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'I Didn't Even Know That Was An Ad!' –
The Effects of Advertising Storytelling Integration on Download Intention

„Nawet nie wiedziałem, że to była reklama!" – wpływ integracji narracji reklamowych na zamiar pobrania

Streszczenie

Integracja narracji reklamowych to nowy sposób, w jaki YouTuberzy znaleźli skuteczne promowanie marek w swoich filmach na YouTube. Dzięki imponującej historii wyników wiele agencji i badaczy zastanawia się, skąd bierze się ten sukces. Niniejsze badanie ma na celu wyjaśnienie sukcesu tej nowej formy marketingu influencerów poprzez zbadanie wpływu integracji narracji reklamowych na zamiar pobrania. Badana jest również moderująca rola relacji paraspołecznych oraz mediacyjna rola postrzeganej kreatywności reklamowej.

Abstract

Advertising storytelling integration is a new way that YouTubers have found to effectively promote brands in their YouTube video's. With an impressive track record of results, many agencies and researchers alike are wondering where this success comes from. This research aims to explain the success of this new form of influencer marketing by researching the effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention. The moderating role of parasocial relationships and the mediating role of perceived advertising creativity are also examined.

Introduction

In 2021, YouTuber Jimmy Donaldson, better known by his YouTube alias 'Mr. Beast', created a video that would shake up the YouTube landscape. On the 24th of November he released a video titled '$456,000 Squid Game In Real Life', in which he recreated popular Netflix show 'Squid Game' to a level never seen before on YouTube[1]. The video broke multiple records on the platform, and managed to draw in more views in the first week than the actual series did in a month[2].

The total production cost of the 18-minute video was $3.5 million[3], which is high considering that the video was uploaded to free-to-watch platform YouTube. Whereas the original Squid Game series was produced with backing from streaming platform Netflix, Donaldson's recreation was mainly paid for by mobile game *Brawl Stars*. The app had a one minute and 31 second advertisement in the video. *Brawl Stars* made a bet and spent $3.5 million on an advertisement on YouTube. It paid off, as the app saw an increase of 41% in worldwide downloads, and in-game spending was up by 51%. In concrete numbers, that means that *Brawl Stars* generated $8.2 million of profit in just the first week of the video being live[4].

These are numbers that other advertisers can only dream of. Donaldson integrated the advertisement in such a way into his story, that the ad couldn't be skipped without missing a part of the storyline of the whole video. The advertisement was also very creative, which ultimately resulted in huge results of the advertisement for Brawl Stars. What Donaldson used in his video can be described as advertising storytelling integration. A concept not yet researched in other studies, advertising storytelling integration is defined in this study as a concept that describes whether the advertising in a video is integrated into the video's

[1] J. Donaldson, *$456,000 Squid Game In Real Life!*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0e3G-Pea1Tyg [dostęp: 24.11.2021].

[2] R. Blom, *YouTuber organiseert eigen Squid Game en trekt meer kijkers dan Netflix. Retrieved from adformatie.nl*, https://www.adformatie.nl/digitaltransformation-tech/youtuber-organiseert-eigensquid-game-en-verslaat-netflix [dostęp: 30.11.2021].

[3] M. Pearce, *How much did mrbeast's 'squid game' remake on YouTube cost? we did the math. Los Angeles Times*, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2021-12-09/mr-beast-youtubes-quid-gamevideohit#:~:text=As%20of%20Thursday%2C%20the%20MrBeast,video%2C%20with%20158.2%20million%20views [dostęp: 9.12.2021].

[4] A. Orr, *Brawl stars US downloads surge 350% following sponsorship of Mr Beast's squid game. pocketgamer.biz,* https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/77658/brawl-stars-us-downloads-surge-350-percent-mr-beast-squid-game-sponsorship/ [dostęp: 1.12.2021].

storytelling or not. Advertising storytelling integration describes a form of influencer marketing where the influencer uses advertising storytelling, native advertising and product placement to make the advertised brand appear as naturally as possible in the video, while keeping the storyline engaging and entertaining. This method of advertising on YouTube is something relatively new to the academic space. It is clearly an effective way of marketing products, but it is not clear what makes this so effective in academic terms.

This concept of advertising storytelling integration is a concept that has not been studied before by. With influencers on YouTube gaining more and more subscribers and viewers, the overall influence they have over the people that follow them will also become bigger and they will become more important to advertisers[5]. If all the eyes are on YouTube, advertisers will want to market their products there. This concept of advertising storytelling integration is a new form of influencer marketing that could have potential to be of great interest to these advertisers, as it already worked very well in the past. This concept has now been employed in advertising, but the process of how it works remains unknown in a scientific context. That is what this research will try to uncover.

This study will test how important the integration of an advertisement into a story is, and whether the ad creativity and the parasocial relationship that a viewer has with the YouTuber matters when it comes to download intention. The study will aim to draw from research about influencer marketing, narrative advertising, product placement and brand storytelling to try to explain why advertising storytelling integration may be an effective marketing strategy. To start off, the concept of influencer marketing will be explored.

Research has shown before that influencer marketing has a positive effect on purchase intention[6]. This research will aim to uncover whether this new form of influencer marketing has this effect as well. Secondly, the persuasive effect of advertising storytelling has been explored in the extended elaboration likelihood model by Slater & Rouner[7]. They found that in the context of entertainment education, advertising storytelling could result in positive behavioural and attitudinal

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[5] S. Zak, M. Hasprova, *The role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process*, SHS Web of Conferences 2020, 74, pp. 1–7.

[6] J. Trivedi, R. Sama, *The effect of influencer marketing on consumers' brand admiration and online purchase intentions: An emerging market perspective*, Journal of Internet Commerce 2019, 19 (1), pp. 103–124.

