Participants’ Perspectives on Fine-Print Disclosures in TV Advertisements

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Background

Content Analyses of Prime Time and Children’s TV Ads

Survey of Those Who are Involved in the Presentation of Disclosures in TV Ads (Conducted in 1995)

All studies were conducted with Darrel Muehling
Washington State University
Sample of Top Managers

100 Leading National Advertisers

100 Largest U.S. Advertising Agencies

As listed in Advertising Age
65 Major Television Media Firms

ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, MTV, ESPN, CNN, The Disney Channel

27 Regulatory Agencies and Advertising Trade Associations

FCC, FDA, FTC, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, NAD/NARB, AAAA, Advertising Council, Association of National Advertisers
Response Rate

Advertisers: 21 percent
Ad Agencies: 24 percent
Media Firms: 23 percent

Regulatory Agencies and Trade Associations: 48 percent

Overall Response Rate: 25 percent
Fine-Print Disclosures Defined:
Any part of an advertisement that appears in type size noticeably smaller than the headline or dominant ad copy

Any statement that is intended to augment, document, clarify, or delimit the selling message, offer advice, identify the product manufacturer, and/or provide supplemental information to the viewer
Issues Addressed

How do participants feel about fine-print disclosures on the dimension this advertising practice is most often criticized (i.e., readability)?

Why are fine-print disclosures used in ads?

How important is the issue of fine-print disclosures to participants and to whom do they perceive this issue is most important?
Major Findings
On the Issue of Readability

Most respondents believed that:

Consumers do not read, cannot read, do not attempt to read fine-print disclosures in TV ads.

Consumers cannot read disclosures in TV ads because it is on the screen too briefly.

Advertisers do not expect consumers to read disclosures in TV ads.
To Whom is the Issue of Fine-Print Disclosures Important?

The issue was perceived as important by each group of respondents.

Participants gave the issue more importance to other groups than themselves.
Top Importance Ratings by Each Respondent Group

Advertisers: Regulators and Media

Ad Agencies: Regulators and Media

Media Firms: Ad Agencies and Regulators

Regulatory Bodies: Ad Agencies and Regulators

Trade Associations: Ad Agencies and Media
Why are Fine-Print Disclosures Used in TV Advertisements?

In response to the question: Fine-print disclosures are usually placed in ads because advertisers are required to do so.

Ad Agencies 4.92
Media 4.67
Trade Associations and Regulators 4.54
Advertisers 4.33

(Based on a 5-point scale)
Conclusions

Participants in the presentation of fine-print disclosures in TV ads recognize that the messages are not readable and therefore have little communication value.

Participants saw fine-print disclosures as an important issue, but saw it as more important to others than themselves.
Value of a Dialogue between Participants to Generate Consumer Useful Remedies