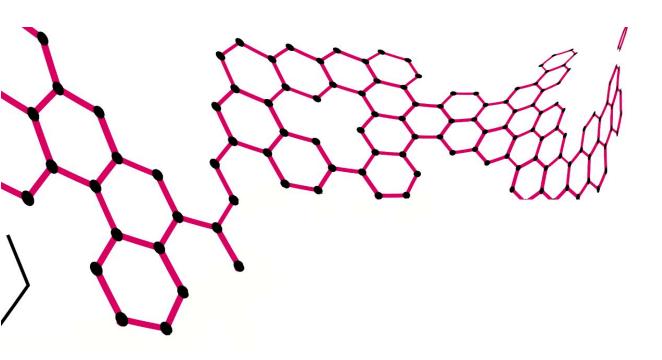
Never a second chance for a first impression

Effects of design elements in email newsletters on click-through intention.



Master Thesis

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Date: 22/02/2021

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Total words: 12685

Abstract

Today we live online more than ever. We watch online videos, we talk to each other online and we also shop more online. This is the reason, more companies are moving to the online market. This means that marketing strategies must be adjusted accordingly. One way to still inform people, without getting a physical leaflet in the mail, is to send a newsletter. That way, companies can still continue to reach their customers. As consumers see a lot of this type of online advertising, it is important that you stand out and capture the consumer's attention if you want them to keep clicking on your newsletter and going to your website. The aim of this research is to see which design elements in online newsletters have a positive influence on the click-through intention of consumers. The design elements investigated in this research are color, length of a newsletter and the placement of links in the newsletter.

Previous studies have shown that these are elements that can positively influence the click-through intention of consumers. Based on the literature, 12 hypotheses have been formed that are in line with the literature used in this research. These variables were investigated in a 2 (color: colorful vs. greyscale) x2 (length: short vs. long) x2 (link placement: top vs. bottom) design and by means of an online experiment. In addition, any mediating variables were considered. The mediating variables used in this study are credibility and attitude towards a message. In addition, interaction effects were also measured between the three main variables.

Prior to the online experiment, a pre-test was performed to test the variables used. The definitive online experiment was conducted by means of an online survey in which participants were shown one of the eight newsletters and had to answer the related questions. According to the outcome of the experiment, only color had a significant effect on the click-through intention of the participants who took part in the study.

Contrary to expectations, link placement and length had no direct effect. For this reason, the hypotheses for these two variables were rejected. Looking at the mediating variables in this study, it was found that attitude has full mediation and credibility has partial mediation. Both have been investigated in combination with the variable color. Looking at the interaction effects, it turned out that length and link placement in combination did have an effect on click-through intention. When choosing a long newsletter, it is advisable to place the links at the top of the newsletter the other way around. This allows for a higher click-through intention. To answer the research question, it can be said that for the design element color a significant effect was found on the click-through intention and that if one opts for a long newsletter, the links should be placed at the top. In addition, it is advisable to ensure that people develop a good attitude and credibility towards Twepa so that there is a more positive effect on the click-through intention when receiving a newsletter from Twepa.

Keywords: design elements, click-through intention, credibility, attitude, email marketing, email newsletter

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1. Introduction

In today's society, the use of email marketing is still prominent. It is an important means of communication to keep customers or visitors informed of the activities carried out by the company. Notifying them about promotions or conveying information that may be of interest to the recipient of the email (Hudák, Kianičková, & Madleňák, 2017). A recent study that utilised an extremely large database suggests that an email newsletter can be even more important than a corporate website or social media (e-Village, 2020; Frankwatching, 2020). This research takes place annually and is known as the Email Benchmark.

When a campaign is established with the use of email marketing, it can be monitored whether it is effective or not. This can be measured on the basis of a number of factors. These include the open rate, click-through rate and the conversion of an email newsletter (Frankwatching, 2020). In this study the focus is on the click-through rate (CTR) and the other factors are left undiscussed.

By focusing on the click-through rate, it is assumed that the recipient has already opened the email newsletter. For this reason, the recipient must be triggered in the newsletter to proceed, for example to a business' website. This trigger can be caused by the design of the email newsletter (Twilio Sendgrid, 2019). When the design of the email newsletter is appealing enough to the recipient, it ensures higher interaction with the email newsletter and the information it contains.

A clear design makes it clear to the recipient what the purpose of the email newsletter may be. Does the sender want to trigger the recipient to take an action by presenting an offer or is it mainly about providing information? When this is clear, the probability of the recipient starting an interaction increases (Campaign Monitor, 2020.; Twilio Sendgrid, 2019). This interaction can be monitored by looking at the click-through rate. When one prefers to click through to, for instance, the sender's website, a more positive click-through rate can be concluded (Briggs & Hollis, 1997). There are several different elements in the design of the email newsletter that may affect the click-through intention of the recipient. Looking at the literature found in the area of click-through intention and design elements, three recurring factors emerge. These factors are email length (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2016; Kumar & Salo, 2016), color of the email (Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014; Twilio Sendgrid, 2019) and link position (Kumar & Salo, 2018).

The colour-focused studies that have been conducted by previous researchers concluded that colour has a substantial effect on the decision-making process. Colour can have an effect on the subconscious part of a person's brain. This can lead to a decision being made that cannot be substantiated directly. Colour can trigger someone in a subconscious way (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Although colour affects us unconsciously, we also make conscious decisions based on colour. Colour can also have an effect on how much attention we pay to something. When browsing through a book and suddenly seeing something that attracts our attention, people often choose to dwell on it. Attention is paid to the thing that attracted the reader's attention. In an email newsletter, a colour can be found in various elements. For instance the text or font, the background and any images. The study by Meyer-Levy and Peracchio (1995) that focused on images and colour use reported that advertisements with coloured images had a stronger effect on persuasion than images in advertisements that did not contain colour (Black and White) (Meyer-Levy & Peracchio, 1995).

How well recipients are triggered and motivated enough to read an email newsletter that is being sent depends, in addition to colour, on the length of the message (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2016; Kumar & Salo, 2016). Research from 2016, carried out by Kumar and Salo, reports that length of a message has an impact on click-through intention. Looking at the literature consulted for the design element of colour, it can be suggested that colour and length are related. When colour is present, people may be triggered to read a longer message because their attention has been drawn to the message. Besides the fact that they can both have an individual effect on the click-through intention of recipients of email newsletters, they can also form an interaction effect.

The final design element that will be examined in this study is the element of link placement. There has been a previous study on this design element by Kumar and Salo in 2018 but this study only involved the use of observations. Because of this, the outcome of this study may not be consistent when manipulations are performed in an experiment regarding link placement. The study by Kumar and Salo (2018) concluded that link placement in a newsletter has an effect on the click-through intention of the recipient of the email newsletter. To find out if there is also an effect in this study, it is important to set up manipulations that fit the element of link placement.

Research into the effects of design elements in an email newsletter on click-through intention is performed through an experiment with stimuli associated with an existent company called Twepa.

The experiment may be relevant for companies who hesitate to continue using email newsletters because they no longer have the desired effect. Through this research, elements can be adjusted which could contribute to making email marketing a relevant marketing tool again. In addition, it may be interesting for a company in the same industry as Twepa to see which elements are important and which are not. These companies may also be triggered to do research in the field of email marketing. To investigate the suggested relevant role of design elements in email newsletters, the following research question can be explored:

RQ: To what extent can design elements in email newsletters enhance the click-through intention in email newsletters?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Email marketing

In the modern economy and society we live in, it is no longer possible to imagine being without the Internet. We all use the Internet in our everyday lives, for example, to relax, but we also use it for work. Because people like to communicate with each other in a way that differs from the telephone, we frequently send emails. This allows a person not to be immediately contactable, but still has the possibility to have their questions answered or to have messages sent (Chaffey, 2013). Furthermore, email marketing can also be used to build a relationship with a customer. This can potentially create new loyal customers who trust the brand or company that sends the message (Bawm & Nath, 2014; Beashel, 2014).

Apart from the fact that email (marketing) can create a positive image for the business, it has a number of benefits. Email marketing is comparatively cheaper than other methods of advertising, and it is possible to establish better contact and interaction with customers. And last it is possible to test which titles, texts, images or colours people react to most favourably. This can be measured using statistics such as the open rate or click-through rate (Bawm & Nath, 2014).

When examining important changes when it comes to email marketing, the use of device by the recipient of emails is an important component. In the beginning, email was used mainly on desktops, but this has shifted in recent years (Chaffey, 2013). Nowadays, the majority of emails are read on mobile phones. Research showed that in 2012, 40% of the marketing emails received were opened via mobile phones. As a result, marketers were challenged to think more about the design of the emails that were sent out because the format was different and the display of the message was therefore limited (Chaffey, 2013). A survey conducted by Hubspot in 2020 found that about 35% of marketers send about three to five marketing emails per week to their customers. It is also expected that the number of people worldwide using email will continue to grow in the coming years (Statista, 2020).

