

Determinants of affect versus cognition: A review on evaluation of humorous ads

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Abstract

Individuals process the information in the ads with a combination of affect and cognition. Certain individuals have a tendency to process information with a greater percentage of affect while others resort to cognitive information processing. Various factors dictate the dominance of one over the other. This review article studies the factors like product category involvement, mood, need for cognition and gender effects that influence the route of processing. Further, the use of humorous advertisements like incongruity-resolution and arousal-safety are studied to find their appropriateness in both these contexts.

Keywords: Affect, Cognition, Incongruity-resolution, Arousal-safety

1. Introduction

Managers are responsible for the success of their brands by maximising its acceptance, which can lead to satisfactory sales. Advertisements help to create awareness and introduce new products and their attributes to the consumers (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Advertising campaigns require high investment; therefore, it is imperative that these investments are used effectively and efficiently. Ideally, managers must ensure that their ads are not only seen by the potential consumers but also are evaluated in a positive manner. However, such a scenario is not always possible due to the various factors that interfere with the successful evaluation of ads. The effectiveness of ads depends on the consumers, the content of the ad and the context in which it is viewed (Khandeparkar and Abhishek, 2017). These factors are capable of influencing the physiological process that consumers adopt to evaluate different ads. Therefore, in order to maximise the effectiveness of

advertisements, we have to study the human brain's functioning.

The study of the function of the brain and its different regions helps us in understanding the decision making process of consumers while facing various alternatives. Multiple brain areas work in tandem, however, independently, and the interaction of these neural processes help in the decision making process (Sanfey, Loewenstein, McClure & Cohen, 2006). Specific areas of the brain have specific functions and the outcomes of these areas interact with one another to come up with the final choice (Litt, Eliasmith, & Thagard, 2008).

When a consumer faces various options, the brain has to evaluate them on a common reference point so that it can compare all of them. The orbitofrontal cortex carries out this evaluation of alternatives in the brain (Rolls, 2000). The neurons in this part of the brain help in providing a common neural currency, which helps in comparing alternatives with one another

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(Montague & Berns, 2002). The orbitofrontal cortex is the emotionless part of the brain, which judges alternatives without any emotional association, and checks for the valence (positive or negative) of the output (Litt, et. al., 2008).

The part of the brain associated with the emotional processing of alternatives is called the amygdala. This part is responsible for the emotional arousal of the neurons while judging various alternatives in the decision-making process. The decision-making, therefore, involves the contribution from both these areas of the brain, working independently. The interaction of the amygdala with the orbitofrontal cortex leads to the subjective valuation of the various alternatives (Litt, et. al., 2008). This shows that the evaluation of options is a combination of affect and cognition. The degree of arousal in amygdala will show the dominance of affect over cognition while making decisions. Similarly, the degree of arousal in the orbitofrontal cortex will show the dominance of cognition over affect (Litt, et. al., 2008).

The degree of dominance of affect over cognition (and vice versa) differs due to various factors that influence the consumers. Therefore, we need to understand the conditions under which one should expose the audience to different types of ads or contextual conditions. Consumers who positively respond to cognitive appeals can be exposed to ads that require cognitive capacity, and consumers who positively respond to affective stimuli can be exposed to ads that have an emotional appeal.

The main objective of this article is to study and understand the various parameters under which one form of evaluation will be greater than the other so that we provide suitable form of evaluation opportunity to the target consumers. There fore, we will review the parameters like product category involvement, audiences' mood, their need for cognition and gender to understand their impact on the processing of advertising stimuli. Additionally, this article studies the two types of humorous appeals to suggest the appeal that is most suitable under different contextual parameters.

2. Literature review

Three factors dictate the successful evaluation of ads: ad type, contextual parameters, and characteristics of the viewers. Firstly, a particular message in an ad can be communicated via different routes. Some ads take help of rational arguments, whereas, others resort to emotional appeals like fear or humour. These appeals can interfere with the audiences' ability to process the ads successfully (Speck, 1991). Secondly, a contextual factor like the characteristics of the program in which the ad is placed tends to impact the processing of that ad (De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Anckaert, 2002). Lastly, the demographics of the viewers can also impact the processing of the ads (Sahay, Sharma & Mehta, 2011).

Brands have the option of producing ads that elicit different emotions. The suitability of a particular emotion depends on the characteristics of the target consumers and their level of involvement in the product category (De Pelsmacker et. al., 2002). Ads are placed at different pod positions during a television program (Roy, 2013). Therefore, managers must be sure of not only the channel but also the type of program content in which to place their ads to maximise their effectiveness (Khandeparkar & Abhishek, 2017). Additionally, past research has suggested that demographics like gender also tend to dictate consumers' ability to process ads effectively (Sahay et. al., 2011).

