Emerging Markets Queries in Finance and Business

Advertising creativity – the right balance between surprise, medium and message relevance

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Abstract

Nowadays, alternative advertising is driving not only a new perspective, but also key challenges for marketers. There is growing evidence that creativity has become many-faceted over time. Considering the medium as a contextual cue, the current study investigates the role of creativity in the new advertising formats among university students. Therefore, the purpose of the present paper is to identify the effectiveness of non-traditional advertisements in generating consumers’ favorable attitude and credibility toward the brand and the way it influences consumer behavior. The findings suggest that the creative change of the context could be a solution to consumers’ negative perceptions and avoidance caused by traditional media.

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Keywords: advertising creativity; alternative advertising; attitude; medium; credibility.

1. Introduction

There is great interest in understanding advertising creativity and its capacity to generate attention, awareness or a favorable attitude toward the advertised brand Sheinin et al., 2011. Creativity helps advertising to convey the message in a different manner, depending on the medium in which it is developed. Irrespective of its creative or non-creative nature, traditional advertising has become too familiar and truly annoying to

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consumers. Based on this argument, researchers’ interest has recently begun moving towards non-traditional advertising. In this context, following the Smith et al.’s, 2007 model, the current paper approaches the perspective of creativity in ambient media versus traditional media. Moreover, it is highlighted the idea that advertising creativity means much more than a combination between originality and message relevance. The placement of an ad message in a certain medium could drastically change the consumers’ perceptions of the advertising message.

In order to examine these two perspectives – traditional and non-traditional advertising –, two different studies have been developed. While the first study approaches an out-of-home medium – an amusement park –, the second one deals with a popular magazine.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Advertising creativity

Creativity in advertising and its impact on advertising effectiveness have a long tradition among researchers and practitioners. Although there are consistent findings of the literature in terms of the effectiveness of the creative advertising, there still remain questions concerning the roots of this effectiveness Baack et al., 2008. Therefore, marketers are turning towards developing novel and meaningful ads Ang et al., 2007, unanticipated and distinctive approaches Kim et al., 2010 based on originality and relevance Haberland & Dacin, 1992; Altsech, 1995, cited in Mercanti-Guérin, 2008, Kim et al., 2010, novelty and message usefulness Sheinin et al., 2011. According to the perception of unexpectedness, creativity in advertising is also defined as an act that is able to produce effective surprise Haberland and Dacin, 1992.

The representation of advertising creativity by originality or novelty and message relevance has received considerable support in the literature, being considered the most common and recurrent dimensions of advertising creativity Mercanti-Guérin, 2008.

Most studies have used experimental methods and, therefore, academic research empirically linking creativity to effectiveness has been limited Baack et al., 2008. Considering its importance, the subject of advertising creativity and empirical data is still relatively sparse Sheinin et al., 2011.

2.2. Traditional versus “non-traditional out-of-home” advertising

Companies no longer choose traditional media to advertise their brands. They find new ways to communicate their message, sometimes placing the advertisement in “unusual and unexpected places (location), often with unconventional methods (execution) and being first or only ad execution to do so (temporal)” Luxton and Drummond, 2000: 735. This method is called “ambient advertising” or “non-traditional out-of-home” media Shankar and Horton, 1999 and it works through surprise, humor, creativity and discovery Luxton and Drummond, 2000. Researchers have found other terms – “creative media choice” Dahlen, 2005; Dahlen et al., 2009(b) or “non-traditional advertising media” Dahlen & Edenius, 2007 – through which the medium itself implicitly communicates the message. Consumers engage in the medium and the context could replace the message. The medium creates imagery and awareness of the advertised brand Dahlen, 2005 because images, colors and contexts may suggest certain meaning more effectively and quickly than the text alone Luxton and Drummond, 2000.

In support of these concepts, studies determine that using a non-traditional advertising medium diminishes the representation of the message as advertising Dahlen and Edenius, 2007. This approach supposes that consumers pay more attention to a certain type of ambient advertising because the context becomes an environmental challenge to viewers. Thus, the first step in effective out-of-home advertising is getting the
consumer’s attention. Therefore, a strong advantage of outdoor context is its ability to generate a second look Young, 1984.

As far as the difficulty in measuring advertising effectiveness is concerned, it is worth noting that most studies in the traditional context and in the non-traditional one as well, have employed various exploratory measures Dahlen and Edenius, 2007; McStay, 2010, therefore, a research call on developing new measures of advertising perceptions has been highlighted Dahlen and Edenius, 2007 and still needs further investigation.

