Linkage between Persuasion principles and Advertising

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Abstract

The study attempted to highlight the link between the concept of persuasion and advertising. Some theories of persuasive advertising were reviewed and discuss. Across those theories, there are important overlaps as well as differences. However, it is important to note that persuasive advertising does not actually state that if the consumer uses a given product, the effect illustrated in the advertising will automatically take place. The idea is to convey the perception that there is a good chance that the consumer will experience some type of benefit that is similar to what is portrayed in the print ad or the television commercial.

Key words: persuasion, advertising, attitudes, communication

1. Introduction

Studies have shown that evidence-based advertising principles underlie persuasion. Thus, persuasive advertising is perceived as a creative guide for advertisers and those who evaluate advertisements. According to Armstrong (2010), much of what is known about advertising has been hidden in obscure academic papers, hence the need to put useful knowledge about persuasion into an understandable and easy-to-access format. Given advertising's prominence in the domain of persuasion, it is not surprising that theories of persuasion have played a central role in scholarly research on effects of advertising (Shrum et al. 2012)

Existing literature such as Edin, (2012), suggests that the concept of persuasion reaches around a wide range of subjects, contrary to the view of Perloff, (2010) who opined that persuasion is basically anything that involves shaping or moulding attitudes. Therefore, persuasion is concerned with the understanding and subsequently changes of attitudes by influencing other people's minds (Perloff, 2010). The aim of this study therefore, is to review the concept of persuasive advertising in order to provide a guide for the advertisers and those who associate themselves with advertising industry.

2. Literature review

Miller (1980) observed that persuasive communication aims at three diverse persuasive effects. These effects are changing, reinforcing, and shaping responses. He also observed that the application of responses allows for other types of possible persuasive outcomes to be included, such as the changing, reinforcing, and shaping of emotions, perceptions, behaviours etc (Miller, 1980). Following this argument, Stiff and Mongeau (2003) argue that the definition of persuasive activity is limited to intentional behaviour. They further state that persuasive communication must not always be intentional as it sometimes unintentionally affects others' responses. However, Miller (1980) uses responses and not attitudes in relation to the different persuasive effects, as he argues that persuasive attempts do not necessarily have to affect solely people's attitudes. Many of the principles of advertising have profound effects, some of which are counter intuitive. However, understanding evidence-based principles can improve the ability of novices and experts to develop persuasive advertising. It will help advertisers appreciate the challenges that their advertising agencies face as well as contribute to good long-term relationships between sellers and buyers.

2.1 Concept of persuasive advertising

Persuasive advertising is a component in an overall advertising strategy that seeks to entice consumers into purchasing specific goods or services, often by appealing to their emotions and general sensibilities. This particular advertising strategy is different from informative advertising, which essentially provides the customer with hard data about the nature and function of the product. With persuasive advertising, the assumption is that the consumer already understands the basic nature of the product, but needs to be convinced of the desirability and the benefits that set a particular product apart from the competition (Tatum, 2003). However, it is important to note that persuasive advertising does not actually state that if the consumer uses a given product, the effect illustrated in the advertising

will automatically take place. The idea is to convey the perception that there is a good chance that the consumer will experience some type of benefit that is similar to what is portrayed in the print ad or the television commercial. In fact, some examples of persuasive advertising go as far as to include a disclaimer that the situation displayed in the advertising is only an example, and not the only possible outcome. This approach is often used in advertising for legal firms, in that the disclaimer notes that the advertising does not imply that the services provided by the firm are necessarily superior to those provided by other legal firms. (Tatum, 2003)

According to Shrum et al. (2012) the early fears about the persuasive power of propaganda on citizens in the 1930s and 1940s soon morphed into worries about the persuasive power of advertising, particularly the worry about subliminal persuasion through advertising (Bargh, 2002; Brannon & Brock, 1994). One of the more effective approaches to persuasive advertising is to focus on specific benefits of the product. While those same benefits may also be found with competing products, the idea is to convey that a given product provides that benefit in a way that is hard to find elsewhere (Tatum, 2003).

Another approach to persuasive advertising is to convey the perception that using a given product will help an individual be more successful with some area of his or her life. A brand of mouthwash may use media advertising to convey the message that using the product assures the breath is fresh for a longer period of time, and therefore helps to enhance the confidence of the user when interacting with other people. This same general approach is used with perfumes and colognes, where the advertising creates the perception that anyone who uses the product will be more attractive and socially successful.

Given advertising's prominence in the domain of persuasion, it is not surprising that theories of persuasion have played a central role in scholarly research on effects of advertising (and marketing communications more generally). There are numerous theories of persuasion that have implications for advertising and marketing, many of which are covered in this volume. Rather, we have chosen to highlight the persuasion theories that have been most influential in advertising, marketing, and consumer behavior research over the last 30 years. Some of these theories will be familiar to communication researchers (e.g., theory of reasoned action; elaboration likelihood model), others less so (e.g., persuasion knowledge model). We provide a brief presentation and discussion of each theory, and then review the research that applied these theories to marketing questions. Finally, in the last section, we discuss some new directions in consumer research that pertain to concepts related to persuasion (e.g., preference construction and choice, perceptions, liking).

