

THE IMPACT OF CONSUMERS ATTITUDE TOWARD ADVERTISING ON PRODUCT ATTITUDE

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SUMMARY

In the paste decades, marketing researchers tried to understand and determine the impact of advertising on consumers' attitude toward products or brands. The starting point into the analysis was that the favorable or unfavorable evaluation of advertisement is transferred or associated with the promoted product or brand. This paper is aimed to highlight the manner and the grade in which the consumers' attitude toward advertising is influencing the attitude toward the advertised product. More than evaluating the influence of attitude toward advertising, we outline the influence exerted by the elements of an advertisement. Moreover, we examine the impact of attitude toward the advertising on the attitude toward various product categories. The results are based on an empirical research that took place in Cluj-Napoca.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last decades, a major concern of the marketing researchers has been to understand and determine the impact of advertising on consumers' attitude toward the promoted products or brands. The premise behind this was that the favorable

or unfavorable assessment of an ad is associated with the promoted brand. There is thus a potential for a direct causal link between the attitude toward an advertisement and attitude and behavior toward the brand promoted in that ad.

The attitude toward the ad is defined as the predisposition to respond (react) in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular ad and has two different components: an affective component reflecting the emotions evoked by the ad and a cognitive component reflecting how well made and useful the message and the information in it is considered to be (Shimp, 1981, p. 9-15).

The studies conducted by Mitchell and Olson (1982) were among the first to demonstrate that the way consumers assess an ad provides an impact on brand attitude above the ability of the ad to communicate information on brand attributes. Both the attitude toward the brand and the purchase intention are influenced, according to the above authors, not only by beliefs about the brand but also, to a considerable extent, by the attitude toward the ad.

A primary objective of the research was to identify the mechanisms through which the thoughts and feelings evoked by an ad lead to a favorable attitude toward the ad and how (and under what conditions) this attitude leads, in turn, to a favorable brand attitude. Thus, MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch (1986) developed a model, supported by considerable empirical evidence, by means of which to explain the impact of advertising on consumers' attitudes. According to their model, the consumer's exposure to a particular ad triggers affective (feelings) and cognitive (thoughts) responses. These feelings and thoughts influence the consumer's attitude toward the ad and the cognitions that relate to the brand which also affect attitude toward the brand. Thus, the attitude toward the ad affects attitude toward the brand both directly and indirectly through shaping brand cognitions. The reasoning is as follows: consumers with a favorable attitude toward an ad are more receptive to arguments in favor of the brand. For example, a consumer who likes the commercial for the Milka chocolate is less likely to consider the disadvantages of the brand (higher price) but rather s/he will only have in mind its advantages as the ad contains humor and originality.

In the analysis that LeRoux makes concerning the influence of the attitude toward the ad on brand attitude, he proposes a model in which the attitude toward the ad can be explained by means of three categories of reactions: reactions triggered by the execution of an ad, emotional reactions and cognitive reactions triggered by arguments presented in the ad. Concomitantly, LeRoux elaborated a

matrix with reactions triggered by ads, by identifying for each type of reaction a series of specific perceptual factors: positive cognitive reactions (relevance, credibility, realism, creativity, imagination, familiarity), negative cognitive reactions (confusion, hate), positive affective reactions (entertainment, humor, vitality, activity, liking, empathy, sensuousness), negative affective reactions (irritation, sluggishness) (Dobre, 2005, p.172).

Concerning the period of time during which the effect of the favorable attitude is manifested, some studies claim that this effect persists over time while other studies show that it is short-lived. Thus, it has been suggested that in the case of a likable ad which draws so much attention to itself that brand attributes in the ad are not processed by the consumer, after a time lag, the ad liking decays and the consumer has weaker attitudes to the brand than if the ad had not taken away attention from brand attributes (Chattopadhyay, Nedungadi, 1992).