[7] M.D. Slater, D. Rouner, *Entertainment-education and elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion*, Communication Theory 2002, 12 (2), pp. 173–171.

effects. The question is whether this will also apply to the context of this research. Furthermore, van Reijmersdal and colleagues found that product placement has a positive effect on purchase intention[8].

This study also predicts that parasocial relationship will play a moderating role in the relationship between advertising storytelling integration and download intention, while perceived advertising creativity is hypothesized to play a mediating role. Research found that people form parasocial relationships with YouTubers in the same way that Rubin and argued people do with television characters[9] and have showcased the moderating effect of parasocial relationships in the context of influencer marketing with children. Advertising creativity has long been considered an important driver of advertising success, with it having positive effects on purchase intention[10]. Research has shown that creativity is an important predictor of user responses to social media advertising as well[11].

Following this short overview of the academic knowledge on the topic, the research question for this study can be formulated as:

What is the effect of an advertisement integrated into storytelling in video's made by YouTubers on the download intention compared to having the advertisement separate to the story, and how does this effect change for different levels of a parasocial relationship with the YouTuber and how does perceived ad creativity mediate this effect?

As demonstrated by the small overview of previous research, there is a lot of knowledge about the effects of the separate variables, but advertising storytelling integration in the context of influencer marketing is something that has not been researched before.

This research will thus aim to see whether these theoretical concepts also apply in the context of advertising storytelling integration. This will expand the theory available on influencer marketing, a field that is still relatively new. This

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[8] E.A. van Reijmersdal, P.C. Neijens, E.G. Smit, *Effects of television brand placement on brand image*, Psychology & Marketing 2007, 24(5), pp. 403–420.

[9] K. Kurten, N. O'Brien, D. Roy, L. Dam, *The development of parasocial relationships on YouTube*, The Journal of Social Media in Society 2018, 7 (1), pp. 223–252; S. Boerman, E. van Reijmersdal, *Disclosing influencer marketing on YouTube to children: the moderating role of para-social relationship*, Frontiers in Psychology 2020, 10, pp. 45–54.

[10] S.H. Ang, S.Y. Low, *Exploring the dimensions of ad creativity,* Psychology & Marketing 2020, 17 (10), pp. 835–854.

[11] J. Lee, I.B. Hong, *Predicting positive user responses to social media advertising: The roles of emotional appeal, informativeness, and creativity*, International Journal of Information Management 2016, 36 (3), pp. 360–373.

study will also help brands and influencers in ameliorating their partnership and better the results for both parties. If advertising storytelling integration does indeed turn out to be an important factor in increasing the download intention of the viewers, it could spark a new wave of branded content in the influencer marketing field, with everyone trying to make their advertisements as engaging and entertaining as possible.

Theoretical framework.
Advertising storytelling integration

Advertising storytelling integration is a concept that describes whether the advertising is integrated into the storytelling of a video or not. As this variable has not been discussed in research before, no academic definition has been previously defined.

However, the variable's background mainly lies in influencer marketing, storytelling and product placement. Advertisement storytelling integration in this research is defined as a form of influencer marketing where the influencer uses native advertising, storytelling and product placement to integrate an advertisement into the storytelling of the video. To discuss the effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention, we will discuss previous research into influencer marketing, native advertising, storytelling and product placement in order to determine how it fits within advertising storytelling integration.

Influencer marketing

The first part of the definition of advertising storytelling integration states that it is a form of influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is defined as a 'form of marketing where marketers and brands invest in selected influencers to create and/or promote their branded content to both the influencers' own followers and to the brands' target consumers'[12]. Influencers are online personalities with large numbers of followers across one or more social media platforms, who have an influence on their followers[13]. Advertising storytelling integration in this context is a form of influencer marketing because of the context it is applied to. Influencers

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[12] C. Lou, S. Yuan, *Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media*, Journal of Interactive Advertising 2019, 19 (1), pp. 58–73.

[13] Ibidem.

try to have their branded content be as effective as possible for the brand they work for in order to increase their worth to the brand[14]. Advertising storytelling integration is one of the ways in which this can be achieved. Due to the fact that influencers carry this out and its paid for by the brands, it can be considered as a form of influencer marketing.

Earlier research has already suggested that influencer endorsements in general are more effective in increasing the purchase intention of the public than using celebrity endorsements[15]. Trivedi found that in the context of the fashion and lifestyle industry, influencers had a higher impact on the purchase attention of a Gen Y sample than celebrities, while Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget saw that this was true for fitness, beauty and food products as well[16]. It thus seems that an effect of influencer marketing on purchase intention is definitely present. With advertising storytelling integration being a form of influencer marketing, it can be expected that there will be a positive effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention as well. Even though the product advertised in this research is not part of one of the categories researched before, the fact that it's free makes it likely to be a low-involvement product, similarly to the products used in earlier research.

Native advertising

In line with the E-ELM model advertising storytelling integration tries to make the persuasive intent of the advertisement be as unobtrusive as possible[17]. One of the ways of achieving this is through native advertising. Native advertising are advertisements that blend into and resemble surrounding non-ad content[18]. This phenomenon is not just something from recent times, but it was in fact already introduced by agricultural company John Deere in 1895 with the launch of their branded magazine 'The Furrow'[19]. However, native advertising

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[14] S.V. Jin, A. Muqaddam, E. Ryu, *Instafamous and social media influencer marketing*, Marketing Intelligence & Planning 2019, 37 (5), pp. 567–579.

[15] J.P. Trivedi, *Measuring the comparative efficacy of an attractive celebrity influencer vis-à-vis an expert influencer – a fashion industry perspective*, International Journal of Electronic Customer Relationship Management 2018, 11 (3), pp. 103–124.

[16] Ibidem.

[17] M.D. Slater, D. Rouner, op.cit., Communication Theory 2002, 12 (2), pp. 173–171.

