

THE IMPACT OF HUMOROUS TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENT IN CUSTOMER OPINION IN BAHRAIN

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out the role of humorous television advertising in viewer persuasion and why humour is used. Factors behind achieving effective humorous television advertisements were investigated. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of 100 and 350 respondents from advertisers and television viewers respectively. Self-selection and convenience sampling methods were used for advertisers and viewers respectively. The study revealed that advertising practitioners use humorous television advertisements because they believed it was better at achieving communication goals. Situational factors like product features, media placement as well as audience factors were very important considerations for effective humorous television advertisements. There was also a positive relation between humorous television advertisements and persuasion. However, certain conditions must be met. Practitioners must know their target audience very well to be sure if particular humour treatment will be effective or not. Objectives for any particular advertisement should be clear so as to use humorous television advertisements appropriately.

Keywords: *Advertisement, communication, humour, television.*

Introduction:

The use of humour in advertising, especially in the electronic media is very common (Stern, 1996). At least, 50% of the US television commercials in the 1980s were found to be humorous (Speck, 1991; Weinberger and Gulas, 1992 cited in Stern, 1996). Practitioners are divided on whether or not humour advertisements are effective in eliciting positive consumer responses (Fugate, 1998). Again, the use of humour is seen by many as risky in the sense that it may affect recall of product attributes (Madden and Weinberger, 1982 cited in Stern, 1996). Further, individual and cross-cultural differences may influence the determinants of what is funny. It is unclear whether humour advertisements are superior to non-humorous advertisements in achieving the advertisement's intended purpose. Even if humour is superior, on what circumstances are they superior to non-humour in advertisements? This study seeks to find out about what motivates the use of humour advertisements in television commercials in Bahrain

and to find out from practitioners if humour fulfils its intended communication purpose.

Literature Review:

According to Anand et al (2009) every advertisement strategy includes two main characteristics which are targeting and information content of the advertisement. The information is presented to the target audience through firm's selected advertising medium. Furthermore Byzalov et al (2004) revealed that consumer gets enough informed about product when he is more exposed to a product's advertisement and this results in lessening the risk involved with product and this factor is called as advertising role of risk reduction. Moreover Hanif et al (2010) observed that the key to customer satisfaction is when his needs and desires are fulfilled and proper services are provided, moreover fair pricing also leaves impact on customer. According to Hamilton et al (2009, August) when a firm participates in generic advertising programs, it has a significant impact on firm's market performance. According to Shachar, R., & Anand, B. N. (1998) too much

expenditures of TV networks on tune-in seem unnecessary but in actual these advertisements really influence the decision of audience for what to watch. De Mooij, M. (2003) also elaborated that the divergence in consumer behavior that leads to variation in consumer's choices is majorly due to cultural difference that usually results in different consumption pattern. Moreover Yang et al (2002) observed that the reliability, personalization, ease of use and access are the factors that are considered by both internet purchasers and non-purchasers. So internet based companies must give importance to Muhammad Ehsan Malik et al. 58 these services. Moreover credibility and availability are also important factors to be considered. Ackerberg, D. A. (2001) also argued that advertisement containing product information influences prospect's opinion about product, while advertisement with prestige or image effects influences both prospect's and product users opinion about product. According to Barroso, A. (2008) when the sale of any product increases, it is because the consumer is aware about the product's value and this point is achieved through efficient advertisement about product. Furthermore, Kihlstrom et al (1984) argued that there are cases when advertisements with no product information still reflect quality and this is when market mechanisms create positive association between product quality and advertising expenditures. According to Hoch et al (1986) advertisement plays a significant role in deciding product's quality when the physical evidence provided for the product is somewhat ambiguous. Tsang et al (2004) also stated that mobile advertisement is not so affective medium to convey the message to consumers unless consumer himself has subscribed to any kind of mobile advertisement service. Moreover Weilbacher et al (2003) elaborated that the advertisement only adds value to what customer has perceived and learned about the brand and the main advertisement task is to present the whole advertisement idea in a way that product always stays fresh in mind of customers. Mohr et al (2001) identified a different dimension in consumer perception that consumers prefer those firms or organizations that are socially responsible and make charitable donations. The ethical behavior of organizations increases the inclination of customers towards them. According to Kacen et al (2002) emerging ecommerce has provided consumers so many impulsive purchasing opportunities but some cultural aspects temperate the consumer's impulsive purchasing attitude. Moraga-González (2000) also explained that informative advertising is designed when consumers are capable of evaluating quality of product, and they give consideration to quality of product and cost of advertisement is high. Li et al (1999) analyzed that demographics, channel knowledge, shopping orientations and perceived channel utilities are the important factors that must be taken into account while analyzing consumer online