According to Shrum et al. (2012), changing responses, is the most common persuasive effect and probably also the one with the most important persuasive impact (Miller, 1980). In trying to change consumers' responses, marketers of HRPs may provide counterarguments for the consumers' doubtfulness against the product e.g. by claiming that the product will solely do well and by communicating high degree of satisfaction from the early adopters of the product.

To reinforce responses messages which suit individuals' existing preferences are created. In reinforcing, the message senders try to create messages which correspond to and reinforce individuals' attitudes (Miller, 1980). Consumers may feel that an all-round diet is good for their health although they believe that they lack the time of cooking such. The marketers of nutrition supplies may then market their products with the main argument that they are a perfect supplement to reach an all-round diet.

A common way of *shaping* responses is to create associations between the advertised product and a positively perceived object or person (Miller, 1980). To relate to the subject of interest, HRPs are often advertised by the use of a liked celebrity as a spokesperson, i.e. through celebrity endorsement. To sum up, persuasive communication can be used in order to reach three different persuasive effects; changing, reinforcing, and shaping, responses. For the purpose of this paper, persuasive communication that intentionally tries to reach any of these three effects will be of further focus as it is suggested that these are the persuasive attempts that the consumers react strongest to. In order to understand how the three persuasive effects may occur through advertisements for HRPs, examples of persuasion strategies for each one of them will be given in the following section. The intention is that this will help to reach an understanding of how their usage could increase the likelihood of reaching the desired persuasive effect.

2.2 Theories of persuasion in advertising

2.2.1. Theory of Reasoned Action

The theory posits that the most proximal input into behaviour is a person's intention to engage in that behaviour.

Although seemingly obvious, this assumption is important because it implies that behaviour is intentional. In turn, behavioural intentions are determined by one's attitude toward performing the behaviour or act and one's beliefs about what important others think about one performing the behaviour. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) further specified that each component of intention, attitudes, and subjective norms were themselves determined by specific beliefs about each. Using an expectancy-value approach, they quantified attitude toward the behaviour as a cross-product of the subjective likelihood that performing a particular behaviour would lead to a specified outcome and their evaluation of that outcome (Shrum et al., 2012)

2.2.2. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

As observed by Shrum et al. (2012), the ELM has proved to be a robust model for predicting the effects of advertising and marketing messages on consumer attitudes and behaviour. It provides a clear theoretical framework for understanding the conditions under which typical executioner variables will have an effect, thereby providing both a guide for how advertisers can maximize the persuasiveness of their ads and how consumers can maximize their resistance to those ads. More recently, other models of persuasion have been developed that provide a somewhat different focus on how consumers process persuasive communications, and in particular the thoughts consumers have about motives underlying messages.

2.2.3. Persuasion Knowledge Model

A number of studies have provided support for key components of the model. For example, one key component is the notion that consumers have well-developed knowledge structures about persuasion tactics and that people generally understand the motives of persuasion tactics. Consistent with this proposition, research suggests that lay people do have clear knowledge of persuasion tactics of advertising, and the beliefs of lay people about how advertising works are actually quite similar to those of academic marketing scholars (Friestad & Wright, 1995).

2.3. Persuasion strategies and techniques in advertising

Claims

Claims are supposed to function as information sources of the quality of the products. However, especially in the supplement industry the trustworthiness of the information to the consumers is questioned. The discussion arises as it is not clear if the consumers understand the meaning of disclaimers, i.e. a warning of that the claim has not been evaluated (Mason & Scammon, 2000). Thus, consumers face difficulties in determining the trustworthiness of different claims and its scientific base (Silverglade, 1994).

Consequences

Consequences represent the reasons why an attribute is important to someone and why it is positively or negatively valued (Reynolds, Gengler & Howard, 1995). The importance of consequences and their attractiveness or unattractiveness is derived from their perceived ability to satisfy personal values. Consequently, consequences are meaningful as they help individuals to reach values central to the self (Reynolds et al., 1995).

Celebrities

Celebrities are used in advertising to persuade consumers through credibility (Monahan, 1995). The influencing power of a well-known endorser lays first of all in the celebrity's ability to attract attention. Furthermore, the general view is that celebrities possess likeable and attractive qualities. (Atkin & Block, 1983). The aim is that through endorsement, the positive meaning connected to the celebrity will transfer to the product and subsequently, to the buying consumer (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008). However, even though consumers seem to have a positive view of celebrities, their credibility and thus effectiveness in advertising have been questioned (Atkin & Block, 1983; Freiden, 1984).

The increasing consumer interest for celebrities and how they act, do, and behave, is a clear indicator of the increasing influence of the famous in today's society (Choi & Berger, 2010). Consumers aspirations to possess the same skills as certain celebrities raises questions of responsibility and consciousness (Choi & Berger, 2010) and who to hold responsible in a scenario where the influence is a followed by a negative outcome. In order to understand

consumers' responses to different persuasive attempts one need to know how consumers may process the message and subsequently how their evaluation of the same is formed. Therefore, individuals' message processing and judgment formation are described in the following section.