[18] B.W. Wojdynski, *The deceptiveness of sponsored news articles,* American Behavioral Scientist, 2016, 60 (12), pp. 1475–1491.

[19] J. Grimm, *A brief history of native advertising. Pressboard,* https://www.pressboardmedia.com/magazine/a-brief-history-ofnative-advertising [dostęp: 17.09.2015].

has become very popular in the digital area, and that is shown by the effects that it has. When native advertising is done in the form of content produced by the general public, it has shown to also increase their purchase intention[20]. In addition, when native advertising is done through influencers, the effect on purchase intention is present as well, with it being even more effective than native advertising on brand social media accounts[21]. This research will therefore expect that the native advertising in the context of advertising storytelling integration will have a positive effect on download intention.

Advertising storytelling

Advertising storytelling is defined as 'using advertising messages and imagery to convey a narrative to consumers'[22]. The success of storytelling in advertising can be described through the extended elaboration likelihood model (E-ELM)[23]. This extended version of Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (1986) describes how people process entertainment messages. As the core of storytelling lies in entertainment, this model can be used to explain the success that narrative storytelling has in increasing purchase intention[24]. The E-ELM incorporates variables like absorption, homophily, quality of production, storyline appeal, and identification with characters to demonstrate the effects of storytelling on behaviour. Earlier research has already uncovered the importance of these variables in explaining the effects of narrative advertising, so the advertisement will have to tick all these boxes to get the maximum increase in purchase intention possible. The E-ELM has not been applied to influencer marketing before though, so this study will aim to uncover whether the E-ELM also applies in this context[25].

[20] M. Mayrhofer, J. Matthes, S. Einwiller, B. Naderer, *User generated content presenting brands on social media increases Young Adults' purchase intention*, International Journal of Advertising 2019, 39 (1), pp. 166–186.

[21] D.C. Balaban, R.G. Racz, *Social Media influencer advertising versus advertising on social media account of a brand. evidence from an experimental design*, Journal of Media Research 2020, 13, 3 (38), pp. 45–54.

[22] J.L. Grigsby, H.N. Mellema, *Negative consequences of storytelling in native advertising*, Journal of Interactive Marketing 2020, 52, pp. 61–78.

[23] M.D. Slater, D. Rouner, op.cit., Communication Theory 2002, 12 (2), pp. 173–171.

[24] S. Joshi, M. Domb, B. Chanda, A. Bais, *Evaluating the impact of storytelling ads on consumer purchase intention,* Journal of Service Science and Management 2002, 15 (01), pp. 10–22.

[25] J.A. Kang, S. Hong, G.T. Hubbard, *The role of storytelling in advertising: Consumer Emotion, narrative engagement level, and word-of-mouth intention*, Journal of Consumer Behaviour 2020, 19 (1), pp. 45–56.

Product placement

Product placement is the adding of branded content into mass media content with the intent of influencing consumer attitude or behavior[26]. Product placement is a type of advertising that has been around for decades already. Whether it be in movies, tv programs, or video games[27], product placement has been widely used in media. The popularity of product placement as a marketing technique is valid, considering how well product placement does at increasing the purchase intention of the viewer[28]. Therefore, it is logical that product placement is being used in digital media as well. Research has found that the product placement in digital media is as effective as product placement in traditional media[29]. With this being the case, it can be expected that the product placement part of advertising storytelling integration will further help in increasing the download intention of the viewer in this study.

The effect of advertising storytelling integration in itself and the role of native advertising, storytelling and product placement in this can be theoretically explained by the extended elaboration likelihood model (E-ELM)[30]. The model argues that absorption into the storyline and identification with the characters decreases the extent to which people try to counterargue the advertisement, which in turn reduces the resistance to the persuasive message that people have[31]. The main component in this research that comes back in this theory is advertising storytelling, as it is linked to three of the four main variables that influence absorption.

However, native advertising and product placement also fit into this model. The variable unobtrusiveness of persuasive subtext describes to what extent the persuasive intent of the advertisement is unobtrusive to the narrative[32]. Native advertising and product placement are both ways to decrease the obtrusiveness

[26] J. Newell, C.T. Salmon, S. Chang, *The hidden history of product placement*, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 2006, 50 (4), pp. 575–594.

[27] V. Jusufovic-Karisik, *20 years of research on product placement in movie, television and Video Game Media,* Journal of Economic and Social Studies 2014, 4 (2), pp. 98–101.

[28] E.A. van Reijmersdal, P.C. Neijens, E.G. Smit, op.cit., Psychology & Marketing 2007, 24 (5), pp. 403–420.

[29] B.L. Fossen, D.A. Schweidel, *Measuring the impact of product placement with brand-related social media conversations and website traffic*, Marketing Science 2019, 38 (3), pp. 481–499.

[30] M.D. Slater, D. Rouner, op.cit., Communication Theory 2002, 12 (2), pp. 173–171.

[31] Ibidem.

[32] Ibidem.

of advertising. Native advertising does this by blending the advertisement in with its surroundings, while product placement combines entertainment and advertising to create a storyline around the product[33].

Due to the fact that all four of the main variables that influence absorption in the E-ELM are related to the concepts that make up advertising storytelling integration, it could be assumed that advertising storytelling integration positively influences absorption and identification with characters, which will ultimately lead to attitudinal and behavioural effects. A visualization of this idea can be found in figure 1.

Drawing from the theories and previous research, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The integration of advertising into the storytelling of a You-Tube video will have a more positive effect on viewers' download intention than no integration of the advertising into the storytelling.

