

SESSION 1.3: ADVERTISING

DISCUSSION LEADER COMMENTS

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ADVANCES IN HOW ADVERTISING WORKS ... FROM CONCEPTION TO EFFECTIVENESS

All three papers presented in this session offer notable contributions in advancing our understanding — for both academicians and practitioners — of how advertising works in terms of a) developmental dynamics at the agency - client intersection (agency risk-taking, *West and Miciak*); b) the selection and manipulation of a specific creative element (the use of spokesperson attractiveness, *Petroshius and Newell*); and c) in terms of advertising effectiveness in one specific category (food advertising effectiveness, *Ewing, Napoli, and du Plessis*).

West's and Miciak's "Risk-Taking in Advertising Agencies: A Stakeholder Perspective" examines risk and creativity from the perspective of ad agency and advertiser stakeholders. Based on their analysis of previous research and observation, they propose three hypotheses for testing:

- H1: Advertising agencies will exhibit greater risk-taking behavior than advertisers.*
- H2: Advertising agencies will exhibit greater risk-taking behavior with small clients*
- H3: Advertising agencies will exhibit greater risk-taking behavior when their financial performance falls short of aspiration level.*

From survey data provided by advertising agency personnel, West and Miciak concluded that H1 was unsupported (agencies perceive that advertisers have more to gain from risk-taking and assume more risk); H2 was supported; and H3 was not supported, although there may be indications advertisers', rather than agencies', financial shortfalls may promote greater creative risk-taking.

The dynamics of how agencies and advertisers work together to develop marketing communications are obviously complex and multivariate, and West's and Miciak's contribution is a significant one in documenting how creative risk is perceived by key agency executives — owners, presidents, CEOs (45 percent of respondents); account managers and VPs of client service (30 percent); creative officers and creative directors (19 percent); and art directors and others (6 percent).

Further research in this area might focus on several different aspects of creative risk. First, the authors or other researchers might consider examining risk itself as a dependent variable in the context of brand, brand position, product category, consumer perception of the product in terms of the FCB grid or other schema, and similar attributes that would ordinarily be discussed in the marketing plan and thus be shared (and possibly co-developed) by the advertiser and agency. The hypothesis here is that, in addition to the organizational and other dynamics involving advertiser and agency, creative risk may also be a function of the product itself and its perception or intended perception by target segments. Thus, for example, risk-taking and risk-averse behaviors and executions may differ substantively depending on whether the ad account is for a major bank or a snowboard, and further what the brand's actual and desired position is within each consumer segment's brand universe. One potential benefit from this approach would be toward initial development of a multidimensional matrix with both explicatory and even predictive ramifications — and a matrix that could theoretically incorporate additionally relevant elements such as perceived or desired creative reputation of the agency, creative reputation of the advertiser (e.g., Apple vs. IBM), publicly-held agency status vs. privately-held status, and the actual locus of creative decision-making in both agency and advertiser organizations.

Petroshius' and Newell's work in "Beauty and the Prince vs. Beauty and the Beast: An Investigation of the Effects of Male and Female Communicators' Physical Attractiveness on Evaluations of Advertisements" examines physical attractiveness not in terms of risk vs. certainty creative choices by ad agencies — an interesting topic in its own right — but in terms of the relevance of spokespersons' physical attractiveness in ads for products which are and are not themselves attractiveness related; and the perception of ads, as well as purchase intention, by male and female readers when a spokesperson of the opposite gender is physically attractive.

In general, Petrosenius and Newell found that attitudes toward the ad and purchase intentions are affected by physical attractiveness of communicators or spokespersons when the advertised product is attractiveness related. When the product is not attractiveness related, attractiveness and perception are not significant. The authors further found that an attractive female spokesperson had a significant impact on attitudes toward the ad and the product, regardless of reader gender, but not on purchase intention. They suggest that this may be consistent with a cultural emphasis on female physical beauty as opposed to other female attributes. Interestingly, advertisers and agencies have long recognized that attractive female spokespersons and models (along with babies, dogs, and cats) readily generate ad awareness and interest, even for products or services without any relationship to physical attractiveness (e.g., financial services, auto parts, industrial tools). In the last several decades, use of attractive female models and spokespersons has perceptibly declined in business-to-business and trade magazines — perhaps in response to changing societal norms and perhaps, as Petrosenius and Newell have found, in response to the recognition that such creative ploys may not impact purchase intent and purchase behaviors.