buying behavior. Also the education, convenience and experience are important to confer to while discussing online shopping attitude. According to Elliott et al (1994) country of region is important predictor of product quality as imported product is more preferred when local product is considered of low quality. But consumer pick local product when price, technical features, and brand name are invariant. Raj S. P. (1982) also examined that consumer purchase for a product increases when advertisement for that product increases and this increase is due to high loyalty. While increase in advertisement doesn't affect low loyal customers purchases so much. According to Wogalter et al (1991) product warnings and consumer's willingness to read those warnings is one of the important factors through which customers forms hazard perception about product. Becker et al (1993) analyzed that the impact on customer utility, the level of competition in the market for advertised goods and the induced variation in prices are some deciding factors to judge whether huge or little advertisement is required. Holbrook et al (1982) also discussed that in order to analyze consumer buying behavior more deeply, one must go through the pattern of experiential aspects of consumer behavior such as fantasies, feeling and fun associated with product because these leave a great impact on consumer buying behavior. Deighton et al (1994) suggested that advertising might result in switching from one brand to another brand but it does not influence purchase rate of consumers. Anderson (1973) suggested that when product actual performance does not meet consumer's high expectations, it generates unfavourable and negative product image. According to Sirgy et al (1982) self-concept of consumer about the product is an important predictor to judge consumer attitude and consumer preference about the products. Moreover Petty et al (1983) described that the central and the peripheral routes of the persuasion are equally important to bring effective results from any advertisement but which route to choose to advertise a product entirely depends on the level of the involvement (investment required to get hold on the product). Central route of the persuasion works where product has high involvement as in this case the consumers focus more on the informational content about the product. Peripheral route is International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2014), 55-64 59 adopted when the product is of low involvement and in such scenario the use of celebrities and common citizens as endorsers in the advertisement has the positive effect on the consumer attitude toward the product. Smith et al (1983) also presented a marketing scenario in which the influence of direct and indirect experience is revealed on the consumer's attitude and behavior consistency. The direct experience in terms of product trial leaves a remarkable impact in shaping attitude and behavior of the consumer towards purchase decision. While the indirect experience which

includes advertising a product has comparatively lesser impact on attitude and behavior consistency of consumer. Milgrom et al (1986) proposed a different view in shaping consumer behavior that the importance of camera angle in product advertisement for seeking the attention of audience. Different camera angles have different impact on audience. The camera angle is the most influential factor when the audiences' processing motivation is not very high. In case of low processing motivation the camera angle that makes the audience to look up at the product is highly favourable, moderate results are obtained when angle enables the product to be positioned at eye level and the least favourable results come when audience has to look down at the product. But in case of audience having moderate processing motivation the eye level camera angles work best. Childers et al (1984) acknowledged the importance of picture for any product advertisement and said that it has great impact on consumer memory. The pictorial ads give really incredible results in scenario of immediate and delayed recall tasks where apparent features are focus of processing. While verbal works only in case of immediate recalls and it loses its value when the delayed recall is required. Mela et al (1997) also studied the long term outcome of the advertisement and the promotional activities on consumer choice of brand. The model says that advertisement plays a major role over time in making the consumer less price sensitive while in comparison the promotional activities are one of the important causes of making the consumer more sensitive towards price and the promotion of the product. This pattern is observed in both loyal and non-loyal consumers but it is observed more widely in the non-loyal consumers. Akerbergm D. A. (2003) also revealed that advertising is a great source of product learning. This learning process is carried by either information advertisement or prestige or image advertisement but the research shows that the presence of informational content in an advertisement is a primary tool for creating learning about the product and the image content has relatively less significance in creating the learning about the product and this prestige strategy does not work in every product category with same effectiveness to support the purpose of learning. According to Wang et al (2002, August) traditional and the internet marketers both can strategize their advertisement policies more effectively by deeply studying those factors in advertisement through which the audience or the consumers form their perception about the product. Some of these factors are information content presented in advertisement, the degree of focus on entertainment, credibility and the different demographic characteristics presented in advertisement. Moreover, the advertisement with more interactive concept grabs more attention of the consumer. Vakratsas et al (1999) also suggested that in order to know how an advertisement works; it should be evaluated on the basis of three

aspects. First of all, the behavioural dimension that includes purchasing decision, brand choice and market share. Secondly the effect on the consumer behavior values and believes. And third the most important cognitive dimension that includes product type, the degree of competition in the market, the development stage of the product and the consideration of the market that needs to be captured. According to Zhang et al (1996) the phenomenon of humour in the advertisement significantly influences the individual's response towards product. And this phenomenon does not equally influence each individual. Presence of humour in advertisement produces favourable results for a person possessing low need for cognition.