Figure 1. The extended elaboration likelihood model (Slater & Rouner, 2002) with the concepts that are relevant to the variable highlighted in red (advertising storytelling), yellow (native advertising) and green (product placement)
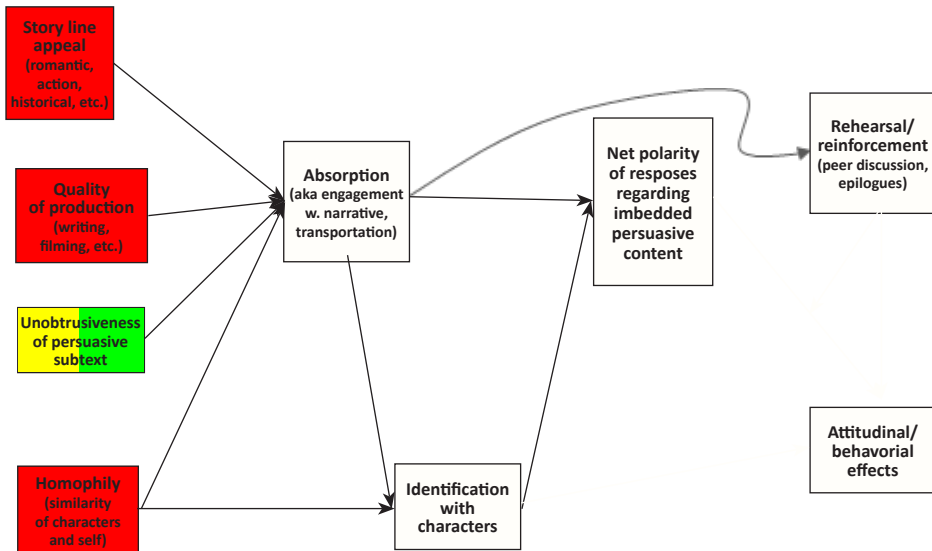
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[33] J. Newell, C.T. Salmon, S. Chang, op.cit., Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 2006, 50 (4); B.W. Wojdynski, op.cit., American Behavioral Scientist 2016, 60 (12), pp. 575–594.

Perceived creativity

Ad creativity is the extent to which the participants think the advertisement that they are faced with is creative or not. Smith and colleagues defined advertising creativity as "the extent to which an ad contains brand or executional elements that are different, novel, unusual, original, unique, etc."[34]. From this definition, they came up with five different dimensions for advertising creativity: originality, flexibility, elaboration, synthesis and artistic value. These five indicators were given clear definitions by the authors. Originality described the extent to which ads contain rare or surprising elements[35]. Flexibility was defined as the extent to which ads switch between viewpoints or contain different ideas[36]. Elaboration was defined as 'ads that contain unexpected details, or finish and extend basic ideas so they become more intricate, complicated or sophisticated'[37]. Synthesis encapsulated the extent to which ads combined normally unrelated objects or ideas. Lastly, artistic value was about ads that have artistic verbal or non-verbal impressions. The authors also argued that relevance was an important factor to consider when looking at the effectiveness of advertising creativity[38]. Especially ad-to-consumer relevance and brand-to-consumer relevance were considered important, as people are less likely to be influenced by something that is not relevant to them.

As the independent variable in this research is one that has not been researched in this state before, there is no current research on how advertising storytelling integration influences perceived ad creativity. There was also no current research on how the factors within advertising storytelling integration influence perceived ad creativity, but there is research to connect the two variables. Multiple studies describe that creative advertisements result in a more favourable attitude towards the advertisement than non-creative advertisements, making creativity a predictor of attitude towards the ad[39]. In turn, advertising storytelling[40],

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[34] R. Smith, S. MacKenzie, X. Yang, L. Buchholz, W. Darley, *Modelling the determinants and effects of creativity in advertising,* Marketing Science 2007, 26 (6), p. 820.

[35] Ibidem.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] Ibidem, p. 821.

[38] Ibidem.

[39] S.H. Ang, S.Y. Low, op.cit., Psychology, Marketing 2000, 17 (10), pp. 835–854.

[40] K. Polyorat, D.L. Alden, E.S. Kim, *Impact of narrative versus factual print ad copy on product evaluation: The mediating role of AD message involvement*, Psychology and Marketing 2007, 24 (6), pp. 539–554.

native advertising[41] and product placement have all been proven as well to positively influence attitude towards the advertisement[42]. As these variables all have the same effect, it can be assumed there is an effect of advertising storytelling integration on perceived ad creativity.

The effect of advertising creativity on advertising responses is something that has been much argued in previous academic research. Ang and Low argued that advertising creativity only had positive effects on purchase intention when the advertisement meets three conditions; being unexpected, being relevant and leaving a positive feeling[43].

This tied in to the dimensions that Smith and colleagues introduced, as the unexpectedness relates to the elaboration dimension, the relevance is related to the ad-to-consumer relevance and brand-to-consumer relevance dimensions, while positive feelings are related to the originality dimension[44]. More and more research backed up the findings by Ang and Low, showing that ad creativity was only effective when it ticked the boxes of the dimensions proposed by Smith and colleagues[45]. This research will thus also use these dimensions to determine the levels of perceived ad creativity. This study is expecting to find a positive effect of storytelling integration on perceived ad creativity, and another positive effect of perceived ad creativity on download intention.

Following this overview, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

Hypothesis 2: Integration of advertising into storytelling of a YouTube video will have a more positive effect on viewers' download intention when the perceived creativity of the advertisement is high compared to when the perceived creativity of the advertisement is low.

Parasocial relationships

This variable describes the extent to which the viewer feels a parasocial relationship with a YouTuber. Parasocial relationship is defined as the extent to

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[41] J. Lee, S. Kim, C.D. Ham, *A double-edged sword? predicting consumers' attitudes toward and sharing intention of native advertising on social media,* American Behavioral Scientist 2016, 60 (12), pp. 1425–1441.

[42] Z. Glass, *The effectiveness of product placement in video games*, Journal of Interactive Advertising 2007, 8 (1), pp. 23–32.