2.2 The effectiveness of a marketing email

Because email marketing is a low-cost method of spreading information, people also use this medium to send unwanted messages, known as spam. Because spam e-mail is becoming more common, it is important that your company does not end up in the spam filter. When messages end up in this filter, people do not look at them. As a result, the non-opening of email messages is much greater (Pavlov, Melville, & Plice, 2008). In order to distinguish messages from spam, it is important that people recognise your emails. Loyalty and familiarity are therefore important for the sender of the e-mail. This can be achieved through better targeting and customization of an email. For example, products that have been specially selected for the recipient based on previously purchased products. The customer feels more connected to the brand or company and brand loyalty of the customer can be increased (Ansari & Mela, 2003).

A (personalised) marketing email is a type of external customisation approach. A marketing email can lead the reader to the website or web shop of the sender. These external customisations are effective when the recipient actually benefits from them. For example, a discount code that is mentioned in the email. When one clicks on the code and arrives at the

website or web shop, the recipient really benefits from it. This can lead to increased loyalty, trust and a more positive attitude towards the company that sends the email.

2.3 Click-through intention & design elements

The external customisation approach should ensure that the desired click actions are performed in the newsletter, by the recipient. Returning to the example of the discount code, the desired click action is for the recipient to click on the code and be led to the website or webshop. These click-throughs can be measured via the click-through rate (CTR). This rate shows how many people ultimately clicked on a link to, for example, a webshop or a link to a social media account (Wang, Li, Cui, Zhang, & Mao, 2011). The study of Briggs and Hollis (1997) even proposed that CTR is the best way to measure the response to an email or advertising.

The click-through intention can be influenced by various design elements in the email newsletter (Ansari & Mela, 2003). These factors are email length (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2016; Kumar & Salo, 2016), color of the email (Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014; Twilio Sendgrid, 2019) and link position (Kumar & Salo, 2018). These three factors, also referred to as design elements, should help to ensure that the reader's attention is maintained when reading an email newsletter.

To ensure that the reader's attention is maintained, it is important to know how the reader divides their attention. It has been found that people lose their attention easily and it is therefore important to hold their attention (DuFrene, Engelland, Lehman, & Pearson, 2005; Kuisma, Simola, Uusitalo, & Öörni, 2010; Kumar & Salo, 2018; Tourangeau, Couper, & Conrad, 2004). A positive first impression is a good starting point to keep this attention. Often, this first impression evaluates the overall design. If the reader is triggered well enough by the design, the reader may be driven enough to investigate the newsletter and its information in more detail. The final goal is to persuade the reader to click on a link that will lead to the sender's website.

2.3.1 Design element: Color

Colour has a profound effect on the way we make decisions. Colour has an effect on our subconscious (Singh & Srivastava, 2011) and colours can create feelings that can increase the purchase intention (Singh, 2006). Finally, colour also draws our attention to something and this can create persuasion. This was shown in research by Meyer-Levy and Peracchio (1995). This study focused on colour and images and their effect on persuasion. The result was that advertisements containing pictures with colour had a greater effect on persuasion than those without colour (black and white). Colors are attractive to the brain and therefore retain the reader's attention (Labrecque, Patrick & Milne, 2013).

The research conducted by Pelet and Papadopoulou (2013) indicates that when too many colours are used in an environment, for example an email newsletter, people start to feel uncomfortable. Too many colours can have a negative effect on a person's mood. It is important that the colours fit in with what is being shown. In an email newsletter these colours can be the company's or brand's house style colours. In this way, people get used to the company colours and can recognise the company faster (Pelet & Papadopoulou, 2013).

Based on the described expectations that color has with regard to the effect on an email newsletter, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1: Email newsletters that are colorful result in a higher click-through intention than email newsletters that do not contain a lot of color.

2.3.2 Design element: Link placement

When researching the design element of link placement, it immediately becomes obvious that there is little to be found in the literature. Link placement can be interpreted as a nudge, but even when searching the literature, there is not much to be found about the placement of a nudge in ,for example, an email newsletter. One research study that does focus on link placement in email newsletters is by Kumar and Salo in 2018. The research concluded that links that are placed in the left region in email newsletters are more likely to be clicked on than links that are placed in the right region. Also links that are placed in the top of an email newsletter generate a higher click-through rate than links that are placed in the bottom of the newsletter. In the research by Mogos and Acatrinei (2015) is stated that in the first paragraph of the mail, the purpose of the mail should be clear and it is best to include a link to this part of the email. This link should lead the recipient to the desired page. For example the webshop. Based on the described expectations that link placement has on the click-through intention on an email newsletter, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Links that are placed in the top region result in a higher click-through intention than links that are placed in the bottom of the email newsletter.

2.3.3 Design element: Length

Besides colour and potentially link placement as design elements, there is a third factor that can influence the click-through intention in email newsletters. This third factor is the length of the email newsletter (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2016; Kumar & Salo, 2016). Kumar and Salo's 2016 research proposes that the length of a newsletter affects the click-through intention of the recipient of the email newsletter. Another research, carried out by Mogos and Acatrinei (2015), suggests that the length of the newsletter is not necessarily the most important factor, but rather the content of the first paragraph. Once this is instantly clear, the reader is more likely to be triggered to continue reading. Then length is no longer important (Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015).

On the contrary, Chittenden and Rettie (2003) and Sigurdsson et al. (2016) propose that length does matter and that a long email newsletter may have a negative impact on the attitude towards the email newsletter. Based on the described expectations that length has with regard to the effect on an email newsletter, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H3: Email newsletters that are perceived as short result in a higher click-through intention than email newsletters that are perceived as lengthy.

2.4 Interaction effects

Because several factors are involved in a possible effect on click-through intention in this research, it is also possible that the factors not only have an effect on click-through intention individually but also in interaction with each other. This would suggest that three interaction

effects are possible. An interaction effect between link placement and length, an interaction effect between colour and link placement and finally an interaction effect between colour and length.

2.4.1 Link placement in combination with length

The first possible interaction effect is between link placement and newsletter length. The interaction between these two factors may have an effect on the click-through intention of recipients of an email newsletter. This interaction is not directly found in the literature that was reviewed for this study, but the interaction between these two factors can have an effect on click-through intention that may be of interest in a possible follow-up study on these two factors. The literature consulted regarding link placement (Kumar & Salo, 2018; Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015) suggests that a link placed in the upper regions of a newsletter can have a positive effect on click-through intention.

Looking at the literature consulted for length (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2016), it is suggested that it is important that a newsletter is not too long and that the reader is able to see at once what the newsletter is about (Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015). This being said, it can be suggested that when using a short newsletter, link placement can also take place at the bottom because the reader will be able to see what is going on immediately. You don't have to scroll and see the link placement in similarity to when choosing a long newsletter with a link placed in the upper regions.

Based on the described expectations that link placement has in combination with length on the click-through intention on an email newsletter, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H4: The use of a link placed at the bottom in combination with a short newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a link placed at the top in combination with a long newsletter.

2.4.2 Color in combination with link placement

The second possible interaction could be an interaction between colour and link placement. This interaction has not been found in the literature that was consulted. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate this possible interaction so that it may be used in future studies. In the literature consulted for this research, Dzulkifli and Mustafar (2013) suggested that colour can extend the attention span a person has and can also improve the ability to remember things. The research of Farley and Grant (1976) also suggests that colour may have a positive effect on memory functioning. People stay triggered for a longer period of time, which allows them to retain their attention longer.

Reviewing the literature that has been consulted for the link placement factor, not much data can be found. The study by Kumar and Salo (2018) is mainly used as a reference in this research and it suggests placing a link at the top of an email newsletter. This is recommended because the reader is then faced more quickly with a link to, for example, a web shop than when the link is placed at the bottom. The advice for this is partially based on the fact that a person often does not have a long attention span and when they are not confronted with the link on time, they do not see the link because they have clicked away or are no longer interested (Kumar & Salo, 2018; Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015). Looking at these suggestions made in the literature, our

research can suggest that using colour, which creates a longer attention span, can place a link further down than not using colour in a newsletter. Based on the described expectations that link placement has in combination with length on the click-through intention on an email newsletter, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H5: The use of a colourful newsletter in combination with a link placed at the bottom of the newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a colourless newsletter with the link placed at the top.