The effect of ad liking on brand attitude varies according to the nature of the promoted product. According to several studies by Brown and Stayman (1992), the effects are greater for novel and unfamiliar brands than for well-known ones. At the same time, the effects of ad liking on brand liking are also greatly reduced after the consumer has tried the brand (Smith, 1993). On the other hand, the brand cognitions, shaped as a result to exposure to the ad, play a deciding role in determining the brand attitude in the case of familiar products.

The consumer's level of involvement in the purchasing decision is another factor which bears on the influence exerted by the ad attitude on the brand attitude. According to the elaboration likelihood model, the effect of peripheral cues on brand attitude is much greater under low-involvement conditions. Consequently, one can infer that the effect of attitude to the ad on brand attitudes is greater under low-involvement conditions since the feelings that play a major role in shaping attitude to the ad are considered to be peripheral cues (Homer, 1990). The results of the studies conducted on this subject are different, which means that the attitude to the ad often contributes to brand attitudes under both high and low involvement on the part of consumer. This is explained through the fact that the different components of attitude to the ad (evaluation of the ability to entertain and inform the consumer) require both central and peripheral processing of the message (MacKenzie, Lutz, 1989). Thus, while under low-involvement conditions the feelings evoked by the ad are a major contributor to ad liking, under high-

involvement conditions both feelings and the ad's usefulness jointly contribute to ad liking (Miniard, Bhatla, Rose, 1990).

To better understand how the ad attitude affects brand attitude it is important to see what kind of attitude consumers develop toward the ad itself. If the feelings that the ad creates are positive and if the way the ad is made and the information in it are evaluated favorably then the ad should elicit a favorable attitude toward itself (Greene, 1992). An ad can be liked either because it is entertaining or because it is considered useful, or both. According to Greene's model, the attitude to the ad is influenced by the following factors: attitude toward ads in general, attitude toward the source of the message (advertiser), the mood of the viewer and the feelings evoked by the ad, the evaluation of the executional characteristics of the ad (the format of the message), the viewer's perceptions of the credibility and believability of the ad.

On the other hand, Solomon lists the following determining factors which affect the ad attitude: attitude toward advertiser, evaluation of the ad's executional characteristics (the message format), the consumer's mood and the feelings evoked by the ad, the ability of the ad to trigger reactions on the part of the consumer (Solomon, 2003, p. 230).

One of the key factors shaping the attitude to the ad is represented by the nature of the executional. Different creative strategies may lead to the same overall level of attitude on the part of the consumers. In this context, the identification of creative characteristics which make an ad to be likable becomes essential.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

This paper is aimed to highlight the manner and the grade in which the consumers' attitude toward advertising is influencing the attitude toward the advertised product or service. More than evaluating the influence of attitude toward advertising, we tried to outline the influence exerted by the elements of an advertisement: message source (TV stars, professional sportspeople, artists, experts, regular consumers, animated and imaginary characters), message format (life scenes, demonstrations, testimonials, experts recommendations, animated scenes, fictional scenes), but, also by the emotions induced by the advertisement.

Because there are researches which show that the impact of attitude toward the ad on brand attitude varies by the nature of the promoted product, we examined

the impact of attitude toward advertising on the attitude toward various product categories (household products, intimate use products, long-term use products, luxury products, banking and financial services, tourism and entertainment services).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data collection was carried out in Cluj-Napoca. The method of data collection was face-to-face interview at respondent's home.

The sample frame included 550 people above 18 years old who watch television programs. We applied the quota sampling because we did not have a database of all the population in order to apply one of the random sampling techniques, moreover random sampling would have been more expensive and harder to achieve by our means.

From our knowledge, a similar study has not been done yet on the Romanian market, thus no prior information was available regarding the most important variables of interest. From the National Institute of Statistics we have obtained the structure of the population of Cluj-Napoca by age and gender which was used in creating the quotas. In the end we obtained a sample of 55% females and 45% males, 46% with ages 18-34, 19% of 35-44, 21% of 45-55 and 14% over 55 years old.

