

## SOCIAL ADVERTISING: EFFECTS OF DOMINANCE AND FIT ON ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

Sridhar Samu , Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada  
Walter W. Wymer, Jr., Christopher Newport University, USA

### ABSTRACT

Social Alliances (or business/nonprofit collaborations) have shown tremendous growth in recent years and demonstrate the potential to grow at an even faster rate. However, these alliances have typically been examined in specific and limited contexts, e.g., cause-related marketing, sponsorships, etc. It is only recently that there have been attempts to take a unified approach to investigate this topic, but without examining how social alliances should be communicated to consumers. With the growth in new forms of social alliances, it is necessary to identify the consequences for both organizations when they communicate to consumers through social advertising.

When consumers are exposed to messages (press releases, ads, etc.) involving a company and a nonprofit, it is important to understand the processing and as well as the outcomes for both the firms. This is an interesting topic as collaborating organizations begin to advertise their social alliances and aim such communications at target consumers using different formats. Consumers may process different types of social ads differently and it is important to identify the impact of these factors on the outcomes. Hence the focus of this paper is to answer the following questions about social advertising: (1) How does the relationship between a company and a nonprofit organization lead to processing and outcome differences, and (2) would consumer processing and outcomes differ depending on which organization (company or nonprofit) is predominantly featured in the ads?

The consequences of social advertising would depend on consumer perceptions of the collaborating organizations. While individual perceptions of the partners will be important, it is the interactive effects of collaborating organizations that will be interesting. The fit between the company and the nonprofit could serve as a more powerful indicator than consumer perceptions of the individual organizations. If consumers perceive a good fit between the organizations, it will be easier for them to understand why the partners are being advertised together. This ease of processing and positive attributions would mean that consumers are more likely to process the information in a positive manner leading to increased liking toward both organizations. On the other hand, if perceived fit is poor, consumers may attribute negative reasons for the formation of the social alliance (e.g., company trying to look good), leading to negative attitude towards both organizations. These effects of fit are robust and have been observed in a number of areas.

A second factor that influences consumer processing and outcomes is the perception of dominance, conceptualized as the amount of space/time occupied by each of the organizations in any communication. If both organizations share equal space/time, there is no domination and consumers could believe that both partners have contributed equally to the alliance and this belief could lead to positive feelings towards both organizations. Or, it could also lead to some confusion, as this type of ad may be different from what consumers have seen elsewhere. If the company dominates the ad, consumers could interpret this as an indication that they are mainly interested in benefiting commercially from the social alliance. This public perception or attribution could lead to negative feelings towards the company. It could also lead to negative feelings towards the nonprofit for allowing it to be compromised by a company's self-interest. On the other hand, if the nonprofit dominates, consumers are more likely to believe that the company supports the cause and this could lead to positive feelings towards both organizations.

This study examined the effect of these two factors – perceived fit and dominance on attitudes towards both organizations, willingness to volunteer/contribute, and intention to purchase, using a press release. The results showed interesting interactions between the two independent variables on attitudes and behavioral intention measures. A discussion of the results and conclusions are also included in the paper.

References available on request. Please contact:

Sridhar Samu ([ssamu@mun.ca](mailto:ssamu@mun.ca)), Faculty of Business, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's A1B 3X5, Canada