2.4.3 Color in combination with length

The third possible interaction is an interaction between colour and length. This possible interaction was not found in the literature consulted for this research. This makes it interesting to analyse this possible interaction and it may be relevant for future research in this area. As has emerged from the existing literature, colour can improve a person's attention span (Dzulkifli & Mustafar, 2013; Farley & Grant, 1976). In addition, colour can also make people recall information better. For example, a coloured quote or image is better recalled by the reader (Dzulkifli & Mustafar, 2013). Looking at the consulted literature for the length factor, the main recommendation is to use short newsletters (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2016). In this way, the reader can see at a single glance what the reader is dealing with and whether it appeals to the reader (Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015). Having said that, it can be suggested that when colour is used in the newsletter, the reader's attention span is increased, which makes it less of a problem if the newsletter is lengthier. Based on the described expectations that color has in combination with length on the click-through intention on an email newsletter, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H6: The use of a colourful newsletter in combination with a long length of the newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a colourless newsletter with a short length.

2.5 Mediation effects

In this study there are also mediator variables to take into account. These variables can affect the outcome between the independent and dependent variables. The variables that are used as mediators in this study are described below.

2.5.1 Credibility towards the message

Credibility is a variable that can be attributed to a message. In studies, message credibility is primarily investigated on the basis of components or characteristics that make a message appear credible (Chung, Kim, & Kim, 2010; Fogg & Tseng, 1999; Kelton, Fleischmann, & Wallace, 2008). Two important components that contribute to the credibility of a message are the reliability and the expertise of the sender. Expertise can be understood as the knowledge and skills of the source that sends the message (Fogg & Tseng, 1999). Research focused on credibility in combination with online related content show that credibility towards the message has a significant influence on wanting to interact with online content (Luarn & Lin, 2005). In the case of this research, the email newsletter can be seen as online content.

In addition to the influence on wanting to interact with content that is seen as credible, the credibility of a message can also have an effect on persuasion. The study of Friestad and Wright (1994) shows that credibility has a positive impact on persuasion. In that case it can be said that a sender or a message that is seen as credible can also persuade the recipient to perform a desired action. In the case of the email newsletter, this may involve clicking on a link.

Furthermore, literature has also shown that the credibility of a message can depend on how attractive someone finds the message (McGuire, 1985). The attractiveness of a message can be determined, among other things, by the design elements it contains. In the case of this study, the design elements are colour, length and link placement.

Research into credibility in combination with colour shows that colour can increase the credibility of a message when the colour is related to the message. In the case of a greengrocer, it is possible that colours and a message about the freshness of the vegetables can increase the credibility of the message for the recipient (Lohse & Rosen, 2001). This may suggest that the effect of colour through credibility conveys a more reliable message. As a result, the following hypothesis can be formed:

H7a: The effect of color in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.

In this research, we examine the factor of link placement. This factor can be seen as a nudge. A nudge, in this case a link, can cause people to be encouraged consciously or unconsciously to perform an action (Vitek & Syed Shah, 2019). In this case, clicking on a link to a webshop, for example. The most important thing is that a nudge never affects the freedom of choice. A person can choose to ignore a nudge and do nothing with it (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). In this research this would mean that the recipient does not react to the link placement and does not click on the link. The acceptance of the use of a nudge and whether people engage with the nudge (clicking on the link) may depend on the credibility of the nudge. Meaning, someone needs to trust the message and see it as credible in order to also see the nudge as reliable and credible (Evers, Marchiori, Junghans, Cremers, & De Ridder, 2018). As a result, the following hypothesis can be formed:

H8a: The effect of link placement in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.

Looking at credibility and length, there is not much information on this. However, several studies have been conducted to investigate the credibility of websites. These show that users attribute a higher credibility when it is visible that attention has been paid to the website and that the information is well organised, well worded and the language used is consistent (Ahmad, Komlodi, Wang, & Hercegfi, 2010). This is also substantiated by a research study conducted by Weerkamp and Rijke (2008). This research focused on the credibility of blog posts. This research suggested that a credible blog post should have a length that provides enough information. Not too long and not too short either. By keeping these two studies in mind, the following hypothesis can be formed:

H9a: The effect of the length of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.

2.5.2 Attitude towards the message

In addition to credibility, attitude is also a variable that can be used to investigate a person's attitude towards a message, for example. Attitude is included in this study as a variable with a possible mediation effect. Hypotheses are formed for the possible effect of attitude in combination with colour, length and link placement on click-through intention.

Looking at the factor colour, the literature shows that marketers and designers mainly use colour to attract the reader's attention (Gorn, Chattopadhyay, Yi, & Dahl, 1997; Meyer-Levy & Peracchio, 1995). Colours can bring out feelings and if these feelings are perceived as positive by the reader then the reader may develop a positive attitude towards the message (Gorn et al., 1997; Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 1992). Research by Theben, Gerards and Folkvord (2020) suggests that when people have developed a positive attitude, they are much more likely to have a purchase intention. In this study, there is no purchase intention, but there is a decision to click through, the click-through intention. In addition to the research by Theben et al. (2020), there are older works such as Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (1985), McGuire's Information Processing Model (1972) and Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (1989), which also suggest that attitude has an effect on the decision-making process and the intention to make that decision. Relating this to the suggestion that colour can create a positive attitude (Gorn et al., 1997; Wells et al., 1992), the following hypothesis can be formed:

H7b: The effect of color in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by the attitude towards the message.

In the case of the attitude variable, the reader's feeling is very important. If the reader has a bad feeling about a sender or a message, this creates a negative attitude towards the sender or the message. It is therefore important to keep the reader satisfied. From the literature consulted, it can be suggested that a reader is satisfied when he or she does not have to pay much attention to what the person sees and is quickly informed about the content. Mogos and Acatrinei (2015) and Kumar and Salo (2018) in 2018. state in their research that it is important to place one in the first paragraph already so that the reader is quickly informed and does not lose attention and is no longer interested. By combining this information from the literature, the following hypothesis can be suggested for this research:

H8b: The effect of link placement in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by the attitude towards the message.

Looking at the literature on email newsletter length in combination with attitude and the effect of these two factors on click-through intention, information is scarce. What is clear is that the decision to open an email newsletter at all is often based on previous experiences with the sender and the received relevance of the newsletter. The choice of whether the email is relevant or not is quickly made on the basis of the title and the first paragraph (Andersson, Fredriksson, & Berndt, 2014; Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Sigurdsson et al., 2016). However, when the attitude towards the sender and the message is positive, the recipient is more likely to open the newsletter and make the effort to read it, even if the text is longer (Andersson et al., 2014). Based on this information, the following hypothesis can be suggested:

H9b: The effect of the length of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by the attitude towards the message.

2.6 Research Model

The literature search reveals three design elements that may relate to the click-through intention (independent variable) of the recipient of an email newsletter or marketing email. These three elements are the independent variables in this study. All these variables are all linked to the aesthetically pleasing aspect. The three independent variables are links, color and length of the email.

In addition to these three variables, there are two other elements that are important and can have an effect on the click-through intention. These elements emerge from the literature on behavioural intention. In this study, these elements are the mediators, because without these mediators (credibility and attitude) the independent variables have little to no effect. If the design can still be so beautiful, but the recipient of the email newsletter does not have a positive attitude towards the sender, then the chance that the recipient will take an action or open the email, is very small.

With the literature and the established independent variables and mediators, the following Research Model can be proposed:

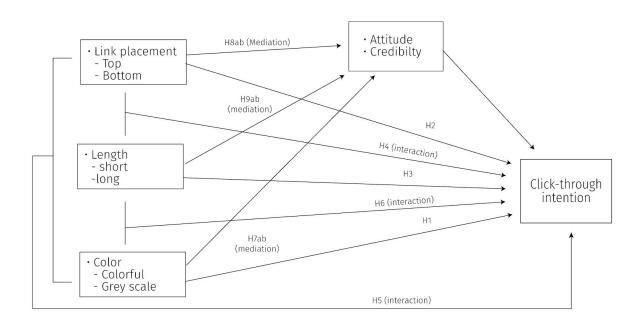


Figure 1. Research Model

Table 1. Hypothesis overview

	Hypothesis
H1	Email newsletters that are colorful have a higher click-through intention than email newsletters that do not contain a lot of color.
H2	Links that are placed in the top region will result in a higher click-through intention than links that are placed in the bottom of the email newsletter.
Н3	Email newsletters that are perceived as short have a higher click-through intention than email newsletters that are perceived as lengthy.
H4	The use of a link placed at the bottom in combination with a short newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a link placed at the top in combination with a long newsletter.
H5	The use of a colourful newsletter in combination with a link placed at the bottom of the newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a colourless newsletter with the link placed at the top.
Н6	The use of a colourful newsletter in combination with a long length of the newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a colourless newsletter with a short length.
Н7а	The effect of color in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.
H7b	The effect of color in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by attitude towards the message.
Н8а	The effect of link placement of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.
H8b	The effect of link placement of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by attitude towards the message.
Н9а	The effect of the length of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.
H9b	The effect of the length of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by attitude towards the message.

3. Methodology

The hypotheses formulated in this research were investigated through an online experiment. The three independent variables of interest in this study have been manipulated and all contain two conditions. It concerns the variables color, link placement and length. This experiment was conducted by means of an online survey.

