

## Can a Print Publication Be Equally Effective Online? Testing the Effect of Medium Type on Marketing Communications - By Robert G. Magee - Consumer Attitudes

"Faced with budgetary pressures, many marketing communication managers are canceling the print distribution of their flagship magazine in favor of an online version. However, if the online publication is less effective in achieving the organization's goals, this move may be ill advised."

Source: Can a print publication be equally effective online? Testing the effect of medium type on marketing communications; Robert G. Magee, Virginia Tech; Marketing Letters; March 2013, Volume 24, Issue 1, pp 85-95.

Activity Tested: The effectiveness of the print & online versions of a university alumni magazine on open rate & recall.  
Method: Field experiment

Sample: Virginia Tech alumni subscribers received either a print version of the magazine or an e-mail invitation that linked to the online version of the magazine at the VT website. Then, subscribers were contacted via a telephone survey until 675 surveys (print n=337; online n=338) were completed. Of the respondents, 67% were male. The mean college graduation year was 1980.

Results - Recall of receipt: Of the respondents who received the online version, only half (49 %) recalled receiving the email invitation with the link. Of the respondents who received the print version, 82% recalled having received the publication.

Format preference - When asked whether they preferred to receive the magazine in print or online form, 63% expressed a preference for print, 26% state a preference for online while the percentage who expressed a preference for both, either, or neither was 4% or less. Looking at the age of the respondents, the likelihood that a respondent would choose the online (vs. print) magazine increased as graduation year decreased.

Print had a higher open rate - Of the respondents who recalled receiving the publication in print, 77% viewed the publication, while only 49% of those receiving the online version said they viewed the online publication.

Print had a higher recall rate - Respondents who viewed the print version recalled a significantly greater number of articles than did the respondents who viewed the online version.

Print had a higher cued recall rate - When prompted about specific articles in the magazine, readers of the print version recalled having seen a significantly greater number of articles than did readers of the online version.

How age played into the findings - Although younger readers indicated a preference for receiving an online version, the effect of the print medium on memory performance was strongest among the younger readers. Respondents were split into thirds by graduation year, 1940–1972 (32 %), 1973–1988 (36%), and 1989–2011 (32%).

For the oldest cohort, the difference was significant with greater recall for print than for online articles. For the middle cohort, no significant difference was apparent. For the youngest group, a significant difference appeared with greater recall for print than for online articles. The youngest cohort also yielded greater difference in recall than did the older cohort, "suggesting the effect of medium was greatest on the youngest readers."

The effect of attitude towards the university on magazine open rates - The author hypothesized that a reader's attitude toward the university would moderate the open rate but this proved not to be true. The effect of attitude towards the university on recall of magazine articles - A favorable opinion led to greater recall, but only if respondents viewed the print version.

Take-Aways: The print publication of the magazine appeared to be more effective than the online publication; it was viewed more than the online version and print readers recalled a greater number of articles--freely and when prompted.

"Faced with budgetary pressures, many marketing communication managers are canceling the print distribution of their flagship magazine in favor of an online version. However, if the online publication is less effective in achieving the organization's goals, this move may be ill advised." The author surmises "ceasing a print publication in favor of an online-only publication might hurt the effectiveness of an organization's marketing communications, and managers should not make the decision based on cost alone."

Complexity rating of original source: 2 (Complex statistical analysis scale: 1= easy, 2= moderate, 3 = difficult)

- See more at: <http://printinthemix.com/research/show/102#sthash.4OCq07YK.dpuf>