

What Makes an Effective Advertising for a Man or a Woman?

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ABSTRACT This paper, discusses the factors that make for effective gender advertising as well as the relevance of sex in advertising in southern African culture. The information gleaned from literature review was helpful in providing direction in pursuing certain areas of inquiry. Perceptual differences were observed on how men and women process information. Unlike women, men appear not pay close attention to nutritional value of what they consume. Furthermore, the portrayals of women and men's roles in advertising as well as the disposition to the use of sex appeal strategies in advertising differ in different culture. Finally, men tend to be valued by what they think, while women tend to be valued by what they look like. For ads to be effective for a man or a woman, it is important to consider and appreciate the factors identified in this paper although they are by no means exhaustive.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from price to non-price competition in the modern business has meant that not only markets but also the tools of marketing must be researched. As sellers increase their reliance on non-price competitive weapons such as branding, product differentiation, advertising and sales promotion, they require great quantities of information on the effectiveness of these tools. Non-price competition is defined here to mean an attempt to influence the demand curve facing individual firms without lowering the price.

Furthermore, this paper perceives sex in advertising of businesses as an attempt by businesses to enhance sales in the most simplistic way, probably because they are running out of advertising ideas. The paper further argues that sex in advertising is a Western phenomenon whose influence in other cultures such as those in Southern Africa has not been well researched.

In this paper however, factors that make for effective gender advertising will be discussed. This is because advertising cost has risen dramatically all over the world recently. Viswanath and Zeng (2003) noted that advertisers are less interested in advertising effects per se and more in advertising effectiveness. Furthermore, there exists a huge interest among marketing researchers in gender-related research since gender is one of the largest segmentation variables (Milner and Collins 2000; Milner and Higgs 2004). The factors to be discussed include the following: how men women process information, how they think

about the product/products being advertised, gender role stereotyping in advertising, the prevalence of patriarchal system in advertising, and the use of sex appeal in advertising (degree of nudity or sexual explicitness)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on review of literature covering the period from 1975 to 2006. The information was sourced from secondary data using journals mainly. A range of online databases was used to get insight into various aspects of gender advertising.

HOW MEN AND WOMEN PROCESS INFORMATION

There are fundamental differences in the way men and women process information. Women tend to process more extensively, more different pieces of information. "Men tend to rely more on mental shortcuts ..." (Yarborough 2000). According to him, in a recent study, a group of people were brought to a room and later asked to remember various items there. The result showed that women had much better memory for details than did men. Men might remember the big picture of an office like the location of a desk or a bookshelf. But women would remember more intimate details like a vase of flowers in the corner, or a picture of a husband and wife on a book case. This raised a question "are women smarter than men?" Yarborough said there is no simple Yes or No. The answer seems rooted in

human evolution. Men and women had to face different pressures as each adapted their own specialized roles. Men had to become the more aggressive hunters and compete with other men. They had to process information quickly, perhaps more quickly than the females. The converse of this is that women as gatherers had to mentally map in fine detail things like bushes, barriers and where they had stored food. They also tended to relate less by competition and more by sympathy and empathy. Furthermore, Yarborough suggests that in women, the two spheres of their brain communicate better than those of men. Studies show that women pull in information from both halves. This allows women to give a more sophisticated emotional response. Thus, women are better in talking about their emotions and reading subtleties.

As a result of the above gender differences, ads are often more detailed for women. For example in toiletry ads, women appreciate very fine distinctions such as shampoo for dry hair, for straight hair for curly hair, for oily hair etc. Yarborough went on to say that for men, by contrast, toiletry ads focus mainly on a single product and that men are unlikely to process complex metaphors.

In addition, he said that men do not hate fashion but they don't want to be perceived by other men as caring about it too much or as seeming to be overly concerned about dress. This suggests that those selling fashion to men have to offer the options in a subtle way, not a direct one. Offering too many options can destroy the effectiveness of the ads. For ads to be effective, it is important to appreciate these perceptual differences between men and women. The next factor to consider is how men and women think about the product/products being advertised.

HOW MEN AND WOMEN THINK ABOUT THE PRODUCT/PRODUCTS BEING ADVERTISED

For purposes of illustrations, let us assume that the product to be advertised is food. Food can mean very different things for men and women. Men are not taught to pay close attention to the nutritional value (fat and calorie) of what they consume, particularly in the developing countries where literacy level is still considered low. Men are usually not expected to watch what they eat in the same way that women do.

Men are often looked upon as strange when they attempt to regulate their diet carefully. However, once in a while men do make an effort to eat diet food for health reasons particularly in the so-called developed countries, but in a typical African society, and in most parts of the world indeed men are typically expected to enjoy fattening greasy, savory dishes. When women partake of such foods particularly, the educated ones, they are often viewed as exceptional. Just as there are stereotypical "masculine" foods, there are many foods that are generally associated with women. The most common are vegetables, salad, diet soft drinks and ice cream low in calories. Most women agree with societal cue that suggest that some foods are characteristically more feminine. Such signals include the behavior of female parents, friends and commercial marketing strategies.