One of the measures used to test the effectiveness of ads is the attitude towards an ad (A_{ad}). Lutz (1985) defined it as "predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion." This measure represents the affective component of evaluation of the ad (Aylesworth & MacKenzie, 1998). Past research has demonstrated that A_{ad} is capable of transferring from the ad to the brand, as per the affect transfer hypothesis (ATH) (McKenzie, Lutz and Belch, 1986). This attitude towards the brand (A_{Br}) is capable of influencing the purchase intentions of that brand, which is capable of positively influencing the sales of that brand (De Pelsmacker et. al., 2002).

Previous studies in this field have shown that consumers use affective as well as cognitive routes to

evaluate a particular ad (Lutz, 1985). However, the degree of usage of both routes differs on several factors like product category involvement, gender, and contextual cues (Pelsmacker et. al., 2002; Sahay et. al., 2011). Due to the myriad types of advertising appeals that are present, managers have to choose the most suitable type for their product and audience.

Therefore, it is important to study the conditions under which a particular route will dominate the other. This article reviews these conditions and studies the type of humour that is suitable for cognitive as well as affective evaluation styles. Table 1 reviews the factors, which impact the evaluation of humours advertisement.

Factor	Study	Findings
Product category involvement	Zaichkowsky (1985)	Low product category involvement can result in less attention to advertising stimuli
	De Pelsmacker et al. (2002)	High product category involvement is able to process the information centrally
Role of mood	Batra and Stayman (1990) Aylesworth and Mackenzie (1998)	Mood influences evaluation of the ads placed Mood states influences advertisement processing
Need for cognition (NFC)	Zang (1996)	Humour appear to generate positive response for low NFC
	Cline, Altsech and Kellaris (2003)	NFC affects motivation to process advertisement
Gender Effect	Lammers (1991)	Self-monitoring interact with gender in moderating responses to advertising
	Lee (2010)	Interaction of message strategy and gender that significantly predicted behavioural intentions

Table 1: Factors which impact the evaluation of humours advertisement.

Pelsmacker et al (2002) have demonstrated that contextual cues that audience experiences during the viewing of ads play an important role in the evaluation of those ads. They suggested that product category involvement is one of those factors. Therefore, we will review this factor.

Product category involvement

An audience, with a low product category involvement, perceives the importance of a choice of a product as less risky and unimportant. Therefore, they do not need greater product information, devoting less attention to the advertisements (Zaichkowsky, 1985). They rely on peripheral cues for processing of the information presented in the ad since they are not motivated to centrally process this information.

However, an audience with a high product category involvement is able to process the information centrally as they are highly motivated to use their

cognitive capacity(De Pelsmacker et. al., 2002). They are able to process the structures and themes shown in the ads via a cognitive route, as their cognitive capacity is higher than that of the viewers with lower involvement. Therefore, consumers with a higher involvement will be able to evaluate that ad centrally and effectively.

This theory is based on the ELM (Elaboration Likelihood Model) which says that the cognitive capacity of individuals is limited. Therefore, the capability of processing the information centrally depends on the individual's ability and motivation at that time. Using ELM, we can conclude that if the audience is no highly involved with the advertised product category then their motivation to process those advertisements will be low. The viewers will be not be interested in solving the problem created by the context. Therefore, they will not pay attention to the ads (Pelsmacker et. al., 2002). However, audience with

a high product category involvement will be able to process information in the ad. Their motivation is high for processing the new information that is presented in the ad (Schwarz, 1990).

Therefore, the consumer's level of product category involvement should be able to help advertisers in selecting the type of ads that need to be shown to the target audience. Viewers with lower product category involvement can be exposed to ads that elicit an affective response, whereas, viewers with higher product category involvement should be exposed to ads that present rational arguments embedded in the theme.

Furthermore, the mood of the audience while viewing the ads can also play an important role that influences its evaluation (Aylesworth & MacKenzie, 1998). Therefore, their mood is capable of dictating its effectiveness. We will explore this parameter in the following section.

The role of mood in ad processing

Gardner (1985) defines mood as "subjectively perceived feeling state that is general, pervasive, temporary, and nonspecific". Mood doesn't have any level of arousal and is considered to be either positive or negative (Aylesworth & MacKenzie, 1998). A mood is a feeling that is targeted towards the environment in which an individual is nestled, and it is not directed towards a specific target (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). The span of a mood is very short and it might not last even for a day (Gardner, 1985).