The authors suggest a number of promising avenues for further research. In addition, they and others interested in this broad topic may wish to determine if similar findings apply when the attractive and unattractive spokespersons are also celebrities; when the product categories (shampoo and pain relievers in the study) also include higher involvement products in both cognitive and affective dimensions; and when the selection of research participants — an undergraduate convenience sample in this case — can isolate for age, income, family status, and other demographic and psychographic variables. These additional foci, along with the intriguing but difficult to study issues of social responsibility posited by the authors, could further contribute to our understanding of specific iconic elements in advertising and how those symbols affect perception and behavior.

“A Cross-Category Analysis of Food Advertising Effects” by Ewing, Napoli, and du Plessis proposes a number of hypotheses related to likability and recall of TV food commercials as a function of food category, female vs. male viewers, the relationship of likability to recall, media factors (flighting and GRPs), and ad duration. Generally, their findings in this extensive study (200 respondents reacting to 1,022 commercials) support all hypotheses. Specifically, fun or “sin” food categories (alcoholic beverages, products high in sugar and fats such as desserts and chocolate) utilize different creative appeals and are better recalled; females like food advertising better than males and demonstrate higher recall; liking of food advertising leads to higher recall, as, to a significantly lesser degree, does ad duration; and finally, neither flighting of spots nor total media weight in GRPs affect recall.

The findings generated by Ewing, Napoli, and du Plessis offer a valuable perspective for advertisers and should stimulate additional research in a number of areas. Their suggestions include confirming cross-cultural applicability, looking at data on the basis of respondent age, looking at response based on user, non-user status, looking at executional quality, and looking at media strategy, particularly in terms of possibly greater exposure to food commercials during the day by women. They further suggest considering the role of men and children as food purchase decision-influencers and/or decision-makers, the critical moral and ethical issues of food advertising on children, and the user, non-user parameter applied within and across food categories.

Additionally — and given that advertising for fun foods is more effective than that for healthier foods — researchers may wish to explore how category, consumer purchase behavior, and creative execution interrelate. Does, for example, the generally low-involvement, affective (emotional) consumer behavior paradigm for fun foods, the fact that a number of these are impulse items such as candy, and a hypothesized correlation between high-fat and high-sweet items and advertising appeals based on self-reward and self-esteem (“you deserve a break today”) allow advertisers more creative freedom and thus arguably lead to more likable and memorable advertising than compared to healthier products purchased as the result of a more cognitively-focused and deliberative purchase experience where the gratification is delayed and largely intellectual (consuming oatmeal, for example) as opposed to immediate and largely sensual (as in eating a chocolate bar)? As the authors correctly note, of course, opportunities do exist for food advertisers to improve commercial effectiveness and this should be true across food categories.

It might also be instructive to examine purchase intention across categories when the purchaser is not the primary or at least sole consumer. That is, would the dynamics of liking and recall for the purchaser of a non-fun item (spaghetti sauce) or a fun item (ice cream or boxed chocolates) differ as a function of purchase for self alone vs. purchase for a spouse or family vs. purchase as a gift?

Finally, while the authors found a relatively weak but positive relationship between longer commercials and likability, it may be worth exploring whether shorter commercials are effective in at least certain categories, presumably those for fun foods. With media costs increasing significantly and advertisers more likely to utilize thirty- and even ten- and fifteen-second spots in the US (and with some industry research support that shorter commercials may be effective for certain categories), such an examination could shed further light on the interrelationship between product, creative approach, and media strategies.