BRAND INTEGRATION AND COMMERCIAL EFFECTIVENESS

By
Alicia Biggs

A thesis submitted to The Johns Hopkins University
in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

COMMUNICATION
Baltimore, MD
December 2011

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Abstract

A brand integration advertisement is a modern form of commercial that combines two brands (an advertiser and the television network the ad airs on). Very little research exists on these innovative ads and how viewers perceive them, compared to how viewers perceive standard commercials. In this study, I conducted an experiment with 164 total participants, who were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. One group of participants \( n = 70 \) viewed a five-minute program with a brand integration ad in the break, and the other group \( n = 94 \) viewed an identical segment, except the break included a standard commercial. Both groups completed surveys that measured whether brand integration ads have different effects than standard commercials on viewers’ attitudes toward the television network airing the ad, attitudes toward the featured product, intent to purchase the product, and the perceived link between the ads and the program. Results showed no significant difference between participants’ attitudes toward the television network, attitudes toward the product, or intent to purchase the product, regardless of whether they viewed a brand integration ad or a standard commercial. Results also showed that participants were more likely to draw a link between the brand integration ad and the program it aired within than between the standard commercial and the same program.

Readers:

Paula Weissman, MA

Memi Miscally, DrPH, MPH
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Introduction

Advertisers are spending more than ever on television commercials on broadcast and cable networks. In 2011, advertisers spent nearly $60.5 billion on commercial time (Panayiotou, Francis, Weed, Clark, Addicks, & Pritchard, 2011). With the advent of various multimedia opportunities and digital video recorders (DVRs) that enable viewers to skip commercials, advertisers have been forced to find innovative ways to market to consumers. Brand integration advertisements are one of the creative ways that advertisers are using to entice consumers to purchase their products.

Despite substantial investments in brand integration advertising, little research exists that explores whether brand integration ads are more effective than standard commercials in terms of eliciting favorable viewer perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions. This study examines if brand integration ads have different effects than standard commercials on viewers’ attitudes toward the television network that aired the ad, attitudes toward the featured product, intent to purchase the product, and the perceived link between the ads and the program.

Brand integration ads are very different from standard commercials. These integrated ads are part of a larger advertising buy on a network. For instance, Geico may spend $1 Million on an ad buy with Music Television (MTV) network. As part of the ad buy, MTV produces one thirty-second brand integration advertisement that incorporates Geico and MTV’s brand elements, and the ad airs only on MTV. The brand integration advertisement could feature a reality star from a popular MTV program, such as Jersey Shore, calling Geico to ask about car insurance, and having a humorous conversation with the Geico gecko. MTV would likely only air this brand integration ad during Jersey Shore
episodes, in an effort to connect the brand integration ad to the program. In this example of brand integration, both Geico and MTV are advertising in the same thirty second ad.

Brand integration advertisements benefit both the advertiser and the network that produces and airs the ad. Geico spends considerably more money to create standard commercials than on a brand integration ad on MTV, so these custom advertisements offer a high-production quality commercial for a lower advertiser investment. MTV also benefits because the brand integration advertisement is an opportunity to promote their program talent, and because media buys are a major source of income for television networks. Advertisers are careful about which networks they choose for brand integration advertisements, because they only want to be associated with networks that attract potential consumers.

In one real-life example, Target invested in a brand integration ad on Bravo. The ad featured the host of a popular Bravo show, Top Chef, having a shopping experience in a Target store. Target VP-CMO Michael Francis said “Brand and media integration tactics… allowed us to engage our guests during the show” (Panayiotou, Francis, Weed, Clark, Addicks, & Pritchard, 2011). In this case, the advertiser was able to take advantage of viewers watching Top Chef, and integrate the two brands (Target and Bravo) in a seamless way that promoted both the network and the retailer.

Brand integration ads do not always integrate talent from network programs, as in the examples above. These unique advertisements often find a common link between the network’s program and the advertiser, and focus on that link in a thirty-second custom ad. For instance, Acura invested in a brand integration ad with the National Geographic Channel (NGC) in 2010. The ad aired in a one-hour program about the construction of Air
Force One and the innovative technologies used to build the plane that carries the U.S. President.

Innovation is one of Acura’s key advertising points, so NGC produced a brand integration ad that leveraged the innovation link between these two seemingly unconnected brands. The ad focused on a sound-proofed room on Air Force One, and then in both audio and video, the content switched gears to the similar sound-blocking technology featured in Acura vehicles. In this thirty-second brand integration, the advertiser (Acura) was directly linked to the program (On Board Air Force One), for a seamless integration. Both Acura and NGC benefited from the promotion of their brands.

Besides increased advertiser and network profits, a secondary goal of brand integration ads is to keep viewers from skipping through commercial breaks with digital video recorders (DVRs). Over 40% of US television viewers own DVRs (Carter, 2011), and most viewers admit to skipping through commercial breaks (Rubinson, 2009). By including talent or content from a program in a brand integration ad, the network and the advertiser seek to maintain viewers’ attention during commercial breaks. The hope is that viewers enjoy the program, so when they fast forward through breaks, they will stop when they see brand integration ads because they will believe it is show content.

Since brand integration advertisements serve as an inexpensive commercial for advertisers, revenue for networks, and promotion for both the product and the network, these ads are financially beneficial to both brands. Despite several benefits of brand integration ads, there is little research on their effectiveness.