RESULTS

The analysis of the way advertising affects consumers attitudes had as starting point the evaluation of consumers' attitude toward advertising. Based on our empirical research, 48.5% of interviewees display a favorable or very favorable attitude toward advertising whereas only 15.5% of them display an unfavorable or very unfavorable attitude. Also, the percentage of indifferent respondents is quite high, namely 35%.

Before determining how advertising affects the shaping of the attitude to various product categories, we deemed appropriate to analyse the role and place of advertising as against the other personal or commercial sources that consumers appeal to in order to adopt an attitude toward different products or brands. The interviewees were thus required to state how often they take into account the opinion of

acquaintances, the ads, their experience with the product, the shop-assistants or brand awareness when they adopt an attitude toward a product, service or brand.

In the ranking of these information sources the ads hold the last position whereas experience with the product and brand awareness are ranked the first and second, respectively (more results are available upon request). Thus, only 26.1% of respondents state that they often or very often take account of ads when they form their opinion about a product, service or brand whereas 44.4% state that they seldom or very seldom take account of advertising when they adopt a certain attitude (authors' calculations).

According to socio-demographic characteristics, sex and occupation are discriminant variables. Women are thus the consumers who more often take account of ads when they adopt an attitude toward a product, service or brand (Kendall's tau-b = 15.828, Sig. = 0.003). As for the other information sources, the opinion of acquaintances (friends, colleagues) and brand awareness are equally important to the youth segments (Kendall's tau-b = 48.255, Sig. = 0.010).

The attitude toward advertising has a positive and significant impact as well (Kendall's tau-b = 0.297, Sig. = 0.000), which reveals that a positive attitude to advertising as well as to the endorser or format of the ad prompts consumers to take account of ads when shaping their attitude to a product, service or brand. The strongest liking is for TV stars (Kendall's tau-b = 0.212, Sig. = 0.000) and experts (Kendall's tau-b = 0.164, Sig. = 0.000) as well as for demonstration (Kendall's tau-b = 0.238, Sig. = 0.000) and testimonial (Kendall's tau-b = 0.234, Sig. = 0.000) formats which means that consumers with a favorable attitude toward the above endorsers and formats will more often take account of ads when they form opinion about products and services (authors' calculations).

The analysis of advertising's impact on consumers' attitude toward different product and service categories (household products, intimate use products, long-term use products, luxury products, banking and financial services, tourism and entertainment services) reveal insignificant differences among statistical averages (more results are available on request). According to the answers given, over 40% of interviewees state that they seldom or very seldom take ads into account when they adopt an attitude toward different product and service categories.

It should be noted, however, that the attitude ads most often influence is toward household products, long-term use products and intimate use products (clothing,

