

The Effectiveness of Advertising Messages Causing Guilty Pleasure

Rei Sagawa, Kansai University

Kyosuke Woo, Kansai University

Miki Ikezawa, Kansai University

Yuya Ogata, Kansai University

Haruka Tohge, Kansai University

Haruna Okamoto, Kansai University

Rintaro Okada, Kansai University

Takahiro Chiba, Kansai University

ABSTRACT

It is important how to appeal information to viewers in the modern times when advertisement is full of market. Therefore, we focused on “Emotion” as an element for effectively appealing information to consumers, and discussed the relevance to advertising effects.

Keywords: *guilty pleasure, product’s attribute, impact of advertisements, emotions*

Introduction

As a result of the progressive increase in the advertising volume and intensified competition among advertisements, viewers are often exposed to advertisements for a single product category. The scope of advertisements is to appeal to viewers. Moscovitch (1976) focused on the concept of discrimination, which is the perceived difference among advertisements within a single product category. The higher the information discrimination, the easier for an advertisement to be adequately perceived. Chandy, Tellis, Macinnis, and Thaivanich (2001) found that, in low-maturity markets, the effect of language-centered advertisements on sales is higher, while in high-maturity markets, the impact of emotional-centered advertising on sales is more significant. The emotions caused by advertisements on viewers are one of the peripheral elements of advertising and are believed to affect information processing (Kishi, 2012; Tellis, 2004).

Guilty pleasure is an emotion that functions as a peripheral element of advertising (Lancellotti and Thomas, 2018). Consumers feel guilty about consumption and consumption con-

ditions when using certain products and services. Thus, they feel greater pleasure as a result of consumption. This is the concept of guilty pleasure. Lancellotti and Thomas (2018) argued that advertisements that generate guilty pleasure increase viewers’ positive attitude toward the advertised product or service. The response to advertising messages that generate guilty pleasure depends on the viewer’s gender. However, screening advertisements based on viewer attributes is not straightforward. Therefore, classifying and analyzing viewers according to their intrinsic characteristics may not be appropriate.

This study classifies advertisements not based on an intrinsic characteristic of the viewer but focusing on the product itself. More specifically, both the new and existing features of a product are considered, and the scenarios in which an advertisement causes a guilty pleasure are identified. By approaching products as a set of attributes, we investigate whether advertisements focus on a product’s attribute (level) and/or cause guilty pleasure (Fishbein, 1963; Ono, 1998), and we compare the impact of advertisements with different

For further information contact: Rei Sagawa, Kansai University (sagawagasa0506@gmail.com).

functions. The comparative analysis shows that, in the case of products with attributes that already exist, advertisements that generate guilty pleasure are the most effective.

Literature Review

The Different Functions of Advertising

Advertisements belong to the 4Ps that constitute the marketing mix. Advertisers see viewers exposed to the media as potential buyers in that they may not be aware of the existence of their products. In this scenario, the advertiser's products are not purchased; hence, advertisers need to convert viewers into buyers. In other words, advertisers let viewers perceive the existence of their products by sending an advertising message. Therefore, the primary function of an advertisement is indicating the existence of the product (Ono, 1998).

According to the multiattribute attitude model, a product is conceived as a bundle of attributes (Bass and Talarzyk, 1972; Fishbein, 1963). Consumers' attitude toward products is the sum of products' attributes and beliefs regarding each product. Likewise, advertisements will consciously or unconsciously generate attitudes toward products. As a result, viewers form positive or negative impressions (Lutz, 1985). A viewer exposed to the media may not know the attributes of a product, even if he/she is aware of the existence of the product. Therefore, advertisers communicate the attributes or attribute level of their products to potential buyers (viewers) not only to make sure that a product is recognized but also for assuring that such product is preferred over alternatives. Therefore, showing the attributes (level) of products is one of the functions of advertising (Ono, 1998).

Advertisements That Cause Guilty Pleasure

When a consumer has never used a certain product category, he/she chooses a product that is perceived as easy to use (Shiv and Huber, 2000). Lancellotti and Thomas (2018) showed that the effectiveness of advertisements that generate a guilty pleasure depends on the gender of the audience. On the one hand, men are characterized by a high agency and do not consider the evaluation of others when choosing a product. Agency is an independent trend and does not place importance on the evaluation carried on by others (Stevens, Maclaran, and Brown, 2003). On the other hand, women are characterized by a low agency and usually take into account the judgment expressed by others.