However, there is substantial research regarding standard commercial effectiveness and how viewers perceive commercials. There are also some studies on unique advertising strategies, such as product placement in programs, and how they affect viewers’ perceptions.
of products. Although researchers have dissected the effects of these methods of advertising, there is a lot to learn about how viewers perceive brand integration advertisements. Brand integration ads have been airing on national networks for over ten years, and it is crucial to understand how viewers perceive these ads. This study is important because both advertisers and networks need to know if brand integration advertisements are effective ads, and therefore a good investment for both entities.

Advertisers will be most interested in the results of this study, especially those who use television as a vehicle for marketing their products. Commercials are the most frequently used advertising medium, so this study will be useful to hundreds of advertisers (Panayiotou, Francis, Weed, Clark, Addicks, & Pritchard, 2011). The results will give advertisers a better understanding of which type of ad yields a higher intention to purchase, and which type yields a more favorable attitude toward the product. This study will help advertisers decide how to best allocate marketing dollars on television when faced with decisions regarding brand integrations versus standard commercials.

Television networks will also benefit from the results of this study. As brand integrations strongly connect the network to another brand, network marketing employees can use these results to understand how viewers perceive a network after viewing a brand integration ad and a commercial. They can also determine if viewers perceive the brand integration ad as being connected to the program, or if they see it as just another commercial. If viewers do perceive more of a connection between the brand integration ad and the program, network sales teams can pitch brand integration ads to advertisers with the claim that viewers are more likely to watch these ads than standard commercials.
Literature Review

Although there is very little research on how consumers perceive brand integration advertisements, there is substantial literature on the effectiveness of standard commercials that can offer potential insights. Various studies reviewed below reveal that analyzing commercial effectiveness is complex and may be related to various factors, including commercial placement, consumer memory, and brand associations.

Commercial Placement and Attention

Before we can assess consumers’ perceptions of commercials, it is important to determine if and when viewers watch commercials. Studies below show that many viewers do not watch full commercial breaks; instead consumers may leave the room, or be otherwise distracted during commercials. Studies also reveal mixed results when it comes to the importance of commercial placement with regard to keeping viewers’ attention.

In a 1994 study on attitudes toward commercials, Mittal surveyed 300 randomly selected students at a southern university. There were 203 completed surveys for analysis. Sixty-nine percent of respondents were females; 36% were 45 years of age or younger; and 60% graduated from college. The surveys included questions to measure viewers’ perceptions of commercials, attitudes toward commercials, and behavior during commercial breaks. Mittal (1994) found that many consumers have a negative view of commercials and do not attentively watch commercial breaks. He found that viewers often change the channel or leave the room, and placement of commercials at the beginning or end of the break were more frequently viewed. This attitude toward commercials was similar across the surveyed age, gender, income, and education groups.

Pieters and Bijmolt (1997) also found that commercial placement is important to keep viewers’ attention during breaks. The researchers used the interview method to study
how the placement of an advertisement affects consumer recall. In this study, three commercial breaks aired live over three major television stations in the Netherlands. Immediately after the commercial blocks aired, 60 trained female interviewers visited randomly sampled consumers throughout the Netherlands at their homes and interviewed them. Interviews started about 15 minutes after each commercial block aired, and participants were screened based on whether or not they had viewed the recently aired programs and commercial breaks. Approximately 175 consumers over the age of 18 participated in the interviews. Recall questions included “Which television commercials do you remember seeing in the last break?” and “Name all the commercials you can recall.” The results showed that consumers are more likely to remember an advertisement when it airs at the beginning of a commercial break rather than airing at the end.

Another study (Moorman, Moorman, Neijens, & Smit, 2005) revealed opposing results about commercial placement. In a telephone survey with 1,477 respondents, researchers used random-digit dialing to call people from 6pm – 11pm over a period of one month in 1999. The interviewers screened participants by asking which person in the household was between 18 and 65 years of age, had watched television in the last two hours, and had watched one of eight national Dutch channels during that time. Participants also must have seen at least one commercial break in the recently viewed program. Once the criteria were met, the phone survey began. A computer-generated system with information on recently aired programs and commercials customized survey questions for the participants based on what they viewed. Questions focused on the most recent commercial block the participant saw that evening, which commercials he or she recalled seeing, and attitudes toward those commercials. The researchers analyzed whether different commercial placement positions had different effects on viewers, and they found that the position of the
commercial within the block did not have a significant impact on viewers’ recall or attention (Moorman, Moorman, Neijens, & Smit, 2005).

The studies above showed that television viewers are rarely attentively viewing commercials during programming breaks. Additionally, studies show a lack of consistent results about the effects of commercial placement, and whether placement affects viewers’ attention.

**Consumer Memory and Recall**

When viewers do watch commercials, several studies indicate that emotional appeals affect consumers’ ability to remember the commercial and the product. The research below shows that viewers are more likely to remember the advertiser and commercial message longer when commercials evoke emotions, especially if they are positive emotions.

