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Measuring Soft-Sell Versus Hard-Sell Advertising Appeals

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Abstract

The terms "soft sell" and "hard sell" are well known to advertising scholars and practitioners. Despite wide-spread use of these terms, generally accepted definitions do not exist. Attempts to measure soft-sell and hard-sell appeals have typically been unsophisticated, relying on a single item that classifies an ad into one category or the other. This study is designed to provide a deeper understanding of the concepts "soft sell" and "hard sell," and to examine whether they are better measured on a single dimension than on two distinct dimensions. The main objective of the study is to develop and validate a method for measuring soft-sell and hard-sell appeals. To this end, candidate items were generated via a review of prior literature, supplemented by content analysis, a free-association task, expert judgment, and focus groups. The measurement instruments were then purified and validated using a pretest with a sample of student participants, and further validated using a general consumer sample.

Results indicate that soft-sell appeals can be measured using a 12-item, 3-factor index, whereas hard-sell appeals can be measured using a 15-item, 3-factor index.

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