

Humour Appeals and Advertising Recall: A Review of Extant Literature

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Abstract

The study is on humour appeals and advertising recall. It is a self-affirmative study conducted to determine whether the use of humour contributes to product and service recall among the target audience of advertising campaigns. The researchers relied on library research method to gather data for the study. Thus, the study is a complete review of extant literature. The researchers advanced that humour in advertising enables consumers to recall advertising. It was also argued that humorous advertising has a way of drawing attention of the consumers to advertised products and services and it may also aid product recall and brand loyalty. Based on the arguments advanced, the researchers concluded that humour appeal is very important in advertising as it helps consumers to retain and remember advertised products. Based on the conclusion, the researchers recommended, among others that advertisers should always use humour appeals to enhance the patronage of advertised products as it is one of the ways of winning customers' loyalty and that advertisers should combine humour appeals with other types of appeals so that the combination will further enhance product patronage.

Keywords: Humour Appeal, Advertising, Consumers, Product Recall, Brand Loyalty

Introduction

Advertising appeals are used to catch attention of the target audience, to arouse interest, create desire and compel desired action (Asemah, 2011). In other words, advertising appeals are used to attract and draw the attention of consumers and also, to influence their feelings towards products and services. Advertising according to Arens (2008) is a structured and composed non-personal communication of information usually persuasive in nature about products, services and ideas by identified sponsors, through the various mass media. Advertising appeal is a stimulant that compels or propels the consumers to choose and patronise a particular product. Advertising appeals if well utilised pierce the inner thought of an individual as well as reinforce his motive.

Advertising appeal is emphatically aimed to influence the way consumers view themselves and how buying a certain product can prove to be beneficial to them. The message conveyed through all appeals influence the purchasing decision of the consumer. Advertisers use different communication styles to drive home their points. This communication is usually through various forms of paid media like television/radio

commercials, print media advertisement, bill board and more recently, product placement. This marketing communication is used to encourage, persuade, motivate and mobilise consumers to purchase products and use services of companies and organisations.

Asemah (2019) notes that humour is one of the most common and frequently used emotional appeals in advertising; humour is an unavoidable tool for the positioning and promotion of brands and increasing the sales of products. Humorous advertisements work best with established and commonly purchased products such as cell phones, fast food and alcoholic beverages. Advertisers use this strategy to attract customers to their products. People will pay more attention to a humorous commercial than a factual or serious one, opening themselves up to be influenced. The key to funny advertising is assuring that the humour is appropriate to both products and customers. The balance between funny and obnoxious can often be delicate and a marketer must be certain that the positive effects outweigh the negative effects before an advertisement can be introduced.

On the most basic level, something that connects all humans is laughter. Laughter is an important part of human psychology as it gives us a way to process all kinds of information, from funny stimuli to a situation where laughing is the only possible reaction because circumstances are tough. Humour grabs our attention and that is why it is often used in advertising (Point Park University, 2020). Based on the foregoing, the researchers set to examine the influence of humour on product recall and patronage.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Hawkins Stern impulse buying theory. Hawkins Stern totally believes in the idea of impulse behaviour. Stern argued that sudden buying impulses fit alongside rational purchasing decisions to paint a complete picture of the average consumer. Impulse purchases are driven largely by external stimuli and have almost no relationship to traditional decision-making. Stern established four categories of impulse buying. First are the pure impulse purchases, like a candy bar at the checkout line of a grocery store. Second, consumers make reminded impulse buys, like placing a display of hot dog buns next to a meat cooler. Third, are suggested impulse purchases, such as a warranty for an electronic device. Finally, consumers make planned impulse decisions, where they know they want to buy a product, but are unsure about the specifics (<https://onlinemasters.ohio.edu/blog/four-consumer-behavior-theories-every-marketer-should-know>, as cited in Asemah *et al* 2020).

Impulse buying theories present an ocean of opportunities for marketers. Every aspect of a product, from the way the packaging catches the eye, to the way the product is displayed in the store, has an impact on a consumer's impulse control. Marketers who can capture the impulsive thought and close the sale will have the most success (<https://onlinemasters.ohio.edu/blog/four-consumer-behavior-theories-every-marketer-should-know/>, as cited in Asemah *et al* 2020). The relevance of this theory to this study is based on the fact that a well-packaged advertising message, when communicated effectively can change the feelings of the audience towards acquisition and acceptance of an advertised product or service positively.

Conceptual Review

Advertising is one of the most powerful communicational tools that almost every company uses in order to promote its products or services (ASA, 2008, cited in Asemah, 2017). Advertising is a form of communication for marketing and used to encourage, persuade or manipulate an audience (viewers, readers or listeners; sometimes, a specific group) to continue to take some new actions. Most commonly, the desired result is to drive consumer behaviour with respect to a commercial offering; although, political and ideological advertising are also common (Maitra, n. d, cited in Asemah, 2017). Thus, advertising can be said to be a paid non-personal communication about an organisation and its products that is transmitted to a target audience, through a mass medium; it is a kind of promotional activity. Advertising is a small word, but it is a whole world in itself. In this materialistic world, we are surrounded with a number of products/brands; each company is battling for consumer mind space and this has increased the scope of advertising. Advertising is all-pervasive and is becoming a powerful force, shaping attitudes and behaviours in today's world (Maitra, n. d, cited in Asemah, 2017).

