

ARTICLE

EFFECTS OF HUMOR APPEAL, THE PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT DEGREE AND GENDER ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRAND

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ABSTRACT

Being inspired by communication patterns, marketing tries to change the consumers' attitudes. The capabilities of marketing messages in changing the consumers' attitudes depend on the credibility, appeal, method of message framing, its transmission method and the quality of conveying the message. Various appeals in marketing messages can be used in achieving marketing goals. The approach we face today is using humor in advertising for products and services; which has become a prevailing method. This paper studies the effects of humor appeal in commercial ads, the mental engagement of products and gender on attitudes towards ads, and attitudes towards brand, in template of six hypotheses. The research method of this study is trial and the factorial designs in 8 modes or 2 x 2 x 2 situations have been used. The data was collected by questionnaires and pictures. The products studied in this research were ice-cream and mobile phone and college students were the statistical population of the research. The findings showed humor in ads is effective in customers' behavior; however, variables such as gender of audiences and the degree of mental involvement of the products shall be considered as well.

INTRODUCTION

A large portion of advertisement messages which are nowadays reflected and published via mass media has a one sided- invasive, advertisement and complementary nature and for this reason, they lack the necessary efficiency and effects on the audience. In fact, the amount of the message effectiveness on the audience depends on whether or not the audience is recipient of the transmitted message; and if he/she finds it in alignment with his/her demands, interests, views and best interests. In the modern theories of communication science, it has been discussed that a series of steps must be taken in the process of publishing a message to make it effective on audiences. The first step is receiving the message completely, comprehensively, understandably; and being acceptable for the audiences. And, other stage is the effect on audience and acting accordingly. By considering the psychological concepts, the commercial ads use a series of appeals, methods and executive procedures for affecting the audience, attracting the audience and transmitting a message temporarily. In the present research, the product involvement (up and down), the audiences' gender (female and male) and the type of appeal used in the ads (humor and non-humor), effort has been made to measure the degree of effectiveness of those variables on the attitudes towards the ads, and attitudes towards the brand.

THE EXPRESSION OF THE PROBLEM

In the consumption-centered world of today, advertisement is considered as an important element for producers and in this venue, the entrepreneurs and the economic managers of different countries around the world try to introduce and advertise their products by benefitting from specific and new facilities and ideas. This is a highly important subject to see in the pile of the advertisements, what attitudes customers show towards the ads and brands and what factors direct the potential consumers to attempt the purchases. In fact, among large volumes of advertisement messages, audiences only pay attention to messages which appear attractive and appealing to them.

Humor appeal is one of the attractions which are used in advertisement and it has been also studied in the present research. Humor could be effective on the quality of attitude and behavior. Ads with funny contents become more prevailed and known by people, and remain in memory more than other ads; and show stronger effectiveness in attracting the customer, Humorous works are defined by these findings in such an extent that different audiences show reactions to advertisement messages with humor content in various ways. In a study, it was revealed women show more negative reactions to introducing humor in advertisements than men; therefore, since studying the appeals of humor and recipients simultaneously

KEY WORDS

Humor, Mental involvement of product, attitude towards brand, attitude towards ads

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and their effects separately on females and males have been ignored in previous researchers; and hence, it can be taken as a vague issue, this research has tried to study this issue.

Therefore; the main question of this research is: What are the effects of humor appeal in commercial ads, the degree of mental involvement of the product and gender on the attitude towards ads and towards brand?

RESEARCH HISTORY AND LITERATURE

The Elaborative Likelihood Model (ELM) explains how involvement in a stimulating message changes the attitudes of the message recipient. According to this model, the degree of person's involvement in the course of message processing is considered an important factor in determining the path of persuading him/her [1]. Individuals form their attitudes via two persuasive paths; the main path and the auxiliary or side path. In the main path process, if individual can explain the message with more precision, there is a higher possibility of being persuaded; therefore, this message acts stronger when it can be both persuasive and stimulating. In processing the side path, signs such as humor appeal changes individuals' attitudes without going through the message reasoning and arguments. People might be convinced through factors other than the contents of the message; therefore, the humor appeal shall move more through side paths in order to persuade individuals.

