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Level of Creativity and Attitudes Toward an Advertisement

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There have been diverse arguments regarding the factors that could have an impact on individuals' attitudes toward a specific ad, brand, or product. However, there is still no overall agreement pertaining to these issues because many circumstantial factors, including personal characteristics of targeted audience members and product diversity, can affect attitudes and receptivity to an advertisement. Through the 3×3 experimental method, an investigation seeking for the possible interplay between levels of creativity (i.e., low, medium, and high) inherent in advertisements and individuals' professional roles as consumers, advertisers, or ad agency professionals was conducted. The results indicated that the variables (i.e., creativity levels, diversity of roles among targeted audience members) affected individuals' attitudes toward ads, as well as advertised brands and products. In addition, an interaction effect between two variables on attitudes toward an ad was detected. In general, advertising creativity level was more important than roles of targeted audience members on their attitudes toward brands and products seen in ads.

Creativity is one of the most important factors in advertising, despite its non-scientific and subjective aspects (El-Murado & West, 2004; Kover, James, & Sonner 1997; Reid et al., 1998). Many researchers have affirmed the crucial value of creativity in advertising (Blasko & Mokwa, 1986; Dillon, 1975; El-Murad & West, 2004; Reid & Rotfeld, 1976; Smith & Yang, 2004; While, 1972). Even though the perception of creativity depends on the culture and the individual, creativity has been considered just as critical in its own right (Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2003; Smith & Yang, 2004; White & Smith, 2001). Stone, Besser, and Lewis (2000) showed that people prefer advertisements that are creative by analyzing memorability, recall, and likeability as advertising effects. The researchers explored the relationships between each attribute and the mechanics of creativity. They discovered a high percentage of overlap among advertisements that were liked, creative, and effective.

Moreover, Kover, Goldberg, and James (1995) found that viewers placed creativity and their overall perceptions of advertisements in the same dimension. In fact, a decade-long market tracking study found that several psychological models combined recall and perception to predict advertising effectiveness (Plessis, 1994; Stone et al., 2000). Thus, the perception of an advertisement, which is linked to its creativity by general consumers, is related closely to advertising effects. Stone and his colleagues (2000) also noted that liking a commercial is linked to the intent to purchase the advertised brand and higher persuasion scores. As White and Smith (2001) indicated, creativity is a prerequisite for advertising effectiveness. Kover and his colleagues (1995) regarded the two concepts of creativity and advertising effectiveness as inseparable.

Researchers, marketers, and ad agency professionals have investigated the important factors impacting the extent to which people like an ad, a brand, and the product appearing in an ad (Heath, Nairn, & Bottomley, 2009; Schmitt, Podtma, & Haan, 2000). Since individuals' attitudes toward those elements could influence

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their future behaviors regarding a brand and/or product, researchers and ad agency professionals have attempted to acquire satisfactory answers regarding related questions (Shapiro, MacInnis, & Heckler, 1997). Regarding the likeability of an ad and the advertised brand and product, many different factors have been investigated as essential, including types of media (Yang & Smith, 2009), uniqueness of the vehicle (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2005), length of commercials (Spence & Driver, 1998), advertising appeal (Shapiro & Krishnan, 2001), product characteristics (El-Murad & West, 2004), and brand awareness (Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2006). In addition, the creativeness of an ad (Sasser & Koslow, 2008) and the roles of audience members as advertising professionals or regular consumers (Chong, 2006) were discussed as important factors in predicting individuals' attitudes toward an ad, a brand, and the product appearing in the ad.

When addressing the different perspectives regarding advertising creativity, research has been conducted mostly in two ways. Previous research indicated that individual perspectives toward advertising creativity are dependent on the audience members' various professional roles especially as consumers or ad agency professionals (Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2003). Further, ad agency professionals in different departments (e.g., copywriting, graphic design, account management, and media) expressed different opinions about advertising creativity (Ensor, Cottam, & Band, 2001). Likewise, researchers have addressed the gap in perceptions of ad agency professionals and clients (advertisers) regarding advertising creativity (Klebbba & Tierney, 1995; Koslow et al., 2006; Reid & King, 2003).

