Chapter 2
The Dark Side of Multi-Platform Advertising in an Emerging Economy Context

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ABSTRACT

Consumers' complex media consumption habits mean that advertising must, of necessity, be multi-platform to boost reach and engagement levels. Several benefits of multi-platform advertising have been highlighted in the literature. However, it is unclear whether there are any inherent challenges. Particularly in developing African economies such as Ghana where firms face resource constraints, advertisers cannot afford to miss the mark with the advertising spend. As such, practitioners must carefully off-set any dangers of multi-platform advertising. Given the subject's absence in the literature, there is little scholarly guideline with which to do this. This chapter contributes insights into the issue by asking the questions: (1) are there negative consequences to multi-platform advertising and (2) how may practitioners counter such? Then, using Ghana as empirical setting and exploratory interviews as primary method, the chapter engages the experiences of advertisers, advertising practitioners and audiences to gain a holistic view of the challenges of multi-platform advertising.

INTRODUCTION

With rising levels of consumer sophistication (O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998) and complex media consumption behaviors (Taneja et al., 2012), advertisers must, often, rethink their marketing communication strategies. To effectively reach and engage consumers, firms are forced to use multi-platform advertising to counter consumers' sophisticated and fragmented media consumption habits (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014). This means that in a single advertising campaign, messages are delivered on a multiplicity of

media platforms including both traditional and new media as advertisers seek to leverage cross benefits (Briggs & Stipp, 2000; Zigmond & Stipp, 2010).

The objectives of this strategy are manifold, including enhancing the reach of advertised messages (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014), boosting message impact and increasing brand engagement as well as the opportunity to trigger cross-platform information search (Zigmond & Stipp, 2010). While these benefits have received validation in the literature, assertions in both popular and scholarly media suggest the need for a closer look. For instance, according to a Nielsen Cross-Platform Campaign Ratings (2014) report, multi-platform advertising campaigns do not always live up to their promises; they fail to achieve much better results than single media campaigns. Vakratsas and Ma (2005) have also presented evidence suggesting advertising effectiveness varies across the various media used in multi-platform advertising.

Yet, scholarly literature appears silent on the inherent dangers of multi-platform advertising. In an era when the advertising spend faces great scrutiny, this chapter argues that marketers cannot afford to miss the mark with their multi-platform advertising campaigns. This places on scholars a greater need to shed light on any possible dark-sides. Critically too, while the literature on multi-platform advertising is growing, evidence on its practice in and implications for firms in emerging markets is scarce. As such, for advertisers and advertising practitioners in countries such as Ghana, there is a double jeopardy of working with a scholarly foundation that is lagging in both danger signposts and context-relevant insights.

To fill these gaps, this chapter explores the negative sides of multi-platform advertising in an emerging market context, Ghana. Specifically, it examines the challenges arising out of multi-platform advertising from the perspectives of three advertising stakeholders for whom the use of multiple platforms has implications: advertisers, advertising practitioners and advertising consumers. Alongside this agenda, the chapter also delves into the possible remedies that exist for countering any challenges of multi-platform advertising. This chapter reports data from a study of some advertisers, advertising practitioners and consumers in Ghana.

In so doing, the study makes three key contributions to the literature. First, this study is the first to engage the subject of multi-platform advertising from the perspective of its inherent challenges. While there is growing evidence of its benefits (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014; Zigmond & Stipp, 2010), an absence of evidence on its dark-sides presents a challenge to both advertisers and practitioners. Not only is there a threat of overlooking such challenges during campaign planning and execution, but critically, advertisers risk reducing the impact of their investments in the advertising budget. By exploring the inherent dangers in multi-platform advertising, this study presents an opportunity to illuminate, holistically, the advertising media planning process.

Secondly, this chapter is the first to integrate advertiser, practitioner and consumer perspectives in a single discussion on multi-platform advertising. To the extent that advertising necessarily encompasses three parties, advertisers, advertising practitioners and advertising consumers (and often a fourth, the media), one may argue that single perspective evidence presents a potentially skewed rather than a holistic picture of the phenomenon. As such, by integrating the viewpoints of the three principal stakeholders, the study promises a more all-encompassing perspective for the purposes of strategic planning. Finally, this study brings rare emerging economy evidence to the multi-platform advertising discourse. As an offshoot of the broader advertising literature whose evidence is largely drawn from global north economies, the multi-platform advertising literature displays a similar bias. As such, by conducting the study in a developing emerging economy context, this chapter enriches the literature with evidence from least researched and understood markets.

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