

Death of a salesman? Social media debunks views of advertising

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(PhysOrg.com) -- More than 70% of people find advertising 'sinister' and 'devian' if they dislike the company and social media enhances those feelings, a University of Melbourne study has found.

Dr Brent Coker, from the Faculty of Business and Economics, says social media is to blame for making [consumers](#) 'wiser', as people are now more likely to read online reviews before making a purchase than to naively believe advertising claims of having the best product.

“When a consumer evaluates a product to purchase by using online channels, we adjust our [attitudes](#) according to the valence of information. It's a no brainer. Who are we more likely to believe: the claims and promises of corporations, or the buzz and recommendations on [Twitter](#) and Facebook?” he says.

Dr Coker completed two experiments to examine what effect this change in consumer shopping behaviour has had on consumer perceptions towards advertising. In the first, three groups watched an 'emotive' [mobile phone](#) ad -one with no sponsor or logo attribution, one where the sponsor was a disliked brand and the third where the sponsor was a liked brand. The second experiment was similar, however the ad was classified as more informative.

The study found 51% of those who saw the disliked brand ad found it 'dishonest', while 70% also found it 'deviant'. Participants also hated the brand more than before they saw the advertisement, because of sinister

attributions. Only 26% of those in this group found the ad ‘meaningful’, compared to 67% of those who saw the unbranded version.

“Open ended questions and analysis found that people resented the disliked company for making an otherwise great ad, and trying to convince them they were good, when people really didn’t like the company in the first place,” says Dr Coker.

“When asked why they rated the brand as they did, the overwhelming response was due to evaluations they had read online in [social media](#) forums. If a company is already disliked, good advertising can actually ‘go bad’. Spending thousands to turn things around may actually just make things worse.”

Dr Coker says consumers are more likely to experience 'Sinister Attributions' when exposed to corporate marketing- an instinctive survival mechanism that stops us being naive in the wild when being hunted by predators. "Recent research has found evidence of the same attributions being released from salespeople, who are becoming increasingly creative in the hunt for customers.”

“For a company that is already on the radar of consumers, this means that extremely well crafted - and expensive - advertisements can evoke Sinister Attributions in consumers. The consumer’s reaction is often ‘I hate this company for trying to talk me into liking them’.

More exposure to community attitudes through reading blogs, Facebook, and Twitter enhances such [feelings](#), says Dr Coker. “Corporations are now more transparent as negative buzz transfers almost instantly, reaching millions of people. Corporations can no longer afford to pull the wool over consumer's eyes. The burger in the box that doesn't look like the picture is no longer acceptable.”

Provided by University of Melbourne

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