When a male viewer is presented with an advertising message that causes guilty pleasure, he perceives his action and experience as being negatively evaluated. However, the same message induces a female viewer to imagine the use of the product in the future. Based on the results of their analy-

sis, Lancellotti and Thomas (2018) claimed that advertisements causing guilt delight exert a more significant impact on female viewers.

The Impact of Discrimination Between Advertisements on the Advertising Effect

Viewers are often exposed to a large number of advertisements, even within a single product category. Therefore, differentiation is essential for advertisers to appeal to viewers. Moscovitch (1976) focused on discrimination based on the differences among advertisements within a single product category. He argued that the higher the discrimination of information compared to other advertisements, the more the audience can perceive advertisement information. Conversely, if discrimination of information is scarce, viewers see the plurality of advertisements as similar, making it difficult to discriminate among products (Takeuchi, 2012).

Information Processing Motive and Advertisements Type

Chandy, Tellis, Macinnis, and Thaivanich (2001) categorized advertisements into language-centered advertisements, which claim the benefits of products based on facts, and emotional-centered advertisements, which claim the benefits of products based on emotions. They investigated the different influence of these types of advertisements on sales and showed that the effectiveness of language-centered advertisements is higher in low-maturity markets, while emotional-centered advertisements are more effective in markets with high maturity.

In markets characterized by low maturity, the knowledge and experience of products are limited, and the motivation for information processing is strong. Therefore, viewers positively respond to a language-centered advertisement, through which they can obtain information on the product. On the other hand, in markets characterized by high maturity, viewers' motivation for information processing is weak due to the abundant knowledge and experience of products. Therefore, viewers are more likely to have a positive response to emotional-centered advertisements (Takeuchi, 2012).

Hypotheses

Products with Existing Attributes

Products with existing attributes have socially recognized characteristics. Therefore, the effect obtained by "advertisements indicating the existence of the product" or "advertisements showing an attribute (level)" is generally low (Moscovitch, 1976). Products with existing attributes typically belong to a product category characterized by high market maturity and poor information processing motivation for viewers, as their existence and attributes are known

(Chandy, Tellis, Macinnis, and Thaivanich, 2001). Thus, in this case, an advertisement that causes a specific emotion is more effective. In this scenario, advertisements that cause guilty pleasure are thought to be more effective. Therefore, we propose Hypothesis 1, as follows:

H1: In the case of products with existing attributes, advertisements that generate guilty pleasure are more effective than those indicating the existence of products and their attributes (level).

Products of Existing Brands with New Attributes

Companies often sell their existing brands while promoting new attributes for their products. For example, black carbonated drinks are sold as existing brands with the new feature of being transparent. Products of existing brands with new attributes belong to a product category characterized by low market maturity and high information processing motivation for viewers, as they do not have sufficient knowledge of the new attributes (Chandy, Tellis, Macinnis, and Thaivanich, 2001). Thus, an advertisement that conveys linguistic or visual information on a specific attribute is likely to be effective. Also, since these are products of existing brands that have already been the object of advertising messages, the effect obtained by advertisements indicating the existence of the product is not significant. In addition, advertisements that indicate the new attribute (level) are more effective than advertisements that generate guilty pleasure and advertisements indicating the existence of the product. Therefore, we propose Hypothesis 2, as follows:

H2: In the case of existing brands with new attributes, advertisements indicating the product attributes (level) are more effective than those indicating the existence of products and those generating guilty pleasure.

New Products with New Attributes

New products with new attributes incorporate features that have not been socially recognized yet. These products may generate a new product category because there is no similar product group. Such products are thought to demand a high level of motivation and ability of information processing (Chandy, Tellis, Macinnis, and Thaivanich, 2001). Thus, advertisements that convey linguistic or visual information on the new attributes are likely to be effective. Also, as new products with new attributes are not socially recognized in their existence and attributes, advertisements that convey information on the product itself are also considered effective. Therefore, both advertisements indicating the existence of the product and advertisements showing product attributes (level) are highly effective, in contrast with advertisements that cause guilty pleasure. Therefore, we propose Hypothesis 3, as follows:

H3 In the case of new products with new attributes, advertisements indicating the existence of products and the product attributes (level) are more effective than those causing guilty pleasure.

