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Pulling a Fast One: How Do Consumers React to Zippy Disclaimers?

Consumers react negatively to most quick disclaimers at the end of ads, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#). But if the fast disclaimer comes from a trusted company, they'll let it slide.

“We suggest that fast disclaimers can give consumers the impression that the advertisement is trying to conceal information, ‘pulling a fast one’ toward the goal of boosting purchase intention,” write authors Kenneth C. Herbst (Wake Forest University), Eli J. Finkel (Northwestern University), David Allan (Saint Joseph’s University), and Gráinne M. Fitzsimons (Duke University). At first glance, it may seem preferable to zoom through those nasty side effects, saving precious advertising moments for the positive aspects of a product and glossing over undesirable information. But the authors found this strategy can backfire, except for the most trusted brands.

In a series of experiments the authors found that fast disclaimers undermine consumers’ purchase intentions for unknown or distrusted brands. “Advertisers frequently only have 30 seconds to convey their message, and regulatory agencies sometimes require that the advertisement include a disclaimer,” the authors write. “Our findings suggest that advertisers promoting unfamiliar or not-trusted brands may want to conclude advertisements with normal-paced disclaimers, whereas advertisers promoting trusted brands can afford to save additional seconds for the advertisement’s primary message by using fast disclaimers,” the authors write.

The authors believe their findings may reveal some bias in the system of regulating advertisements and requiring disclaimers. “Any policies that regulate disclaimer content but not disclaimer speed could infuse systematic bias favoring some companies over others,” the authors explain. “Such policies would allow companies whom consumers already trust to pack the required disclaimer content into just a few seconds without undermining consumers’ trust and purchase intention, whereas these policies would end up forcing companies whom consumers either distrust or do not know to devote more time to this required content, presenting it at a slower speed.”

Kenneth C. Herbst, Eli J. Finkel, David Allan, and Gráinne M. Fitzsimons. “On the Dangers of Pulling a Fast One: Advertisement Disclaimer Speed, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2012 (published online June 1, 2011). Further information: <http://ejcr.org>

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