[43] S.H. Ang, S.Y. Low, op.cit., Psychology & Marketing 2000, 17 (10), pp. 835–854.

[44] R. Smith, S. MacKenzie, X. Yang, L. Buchholz, W. Darley, op.cit., Marketing Science 2007, 26 (6), p. 820.

[45] Ibidem.

which people think they have a relationship with a media personality[46]. Horton and Wohl first argued that people form parasocial relationships with media personalities as if they are friends with them in real life[47]. In the decades following, a lot of research confirmed the existence of this phenomenon and discovered the effects it had[48].

Parasocial relationship showed to influence the amount of television viewing people did, their perception of the attractiveness of characters in television programs, but also to what degree people perceived themselves to be similar to the characters they saw. Kurten and colleagues confirmed that parasocial relationships work the same with YouTubers. In this research, they tested Rubin & McHugh's original model of how television exposure increases parasocial relationships by integrating YouTube viewing instead of television exposure. They found similar effects to what Rubin & McHugh found, confirming that parasocial relationships work the same for YouTubers as they do for characters in TV shows[49].

The moderating role that parasocial relationship will assume in this research has been studied in other research. Hwang and Zhang researched parasocial relationship as a moderating role in the effect of persuasion knowledge on purchase intentions[50]. They found that persuasion knowledge had a negative effect on purchase intentions, but when there were parasocial relationships present, this negative effect was reduced. It thus seemed that when a person has a parasocial relationship with someone, they are less likely to let the persuasive intent of an advertising message influence their purchase and negatively. Boerman and van Reijmersdal researched the moderating effect of parasocial relationships in the context of influencer marketing[51]. They sought to find the effect of disclosing sponsorship disclosure in YouTube video's on the attitude towards the brand, product and video. They found that disclosing sponsorship in a video negatively

[46] D. Horton, R.R. Wohl, *Mass communication and para-social interaction: observations on intimacy at a distance*, Psychiatry 1956, 19, pp. 215–229.

[47] Ibidem.

[48] R. Preiss, W. Gayle, B. Burrell, M. Allen, J. Bryant, E. Schiappa, P.B. Gregg, M. Allen, *Parasocial relationships and television: A meta-analysis of the effects. In Mass media effects research: Advances through meta-analysis*, 6th ed., 2007, Vol. 70, pp. 301–314.

[49] R.B. Rubin, M.P. McHugh, *Development of parasocial interaction relationships*, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 1987, 31 (3), pp. 279–292.

[50] K. Hwang, Q. Zhang, *Influence of parasocial relationship between digital celebrities and their followers on followers' purchase and electronic word-of-mouth intentions, and persuasion knowledge, 2018*, Computers in Human Behavior, 87, pp. 1555–1573.

[51] S. Boerman, E. van Reijmersdal, op.cit., Frontiers in Psychology 2020, 10, pp. 1–15.

influenced brand attitudes when the parasocial relationship was low to medium. However, there was no indirect effect of disclosure on the attitudes via persuasion knowledge. Both studies thus seem to prove the same point; parasocial relationships reduce the negative effect of people being aware of the persuasive intent of the message. People are nowadays by law made explicitly aware of the persuasive intent of the video, which will reduce their susceptibility to the persuasion. However, integrating the advertising into the storytelling may distract people from this persuasive intent, which will reduce the negative effect of disclosure. If this is the case, the role of parasocial relationships in reducing the negative effect of persuasion knowledge would thus lead to an even stronger effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention. It is thus expected that this research will show that the effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention is even higher when there is a parasocial relationship with the YouTuber present. This is the case because both the integration and the parasocial relationship negate the negative effect of people being aware of the persuasive intent.

Following this overview of literature, the following hypothesis can be drawn up:

Hypothesis 3: The effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention will be higher when there is a strong parasocial relationship with the YouTuber than when there is a weak parasocial relationship with the YouTuber.

Methods

An online experiment was conducted that made use of a one-factor between-subjects design with two conditions. In the first condition people were exposed to a video where the advertisement was integrated into the storytelling of the video, while in the second condition people were exposed to a video where the advertisement was not integrated into the storytelling of the video.

Prior to participating in the survey, participants read the factsheet and accepted the informed consent form. When they agreed, they went on to the survey, if they didn't, they were not allowed to take part in the survey. The survey started off with demographic questions pertaining to the participants age, gender, nationality and level of education. The next set of questions introduced the participant to the YouTuber and video title they were going to be exposed to in the manipulation. They were presented with the questions that measured the parasocial relationship the participant has with Mr Beast. The questions were posed to the participants before the manipulation took place, as the video that they would see could influence their answers to the questions. Participants were

introduced to Mr. Beast and given the title and thumbnail of the video they're going to watch, after which they were presented with the questions about para-social relationships. Following that, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the two manipulations. After watching the manipulation video, the participants were faced with the questions about perceived creativity and download intention. After this, the participants had to answer a manipulation check in which they were asked whether they thought the manipulation was part of the story of the video or not. Following this, they were thanked for their participation and debriefed.

Stimulus material

The first condition had the video with the advertisement integrated into the storytelling, while the second condition had the advertisement separate from the story of the video. The video in the integrated condition was the original video as it was uploaded to YouTube, while the video in the not integrated condition was edited. The integrated advertisement was taken out and replaced by an ad block read by the same YouTuber. The brand advertised in the video was Honey. Honey is an app that people can download for free. The app searches for discount codes on every website you visit and automatically applies them for you.

Sample

The sample consists out of 18–25-year-old men and women. This is the age range of people who use YouTube the most, and thus are more likely to belong to the target audience of the YouTuber used as stimulus material. There were no specific gender or education demographic restrictions, as YouTube is accessible to anyone. This sampling method that was used is convenience sampling, due to the limited budget and time available. The participants were recruited through the University of Amsterdam lab pool of students, as well as through posting the links on social media.

