

Incidental Use of Promotional Merchandise and Its Benefits for Unfamiliar Brands

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Incidental Use of Promotional Merchandise and Its Benefits for Unfamiliar Brands

Abstract

Many brands distribute promotional merchandise like branded pens, flash-drives or sticky notes in the hopes that it will improve consumers' reactions to the brand. Yet, consumers often pay little attention to these items and may even use them purely incidentally such as when borrowing a pen from a colleague. Given the prevalence of this phenomenon, we query whether even incidental usage of promotional merchandise affects consumer response. We suggest it does but only for unfamiliar brands that consumers hold no prior beliefs about. In a controlled lab experiment, we find that after incidentally using its promotional pen, consumers react more positively to an unfamiliar but not to a familiar brand. This holds even if they do not notice the brand's logo. In a second lab experiment, we replicate this effect and show that incidental use of promotional merchandise outperforms incidental exposure to merely visual marketing stimuli, i.e. billboards.

Keywords: *Promotional merchandise; Incidental use; Unfamiliar brands*

Track: Advertising & Marketing Communications