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The Role of Humor Appeal in Advertising

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Abstract

Advertisement is an inseparable element of the promotional activities of a company. There are multiple ways in which a company designs its advertisement to attract and induce customers. For the FMCG sector, advertisements have become an essential part of the expenditure. Advertisements have a significant impact on society. Every section of society has its preferences and appealing factors. On one side, youth commonly relates to humor. On another side elderly aged people generally feel connected with emotional content. Nowadays, companies are paying huge attention to design an advertisement in such a way that appeals to their target market customers. People usually do not like to watch advertisements while watching TV or browsing on the internet. A component of humor can make the advertisement worth watching. It can considerably affect the buying decision of customers. The humor appeal can induce people to buy a product because they may feel an emotional attachment with that product as its advertisement makes them smile. We have many examples of advertisements like Pepsi Max, Heat Electric, Budweiser & Uber, etc. This paper has highlighted how humor in advertising is gaining massive recognition as it extensively affects people's buying behavior.

Key Words: Advertisement, Humor, Emotion, Customer.

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1. Introduction

Advertising plays a crucial role in attracting customers towards a particular product and hence escalating its sales. In India, advertising has evolved, witnessing many changes in its almost 70year duration. In early times advertisements used to be emotional. Then, humor has taken a good share in advertisement models. With the rapid increase in consumption of intoxicating products, "fear advertising" evolved. Advertising is not a mere promotional activity, but it is a bedrock for brand loyalty. An emotional connection of customers while watching an ad on television or seeing that ad in a newspaper evokes relatedness and forms a perception in their minds. Generally, we perceive what we know, so it becomes essential for advertisers to show to their targeted audience. Although we try to be rational and reasonable before making our buying decision, our emotions significantly affect our buying behavior, which does not mean that emotion-driven choices are wrong. Advertisements are designed for promoting a cause or campaign that contains emotional content which inspires people at large.

Similarly, adding humor in an advertisement make it more impactful. The right type of humor attracts the attention of the audience. Who does not like to laugh? Humorous content makes customers laugh hence manages to create a link with the particular product. It establishes the intent to purchase the product in the customer's mind as long as the advertiser knows what type of humor strategy will. Even while watching TV, people constantly use smart phones. In such a situation, it becomes very challenging to grab the attention of consumers. Humor appeal grabs attention and makes an enduring impression in the mind of the customers.

They focus on providing the solution to customer's fear and insecurity. The importance of emotional appeal in an advertisement is undeniable. The degree of effect may vary from person to person. If fear, humor, and emotions are put wisely in designing an ad, it can significantly change the sales of a particular product. In a country like India, where culture and values play a significant role in making the buying decision, the emotional appeal in an advertisement may act as a "silent salesman" and persuade people more efficiently. Sometimes, by arousing fear, the marketer scares the audience by explaining the consequences of not using a particular product. Cause-related marketing focuses on profit-making and society's betterment by following corporate social responsibility generally grabs audience attention through powerful emotional appeal. Advertising awareness campaigns such as climate change, child labor awareness programs, female feticide awareness programs, and other sensitive issues are advertised through "soul-shaking" content and considerably impact society. The mindful use of humor in advertisements can also bring a positive outcome for a particular product. Humor appeal brings smile on consumers' face and psychologically link consumer with the product. It is a tricky but practical approach to seek the attention of consumers.

Hilarious advertisements, incredibly animated cartoon characters catch kids' attention and make the product popular among kids. Funny TV ad commercials and funny print ads proved to be more helpful in popularizing a brand among the masses. Strategically using fear, humor, and emotions in advertising can be very helpful for spreading brand awareness for new entrants. The mixed-use of fear with humor is a very inventive concept that can work very well. Fear appeal is used for advertising various services and causes like antismoking, careful and safe driving, sunscreen usage, liquor consumption, etc. It can lead to defensive responses in the audience, decreasing the influential factor of fear advertising. Past research suggests that high levels of fear



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tension stimulation are disturbing to the audience and can induce defensive responses such as reduced message amplification and perceived vulnerability to the threat.

Role of Humor

"Humor in advertising is like a gun in the hands of a child. You have to know how to use it. Or else it can blow upon you". (Miller, 1992)

Humor consists of various elements, namely

- 1. Humor creation
- 2. Sense of relativity
- 3. Ability to use humor to achieve social goals
- 4. Admiration of humor
- 5. Content of humor

When an advertiser uses humor in advertising, the above-pointed elements are considered to be included in designing an advertisement. Spirit is intrinsically attractive to consumers as it has value in culture. Humor can seize a consumer's attention if it is portrayed in a playful style. A positive correlation between mood and attracting attention has been found in diverse types of conditions. Relatedness with humor can positively persuade people to relate with the brand it has been recommended for many years, as the intended use of humor can be fruitful to advertisers. Advertisers have to make sure that gross humor does not distract the audience's attention from the message, using the right amount of humor relating it with the statement, avoiding the things that make fun of consumers, and being alert with the core content spirit is noteworthy.