The Elaborative Likelihood Model (ELM) [1, 2, 3] suggests that product involvement is one of the important variables that motivates customers in their processing the advertisement. According to this model, if the message recipients have high involvement with the product, they will show more concerns on the message arguments in discussing the characteristics of the brand and its advantages. As a result, the recipients act with more motivation to show more careful precision and form their attitudes via the main path.

When the customers show less involvement in products, using side signs could change their attitudes. Therefore, we assume the involvement of products will modify the effects of emotional appeals on the attitudes, including attitudes towards ads; and the humor appeals on this attitude by customers with low involvement will have more positive effects in comparison with customers with high involvement. On the other hand, since the effects of these appeals on products with high involvement are not studied seriously, this research tries to study their effects simultaneously on two products, one with low involvement and the other with high involvement.

The elaborative likelihood model (ELM) [2] determines when individual's processing motivations, abilities and opportunities are higher, persuading them will take place via main paths. In the absence of any of the mentioned factors, audiences refer to the side process of message based on other signs. When consumer notices the information in a persuasive message is related to him/or or in one way, it will be interesting for him/her, he/she will pay attention to the contents of the message with care. In this condition, it is possible for him/her to think actively on the subjects the marketer presents and develops cognitive responses for these subjects. In our central path, we establish and evaluate beliefs carefully and the strongly formed attitudes direct our goal. The implied conclusion is the factors related to the message specify the amount of change in the attitude. Products with high involvement intend to create main processing; that is, consumers will show the necessary cognitive efforts for assessing arguments and reasoning related to the subject which is shown to them. Under these conditions, consumers incline to focus on high recognition signs including the attitude and performance of information for evaluating the products. In turn, when we actually have no motivation to think about the discussions introduced by marketers, we take the side path towards encouragement. In turn, it is possible to use other signs for making decisions on the method of reacting to the message. These signs include packaging the product, appeal of the resource and/or the environment where the message appears. When consumers do not pay attention to a product, its presentation method (for example, which supports it and/or the images which are shown with it) might become more important.

This question of whether or not humor appeal could be effective for products with low and high products could deserves to be studied more by linking the principles and findings that support the two theories of persuasion. Clearly, according to the side path, the method in which the humor appeal acts in advertisement works at least when product involvement is low. Although, perhaps this might happen for the products with high involvement. Based on the above-mentioned issues, what is anticipated is humor appeal is more effective in the class of products with low involvement than products with high involvement.

This research simultaneously studies the effect of humor appeal in advertisements on the products with low and high involvement and the advantage of this method than other researches is it has separated the audiences based on gender and measures the effects of the mentioned factors on each group; for, studied showed women show more negative reactions than men towards humor in advertisement.

Different definitions have been introduced on the effects of advertisement [4], and for measuring the effects of humor appeals in advertisement, it is necessary to measure some attitudes. The specific attitudes which are studied in this research include attitudes towards advertisement (A_{AD}) and attitudes towards brand (A_{BR}). Although the attitude is structural and exists everywhere, an absence of an integrated

and compatible definition of it could be seen in marketing literature. In any event, there is a general agreement the attitude is followed by an emotional evaluation [5]; and this evaluation could be positive, neutral or negative. One of the most effective theories in marketing research is "attitude towards ads" [6, 7]. The theoretical literature defines attitudes towards ad as "inclination to respond in a desirable or undesirable method to a specific advertisement stimuli in the course of exposure to a specific situation" [8, 9]. Sometimes, individual's attitudes towards something can affect his/her attitudes towards other things which he is in connection with [10]. In this sense, the consumers' enthusiasm to ads could be drawn towards visualization of brand in the same advertisement. Therefore, attitudes towards ads play important role in the effectiveness of consumers' attitudes towards brand and their intention towards purchase in direct and indirect methods. Attitudes that form towards advertisement are effective on the customers' attitudes towards the brand as well as the purchase target of the customers [6, 8]. If the final goal of advertisement is to establish positive attitudes towards ads and brand, increase in the likelihood of purchase or the positive emotional response towards an advertisement could serve as the best index in evaluating the effectiveness of advertisement [11, 12]. Many researchers have shown a positive emotional response to an advertisement has positive and direct relationship with identifying the brand and positive attitudes towards the brand and the purchase goal of customers [11]. It seems when customers like a specific advertisement, perhaps they will like the advertised brand as well and the customer will become more prepared for buying it. It is not important how much time, effort or money are spent for an advertisement, it is important that marketers shall have faith the advertisement with the effects on the attitudes of consumers is considered as a key element in selling products and services.

