HOW HUMOR TYPE AND VISUAL IMAGERY INFLUENCE THE PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract - The purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of humor type and moderating effect of visual imagery on purchase intention. We conducted a 2 (humor type : cognitive versus affective) x 2 (visual imagery : high versus low) between subject experiment. The results indicate that cognitive humor ads with high visual imagery have more influence on purchase intention . In contrast, affective humor ads are more effective by using low visual imagery. This results will help the marketer planning the effective advertisement by matching the humor type of the ads with the appropriate visual image of the product.

Index terms - Humor Advertisement, Cognitive Humor, Affective Humor, Visual Imagery, Purchase Intention

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of advertising is to attract customers to purchase the product. Advertisers try to grab customer attention through interesting advertisement because likeability of the advertisement will lead to likeability of the brand and purchase of the brand. Research showed that the more the advertisement is humorous, the more it will be liked by the customers (Cheng and Duo, 2003).

Humor has been known to boost positive response to advertisements (Weinberger and Campbell, 1991). Respondents watch the humorous ads because humor bring pleasant feeling and it becomes an incentive to pay attention (Zillman et al, 1980). Humor also distracts person from generating negative thoughts, consequently it will enhance the persuasiveness of that communication (Lammers et all, 1983). For these reasons the use of humor has become popular marketing communication over the years.

Although many studies have found that humor is successful in attracting audience attention, it is also found that humor are not effective in terms of purchase intention (Weinberger and Campbell, 1991). Additionally, the use of humor also decline the credibility of a source, which will reduce the persuasion effect (Bryant et al, 1981).

There are three categories of humor mechanism namely cognitive, affective and interpersonal mechanisms. Cognitive humor is related to surprise, an incongruity that resulted in humor. This kind of humor required an ability to reconcile the message. Affective mechanisms are related to the pleasure feeling that comes from release of tension or energy. By this definition, humor is seen as a healthy adaptive behavior to release the stress. The last type of humor mechanism is interpersonal or disparagement mechanism. Some expert assumed the interpersonal humor as the lowest type of humor because it comes from attacking other party to create the humor (Spotts, Weinberger and Parsons, 1997). As a result, this research focuses only on the effect of cognitive and affective humors.

Humor advertisement can be presented visually (in a picture) or verbally (in a text), depends on the media. Many researches have proved that visual advertisement was found more effective in communicating the target for the brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981) because visual content is capable to stimulate visual imagery than less picture advertisement or one without a picture (Babin and Burns, 1997).

Humor ad may result impact on attention, comprehension, persuasion, greater liking and so on. Most studies focus on humor type, media placement and the nature of product. However, only few study investigated humor types together with other variables like visual imagery. Research is needed to address these gaps in the literature. Given this background, this paper has several purposes : first, we review humor type and visual image on purchase intention ; second, we present an appropriate conceptual framework and the research hypotheses derived from it. An experiment research was designed to test these hypotheses using print advertisement. Two variables were manipulated : humor ad type and visual imagery.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF HUMOR TYPE ON PURCHASE INTENTION

The injection of humor into a communication will enhance the persuasiveness of that communication. Since most people enjoy humor, the probability of attention is increased along with the subsequent probabilities of attitude change (Lammers, Leibowitz, Seymour, and Hennessey, 1983).
Humor in advertising has a high attention attracting ability. Attention leads the consumer to elaborate

more on the message thus enhancing cognitive responses. Provided that the message offers positive information, which applies to most advertisements, positive cognitions related to the ad and to the brand outweigh negative ones. As a result, consumers develop more favorable attitude toward ad and attitude toward brand (Lett, 2011). On the contrary, affective humor ads encourage audience to pay attention more on the humor and leave the important message of the advertisement (Zhang, 1996). Based on this theory, we propose :

H_1 : Cognitive humor adhas higher impact on purchase intention than affective humor ad

III. VISUAL IMAGERYAS MODERATOR ON THE REALTIONSHIP OF HUMOR TYPE AND PURCHASE INTENTION

According to Lutz and Lutz (1977), imagery is a mental event involving visualization of a concept or relationship. Hence, imagery can be multisensory processing, which may lead to better recall of information (Babin and Burns 1997). Based on this theoretical framework, some studies in marketing literature consider effect of imagery on brand attitude and brand claim recall (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Burns et al., 1993). The results of these studies demonstrate positive relationships between various dimensions of imagery (vividness, concrete vs. abstract wording, instructions vs. no instructions to imagine, etc.) and the subsequent advertising effects (attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, intention to buy, etc.).

Picture size has long been recognized as a visual stimulus variable that increase memory responses such as recognition and recall. Rossiter and Percy (1980) found that large picture produced almost twice as favorable effect on overall brand attitude than an identical but smaller picture. They proposed three related explanation. First, a larger picture of the product in an ad may cause consumers to focus on the product rather than the ad. This might be called the "attention" explanation. Second, larger pictures produces larger reported visual images that tend to block out competing images. This may be called the "image carryover" explanation. Third, a larger picture of the product makes it appear more lifelike in size and may therefore stimulate thoughts or image of consumption. This may be called the "consumption imagery" explanation.

