
The Effects Of Advertising Humor In Customer Attraction

“I am one who believes that one of the greatest dangers of advertising is not that of misleading people, but that of boring them to death” – Leo Burnett

Every day millions of people are exposed to a wide array of advertisements, most advertisers use the conventional medium of television and print ads to reach these people, while some advertisers now prefer to use the internet as a medium for advertising due to its fairly larger reach than the conventional method of television and print advertising. With thousands of products on the market, it would be interesting to find out why we respond to certain advertisements and not to others. We will be concentrating on humorous advertisements since they are a great part of advertising today. Therefore the purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of humor in advertising in the Philippines. The extent of the study is to look both on how different types of humor are used and what are the benefits of humor in advertising.

Advertising affects us in our day to day lives, small testament on the effects of advertising in our lives. Advertisements today inform and guide us on many important decisions we make, not just on the products we buy, but also whether we are to take on an entrepreneurial risk, choose a to live a healthier lifestyle, plan ahead for our retirement or to donate to charity. The ways in which advertisements are affecting and molding our attitudes, lifestyles and culture are too many to tally. More than \$500 billion a year is spent on advertising in the world; beyond that, the commercial and economic impact of advertising reaches just about every industry from cars to candy bars. According to Elliot and Speck, (1998), the overall level of advertising is extremely high, they claim that people in general are exposed to over 6,000 advertisements on an average day and over 25,000 new products in any given year.

The traditional definition of advertising includes a series of elements that distinguishes the field from others. Every innovation in the field of communication has been integrated and used in advertising, and in some way, each has modified and changed how advertising works, which in turn has also changed the set of elements used in its definition. Consumers tend to think that every form of commercial promotional activity such as sponsorships to telemarketing is a form of advertising. Over the decades, advertising has been defined in many ways. Industry icon Leo Burnett defined advertising as “selling corn flakes to people who are eating Cheerios” and the late U.S. President Calvin Coolidge called it “the life of trade”. Textbooks gives a stricter definition of advertising such as in Jobber (2004) where he defines advertising as “any paid form of non-personal communication of ideas or products in the prime media, i.e. television, the press, posters, cinema and radio”.

Advertising can be used to make the target audience aware of the existence of a product or service, and the benefits that the target audience will receive from getting the product or service. Advertising is a part of the promotional mix that also includes trade promotions, sales promotions, personal selling and sales management.

The marketing communication process is based upon the source that encodes a message by translating the idea to be communicated into a symbol of consisting words, pictures and

numbers. The message is transmitted through media such as television or posters, which are selected for their ability to reach the desired target audience in the desired way. Communication requirements may affect the choice of media by the advertiser. For example, if the encoded message requires the product to be demonstrated to the consumers, then television is preferred than posters and print ads due to the capability of television as a form of medium that is capable of motion picture. Noise, distractions and distortions during the marketing communication process, may prevent the transmission to some of the target audience. A television advertisement may not reach a member of a household because of conversation or some other distraction. When a receiver sees or hears the message, it is decoded. This is the process by which the receiver interprets the symbols communicated by the source. The aim is for the receiver's decoding to coincide with the source's encoding process. The receiver will then interpret the message as intended by the source. Advertisers need to understand their targets before encoding messages in order for them to be credible. Otherwise the response of the receiver may be of disbelief or rejection. Feedback may rely on marketing research to estimate the reactions to advertising, and increases to sales due to the right way of advertising. Rogers (1995) believes in one basic rule; that the message should be easy to receive. The guide to media selection and advertising the product should be what the people you wish to affect are used to.

Analyzing the composition of television advertising in the Philippines, one finds that it is very much concerned with fast-selling consumer goods. The strength of television advertising lies in its great range and impact. As a common rule, it has to be combined with advertising through other media. The new emergence of a wide variety of television channels and alternative uses of television receivers is said to result in a fragmentation of the television audience. New technical equipment is giving viewers an opportunity of discarding television advertising. These developments can result in a loss of interest in commercial television advertising on the part of the advertisers. Evans (1994) agrees and describes how television advertisements have gone from bad to worse.

The three decades following 1950 in the Philippines had been good indeed. There were only three major commercial networks in the Philippines. Audiences were large and easy to track. In terms of numbers and demographics, advertisers got exactly what they paid for. Then, along the 1980's, the tidy little set up got a bit messy, with the arrival of cable television. It soon became clear that network ratings were deteriorating. With the arrival of the remote control unit and the VCR, advertising became completely optional. Unless the advertisement was immediately relevant, your audience would zap merrily away, up and down the dial. As destructive as these changes have been to the advertiser, the worst is yet to come. Looming on the horizon is the most fearsome spectacle of all: the 500-channel universe. In a survey conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide, it showed that only 26 percent of viewers stated that they watched advertising programs during a program. It has been said that nobody ever tunes into a television show to watch the advertisements. But this is not to say people do not watch advertising, 26 percent does according to the Roper Starch Worldwide survey. Several decades of experience, along with a great deal of testing and experimenting, have proved that advertising can build positive images, affect attitudes and make sales. Evans further states that the key to success of any advertisement is relevance. If the message is made clear, and if it relates to a real consumer need, it will work.

The advertisement does not have to be expensively produced, it does not have to be clever, but it does have to be relevant. Because if the message relates to an immediate consumer need,

people will watch, and respond to the advertisement's message. While nobody tuned in just to watch it, the advertisement's message interested them, it involved the viewers and it worked. However, there are problems in every advertising medium. Shimp (2000) defines clutter as the "growing amount of non-program material: advertising, public services messages, and promotional announcements for station and programs". Consumers perceive television to be the most cluttered of all major advertising media. Clutter has been created by the network's increased use of promotional announcements to stimulate audience viewing of heavily promoted programs and by advertiser's increased use of shorter advertising. Clow & Baack (2002) mean that clutter makes capturing someone's attention quite difficult.

Once an advertiser has the audience's attention, keeping that attention becomes even more challenging. Humor has proven to be one of the best techniques for cutting through clutter. Humor is effective in both getting attention and keeping it. Shimp (2000) agrees and states that politician, actors and actresses, public speakers, professors and indeed all of us at one time or another use humor to create a desired reaction. Advertisers also turn to humor in the hopes of achieving various communications objectives to gain attention and to guide the consumer's comprehension of the product's claim, influence and attitudes, and enhance the recall ability of advertised claims, and penultimately, create customer action. Catanescu & Tom (2001) defines seven types of humor: comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, silliness and surprise. They found that different types of humor in advertising vary by medium. Their study revealed that humor is used more in television advertising than print advertisements.

Consumers, as a whole, enjoy advertisements that make them laugh. Something that is funny has intrusive value and can grab attention. Humor is used in about 30 percent of all advertisements. One reason for the success of humor in advertising may be that the population is aging. According to Abraham Maslow, people tend to develop a more comedic view of life as they mature. Also, humor helps individuals to escape from reality. Comedy shows and comedy bars have grown in popularity over the past decade. Consequently, humor is an effective approach for reaching a wide audience. The success of humor as an advertising tactic is based on three factors. Humor causes consumers to: 1) watch, 2) laugh, and most importantly, 3) remember. In recall tests, consumers most often remember humorous advertisements.

For humor to be a successful tactic, the humor should be connected directly to the product's benefits. It should tie together the product features, the advantage to customers, and the personal values of the means-ends chain. However Mooij (1994) considers humor to be strongly culture-bound and can be rarely internationalized. Humor generally does not travel well: what is thought to be funny in one country may be considered stupid or misunderstood altogether in another country.