As Michell (1984) indicated, advertising creativity is a "day-to-day decision-making" process (p. 9) between clients and ad agencies to improve performance. Michell investigated the different opinions on advertising creativity from a sample of 100 people (50 advertising clients and 50 ad agency professionals). Opinions about advertising creativity differed considerably from the group. For example, the client group determined that advertising creativity reflected good business and communications strategies and long-term organizational efforts, whereas ad agency professionals thought that creativity emerged from a liberal and spontaneous atmosphere (Michell, 1984). As a possible solution for the gap in perception, the researcher suggested that account planners employed by advertising agencies should be responsible for improving communications between clients and creative teams in the "day-to-day decision-making" process.

White and Smith (2001) conducted an experimental study with people outside of the advertising industry to identify differences in evaluations of advertising creativity among several groups of people. The sample group included ad agency professionals, college students, and

members of the general public. Participants were asked to evaluate the creativity of 15 print ads. The result of this evaluation demonstrated that demographics affected how people defined and judged advertising creativity. Although they agreed on the importance of originality, surprise, and logic, the participants had diverse views regarding use of graphics, well-craftedness, and sophistication of the messages. In addition to the three grouping variables (ad agency professionals, college students, and general public), White and Smith (2001) also found that differences in age group, gender, professional experience, location, and other demographic variables influenced how people judged advertising creativity.

The impact of culture on different perspectives toward advertising creativity has also been discussed. Carey (1975) indicated that culture is a dominant influence in communications among people and diverse societal structures in society. Punyapiroje, Morrison, and Hoy (2002) acknowledged cultural idiosyncrasies as powerful mediators shaping the development of creative messages in advertising. Through a qualitative study involving local creative professionals, they found out the fact that culture significantly influences opinions about advertising creativity. Regarding creative strategies, Taylor, Hoy, and Haley (1996) concluded their research involving local ad agency professionals that their cultural backgrounds contribute to diversity in creative strategies. In addition, several advertising researchers have addressed the important role of culture in the selection of tools used to develop creative advertisements (Domzal & Kernan, 1994; Polonsky & Waller 1995).

Several different experiments have been performed to examine interactions among factors that influence attitudes toward ads, brands, or products. The use of appeals and the effect of individuals' personalities have been discussed (Stewart, Cheng, & Wan, 2008). For example, researchers indicated that using different appeals in advertising as well as the audiences' different personalities could be important factors in influencing individuals' attitudes toward the ad itself, the products, and the brand appearing in the ad. The interactions produced by specific appeals and the audiences' personalities were critical factors in determining what kinds of attitude people might have toward the ad itself, the brand, and the product. Additionally, previous use of a product and the occasions associated with exposure to the relevant ad were cited as important factors in determining an individual's specific attitude toward an advertisement (Sith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz, & Darley, 2007). Interactions caused by consumers' prior experiences with a product and their surroundings when they were exposed to the ad were found as well (Stewart et al., 2008). In addition to the factors mentioned above, there have been several other studies discussing the possible interactions among other factors on influencing individuals' attitudes

toward an ad, a product, and the brand seen in the ad. Because of the gap in the relevant literature regarding possible interactions between the creativity level expressed through an ad and the roles of audience members (i.e., ad agency professionals, clients, or advertisers), the present study has focused on this topic.

In the present study, the main effects of and possible interplay between varied levels of advertising creativity and roles of audience members regarding attitudes toward an ad, brand, and product were investigated. This research should identify influences on individuals' attitudes toward strategic communications, including advertising. At the same time, this information should be helpful for ad agency professionals and marketers in their strategic considerations about the effects of creativity levels inherent in advertisements and relevant characteristics of the targeted audience.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since there were few published studies dealing with the interactions caused by differences in professional roles and levels of creativity in advertising, the present study applied research questions instead of hypotheses. Subsequently, three different attitudes were investigated as dependent variables.

- RQ1:** Were there interaction effects caused by individuals' roles as consumers, advertisers, or ad agency professionals and creativity levels inherent in advertisements (i.e., high, medium, low) on attitudes toward the advertisements used in this study?
- RQ2:** Were there interaction effects of audience members' roles and advertising creativity levels on attitudes toward the advertised brand?
- RQ3:** Were there interaction effects based on roles of audience members and advertising creativity levels on attitudes toward the advertised product?