Consequent upon the above, advertisements for potentially fattening foods and drinks like chips or beer, are targeted towards men. These ads appeal to basic human appetites such as: hunger and thirst. Consequences, such as obesity or stigmatization that can result from the consumption of food and drinks that have little or no nutritional value, are not addressed to the target male audience. Nutritional information is only disclosed in ads for stereotypical male food and drink when the producer consciously wants to adapt the product to attract female consumer, for example, a commercial regular brand name potato chips features men eating the chips as they watch a boxing tournament over a television. Men's appreciation of the product's taste is emphasized instead of the fatty or the caloric content. An ad for reduced fat potato chips, made by the same company for example, is positioned in a completely different way as follows: a woman laments the fact that "men can eat whatever they want". The same woman jubilantly reveals that now thanks to the XYZ Company, women can enjoy the flavor of original potato chips, in the new reduced fat variety.

THE PREVALENCE OF PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM IN ADVERTISING

In addition, to ensure effective advertising, there is need for advertisers to understand the extent to which the patriarchal system prevails in advertising. Men tend to be valued by what they think; women tend to be valued by what they

look like. This explains in part why men are continually being given the voice of authority in society and in the media, especially in advertisements; whereas women as the weaker sex in terms of physical strength is a common theme in ads. Men are always taller than women; men are often seen helping women, carry them up in authority. Women are often portrayed caressing and men grasping. Furthermore, men have the voice of authority in TV commercials. Research showed that over 93% of all commercial voice is male. This has not changed in over 15 years, while pictures of women's bodies and body parts – "bodysim" appear more often than men's in print ads. Men's faces appear more often than women's – "facism".

Finally, when it comes to arguing, men have something to say, women not much. Studies show that men are three times as likely to present an argument, scientific or opinionated, than are women in endorsing products. Ads tend to encourage women to let their looks or their scent talk for them.

GENDER ROLE STEREOTYPING AND PORTRAYAL IN ADVERTISING

A gender role is defined here as a set of culturally defined behavioral norms associated with males and females, respectively, in a given social group or system (Connell 1987, p. 165). For effective advertising, there is need to consider the possible contribution of the mass media to the origins of and maintenance of gender roles. McArthur and Resk (1975) found that overall, men appeared more often than women in TV advertisements and men and women differed in terms of the following:

- Credibility – men being authorities and women users;
- Role – women are portrayed in terms of their relationships to others and while men's role is perceived as independent of others;
- Location – men are shown in occupational settings and women in the home;
- Persuasive arguments – men gave more "scientific" arguments than women;
- Rewards – women were shown obtaining approval of family and males; and
- Product type – men were authorities on products used primarily by women.

Manstead and McCulloch (1981) assessed the situation in Great Britain using 170 TV commer-

cials and a coding scheme modeled closely on that used by McArthur and Resko (1975) so that legitimate comparison could be made. The overall results were unambiguous and comparable to those of the American study, but the portrayal of men and women on the television showed British advertisements at the time to be gender role stereotyped. Replications over time in different countries such as Australia (Mazzella et al. 1992), Kenya (Mwangi 1996) as well as America (Gilly 1988; Kolbe and Langefeld 1993); have shown surprisingly few differences, indicating that these studies can be relied upon. Furthermore, gender role portrayal has become an important issue in international advertising (Cheng 1997), and researchers have become interested in the cross-cultural account of the societal roles attached to women and men in advertising because of rapid changes surrounding the global advertising environment. Such changes among others include the following:

- Increasing use of the web and satellite broadcasting (Viswanath and Zeng 2003);
- increasing global advertising expenditures (Advertising Age 2006); and
- the fact that societal norms on the roles and portrayal of women and men are quickly communicated through the commercial message among people of diverse cultures.

In this respect, cross-national comparisons are of a great importance since they benefit international advertisers with both practical and theoretical implications. Web's prominence as a global advertising medium in particular warrants a careful attention with respect to its advertising content dimensions, considering its unprecedented potential to reach the global target audience (Berthon et al. 1996) and an exponential growth in Web advertising expenditures by international advertisers (Oser 2004). Although limited to magazine and television advertising, many cross-cultural content-analytic studies agree that the portrayals of women and men's roles in advertising differ by culture (Sengupta 1995). Specifically, it has been found that in a society where feminine values have a dominant influence on a culture, there tends to be less difference between women and men in the type of roles portrayed in advertising, whereas in a society where masculine values are dominant, there tends to be a large difference in societal roles attached to women and men in advertising (Wiles et al. 1995; Miler and Collins 2000).

