Provocation and Humor in Ad Effects: Constrained Multi-Group Analysis and Beyond

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Conceptualization

It is not easy to stir consumers’ emotions with a routine advertisement because a multitude of advertisements surround them (Armstrong 1995). Advertisers have found a new, albeit controversial way to get their message across. They have begun using shock ads to attempt to capture consumers’ attention from within a media clutter.

Provocative Advertising

Vezi
ta and Paul (1997) suggested the three main characteristics of provocation: distinctiveness, ambiguity and transgression of norms and taboos. Distinctive advertisements have been shown to get greater attention than nondistinctive advertisement (Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard 1986; Rossiter and Percy 1987). If ambiguous ads contain factors which irritate or challenge social norms and standards, they can be called as provocative ads.

Provocative and Humorous Advertising

Humorous provocative advertising can be regarded as the mixture of the humor and the provocative appeal. Though the results of humor appeals in ads remains uncertain, it seems clear that humorous ads have a positive impact on increasing attentions and the liking of the source.

Emotional Response

The Thayer Arousal Model (Thayer 1986; Thayer and Carey 1974) suggests that arousal is a complex phenomenon that comes from the interaction of two dimensions: energy and tension. If the feeling of tension is not excessive, it activates to generate energy, which causes to positive cognitions (La Tour and Pitts 1989). Humor can be used to weaken feelings of tension.

Measures of Emotion: The Self-Assessment Manikin

The self-assessment manikin (Lang 1980) is better than the verbal check list for measuring a respondent’s emotional responses, because the visual method (see Figure 1) eliminates cognitive processing (Lang 1985; Morris and Waine 1993). The validity of SAM and AdSAM (Morris, Woo, Geason, and Kim 2002) a variation of SAM, has been established in a number of studies (Lang 1980; Morris, Bradley, Lang, and Waine 1992; Morris and Waine 1993; Morris, Woo, Geason, and Kim 2002; Morris, Woo, and Cho 2003).

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Provocative ads and humorous provocative ads will generate higher emotional responses on the arousal and dominance dimensions than general ads as measured by the Self-Assessment Manikin (AdSAM) and PAD.

Hypothesis 2: Humorous provocative ads will generate significantly higher levels of pleasure than provocative ads as measured by the Self-Assessment Manikin (AdSAM).

Hypothesis 3: Pleasure levels rather than arousal and dominance in emotional responses to ads as measured by the Self-Assessment Manikin and PAD will have a stronger relationship to the attitude toward advertising, the brand attitude, and the purchase intention.

Methodology

Pretest and Stimuli Selection

Nine print advertisements were created or selected from existing campaigns for pre-testing. There were three potential provocative, three potential humorous provocative, and three potential traditional ‘general’ ads. Since nine print advertisements were selected as stimuli based on the authors’ subjective judgment, they were pre-tested to make sure that they fit the present study. One more advertisement was created as a control.

Respondents

One hundred four students at the university participated in the study. A convenience sample of 55 subjects was recruited from the advertising elements class and 49 responses were randomly collected on campus. The subjects consisted of 56 female students and 48 male students with a mean age of 22.

Procedure

The seven advertisements were randomly ordered in seven different ad sequences. The seven order levels make a block factor and a common group period effect/ no residual effect was assumed since the cross-over design satisfied the strong condition for balance. After viewing each ad, subjects were asked to fill out each seven questionnaires, examining their emotional response, attitude toward the ad and their brand attitude and purchase intention.

Dependent Variables

The AdSAM (Morris, Woo, Geason, and Kim 2002) was used to measure subjects’ emotional responses. The Aad and Ab scale contained four-bipolar scale items with .99 and 98 cronbach’s alpha, respectively (Holbrook and Batra 1987). Purchase intention was measured based on the summed score of a three-item scale (Cronbach’s alpha=.88) used by Bearden, Lichtenstein, and Teel (1984)

Results

Ad execution had a significant effect on pleasure (F=71.393, p<.05), arousal (F=83.936, p<.00), and dominance (F=71.393, p<.00) and following multiple comparison test using Tukey’s HSD showed that the humorous provocative advertisement has a greater influence than the simple provocative and general ad. For the attitude measurement, ad execution had significant effects on Aad (F=52,728, p<.05), Ab (F=20,406, p<.05), and PI (F=5.051, p<.05), and consequently post-hoc tests using Tukey’s HSD concurrently indicated that humorous provocative advertisement had more effect than simple provocative ad on attitude and intention.

Multi-group LISREL (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1997) structural equation modeling reproduced Pearson’s correlation coefficient confirmed the overall linear relationship between the three dimensions of emotional response and attitude dimensions of Aad, Ab, and PI (SRMR=.05 (.04) and CFI=.96 (.98) for provocative (humorous provocative) response grouping. According to the likelihood ratio test (LRT), humorous provocative responses had significantly stronger linear loading patterns than provocative ads.

Conclusion and Discussions

The provocative ad and humorous provocative ad, both of which had provocative factors, were expected to have a strong impact on consumers’ emotional responses. In arousal and dominance, the provocative ad and humorous provocative ad got signifi-
FIGURE 1
AdSAM

FIGURE 2
Multi-group LISREL Structural Equation Modeling with correlated measurement errors between Aad and Ab.

Significantly higher scores than the general ad and the brand name only ad. On the pleasure dimension, the response to the provocative ad is significantly different than to the humorous provocative ad. Based on the MANOVA results, perceived pleasure levels for the humorous provocative ad and the general ad are significantly more positive than the provocative ad and the brand name only ad.

Overall, if one were to choose the general ad over the humorous provocative ad because of the Aad score the level of PI would be lower. If PAD were to be used in combination to select the ad with the better relationship to purchase intention, then the humorous provocative ad would have been selected. The combination of the PAD, therefore, provides better information than Aad when selecting between a provocative, a humorous provocative and a general ad.

References