Empirical Analysis

Data Collection

This section verifies the empirical validity of the proposed hypotheses. We conducted an experimental survey and addressed nine types (3*3) of video advertising messages, which indicate the existence of the product, an attribute (level), or cause guilty pleasure for products with existing attributes (Hypothesis 1), products of existing brands with new attributes (Hypothesis 2), or new products with new attributes (Hypothesis 3).

To verify Hypothesis 1, we utilized three kinds of advertisements for instant noodles as a product with existing attributes. These noodles can be easily cooked in a short time. After each video advertising message, we measured the subjects' attitude toward the advertisement.

For Hypothesis 2, we employed three kinds of video advertisements of water pet bottles as a product of an existing brand with new attributes. This water bottle allows drinking clear water that tastes like coffee. After each video advertising message, we measured the subjects' attitude toward the advertisement.

For Hypothesis 3, we used three kinds of video advertisements of robot cleaners as a new product with new attributes. These robots clean one's room automatically. After each video advertising message, we measured the subjects' attitude toward the advertisement.

Overall, 363 subjects participated in the survey, and 363 valid responses (100%) were collected. The survey participants were both male and female undergraduate students from the Kansai region or social workers.

Measurement Scale

To assess the relative effectiveness of the different advertising messages, we adopted the measures developed by Wells (1964), Perrien, Dussart, and Paul (1985), and Leavitt (1970). The participants were asked to answer the question: "What did you think about the video advertising?" We asked participants to express their views by using a seven-point semantic differential method (pleasant-unpleasant)(Wells, 1964). In addition, we adopted a seven-point Likert scale to assess viewers' perceptions. Participants were asked to choose one from seven values, which range from strongly agree to strongly disagree, for answering two questions about their attitude toward advertising after watching the

video advertising messages. More specifically, they were asked whether the advertisement was interesting, as in Perrien, Dussart, and Paul (1985), and familiar, as in Leavitt (1970). Then, we used the average for each of the three questions as a numerical score of the attitude toward advertising, which is our dependent variable.

Manipulation Checks

Before this analysis, we conducted a manipulation check to determine the suitability of the proposed operation of the experimental investigation. Each question item was assessed by using a seven-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree).

For Hypothesis 1, we verified whether the considered attribute exists. For Hypothesis 2, we checked whether the considered brand exists and whether the considered attribute is a new attribute. For Hypothesis 3, we verified whether the considered product is a new product and whether the considered attribute is a new attribute. For each question, we verified the number of positive and negative answers. More specifically, answers between 1 and 3 were considered negative, while answers between 5 and 7 were considered positive. Then, we conducted a chi-square test. The χ^2 value ($df = 1$) of Hypothesis 1 was 10.94 and significant at the 1% level. The χ^2 values ($df = 1$) for the two question items of Hypothesis 2 were 8.17 and 18.00 and significant at the 1% and 0.1% level, respectively. The χ^2 values ($df = 1$) for the two question items of Hypothesis 3 were 12.48 and 31.18 and both significant at the 0.1% level. Therefore, the operation of the experimental investigation was normally performed.

Next, we determined whether the moving image advertisement presented to the subjects was perceived as an advertisement having the function of “indicating the presence of the product,” “indicating the attribute (level),” or “causing guilty pleasure.” Comparison analysis was carried out to assess subjects’ perceptions. With respect to Hypothesis 2, no significant difference was found between advertisements that indicate the existence of the product and advertisements showing product attributes (level) when viewers were shown an advertisement that indicated product attributes (level) ($P > 0.05$). The remaining results were in line with the experimental investigation operation. In all cases, when presenting an advertisement that causes guilty pleasure, the numerical value associated with the advertisement was the same as in the experimental investigation.

Results

Results of Hypothesis 1

As mentioned before, to examine the empirical validity of the proposed hypotheses, we utilized an advertisement indicating

the existence of a product, an advertisement showing an attribute (level), and an advertisement generating a guilty feeling for products with existing attributes, products of existing brands with new attributes, and new products with new attributes.