Friestad and Thorson (1993) conducted an experiment with men and women ages 21 and older. The 123 participants, recruited from undergraduate communication classes, were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. Half of the subjects viewed five emotional advertisements embedded in identical programming, and the other half viewed five neutral advertisements embedded in programming. The emotional ads ranged from serious and somber to humorous. Afterwards, the researchers conducted a survey with questions about the programming, to deter participants’ thinking from the commercials they viewed and minimize their short term memory. Then the experimenters gave a second survey that asked questions about emotional response to ads, about the message in the ads they viewed, and about prior exposure to the ads. In the study measuring memory and message recall, Friestad and Thorson (1993) found that when consumers watch ads that create an emotional response, they remember the advertiser and the message of the commercial longer.
Mai and Schoeller’s (2009) study yielded similar results. They conducted a combined survey and experimental design with 120 respondents ages 20 and older. Subjects were randomly assigned to watch one of four television commercials airing in the United Kingdom. The commercials featured Baci (a Nestle product), British Airways, Nestcafe, and Nike. After viewing the commercials, participants answered online survey questions geared toward analyzing their emotions, attitudes, and memory of the commercial. All four commercials implemented emotional appeals, and participants were asked to choose which, if any, emotions they felt from a list of possibilities. Some results were feelings of “admiration” and “passion” for Nike, and feelings of “freedom” and “relaxation” for British Airways. This experiment showed that advertisements can elicit different levels of emotions such as love, desire, amusement, and happiness. Results also showed that the most memorable advertisements were those that consumers responded to with positive feelings.

Using a different research technique, Rossiter and Silberstein (2001) found similar results. These researchers used a combination of brain imaging and follow-up testing to investigate patterns of brain electrical activity while participants watched a television program with naturally-embedded commercials. Participants were recruited through random-digit dialing and screened to make certain they were right-handed, meaning that they dominantly use the left-hemisphere of their brain for language processing. Using an apparatus attached to participants’ nose and earlobes, software recorded brain hemisphere activity while 35 women, from 25 to 45 years of age, watched a program with television advertisements. One week later, the researchers surveyed the women for visual recognition of the commercials. The research showed that if any video scene was on screen for more than 1.5 seconds, it was more likely to stimulate the left-brain hemisphere. This stimulation caused an emotional response, and thus the viewer was more likely to remember the
commercial. In other words, any scenes long enough to evoke viewer emotions were the most memorable one week after viewing.

These studies reveal that television commercials can elicit an emotional response from viewers. Some advertisements cause happiness, laughter, guilt, sadness, or desire. The studies above show that television viewers are more likely to remember commercials that elicit an emotional response, especially if the emotions are positive.

**Brand Associations**

When viewers watch a commercial for a product, they may already have positive, negative, or neutral emotions associated with that product. Studies below show that consumers have pre-existing brand associations that influence their intentions to buy. However, when consumers view advertisements for those brands, their feelings toward the products can change based on the context of the advertisement.

Rubinson (2009) conducted surveys with 380 randomly sampled adults over 18 years of age living in the United States. Surveys featured over 74 different products, and participants answered questions about what goods they purchase regularly and why. Rubinson found that as brand awareness increased, intent to purchase the product increased. He also found that the commercials that created a positive emotional response for consumers, i.e.: happiness, laughter, reminiscing, etc., led to increased consumption of the products (Rubinson, 2009).

While brand associations are a factor in consumers’ purchase decisions, they also attribute those associations to other products when more than one brand is featured. In another study, 183 staff members and students at a major university participated in an experiment featuring a print advertisement for two brands (Simonin & Ruth, 1998).
Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight different ads featuring different brand alliances. Car brands Ford, Toyota, Hyundai, and Volkswagen were paired with one of four microprocessor partners: Motorola, Fujitsu, Samsung, or Siemens. First, respondents answered a series of questions based on brand associations with a variety of brands. Then they reviewed a print advertisement featuring two brands, and completed another survey. Many respondents were more familiar with the car brands than the microprocessor brands, and thus they attributed their prior notions of the car brands to the other product in the ad. Simonin and Ruth (1998) found that when two brands are featured in a print advertisement, prior associations with one brand can positively or negatively affect consumer attitudes toward the other brand.

Similar results occur when two brands are featured in a television program. In Russell and Stern’s (2006) study, the researchers conducted an online survey with 261 randomly selected participants. Subjects watched premiere episodes of popular sitcoms (Will and Grace, Friends, Everybody Loves Raymond, and Frasier) live on television, with each episode including a form of product placement. Products varied but included retail items such as cake, chips, ginger ale, a vacuum cleaner, and wine. Immediately after the episode aired nationally, viewers received an email inviting them to participate in an online survey. Results showed that when advertisers use product placement in sitcoms, consumers’ attitudes toward products align with the characters’ attitudes toward those products, and this was driven by consumers’ attachment to the characters in the series.

Research reviewed above showed that brand associations are a major factor in consumers’ intentions to purchase advertised products. When more than one brand is featured in an ad, a prior association may be applied to both brands. Viewers may also change their perceptions of a brand based on the context that a brand is presented within.
Although there is little research specifically for brand integration ads, there are many studies on standard commercial effectiveness. The research above reveals that most people who watch television do not attentively view commercial breaks, although results are split as to whether or not strategic commercial placement can gain or keep attentive viewers throughout breaks. Studies also show that when commercials evoke emotions, especially positive emotions, viewers are more likely to recall the advertiser after time has passed. Lastly, studies show that consumers have preconceived attitudes toward brands, but their feelings towards the brand can change based on the context of the advertisement. Overall, research reviewed above shows that commercial placement, consumer memory, and brand associations are important factors in determining commercial effectiveness.