3.1 Research procedure

Based on the literature consulted and reviewed for this study, a research model was created. This model showed that there are three independent variables, two possible mediators and one dependent variable.

To examine the three independent variables, the literature was searched for established scales for these variables and, based on this search, questions were formulated which were included in a pre-test. Because the study used a 2x2x2 experimental design, eight images were developed incorporating all design elements. These images were also included in the pre-test.

The results of the pre-test were successful and it was found that the scales drawn up for the variables were correctly interpreted, which allowed them to be used in the main study. The main study was compiled in Qualtrics and the respondents were collected by means of a message via social media, but also via email and whatsapp. After the data from the main study was collected, it was analysed in SPSS.

3.2 Research design

To investigate which design elements in email newsletters had a potential influence on click-through intention, an experimental 2 (colour: colorful versus greyscale) x 2 (link placement: top versus bottom) x 2 (length: long versus short) design was used. By conducting an experiment, we tested whether the implementation of these design elements resulted in a higher click-through intention.

In addition to this experiment, the possible mediation variables of attitude and credibility were also investigated. Finally, possible interaction effects were also included in the analysis of this study.

3.3 Stimuli

The stimuli used in this experiment is an example of an email newsletter from facility wholesaler Twepa. In total there were eight conditions used in this experiment. Table 2 provides an overview of the eight conditions used.

The manipulations marked as colorful used the Twepa corporate identity colors in combination with a color image at the top of the page. In addition, the text in the newsletter also had a color. The manipulations marked as greyscale used as little color as possible. The colors used were mainly shades of gray, but to make the newsletter look realistic, the images were in color and not in black and white.

The manipulations marked with link placement used so-called clickable images. That these images were clickable was indicated by the following text: 'Click on the products below for more information!'. The manipulations with a link placed at the top had the images placed at the

top of the newsletter and manipulations with a link placed at the bottom had the images placed at the bottom of the newsletter.

The manipulations for length had been made clear by adding the section 'Maybe also interesting for you' in the long newsletter. This section listed three additional products to provide the newsletter with additional information. This part had been omitted in the short newsletter.

Table 2. Conditions

condition	Length of the newsletter: short versus long	Amount of color in the newsletter: colorful versus greyscale	Link placement: top versus bottom of the newsletter
Condition 1	Short	Grey	Тор
Condition 2	Short	Grey	Bottom
Condition 3	Short	Color	Тор
Condition 4	Short	Color	Bottom
Condition 5	Long	Color	Тор
Condition 6	Long	Color	Bottom
Condition 7	Long	Grey	Тор
Condition 8	Long	Grey	Тор

3.4 Covariate

A covariate can be included as an independent variable in the research. A covariate is a variable that, in addition to the independent variable, also influences the dependent variable. In this study, the variable familiarity is included as a covariate. Because we have the independent variables credibility and attitude in this study, it is important to investigate the influence of familiarity because it can influence the ultimate click-through intention of a person. For example, because someone knows the company because a family member or the person himself works there, they may already be affected by it, which creates a more positive attitude and credibility for the company and the messages or products that the company brings out.

3.5 Pre-Test

To find out whether the conditions with the manipulations were experienced as intended, that colorful was experienced as colorful and a long newsletter was also experienced as long, a pre-test was carried out. The results of this pre-test were used to validate whether the conditions created can be used for the main study. An example of a stimulus used in the pre-test is shown in Figure 2.

The eight test conditions were tested by respondents who completed an online survey. The eight conditions are divided into two groups. Group one was shown conditions 1 to 4 with associated questions and group two was shown conditions 5 to 8 with associated questions. The

questions were the same for both groups. Both groups consisted of twenty respondents, which ultimately resulted in 160 (20x8) observations.

The three independent variables (length, link position & color) were analyzed to check if the manipulations were applied correctly and if there were significant differences between the manipulations made in terms of length (long or short), link position (top or at the bottom) and color (colorful or colorless)

Figure 2. Short colorful newsletter with link placed at the top (example)



The difference in length between the short newsletter (M = 3.35; SD = 1.77) and the long newsletter (M = 4.99; SD = 1.37) was found to be significant (t = 6.53; p < 0.001). Since the answers were measured on a seven-point scale, it could be said that anything under four can be seen as short and anything above four as long. After performing a one-sample T-test with a confidence interval of .95, it could be concluded that short was really experienced as short by the respondents (t = -3.28; p < 0.05) and that long was also experienced as long (t = 6.43; p < 0.05)

The difference in position of link placement between the at the top of the newsletter (M = 3.06; SD = 1.58) and on the bottom of the newsletter (M = 5.99; SD = 1.57) was found to be significant (t(158) = -11.75; p < .001). After performing a one sample T-test with a confidence

interval of .95, it could be concluded that link placement at the top was also interpreted as at the top (t(79) = -5.31; p = <.05) and that link placement at the bottom was interpreted as at the bottom (t(79) = 11.31; p < .05) following the answers on the seven-point scale.

The difference in color of the newsletter between greyscale (M = 3.83; SD = 1.85) and colorful (M = 2.79; SD = 1.46) was found to be significant (t = 0.95). After performing a one sample T-test with a confidence interval of .95, it could be concluded that the greyscale newsletter (t = 0.95) and one sample T-test with a confidence interval of .95, it could be concluded that the greyscale newsletter (t = 0.95) and t = 0.95) when it came to the interpretation from the respondents. This could be explained by the fact that the newsletter manipulated as greyscale still contained colors such as gray, black, white and a small number of colored images. However, this manipulation was successful because a significant difference was found by the respondents in both manipulations.

In the pre-test, the question was also asked how realistic the newsletters were found to be. An ANOVA showed that no significant differences were found when it comes to realism between the newsletters (F (7) = 1,682; p = ,117) which means that all the manipulations were found to be realistic.

3.6 Participants

To collect respondents for this online experiment it was distributed via social media channels such as Facebook, instagram and LinkedIn. In addition, the link for the survey was also shared via Whatsapp and via email.

A total of 251 respondents took part in the online survey. In the survey, respondents were shown stimulus material in the form of an image. A total of eight images were used in the experiment, but each respondent was shown only one of the eight. The images were assigned by randomization. Stimuli 1 and 8 were viewed by 37 respondents and stimuli 2 to 7 were viewed by 38 respondents.

The respondents who spent less than three seconds looking at the image were not included in further analyzes. This is because the answers they possibly gave after seeing the image cannot be seen as reliable because it is not realistic that someone who sees an image for less than three seconds has absorbed it properly. This leaves 229 respondents who are included in the analyzes.

Of these 229 respondents, 31% are men, 67.7% men and 1.3% prefer not to report it. A chi-square test on a crosstab showed no significant relationship between gender and the eight manipulations $\chi 2$ (14, N = 229) = 14.89, p = .385.

The average age of the respondents was 35.59 years. An ANOVA showed that there is no significant difference in age between the eight conditions (F (7) = .617; p = .742). In addition to gender and age, education level was also asked and a chi-square test on a cross-tab shows no significant relationship between education level and the eight manipulations $\chi 2$ (21, N = 229) = 24.40, p = .274.

3.7 Construct validity and reliability

The construct validity was tested to confirm that the questions posed in the online experiment, conducted through a survey, actually measured what to measure. To find out, a factor analysis was performed. The following constructs were measured in this analysis: Click-through intention, Familiarity, Credibility and Attitude. To test the reliability of these constructs, a Cronbach's Alpha

was performed to measure the internal consistency of the constructs. Table 3 shows the factor analysis. Only one factor analysis was performed in total because all items were loaded into the correct constructs.

3.7.1 Click-Through intention

The Click-through intention construct has been measured using the Ogbanufe and Kim (2018) scale. Four statements with a five-point Likert scale from completely agree to completely disagree were used: "I intend to click-through to the website of Twepa suggested to me by the email newsletter", "I am likely to click-through to the website of Twepa from the presented email newsletter", "I am likely to buy from Twepa after seeing this email newsletter", "I am planning to click-through to the website of Twepa". The Click-through intention construct is reliable as the Cronbach's alpha for the four items is excellent ($\alpha = .920$)

3.7.2 Familiarity

The variable Familiarity was included in this study because Familiarity can be a factor that can influence how people perceive Twepa. Literature shows that people who are familiar with a company generally have a better attitude and credibility towards it.

The construct familiarity was measured by means of the Brand Familiarity scale of Kent and Allen (1994). Four statements with a five-point Likert scale from completely agree to completely disagree were used: "I am familiar with Twepa", "I have experience with buying products from Twepa", "I have experience with receiving email newsletters from Twepa", "I am knowledgeable about twepa". The familiarity construct is reliable because the Cronbach's alpha for the four items is excellent (α = .903).