The attention and image carryover explanations are essentially cognitive whereas the consumption imagery explanation is essentially affective. Accordingly, we might expect picture size to influence general belief-based attitude more than affective attitude toward the product. Based on theories, we can set the hypotheses :

H_{2a} :Cognitive humor a with high visual imagery advertising has more influence on purchase intention than low visual imagery advertising

H_{2b} : Affective humor ad with low visual imagery advertising has more influence on purchase intention than high visual imagery advertising

IV. RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

4.1. Method

We design a 2 (humor type : cognitive vs affective) x 2 (visual imagery : high visual imagery vs low visual imagery) between subject experiment.

4.2. Pretest

We conducted a pretest study to select the product to be featured in our advertisement copy. The research sample consisted of fifty graduate students from one Taiwan reputable university. All participants were asked to complete personal information such as age, gender and school department. Fifty questionnaires were distributed and total valid answers were 50 questionnaires or validity of the questionnaires are 100%. From 50 subjects, 24 are men and 26 are women with age distribution from 19 years old to 33 years old. The participants were asked to select 17 products that can be categorized as utilitarian and hedonic product in nature. Participants were asked whether they have used or purchased through the experience of these products. To rate the hedonic value of each product, the participants used a seven Likert scale to measure the degree of enjoyment of the product, from completely non hedonic product to very hedonic product. Similarly, they rated the utilitarian value of each product by measuring the usefulness of the product from completely non practical to very practical. The results of the pretest showed that participants gave a higher rating to smartphone in both utilitarian and hedonic aspect ($M_{utilitarian}$= 5.98 ;$M_{hedonic}$= 6.00). Thus, we chose smartphone as the target product.

4.3. Stimulus Material

In order to investigate the effect of humor ad and visual image, four different versions of an advertisement were designed. We divided the advertisement into two categories, the advertisement with cognitive aspect and the advertisement with affective aspect. Then we split these categories into four versions, cognitive advertisement with high visual image, cognitive advertisement with low visual image, affective advertisement with high visual image and affective advertisement with low visual image. In cognitive ad, the picture showed a woman is in the bathroom while enjoying a music through her smartphone. The music quality is so good as if the singer performs live in front of her. Cognitive aspect on this ad explains about music player as one of hedonic features on a smartphone.

In affective ad, we used the picture of a couple is in a park. An expression "love is in the air" is represent by a beautiful love shaped clouds, three cupids and a big white pigeon flies in the sky. We use more bright color to enhance feeling aspect for affective ad type.
Respondents were presented with one of four ads of the advertised product. In cognitive humor ad, respondents viewed an advertisement that emphasized the quality of the advertised product. In affective humor ad, focus of the advertisement were not on the advertised product but the emotional connection of the viewer when viewed the ad. Regarding visual imagery, half of respondents observe the ad with high visual image, and the other half examined the ad with low visual image. Each advertisement was printed in an A4 size. The details of experiment materials are presented in the Apendix.

4.4. Measurement

Respondents humor tendency were assessed using 24item questions developed by Thorson and Powel (1993). Respondents marked their agreement regarding their humor preferenceusing a seven Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
For humor type manipulation check, respondents assessedwhether the leaflets were considered as cognitive or affective humor. To assessed manipulation check on visual imagery, respondents were asked to recall the content of advertisement after seeing it.
Purchase intention were assessed in terms of the worthiness the promoted item, the likelihood of purchasing it and the probability of recommending it to family and friends (Chang & Yen, 2013)and rated based on a seven Likertscale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
Moreover, we assessed the following demographicaspects :gender, age, education level, working field and disposable income. Related demographic were considered as potential variables that might have impact on the experiment results.

4.5. Data Collection

From total of 315 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, 10 questionnaires were discarded because of incomplete data, leaving 305 usable questionnaires for this study.The final sample were 305 respondents that consist of 105 men and 200 women whose ages ranged from 22 to 56 years (M = 27.51 years, SD = 5.66). The largest percentage of respondents were undergraduate and graduate students (81.3%) whose disposable income less than 15.000NTD.

V. RESULT

5.1. Manipulation Check

The results of the manipulation check for humor type showed that most respondents perceived the humor type as intended (cognitive humorad :Mean = 2.27 ; affective humor ad : Mean = 5.92, t= -35.94, p<.01). Thus, the manipulation of humor type was successful.
In visual imagery manipulation check, respondents were asked to recall the content of the advertisement after seeing it. The result showed that the Mean value for high visual imagery (5.66) was greater than low visual imagery (3.44) with significant difference (t = 31.89, p < .01). Based on the result, it can conclude that there was a different effect for high and low visual imagery from the ads. The results confirmed the successful manipulation for visual imagery.

