Luxury Versus Humor: Contrasting the Use of Art in Advertising

Henrik Hagtvedt, University of Georgia
Vanessa Patrick, University of Georgia

Visual art is extensively used in advertising, but its impact is not clearly understood and has not been systematically studied. This research contrasts the luxury appeal of original artworks with the humor appeal of modified artworks. The polarizing influence of a relevant bond between the artwork and the advertisement is also demonstrated. Further, it is demonstrated that an original artwork works best with a luxury brand positioning, while the humor appeal of a modified artwork works best with a value brand positioning.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13171/volumes/v35/NA-35

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
(thus, increasing favorability of the offer) and less toward the brand associated with the offer. We plan to follow up this study by testing the underlying mechanisms via measurement of arousal and cognitive elaboration, and by examining the moderating effects of consumers’ need for cognition and style of thinking (analytic/holistic) on their response to perceived congruence.

References


Luxury Versus Humor: Contrasting the Use of Art in Advertising
Henrik Hagtvedt, University of Georgia, USA
Vanessa Patrick, University of Georgia, USA

Visual art has been used extensively in advertising (Hetsroni and Tukachinsky 2005). Indeed, such “high-culture images reach more people more often through advertising than through any other medium” (Hoffman 2002). However, while the use of visual art is widespread in advertising, its impact is not clearly understood and has not been systematically studied. We therefore pose the question *whether, when and how* visual art works in advertising.

Since antiquity, art has been associated with a heritage of culture, it has represented a special kind of quest for excellence, and it has connotations of luxury and exclusivity (Hoffman 2002; Margolin 1992; Martorella 1996; Tansey and Kleiner 1996). Indeed, recent research on the art infusion phenomenon (Hagtvedt and Patrick 2006) has suggested that art has a positive influence on the evaluation of products with which it is associated. This research demonstrates that this influence stems from an automatic and content-independent spillover of luxury perceptions.

Importantly, this research has relied on the influence of art in its original form. In advertising practice, however, advertisers use artworks in their original form or modify them to fit their purposes (Hoffman 2002). For instance, the use of the original Rodin’s “Thinker” lends the gravity of art and philosophy to an ad for Dewar’s whiskey, connoting the luxury and sophistication of the brand. On the other hand, artworks may be modified to convey the advertising message with a humor appeal. For example, an ad for Clear Blue pregnancy tests features a painting by Fra Angelico, where the angel Gabriel informs the Virgin Mary that she will bear forth a child. Mary responds: “Thanks, but I already know.”

In this research, we propose that this latter use of art in advertising presents a boundary condition for the art infusion effect. We theorize that artworks in their pure form have integrity, a quality of completeness and incorruptibility. The integrity of an artwork refers to its “wholeness, intactness or purity” (Cox, LaCaze, and Levine 2005). Visual art, like other art forms, maintains this integrity when it remains untouched or untarnished. Consequently, we would expect that any modification of a work of art interferes with this integrity, diluting its impact on the viewer and limiting the potential for art infusion to occur.

Specifically, we propose that when art is used in its original form, the positive spillover of luxury connotations results in a more favorable evaluation of the product and the ad. Conversely, we argue that a modified artwork is no longer categorized as art, but as a humorous image, thus diminishing or eliminating completely the art infusion effect. We test this assertion in two studies.

Study 1: Examining the Relevance and Modification of Art
In study 1, we examine the influence of original (vs. modified) art on product and ad evaluation. In addition, we examine the “fit” of the artwork, i.e. the extent to which the visual image is relevant to the ad message. In investigating the fit of music in advertisements,