Use of Sex Appeal in Advertising - The Degree of Nudity or Sexual Explicitness

Another factor that makes for effective gender advertising that needs to be considered is the use of sex appeal. International advertisers often face an obvious dilemma when they introduce foreign brands into foreign markets: should they adopt a standardized or localized strategy and to what extent if they choose either of the two? To answer these questions, international advertisers need to understand how their target consumers from various parts of the world respond to different advertising strategies, including sex appeal strategies. Sex appeal as an advertising strategy is well adopted in both Western and European countries as advertisers attempt to find ways to break through the media clutter but there is no guarantee that it will be effective globally. Price (2002) claimed that sex appeal has become one of the most popular and effective tactics in mainstream consumer advertising in most of the Western countries such as the United States. Reichert et al. (2001) identified sex appeal as serving a number of important roles in advertising including attracting initial attention, augmenting recognition, bolstering brand image, increasing receivers interest in processing the ad, enhancing persuasion, and evoking emotional responses (Hoyer and MacInnis 2001). On the other hand, Furse (2000) contended that sex appeal might increase attention to the ad, but not necessarily enhance recall or positive attitudes towards a brand. Furthermore, Brown (2002) claimed that overly blatant applications of sex as an attention grabber can be counterproductive. Having examined how their target consumers from Western countries such as the United States respond to sex appeal advertising strategies, there is a need to explore how their counterparts from other parts of the world particularly China respond to the same strategies. International advertisers who are planning a global campaign for their gender-related consumer products can benefit from the information. China has become one of the most attractive markets in the world and advertising has become one of its fastest –growing industries.

Research showed that men and women have different perceptions about what is sexually attractive for example, Garrett (1993) found that males are most sexually aroused when presented with nudity or suggested sources but sources that

are romantic are most noticeable to their female counterparts. In addition, Fang and Jianyao (2006) had two findings: the first finding supports the previous studies. The second finding seems to be China specific. First, it was found that males and females only differed significantly when they were exposed to the ad featured by the male model with a low level of sex appeal. The gender difference suggests that Chinese male consumers, quite like their counterparts in the West, may have little interest in male models in ads. On the contrary, male models if portrayed in a suggestively romantic fashion with a low level of sex appeal could attract Chinese female consumers the way female consumers are attracted in Western countries. The results are consistent with Garrett's (1993) finding that if a male model is used, only females tend to have an interest increase. Due to gender differences in response to sex appeal, Richert et al. (2001) warned that sex appeal may be effective to one gender but may be offensive to the opposite gender. The above finding suggests that international advertisers must not only take into account whether their ads are intended to attract male or female targets, they should also be concerned with the target country's disposition to the use of sex appeal strategies in advertising. For example, it is not clear how their target consumers from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) will respond to the use of sex appeal strategies in advertising given their conservative nature, heightened by the recent "SADC protocol on Gender and Development" which is a document signed by Heads of State or Government of 14 Southern African countries that make up SADC region. These Heads of State are convinced that the integration and mainstreaming of gender issues into Southern African Development Community Building Initiatives is a key to sustainable development of SADC region. The document provides that State Parties shall take measures to discourage the media from:

- i. promoting pornography and violence against all persons especially women and children;
- ii. depicting women as helpless victims of violence and abuse;
- iii. degrading or exploiting women, especially in the area of entertainment and advertising and undermining their role and position in society;
- iv. Reinforcing gender oppression and stereotypes.

With all of these in place, the relevance of the use of sex appeal strategies in such conservative and regulated region is questionable (Reports on the SADC Consultative Conference on Gender and Development Dec. 2005).

FINDINGS

- Perceptual differences were observed on how men and women process information. Women tend to process more extensively more different pieces of information while men tend to rely on mental shortcuts.
- Unlike women, men tend not to pay close attention to nutritional value of what they consume.
- Furthermore, men tend to be valued by what they think; while women tend to be valued by what they look like.
- The portrayals of women and men's roles in advertising differ in different cultures.
- Finally, the disposition to the use of sex appeal strategies in advertising differs in different cultures.

CONCLUSION

For ads to be effective for a man or a woman, it is important to consider and appreciate the following factors:

As a result of the gender differences on how men and women process information, ads should be detailed for women and less detailed for men. Direct cost savings will result from the idea as advertisers avoid advertising complex metaphors that men are unlikely to process. In addition, since men tend not to pay close attention to nutritional value of what they consume, potentially fattening foods and drinks should be targeted toward them without disclosing the nutritional information. Direct cost savings will again result from the practice as unnecessary details are excluded from the ads.

Furthermore, since men tend to be valued by what they think; women, by what they look like, effective ads should encourage women to let their looks or their scent talk for them while men should continually be given the voice of authority in society and in the media. In addition, the portrayals of women and men's roles in advertising differ in different cultures. The practice calls for close attention to be given to the cross-

cultural account of the societal roles attached to women and men on the part of international advertisers because of rapid changes surrounding the global advertising environment.

Finally, due to gender differences in response to sex appeal strategies, international advertisers must not only take into account of whether their ads are intended to attract male or female targets, they should also be concerned with the target country's disposition to the use of sex appeal strategies. For example, it is important to highlight some challenges of using sex appeal strategies in global advertising. For example, the globalization of advertising is such that the same advertisement in CBN, BBC, and CNN is also viewed internationally. How would a potential buyer respond to such ads given the conservative nature of Southern African countries? There is not much evidence to suggest that sexual appeal directed to Southern Africa are really making the impact. Researchers in the United States and UK should look for collaboration to investigate whether the practice do apply to different cultures. In addition, those using Web as a global advertising medium in particular should pay a careful attention to its advertising content dimensions considering its unprecedented potential to reach the global target audience. The factors considered in this paper are by no means exhaustive but they are fundamental to effective gender advertising.

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