Attitudes towards brand are inclination to respond to a specific brand in desirable or undesirable method after showing people the advertisement stimuli [13]. In different studies, this result was obtained that attitudes towards brand play an important role in the purpose of purchasing [14, 15, 16].

Researchers showed attitude towards brand which is defined as inclination to responding a specific brands in a desirable or undesirable method [6], is affected by attitude towards ads [17, 18]. As there is more probability the side signs could affect the attitude towards ads for the products with low involvement, attitudes towards ads must be more effective on the attitudes towards brand among products with low involvement [6]; therefore, it is anticipated humor appeal have more positive effects on the attitudes towards brand in the products with low involvement than products with high involvement.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis one: The customers' gender has significant effect on customers' behavior (attitude towards ads, attitude towards brand).

Hypothesis two: The degree of mental involvement of the product has significant effects on customer's behaviors (attitudes towards ads, attitude towards brands).

Hypothesis three: Humor in advertisement has significant effects on customer's behaviors (attitude towards ads, attitude towards brand).

Hypothesis four: There is a significant interaction between customers' gender and the degree of mental involvement of products in affecting the customer's behavior.

Hypothesis five: There is a significant interaction between the customers' gender and the amount of ads humor in affecting customer's behavior (attitudes towards ads, attitudes towards brand).

Hypothesis six: There is a significant interaction between mental involvement of the product and humor in advertisements in effecting customer's behavior (attitudes towards ads, attitude towards brand).

METHOD

In terms of goal, the present research is applied or work-bound and the research methodology used in this research is experimental. trial. The factorial designs 2 x 2 x 2 in 8 modes or conditions are used.

Selection of products: In first stage, by using the questionnaire of Ph.D. students in merely marketing area, we divided the class of products as per high and low involvement. In the inferential analysis and extracting the results of the research for selecting the goods, the one-factor variance analysis (ANOVA) was used. After making the analysis, ice-cream was chosen as a product with low involvement and mobile phone was chosen as a product with high involvement.

Selecting the brand name of the products: Since the goal of this research is to study the effect of humor appeal and confirmers in advertisements on the three variables of attitude towards ads, attitudes towards brand and the purchase purpose of the customer; with respect to the previous researches and considering the previous researches and the fact that individuals have some attitudes and beliefs (whether positive and negative); thus, one brand has been made for each product subject of study in this

research, which do not exist in the market so the respondents will have no previous mentality. For the ice-cream, a brand named “Chana” (meaning brunch) was selected which could be suitable for the messages in the ads; and for mobile phone, “Zino” meaning (In Farsi) living and durable was chosen.

Manipulating variables: Two ads (humors and non-humorous) were produced for each product. The products were selected with respect to the intensity of their involvement (high involvement and low involvement).The audiences were divided as per gender (female/male) to study their attitudes towards ads, brand and their purpose of purchases.

Statistical population, taking samples and size of the sample: This study was performed in Azad University, Science and Research Branch, which is one of the reputable universities of Iran. In this study, the number of states which were considered was 8 (2 x 2 x 2). Therefore, by the assumption of giving one scenario to each subject at random, the number which is considered per scenario is for 30 subjects. This number has been obtained based on past studies [19]. The number which is considered is in total 240 subjects. Each subject saw one picture and answered the questionnaire. The questions developed for attitude to brand is in five option semantic differentiation; and the questions for attitudes towards ads were in the five-question Likert type.

Data Analysis methods and tools: The data analysis methods in the present research were inferential statistics in parametric type. In the present study, MANOVA statistical methods were used as required and for data analysis; and the research hypothesis has been analyzed by using SPSS software.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the results obtained from variance analysis, the Fischer Statistic on the two variables of attitudes towards ad and attitudes towards brand in the three variables of the existence of humor, gender and mental involvement were higher than critical value; and in another expression, the significance level which has been calculated is smaller than 0.05. As a result, the hypothesis zero (0) is rejected in 95% level and the difference of mean (score) in attitudes towards ads and attitudes towards brand in both female and male groups, the existence or absence of humor and high and low mental involvement is confirmed. In addition, the results obtained reveal the existence of interactive effects of involvement and humor; and the mental involvement is rejected (the significance level became more than 0.05)[Table 1 & Table 2].