Materials and Methods:

The research relied on both qualitative and approaches to research. The study was conducted in Manama and Riffa Regions with both structured and semi-structured questionnaires to elicit the required responses. Manama region was chosen to represent Northern while Riffa represents Southern Bahrain. Two sets of target population were used in this research. Advertising practitioners including Creative Advertising Agencies, Outdoor Advertising Companies and Advertising Media Buying Companies were studied in Bahrain. The second set of the target population are the television viewers in the Manama and Riffa respectively. The population of Manama is estimated at 1, 57,474 and that of Riffa is estimated at 1, 21,566. Sample from the Advertisers Association of Bahrain was taken from 100 practitioners who were registered members as at December 2012. A total of 350 participants were selected from television viewers from Accra and Kumasi. Preliminary interviews as to whether they owned and watched television were conducted to screen potential participants to ensure their qualification for this survey. 200 participants from viewers completed their questionnaires, thus representing 57% response rate. Non-probability sampling technique was used in this research. Self-selection sampling method was used to select at least one representative from all the advertising agencies registered with the Advertisers Association of Bahrain. Convenience sampling method was used to select respondents from the television viewing public. Respondents were selected from all the eleven administrative districts of Accra metropolis and the ten administrative districts of Kumasi. Information was also gathered from academic journals, books, newsletters and published articles about humorous television advertisements. Data analysis was done by the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Pearson's correlation analysis was also performed to measure the relationship between humorous television advertisements and persuasion to purchase.

Results and Discussion:**Reasons behind usage of humorous television advertisements.**

The study brought to the fore some of the main reasons why advertisers use humour content in television advertising in the Bahrain. Two main reasons were that humorous television advertisements in general are better at achieving communication goals and the fact that it is used in order to achieve instant awareness for products and services being advertised. Sternthal and Craig (1973) cited in (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992) listed advertising goals which included comprehension, persuasion, attention etc. and the impact of humour on each of these goals.

Perception of humorous television advertisements

Humorous television commercials have a very favourable perception with practitioners and viewers alike. Both say they prefer humour advertisements to serious ones. 90% of viewers see humour advertisements as effective and majority also do watch humour advertisements. However, viewers saw bad joke that may offend consumers as a very high risk of humorous television advertisements.

Determinants of effective humorous television advertisements.

Practitioners believe product features is very important consideration for an effective humorous television advertisement. Majority said they would use humour for products and not services and 96% said they would use humour with low involvement products and services than with high involvement products and services. This agrees with views of many humour researchers. The nature of the product being advertised affects the effectiveness of the use of humour in the advertisement (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992; Fatt, 2002). Certain product types are perceived to be less appropriate to the use of humorous advertising than others (Fugate, 1998). Low involvement products such as consumer non-durables (foods, beverages, snacks) seem more suitable for humorous advertising treatments as against intimate, serious or high involvement products (Fugate, 1998). Practitioners also considered audience factors as very important, and that level of education, cultural background as well as ages of target audience should be taken seriously into consideration for an effective humorous television advertisements. 68% of respondents are of 35 years and below said yes to liking humour which indicates that the youth have affinity for humour advertisements. An advertisement placement was also considered as important to effective advertising. 86% of practitioners believe advertisements placed in a humorous programme will do better than when placed in a serious programme. Studies have indicated an interaction effect between

the program being aired and the humour advertisement (Chattopadhyay, 1991).

Communication goals/ roles of humorous television advertisements

Practitioners as well as viewers were unanimous on the role of humorous television advertisements. Humorous television advertisements were found to enhance comprehension, liking for product or service and increasing persuasion. Both practitioners and viewers gave high marks to humorous television advertisements' attention grabbing role and its ability to enhance product recall. On persuasion however, practitioners were not in agreement with viewers since majority of viewers did not vote for that. Many of the respondents did not see humour advertisements to increase source credibility. This is not surprising since results of studies on humour and source credibility are mixed (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992). There is a significant positive relationship [$r=0.25$, $n = 200$, $p<0.05$] between humorous television advertisements and persuasion to purchase.

