The Impact of Perceived Advertising Creativity on Ad Processing and Responses

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Recent years have witnessed a steady increase in creativity research in marketing, especially in the strategy literature (e.g., Andrews and Smith 1996; Im and Workman 2004; Moorman and Miner 1997). However, with the exception of a handful papers, creativity research in a consumer/advertising context is scarce (e.g., Burroughs and Mick 2004; Zinkhan 1993). In this paper, a structural model is proposed to capture the impact of perceived advertising creativity on consumers’ ad processing and response. Based on previous information processing models (e.g., MacInnis and Jaworski 1989; McGuire 1976), the proposed conceptualization discusses how creativity can affect various stages of information processing (ranging from ad perceptions, motivation to process, to the formation of various ad response variables) and reveals the relationships between ad processing and response variables. In addition, the paper delineates the boundary conditions of the effects of advertising creativity. Specifically, two dimensions of creativity (divergence and relevance) are examined together with ad exposure conditions to shed light on this issue. An experiment supports the proposed conceptual framework.

[to cite]:

[url]:
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Recent years have witnessed a steady increase in creativity research in marketing, especially in the strategy literature (e.g., Andrews and Smith 1996; Im and Workman 2004; Moorman and Miner 1997). However, with the exception of a handful papers, creativity research in a consumer/advertising context is scarce (e.g., Burroughs and Mick 2004; Zinkhan 1993). Even these few papers only focus on the effects of ad creativity on a limited set of outcome variables such as recall/recognition and attitude.

A primary goal of the present paper is to provide process explanations of how creative ads work by proposing an integrative structural model to capture the impact of perceived advertising creativity on consumer ad processing and response. A second objective is to investigate the mechanisms through which creative ads are effective in reducing consumer resistance to persuasive messages. A third objective is to delineate the boundary conditions of the effects of advertising creativity. A fourth goal of the paper is to expand the list of outcome variables currently focused upon by the creativity literature. Specifically, cognitive responses, affective responses and conative responses will be examined (e.g., MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986).

In the current paper, creative ads are defined as ads high in both divergence and relevance. In an advertising context, divergence refers to the extent to which an ad contains elements that are novel, different, or unusual in some way. While divergence is deemed as the central element to the definition of creativity, the ad also must be relevant—it must be meaningful, appropriate or valuable to the audience.

For the structural model, perceived advertising creativity is proposed to affect ad response variables (cognitive, affective and conative responses) via two routes. In the cognitive route, perceived advertising creativity activates an open-minded approach of information processing (heightened desire to postpone closure), which in turn leads to fewer negative statements and more curiosity statements about the brand. Accordingly consumers’ brand attitude is more favorable and their intentions to view the ad again and purchase are enhanced. In the affective route, the positive affect engendered upon viewing creative ads affects downstream ad processing and response variables by (1) indirectly affecting consumers’ desire to postpone closure (2) directly transferring to brand attitude and intention to view the ad again.

The proposed structural framework was examined in a 2 (divergence: high vs. low) x 2 (relevance: high vs. low) x 2 (exposure conditions: directed exposure vs. incidental exposure) experiment. Participants were asked to review an ad embedded in an entertainment news program and provided their answers to a set of questions aiming to measure their ad processing and ad responses. The proposed structural relationships received good empirical support (9 out of 12 hypotheses were supported), providing reasonable support that desire to postpone closure plays the key mediating role in explaining the effect of perceived advertising on ad processing and response variables. Both cognitive route and affective route were found to impact consumers’ ad processing and responses.

REFERENCES