Gender Effects in Perceiving Advertising Archetypes

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

  This study will examine the gender effects in perceiving advertising archetypes. Our society is constantly becoming more and more media saturated, and advertisers need to focus on employing evidence-based strategies to reach their target audiences. One repeating pattern throughout advertising is the use of archetypes. This study analyzes the prominent use of archetypes in today's advertising, and factors in information on how gender can potentially impact the effectiveness of archetypes. Many studies in the past have shown females are naturally better at non-verbal communication, and perhaps this translates over into them being able to recognize advertising archetypes better.

Literature Review

Little is known regarding the role of gender when it comes to perceiving archetypes in advertising. The current study's aim is to try and shed light on the matter. This study will consider the gender effects of perceiving advertising archetypes. An archetype is an ideal model after which other things are patterned. It is a deep, symbolic expression whose images are aimed to attract, convince, and overpower (Jung 1940). While relatively similar to the common definition, Carl Jung's definition of an archetype deals more with the human unconscious. Jung is the founder of analytical psychology, and defines an archetype as a collectively inherited unconscious idea, pattern of thought, or image that is present in the unconsciousness of an individual. He found universal patterns present in mythology and stories all over the world, regardless of location, culture, and time period. He hypothesized that part of the human mind contained a collective unconscious shared by all members of the human species. A kind of primal or universal memory. This knowledge is characterized by what we know today as "archetypes." They represent universal and inborn ways of perceiving the world (Groeppel-Klein, Domke, and Bartmann 2006). Jung's collective unconscious theory stands out from all the others.

Archetypes often have a tendency to activate behavior. As a direct result, archetypes are often used in the advertising industry to subtly influence consumers to buy certain services or products. Archetypal advertising spawns from the innate human "unconscious" that we all share and tends to focus on our innate needs. Advertisements using archetypes to reach the audiences innate desires will be more effective than advertisements not focused so much on innate desires.

Symbols are often seen in archetypal branding. They help a company or business truly establish themselves. A symbol is something visible that through convention or association

represents something invisible. To cite and example, the eagle is both a symbol of the United States as well as several universities across America (Princeton University Cognitive Science Lab 2005). Symbols are seen as means of encoding reality and contain figurative and literal meaning (Epstein 1994). For example, a brand's logo or name in general may take on the role of a symbol (Davies and Chun 2003). Very basic visual symbols, such as shapes, can be seen in many company logos. Circles actually symbolize eternity, wholeness, perfection, fluidity, divinity, and completeness. A lot of car companies use circle logos, and it would make sense for them to be attempting to communicate these words to their prospective consumers. Squares, another common shape, are also prevalent in advertising. Squares symbolize stability, rigidity, and earthly qualities. Symbols, in general, are known to help build and strengthen brand identity by making sure that brand attributes are recalled in the consumer's mind each time their specific symbol is seen (Aaker 1995). For this to work, however, there must be a suitable and clearly demarcated fit between the brand and their chosen symbol.

Many character archetypes are used throughout advertising as well. Character archetypes are actually the most common. The 12 main character archetypes include the following: the innocent, the regular guy/girl, the explorer, the sage, the hero, the rebel/outlaw, the magician, the lover, the jester, the caregiver, the creator and the ruler. (See Appendix A for a definition of each archetype).

Archetypes can not only heavily influence the advertising industry, but the marketing industry as well. Archetypes also have a direct effect on brands. Many believe a brand is simply a clever concept or particular product or even an appealing logo, but it is more than that. A brand is a way to separate a certain product from all the rest. It helps assign a specific meaning to a product (Roberts and Marshall 2014). The relationship between a consumer and particular brand

is very intricate and can be affected by many factors. Consumers often have a lot of emotional, physical, and mental ties or feelings to certain products. Consumers "build relationships with brands, they become committed, they become loyal, they create brand repertoires, they switch brands, they love brands and so on" (Wilson and Calder 2006). Brand personality is indispensable to any consumer relationship.

Although Carl Jung is usually highly recognized for his work with archetypes, Joseph Campbell, Margaret Mark, and Carol Pearson made significant contributions as well. Campbell (1949), almost identical to Jung, translates archetypes as basic, recurring symbols across the collective unconscious. Mark and Pearson (2001) are known for reasoning that archetypal marketing and branding was once "an interesting bonus to effective marketing [but] is now a prerequisite." Based on the reasoning of these four people, it is safe to conclude that the inclusion of archetypes is essential for effect brand management. Caldwell, Henry and Alman (2010) believe there are three ways in which an archetype can be integrated into a marketing strategy. The first is through character use in advertising. Companies can be seen employing spokespersons such as the Jolly Green Giant or even Tony the Tiger (Roberts and Marshall 2014). The second way is through a specific brand logo or particular symbol. The Apple Logo is believed to be a good example of this. Mark and Pearson (2001) have hypothesized that the bite mark in the iconic apple represents original sin, which therefore spawns from the Outlaw Archetype. The third way is through product outlets' utilization of archetypes. For example, online giant Amazon has employed the creator archetype "through its reference to the great river and the brand's aspiration to provide abundant opportunities to consumers" (Caldwell, Henry, and Alman 2010).