Conclusion:

It is not uncommon to count many humorous advertisements in a single commercial break in a television program in Bahrain. Humorous television advertisements attract attention. Humour does not harm comprehension. Humour does not appear to offer an advantage over non-humour at increasing persuasion. Unlike practitioners, who believe humour enhances persuasion; viewers on the other hand do not give that clear picture. Humour does not enhance source credibility. It appears humour may harm source credibility instead. Humour enhances liking for products and services advertised with humour. Audience factors affect humour response. Special emphasis is on age, level of education and cultural background of target audience. What is funny to a certain ethnic, gender or age group might necessarily not be funny to others with different characteristics. The nature of product affects the appropriateness of a humour treatment. Humour is more appropriate for low involvement products than high involvement products and also with product than with services. It is important to state that humour can be very effective in some situations and not others. It is imperative that advertisers are aware of the contingencies that define humour's effectiveness beforehand before attempting to use humorous television advertisements.

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Tables & Figure

Table 1: Level of importance of audience factors

	Frequency	Percent
Most Important	41	41.0
Important	53	53.0
Unimportant	6	6.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 2: Level of Importance of Product Features

	Frequency	Percent
Most important	42	42.0
Important	43	43.0
No difference	15	15.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 3: Do humorous television advertisements Enhance message comprehension?

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	16	16.0
Agree	53	53.0
Neutral	07	07.0
Disagree	14	14.0
Strongly Disagree	10	10.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 4: Do humorous television advertisements

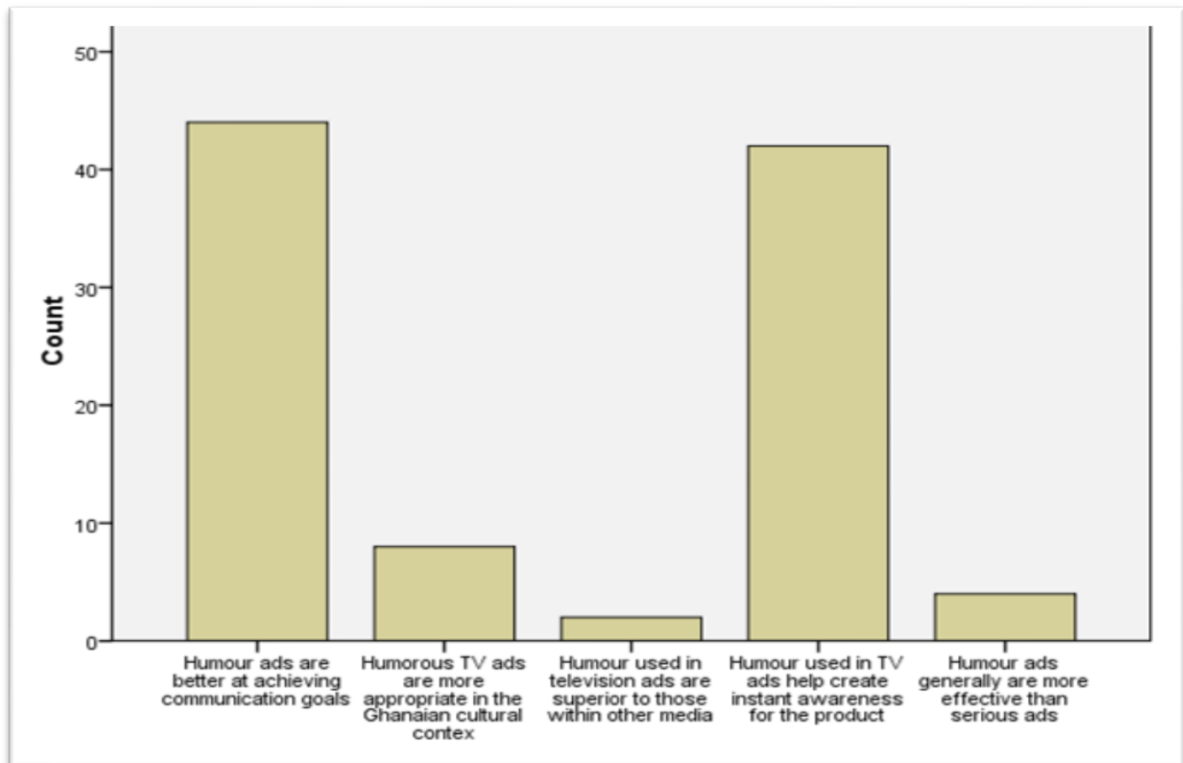
increase persuasion?

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	26	26.0
Agree	42	42.0
Neutral	23	23.0
Disagree	05	05.0
Strongly Disagree	04	04.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 5: Do humorous television advertisements enhance liking of products and services?

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	19	19.0
Agree	51	51.0
Neutral	19	19.0
Disagree	07	07.0
Strongly Disagree	04	04.0
Total	100	100.0

Figure1: Reasons for using Humour Advertisements



Source: Data field, 2013
