

Gender Differences in Emotional Advertising: How Types of Emotion Impact One's Trust and Attitude Toward a Brand

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Abstract

Emotions can drive much of what individuals do, say and feel – and often impact one's decision-making. It is no wonder then that brands attempt to elicit emotion through advertising. This study sought to learn how men and women are impacted by different types of emotions elicited from advertising. Past research focused on types of products and their impact, how gender stereotypes play a role in how men and women interact with ads, and how men and women respond to a generally labeled "emotional" advertisement. Participants viewed three video advertisements then took a survey that collected both qualitative and quantitative data. A major finding was that high levels of ad enjoyment don't relate to a memorable brand, but emotional connection and assimilation play a major role in developing brand trust and favorability. These findings are important to advertisers so they may better cater to and develop an emotional connection with their target audiences.

I. Introduction

Emotions drive much of what we do, say, and feel. Not only do emotions prompt us to express ourselves, but to help us make decisions as well. In his book *Descartes Error*, neuroscience professor Antonio Damasio explains that emotions are one of the key factors of decision making, as they create preferences to lead to a decision (Damasio, 2008). An example of this is how brands possess the ability to manipulate and cause people to express emotion through advertising. This can be accomplished by creating a sad advertisement that connects with someone on a deeper level, a humorous advertisement that resonates, or a disconcerting advertisement that creates a sense of urgency and motivates someone to act. The main goal of these advertisements is to create a sense of trust in the consumers' minds; some of the best ways of doing so are by creating a sense of vulnerability and developing a connection with the consumer (Pardham, 2015). Emotional advertisements are a powerful tool that can build brand trust and recognition.

Knowing how to catalyze emotion from advertisements is crucial, especially to advertisers and brands seeking to cater to a target audience. In today's world of expansive media presences from millions of different companies across the globe, making a brand's target audience feel emotions, trust, and recognition in the brand is more important than ever. For new brands entering competitive markets, this type of connection with an audience could be what sets them apart and defines their success.

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Many researchers have explored how emotional advertisements have impacted one's ability to retain information about a brand, influence trust in a brand, and even how the effects of emotional advertisements differed between males and females. A number of the studies focused on one emotion from an advertisement, rather than studying the role and distinction of numerous emotions. This study will compare the level of trust and recognition in a brand between men and women, but it will also investigate how these factors are impacted by three distinct emotions.

II. Literature Review

Emotional advertising is the practice of promoting a brand or product through the use of emotions in order to connect with a client. The study of psychological research to support advertising strategies is a fairly recent practice. A few emotional advertising strategies include telling a story that consumers can connect with, creating a movement or community, inspiring people to do what they think is impossible, and projecting an ideal image (Decker, 2018). These strategies help elicit various emotions depending on the type of advertisement and the brand.

The study is underpinned through the theory of symbolic interactionism, which suggests that media can influence people's emotions and actions through the meanings they find in images. Those studying symbolic interactionism examine "how narratives, connected to systems of discourse, represent experience. These representational practices are narrative constructions. The meanings and forms of everyday experience are always given in narrative representations," (Flick, Kardorff and Steinke, 2010, p. 85). The aspect of experience could serve as a way for people to connect with the ad or brand. If one's memory of an experience is represented through an advertisement, their inclination to trust in the brand could dramatically increase due to their emotional connection to the experience.

Numerous scholars have studied how emotions may affect consumer preferences for types of advertisements. One such study explored how the type of advertisement and product impacted a consumer's "brand love," defined as a reciprocal relationship between a brand and consumers, with three key factors that include brand passion, commitment, and intimacy. The researchers determined that rational advertising was more effective for utilitarian-value products, while emotional advertising was more effective for services and hedonic-value products (Pang, Keh & Peng, 2009).

Through a psychology-based lens, Friestad and Thorson explored how semantic and episodic processing played into memory and attitude toward a brand. The authors discovered that emotional messages resulted in stronger memory and more positive judgements. Stronger memory was more common in the episodic processing group, while judgements were more positive in the semantic processing group (Friestad & Thorson, 1986).

Another interesting study focused on how emotion toward an advertisement differed among genders. However, an additional component examined how watching an advertisement in the presence of someone else impacted one's emotions and gender stereotypes. Results showed that females portrayed no change if they viewed the advertisements on their own or with someone else, while males experienced a significant drop in viewing pleasure and emotion when viewing with someone else. However, when alone, males showed around the same level of emotion as the females who viewed the ads on their own (Fisher & Dubè, 2005).