Since archetypes are commonly communicated nonverbally, perhaps there is a difference between female and males when it comes to perceiving them through advertising. The ability to correctly interpret another's nonverbal behavior is a highly advantageous skill and can make communication in general more effective and much smoother (Rotondo 2000). Nonverbal behavior provides us with a very complete interpretation of a situation and allows us to respond appropriately during interpersonal situations (Rotondo 2000). Nonverbal communication is a highly significant part of every interpersonal interaction. It compromises anywhere from 64% to 93% of all communication (Knapp 1972, Mehrabian 1982). According to Henley, nonverbal communication is defined as what we express through eye contact, use of space, facial expressions, posture, gestures and movements (Henley 1977). In contrast, Hall believes nonverbal communication refers to styles of expression, excluding the actual verbal messages they are sending (Hall 1984).

The study of people's ability to judge the meanings of nonverbal cues has a long history in social psychology, dating to the second decade of this century (Hall 1978). The first question asked in regards to nonverbal communication was if people could recognize nonverbally expressed emotions at all. Gender happened to be one of the attributes of judges to be looked at in relation to judging ability (Hall 1978). Gender has not always been an important attribute in research, however, it was considered important from the start when nonverbal communication began being studied. It was believed to be crucial because of predictions that could be made based on stereotypes regarding gender roles and folk beliefs about "women's intuition" (Hall 1978). Women do usually outperform men on the ability to assess nonverbal behavior. Many suspect this is the case because women are naturally taught to be more emotional and sensitive to at a young age compared to men (Schmid and Bombari 2011). As a result of this, women

typically use a more favorable cognitive processing style than men during the process of nonverbal decoding. Despite assumptions, little is actually known about the mechanisms underlying this gender difference (Schmid and Bombari 2011).

Rosenthal conducted a study with 133 samples from 20 nations, taking into account the relationship between biological sex and decoding ability (Rosenthal 1979). He ended up finding women to be superior nonverbal decoders compared to men. In addition, Hall reviewed 75 nonverbal decoding studies and also indicated that women did better (Hall 1978). There have been countless other studies similar to these, many of them coming back with the same results. Based on these studies, Borisoff and Merrill took it upon themselves to discover why women are better nonverbal decoders compared to men. They attributed it to women's greater levels of empathy as well as to the traditionally subordinate status of women in society (Borisoff 1992). Concerning women's status, a potential link between male dominance and nonverbal decoding accuracy presents itself. Dominance is considered one of the most important dimensions of social interactions. Weitz believes that because of their traditionally oppressed status within society, women are able to better-interpret the actions of others that they perceive as more powerful than themselves (Weitz 1974).

Little is known regarding the role of gender when it comes to perceiving archetypes in advertising. The current study's aim is to try and shed light on the matter. This study will consider the gender effects of perceiving advertising archetypes.

Methodology

Thirty six students enrolled in media classes at a junior college participated in the present experiment for course credit. The only demographic information taken was the participant's' age and gender. The average age of the participants was 20-years-old.. The survey was administered to six classes and took 10-15 minutes to administer.

Data was collected by showing the participating students five commercials, each containing a different character archetype. Before playing the commercials, a definition of each archetype was read to the students. The students were also given a paper copy of the definitions so they could reference them at any time during the experiment. In addition, a general definition about what an archetype itself is was provided. After watching each commercial once, the students were given around 15 seconds to choose from four choices the archetype that they think the advertiser used in their commercial.

The commercials used in the experiment were selected based on their exemplification of character archetypes. The brands embody the archetype characteristics through all of the mediums they advertise through, not just the one specific commercial. The brands chosen include North Face, Apple, Campbell's, Duracell and Levi's. The North Face brand embodies the explorer archetype. The explorer craves adventure. Explorer brands promote themselves as a means to help others experience the new and unknown. Apple represent the creator archetype. The creator is driven by their desire to produce exceptional works. Creator brands often position themselves as the key to unlocking a creator's creativity. Campbell's does a good job of representing the caregiver archetype. The caregiver is driven by their need to protect and care for others. Caregiver businesses offer protection, safety and support to their customers. Duracell embodies the hero archetype. Hero customers value quality in their products. Hero businesses

promote themselves as good quality as well as superior to their competition. Levi's very much so represents the rebel archetype. Rebel brands position themselves as an alternative to the mainstream. Rebel customers value unique or shocking content.