METHOD

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from groups of ad agency professionals, clients (i.e., advertisers), and consumers (audience members) to examine diverse types of ads. In addition to individual characteristics of these participants, advertising creativity level was identified as an independent variable in the present study. Each participant in this study was assigned to one of nine different groups, based on levels of creativity reflected in advertising (high, medium, and low) and practical role (i.e., consumer, advertiser, and ad agency professional). Participants were asked about their attitudes toward an ad and the brand and the product appearing therein.

Measures

Three different scales were applied to investigate individuals' attitudes toward an advertisement, the brand appearing in the ad, and the product appearing in the ad. In addition, we asked the participants to answer some demographic questions. Scales for general impressions of an ad included the following items: *appealing/not appealing*, *informative/not informative*, *persuasive/not persuasive*, and *effective/not effective* (Peterson et al. 1992). Individuals' attitudes toward the brand appearing in the ad were evaluated according to five questions developed by Peterson et al. Finally, individuals' attitudes toward the product seen in the ad were evaluated according to five different questions (Bezjian-Avery, Calder, & Iacobucci, 1998). The three scales used in this study generated acceptable reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha: .888 for attitude toward ad itself, .875 for attitude toward brand, .904 for attitude toward product, and .929 for intent to purchase).

Procedure

A 3 × 3 factorial design was applied in this experimental study. Thus, two independent variables were used as

TABLE 1
Advertisements Used After Manipulation Check

High Creativity			Medium Creativity			Low Creativity		
# of Ad	Mean	SD	# of Ad	Mean	SD	# of Ad	Mean	SD
040 (1)	5.9091	1.0320	—	—	—	—	—	—
057 (2)	5.8945	1.0717	071 (1)	4.6802	1.0462	—	—	—
030 (3)	5.8673	.8939	106 (2)	4.6622	1.0162	083 (4)	3.1486	1.2240
089 (4)	5.8514	.9525	105 (3)	4.6351	1.0723	053 (3)	3.0136	.9826
—	—	—	002 (4)	4.6195	1.3401	036 (2)	2.9682	1.1638
—	—	—	—	—	—	059 (1)	2.9312	.8987

Note. Numbers preceding those in parentheses were assigned originally, and numbers in parentheses were assigned after the manipulation check.

grouping variables, as described in the preceding section. Through a manipulation check conducted among local ad professionals, specific ads for the experiment were selected. Those were considered to have high levels of creativity (Range $M > 4.75$, 37 advertisements, 33.33%), medium levels of creativity ($M = 4.32-4.74$, 32 advertisements, 66.66%), and low levels of creativity ($M < 4.32$, 39 ads, 100%). The categories used in this study were presented originally in research by Haberland and Dacin (1992) for a semantic differential scale. Total 60 participants were selected for the pilot study to categorize each ad according to one of the three creativity levels. Individuals who participated in the manipulation check did not participate in the main experiments for this research, for which nine groups of people were used. Table 1.

RESULTS

Total 382 participants were hired for the main experiment. The sample included 138 ad agency professionals (36.1%), 105 clients, or advertisers (27.5%), and 139 consumers (36.4%). Furthermore, 163 people (42.7%) were exposed to an advertisement exhibiting a high level of creativity (42.7%); 126 (33.0%) to an ad characterized by a medium level of creativity, and 93 (24.3%) to an ad exhibiting a low level of creativity.

Regarding the first RQ, the creativity levels exhibited in ads had the most significant effect on individuals' receptiveness. More specifically, the participants who were exposed to ads exhibiting high levels of creativity responded favorably toward the ads ($p < .01$). Clients (advertisers) who were exposed to the highly creative ads showed the most positive attitudes toward them ($p < .01$). Table 2.

Regarding the second RQ, it was found that the attitudes toward advertised brands were significant based on creativity level. More specifically, the participants who were exposed to ads reflecting high levels of creativity demonstrated the most favorable attitudes toward the advertised brand ($p < .01$). No interaction effects

TABLE 2
Main Effects and Interaction Effects of Advertising Creativity and Roles of Targeted Audience (Dependent Variable: Attitudes Toward Advertising)

Variables	df	Mean Square	F
Main effects			
Creativity level	2	48.939	68.593
Role or professional position	2	.179	.251**
Interaction effects			
Creativity*	4	2.967	4.159**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 3
Main Effects and Interaction Effects Based on Creativity Levels and Roles of Targeted Audience (Dependent Variable: Attitudes Toward Brand)

Variables	Df	Mean Square	F
Main effects			
Creativity level	2	26.763	28.898**
Role or professional position	2	.663	.716
Interaction effects			
Creativity*	4	1.161	1.253

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

based on the role or positions of the audience members were found. Table 3.