2.3. The conceptual framework

In order to approach comparatively both perspectives (traditional and non-traditional advertising), the conceptual model we propose is based on Smith et al.’s, 2007 and Sheinin et al.’s, 2011 studies. Taking into account the idea that creativity could provide both originality (novelty) and a valuable message and that it has positive effects on attitude toward ads Ang et al., 2007; Sheinin et al., 2011, we analyse to what extent creative ads in non-traditional media develop a more favorable attitude toward ads than creative ads in traditional media. Therefore, the first hypothesis was formulated:

**H1a:** Originality in non-traditional media develops a more favorable attitude toward ads than in traditional media;

**H1b:** Message relevance in non-traditional media develops a more favorable attitude toward ads than in traditional media;

![Diagram of the advertising creativity model (traditional/non-traditional context)](source: Smith et al., 2007; Sheinin et al., 2011)

According to previous research Sheinin et al., 2011, the influence exerted on brand credibility by the attitude toward the ad and toward further effects such as purchase intention is clearly established Ahmad and Mahmood, 2011. Having in mind the comparison (traditional/non-traditional advertising), we expect that:

**H2:** A favorable attitude toward ads in non-traditional media develops greater brand credibility than in traditional media;

**H3a:** A favorable attitude toward ads in non-traditional media has a greater positive influence on purchase intention than in traditional media;

**H3b:** Brand credibility in non-traditional media has a greater positive influence on purchase intention than in traditional media.
3. Method

3.1. Instrument development

The nature and the complexity of the subject matter suggest a variety of constructs that measure advertising creativity and its effects, either in a traditional or in a non-traditional context. In order to analyze the difference between these two perspectives, this research is based on two studies, each of them using the same conceptual model and measuring the same constructs: Originality, Message Relevance, Attitude toward ads, Brand credibility and Purchase Intention. Regarding measurement scales, we adopted several types used in previous research: Kim et al., 2010 – a seven-point Likert scale (totally disagree/totally agree) on the one hand, and a seven-point bipolar semantic differential format, on the other hand.

The first dimension of creativity was originality. Scale items for originality were developed using 14 items from previous research: Altsech, 1995; Mercanti-Guérin, 2008; Haberland and Dacin, 1992; Smith et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2010; Sheinin et al., 2011. All the items were selected according to their degree of appropriateness to apply to different contexts (traditional or non-traditional advertising). The second dimension of creativity was message relevance. We used 4 items for this construct from previous research: Smith et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2010.

Attitude toward ads was measured from MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989, cited in Dahlen and Edenius, 2007 using three items for each dimension: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant and favorable/unfavorable.

Brand Credibility was measured with three items Dahlen and Edenius, 2007 assessing participants’ perceptions regarding how convincing/unconvincing, believable/unbelievable and biased/unbiased the construct is.

Three adapted items were used to measure purchase intention: “It is possible to buy the brand”, “If I have the opportunity, I will probably buy the brand”, “I will definitely buy the brand” Smith et al., 2007; Pelsmacker, 1998, cited in Ahmad and Mahmood, 2011.

3.2. Participants and data collection

261 undergraduate Romanian students enrolled in business courses at Babes-Bolyai University participated in the current research. For the first study, we selected a convenience sample of 161 participants, who were targeted on a confirmatory analysis in the case of non-traditional advertising. The second study used a sample of 101 individuals and aimed to provide valuable insights into traditional advertising. Both studies involved young students ranging in age from 18 to 24. In the first study, participants were asked to imagine that they were walking in the park and the playground for children was decorated with colorful images indicating a known brand. In the second study, the scenario is a magazine in which one page is covered with the same brand advertising. Considering these two different images (non-traditional/traditional advertising), the research adopted a self-administrated survey based on an online questionnaire. The respondents were recruited through social networking web sites.

4. Data analysis

The method of data analysis used in the present study was Structural Equation Modeling analysis (SEM). The model was estimated using AMOS 20. Software. It allows the researchers to specify the relationships among the constructs and the measures of each factor.
4.1. Measurement Model

To establish construct validity, we estimated the measurement model for both studies. Some items which appeared to be problematic were removed from the model in order to assess internal consistency (reliability) of the latent variables. According to Hair et al., 2010, cited in Gaskin, 2012, composite reliability higher than 0.7 is acceptable (all of the coefficients are 0.8 or above, Table 1.). The final measurement model was supported as fit statistics indicated acceptable fit for the model (RMSEA = 0.064, CFI = 0.951, $\chi^2$/df= 1.720). Regarding the convergent and discriminant validity, Table 1 and Table 2 clearly show that the correlations between the factors are significantly lower than the square root of the AVE Fornell & Larcker, 1981.

Table 1. Correlations between constructs – Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>CRED</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>REL</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>INT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRED</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td>0.737</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>0.378</td>
<td>0.749</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL</td>
<td>0.911</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td>0.631</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td>0.413</td>
<td>0.533</td>
<td>0.240</td>
<td>0.645</td>
<td>0.781</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keys: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CRED = Brand credibility; OR = Ad Originality; REL = Message Relevance; AT = Attitude towards ads; INT = Purchase Intention.

Note: Diagonal elements represent square roots of the AVE (average variance extracted).