Results
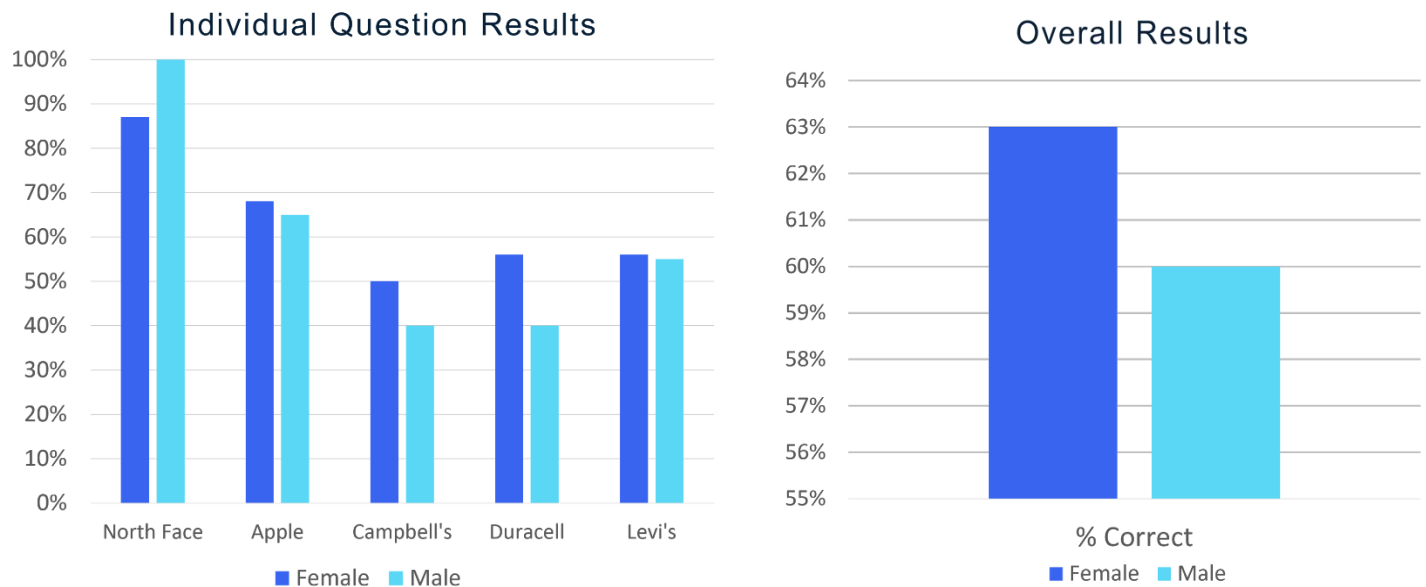
Discussion

The study here examines how gender can potentially affect one's ability to recognize advertising archetypes. The results of the survey were very close. Overall, the females got 63% of the questions correct, and the males got 60% correct. This is only a 3% difference. To break it down further with individual question results, the females did better on every question except for the North Face brand question; 87% of the females surveyed got it correct, while 100% of the males did. On the Apple brand question, 68% of the females answered correctly, while 65% of the males did. On the Campbell's brand question, 50% of the females got the question correct, while 40% of the males did. On the Duracell brand question, 56% of the females answered

correctly, while 40% of the males did. On the Levi's brand question, 56% of the females answered correctly, while 55% of the males did.

The results of this study certainly have implications on the way advertisers should use archetypes in the future. Advertisers should take into account the increased archetype recognition by women. When they are trying to sell a product or service to women, perhaps they should try and use more archetypes in their advertisements. On the other hand, when advertisers are trying to advertise a product strictly to men, perhaps they should try and not include archetypes in the advertisement since they do not have much of an effect.

Limitations

An obvious limitation to the study is the small amount of people surveyed. Though the amounts of males and females that participated in the study were fairly equal, a larger study in general would have shown more accurate results. Also, all of the students surveyed were enrolled in media classes. This might have skewed the results somewhat. It might have skewed them for the better, because chances are, students involved in media/advertising related classes may have a better understanding of not necessarily archetypes, but how advertisers use certain tactics to manipulate consumers into purchasing their products. Lastly, all of the students surveyed were of college age. A broader range of ages would have most likely influenced the results as well.

Conclusion

Advertisements can be effective without archetypes, however, this study has proved that advertisers need to know their audience or consumer before deciding whether to use archetypes in their advertisement or not. There are many different type of archetypes, including primarily symbols and characters; characters being the most prevalent. Archetypes are used in both

advertising and branding to achieve a wide variety of things. In this study, we noted that females

are able to better-recognize non-verbal cues and also, according to this study, character

archetypes in advertising. Archetypes can either help or harm an advertiser.

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Appendix A

Character Archetype Definitions

The Innocent

The innocent's core desire is to be free and happy, and their biggest fear is to do something wrong and be punished for it. The innocent customer prefers straight-talking, gimmick-free advertising, and is naturally drawn to optimistic brands. Innocent-focused businesses promote themselves as pure, simple and trustworthy.

