

## **Don't feel, think: the application of experiential marketing approach in pharmaceutical advertising**

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### **Abstract:**

The global pharmaceutical industry is actively growing both in terms of sales (Kakani et al., 2020) and spending on advertising (Schwartz & Woloshin, 2019). The competitive market environment stimulates pharmaceutical companies to look for new ways to attract the consumer's attention. Despite the fact that pharmaceutical advertising was previously considered to focus on conservative rational appeals (Main et al., 2004), recent drug advertising campaigns start to use various creative and emotional tools such as humor (Huhmann & Limbu, 2020), animation (Shah et al., 2019), and celebrity endorsement (Morimoto, 2020). This paper contributes to a growing body of research that discusses new approaches to marketing communications in the pharmaceutical market. In our study, we aim to test the applicability of Schmitt's experiential marketing approach to the over-the-counter (OTC) drug advertising. The experiential marketing concept (Schmitt, 1999) assumes a shift from a traditional marketing approach that provides rational consumers with information about the product's features and benefits to a new "experiential" approach that focuses on consumers' emotions and pleasurable experiences. Recent empirical researches show applications of Schmitt's concept in various industries such as luxury goods (Atwal & Williams, 2019), tourism (Le et al., 2019), and consumer electronics (Maghnati et al., 2012). However, there is still no evidence of experiential marketing's applicability to OTC drug advertising. Based on a consumer choice survey (N=277) followed by regression analysis, we found that respondents tend to prefer OTC drug advertising posters that use the traditional "features-and-benefits" approach. Among the "experiential-based" posters, respondents are more likely to choose cognitive appeals ("THINK experiential module" in terms of Schmitt's concept) than emotional appeals ("FEEL experiential module"). Our analysis also identifies factors influencing consumer choice: female respondents significantly more often prefer "experiential-based" posters than males, while age, income, and purchase frequency had a negative impact on the probability of "experiential-based" posters' choice. Our results give useful insights to pharmaceutical companies and advertising agencies engaged in the promotion of OTC brands.

**Keywords:** *experiential marketing, strategic experiential modules, pharmaceutical market, over-the-counter drugs (OTC) advertising, consumer choice*

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