It is important for both advertisers and television networks to take this research further, and measure consumer perceptions of standard commercials versus brand integration advertisements. This research study will help advertisers and networks choose which brands are best to associate with through advertisements, and help determine if brand integration commercials are a successful marketing method. Therefore, I propose the following research questions:
Research Questions

RQ 1: Do participants exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the television network after viewing the brand integration advertisement or the standard commercial?

RQ 2: Do participants exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the product after viewing the brand integration advertisement or the standard commercial?

RQ 3: Are participants more likely to report intentions to purchase the product after the brand integration advertisement or the standard commercial?

RQ 4: Are participants more likely to perceive the brand integration advertisement as more relevant or connected to the content of the program than the standard commercial?
Method

An experiment was the best method to answer these research questions because it involved manipulating an independent variable (the cause) and measuring a dependent variable (the effect), which allows researchers to answer questions about cause and effect relationships (Field & Hole, 2003). Using an experiment, I randomly assigned and exposed participants to two different types of advertisements and measured how they responded to each advertisement. Also, by conducting a survey after participants viewed the stimuli, the resulting data could be quantified and tested for statistically significant differences between conditions (Field & Hole, 2003). The experimental method allowed me to determine which type of advertisement leads to more favorable attitudes toward the product and the network; stimulates more product purchase intentions; and encourages viewers to perceive the ad as more relevant or connected to the program content it appeared within.

One weakness of the experimental method is that the participants viewed stimuli in simulated environments, so they may have viewed the stimuli more attentively than they would if they were watching television normally. In a real-life setting, 50% of viewers multi-task while watching television; they simultaneously browse the internet, read, cook, and engage in other activities around the house (Rubinson, 2009). While this is a weakness of the experimental method, the controlled assignment of participants to conditions in an experiment still allows researchers to determine cause and effect (Field & Hole, 2003).

I conducted an experiment to assess whether a brand integration advertisement has different effects than a standard commercial on the perceptions of television viewers, ages 18 to 49. The independent variable that was manipulated in this study was the type of advertisement. The independent variable had two levels, resulting in two experimental conditions: a thirty-second brand integration ad and a thirty-second standard commercial,
both for the same product, the 2011 Audi A8. This product was chosen because it does not have a direct connection to the program in the experiment, *Finding Atlantis*, or to the cable network in the brand integration ad, the National Geographic Channel. Brand integration advertisements often combine two seemingly unconnected brands by finding a link between them. The dependent variables measured in this study were the participants’ attitudes toward the network, the product, their reported intentions to buy the product, and the perceived connection between the ads and the program.

**Participants**

Participants were men and women between 18 and 49 years who watched television for at least one hour per week. Respondents who watched television for at least one hour per week were deemed of most interest to advertisers who use television as the main marketing tool to increase consumption of their products. The age bracket of 18 to 49 is also the target age for the 2011 Audi A8, the product featured in both ads.

Before any recruitment began, I obtained approval for my research study from the Johns Hopkins University's Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB) to ensure ethical treatment of participants. I then recruited participants using a convenience snowball sample. I began by posting recruitment notices with the survey link and a short description of the research study on social media site, Facebook. I also sent recruitment notices as email blasts to friends, family, and colleagues who did not have a conflict of interest. In this case, anyone who works in television production is familiar with brand integration ads, and would not be an objective participant. Conversely, network employees who work in finance, project management, and digital departments were excellent candidates for this research because they do not have any daily working knowledge of brand integration ads. In these email blasts to friends, colleagues, and family, I also asked them to forward the survey link to
their network of friends and family. Lastly, I posted recruitment notices on the Johns Hopkins University Communication program’s listserv.

In my recruitment notice, I stated the criteria required (men and women between the ages of 18 and 49 who watch at least one hour of television per week and do not work in television production). I also gave a brief explanation of the study and provided a direct link to the online survey. I did not offer recruits any incentives for participating in this experiment. Interested participants could click the link that was available on all recruitment notices. Participants could also contact me via phone and email for details on the study. See Appendix A for the full recruitment notice.

A total of 164 participants participated in the experiment. This sample size far exceeded the desired sample size of 52 participants for this study, which was determined from an a priori sample power analysis for a two-tailed, independent t-test based on the following assumptions: approximately equal sample sizes per group; \( \alpha = .05 \); Power \( (1-\beta) = .80 \); and Cohen’s \( d = .80 \). A sample size of 52 total participants would have provided enough statistical power to detect a large effect size difference between conditions. The final sample of 164 participants provided more than enough statistical power to detect more moderate effects size differences between conditions (in the Cohen’s \( d \) range of .40-.45).

Each study participant was randomly assigned to one of two conditions. One group of participants \( (n = 70) \) viewed a five-minute program with a brand integration ad in the break, and the other group \( (n = 94) \) viewed an identical segment, except the break included a standard commercial.

**Procedures**

Participants were randomly assigned to watch either the brand integration advertisement or the standard commercial. I included a link to the experiment in all
recruitment notices. Once participants clicked on the survey link (posted on Survey Gizmo’s website), they were prompted for informed consent with an introductory statement about the study for each participant to read through. Each participant was required to choose “yes” and click through to the next page if they consented to the study. See Appendix B for the full introductory statement.