Advertising, as described by Arens (2008), cited in Asemah (2011) is any communication that is paid for, identified by a sponsor, directed at a targeted audience, through the various mass media like television, radio, bill boards, newspaper and magazine, with the aim of creating awareness about goods and services. Arens (2008, p. 7) says that advertising is a structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about product, services and ideas, by identified sponsors through various mass media. Advertising is seen as the process of persuading potential customers to buy products or promote its services. This simply implies that advertising is a way of calling attention to a product, service or good. Thus, when an advertising campaign is carried out, it means that the company is directly or indirectly communicating with the users of a product or service.

Humour, as noted by Asemah *et al* (2020) is a strong tool of persuasion that makes use of amusement to draw and sustain the attention to a product or service. Advertisers and advertising agencies can design advertisements to arouse laughter, but also, provide little information about the product or service. In creating laughter, advertisers show their products or services in an attempt to connect those good feelings to their products or services. This is very effective because consumers remember advertisements easily and associate positive feelings with the product (Asemah *et al* 2010). Many advertisers use humour because it grabs the attention of the audience and it is a powerful persuasion technique. Advertisers make us laugh and then show us their products or logos because they are trying to connect those good feelings to their products. They hope that when we see their products in a store, we will subtly re-experience that good feeling and select their products (Asemah *et al* 2010). There are basically five types of humour; these include comic wit- incongruity resolution humour (level of respondent surprise); sentimental humour- arousal safety (the degree of effected relief); satire-incongruity resolution and dispositional humour (identification with or detachment from the humour's victim); sentimental comedy-incongruity resolution and arousal safety humour and full comedy- incongruity resolution, dispositional and arousal safety humour (Djambaska, 2016).

Review of Previous Studies

Hoang (2013) conducted research on the impact of humour in advertising on consumers' purchase decision. The purpose of Hoang's study was to study the consumer decision process and its determinants, explore the concept and usage of humour in advertising to find out its impacts on consumers' purchase decision. Hoang (2013) found that personification, surprise, silliness and exaggeration humour are effective in attracting attention, but can distract consumers from urges to purchase; pun, sarcasm and comparison were perceived as not suitable to target audiences. The findings also showed that humorous advertising has impact on consumers' recall when accompanied by aligning campaign and product placement. Humour has relatively impacted on encouraging repurchases, but appropriate for building brand image and gain consumers' fondness.

Kovindasamy & Ogundare (2017) investigated humour advertisement and its influence on consumer purchasing decision. The main aim of the study was to determine the impact of humorous advertisement on the purchasing decision of Malaysian consumers. The findings showed that humour advertisement has always remained important to the marketers. The results revealed that a significant relationship exists between humour advertisement and purchase decision, attitude towards brand, attitude towards quality, attitude towards presentation and attitude towards entertainment. The findings also showed a strong correlation between humour advertisement and attitude towards advertisement and consumer purchase decision.

Elbers (2013) examined the effects of different humour tool groups in television advertisements for customers with different motivational values by making use of eighteen different advertisements and the results showed that humorous advertisements can lead to higher purchase intentions. The study of Lee & Lim (2008) showed that it is possible to predict the humour effectiveness in a television advertisement under various cultural orientations. Their study was based on two Hofstede dimensions: individualism–collectivism (1) and uncertainty avoidance (2) and one of their conclusions was that in collectivistic cultures, advertisements are liked better when the humour devices are based on arousal safety. Another main finding in their research was that humour advertising and humorous advertisements & motivational value culture are related and that it should always be kept in mind that the interpretation of humour advertisements always happens within a culturally-constituted world (cited in Elbes, 2013). Mehmood & Masmood (2016) carried out a study with the main aim of finding out the impact of humour in advertising on consumer purchase intention in Ufone network out of telecommunication sector of Pakistan. The findings showed that humour in advertising has significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

According to Kotler (2009), marketing is totally about customers; hence, the core mission of marketers is to provide the solution to customers' needs and wants by identifying and meeting them. Advertising as a component of the promotional mix further enhances creation of customers' awareness towards organisational products and then the need to patronise such products if they meet the needs, expectations and satisfaction of the consumers (Belch & Belch, 2003). Morden (2001) notes that advertising is used to establish a basic awareness of the product or service in the mind of the potential customer and to build up knowledge about it. Kotler (2002) sees advertising as one of the four

major tools companies use to direct persuasive communications to target buyers and public noting that it consists of non-personal forms of communication conducted through paid media under clear sponsorship. According to Kotler (2002), the purpose of advertising is to enhance prospects' responses to the organisation and its offering.