The cognitive capacity of individuals is limited; therefore, they are able to process a limited amount of information at a given time. The human brain is capable of getting overwhelmed with information. When an individual is in a bad mood due to a particular stimulus then his/her cognitive capacity is preoccupied in identifying the problem that led to that mood. Consequently, such individuals are unable to process new information, as they are preoccupied. However, individuals in a good mood refrain from processing the cause of the good mood and are capable

to processing new information that is coming their way. This is the mood as information theory suggested by Schwarz (1990).

This theory is also based on the ELM (Elaboration Likelihood Model) Using ELM, we can conclude that if the audience is in a bad mood due to a sad context then their ability to process advertisements following that program will be hindered due to the preoccupied cognitive resources. The viewers will be occupied in solving the problem created by the context. Therefore, they will not pay attention to the ads that are adjacent to the mood-inducing context (Aylesworth & MacKenzie, 1998).

However, audience experiencing a good mood due to a happy context will be able to process information in the ad that is adjacent to the mood-inducing context. Their cognitive capacity is available for processing the new information that is presented adjacent to the media context (Schwarz, 1990). Therefore, ads requiring cognitive resources should not be placed in contexts that generate a bad mood. Evidently, they should be placed in contexts that generate a good mood.

Consumers differ in their physiological make-up. Therefore, it is important to study the characteristics of the audience that are capable of dictating the evaluation of advertising stimuli. We will review audiences' need for cognition and gender in the following sections.

Need for cognition

Need for cognition is a personal trait that is a measure of the individual's motivation to seek out information for issue relevant thinking (Cacioppo & Petty 1982). Therefore, need for cognition is capable of defining the amount of cognitive resources that individuals are capable of expending while processing information. Individuals with lower need for cognition depend on heuristics, and do not engage in centrally processing the information that is presented to them. They tend to depend on peripheral cues to decide upon a particular option while making a choice (Petty & Cacioppo

1984). Therefore, emotional appeals are able to persuade individuals with a lower need for cognition, as they are not motivated to critically process the information in the ads (Cline, Altsech, & Kellaris, 2003). Such individuals can be presented with ads that include peripheral cues, which are picked up effectively by them.

However, individuals with higher need for cognition are highly motivated to process the new information centrally. They do not rely on peripheral cues to take their decisions. They are inclined to use their cognitive resources to come to a rational decision (Cacioppo & Petty 1982). Therefore, irrelevant arguments in ads are unlikely to influence individuals with higher need for cognition (Cline et. al., 2003). Such consumers may be presented with rational arguments and logical messages.

Gender effects

Gender differences play an important role in the dominance of cognition over affect (and vice versa) while evaluating various alternatives. Men are more inclined towards using their cognitive resources to process the information they receive in order to make a choice (Meyers-Levy, 1988), whereas, women process the information more comprehensively to find a finer distinction between products (Laroche, Clevel and & Bergeron, 2003). Women tend to focus more on processing of emotional experiences than men (Davis, 1999). Women have a detailed memory of their brand experiences comprised of greater feelings than men do (Kring & Gordon, 1998). Men, on the other hand, need technical complexities to process the information (Putrevu, Tan & Lord, 2004).

The MRI scans of men and women have shown that the brain structures and connection are different for men and women. Therefore, they differ in the way they process information. Women are more intimate than men as far as their relationships are concerned, and they tend to apply greater feelings to their memories and events (McAdams, Lester, Brand, McNamara & Lensky, 1988). Women show a greater tendency to resort to impulse behaviour depending on peripheral

cues while men are more calculative and evaluative while making decisions (Laroche et al., 2003).

Depending on these factors, it is evident that not all consumers will be able to effectively process messages that are complex. Therefore, managers have to take into account these factors before designing advertising messages that are suitable for them. As previously discussed, the content of the ad is also capable of dictating its evaluation. A particular appeal may work for a certain set of individuals but not others. In the next section, we will explore the most common type of advertising appeal: humour. Additionally, we will suggest appropriate humour types for different contexts.

3. Humour advertisements

Advertisers invest millions of dollars in developing ads which appeal to the audience and fight for their attention. Humour is used almost 25% of the times which is more than any other form of advertisement used to gain the acceptance of the audience (Weinberger & Spotts, 1989; Khandeparkar & Abhishek, 2017). Humorous ads are different in the measure of humour that they evoke in the minds of the target audience (Speck, 1991). Some ads generate a lot of humour whereas others fail to do so even if intended. The perceived humour is seen to affect some significant downstream parameters of an ad's effectiveness like its recall, message credibility and attitude toward the ad and brand (Chattopadhyay & Basu 1990; Shimp 1997; Weinberger & Gulas 1992).