3.7.3 Credibility

The Credibility construct is measured using the Appelman and Sundar (2016) scale. We used 4 statements with a five-point Likert scale from completely agree to completely disagree: "The newsletter by twepa is accurate", "The newsletter by twepa is authentic", "The newsletter by twepa is trustworthy", "The newsletter by twepa is credible". In the first factor analysis, all four constructs were measured. The outcome showed that Credibility_3 did not meet the minimum factor value of .5. Therefore, another factor analysis has been performed in which Credibility_3 is omitted. This caused the Total Explained Variance to go from 72,063 to 74,362.

The construct for Click-through intention is reliable because the Cronbach's alpha for the four items is good ($\alpha = .834$).

3.7.4 Attitude

The construct Attitude is measured by means of the existing Attitude scale of Villegas (2002). Use was made of 4 statements with a five-point Likert scale from completely agree to completely disagree: "I like this newsletter", "I find this newsletter useful", "I find this newsletter interesting", "I find this newsletter good ". The construct for Attitude is reliable because the Cronbach's alpha for the four items is good (α = .845)

Table 3. Factor analysis.

		Factor			
Item	1	2	3	4	
CTR_4 I intend to click through to Twepa's website.	.864				
CTR_2 From the newsletter presented I will probably click through to Twepa's website.	.858				
CTR_1 After seeing the email newsletter I intend to click through to Twepa's website.	.845				
CTR_3 After seeing the email newsletter I will most likely buy a product from Twepa.	.828				
Familiarity_4 I have knowledge of Twepa.		.911			
Familiarity_2 I have experience in buying products from Twepa.		.899			
Familiarity_1 I am familiar with Twepa.		.852			
Familiarity_3 I have experience with receiving email newsletters from Twepa.		.828			
CRED_5 Twepa's newsletter is credible.			.842		
CRED_4 Twepa's newsletter is reliable.			.788		
CRED_1 Twepa's newsletter is trustworthy.			.784		
CRED_2 Twepa's newsletter is accurate.			.687		
ATT_2 I find this newsletter useful.				.747	
ATT_3 I find this newsletter interesting.				.741	
ATT_1 enjoy this newsletter.				.732	
ATT_4I think this newsletter is good.				.676	

	Click-through intention	Familiarity	Credibility	Attitude
Initial Eigenvalues	6.308	2.808	1.879	.903
Explained Variance	39.427	17.549	11.744	5.643
Cronbach's Alpha	.920	.903	.834	.845

4. Results

4.1 Manipulation check

In the online experiment, performed by means of a survey, three manipulations were performed for the independent variables. The first manipulation that took place is the manipulation for the length of an email newsletter. The independent t-test that was performed indicates that the respondents actually experienced a difference between the short newsletter (M = 2.94; SD = .798) and the long newsletter (M = 3.36; SD = .772). This can be concluded because the difference is significant (t (227) = -4.039; p <.001). To actually investigate whether short is really seen as short and long as long, a one-sample t-test with a CI of .95 was performed. This shows that the short newsletter (M = 2.94; SD = .798) is more likely to be perceived as shorter (t (117) = -.807; p = .421). The long newsletter (M = 3.36; SD = .772) is actually experienced as long (t (110) = 4,917; p <.001).

The second manipulation that took place is the manipulation for the color of the newsletter. The independent t-test indicates that a difference is actually experienced between the newsletter in greyscale (M = 3.10; SD = 1.167) and the newsletter in color (M = 2.21; SD = 1.013). This can be concluded because the difference is significant (t (227) = 6,149; p <.001). The one-sample t-test with a CI .95 shows that the newsletter manipulated as greyscale (M = 3.10; SD = 1.167) does not differ significantly in interpretation (t (7113) = -.883; p = .379) than the newsletter manipulated as colorful (M = 2.21; SD = 1.013) (t (114) = -8.377; p = <.00). This may be explained by the fact that the newsletter manipulated as greyscale contains the colors gray, black and white. As indicated in the pre-test, this manipulation is successful because a significant difference is experienced between the greyscale and the colorful newsletter.

The third manipulation that took place is the link placement manipulation. The independent t-test that was carried out indicates that a difference is actually experienced by the respondents in link placement at the top of the newsletter (M = 2.57; SD = 1.134) or at the bottom M = 4.42; SD = 1.023). This can be concluded because the difference is significant (t (227) = -11,714; p <.001). The one-sample t-test with CI .95 shows that the link placed at the top (M = 2.57; SD = 1.134) is really experienced as the top t (104) = -3.873; p = <.001) and that the link placed at the bottom (M = 4.42; SD = 1.023) is really experienced as the bottom (t (123) = 13.518; p <.001).

4.2 Multivariate test

The results of the online experiment were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). A MANOVA was used to test the effects of the different independent variables on the dependent variables. In this research it was used to test the effect of color, length and link placement on click-through intention, credibility and attitude. The variable familiarity was also measured in the experiment and used as a covariate in the MANOVA. A correlation analysis shows that there is a positive relationship between familiarity, attitude and credibility. This means that people who are already familiar with Twepa have a more positive attitude and credibility towards Twepa than people who are not or less familiar with Twepa. The results of the multivariate test can be seen in table 4.

Table 4. Multivariate tests

	Independent variable	F-value	Sig.
Wilk's lambda	Length	.663	.575
	Color	5.194	.002
	Placement	1.444	.231
	Length*Color	.359	.783
	Length*Placement	3.260	.022
	Color*Placement	.813	.488

Based on the MANOVA test, it can be concluded that no significant effect was found of length (Λ = 0.991, F (3, 218) = .663, p = .575) and Link Placement (Λ = 0.981, F (3, 218) = 1.444, p = .321) on the dependent variables.

However, a significant effect of color on the dependent variables was found (Λ = 0.933, F (3, 218) = 5.194, p = .002). In table... you see the effects per dependent variable.

No significant interaction effect was found between Length and Color (Λ = 0.995, F (3, 218) = .359, p = .783) nor between Color and Link Placement (Λ = 0.989, F (3, 218) = .813, p = .488). There is, however, a significant interaction effect between Length and placement (Λ = 0.957, F (3, 218) = 3.260, p = 0.022).

4.3 Main effects of length on dependent variables

As can be seen and read from table 4 there appears to be no significant effect of length on the dependent variables. In table 6 you can see an overview of the means and the standard deviation. Table 6 shows that there are also no significant effects with a single dependent variable confirming that there is no difference in click-through intention, attitude and credibility between the groups of people who have seen a long newsletter or a short newsletter. As a result of the findings hypothesis H3 can be rejected.

Table 5. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for email length.

	Short N = 118			ong 111
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Click-through	3.03	.88	2.90	.86
Attitude	3.45	.80	3.39	.66
Credibility	3.85	.60	3.78	.53

^{*}The variables were measured based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)..

Table 6. Test of between subject effects

Independent variable	Dependent variables	F-value	Sig.
Length: Short/long Click-through		1.214	.272
	Attitude	.460	.492
	Credibility	1.213	.272

4.4 Main effects of color on dependent variables

Table 4 shows a significant effect of color on the dependent variables (F(3, 218) = 5.194, p = .002). In table 7 you can see an overview of the means and the standard deviation. Table 8 shows that for each dependent variable there is a significant effect of color on, for example, Click-through, attitude and credibility.

Table 7. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for color.

	Greyscale N = 114		Colorful N = 115
	Mean :	SD	Mean SD
Click-through	2.78 .	86	3.15 .85
Attitude	3.26	.72	3.56 .71
Credibility	3.70	.54	3.95 .59

^{*}The variables were measured based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 8. Test of between subjects

Independent variable	Dependent variables	F-value	Sig.
Color: Grey/Color	Click-through	9.101	.003
	Attitude	11.305	.001
	Credibility	10.308	.002

The main effect of color on click-through intention was significant (F (3, 218) = 9,101, p = .003). The colorful newsletters shown (M = 3.15, SD = .85) have a higher click-through intent than the greyscale newsletters (M = 2.78, SD = .86) shown during the experiment.

A significant main effect of color on attitude was found (F (3, 218) = 11.305, p = .001). The colorful newsletters led to a more positive attitude (M = 3.59, SD = .71) than the greyscale newsletters (M = 3.26, SD = .72)

A significant main effect of color on credibility was also found (F (3, 218) = 10.308, p = .002). The colored newsletters led to a higher credibility (M = 3,95, SD = .59) than the greyscale newsletters (M = 3,70, SD = .54).

As a result of these findings, hypothesis H1 is supported.

4.5 Main effects of link placement on dependent variables

As can be seen and read from table 4 there appears to be no significant effect of Link Placement on the dependent variables. In table 9 you can see an overview of the means and the standard deviation. Table 10 shows that there are also no significant effects with a single dependent variable confirming that there is no difference in Click-through intention, attitude and credibility between the groups of people who posted a newsletter with a link at the top or a newsletter with a link posted at the bottom.

