

How Facial Prominence Impacts Perception of Interaction Space and Consumer Response: An Abstract



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Abstract Print ads, billboards, online banners, and product packaging frequently feature human faces, and both global brands and local service providers include human faces to increase the effectiveness of their persuasive appeals. While existing literature suggests that incorporating a face into marketing communications is beneficial, research has been surprisingly limited on issues related to the size of a face featured within a marketing message. The current research addresses this gap by examining how facial prominence in marketing communications affects consumer responses to various types of persuasive communications.

We define facial prominence as size of a source's face within a marketing communication relative to the overall size of a marketing message. Drawing from social communicative theories on facial perception (Fridlund 2017), we propose that facial prominence impacts interpersonal-level inferences about social interaction intentions that subsequently impact consumer reactions. While higher facial prominence is generally expected to have positive effects given its association with dominance and confidence, our findings counterintuitively suggest that less is more – that is, consumers respond more positively to marketing communications featuring lower facial prominence. This effect is driven by consumers' perceived social interaction intention with the endorser or spokesperson. These predictions were examined across four studies.

Study 1 looked at two accident lawyer advertisements with manipulated levels of facial prominence of the male spokesperson, and showed that the ad with lower facial prominence generated higher purchase intention. Study 2 generalized this

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observation to a different product category (laptop) with a female spokesperson and provided support for interaction intention with the spokesperson as the underlying mechanism of the effect. Study 3 demonstrated that the effect went away when the spokesperson has a high level of similarity with the audience. Study 4 examined another boundary condition, showing that the effect reversed when the spokesperson was an aspirational individual such as a celebrity.

Four studies provided support for our hypothesis that higher facial prominence can have a negative impact on marketing-related outcomes. Our findings can be applied to improve the effectiveness of advertisements and layout of e-commerce websites that feature human faces.

Keywords Facial prominence · Nonverbal communication · Persuasion · Interaction intention

References Available Upon Request