After giving informed consent, participants answered three questions to determine if they were between the ages of 18 and 49, if they view television for at least one hour per week, and if they work in the field of television production. If they matched the criteria for the study, they continued onto the next question, which asked if the last number in their birth year is even or odd. If participants chose “even,” they viewed the brand integration ad (Group A) on the following page. Conversely, if participants chose “odd,” they viewed the standard commercial (Group B) on the next page of the survey. This method insured that participants were randomly assigned to each condition.

Participants were exposed to two different experimental conditions. The first condition, Group A, consisted of a brief, five-minute excerpt of a television special, Finding Atlantis. Half way through the excerpt was a short break with a thirty-second brand integration ad for the 2011 Audi A8. This ad integrated content from both the National Geographic Channel (the network airing Finding Atlantis) and the 2011 Audi A8. The second condition, Group B, was identical, except the break featured a thirty-second standard commercial for the 2011 Audi A8. The stimuli are available to view separately on websites (see Appendix C for complete information).

After viewing the stimuli, participants clicked “continue,” and all participants (Groups A and B) continued onto a brief questionnaire about their attitudes toward the television network, their attitudes toward the product, their intent to purchase the product,
and the relevancy of the ad to the program. These questions were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. Additionally, the questionnaire included standard demographic questions about age, household income, and hours of television viewership per week. See Appendix D for the full instrument.

The experiment was online and available for completion from October 21, 2011 to October 28, 2011, and took no more than 15 minutes for each participant to complete.

**Data Analysis**

To answer RQ1, which asked if participants had a more favorable attitude toward the television network after viewing the brand integration advertisement or the standard commercial, means and standard deviations were calculated for the appropriate survey questions for each experimental condition. The t-test for independent samples was conducted to determine if any difference found between the means was statistically significant.

To answer RQ2, which asked if participants had a more favorable attitude toward the product after viewing the brand integration ad or the standard commercial, means and standard deviations were calculated for the applicable questions for each experimental condition. Results from the t-test for independent samples showed if there was a statistically significant difference between the means.

To answer RQ3, which asked if participants were more likely to purchase the product after the brand integration ad or the standard commercial, I calculated means and standard deviations for the relevant questions for each experimental condition. I then conducted the t-test for independent samples to determine if any difference that was found between the means was statistically significant.
To answer RQ4, which asked if participants were more likely to report a brand integration ad or a commercial was more relevant or connected to the content of the program, means and standard deviations were calculated for the pertinent questions for each experimental condition. Results from the t-test for independent samples revealed a statistically significant difference between the means.

There were also a few survey questions about participant demographics. In order to better understand the sample audience, I calculated percentages on these data.

**Results**

This section reports the results of the online experiment conducted with a total of 164 participants. There were 70 participants assigned to Group A to watch the brand integration and 94 participants were assigned to Group B to view the standard commercial. I will begin by reporting on demographic and background characteristics of the sample. Afterwards, key results of this study are organized into four sections. The first section discusses the attitudes toward the cable network after viewing the stimuli, and the second section reviews attitudes toward the product after viewing the stimuli. The third section addresses intentions to purchase the product. The last section examines whether each ad is perceived to be linked to the program.

**Demographics**

All participants fully completed the experiment and accompanying surveys; Group A participants \( (n = 70) \) watched the brand integration ad, and Group B participants \( (n = 94) \) viewed the standard commercial. More than half (58%) of the total sample were between the ages of 26 and 35, and 18.3% of participants were ages 18 to 25. The sample was also highly educated; 89.6% of participants earned at least a four year Bachelor’s degree.
Additionally, 55.9% of the sample had an annual household income over $65,000. While all the participants view at least one hour of television per week, 59.2% of participants watch over six hours of television per week.

RQ 1: Do participants exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the television network after viewing the brand integration or the standard commercial?

The type of advertisement participants were exposed to did not have an effect on whether they reported favorable attitudes toward the television network, the National Geographic Channel. As demonstrated by Table 1.1 below, participants in Group A were not more likely than participants in Group B to report that they trusted the network more, considered the network to be high quality, or had a more favorable attitude overall toward the network. Both Groups A and B tended to “agree” that National Geographic Channel is trustworthy and has high quality programming, and the average response for a favorable attitude toward the network was 4.3 (SD = 0.629; SD = 0.633) across both groups.

| Table 1.1 – Results of favorable attitudes toward the television network (NGC) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| Group A (Brand Integration)     | Group B (Commercial)         | t(df)          | P       |
| Trustworthy network             |                               |                |         |
| n = 70                          | n = 94                        |                |         |
| M = 4.3                         | M = 4.4                       | 1.221 (129)    | 0.224   |
| SD = 0.768                      | SD = 0.614                    |                |         |
| High quality network            |                               |                |         |
|                                    |                               | 0.269 (152)    | 0.788   |
| n = 70                          | n = 94                        |                |         |
| M = 4.3                         | M = 4.3                       |                |         |
| SD = 0.603                      | SD = 0.632                    |                |         |
| Favorable attitude toward network |                               | 0.302 (149)    | 0.763   |
| n = 70                          | n = 94                        |                |         |
| M = 4.3                         | M = 4.3                       |                |         |
| SD = 0.629                      | SD = 0.633                    |                |         |
RQ 2: Do participants exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the product after viewing the brand integration or the standard commercial?