The persuasive strategies used by advertisers who want you to buy their product can be divided into three categories: pathos, logos, and ethos. Pathos: an appeal to emotion. An advertisement using pathos will attempt to evoke an emotional response in the consumer. Sometimes, it is a positive emotion such as happiness: an image of people enjoying themselves while drinking Pepsi. Other times, advertisers will use negative emotions such as pain: a person having back problems after buying the "wrong" mattress. Pathos can also include emotions such as fear and guilt: images of a starving child persuade you to send money. Logos: an appeal to logic or reason. An advertisement using logos will give you the evidence and statistics you need to fully understand what the product does. The logos of an advertisement will be the "straight facts" about the product:

Ethos: an appeal to credibility or character. An advertisement using ethos will try to convince you that the company is more reliable, honest, and credible; therefore, you should buy its product. Ethos often involves statistics from reliable experts. In knowing how the different strategies appear, a natural question follows of why an individual employs a certain strategy. Strategy that is employed depends on the amount of resources that the message recipient is willing and able to put into the processing. The advertising message, (e.g. complexity and inclusion of pictures), the individual's personal characteristics, (e.g. message involvement and expertise), and the situation in which the message is received, (e.g. editorial and advertising context), constitute the determinants of the allocation of resources. Moreover, the mood of the message receivers has also proven to play an influencing role in the adoption of processing (Forgas, 1995).

To conclude the findings presented by Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999), people tend to adopt the systematic processing strategy when they put a high value on forming accurate views and are able and motivated to allocate the resources needed to extensively and critically process the message. When adopting a systematic strategy the degree of persuasiveness is dependent upon the perceived strength and the information provided in the advertisement. On the other hand, people are likely to adopt the heuristic strategy when they are interested in producing judgments that are adequate but not necessarily fully accurate. Lastly, the experiential strategy is employed when people have scarce ability and little motivation to process the message (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999).

Resistance to persuasive advertising messages

Although one of the main objectives of persuasion appears to be attitude change (Perloff,2010) it is not always the outcome of persuasive communication as people sometimes tend to defend themselves by engaging in different resistance strategies. According to Jenkins and Dragojevic (2011) "resistance to persuasion may be observed as no change in attitude, a boomerang effect (i.e., attitude change in the direction opposite of what is desired by the message source), and derogation of the message source" (Jenkins & Dragojevic, 2011). They applied the politeness theory in order to understand the reasons behind people's resistance to persuasion, which suggests that people have a need for autonomy as well as for acceptance and approval. Therefore, messages that threaten these needs through the employed language will be judged as impolite and consequently exposed to resistance. Further, if the message receivers perceive that the source of the message questions their judgment or competence through the use of a forceful language, they may perceive it as a threat to their need of being liked and accepted (Jenkins & Dragojevic, 2011). Jacks and Cameron (2010) add an additional explanation by stating that unfavorable thoughts create resistance if they directly disprove message arguments.

The findings by Jenkins and Dragojevic (2011) show that an increase in threat is followed bygreater derogation of the message source, derogation of the message, and lastly negative attitudes towards the message's posture. Furthermore, they stated that people are likely to act according to the formed attitudes (Jenkins & Dragojevic, 2011), e.g. if negatively formed by engaging in resistance strategies. Thus, it can be concluded that if consumers view an advertisement negatively (as a perceived threat to either of their needs) they are likely to employ a defense action by engaging in resistance strategies. Jacks and Cameron (2010) argue that resistance can partly be prevented by knowing what resistance strategy an individual is likely to employ in response to a certain persuasive attempt.

In knowing that, the sender could construct the message in such a way that makes it difficult for the receiver to employ the intended strategy. Jacks and Cameron (2010) identified and categorized seven different resistance strategies based upon consumers' own thoughts according to: Counter arguing: "must explicitly counter an argument posed by the source of influence or it must be an explicit statement of the intent to counter argue the source's points"

Attitude bolstering: "reflected a statement of the respondent's beliefs or a claim that the respondent would think about or express the reasons supporting those beliefs"

Social validation: "reflected desired or perceived social support for the belief or an appeal to support from a 'higher power'" Selective exposure: "statements of ignoring, avoiding, or tuning out the threat" Negative affect: "the respondent indicated a negative emotion (e.g. angry or sad) in response to an attitudinal threat"

3. CONCLUSION

Persuasion is all around us, and even more so in a competitive consumer society such as the where persuasion is virtually synonymous. This study examined concepts of persuasion as it relates to advertising. The study attempted to highlight the theories that have had the most recent impact. Across those theories, there are important overlaps as well as differences. However, it is important to note that persuasive advertising does not actually state that if the consumer uses a given product, the effect illustrated in the advertising will automatically take place. The idea is to convey the perception that there is a good chance that the consumer will experience some type of benefit that is similar to what is portrayed in the print ad or the television commercial.

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