As a result of the findings, hypothesis H2 cannot be supported.

Table 9. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for link placement.

	N =	Top = 105		ttom 124
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Click-through	2.93	.81	3.00	.92
Attitude	3.48	.64	3.38	.80
Credibility	3.89	.47	3.77	.66

^{*}The variables were measured based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 10. Test of between subject effects

Independent variable	Dependent variables	F-value	Sig.
Placement: Top/Bottom	Click-through	.112	.738
	Attitude	1.484	.224
	Credibility	2.784	.097

4.6 Interaction effect Length * Placement

Table 4 shows a significant interaction effect between the independent variables length and Link Placement (F (3, 218) = 3.260, p = .022)). Table 11 provides an overview of the means and standard deviation. Table 12 shows that there is a significant interaction effect of length and link placement on the dependent variable Click-through intention (F (3, 218) = 4.111, p = .044)). Figure 3 shows the interaction effect on Click-through intention even better in the interaction plot. The plot also shows, like the table, that the lines are not parallel, which means that there is an interaction. Based on the interaction plot it can be stated that the best effect on click-through intention can be achieved when using a short newsletter with the link at the bottom. The plot shows that the interaction effect mainly arises from the variable Link Placement and especially placement at the bottom. This figure shows that when using a short newsletter it is better to place the link at the bottom and when using a long newsletter, the link placement can be better located at the top of the newsletter when it comes to the effect on the click-through intention.

As a result of these findings, hypothesis H4 can be supported and hypotheses H5 and H6 are not supported.

Table 11. Length*Link placement means (M) and standard deviations (SD)

		Short (Length)		Long (Length)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Top (Placement)	Click-through	3.07	.70	3.13	.75
	Attitude	3.74	.56	3.75	.53
	Credibility	4.03	.52	3.91	.44
Bottom (Placement)	Click-through	3.38	.85	2.97	1.02
	Attitude	3.50	.92	3.54	.72
	Credibility	3.91	.72	3.96	.53

Top*Short (N=55) Bottom*Short (N=63 Top*Long (N=50) Bottom*Long (N=61)

Table 12. Test of between subject effects.

Independent variable	Dependent variables	F-value	Sig.
Length*Placement	Click-through	4.111	.044
	Attitude	.668	.415
	Credibility	.072	.789

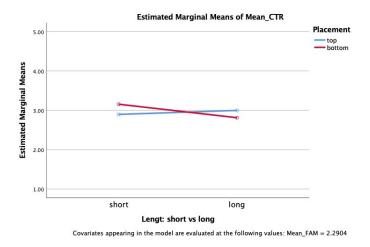


Figure 3. interaction effect of Length*Link placement on Click-through intention

4.7 Mediation effects

This study also tested the mediation effect of the possible mediating variables attitude and credibility. Only a direct effect of color on the dependent variable Click-through intention has been found. Hence, only a possible mediation effect is possible between color and click-through intention. For this reason, the hypotheses H8ab and H9ab are rejected.

A mediation analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro (model 4) (Hayes, 2017) in SPSS.

^{*}The variables were measured based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4.7.1 Mediation effect of Attitude

Figure 4 shows whether attitude mediates the effect of color on click-through intention. First, it can be seen that the independent variable color (without taking into account the possible mediating variable) has a significant effect on the dependent variable click-through intention (b = .361, t (227) = 3.198, p <.05) (path c). Subsequently, the effect of the independent variable color on the possible mediating variable attitude was examined. This effect was found to be significant (b = .317, t (226) = 3,395, p <.001) (path a). The third step showed that the analysis showed that the effect of the mediator attitude controlling for color on click-through was significant (b = .639, t (225) = 9,835, p <.001) (path b). Subsequently, the effect of the independent variable color on the dependent variable click-through intention when controlling for the mediator attitude was examined. This effect did not appear to be significant (b = .139, t (225) = 1,484, p = .139) (path c '). The indirect effect has been tested using non-parametric bootstrapping. The indirect effect (b = .203) is statistically significant (b = .203, .95% CI = [.081, .332]) because CI does not include zero. Because color was not a significant predictor of click-through intention after controlling for the mediator, it can be concluded that attitude provides full mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1987). As a result of these findings, hypothesis H7b can be supported.

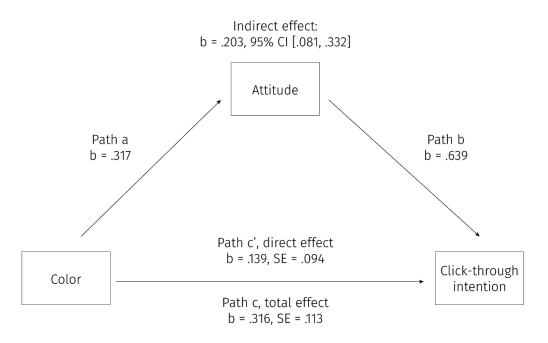


Figure 4. Mediation effect of Attitude

4.7.2 Mediation effect of Credibility

Figure 5 shows whether credibility mediates the effect of color on click-through intention. First, it can be seen that the independent variable color (without taking into account the possible mediating variable) has a significant effect on the dependent variable click-through intention (b = .361, t (227) = 3.198, p <.05) (path c). Then the effect of the independent variable color on the possible mediating variable credibility was examined. This effect was found to be significant (b = .242, t (226) = 3,349, p <.001) (path a). The third step showed that the analysis showed that the

effect of the mediator credibility controlling for color on click-through was significant (b = .450, t (225) = 4,700, p < .001) (path b). Subsequently, the effect of the independent variable color on the dependent variable click-through intention when controlling for the mediator credibility was examined. This effect was found to be significant (b = .233, t (225) = .107, p < .05) (path c '). The indirect effect has been tested using non-parametric bootstrapping. The indirect effect (b = .109) is statistically significant (b = .109, 95% CI = [.037, .209]) because CI does not include zero.

Because color was a significant predictor of click-through intention after controlling for the mediator, credibility, it is consistent with partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1987). As a result of these findings, hypothesis H4a can be partially supported.

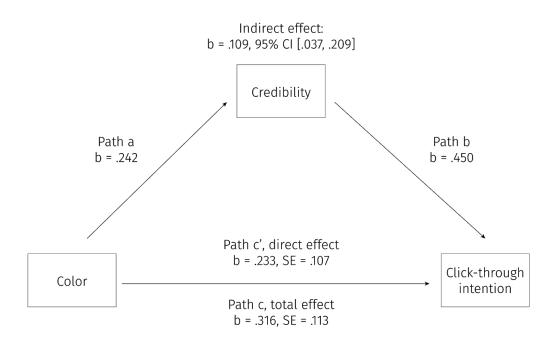


Figure 5. Mediation effect of Credibility

4.8 Hypotheses overview

Table 13 shows an overview of all hypotheses used for this study and the results thereof. As can be seen in table 13, some of the hypotheses are supported and some of the hypotheses are rejected.

Table 13. Hypotheses overview

Hypothesis overview				
	Hypotheses	Result		
H1	Email newsletters that are colorful have a higher click-through intention than email newsletters that do not contain a lot of color.	Supported		
H2	Links that are placed in the top region will result in a higher click-through intention than links that are placed in the bottom of the email newsletter.	Rejected		
Н3	Email newsletters that are perceived as short have a higher click-through intention than email newsletters that are perceived as lengthy.	Rejected		
Н4	The use of a link placed at the bottom in combination with a short newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a link placed at the top in combination with a long newsletter.	Supported		
Н5	The use of a colourful newsletter in combination with a link placed at the bottom of the newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a colourless newsletter with the link placed at the top.	Rejected		
Н6	The use of a colourful newsletter in combination with a long length of the newsletter has a stronger effect on the click-through intention than the use of a colourless newsletter with a short length.	Rejected		
Н7а	The effect of color in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.	Partially supported		
H7b	The effect of color in an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by attitude towards the message.	Supported		
Н8а	The effect of link placement of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.	Rejected		
H8b	The effect of link placement of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by attitude towards the message.	Rejected		
Н9а	The effect of the length of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by credibility towards the message.	Rejected		
H9b	The effect of the length of an email newsletter on the click-through intention is mediated by attitude towards the message.	Rejected		

5. Discussion, implications and future research

5.1 Discussion of the findings

The aim of this research was to find out whether and which design elements in an email newsletter have an effect on the click-through intention of the recipients. A main effect was found for the factor colour on the click-through intention of recipients of email newsletters. The analyses showed that coloured newsletters have a higher click-through intention than newsletters in grey scale. This result is in line with the expectation based on the reviewed literature. The research of Meyer-Levy and Peracchio (1995) indicated that colourful can lead to a higher persuasion than greyscale. Whether colour actually has an effect on the subconscious (Singh & Srivastava, 2011) was not discussed in this study, but it could be interesting for future research. What can be concluded is that colour draws more attention towards the newsletter and stimulates interest (Labrecque et al., 2013; Singh, 2006) because people are more willing to click through to the website/webshop.