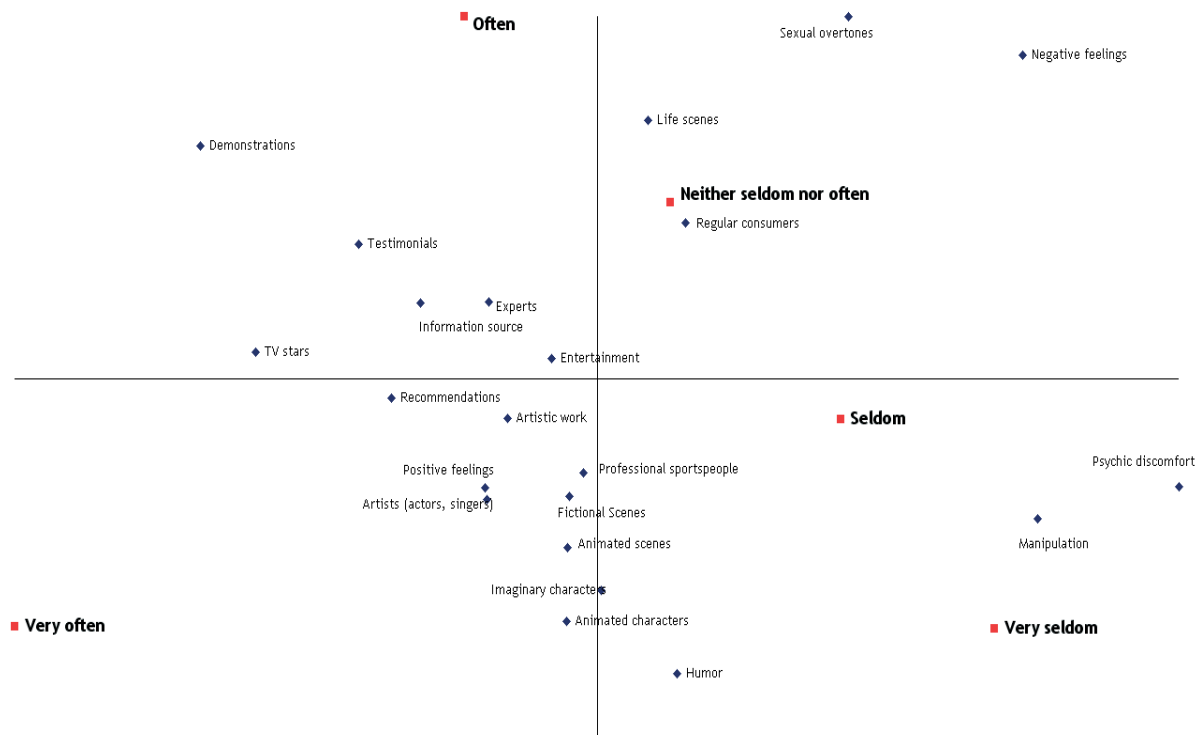
footwear). Within these product categories we set to analyse the existing correlations between how ads affect attitude to household products, long-term use products and intimate use products, and consumers' perception of advertising, their attitude to the endorser and format of the ad and the means used to evoke feelings. Within this analysis, consumers may be divided into the following categories: 1) very seldom affected by advertising; 2) seldom affected; 3) neither seldom nor often affected; 4) often affected and 5) very often affected.

The analysis of the figure 1 reveals that consumers very often affected by advertising when forming opinion about household products perceive advertising as artistic work, thus preferring ads with animated or imaginary characters, artists (actors, singers) or professional sportspeople and whose format is represented by animated or fictional scenes and recommendations. Their preferred means of evoking emotions are humor and positive feelings (joy, pleasure, pride).

Consumers who state they are often affected by ads when forming opinion about household current use products view advertising as an information source on products and services and, to a certain extent, a source of entertainment, with a favorable attitude toward demonstration, testimonial or life scene ads. The preferred endorsers in the ads are experts, TV stars and regular consumers.

Figure 1. The ads' influence on attitude to household products and consumers' attitude toward the ad's