Source: Table created by the authors

Table 2. Correlations between constructs – Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>CRED</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>REL</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>INT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRED</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.787</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td>0.470</td>
<td>0.424</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td>0.703</td>
<td>0.708</td>
<td>0.601</td>
<td>0.540</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>0.667</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>0.668</td>
<td>0.846</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keys: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CRED = Brand credibility; OR = Ad Originality; REL = Message Relevance; AT = Attitude towards ad; INT = Purchase Intention.

Note: Diagonal elements represent square roots of the AVE (average variance extracted).

Source: Table created by the authors

While the concern of reliability and validity of the measurement models was satisfied, the tables below describe the significance of the causality relations. Moreover, the evaluation of the structures proposed in our conceptual framework is comparatively analyzed.
4.2. Structural Model

Tables 3 and Table 4 show the results of structural models. For the first study, except for the relation between brand credibility and purchase intention (H3b), all the relations are significant and supported by the data.

Table 3. Structural Model results – Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Causal relation</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Std. Coefficients</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a</td>
<td>OR ----&gt; AT</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>0,577</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b</td>
<td>REL ----&gt; AT</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>0,242</td>
<td>002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>AT ----&gt; CRED</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>0,731</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3a</td>
<td>AT ----&gt; INT</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>0,788</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b</td>
<td>CRED ----&gt; INT</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p < 0,05*; p < 0,01**; p < 0,001***
Source: table created by the authors

For the second study (advertising magazine), when the message is easily perceived as advertising, the causal relations are less significant (Table 4.). This leads us to expect that consumers have more favorable reactions to the advertised message when it is placed in a non-traditional advertising medium, compared to the more obvious advertisement placement in a traditional medium.

Table 4. Structural Model results – Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Causal relation</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Std. Coefficients</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a</td>
<td>OR ----&gt; AT</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>0,452</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b</td>
<td>REL ----&gt; AT</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>0,353</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>AT ----&gt; CRED</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>0,719</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3a</td>
<td>AT ----&gt; INT</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b</td>
<td>CRED ----&gt; INT</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p < 0,05*; p < 0,01**; p < 0,001***
Source: table created by the authors

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the present study have both theoretical and practical implications. Conceptually, our model provides an overview of what advertising creativity implies and of the effects of this concept. These results are partially similar to previous research by linking advertising creativity (explained by originality and message relevance), to attitude and credibility Dahlen and Edénius, 2007. We found that both originality and message relevance have important implications for advertising effectiveness. Even if both studies show a significant and positive relationship between originality and attitude toward ads (H1a – Table 3 and Table 4), the results emphasize that originality in non-traditional media develops a more favorable attitude toward ads than in traditional media (0.577> 0.452). In contrast, H1b is not supported (0.242 < 0.353). Thus, even if the consumers perceive a message as being relevant in non-traditional media, this perception has not a greater influence on attitude toward ads compared to the same relation in the case of traditional media;

At the same time, the more favorable the attitude toward ads is, the more credible the brand becomes. Taking into consideration the last relationship in the conceptual model (H3a and H3b), we can explain that a
positive attitude toward ads and brand credibility is not necessary translated into the intention to purchase that brand. However, the results seem to be different in case of non-traditional ads, when consumers go forward and express their intention to buy the advertised brand.

All the results highlight the fact that consumers exposed to alternative advertising (amusement park) are often engaged in advertising as a means of entertainment. Therefore, they become involved in the context, having the opportunity and the motivation to process the creative advertising message Baack et al., 2008.

The present study attempted to analyze the role of creativity in alternative advertising. Although previous research examined the difference between traditional and non-traditional advertising creativity, this study offered a new methodological perspective. One of the major contribution of the current study is the method used (Structural Equation Modeling analysis – SEM), since the majority of the studies in this field test the hypothesis through experiments.

Although it is still considered that the ability to advertise in the vicinity of the point of sale is more appropriate and more effective Shankar and Horton, 1999, ambient media should be seen beyond the boundaries of the supermarket. This paper suggests that alternative advertising goes beyond the traditional patterns which companies develop in order to communicate their message. Using a new medium that is a different and significant cue both for the brand and for the audience, creative media choice will produce long-lasting relationships with consumers and their brand perceptions.

6. Limitations and Future Research

As all the other studies, this research has limitations. One of the limitations is the imaginary medium. The respondents were asked to imagine that they are in an amusement park and this fact may not generalize well the real-world conditions.

Another limitation could be that the current empirical study tested the effect of just one single type of alternative media (ambient advertising) on one single brand. Further research could take into account other brands, mediums or contexts that may work as important cues for generating consumers’ favorable attitude and credibility toward the brand. In this context, it is also suggested that such a study and the proposed conceptual framework could be replicated for other unknown brands and advertisements in order to get a further and deeper understanding of the effectiveness of creative advertising either in traditional or non-traditional contexts.

Finally, students may not be the best judges of creative advertising Haberland and Dacin, 1992, advertising professionals being considered superior and more appropriate judges, due to their increased experience and advertising training Till and Baack, 2005. This could be a good reason for future research to employ advertising professionals’ perspective.

References