Humour and attention studies have revealed that 94% of advertising practitioners see humour as a useful way to increase attention. Moreover, 55% of advertising research executives found humour to be better to non-humour in gaining attention. Whereas the special views of advertising executives should not be equated with accurate hypothesis testing, these views do mirror a knowledge-base built on years of day to day understanding with proper research outcome (Madden & Weinberger, 1982; Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Powell & Andresen, 1985; Stewart & Furse, 1986, Weinberger & Campbell 1991, cited in UkEssays, 2020).

Methodology

The researchers adopted the library research method where secondary sources of data collection formed the method of data collection. The researchers consulted books, journals, online materials and edited books to obtain relevant information. Thus, the materials were reviewed and opinions formed on the subject matter.

Implications of Humour Appeals for Product Recall and Patronage

Humorous advertising has a way of drawing attention of the consumers to advertised products and services and it may also aid product recall and brand loyalty; this is because people easily get attracted to funny advertisements and transfer those positive feelings to the advertised products and services. Humour is a very powerful tool to that can be used by advertisers and advertising agencies in drawing consumers' attention and creating a positive effect. Thus, the use of humour in advertising in recent times has increased tremendously and it contributes to product recall a great deal. This implies that the use of humour in advertising campaigns draws the attention of consumers to products or services, increases the tendency of the consumers liking the source and creates a positive mood for the product and service. It can also go a long way in affecting comprehension and increasing persuasion of the consumers. Humour appeals make consumers laugh and create an emotional link with the product. A well-executed humour appeal enhances recollection, evaluation and the intent to purchase the product. Advertisers link the product with the humour.

Humour tends to relax the audience, break the ice and create a connection between the communicator and the audience (Tellis, 1998, cited in Hoang, 2013). Humour helps in setting a good mood to transfer message and gain acceptance (Hoang, 2013). Hoang (2013) notes that humorous advertising has impact on consumers' recall when accompanied with aligning campaign and product placement; humour encourages repurchases, but appropriate for building brand's image and gaining consumers' fondness. Humorous advertisements grab attentions and attract viewers' interest by their ability to cut through clutter. Humorous advertisements outperform non-humorous advertisements on each of the attention measures. Humour is often executed by using incongruity, the initial response may be a cognitive recognition of discrepancy (Gullas, 1992; Clow, 2007, cited in Hoang, 2013).

The main objective of advertisements is to grab attention, create likeability for the brand and create a lasting impression. Sometimes, it is observed that consumers remember the context or story of the advertisement paying no attention to the brand being advertised. Humorous situations are said to lower a person's defense and make one more attentive to the message (Srivastava, n. d). Lighter messages have lasting impressions and shared more frequently than serious messages. Humorous advertisements generally have a surprising twist which is unexpected by the audience. These advertisements are generally those which may need to be reinterpreted after the first watch (Srivastava, n. d). They force the audience's mind to shift from the autopilot mode, making them think more and grabbing their attention in the process. Also, humorous advertisements generate positive feelings and bring about a feel-good factor. Laughter releases hormones which relieve stress and gives the audience a feeling of satisfaction by activating the pleasure senses of the brains. Thus, humour advertisement seems to be an effective way to promote a product to the audience. People like to watch funny things in advertisements. Kotler formulated the basic definitions of humorous advertisements by judging whether the advertisements included puns, satire, jokes, slapstick, irony and incongruities. Humour advertising is fast emerging as a new means of advertising (Srivastava, n. d). Nowadays, humour has been used extensively in consumer product advertising on television, radio and in print media as well since humour is the buzz word these days. It is the rooted belief that humour produces desirable effects in persuading consumers to adopt products. Humour is found to influence consumer brand attitude and their brand information recall (Srivastava, n. d). Research has shown that humour is more likely to enhance recall, evaluation and purchase intention when the humorous messages fall in line with the objectives of the advertiser. This is also achievable when the humorous messages are well-integrated with those objectives and viewed as appropriate for the product category.

Advertising that makes people laugh can create an emotional connection between the consumer and a company, product or service. As a result, the message becomes more meaningful and memorable and this can pave the way for future sales. Humour can make consumers feel that they are being entertained as opposed to being the recipient of a sales pitch, which may lessen their natural resistance to the sales process (Chron, 2020). The submission of Chron (2020) is in line with the Hawkins Stern impulse buying theory which says that sudden buying impulses fit alongside rational purchasing decisions to paint a complete picture of the average consumer. Therefore, the use of humour in advertising can lead to impulse buying because it draws the attention of the consumers and makes them to buy the products advertised.

Conclusion

The use of humour appeals in advertising has become important. Advertising practitioners believe that humorous advertisements attract more than non-humour in gaining observer awareness. The humour may get more responses by making advertising more likeable. Thus, this study was carried out to determine the influence of humour appeals on advertising recall. The researchers conclude that humour appeal is very important in advertising as it helps consumers to retain and remember advertised products. Based on the conclusion, the researchers recommend that advertisers should

always use humour appeals to enhance the patronage of advertised products, as it is one of the ways of winning customer loyalty, advertisers should combine humour appeals with other types of appeals so that the combination will further enhance product patronage and that companies should endeavour to always advertise their goods and services as it is one of the ways of increasing patronage.

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