

Context is everything: An Armani ad on 1 page changes perception of Honda ad on next page

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A person flipping through a magazine or watching TV sees a number of advertisements. Does the placement of those ads matter to consumers? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says it does. But whether people have a positive or negative impression depends on how knowledgeable they are about the products being pitched.

Authors Myungwoo Nam (INSEAD, Asia Campus, Singapore) and Brian Sternthal (Northwestern University) conducted four studies where participants evaluated advertisements. They looked at ads to provide context, then they evaluated "target ads" for products. The researchers also tested participants' knowledge about the products in the target ads. The researchers found that "experts" reacted differently than "novices" in the study.

"The specific effect of context depends on the decision-maker's expertise in the target category and the accessibility of contextual information," write the authors.

In the first study, "positive" ads were for Armani clothing and Rolex watches. "Negative" ads were Old Navy and Timex—brands with less status. The target product was a Honda Civic. After the participants were rated in their expertise about cars, the results showed that experts evaluated the Honda more favorably after seeing positive context ads than negative, and novices showed the opposite pattern.

"Consumers who had substantial knowledge about cars evaluated Honda Civics more favorably after seeing Armani and Rolex ads compared to exposure to Old Navy and Timex ads," explain the authors. "On the other hand, less-knowledgeable consumers evaluated the target brand less favorably." Studies of target ads for fictitious brand stereos and detergent yielded similar results.

Interestingly, the experts in the studies corrected their impressions when they were given more details about the target products. But if they were distracted from their task, this effect disappeared.

"Answering these questions is important because brands are invariably presented in a context that might influence how they are perceived," conclude the authors.

Source: University of Chicago

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