The final sample consisted out of a total of 160 participants. 23 participants were excluded from analysis after they had failed to recognise the right sponsor of the video and thus failed the attention check. This left the sample with a total of 137 valid participants. The age of the sample was just over 20 years old on average ($M = 20.86$, $SD = 1,91$), with the youngest participant being 18 years old and the oldest participant being 29 years old. 86.9% of the sample is female, 12.5% of the sample is male while 0.6% was reported as other.

40.6% of the sample completed secondary school, 34.4% of the sample completed some university but no degree, while 15.0% had their university bachelor degree. 6.9% completed vocational education or similar, while 2.5% graduated with a graduate or professional degree. 90.0% of the sample currently resided in the Netherlands, while 2.6% lived in Germany or Romania. The remaining 7.4% resided in 12 other countries.

Measurements

The independent variable in this analysis is advertising storytelling integration. This variable has two different levels. The first level is integrated advertisement, and has a total of 81 participants. The other level is non-integrated advertisement, with 79 participants. 23 participants failed the attention check, which left the final sample with 72 people in the integrated condition and 65 people in the non-integrated condition.

The mediator is perceived ad creativity. It was measured using the scale constructed by Smith and colleagues (2007). The scale measured the dimensions they came up with for advertising creativity. The researchers divided the scale in two parts. The first part was solely about creativity and included originality, flexibility, elaboration, synthesis and artistic value, while the second part was about creative relevance. Perceived creativity was also measured after the manipulation using the scale in appendix V. To prepare this variable for analysis, a principal axis factor analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation was conducted with 23 items. The Eigenvalue criterion revealed two factors, one explaining perceived creativity (Eigenvalue = 7.81) and the other explaining ad relevance (Eigenvalue = 4.95). The factors explained 55.5% of the variance in the 23 items, with factor one accounting for 34.0% of the variance, and factor two adding 21.5% of explained variance. Factor one's reliability is excellent (α=.91), as well as the reliability of factor two (α=.94). The fact that the scale was divided in two factors with perceived ad creativity and relevance was to be expected, as Smith and colleagues (2007) already made the distinction within the scale. As the variable perceived ad creativity is only really described in factor one, only this factor will be used in analysis. The variable was then construed through taking the average of all the items (M = 4.04, SD = 1.04).

The moderator in this analysis is parasocial relationship. It was measured using a scale created by Boerman & van Reijmersdal, adapted to this research. This scale was tested and presented a reliability of α = 0.84. It was measured before the

manipulation, making it a quasi-experimental variable[52]. The full scale can be found in appendix IV. To prepare this variable for analysis, a principal axis factor analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation was conducted with five items measuring parasocial relationship. The Eigenvalue criterion revealed one factor (Eigenvalue = 3.48). The factor explained 69.5% of the variance in the five items. The factor's reliability is good (α=.87). The variable was then construed through taking the average of all the items (*M* = 2.88, *SD* = 0.95).

The dependent variable in this analysis is download intention. Download intention has not previously been explicitly defined, therefore this research will refer to purchase intention for the definition of this variable. In earlier research, Spears and Singh (2004) defined purchase intention as 'an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand. Referring from this, download intention would thus be defined as 'an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to download the app'. After the manipulation, the participants were asked about their download intentions using a scale taken from research by Yang and colleagues (2021). The scale for download intention presented a reliability of α

= 0.91. The full scale can be found in appendix VI. To prepare this variable for analysis, a principal axis factor analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation was conducted with three items measuring download intention. The Eigenvalue criterion revealed one factor (Eigenvalue = 2.79). The factor explained 93.1% of the variance in the five items. The factor's reliability is excellent (α=.96). The variable was then construed through taking the average of all the items (*M* = 2.87, *SD* = 1.72).

There were a total of four control variables in this research. The four variables were familiarity with the YouTuber, familiarity with the YouTuber's video, YouTube video watching and interest in the YouTube video. All four variables were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Familiarity with the YouTuber was measured with the statement 'I was familiar with Mr. Beast prior to this introduction' (*M* = 3.29, *SD* = 2.34). Familiarity with the YouTuber's video was determined through the statement 'I have watched Mr. Beast video's before' (*M* = 2.99, *SD* = 2.29). YouTube video watching was assessed with the statement 'I watch a lot of video's by YouTubers at home' (*M* = 4.51, *SD* = 1.95). Lastly, interest in the YouTube video was measured with the statement 'If I saw this video on my YouTube homepage, I would click on it' (*M* = 2.71, *SD* = 1.65).

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[52] Ibidem.

Manipulation check

In order to check whether the manipulation was successful, a manipulation check was carried out. A chi-square test was carried out in order to determine whether people correctly determined whether they had just seen the integrated advertising condition or the non-integrated advertising condition. There were a total of 81 people who had been exposed to the integrated condition, while 79 people were exposed to the non-integrated condition.

Out of the 81 people who saw the integrated condition, 88.9% correctly identified what condition they were in. Of the 79 people who saw the non-integrated condition, only 44.9% of the participants correctly identified the condition they were in. The tests found a significant, moderately strong association between the manipulation check variable and conditions, χ^2 (1, N = 160) = 22.01, p < .001, φ = .37. These results indicate that even though the integrated advertising condition might have been successful, a lot of people thought they were exposed to the integrated advertising condition while it was actually the non-integrated advertising condition. The chi-square tests indicate that the overall manipulation was successful, with the test being significant.

Randomization check

In order to check whether the randomization was successful, an independent samples t-test and a chi-square test was run. An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a difference in age, familiarity with the YouTuber, familiarity with the YouTuber's videos, video watching habits and interest in the video shown between the integrated condition and the non-integrated condition.