Types of humor

We have different types of humor which are used in designing an advertisement. These humor techniques should be used wisely.

i. Juxtaposition

The most popular humor technique used in advertising is juxtaposition. In juxtaposition, two or more elements are put together and compared to create humorous content. For example, Hewlett Packard has created a unique advertisement in which a Christmas picture "ruined" by a teenager dressed like a punk. A more idealized teenager is shown in the print ad with the modified image using Hewlett Packard's Photo Smart software. This kind of juxtaposition can be used wisely by delivering a solution to a problem in the advertisement.

ii. Personification

The second type of humor is personification. This type of humor involves attributing human characteristics to plants, objects, or animals without them. An example of this is the FilthyLuker advertisement which personifies a tree by putting eyes on the tree and portraying it as a human. They used personification very cleverly and creatively.

iii. Exaggeration

The third point we have exaggeration involves representing a real-life situation more dramatically or overstating a point more than reality. The simple fact is that you make something is more effective or impactful than it is in reality. This creates a positive link with the audience as they laugh hard seeing an exaggerated situation/content.

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iv. Wicked as a Pun

The fourth most common technique we commonly see in advertising is the simple pun. One of the most well-known of these is the WKD advertisements, which use wicked as a pun for the acronym WKD. This simple technique often assists in installing brand names into your mind and creating specific associations through humor.

v. Sarcasm

Fifthly we come to sarcasm. Sarcasm is a mode of satirical wit generally bitter, acidic, and often mildly derogatory. Sarcasm is situational and is usually used to mock someone. By applying sarcasm in an advertisement, an interaction between two parties is shown by creating humor and often relatable situations that we generally encounter—saying things humorously that need courage is the soul of sarcasm.

Always Avoid Controversial Content

In making advertisements, unique and innovative companies often use controversial topics related to religion, caste, belief, ethnic or social group. It can upset the sentiments of people. It may put the name of the brand in the bin of shame.

Good Humor is Natural Humor

People do not relate themselves to artificial stuff. So it also goes with humor. Many jokes are presented to be funny, but they are not amusing and seem silly and irritating. On the other hand, jokes originating from the heart and in a natural situation are always liked by the audience as they feel connected. Being genuine and original always creates a sense of relatedness.

Don't Act Silly

People generally like those brands that do not use exaggerated content about their brand and show their brand prime and usually joke on their product using mild humor. A bit of selfcriticism makes the brand more real and relatable and enhances the chances of the brand's likeability that your company will offer. Always try to make advertisements customer-friendly to reach the target audience. Do not criticize or make fun of other brands. It will look silly and negatively present your brand.

Humor is a part of human nature. According to Weinberger and Gullas (1992), humorous advertisements strongly attract audience attention and create interest in the ad, which has increased the product's appeal. A study carried out by Speck (1987) compares the effect of humorous advertisement with the non-humor advertisement. The results reveal that it attracts people's attention in the first stage, induces them to sustain interest, makes them quickly get the message content, and encourages them to take final action of purchase. A competitive marketing environment helps the brand break through the traditional advertisement clutter and gives them a refreshing and relaxing feeling. He concluded in his research that a humorous advertisement performs far better than a non-humorous advertisement in terms of creating awareness and preferences

Benefits of humor in advertising

In a study conducted by Weinberger & Galas (1992), the following benefits of humor are concluded:



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- 1. Humor draws attention. Many studies give this result.
- 2. Humor may assist the inclusive aspect of an advertisement.
- 3. Humor increases liking. Even it has been seen that there is a more vital link between humor and appreciation than any other factor. That is why humor in advertising is stressed upon as the impact of humor cannot be undervalued.
- 4. Related humor is superior compare to unrelated humor. The studies carried out to compare these two forms have shown a completely different advantage for related humor. However, there has not been any adequate research that described a specific form of humor that should be applied to have differential benefit.

Complications

1. Humor does not augment source credibility. In common, humor has no differential effect, and many studies advocate cases when humor harms source credibility. Source credibility here means that if the source of the message is reliable or not.

2. Audience aspect affects humor response. There are deviations among the audience in taste and preference of the content of humor in ads. Therefore, it should be assessed in advance that what may appear funny to a specific gender, community, or age group concerning their perception.

