

PLACEBO AND NOCEBO IN MARKETING

Journals of Education & Social Sciences

ISSN: 3069-325X (Online)

Vol. 2: Issue 1

Page 15–19 © The Author(s) 2026

Received: 13 March 2026

Accepted: 31 March 2026

Published: 28 April 2026

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ABSTRACT

The study that I will explain in this section represents research made to demonstrate that marketing actions (pricing, for example) have the power to decrease the efficacy of the products to which they apply. In this case, placebo effect appears from expectations that the consumers have, a process that seemed to be not conscious. This study presents the impact that has a lower price for the consumers when they buy a product (such as an energy drink, designed to increase mental acuity) and shows that they might gain less benefit from consuming this product (for example they will solve fewer puzzles that usual) compared with the consumers that purchase and consume the same product with its regular price.

KEY WORDS

Marketing, Change, Marketing Tools, Placebo and Nocebo, Effects Clasificare

JEL: D83, M31, M

Introduction

1. Placebo in marketing

The study that I will explain in this section represents a research made to demonstrate that marketing actions (pricing, for example) have the power to decrease the efficacy of the products to which they apply. In this case, placebo effect appears from expectations that the consumers have, a process that seemed to be not conscious. This study presents the impact that has a lower price for the consumers when they buy a product (such as an energy drink, designed to increase mental acuity) and shows that they might gain less benefit from consuming this product (for example they will solve fewer puzzles that usual) compared with the consumers that purchase and consume the same product with its regular price.

As I explained previously, marketing actions, such as lowering prices can lead to placebo effect as a preliminary study with an energy drink suggests. Now the researches think that the response expectancies are triggered by some beliefs, and it can lead to a placebo effect.

Here is an example of a study where participants received an energy drink, the list of ingredients was presented and informed that the drink was both at its regular price or at a discount price. These stimuli have made several important beliefs. A good example it is the fact that intrinsic aspects related to the ingredients activated beliefs about the effects of those ingredients. Additionally, brand name is an important aspect because it can activate the beliefs that a product is a high quality one (this is an extrinsic direction) (Rao and Monroe 1989). Another aspect is the perception of the consumer regarding a product expectation is related with the price. A higher price has been associated with a higher quality, or that the product reflects a superior quality.

The same thing happens with a price discount, that is also an extrinsic direction. Consumers tend to associate a product that has a discount in price as having an inferior quality.

Placebo effects in medical treatments

To better understand how placebo works I will describe shortly how placebo works in medicine explained in an article by Beecher. The studies were made for patients that are suffering a variety of conditions like (postoperative pains, headache, anxiety, seasickness). The symptoms were relieved with a high satisfaction grade with 35% by the placebo.

The results of the treatments reviewed by Robert et al that were believed efficacious but later neglected with an average of 70% success of good results reflecting the history and natural of the placebo effect. Patients with good rates outcomes after treatments that have no specific effects vary across studies, but are very high on average. Patients that have a long history of back pain for example, showed significantly good results with placebo.

Placebo effects in surgery

Beecher believed that surgery can create a placebo effect and urged in interpreting the benefit of the new kind of operation. In the same way, Spiro assumed that the results of the previous studies should have been analysed rather than abandoned. He also suggested that the experience of surgery and the symbol of the existing scar must be important sources of pain relief.

Placebo effects of back surgery are suggested by Spangfort sums up 2504 such surgeries with 37% complete relief pain and 43% with negative surgical exploration.

2.A study in marketing of the placebo effect

Starting from a study of Shiv, Carmon and Ariely, Irmak, Block and Fitzsimons (2005), that developed an experiment based on energy drinks, placebo drink and water, they invoke another key element, the motivation. The outcomes showed that when participants wish to receive energy from an energy drink, although they consumed placebo drink instead, were like this: the raised pulse, physical reflexes and mental alertness.

On the other hand, the ones who did not have the motivation to receive energy, although they consumed energy drink, have not registered any change, the results being the same with the ones that consumed water. The authors explain that consumers do not have to wait for a product to work, but they have to want to work (p. 408).

Based on the same idea, the study of Fitzsimons, Chartrand and Fitzsimons (2008) said that the exposure to a certain brand can produce automatic effects in the consumer behaviour, when it is his desire to, is in line with the characteristics of the brand. To demonstrate that, Apple brand was used. Apple created a strong brand personality based on the idea of nonconformism, innovation and creativity. This experiment showed that the participants that had the desire to be creative, non-consciously exposed to the Apple brand, had better results at a creativity test than the other participants that had the same test, but non-consciously exposed at IBM brand.

A study of Amar, Ariely, Bar-Hillel, Cameron and Ofir (2011), is again explained the power of the brands to create a placebo effect at the physical level, through an experiment with sunglasses. Participants had to read as fast as possible, a series of words with no link between them, wearing in the same time sunglasses. The sunglasses used in the study were exactly the same with the difference that they had the brand stuck on the frame, namely Ray-Ban, the famous brand of sunglasses and Mango, a brand that is not that famous for this product category.