For age, Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant, F = 1.43, p =.589. Results revealed that there was no significant difference between the integrated condition (M = 20.95, SD = 2.01) and the non-integrated condition (M = 20.77, SD = 1.82), t(158) = 0.59, p = .278, d = 0.09, 95%CI [-0.42, 0.77]. For familiarity with the YouTuber, Levene's test for equality of variances was significant, F = 11.32, p < .001. Results revealed that there was no significant difference between the integrated condition (M = 2.65, SD = 2.06) and the non-integrated condition (M= 3.34, SD = 2.47), t(151.75) = -1.91, p = .058, d = -0.20, 95%CI [-1.20, 0.26].

For familiarity with the YouTuber's video's, Levene's test for equality of variances was significant, F = 5.59, p = .019. Results revealed that there was no significant

difference between the integrated condition (M = 3.06, SD = 2.20) and the non--integrated condition (M = 3.53, SD = 2.48), t(157.76) = -1.27, p = .206, d = -0.30, 95%CI [-1.40, 0.02].

For video watching habits, Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant, F = 2.09, p = .150. Results revealed that there was no significant difference between the integrated condition (M = 4.26, SD = 2.03) and the non-integrated condition (M = 4.76, SD = 1.83), t(158) = -1.63, p = .104, d = -0.26, 95%CI [-1.10, 0.10].

For interest in the video shown, Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant, F = 5.59, p = .019. Results revealed that there was no significant difference between the integrated condition (M = 2.64, SD = 1.54) and the non-integrated condition (M = 2.78, SD = 1.76), t(158) = -0.55, p = .585, d = -0.09, 95%CI [-0.66, 0.37].

The chi-square tests examined the association between the conditions and gender, and level of education. The tests found no significant associations between gender and condition, χ^2 (5, N = 160) = 7.05, p = .217, τ = .04 and between level of education and condition, χ^2(2, N = 160) = 3.36, p = .187, τ = .00. The results of these tests indicate that the randomization was successful for gender, level of education, familiarity with the YouTuber, familiarity with the YouTuber's videos, video watching habits and interest in the video shown and age.

Covariates

Several control variables were included in the data collection which could have an influence on the relationships that are tested in this analysis. These variables were familiarity with the YouTuber, familiarity with the YouTuber's videos, video watching habits and interest in the video shown. In order to test whether these variables act as covariates in the relationships, a correlation test was carried out. The results did not reveal a significant relationship between advertising storytelling integration and all the control variables, familiarity with the YouTuber (r = .10, p = .206), familiarity with the YouTuber's videos (r =.15, p = .058), video watching habits (r = .13, p = .104) and interest in the video shown (r = .04, p = .585). None of these variables thus have to be included as covariates in the analysis.

Main analysis

In order to test hypothesis 1, 2 and 3, a process analysis was conducted. The process analysis was conducted with download intention as the outcome variable,

perceived ad creativity as the mediator, parasocial relationship as the moderator and advertising storytelling integration as the predictor.

Hypothesis 1 stated that advertising storytelling integration leads to a higher download intention than no integration of the advertising in the storytelling. The overall regression model with download intention as the dependent variable, advertising storytelling integration as independent variable, perceived ad creativity as the mediator and parasocial relationship as moderator variable was not significant $F(4, 155) = 2.01$, $p = .095$, $R^2 = .05$.

The effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention, without perceived advertising creativity as the mediator and parasocial relationship as the moderator, was not significant, $b = 0.57$, t(155) = 0.52, $p = .528$. The average scores for download intention for the integrated condition ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.65$) and the non-integrated condition ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.80$) were not significantly different. Advertising storytelling integration was thus not a significant predictor of download intention, which leads to hypothesis 1 being rejected.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that advertising storytelling integration leads to higher advertising creativity, which consequently leads to higher download intention. The regression model with perceived ad creativity as the dependent variable and advertising storytelling integration as independent variable was not significant, $F(1, 158) = 1.80$, $p = .505$, $R^2 < .01$. Advertising storytelling integration did not have a significant effect on the mediator perceived ad creativity, $b = -0.11$, t(158) = -0.67, $p = .506$. The next step of the mediation showed that the mediator perceived ad creativity, controlling for advertising storytelling integration, was not significant, $b = 0.14$, t(158) = 0.52, $p = .528$. The analysis showed that, controlling for the mediator perceived ad creativity, advertising storytelling integration did not have a significant effect on download intention, $b = 0.21$, t(155) = 1.61, $p = .109$. The indirect effect showed that advertising storytelling integration, via perceived ad creativity, was not a significant predictor of download intention, $b = -0.02$, 95% BCa CI [-0.12, 0.05]. These results show that H2, stating that advertising storytelling integration leads to higher advertising creativity, which consequently leads to higher download intention, are rejected.

Hypothesis 3 stated that advertising storytelling integration has a stronger effect on download intention when there is a high parasocial relationship with the YouTuber than when there is a low parasocial relationship with the YouTuber. The analysis showed that parasocial relationship, $b = 0.50$, $t(155) = 1.02$, $p = .308$, 95% CI [-0.47, 1.47], is not a significant predictor of download intention. The interaction between parasocial relationship and advertising storytelling integra-

tion, b = -0.14, $t(155)$ = -0.48, p = .629, 95% CI [-0.72, 0.43], also is not a significant predictor of download intention. Following this analysis, it is shown that parasocial relationship does not moderate the relationship between advertising storytelling integration and download intention and H3 is thus rejected. An overview of the effects can be found in figure 3.

