosure after the show that sponsored product placements were included, they also were not more likely to list the brand in their top three. But they did not report more favorable attitudes toward the brand, compared with a time when they had not been exposed to the product placement.

"Disclosures after the placement appear to alert people to the impact that covert marketing efforts can have, in which case they are less likely to be influenced," Campbell said.

There have been calls to require disclosure of covert marketing in the U.S. to be consistent with other requirements for disclosure of sponsorship. Other countries, such as the Netherlands, home country of study co-author Peeter Verlegh of the University of Amsterdam, already require some disclosure.

Gina Mohr of Colorado State University also is a co-author.

"In the U.S. there has been some reluctance to incorporate disclosures for fear that it may interfere with creative content," said Mohr. "This research suggests that product placement disclosures need not occur at the time of product placement to be effective."

According to the authors, the findings provide support for the idea that requiring disclosure after exposure to covert marketing would offer consumers information to help them choose how to navigate the marketplace.

"Consumers should get to know when they are being exposed to commercial persuasion so they can decide how they want to respond," said Campbell.

More information: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1057740812001337

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