5.2. Hypothesis Testing

We conducted analysis of variance to investigate the interaction between variables and the results indicates that there were significant main effects of humor type adF(1,301) = 14.361, P<0.01, and visual imagery F(1,301) = 5.343, P<0.05. We also found significant interactions between humor type and visual imagery F(1,301) =79.578, p<0.01. All univariate results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Univariate Results for Purchase Intention

Variable	Purchase Intention	
	F (1,303)	Sig
Humor type (HT)	14.361	0.00
Visual imagery (VI)	5.343	0.02
HT x VI	79.578	0.00

The results of an analysis of variance showed that the main effect of humor type was significant. Compare with affective humor ad, cognitive humor ad had higher effect on purchase intention (M=4.120 versus M=3.743). These results support Hypotheses 1.

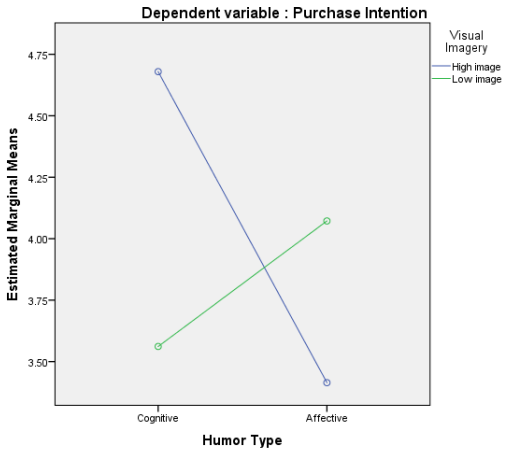


Figure 1. Interaction between humor type and visual image on purchase intention

Hypotheses 2 predicted that humor type together with visual imagery influenced the purchase intention. As expected, we found the significant interaction between humor type and visual imagery F(1,301) = 79.578, p

<0.01. For cognitive humor type, high visual imagery was more effective than low visual imagery (M = 4.679 versus M=3.561). These results supported Hypotheses 2a. For affective humor type, low visual imagery was more effective than high visual imagery (M=4.072 versus M=3.414). These resultsalso supported Hypotheses 2b. The interaction between variables presented in Figure 1 below.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study has several theoretical implications. First.This research expand and deepens the persuading marketing literature by examining the application and causal effects of the humor ads in Asian context. In addition, this articles demonstrates that the effects of humor in advertising influenced by consumer's cognitive or affective aspects. This findings help compare and expand humor ads effectiveness in previous studies (Spotts, 1997 ; Chang & Bandyopadhyay, 2014 ; Venkatesh & Senthilkumar, 2015).

Second, this study expands the theoretical applicability of the argument Rossiter and Percy (1980) that large picture are more effective on advertising than smaller picture. Our study found significant interaction between humor type and visual imagery. Specifically, we found that, for cognitive humor ad, higher visual imagery is more effective on purchase intention than lower visual imagery. Furthermore, for affective humor ad, lower visual imagery is more effective than higher visual imagery.
Our findings have important implication for advertising practitioners. The current investigation provide guidance on how to produce effective humor advertisement by matching the visual image of the product.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study indicate areas of research that should be investigated more deeply, such as comparing these effects among various culture. This research focus on the advertising effect on Taiwanese participant only. Thus, future research may involve examining the humor advertising among individual from other culture.

This current study focused specifically on the cognitive and affective humor on print advertisement only. Future research could investigated how other media influence the effectiveness of humor ad on purchase intention.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of humor type and visual image in advertising. The results indicate that the influence of humor type on purchase intention differs depending on visual imagery's size. The findings show that focusing only humor type advertising (cognitive and affective) and neglecting other factors might be ineffective to attract people to buy the product. There are several observations from our study.

First, cognitive humor ad has higher effect on purchase intention than affective humor ad. This result is relevant with Zhang (1996) that affective humor ad tends to neglect the content of the message because people are more focus on the humor part. This behavior will increase the likeability of the advertisement but has little effect on purchase intention. These finding suggest that cognitive humor ad is more likely than affective humor ad to persuade the consumer to buy the product.

Second, we observed the interaction between humor type and visual imagery. By comparing two humor types, we found that for cognitive humor ad, high visual image is more effective to increased purchase intention than using low visual image. Cognitive advertisement characteristics are rational and informative. Together with larger picture of the product, cognitive ad will give more favorable effect than the small one. Cognitive ads with large picture image will increase positive responses from the customers especially for specific product that need more information before buying decision like a smartphone. This result gives more evidences supported Percy and Rossiter (1983) study about picture size effect in advertising.

Third, for affective humor, we predict that low visual image will have higher advertising effect than high visual image. Affective advertisement related to emotional feelings where low visual product image will increase attention to the ads. High imagery of the product will downgrade the affective feeling of the advertisement.

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