Unfortunately, for the factors of link placement and length of the email newsletter, no direct effects were found on the click-through intention of the email newsletter recipients. Looking back at the reviewed literature for the factor link placement, it can be concluded that the expected effects do not correspond with the results of this research. The effect of link placement suggested by Mogos and Acatrinei (2015) and Kumar and Salo (2018) cannot be supported. These studies suggested that links placed at the top or in the first paragraph were better received than links placed more at the bottom. This direct effect on click-through intent was not observed in this study.

The possible reason why there is no direct effect on the click-through intention could be that there were no hyperlinks displayed but clickable products. It could also be that the respondents were not interested enough in the products that were displayed as clickable products and were therefore not triggered to click on them. The studies of Li, Duan, Zheng, Wang, and Wang (2020) and Wang, Liu, Huang, Xing, and Zhao (2019) further elaborate on the variable interest and present different models that take this variable into account when it's about click-through intention. The lack of interest in our newsletter by the respondents may be because the target group in this study is not the corresponding target group that is desired to be reached with the Twepa newsletter.

Another factor that might influence link placement in combination with click-through intention is the distinction between left and right positioning. The placement of left or right comes up in the study by Kumar and Salo (2018) and also in a study by Oulasvirta, Kärkkäinen and Laarni (2005). This concluded that links feel like the most logical place to place a link. This has not been included in this research. A possible option for follow-up research is to investigate whether respondents perceive the clickable products as a link. This could be done by recording the eye movements of the respondents when they look at the newsletter. This would allow us to find out whether the links are in the right place or whether a distinction needs to be made between left and right when it comes to link placement.

Looking at the literature consulted for the length factor, it emerges mainly that the use of long email newsletters was not recommended. This is suggested because studies show that people's attention span is often not long enough to pay attention until the end (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015; Sigurdsson et al., 2016). Unfortunately, the results did not

show any direct effect between length and click-through intention. The reason for this may be that the respondents were not interested in the information shown in the newsletter (Li, Duan, Zheng, Wang, & Wang, 2020; Wang, Liu, Huang, Xing, & Zhao, 2019) because they may not be the right target group for this newsletter. Another possible reason could be that people expect a newsletter to contain information and might be prepared for a longer text.

Of the three possible interaction effects that could take place in this study, one interaction effect is significant. The interaction effect that has an effect on click-through intention is the interaction effect between length and link placement. The analyses present that when a short newsletter is used, it is better to place the link at the bottom and vice versa. This is consistent with the reviewed research of Mogos and Acatrinei (2015), Chittenden and Rettie (2003) en Sigurdsson et al. (2016). They suggest that a newsletter should be short so that the reader can immediately see what the newsletter is about. This may also explain why the link can be placed at the bottom of a short newsletter because the reader can see the link immediately. This is not the case when using a long newsletter with the link at the bottom.

The literature that was consulted for the factor colour did suggest that colour could improve reader attentiveness (Dzulkifli & Mustafar, 2013) and that lapsing attentiveness often caused people not to read the end of a message (Kumar & Salo, 2018; Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015). This allowed a hypothesis to be formed that suggested that in a colourful newsletter, the link could be placed at the bottom because the reader was paying attention. However, this was not proven in the research and analyses conducted. A possible cause of this could be that when using a short colourful newsletter, the link position no longer matters because with a short newsletter, the link can be seen at a glance.

The analyses also showed that the interaction effect with regards to color and length was not significant. The literature for color mainly found that colorful newsletters resulted in increased attention on the newsletter which, when combined with the literature for the factor of length, suggested that a colorful long newsletter may have had a stronger effect on click-through intention than a short greyscale newsletter. However, the analyses did not find this to be the case. A possible explanation could be that length did not have a main effect on click-through intention either. It could thus be suggested that this is not as relevant to the reader as thought. Since color does have a main effect on click-through intention, it is suggested that a newsletter containing color, whether long or short, has a more positive effect on click-through intention than a greyscale newsletter.

This study also looked at mediation variables. The variables used in this research are credibility and attitude. After analyzing the data from the online experiment, it emerged that the variables credibility and attitude were influenced by the color of the email newsletter. A colorful newsletter received a higher mean for both variables and the click-through intention, which means that a more positive attitude and credibility applies to a colorful newsletter than to a greyscale newsletter. A mediation analysis was carried out to find out whether credibility and attitude were justified as mediators in the study. This showed that attitude provides full mediation because color no longer had a significant effect on click-through intent when controlled by attitude. Literature has shown that design elements, or how aesthetically attractive someone finds a product, influences the attitude someone has towards the message or product. In this case, the product or message is the email newsletter. The research indeed shows that attitude and color together influence click-through intention. This is consistent with what has been found in the literature.

Subsequently, a mediation analysis was performed for the variable credibility. This has shown that credibility provides partial mediation. This can be concluded because color still remains significant when controlled by credibility. Both the direct and total effect are significant. The results for both mediators could be expected based on the consulted literature. The study by Friestad and Wright (1994) already indicated that credibility can have a positive influence on influencing people, for example, to click on something. This is consistent with the results of the study. The study by McGuire (1985) also concluded that the credibility of a message depends on how attractive the recipient finds the message. In this case, color is important for the recipient of an email newsletter to find it attractive. This is consistent with the results of the study.

A covariate was also included in this study. The covariate was the variable familiarity. The correlation analysis performed shows that there is a positive relationship between familiarity, attitude and credibility. This means that people who are already familiar with Twepa have a more positive attitude and credibility towards Twepa than people who are not or less familiar with Twepa. It may therefore be important when conducting a survey for a company that familiarity is included in the survey because this can make a significant difference to the outcome of a survey when many people with familiarity, for example, conduct an experiment or complete a survey for the company. Thus, it can positively influence the click-through intention to familiarize the recipients of the newsletter with the company. This by showing a little more of the company, introducing staff in a video, etc. Make sure people feel they know the company. This can lead to more positive outcomes.

5.2 Academic and practical implications

Previous research in the field of design elements mainly looked at websites. This study is an addition to the previous studies because a newsletter is also a way outside the website to inform consumers about what a company has to offer. Because it should be much more concise in a newsletter than on a website, it is therefore interesting to see whether other design elements are important for sending a newsletter. In addition, sending a newsletter remains popular and it is good to research the trends and the will of the consumer because, due to the digital age, they have access to so much more companies and information than just yours. You have to continue to excel and stand out. Also bearing in mind that nowadays people no longer only open newsletters on a computer, but also on a mobile phone. Do they still want to scroll or should it be clear at a glance.

Furthermore, this research indicates that it might be interesting for a company that uses a newsletter to look at which design elements for the company's target audience have an effect on the click-through intention to the web shop, for example. By analysing this sort of data, a company can improve its newsletter. What is worth considering in any case is the use of (house style) colors in e-mails and newsletters that are sent. This research shows that color has an important effect on the click-through intention and by using color familiarity with the company can be created. The analysis showed that familiarity creates a more positive attitude and credibility towards the message.

In addition, there appeared to be an interaction effect with respect to length and link placement. So it is good for other companies using newsletters to keep in mind that if the newsletter can be viewed at a glance, the link can be placed at the bottom. If this is not the case, then it is wise to place the link at the top so that people are not required to read through the entire newsletter.

5.3 Limitations and future research

There are a few limitations in this study. One of these limitations is that the research is mainly based on a company, namely Twepa. This means that the research results may not be entirely relevant for every sector, for example because Twepa focuses primarily on facility resources. When it comes to a clothing store or perhaps a cosmetics company, those people can attach completely different values to the design and it is perhaps more important in that sector that attention is paid to the length of the newsletter.

Limitations can also be found in terms of how the factors were measured in this study. When it comes to the way the perception of color was measured among the respondents, there are also other possibilities. In this study, it was found that even the newsletter that was created and marked as greyscale was still perceived as containing color. In addition, there are other research possibilities that were not used such as doing eye tracking that allowed the most important elements of a newsletter to be highlighted and where the most attention could be focused.

Another limitation may be that there were no questions asked about the respondent's work. Someone who is employed in an equivalent sector, the facility sector, is more likely to be approached by the newsletter than someone who is still studying, for example. As a result, it may be that a respondent has entered it differently and is still less interested, while a newsletter is often sent to people who register for it and are therefore often more interested than people who do not register for the newsletter.