The Regular Guy/Girl

The regular guy/girl only wants to belong and feel a part of something, and their greatest fear is to be left or to stand out from the crowd. They appreciate quality and dependability in their brands. They prefer the familiar to the strange and will emotionally invest in brands they trust. The worst thing that could happen to a regular guy/birl business would be for them to appear greedy or elitist.

The Explorer

The explorer craves adventure and wants to discover the world for themselves. They fear conformity and inner emptiness. Explorer customers embrace brands that promote freedom and self-discovery, especially those that invite the customer to embark on a journey with them. Explorer brands promote themselves as a means to help others experience the new and unknown.

The Sage

The sage seeks truth and wants to find the wisdom in every situation. Sage customers believe that knowledge comes from growth and they are constantly looking for new information. They like ads

that challenge them to think in a new way. Sage brand's promise learning and usually make use of higher level vocabulary and symbolic imagery.

The Hero

The hero's main motivator is to prove their worth, and their greatest fears are weakness and failure. Hero customers value quality and efficiency in their products. They like to think their consumer choices will put them ahead of everyone else, and aren't likely to be swayed by cute or funny adverts. Hero businesses promote themselves as good quality and superior to their competition.

The Rebel/Outlaw

The rebel craves revolution or revenge, and their greatest fear is powerlessness. Rebel customers appreciate the unconventional and forcefully reject the status quo. They are likely to value unique or shocking content with no obvious 'sell' to it. Rebel brands position themselves as an alternative to the mainstream and make an effort to stand out.

The Magician

The magician wants to understand the universe and their place in it. Magician customers need to feel they can grow wiser or influence people by using your products. Magician brands promote themselves as the gateway to transformative knowledge and experience. They focus on the individual rather than the group, and flatter the customer by telling them to trust their own instincts (and make the purchase).

The Lover

The lover lives to experience pleasure in their relationships, work and environment, and they fear being unwanted and unloved. Lover customers value the aesthetic appearance of goods and services. They are likely to be drawn to premium brands that will make them seem more attractive

to others. Lover brands promote themselves as glamorous, with an emphasis on sensual pleasure. Ads will typically focus on how the product *feels* for the customer. Lover brands can't come across as cheap or businesslike or their cultivated air of mystique will be ruined.

The Jester

The jester wants to live in the moment and enjoy life. Jester customers find regular adverts boring and will love anything unusual or playful - primarily ads that make light of the seriousness of life. Jester brands give the impression they live in the moment, typically using outrageous imagery. They often tease their customers affectionately. The worst thing a jester brand could do is be seen to be strict with their customers.

The Caregiver

The caregiver is driven by their need to protect and care for others, and their worst fear is selfishness and ingratitude for their sacrifices. Caregiver businesses offer protection, safety and support to their customers. The worst thing that can happen to a nurturer business is that their products are shown to be harmful or exploitative.

The Creator

The creator is driven by their desire to produce exceptional works, and they are most afraid of mediocrity. Creator customers shun advertising in general but may enjoy experimental, boundary-pushing or novel ads. Successful creator brands often develop a devout fan base. Creator brands often position themselves as the key to unlocking a creator's creativity.

The Ruler

The ruler is driven by their desire for power and control, and they are most afraid of chaos and being overthrown. Ruler brands speak authoritatively, often spreading the idea that they are the lead

in their field. Their image is solid, polished and often very 'masculine' or 'dumbed down'

advertising. They will value ads that reinforce their feelings of power and stability.

Appendix B

Archetype Survey Used in Experiment

Are you male / female? (Circle one)   What is your age? _____

<u>Archetype definition</u>: In literature, an archetype is a typical character, an action or a situation that seems to represent such universal patterns of human nature. An archetype, also known as universal symbol, may be a character, a theme, a symbol or even a setting.

1. What archetype does the **North Face** commercial best represent?
   a. The Rebel archetype
   b. The Hero archetype
   c. The Magician archetype
   d. The Explorer archetype

2. What archetype does the **Apple** commercial best represent?
   a. The Magician archetype
   b. The Creator archetype
   c. The Caregiver archetype
   d. The Lover archetype

3. What archetype does the **Campbell's Soup** commercial best represent?
   a. The Creator archetype
   b. The Caregiver archetype
   c. The Lover archetype
   d. The Innocent archetype

4. What archetype does the **Duracell** commercial best represent?
   a. The Rebel archetype
   b. The Caregiver archetype
   c. The Ruler archetype
   d. The Hero archetype

5. What archetype does the **Levi Jeans** commercial best represent?
   a. The Ruler archetype
   b. The Magician archetype
   c. The Rebel archetype
   d. The Explorer archetype