Humor is unquestionably not a magical wand, according to the researchers. It is not to suppose that humor content is a guarantee of the success of an advertisement. There is a wave of funny advertisements, but some cases in which advertisers exaggerate it and hence lose the core message of the ad. It is essential to identify that humor can be effective and appropriate in some ads and not in others.

The research by Catanescu & Tom (2001) reveals that humor is more frequently used in television advertisements compared to print. It suggests that television is a more effective medium to use humor. According to researchers, sarcasm is the most accepted form of humor used in magazines and print advertisements, whereas silliness is most frequently used in television advertising.

2. Literature Review

In today's modern bloodthirsty business environment, companies spend a massive amount on advertisements to inform people about their brands and build strong customer relationships. Companies use different promotional gimmicks to catch customer consideration and surpass competitors to stand firm and take competitive advantage. (Sorensen, 2008)

The effect of different types of emotions differs from person to person. Emotions like humor, fear, and excitement can be a magnet for the customers' eyes and make the product well-known among customers. This has been observed that emotions in advertisements like love, humor, fear makes people happy, sad, or excited and arouse feelings for that particular brand. (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012)

Poels & Dewitt (2006) define emotional advertisement as a promotional technique designed to elicit an emotional response from the customer. According to Yoo and MacInnis, "Emotional advertisements attract positive response from the customers as any advertisement that has emotional appeal strikes positively in people's minds. Emotions pull the audiences towards the brand. (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005)

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Page & Heidi said that when a person encounters an advertisement, it influences the customers' feelings and approach towards a brand and acts as a link between the customer and their ultimate brand selection. (Page & Heidi)

Lacsniak & Muehling explains, "Conventionally, emotions are not considered as important in affecting consumers' purchase decisions and supposed to be an unhelpful element in the decisionmaking process. But now, the time has been changed, and emotional advertisements are considered an important part of promotions". Lacsniak & Muehling, 1993)

Edell & Moore speak out in their study that emotion in advertisements certainly draws consumers' attention and makes it interesting. Also, if a celebrity endorses a brand, people like to experience the same by using that product. Hence, they feel connected and convinced by the advertisement". (Edell & Moore, 2005)

According to Alvarez & Cavanagh, "People instantly develop a good feeling for an advertisement that has emotional appeal. It makes a good image in the minds of audiences". (Alvarez & Canavagh, 2004)

According to Hermeking, "emotional advertisement is certainly a very striking sort of advertisement. Emotions pleasantly create involvement with the brands and increase brand popularity". (Hermeking, 2006)

Various researches have been conducted about emotional advertising. A positive relationship has been found between emotions and customer buying patterns. Moving advertisements binds the audience and creates a strong relationship with customers. It enhances the credibility of brand selection. It invokes the feeling of purchase whether the product is needed or not. (Samovar & McDaniel, 2012)

According to Batra and Ray, "there is a strong relationship between emotional advertisements and customer acceptance rate and element of emotions produces purchase appeal. It has also been found in the study that results drawn from dynamic advertising have an extreme probability of affecting the purchase decisions of customers. (Batra and Ray, 1986)

Humor should be favored over fear when the message target unresolved voters or supporters, whereas fear should be preferred when the message targets opponents. (Capelli, S., Sabadie, W., & Trendel, 2012).

3. **Problem Statement**

There is an intense challenge in front of brands to appeal to and retain consumers in the current competitive situation. Today's customers are encountered by many forms of advertisements that make the choice process highly critical and imperative. Thus, advertisers must take significant actions to maintain their competitiveness in the market by adopting emotional appeal in the advertisement. It could be an essential way to build up a strong customer association. Many brands are being advertised through humor and other emotions, and it is working great for them. This study would analyze the effectiveness of humor in convincing consumers.

4. Objectives of the Study

- i. The study's main objective is to know about the importance of emotions in advertising a product, service, or idea.
- ii. To explore the various aspects of humor and other emotions in advertising.



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iii. To analyze the effect of humor in advertising.

5. Research Methodology

The primary research method for this study is a literature review and theoretical modeling. In addition, this study will review various aspects of humorous advertising. Secondary data provides an excellent starting for research papers. The Quantitative technique is also used for understanding and analyzing the effects of humor appeal in advertising. In this study, surveys and studies conducted by various researchers are analyzed. Finally, an exploratory research approach is adopted.

Data Collection

The Convenience sampling method was used to collect data. A Questionnaire was prepared using google forms, and the link was directly shared with respondents to reach the targeted number of responses, that is, 100. A survey questionnaire was designed to assess the impact of humor and on people. A focus group of 100 people was selected from the population of age group 20-40 years. Respondents were asked close-ended multiple-choice questions. Fifty-five respondents were male, and 45 were female. In addition, 25 of them were graduates, and 35 of them were post-graduate.