Table 1.2 below shows that the types of ads participants were exposed to did not have an effect on whether they reported favorable attitudes toward the product, the 2011 Audi A8. Group A was not more likely than Group B to report a favorable attitude toward the advertisement, to report the Audi is attractive, or to report the Audi as a luxury vehicle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.2 – Results of favorable attitudes toward the product (Audi A8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A (Brand Integration)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n = 70</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable attitude toward Audi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audi is attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audi is a luxury vehicle</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

RQ 3: Are participants more likely to report intentions to purchase the product after the brand integration or the standard commercial?

The data regarding intent to purchase is listed in Table 1.3 below. The table displays a lack of significant difference across the conditions as it pertained to participants’ consideration of buying an Audi, and the intent to purchase an Audi in the next three years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.3 – Results of intent to purchase the product (Audi A8)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A (Brand Integration)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n = 70</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider buying Audi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ 4: Are participants more likely to report a link between the brand integration and the program or the standard commercial and the program?

As demonstrated by Table 1.4 below, participants who viewed the brand integration ad reported a significantly stronger link between the ad and the program than those who viewed the commercial (t(134) = 3.65, p = .0004). Alternately, the conditions participants were exposed to did not have an effect on whether participants found the ads to be distracting. Participants who watched the brand integration ad reported that the ad was more informative than those who viewed the standard commercial (t(156) = 2.28, p = 0.024).

Table 1.4 – Results of the link between the ads and the program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group A (Brand Integration) n = 70</th>
<th>Group B (Commercial) n = 94</th>
<th>t(df)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ad is relevant*</td>
<td>M = 2.6 SD = 1.117</td>
<td>M = 2.0 SD = 0.949</td>
<td>3.626 (134)</td>
<td>0.0004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad is not distracting</td>
<td>M = 3.2 SD = 1.112</td>
<td>M = 3.2 SD = 1.049</td>
<td>0.387 (144)</td>
<td>0.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad is informative*</td>
<td>M = 3 SD = 0.901</td>
<td>M = 2.7 SD = 1.001</td>
<td>2.282 (156)</td>
<td>0.024*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = statistically significant results
Discussion

The results of this research study are interesting, and will have an important impact on the field of television advertising. The results show that there is very little difference in viewer perceptions when it comes to watching brand integration ads versus standard commercials. For RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, brand integration ads did not have significantly different effects than standard commercials on viewers’ attitudes toward the television network that aired the ad, attitudes toward the featured product, or intent to purchase the product.

Regarding RQ4, which asked if participants were more likely to report a link between the brand integration ad and the program or the standard commercial and the program, participants perceived a significantly stronger link between the brand integration ad and the program. Participants also perceived the brand integration ad to be more informative than the standard commercial. Thus, viewers are more likely to report a link between the brand integration advertisement and the program than a standard commercial and the program.

This means that viewers are savvy enough to recognize that brand integration ads are more custom advertisements, specifically when they are linked to the program they air within and when they add more information about the product than a standard commercial. These results show that advertisers can pay less by partnering with television networks to create brand integration ads, and at the same time yield similar viewer perceptions, attitudes toward the product, and intentions to purchase as if they invested more money in creating a standard commercial.

These findings are important for both advertisers and television networks. The first important note is that since brand integration ads are viewed as being more relevant to programming and more informative, viewers could be more likely to watch these ads during
commercial breaks than commercials. Future research on this topic could yield important data and may help advertisers and networks decrease audiences’ tendencies to fast-forward through commercial breaks using DVRs.

Secondly, these significant results also have important investment implications for advertisers. Participants found the brand integration ad to be more relevant to the program and more informative than the standard commercial. Despite these factors, the type of ad had seemingly no influence on participants’ attitudes toward the network, attitudes toward the product, or intent to purchase the product.

At first glance this might raise questions about why advertisers would invest in brand integration ads, since they do not yield significantly more positive attitudes toward the product than stand commercials. However, an advertiser can invest a lower amount in a brand integration ad and still yield essentially the same positive attitudes from viewers that a standard commercial yields. From this perspective, advertisers take a smaller risk and still gain attention for their product. If an advertiser has to choose between investing $5 Million dollars on a standard commercial or $1 Million dollars on a brand integration, it could be more beneficial to choose a brand integration ad and make essentially the same impression on viewers.

These results are also important for network sales teams. As explained above, brand integration advertisements serve as a less costly commercial production for advertisers and serve as revenue for television networks. It has seemingly been a win-win situation, but neither entity knew how these ads were affecting viewers. Television networks wondered if viewers perceived brand integration ads as the network selling out to advertisers. They also questioned if these custom ads would decrease trust in the network’s programming. Advertisers wondered if co-branding with the network gave the product less importance in
This study confirms that whether it is a brand integration advertisement or a standard commercial that airs on television, viewers have similar attitudes toward the network, attitudes toward the brand, and intentions to purchase the product. Brand integration ads are in fact a win for both advertisers and television networks.

