The Importance of Being an Abstract:

A Systematic Analysis of Theories in Advertising Abstracts

Abstract: As advertising research continues to grow and intersect with other disciplines, journal abstracts play an increasingly vital role in helping scholars navigate literature. This essay advocates that advertising researchers and journal editors open a dialogue on the expectations for journal abstracts, particularly regarding how theories are addressed. Computational and manual analysis of all 6,084 abstracts from four leading advertising journals over 40 years reveals that only a small portion of abstracts mention the theories used, despite some variation across journals and a slight increase in frequency over time. This scarcity raises concerns that it may limit advertising researchers' ability to advance theories, especially when access to the full body of theory-specific literature is impeded. Notably, when theories were mentioned, over 300 distinct theories were identified, demonstrating the breadth and interdisciplinarity of advertising research and underscoring the need for more systematic attention to the inclusion of theories in abstracts.