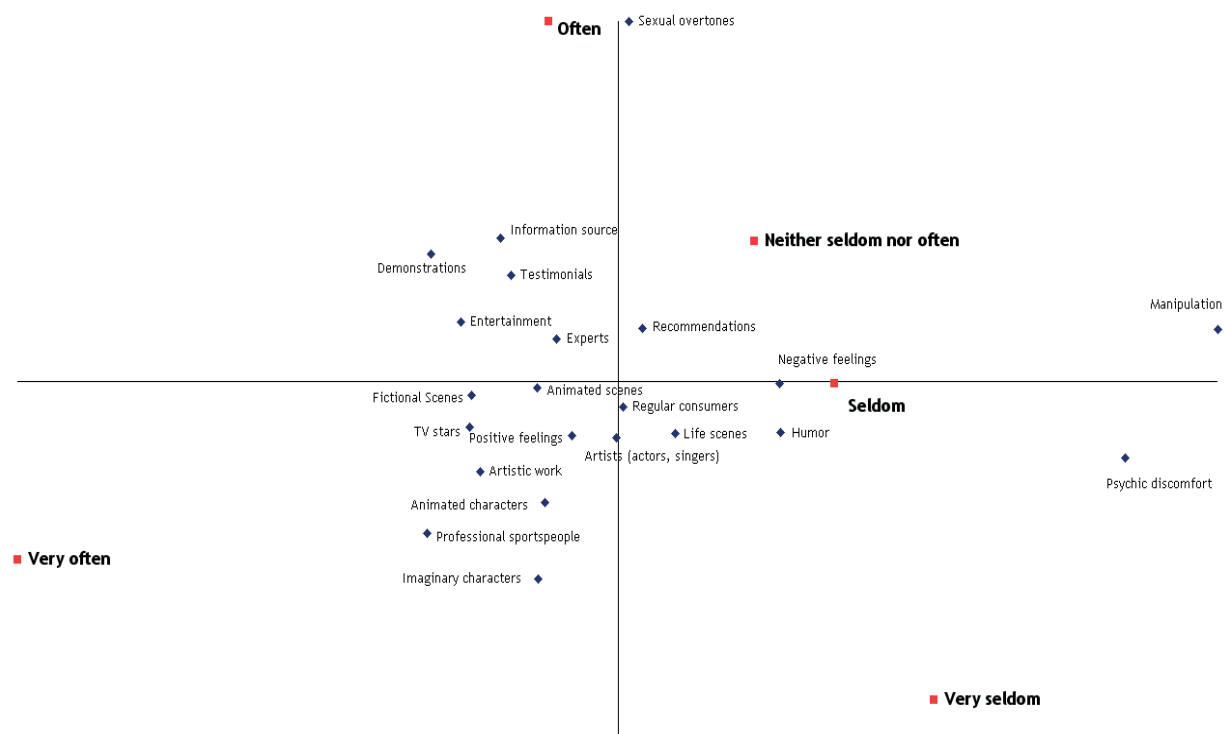
C)



Authors' calculations

In the case of intimate use products, it can be noticed that consumers who very often take ads into account when forming opinion about this product category view advertising as artistic work, thus preferring ads with professional sportspeople, TV stars, animated and imaginary characters and where positive feelings are evoked (joy, pleasure, pride).

As with household products, consumers who are often affected by advertising view it as entertainment and a source of information on products and services. The preferred endorsers are experts and the most liked formats are demonstrations, testimonials and recommendations (figure 2).