Another interesting note about the results is that they could change drastically depending on the product that is featured in both the brand integration ad and the commercial. In this research study, the featured product was the 2011 Audi A8, a neutral and well-known automobile with no obvious connection to the National Geographic Channel. If the same study were conducted with a different product, such as Exxon gas, the results would undoubtedly be different because of viewers’ prior brand associations. Viewers may have pre-existing negative perceptions of Exxon, and connect them to past oil spills and devastating environmental effects. If a brand integration ad featured Exxon and National Geographic Channel, the latter of which is synonymous with an environmentally-friendly mission, participants may have a negative perception of both entities involved in the ad. It is important for future research to take into account what specific product is featured. This will give researchers a reasonable chance to obtain survey responses that are not based on emotional familiarity or past experiences. As another example, if SeaWorld partnered with National Geographic Channel in a brand integration ad, that could have a positive impact on results because many viewers have positive brand associations with SeaWorld.

The Audi A8, used in this research study, was a fairly neutral product, which hopefully helped avoid pre-existing brand associations impacting results.

Lastly, many of the participants in this study fell into a desirable advertiser demographic. Almost 60% of participants were between 26 and 35 years old, and 55.9% of participants had an annual household income over $65,000. An impressive 89.6% of
participants earned at least a four year Bachelor’s degree. Participants in this study mirrored a highly-educated, young, and affluent demographic that is a prime, highly desirable target for many advertisers, and therefore; their opinions and perceptions of ads may be highly regarded.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this research study; mainly the simulated environment of the experiment and participants’ prior brand associations.

The online experiment was easy to access for many participants, but it also created a simulated environment. Television viewers do not ordinarily watch a five-minute clip of a program with only one commercial in the break. Additionally, the research above showed that many consumers do not watch commercial breaks (Mittal, 1994). Since participants were aware of the study, they likely paid more attention to the ads in the break than they would if they were at home, watching television normally.

Another weakness of this study is that the results did not take into account prior brand associations. The research above reveals that brand associations are a major factor affecting intent to purchase products (Rubinson, 2009; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Russell & Stern, 2006). This research study did not take into account participants’ prior brand associations. Participants may already have had positive views of Audi vehicles and/or the National Geographic Channel before they viewed the ads, so the stimuli they viewed may have had little impact on prior attitudes toward these entities. Additionally, Simonin and Ruth (1998) found that when two brands are featured in a print ad, prior associations with one brand can impact consumer attitudes toward the other brand. Participants who viewed the brand integration ad may have applied prior positive attitudes toward the Audi to
National Geographic Channel, or vice versa. Future research could help advertisers and networks understand if brand integration ads have this effect on viewers’ prior associations.

**Recommendations**

Future research should include a pre-test that measures participants’ prior attitudes toward the network and the product. This would solve one of the main limitations of this research study. A pre-test would take into account prior brand associations and help clarify results, as mentioned above. Research on brand integration advertisements with lesser-known brands could also help better understand viewers’ perceptions, by eliminating the likelihood of prior brand associations.

Lastly, participants’ perceptions that the brand integration ad has a stronger link to programming and is more informative could positively affect viewers’ intentions to watch ads attentively and not skip through commercial breaks. Further research on brand integration ads and attention could help researchers better understand these implications. I would suggest a research study involving multiple television networks and products and a pre-test to determine prior brand associations for all entities. Then, by partnering with Nielsen, the industry’s standard ratings company, future research could analyze and dissect commercial ratings and determine if DVR users fast-forward through commercial breaks less often when the breaks include a brand integration advertisement instead of a standard commercial.
Appendix A: RECRUITMENT NOTICE

Below is the recruitment notice that was posted on websites and included in email blasts and announcement boards:

Here’s the chance to voice your opinion. My name is Alicia Biggs, and I am working on a thesis project in communication. I am conducting a research study about television viewers’ perceptions. To participate in brief survey, please use the link below.

To qualify for this research study, you must be between the ages of 18 to 49, watch television for at least one hour per week, and not be employed in the field of television production. It’s a short and easy survey. Just click below to get started.

Click here to take the survey:

Appendix B: INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

I am a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University. As part of my thesis, I'm conducting a research study to assess perceptions of television viewers. Please watch the 5 minute segment and then complete the short survey afterward. Your responses to the survey will be anonymous, and will in no way be linked to you as a participant. Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue the survey at any time without penalty, by closing the survey browser window and not clicking the “submit” button.

For information about the experiment, you may contact Alicia Biggs at aliciabiggs102@gmail.com or via phone at 443-812-4508.

By clicking through to the next section of this survey, you indicate that you consent to participate in this research study. Please only continue if you are between the ages of 18 to 49, you watch at least one hour of television per week, and you are not employed in the field of television production.

Should you choose to participate in this research study, please read the following statement and check “Yes” if you agree.

I agree to participate in this research study and have been made aware of its purpose, the anonymity of my responses, and the right to discontinue my participation at any time.

Yes

No
Appendix C: STIMULI

Below are links to the stimuli (the 5-minute *Finding Atlantis* excerpt with a brand integration ad and a commercial).

**Group A Stimuli**

Group A watched the file below featuring a brand integration ad.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9nfqq7syvo

In this five-minute video, watch a clip from NGC’s show, *Finding Atlantis*, all about three archaeology teams searching for the lost city of Atlantis. One team dives under water off the coast of Spain, where they think they will find clues, and the researchers use various technologies to help them in their underwater search.