Table 1: The indexes of central trend and dispersion of dependent variables as per the independent variables

Dependent variable	Factors	Levels	Mean	Criteria deviation
Attitudes towards ads	Gender	Male	24.19	7.22
		Female	28.58	7.71
	Involvement	High involvement	24.42	7.99
		Low involvement	28.35	7.06
	Humor	No humor	23.91	7.70
		Humorous	28.86	7.05
Attitudes towards brand	Gender	Male	19.50	6.13
		Female	23.53	6.67
	Involvement	High involvement	19.72	6.97
		Low involvement	23.31	5.93
	Humor	No humor	19.71	6.73
		Humorous	23.32	6.20

Table 2: Results of three-side variance analysis related to the variables of attitudes towards ads and brand

Source of changes		Mean square	F Value	Significance level	Size of effect	Results
Humor	Attitudes towards brand	1566.019	50.057	0.000	0.096	Confirmed
	Attitudes towards ads	2945.252	70.894	0.000	0.131	Confirmed
Involvement	Attitudes towards brand	1551.602	49.597	0.000	0.095	Confirmed
	Attitudes towards ads	1844.752	44.404	0.000	0.086	Confirmed
Gender	Attitudes towards brand	1948.102	62.271	0.000	0.117	Confirmed
	Attitudes towards ads	2318.802	55.815	0.000	0.106	Confirmed
Involvement *Humor	Attitudes towards brand	1691.252	54.060	0.000	0.103	Confirmed
	Attitudes towards ads	2283.769	54.971	0.000	0.104	Confirmed
Gender*humor	Attitudes towards brand	11.102	0.355	0.552	0.001	Rejected
	Attitudes towards ads	3.502	0.084	0.772	0.000	Rejected
Involvement *Gender	Attitudes towards brand	0.019	0.001	0.980	0.000	Rejected
	Attitudes towards ads	0.752	0.018	0.893	0.000	Rejected

Involvement*Humor Gender	Attitudes towards brand	31.519	1.007	0.316	0.002	Rejected
	Attitudes towards ads	1.752	0.042	0.837	0.000	Rejected
Error	Attitudes towards brand	31.284				Rejected
	Attitudes towards ads	41.545				

- A) With regards to the mean score of responses, it could be said the attitudes towards ads and brand were stronger in females; therefore, it can be concluded when the customers are female, the mean score in attitude towards ads and brand is higher than when the customers are male. The degree of the effect shows attitude towards brand was affected by the gender in 11.6% and the attitudes towards ad was effective in 10.6%.
- B) By considering the mean score of responses, the attitude towards in brand and ads in high involvement level is higher; thus, it could be concluded when involvement is higher, the mean score of attitude towards the brand and ads will be higher from the time when the involvement is lower. The size of the effect shows attitude towards brand was affected by involvement in 9.5% score and the attitude towards ads was affected in 8.6%.
- C) By considering the mean value of responses towards brand and ads is higher in the existence of humor; thus, it can be concluded when there is humor involved, the mean score of attitude towards brand and ads will be higher from the time when humor is absent. The value of the size of effects shows that attitude towards brand was 9.6% affected by the humor existence and the attitude towards brand was affected 13.6%.

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PRESENT RESEARCH

1. First, it is recommended to conduct a research similar to the variables similar to actual ads and brand.
2. In the next researches, different products could be used.
3. In this research, humor add appeals are used and in the future researches, those appeals can be changed.
4. In the present study, the inquired persons were college students and in the next researches the heavy users of the same product can be questioned.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHES

1. Based on this, the advertisers shall try to use suitable advertisement appeals based on the amount of product involvement (low involvement, high involvement) as well as the gender of audiences.
2. As the results show, in case of the existence of humor in ads, attitudes towards ads and brand increase. Ads with more humorous contents become more popular and remain in mind more than other ads; and, by creating positive feeling, they have positive stronger effectiveness in attracting customers. The marketing specialists shall pay attention to this point that for sensitive goods with high involvement, using humor does not have much application and are mostly used in advertising goods with low involvement.
3. In general, the results showed when the products have higher involvement; marketers shall act very cautious in designing the ads and their contents. Since the risk of buying and the price of those goods are very high, audiences proceed with more care and pay less attention to the advertisement appeals.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
There is no conflict of interest.

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