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The impact of advertising message strategies: Fear appeal versus sex appeal upon consumers’ intention to purchase

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ABSTRACT

Academics and international marketing managers alike have struggled with the issue of the standardisation of advertising programme. Proponents of standardisation argue it is possible for a firm to standardised advertising programmes across countries. In contrast, critics of standardisation have consistently argued a case for their adaptation, citing cultural, economic and political barriers as reasons.

Fear and sex are among the most powerful tool of persuasion. Usage of fear and sexual message strategy in advertising creates certain types of reactions. In the Asian context, empirical studies found that fear and nudity are the most cited reasons for finding the advertisement offensive. Offensive advertisement can be harmful for the products and also to the brands

As such, a few objectives have been constructed and among others is to examine consumer response to fear and sex advertising appeal and its influence on purchase intention. The study also interested to compare gender’s attitude towards those appeals. The study is guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein and Ajzen, which proposes that human behaviour can be predicted by individual’s attitude and his/her subjective norm.
A structured questionnaire is used as the main instrument in this survey to measure the relationship between attitude/subjective norm and consumer’s purchase intention after being exposed to two different print advertisements that use fear and sex appeal. Statistical analysis of the data collected from the survey is then accomplished by using the Statistical Package for Social Science program (SPSS) Windows Version 17.0. Data analysis techniques used in this study are normality test, reliability test, factor analysis, T-Test, Pearson Correlation, simple and multiple regression.

The findings from the study show that both attitude and subjective norm are positively and significantly correlated to the purchase intention, for both appeals. Moreover, there is significant difference between attitude towards fear appeal advertising for male and female, where attitude explains significantly more of the variance in purchase intention for male than for female. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference between attitude towards sex appeal advertising for male and female, where attitude explains moderately of the variance in purchase intention.

From the results, attitude is the focus when designing a fear appeal advertisement. Advertiser that target male market may want to apply fear elements in their advertisement. In the meantime, advertiser that target female market may want to avoid from using this appeal. Product for both male-female markets may use sex elements in their advertisement. Nonetheless, positive or negative reaction against sex appeal advertising depends on the appropriateness to the advertised product.
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