Half way through the clip is a short break with a thirty-second spot. The spot begins with footage from *Finding Atlantis* and discusses the archaeology teams searching for Atlantis by using underwater technology with special lights. Then, through voiceover and footage, the spot shifts into other places you can find this technology, such as the LED lights on the Audi A8. The voiceover describes how the innovative lights help drivers see better through curves, while using less energy than other lights. The brand integration advertisement ends with a five-second graphic that reads in text and audio: “Audi presents Finding Atlantis.”

After this short break, *Finding Atlantis* continues. One of the scientists underwater finds rocks that appear to be man-made bricks, as though there was once a building in this same spot. He calls the other scientists to share the news, and they express excitement because they may have just found Atlantis.
Group B Stimuli

Group B viewed the file below featuring a standard commercial.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pkrs887jTwQ

In this five-minute video, watch a clip from NGC’s show, Finding Atlantis, all about three archaeology teams searching for the lost city of Atlantis. One team dives under water off the coast of Spain, where they think they will find clues, and the researchers use various technologies to help them in their underwater search.

Half way through the clip is a short break with a thirty-second commercial. The spot begins with footage of a huge mansion and opulent furnishings, paintings, and décor. The camera pans through rooms in the mansion, and the voiceover, set to a lullaby, says: “Good night stuffy, good night outdated. Good night old luxury.” For a moment, the video goes dark and then opens on the Audi A8 on a hill nearby in the early morning hours. The music changes and the voiceover says “Good morning illumination, good morning innovation, and good morning unequaled inspiration.” During this shift, the interior and exterior of the Audi are featured as the sun rises. The spot ends with a black screen and simple white text that says “The new Audi A8 is here. Luxury has progressed.”

After this short break, Finding Atlantis continues. One of the scientists underwater finds rocks that appear to be man-made bricks, as though there was once a building in this same spot. He calls the other scientists to share the news, and they express excitement because they may have just found Atlantis.
Appendix D: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

After participants clicked through and gave their informed consent, the experiment began, as listed below.

Certification:

Are you between the ages of 18 and 49?

Yes (1)
No (0) – Thank you for your interest. This study focuses only on individuals 18 to 49.

Do you watch at least one hour of television per week?

Yes (1)
No (0) – Thank you for your interest. This study focuses only on individuals who watch one hour or more of television per week.

Are you employed in the field of television production?

Yes (1)
No (0) – Thank you for your interest. This study focuses only on individuals who are not employed in television production.

Does the year you were born in end with an even number or an odd number?

For example, if you were born in 1983, the year ends with an odd number.

Even
Odd
(Those who entered “Even” were randomly assigned to Group A and watched the clip with the brand integration ad. Those who entered “Odd” were randomly assigned to Group B and watched the clip with the standard commercial).

Survey – After Viewing Stimuli

(After the questions below in parentheses, I noted which RQ each survey question pertains to.)

Thank you for taking the time to watch the video. Now I’d like to ask you a few questions about the material you viewed. Please complete the following survey, answering the questions to the best of your ability.

Below is a list of statements related to the video clip you just viewed. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The *Finding Atlantis* segment was informative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If I was channel surfing and watched this part of the program, I would continue watching the show.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
National Geographic Channel is a trustworthy source for non-fiction programs. (RQ1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</table>

National Geographic Channel produces high quality programming. (RQ1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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I have a favorable attitude toward the National Geographic Channel. (RQ1)

<table>
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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
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I have a favorable attitude toward the Audi A8. (RQ2)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

The Audi A8 is an attractive vehicle. (RQ2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Audi A8 is a luxury vehicle. (RQ2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

If I were in the market to buy a vehicle, I would consider purchasing an Audi. (RQ3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

If I am in the market to buy a vehicle in the next 3 years, I will purchase an Audi. (RQ3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>
The Audi A8 advertisement was relevant to the program, *Finding Atlantis*. (RQ4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

The Audi A8 advertisement did *not* distract me from the program, *Finding Atlantis*. (RQ4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
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</table>

The advertisement for the Audi A8 that appeared in this segment was informative. (RQ4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please answer the demographic questions below.

1. Please choose your age from the correct category below.

   ___ 18-25
   (1)
   ___ 26-35
   (2)
   ___ 36-49
   (3)

2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

   ___ Less than high school (1)
   ___ High school/GED (2)
   ___ 2 year degree (Associates) (3)
   ___ 4 year degree (BA, BS) (4)
   ___ Master’s degree (5)
   ___ Doctoral degree (6)
   ___ Professional degree (MD, JD) (7)
3. Which of the following categories best describes your annual household income?

____ Under $20,000 (1)
____ $20,000 – $45,000 (2)
____ $45,000 – $65,000 (3)
____ $65,000 – $90,000 (4)
____ $90,000 – $125,000 (5)
____ $125,000 plus (6)

4. How many hours (approximately) of television do you view per week?

____ 1-5 (1)
____ 6-10 (2)
____ 11-15 (3)
____ More than 16 (4)

Thank you for your time! For information about the experiment, questions, and comments, contact Alicia Biggs at aliciabiggs102@gmail.com.
References


Vita

Alicia Diane Biggs was born in Columbia, Maryland. After completing her work at Howard High School, Ellicott City, Maryland, in 2001, she entered Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. She earned the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Communication in December, 2004.

During the following years, she was employed as a writer and producer in marketing at Discovery networks, TV One, and National Geographic Channels. In January, 2010, she entered the Graduate School at Johns Hopkins University.