6. Testing Hypothesis

- H₀ (Null hypothesis): Emotion of humor in advertisements has no impact on people's buying behavior.
- H₁ (Alternate hypothesis): Emotion of humor in advertisements is positively associated with customer buying behavior.

7. Findings

No. of people agreed I watch humorous ads 95 I like funny ads 90 I Discuss humorous ads with others 85 Humorous ads are appealing 100 I recommend humor in ads 75

8. Results

Descriptive statistics: count/n= 5 Missing= 0 Mean=89 Median=90 Max.=100 Min.=75 Standard deviation=8.602



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Vaishali Siddhu i. H0 Hypothesis

Since p-value < α , H0 is rejected.

The average of Group-1's population is taken into account to be not equal to the μ 0. In alternative words, the difference between the average of Group-1 and μ 0 is large enough to be statistically significant.

ii. P-Value

p-value equals 0.00000, (p(x \leq T) = 1.000000). This implies that the possibility of type1 error (rejecting a correct H0) is small: 0.000 (0.0%).

The smaller the p-value, the more it supports H1.

iii. The Statistics

The test statistic T equals 10.462683, is not in the 95% critical value accepted range: [-1.9842: 1.9842].

x=89.00, is not in the 95% accepted range: [78.2900 : 81.7100].

The statistic S' equals 0.860.

iv. Effect Size

The observed standardized effect size is large (1.05). Thus, it indicates that the magnitude of the difference between the average and μ_0 is large.

The difference is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternate hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

A study was conducted by Buzzsumo analyzing the top 10,000 most-shared articles on the web. Those articles were then drawn to emotions to see which emotion had the maximum influence on content.

The most popular were

- Awe (25%)
- Laughter (17%)
- Amusement (15%)

On the contrary, the least popular were sadness and anger, just 7% of the most shared content.

9. Conclusion and Suggestions

Humor is undeniably a great tool to use in advertisements to draw consumer attention. Based on literature review and past studies, humor appeared to be a significant factor in stimulating people's emotions towards a particular brand. A positive affiliation is highlighted in the literature review. However, in most studies, it has been emphasized to keep humor ina suitable amount. It has been found that what is liked in one country may not essentially be liked in others. Results have differed across countries about different types of emotions. Through a one-sample t-test, it has been proved that humor appeal is powerfully impactful in creating a positive attitude toward a brand. After discussing all the significant aspects of emotional advertising, we can conclude that emotions are an integral part of advertising. Whether it's humor, fear, fun, anger, excitement, or any other sort of feeling, it triggers the mind of consumers depending upon the psychology of consumers.



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It is suggested that an advertiser should use humor in an appropriate amount and try to create a positive link with the customer. Spirit is the strongest among all emotions to grab the attention of people to an advertisement. However, before using any feeling in the ad, it is advised to conduct audience research as the audience is the king of the market. Therefore, all the endeavors are directed to capture the target audience's attention.

Further scope

There is a growing need to conduct researches in this area. We can have a comparative study of advertisement effects of two companies of the same industry. It can answer the question of how to plan the advertisement superior to competitors. An analysis can be conducted to evaluate the effect of emotional advertising across various nations of different age groups.

A study can be conducted to analyze FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO) emotions in social media advertising how an advertisement can be designed to make it worth watching and eye-catching. Here, the effect of celebrity appeal in ads could also be studied. A comparative study of rational and humorous advertising could also be conducted to identify which is more powerful.

In a world of information surplus, quick change, and intricacy, increased need of building relationships with consumers, and the increasing availability of Web-based products and services, comparison data on any aspect from performance through style to price effect has never been considered necessary.

There is a budding need to research in this area. If one is not already using humor, how can one use it to get maximum benefit? If one is already using this appeal, how can one attract more customers? How can one make it more effective by avoiding its issues? If one is neglecting the effect, there are the chances that one is missing out on the opportunity of making a powerful impact on the customers, hence failed in creating long-lasting relationships with one's customers. It is the memorable part of the appeal that has come, stays, and prevails in the hearts and minds of the consumers, which is much needed to create and manage brand loyalty.

Music also induces emotions and links consumers with the brand. People recollect things quickly, which they connect with some music. There is a strong chance that people memorize an advertisement because of its music appeal. Therefore, music plays a significant role in popularizing a particular brand.

What people don't want to see in a television advertisement is a matter of worry. Some advertisements make people uncomfortable while watching them on TV with family members, thus creating a negative impression in people's minds. We have several studies about what people like in advertisements. Now, there is a requirement to study what people dislike in ads.

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