Additional research has examined the levels of emotions between males and females after exposure to advertisements. Moore discovered that females rated themselves as more emotional for emotional ads than men, but there was no significant difference between genders for neutral ads. One reason for this was that all the emotional ads in the study dealt with cases of missing and abused children. Moore suggested that females would relate more with these ads and cause them to be more emotional due to a motherly instinct (Moore, 2007).

A study in Japan specifically focused on acceptance of the advertisement. Four dependent variables that played into this acceptance included ad assimilation, trust, attitude toward the ad, and attitude toward the brand. The study concluded that females were more likely to perceive stronger trust, attitude toward an ad, and attitude toward a brand more than males. In addition, the results showed women having a stronger ad assimilation than men (Okazaki, 2007).

Research Questions

This study will focus on the following questions:

RQ1: How do varying types of emotions impact brand recognition and attitude among genders?

RQ2: What type of emotion exuded from an advertisement is the most effective in terms of ad assimilation and connection with the ad?

III. Methods

The researcher conducted a mixed-method approach, including both quantitative and qualitative research in the form of a survey. Thirty students in two classes at Elon University served as the sample for the research. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were notified that their answers were confidential and that they may back out of the survey at any point.

Students viewed three ads, one for each of the following emotional categories: sad, humorous, disconcerting. The sad advertisement was from Edeka, a German supermarket, that represented an older man going years without a family dinner with his kids and grandkids. This ad was chosen because of the lack of participant knowledge of the brand, and the level of sadness portrayed from the ad. The humorous advertisement came from Le Trefle toilet paper company, which related the use of tablets and phones to paper in an amusing way. The ad was chosen because of the lack of participant knowledge of the brand, as well as the connection of technology to the younger audience completing the survey. The disconcerting advertisement was a texting and driving PSA from AT&T that involved a younger woman getting into an accident because of texting. Although AT&T is a popular brand, the company's products and logo are not presented in the ad.

After each video ended, students rated their answers to questions on a 7-point Likert Scale concerning four areas drawn from past scholarship: brand trust, attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the ad, and ad assimilation. In addition, two open-ended questions were asked. "How would you describe the brand presented in the ad?" was presented for each ad to elicit qualitative data related to brand trust. At the end of the survey, students were asked "Which ad did you enjoy the most or find most memorable, and why?"

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Survey Monkey. Open-ended answers were sorted by male or female participants, then analyzed qualitatively for positive, negative, or neutral tone about the advertisement and the brand.

IV. Findings

Advertisement 1- Sad

Overall, women responded more positively to the sad advertisement in terms of attitude and trust toward the brand. On a seven-point scale, there was little difference in the level of interest toward the advertisement between men and women, but there was a large difference in terms of brand trust (6.3 for women, 5.4 for men). There was also a pronounced difference in terms of the level of enjoyment felt toward the sad advertisement (5.6 for women, 4.8 for men). Men indicated a slightly higher understanding of the ad (6.0 vs. 5.53 for women).

Open-ended responses to how the brand was presented in the sad advertisement notably differed among men and women. Women typically responded positively, mentioning that the brand seemed, "Personable," "Caring toward their clients," and "Intelligently appeals to emotions." However, the average male participant used less in-depth descriptions, labeling the brand as, "Depressing," and, "Likely to make me cry." Interestingly, the sad advertisement was chosen as the most favorable and memorable ad by both men and women.

Advertisement 2- Humorous

Overall, the humorous advertisement saw the lowest scores in almost every category. Male scores were higher than female scores on each measure. Men rated their level of enjoyment and interest in the advertisement as 4.8 for both categories, compared with 3.7 and 3.2, respectively, in each category for women. Brand trust measures were the lowest overall of any category in the survey, but they were even worse for women (2.3) than for men (3.6). There also were considerable differences in the levels of advertisement assimilation between men and women. Men's attention toward the advertisement was rated at 5.2 and their understanding of the advertisement at 4.8. Women evaluated their attention at 3.8 and their understanding at 2.6, the second-lowest score on the survey.

Open-ended responses to the humorous ad also differed between men and women. Men tended to describe the ad as, "Light-hearted and entertaining," "Funny, but catering toward a more specific audience," and, "Easy-going with a fun product." Conversely, women responded negatively and labeled the brand as, "Tacky and not so professional," with one female participant simply stating, "Weird." Two out of the ten men said the second advertisement was their favorite, and only one woman viewed it as her favorite.

