

Faking it: Can ads create false memories about products?

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(PhysOrg.com) -- People who read vivid print advertisements for fictitious products actually come to believe they've tried those products, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Exposing consumers to imagery-evoking [advertising](#) increases the likelihood that a consumer mistakenly believes he/she has experienced the advertised product, and subsequently produces attitudes that are as strong as attitudes based on genuine product experience," write authors Priyali Rajagopal (Southern Methodist University) and Nicole Montgomery (College of William and Mary).

In one study, the researchers showed participants different types of ads for a fictitious product: Orville Redenbacher's Gourmet Fresh microwave popcorn. Other participants ate what they believed to be Orville Redenbacher's Gourmet Fresh microwave popcorn, even though it was another Redenbacher product. One week after the study, all the participants were asked to report their attitudes toward the product and how confident they were in their attitudes.

"Students who saw the low imagery ad that described the attributes of the popcorn were unlikely to report having tried the popcorn, and they exhibited less favorable and less confident attitudes toward the popcorn than the other students," the authors write.

People who had seen the high imagery ads were just as likely as participants who actually ate the popcorn to report that they had tried the

product. They were also as confident in their memories of trying the product as participants who actually sampled it. "This suggests that viewing the vivid advertisement created a [false memory](#) of eating the popcorn, despite the fact that trying the fictitious product would have been impossible," the authors write.

The authors found that decreasing brand familiarity and shortening the time between viewing the ad and reporting evaluations reduced the false memories in participants. For example, when the fictitious brand was Pop Joy's Gourmet Fresh instead of the more familiar Orville Redenbacher's, participants were less likely to report false memories of trying it.

"Consumers need to be vigilant while processing high-imagery advertisements because vivid ads can create false memories of product experience," the authors conclude.

More information: [www.aps.org/policy/reports/pop ...
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