For Hypothesis 1, the F value was 8.295 and was significant at the 0.1% level. The average values of the attitude toward advertisements indicating a product existence, advertisements showing an attribute (level), and advertisements generating guilty pleasure were 5.214 (SD = 1.135), 5.242 (SD = 1.132), and 5.723 (SD = 1.063), respectively. Figure 1 reports a comparison of these average values.

The comparison analysis shows that the average value (5.723) of the attitude toward advertisements causing guilt pleasure is higher than the average value of the attitude (5.214) toward advertisements indicating the existence of products and the attitude (5.242) toward advertisements showing product attributes (level) (for both $p < 0.01$). Also, the difference between the average value of the attitude (5.214) toward advertisements indicating the existence of products and the average value of the attitude (5.242) toward advertisement showing product attributes (level) was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Results of Hypothesis 2

For Hypothesis 2, the F value was 16.280 and was significant at the 0.1% level. For advertisements indicating the existence of the product, advertisements indicating product attributes (level), and advertisements that cause guilty pleasure, the attitudes toward advertising were 3.951 (SD = 1.306), 4.753 (SD = 1.353), and 4.907 (SD = 1.163), respectively. Figure 2 reports a comparison of these average values.

Figure 1. Results of Hypothesis 1

Comparison of advertisements that indicate the existence of the product average values = 5.214	average values of advertisements that show the attribute (level) = 5.242
	average values of advertisements that cause guilty pleasure = 5.723**
Comparison of advertisements that show the attribute (level) average values = 5.242	average values of advertisements that cause guilty pleasure = 5.723**

F = 8.295 ($p < 0.001$).

*** indicates significance at the 0.1% level, ** indicates significance at the 1% level, and no mark indicates lack of statistical significance.

Figure 2. Results of Hypothesis 2

Comparison of advertisements that indicate the existence of the product average values = 3.951	average values of advertisements that show the attribute (level) = 4.753***
	average values of advertisements that cause guilty pleasure = 4.907***
Comparison of advertisements that show the attribute (level) average values = 4.753	average values of advertisements that cause guilty pleasure = 4.907

F = 16.280 ($p < 0.001$).

*** indicates statistical significance at the 0.1% level, no mark indicates lack of statistical significance, ** indicates significance at the 0.1% level.

The comparison analysis shows that the average value (4.753) of the attitude toward advertisements showing product attributes (level) is higher than the average value (3.951) of the attitude toward advertisements indicating product existence ($P < 0.001$). However, the difference between the average value of the attitude (4.753) toward advertisements showing product attributes (level) and the attitude (4.907) toward advertisements causing guilty pleasure was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported (only for the former relationship).

Results of Hypothesis 3

For Hypothesis 3, the F value was 7.846 and was significant at the 0.1% level. The average values of the attitude toward advertisements showing the existence of products, advertisements showing product attributes (level), and advertisements causing guilty pleasure were 4.700 (SD = 1.233), 4.641 (SD = 1.039), and 5.163 (SD = 1.220), respectively. Figure 3 reports a comparison of these average values.

Figure 3. Results of Hypothesis 3

Comparison of advertisements that indicate the existence of the product average values = 4.700	average values of advertisements that show the attribute (level) = 4.641
	average values of advertisements that cause guilty pleasure = 5.163**
Comparison of advertisements that show the attribute (level) average values = 4.641	average values of advertisements that cause guilty pleasure = 5.163**

F = 7.846 * ($p < 0.001$).

** indicates significance at the 1% level, no mark indicates lack of statistical significance.

The comparison analysis shows that the average value (4.700) of the attitude toward advertisements indicating the existence of the product is significantly lower than the average value (5.163) of the attitude toward advertisements causing guilty pleasure ($p < 0.01$). In addition, the average value (4.641) of the attitude toward advertisements showing product attributes (level) was significantly lower than the average value (5.163) of the attitude toward advertisements causing guilty pleasure ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Conclusion

Summary and Outcomes

Since the advertising market is currently saturated, sending effective advertising messages to viewers is often difficult. Consumers' emotions can be exploited to achieve discrimination of advertisements and obtain a positive advertisement effect (Kishi, 2012; Tellis, 2004). Therefore, in this study, we focused on guilty pleasure (Lancellotti and Thomas, 2018), which paradoxically combines the feeling of guilt, which has the function of suppressing individual behavior, and the feeling of joy, which can promote the opposite behavior and is a key concept in advertising research.