The results showed that for the people that worn Ray-Ban made less errors in reading words, compared with the people who worn exactly the same sunglasses, but with the brand Mango. The conclusion was that the brand really can change, rather than confirm, the efficacy of the product that in our case was sunglasses. In other words, brand really can influence the consumption experience.

Another two studies that support the placebo effect belong to Isen, Labroo and Durlach (2004) and Dedeoglu and Ayangil (2009). The outcomes of the first study evidence the fact that after a tea experiment the brand has a huge role in creating a positive effects like feeling good and refreshment. In the other study, made

on coke, the participants received in glasses branded Coca Cola, another drink based on coke, Cola Turka, and the final result of the research showed that a weak placebo effect of the brand was produced at the conscious level.

3. Persuasion

There was a persuasion testing of a message communicated by men and women that were looking very good, they were in a good shape compared with the persuasion for a message communicated by persons, men and women, that were not so good looking. Results have shown that persons that were better looking had a higher degree of persuasion when we refer to the verbal and nonverbal aspect, compared with the other persons. Besides that, women form the target group were convinced easily rather than men. A previous test made in a lab showed the fact that the persons who were better looking from the physical point of view were very different from the persons that were not like the ones that look good because it has been observed the ability to communicate a message and to easily convince persons.

These differences had been suggested after the average points obtained by the communicators for the attitude test (Scholastic Aptitude Test) but also at personal assessment test. These results suggest the fact that persons that are better looking can be more persuasive than the other persons not so good looking because beautiful persons have characteristics that help them being a good message teller.

The ending results for some experiments when beautiful persons were taken into consideration are not very damaging. Only two studies demonstrated that the attractiveness that a male communicator can influence the degree of persuasion that has on women and men subjects participating in the experiment. All the studies made in the same field have not obtained a link between the physical aspect of a person and the degree of persuasion. At least they only obtained links between the good aspect of the person and other variables (Chaiken, S., Eagly, A.H., Sejwacz, D., Gregory, W.L., Christensen, D., 1978). In a study made by Mills and Aronson (1965) they used a woman as a communicator and the target was made only with men. In this case there were no links between the degree of attractiveness and persuasion. Anyway they have found that it is a weak link between the person who transmit the message and the degree of persuasion had upon the target group.

4. Conclusion

The power of message

Normally, we use media to find out about things events or to receive news from others or to communicate with others. In other word to do good for the social being we represent.

Media can act as a remedy against anxiety, supplying information for solving solutions (Lemoine, 2013). Still, as a drug that is used incorrectly, not the information itself is nocive but the way it is distributed, controlled and received.

Nowadays advertising spots can be found everywhere in both sides, online and offline. For example a british is exposed to 48 ads per day in average. Stuart Ewen said that ads had become a dominant part in the creativity industry. With such a big quantity of messages for ads, everuthing has become rotine and very rearly we really understand the message behind the ad.

The power of advertising has grown so high that consumers are convinced they have to buy more than anything but have more free time. How would a modern society look like without advertising? Individually viewed, advertisements are only trying to sell a particular product or service, but the advertising industry as a whole is basically trying to sell to consumers a certain lifestyle. As John Berger stated in his book "Ways of Seeing", all of the ad messages have a common point, namely that consumer life will be much better with the next purchase, which is often referred to as crucial. The same author claims that freedom should govern the current society, but in this era of consumption, consumer freedom means choosing between Pepsi and Coca Cola, between McDonald's and KFC.

In a study conducted in 1987 by Edell and Burke, two groups of research with marketing studies proceeded as follows. The first group of marketers surveyed a set of advertisements in terms of emotional content, creativity and the extent to which those commercials transmit positive feelings, such as delight, happiness. The second group of researchers with marketing studies has defined certain categories of products

according to their opinions about the needs of consumers and the importance they have. Also, this group of applicants has determined whether for these product groups, the ads have focused on functional qualities, such as toothpaste, or in the advertisements of these products went on the appeal of a luxury product, such as for example a state-of-the-art clock.

Study participants looked at the selected ads and reported their attitude to both the commercials and the brand. The analysis of the data showed that the participants responded more positively and more favorably to the commercials they were empathizing with. This shows that the emotional charm that a commercial or advertising message may have played a direct role in changing the consumer's mind about a particular brand. Surprisingly, this result has been maintained in many industries. Even if it was a product with a longer life, such as a refrigerator, a shorter product life, such as a soap or juice, or even a service such as clipping, the results were constant. So, the results show that advertisements or advertising messages that give more pleasant feelings can trigger more consumer confidence on a certain brand than products for which advertising or advertising is a little bit "cold" or much more informative than emotional.

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