It can therefore be useful for future research, should Twepa specifically want to know the response of customers to the newsletter, that a survey is held among customers who have subscribed to the Twepa newsletter. When it comes to general future research, it can be interesting to compare a number of newsletters from different sectors. That way you find out whether there is a difference in desired design elements per industry. It can also be used to find out whether each industry is still interested in a newsletter or rather has a different way of communicating when it comes to providing information about the company or products. Another interesting part of a future study could be whether it affects whether more photos or videos are added in an email newsletter. Because these are very popular tools nowadays and are sometimes more powerful than text, it can be checked whether they have more influence on the Click-through intention if these elements are added to an email newsletter.

6. Conclusion

This research has focused on which design elements have an effect on the click-through intent of recipients of email newsletters. The main effect was investigated with the variables color, length and link placement. Interaction effects between these variables were also investigated. In addition, possible mediation variables were considered. These were credibility and attitude and the covariate familiarity was taken into account.

According to previous studies using these variables, it was suggested that these three design elements (color, length and link placement) could have a positive effect on the click-through intention of the newsletter recipient, but this study showed that only color has a direct effect on click-through intention. A colorful newsletter provides a higher click-through intention than a newsletter that uses more gray tones. However, an interaction effect was found between link placement and length. This interaction effect indicated that when you use a short newsletter, the link can be placed at the bottom of the newsletter to click through to, for example, a webshop and that if you use a long newsletter, it is better to place the link at the top.

When we look at the outcomes of the mediation effects, it emerges that attitude is a full mediator in this study. Credibility is in this case a partial mediator. Color continued to have a significant effect on click-through intention when the variable credibility is included in the study. The covariate in this study has been included in all analyzes and it has been found that when people are more familiar with the company that sends the newsletter, they also have a more positive attitude and credibility towards the company than when people are not familiar with the company.

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Appendix 1 - Pre-test questions

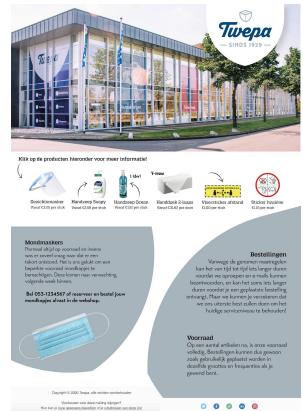
Waar zijn volgens jou de klikbare producten geplaatst in de e-mail nieuwsbrief die je zojuist hebt gezien? 1 vertegenwoordigt bovenaan de nieuwsbrief en 7 vertegenwoordigt onderaan de nieuwsbrief. Bovenaan O O O O O O Onderaan Is de e-mail nieuwsbrief die je zojuist hebt gezien naar jouw mening kort of lang? 1 staat voor kort en 7 staat voor lang. Kort O O O O O O Lang Bevat volgens jou de e-mail nieuwsbrief die je zojuist gezien hebt te veel of te weinig tekst bevat? 1 staat voor te veel tekst en 7 staat voor te weinig tekst. Veel tekst OOOOO te weinig tekst Is de e-mail nieuwsbrief die je zojuist gezien hebt naar jouw mening kleurrijk of kleurloos? 1 staat voor kleurrijk en 7 staat voor kleurloos. Kleurrijk O O O O O O Kleurloos Hoe realistisch vind jij dat het ontwerp van de e-mail nieuwsbrief die je zojuist hebt 1 vertegenwoordigt zeer realistisch en 7 vertegenwoordigt zeer onrealistisch. Zeer realistisch

Appendix 2 - Used stimuli

Short, colorful, link placement at top



Short, greyscale, link placed at top



Short, colorful, link placed at bottom



Short, greyscale, link placed at bottom



Long, colorful, link placed at top



Klik op de producten hieronder voor meer informatie!













ege de genomen maatregelen et van tijd tot tijd iets langer duren at we oproepen en e-mails kunnen woorden, en kan het soms iets langer voordat je een geplaatste bestelling ngt. Maar we kunnen je verzekeren di s uiterste best zullen doen om het e serviceniveau te behouden!

Misschien ook interessant voor jou:







Advanced antibacteriële handgel knijpfles à 100 ml

ndig knijpflesje voor onderweg. Deze antibactieriële har akt je handen schoon zonder gebruik te hoeven maken ter, zeep of een handdoek. Ideaal voor onderweg. Makk e te nemen naar werk, in de auto, op school of op reis.



Op een aantal artikelen na, is onze voorraad volledig. Bestellingen kunnen dus gewoon zoals gebruikelijk geplaatst worden in dezelfde groottes en frequenties als je gewend bent.







Long, greyscale, link placed at top



Klik op de producten hieronder voor meer informatie!











Handzeep Ocean

Handdoek 2-laags

Vloersticker afstand

Sticker hygiëne

Bestellingen
Vanwege de genomen maatregelen
kan het van tijd tot tijd iets langer duren
voordat we oproepen en e-mails kunnen
beantwoorden, en kan het soms iets langer
duren voordat je een geplaatste bestelling
ontvangt. Maar we kunnen je verzekeren de
we ons uiterste best zullen doen om het
huidige serviceniveau te behouden!

Mondmaskers
Normaal altijd op voorraad en ineens
was er zoveel vraag naar dat er een
tekort ontstond. Het is ons gelukt om een
beperkte voorraad mondkapjes te
bemachtigen. Deze komen naar verwochting
volgende week binnen.

Bel 053-1234567 of reserveer en bestel jouw mondkapjes alvast in de webshop.

Misschien ook interessant voor jou:



Desinfectie foamspray Wecovi 750 ml

Desinfectie Airinscare 500ml



Advanced antibacteriële handgel knijpfles à 100 ml



Voorraad

Op een aantal artikelen na, is onze voorraad volledig. Bestellingen kunnen dus gewoon zoals gebruikelijk geplaatst worden in dezelfde groottes en frequenties als je gewend bent.

Voorkeuren voor deze malling wijzigen? Hier kun je jouw gegevens bijwerken of je uitschrijven van deze lijst









Long, colorful, link placed at bottom

Long, greyscale, link placed at bottom



Appendix 3 - Main research questions

Wat is je geslacht?					
ManVrouwAnders, namelijkZeg ik liever niet.					
Wat is je hoogst afger MAVO/ HAVO/ VWO MBO HBO WO		g			
Wat is je leeftijd? Mijn leeftijd is: Zeg ik liever niet.					
Hoe vaak ontvang jij r	Helemaal nooit	Nooit	Soms	Vaak	Heel vaak
nieuwsbrieven	eantal vragen	met betrek	king tot Tweps		0
Hieronder volgen een aantal vragen met betrekking tot Twepa. Beantwoord de volgende vragen:					
	Helemaal eens	Eens	Niet eens, niet oneens	Oneens	Helemaal oneens
Ik ben bekend met Twepa.	0	0	0	0	0
Ik heb ervaring met het kopen van producten bij Twepa.	0	0	0	0	0
Ik heb ervaring met het ontvangen van email nieuwsbrieven van Twepa.	0	0	0	0	0
Ik heb kennis van Twepa.	0	0	0	0	0

Beantwoord de volgende vragen:

	Helemaal eens	Eens	Niet eens, niet oneens	Oneens	Helemaal oneens
Na het zien van de email nieuwsbrief ben ik ben van plan door te klikken naar de website van Twepa	0	0	0	0	0
Vanuit de aangeboden nieuwsbrief zal ik waarschijnlijk doorklikken naar de website van Twepa.	0	0	0	0	0
Na het zien van de email nieuwsbrief koop ik zeer waarschijnlijk een product van Twepa.	0	0	0	0	0
Ik ben van plan door te klikken naar de website van Twepa.	0	0	0	0	0
Beantwoord de volger	nde vragen:				
	Helemaal eens	Eens	Niet eens, niet oneens	Oneens	Helemaal oneens
Ik vind deze nieuwsbrief leuk.	0	0	0	0	0
Ik vind deze nieuwsbrief nuttig.	0	0	0	0	0
Ik vind deze nieuwsbrief interessant	0	0	0	0	0
lk vind deze nieuwsbrief goed.	0	0	0	0	0
Beantwoord de volgende vragen:					
	Helemaal eens	Eens	Niet eens, niet oneens	Oneens	Helemaal oneens
De nieuwsbrief van twepa is geloofwaardig.	0	0	0	0	0
De nieuwsbrief van twepa is accuraat.	0	0	0	0	0
De nieuwsbrief van twepa is authentiek.	0	0	0	0	0
De nieuwsbrief van twepa is betrouwbaar.	0	0	0	0	0
De nieuwsbrief van twepa is geloofwaardig.	0	0	0	0	0

Waar vind jij dat de klikbare pro	ducten zich bevinden i	in de email niewsbrief die je
zojuist hebt gezien?		
Bovenaan	00000	Onderaan
Hoe zou jij de e-mailnieuwsbrie	f, die je zojuist hebt ge	ezien, omschrijven?
Kleurrijk	00000	Grijstinten
Hoe zou jij de lengte van de e-n omschrijven?	nailnieuwsbrief, die je z	zojuist hebt gezien,
Erg kort	00000	Erg lang