Advertisement 3- Disconcerting

The third ad elicited mostly similar responses from men and women. Men averaged a rating of 5.0 for interest in the ad, and 4.0 for enjoyment. Women assessed the ad at 5.6 for interest and 3.93 for enjoyment. Although enjoyment levels were relatively low, ratings of brand trust received the highest scores for both men (6.0) and women (6.27) out of all three advertisements. Men reported a high 6.3 rating for attention, while women responded with 5.33. However, comprehension of the advertisement was the highest-rated category for both men (6.7) and women (6.67) out of the entire survey.

In open-ended responses, men described the brand as, "Concerned for the well-being of others," and, "Worried about not just their customers, but everyone." Female participants noted, "The brand establishes an emotional connection to the audience," and, "An informative brand that cares about real issues." Most answers for this section related to the company's ability to connect with and care about the consumers.

V. Discussion

Some of the results of this study are confounding. For instance, the sad advertisement was voted as both the most memorable and most favored. However, the disconcerting advertisement received higher scores in almost every single category. Even the open-ended responses portrayed the brand in the disconcerting advertisement as all-around more positive and caring for customers. One explanation could be the content in the videos. As previously mentioned, symbolic interactionism involves the study of experiences through narratives. Texting and driving PSAs include narratives that people tend to see on a fairly regular basis. That provides a large population of people with a mediated experience of the topic. This could account for the relatively low ratings of enjoyment for the texting advertisement, but also the higher rated brand trust and connection with the ad.

Exploring the trends within each specific advertisement uncovers useful information about how men and women sometimes react to emotions differently. The sad advertisement was included to see how men would react, since past research suggests women are more trusting and attentive to the sad and emotional connection. Men on the other hand, are pressured with stereotypes to appear strong and unemotional during sad experiences. This research aligns with past studies, as male scores of attitude and brand trust were lower with the sad advertisement. Additionally, the short, non-elaborate male responses on the open-ended question suggested men's inability to outwardly express sadness. However, men's attentiveness scores for the advertisement were higher than women's, and half of the men chose the ad as their favorite. So, although men may want to seem emotionally strong externally, they were still very attentive toward the ad internally.

The humorous ad was unpopular overall, perhaps due to the type of humor. Men rated the ad higher in every category and described the brand in more positive terms than did women. Even though men were more comfortable expressing themselves for this kind of emotion, they still gave relatively low assimilation and brand trust ratings. What mattered was that the advertisement and the brand were unable to connect

with the audience, as suggested through the open-ended responses and lower scores on audience attention. Again, a different kind of humor or stronger punch line may have grabbed the participants' attention differently.

Finally, the disconcerting advertisement exhibited higher assimilation than attitude ratings, as well as high brand trust scores. This could be because the type of emotion. It is safe to say that many people do not enjoy being scared or watching others get hurt. But those events are memorable and, on a larger scale, newsworthy. So, even though the participants may not have enjoyed being scared, the advertisement was able to connect with the audience about a realistic and tragic event. However, these types of advertisements can be difficult to work with. Scaring the audience without providing a solution or showing how the company cares about it can deter the audience rather than draw them in. The brand in the third advertisement succeeds in providing the necessary solution and care, as seen by the positive open-ended responses.

VI. Conclusion

Higher levels of ad enjoyment do not necessarily lead to a better or more memorable brand. The data presented from the survey suggest that emotional connection and assimilation play a major role in brand trust and favorability. Across all three advertisements, men and women typically rated ads as either having high brand trust with high assimilation, or low brand trust with low assimilation. There is also a possibility that emotional connection could motivate attentiveness and assimilation.

Measures of recognition and attitude resulted in similar trends. There was not one emotion that clearly stuck out as by far the most effective, although humor appeared to be not successful with women. Sad and scary emotions were both effective in gaining audience attention, but attitude toward that ad varied between men and women.

Timing, funding, and number of participants were all limitations for the researcher. With more of each, the researcher could have expanded the survey by adding two or three advertisements per emotion. Future studies could also include a deeper look at symbolic interactionism and experience in relation to advertisement connection. Finally, with more control and number of participants, creating a more even distribution of men to women could also improve the findings of the survey.

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