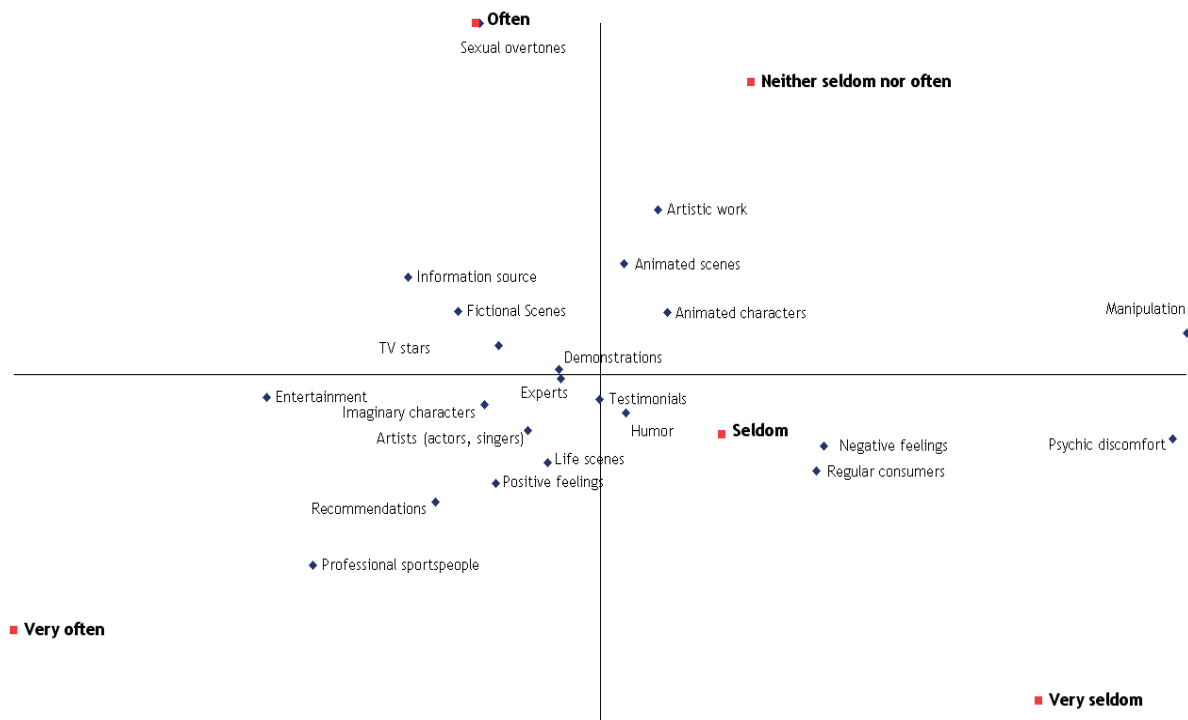
Figure 2. The ads' influence on attitude to intimate use products and consumers' attitude toward the ad's

Authors' calculations

The analysis of the long-term use products chart shows that people often affected by advertising when forming opinion about these products view advertising as a form of entertainment, having strong preference for endorsers such as professional sportspeople, artists (actors, singers) and imaginary characters. The preferred means to evoke emotions are humor and positive feelings (joy, pleasure, pride) (figure 3).

Consumers who often take ads into account when forming opinion about long-term use products view advertising as artistic work, displaying a very favorable attitude toward ads with sexual overtones, or source of information on products and services. TV stars and animated characters are the preferred endorsers and the preferred formats are represented by animated and fictional scenes and demonstrations.

Figure 3. The ads' influence on attitude to long-term use products and consumers' attitude toward the ad's components



Authors' calculations

From the point of view of socio-demographic characteristics, the significant correlations reveal that women more often take ads into account when shaping attitude toward household current use products (Kendall's tau-b = 0.166, Sig. = 0.000) while the young people more often take ads into account when forming opinion about luxury products (Kendall's tau-b = - 0.2213, Sig. = 0.000), long-term use products (Kendall's tau-b = - 0.114, Sig. = 0.000), tourism and entertainment offers (Kendall's tau-b = - 0.122, Sig. = 0.000), (authors' calculations).

CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on our empirical research, we can emphasize the following conclusions:

- Ads most often influence consumers' attitude in the case of household products, long-term use products and intimate use products.

- Women more often take ads into account when shaping attitude toward household products while the young people more often take ads into account when forming opinion about luxury products and long-term use products.
- Consumers affected by advertising when forming opinion about household products assess positively the ad's information (content). Therefore, in the case of this product category, the ads should highlight the benefits and performance of the promoted brands.
- In the case of long-term use and intimate use products, consumers affected by advertising when forming opinion about brands of this category appreciate the ads featuring personalities and regular consumers. In the mapping out of the creative strategy, advertisers could use real or symbolic referents trusted by the target segment and with whom consumers identify themselves or wish to identify. Moreover, these consumers expressed their liking for ads that use humor and sex, these creative strategies being the solution that we recommend in this instance.

LIMITATIONS

The main limit of the present research consists in using information gained from quantitative research as it hinders an in-depth analysis of the studied processes and phenomena.

Moreover, other limits of our empirical research are also represented by the use of a non-probabilistic sampling method and the fact that the data were collected in a single city, Cluj-Napoca.

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