

When More Is Less: The Disfluency Costs of Multi-Identity Appeals in Advertising

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Abstract

Marketers increasingly use identity-based strategies to connect brands with consumers. Advances in personalization and AI technologies now enable campaigns to reference multiple consumers' identities at once (e.g., parents, professionals, environmentally conscious citizens). Although such multi-identity appeals are assumed to boost message relevance and persuasion, their effectiveness is uncertain. Across three experiments, we show that activating multiple identities reduces product evaluations compared with a single identity-appeal. This backfiring occurs because processing multiple identities creates disfluency, a reduced sense of ease when processing the message. The effect is mitigated when the targeted identities are perceived as closely associated, suggesting that identity association supports fluency. Our findings challenge the long-standing assumption that more personalisation is always better and extends fluency theory to the domain of identity processing.

Track: Consumer Behaviour