Finally, through the RQ3, the possible main effects caused by the two independent variables and any interaction effects by the variables were detected in terms of individuals' attitudes toward the product appearing in the ads. As well as the results from RQ2, only different creativity levels caused significant effects on individuals' attitude. Individuals who were exposed to the ads exhibiting a high level of creativity showed the most positive attitudes toward the products seen in the ads ($p < .01$). However, an interaction effect was not detected, possibly due to the effects of different levels of creativity and different roles on individuals' attitudes toward the product appearing in the ads. Table 4.

DISCUSSION

Ad Agency Professionals and Clients

Individuals' attitudes toward ads were significantly different because of interactions between advertising creativity levels and the different positions (roles) of ad agency professionals (Table 2). On the other hand, attitudes toward the advertised product and brand were not significantly different. Clients, in particular, who were exposed to highly creative ads demonstrated the most favorable attitudes toward the ads used in this study.

TABLE 4
Main Effects and Interaction Effects by Different Levels of Creativity/Different Positions (Dependent Variable: Attitudes Toward Product)

Variables	df	Mean Square	F
Main effects			
Creativity level	2	24.731	28.765**
Role or professional position	2	.230	.268
Interaction effects			
Creativity*	4	.347	.404

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

There was a critical gap between evaluations of ad agency professionals and clients regarding the quality of advertising. Advertising agency professionals evaluated ads more critically and analytically, rather than emotionally or spontaneously (Chong, 2006). Ad agency professionals conduct campaigns based on current market situations, appropriate target audiences, and single-minded propositions (SMPs), according to Sasser and Koslow (2008). Therefore, creativity can be viewed as one among several required elements of an advertisement (Kim, Han, & Yoon, 2010). Despite its importance for successful advertising, creativity must not be the sole basis for evaluating advertising effects (McStay, 2010). Other critical factors for consideration by ad agency professionals included strategic backgrounds and sales revenue (West, Kover, & Caruana, 2008). On the other hand, it was clear that the clients valued creativity in ads; this finding indicated that their responses to creative ads were emotional ones (Sasser & Koslow, 2008).

Regular Consumers' Perspectives

Ordinary consumers recruited for this study did not base their attitudes toward ads solely on creativity level. In fact, consumers who were exposed to ads characterized by low levels of creativity responded favorably to them. Reid et al. (1998) noted that the clarity of an advertisement could be diminished with higher levels of creativity. Therefore, consumers appeared to respond most favorably toward ads conveying messages that were easy to understand. Several researchers agreed with these findings (Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2006). For example, Yu (2010) indicated that consumers either lack sufficient knowledge for analyzing the creativity level of advertising or prefer ads that can be understood clearly and quickly. Some studies expressed that creativity is valued primarily by clients and ad agency professionals (Reid et al., 1998). However, regular consumers did not care as much as the two groups did during the information processing of advertisements (Heath, Nairn, & Bottomley, 2009). The results from this study partly supported the findings of researchers cited in the above studies.

Positions Are Not a Crucial Variable

Ad agency professionals, advertisers (clients), and ordinary consumers indicated that their impressions toward the advertised brand and product were not significantly different according to their professional roles. Creativity by itself was the critical element causing differences in attitudes toward products and brands. Based on the results from this study, it is possible that people digest the advertisement, the brand, and the product differently (Yang & Smith, 2009). When people see the brand and the product appearing in an ad, they could lose some of the involvement they had originally (Kim et al., 2010).

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the ads used in the present study were chosen according to a structured pilot test, different definitions/notions of advertising creativity were noted. Therefore, there could have been some inaccuracies in categorizations of ads based on creativity level. As several researchers indicated, advertising creativity has been a subjective and abstract concept despite efforts to establish standard definitions of advertising creativity (Schmitt et al., 2000). On top of that, this study was conducted using 3×3 experimental methods. Categorization could have been more specific. For example, ad agency professionals might have viewed ads differently according to their respective departments (Reid et al., 1998). Furthermore, clients' opinions might have been influenced by the number of years spent in their job (West et al., 2008). Therefore, future studies should include these sub-categories, which were not investigated in the present study.

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