Conclusion and discussion

This study investigated the effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention, with a potential moderating effect of parasocial relationships and mediating effect of perceived advertising creativity. It was hypothesized that advertising storytelling integration would lead to a higher download integration than no integration of advertising in the storytelling, and results showed that was not the case. There was no significant difference in download intention between the integrated advertisement and the non-integrated advertisement. This is not in line with the expected effects following the extended elaboration likelihood model[53]. The second hypothesis of this study stated that advertising storytelling integration leads to higher advertising creativity, which consequently leads to higher download intention. The results also showed this hypothesis was rejected. The last hypothesis stated that advertising storytelling integration has a stronger effect on download intention when there is a high parasocial relationship with the YouTuber than when there is a low parasocial relationship with the YouTuber. Just like the first two hypotheses, this hypothesis was also rejected.

Because this study covered an entirely new concept, it can be hard to put these results into context. These results make it seem like the elaboration likelihood model does not apply in the context of influencer marketing, even though previous research showed that it did affect purchase intention in product categories like fashion, food, fitness and beauty[54]. The brand advertised in this research did not fall into any of these categories, as it was a free-to-download browser extension that applies coupon codes for you online. It could be argued that the

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[53] M.D. Slater, D. Rouner, op.cit., Communication Theory 2002, 12 (2).

[54] J.P. Trivedi, op.cit., International Journal of Electronic Customer Relationship Management 2018, 11 (3); A.P. Schouten, L. Janssen, M. Verspaget, *Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit*, International Journal of Advertising 2019, 39 (2).

product involvement with a free app is a lot lower than with a regular product as well. These could be explanations as to why there was no effect of advertising storytelling integration on download intention. It would be interesting for future research to go either include product involvement as a potential variable for research, or to research the effects with physical products instead of an app. Additionally, the findings that the extended elaboration likelihood model does not apply to the influencer marketing context raises the question about the other contexts that it work or does not work in. As previous research has already shown that it works in different product contexts, it could be interesting for future research to look into different types of marketing that the E-ELM could work in. Even though it might not work in this form of influencer marketing, it could still work in the more traditional form of influencer marketing. Would the E-ELM also apply in other branded content, like sponsored Instagram posts, or would it successfully apply to content made by the brand itself? These are questions that future research could examine.

The fact that hypothesis 2 was rejected what was expected through the literature. Ang and Low suggested that creativity would effect download intention if the advertisement was perceived as unexpected, relevant and positive[55]. However, creativity was defined in a different way in this study, using the dimensions from Smith and colleagues[56]. This might explain why no effect was found. The mediating effect of perceived creativity can also be questioned, as the effect of advertising storytelling integration on perceived ad creativity was not evident. Future research should thus try and create an advertisement that fits all three boxes and manipulate the variable, making it a moderator, instead of using perceived creativity as a mediator.

Rejecting hypothesis 3 was also not in line with the previously researched moderating effect of parasocial relationships, as it hypothesized that parasocial relationships would further improve the effect of advertising storytelling integration[57]. It might now seem like parasocial relationships did not have a moderating effect at all, however, there is a reason as to why it did not have any effect in this context. The low score for parasocial relationships could have led to the effect

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[55] S.H. Ang, S.Y. Low, *Exploring the dimensions of ad creativity*, Psychology & Marketing 2000, 17 (10), pp. 835–854.

[56] R. Smith, S. MacKenzie, X. Yang, L. Buchholz, W. Darley, op.cit., Marketing Science 2007, 26 (6), pp. 819–833.

[57] S. Boerman, E. van Reijmersdal, op.cit., Frontiers in Psychology 2020, 10; K. Hwang, Q. Zhang, op.cit., Computers in Human Behavior 2018, 87, pp. 1–15.

of parasocial relationships not being tested properly, as there were little people who had a high parasocial relationship. Future research should thus make sure that there is enough variation in people with a high parasocial relationship and people with a low parasocial relationship. This should help in establishing the hypothesized moderating effect.

Limitations

There are quite some limitations that might have played a role in the results of this study. The first one has to do with the sample characteristics. The sample of this research was 86.9% female. Even though the exact demographics of the influencer's channel are not known, 53.9% of YouTube users worldwide are male[58]. Mr Beast's channel originates from gaming content, which is traditionally more of a man's interest. This could explain why the mean scores for parasocial relationships were quite low. Another reason could be is that 90% of the sample was based in the Netherlands, while the channel is based in the United States. These are reasons that the participants might not have felt as connected to the influencer, as shown in the low score for parasocial relationships, and thus have influenced the results. Future research should ideally use video's from influencers in the country where they find participants, as well as making sure the sample demographics and the audience demographics are more alike.

Secondly, the videos used in the manipulation could also be a potential explanation for why no significant effects were found. In the manipulation check it was discovered that only 44.9% of the participants in the not-integrated condition correctly identified the condition they were in. The other 55.1% thus felt that the video they just saw had the advertisement integrated into the storyline of the video. The condition was now created using an ad read by the influencer, even though it did interrupt the story of the video. Participants recognized this as an integrated condition, which would theoretically lead them to report a higher download intention. In future research the not-integrated condition can for example be created through an advertisement made by the brand itself, in order to make sure that people correctly identify which condition they are in and the manipulation works as intended.

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[58] L. Ceci, *Global youtube user distribution by gender 2022,* https://www.statista.com/statistics/1287032/distribution-youtubeusers-gender/ [dostęp: 13.05.2022].

Practical and scientific implications

These results however don't mean that marketers should stay away from advertising storytelling integration. The roots in the extended elaboration likelihood model show that it is definitely a viable way of advertising products in other contexts. There might however be other variables in play when employing this form of influencer marketing that are unknown at this moment, so that line must be threaded carefully. Researchers should take this concept of advertising storytelling integration and built further upon it. Practice indicates that this concept is one that is effective in manipulating download intention of the viewers, but this research failed to identify the underlying factors at play. Future research should thus try and create a framework to build upon with this concept and try to uncover what the variables are that make this way of advertising so successful.

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