Companies may be able to conduct more effective advertising campaigns by making use of the knowledge provided by this study. In particular, this study showed that the effectiveness of advertising messages may be increased by using advertisements that cause guilty pleasure when advertising products with the existing attributes.

In addition, this study indicates that, when advertising products of existing brands with new attributes, companies should use advertisements that cause guilty pleasure and advertisements that show product attributes (level) to achieve a positive advertisement effect.

Furthermore, when advertising a new product with a new attribute, companies may be able to obtain a positive advertisement effect by using advertisements that cause guilty pleasure.

Limits of This Research and Future Issues

Several challenges remain open for future research. In the present study, the attitude toward advertising may have been influenced by the (already formed) product attitude. Lee (1995) argued that such prior attitudes toward a brand may affect the evaluation and judgment of advertisements. In other words, when the audience forms attitudes toward advertisements, attitudes toward brands that are already perceived besides advertisement expression methods can also be significant determinants of advertisement attitudes.

In addition, in this study, we asked subjects to address the case of the cleaning robot as it was first released and treat it as though it was a new attribute and a new product. However, the fact that the product automatically cleans when the owner is absent may not have been handled as a new attribute. To make sure that subjects recognize the products targeted for advertisement as new attributes, new surveys using original products and advertisements should be carried out.

Despite these limitations, this study clarified the conditions under which advertisements that cause guilty pleasure work effectively, thus making a significant contribution to advertising research.

References

- Banwari, M., and Myung-Soo, L. (1988), "Separating Brand-Choice Involvement From Product Involvement Via Consumer Involvement Profiles," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 15, 43-4.
- Bass, F.M. (1972), "Fishbein and Brand Preference: A Reply," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 9(4), 461.
- Chattopadhyay, A. and Kunal, B. (1990), "Humor in Advertising: The Moderating Role of Prior Brand Evaluation," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27(4), 466-476.
- Chandy, R.K., Tellis, G.J., MacInnis, D.J., and Thaivanich, (2001), "What to Say When: Advertising Appeals in Evolving Markets," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 38(4), 399-414.
- Fishbein, M. (1963), "An Investigation of the Relationships Between Beliefs About an Object and the Attitude Toward That Object," *Human Relations*, 16(3), 188-240.
- Lancellotti, M.P., and Sunil, T.(2018), "Men hate It, Women Love It: Guilty Pleasure Advertising Messages," *Journal of Business Research*, 85(April), 271-280.
- Leavitt, C. (1970), "A Multidimensional Set of Rating Scales for Television Commercials," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 54(5), 427-429.
- Lee, T. (1995), "A Study on the Effect of Humor Perception on Advertisement: Perspectives of Existing Research and Future Tasks," *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Social Studies Keio University*, 42, 1-7.
- Lutz, R.J. (1985), "Affective and Cognitive Antecedents of Attitude Toward the Ad: A Conceptual Framework," in L.F. Alwitt, and A.A. Mitchell eds., *Psychological Processes and Advertising Effects: Theory, Research and Application*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 45-63.
- Moscovitch, M., and Craik, F.I.M. (1976), "Depth of Processing, Retrieval Cues, and Uniqueness of Encoding as Factors in Recall," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 15, 447-458.
- Ono, A. (1998), "Product Differentiation Model and Advertisement Concept: as a Foundation of a Comprehensive Marketing Theory Model," *Mita Commercial Research (Keio University)*, 41(1), 59-83.
- Perrien, J., Dussart, and Paul (1985), "Advertisers and The Factual Content of Advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, 14(1), 30-35.
- Shiv, B., and Huber, J. (2000), "The Impact of Anticipating Satisfaction of Consumer Choice," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(Sept), 202-216.
- Stevens, L., Maclaran, P., and Brown, S. (2003), "Red Time Is Me Time Advertising, Ambivalence, and Women's Magazines," *Journal of Advertising*, 32(1), 35-45.
- Takeuchi, R. (2012), "Discrimination of Ad Expression Cue: Analysis of Suppression Ability on Competitive Advertisement Effectiveness," Mitsuda Commerce Research Student Papers Collection (Keio University), 2012 issue, 707-720.
- Wells, W.D. (1964), "Emotional Quotient Scale and the Reaction Profile," *Journal of Marketing*, 28(4), 45-52.