Humorous advertisements demand different types of processing depending on the type of humour employed in the advertisement. Certain ads, like incongruity-resolution type, need the capability to resolve a situation or a problem in order to understand the humour. Other types of ads, like arousal-safety, have an emotional appeal, which leads to an affective arousal (Speck, 1991). Different types of humour can be employed to target different consumers based on the type of evaluation (affective or cognitive) the target audience is 'comfortable' with.

The most common type of humorous ads made is incongruity resolution, arousal-safety and humorous disparagement (Speck, 1991). Incongruity resolution humour is termed by the research in psychology and in linguistics as the best framework for understanding humorous ads (Herzog & Larwin, 1988; Raskin, 1985). Therefore, incongruity resolution ads are the most common type of humorous ads.

Incongruity-resolution humour

This humour creates a puzzle that the audience needs to solve in order to understand the joke. It consists of two stages to deliver the humorous message to the viewers. Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer (1999, 2000) formed this two-stage model to explain the process. Incongruity and its resolution are the two crucial ingredients in the making of these ads (Speck, 1991). Incongruity is the first stage, which leads to a feeling of surprise; the level of surprise is higher if the viewers are familiar with the situation that is depicted in the ad (Speck, 1991). The deviation of the situation depicted in the ads from the reality (rules, norms, beliefs etc.) is referred to as the incongruity. The humour is created when this surprise is converted into humour when the viewers resolve the incongruity. This is the second of the process (Alden, et al., 1999, 2000).

A recent ad of Volkswagen Beetle involves a supermodel who walks in a high-end restaurant in an elegant attire. She sits alone at a table while the steward brings food for at least 10 patrons, and she starts eating the entire spread in an uncivilized manner. The tagline flashes- 'Volkswagen Beetle: curves are back'. This ad creates an incongruity by the scene of a supermodel eating away the food for 10 people as they are known for being slim. The tagline offers a resolution that now curves are in style. Khandeparkar and Abhishek (2017) used this ad in their study.

If the situation depicted in the ad is familiar to the audience then the surprise created by the incongruity is larger and the arousal created in the memory will be of a greater degree (Berlyne & Berlyne, 1960; Grunert,

1996). Additionally, the ease of the resolution of the incongruity should be higher to have a greater degree of humour. The ease of resolution helps in creating a positive affect towards the ad, which leads to a positive attitude towards the ad (Speck, 1991). Since the audience has the job of resolving the incongruity, they should be equipped with the necessary cognitive capacity to process the information centrally. Attainment of the resolution will create humour otherwise no humour will be generated, and the ad will fail in creating the required impact (Speck, 1991).

To separate non-sense from humour, the audience should be capable of decoding the humorous message embedded in an incongruity-resolution ad (Shultz, 1976). They have to decode, understand, and solve the problem presented in such ads. The joke is understood by decoding the punch line of the ad, which consists of puns, ironies, or reversals etc. Therefore, such ads are understood only by the viewers whose cognitive capacity is available to process the information presented (Speck, 1991).

When the ad creates a humorous reaction, the audience has a positive evaluation of the ad and this leads to the formation of a positive attitude towards the ad (Alden, et al., 2000). By the affect transfer hypothesis, we know that the attitude towards the ad is capable of positively influencing the attitude towards the brand. Therefore, a positive attitude towards the ad leads to a positive attitude towards the brand (Brown & Stayman 1992; McKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986).

Arousal-safety humour

This humour type creates of a tension at the beginning that is actually found to be absent at the end. This reversal of the point of view generate slaughter. Humour is generated when individuals experience a relief from a perceived feeling of strain or a level of arousal (Berlyne & Berlyne, 1960). As per the description given by Rothbart (1973), "laughter occurs when a person has experienced heightened arousal but at the same time (or soon after the arousal) evaluates the stimulus (usually another person) as safe

or inconsequential". Arousal-safety humour is capable of generating a goodwill or emotional response towards objects (or personified creatures) that are considered cute, friendly, and familiar.

This humour helps in forming an empathetic connection with subjects who narrowly avoid disaster. Keeping the type of disaster believable helps in connecting with the situation presented in the ad. Therefore, it leads to a better response of humour. A strong arousal needs to be generated which is negative at the beginning but turns positive to generate humour (Speck, 1991).

As per Khandeparkar and Abhishek (2017), an example of arousal safety ad was a past ad of Nolan's Cheddar. A mouse encounters a piece of cheese on a mousetrap while a cheerful music plays. As the mouse is trapped while biting the cheese, a sad music plays. Suddenly, the mouse lifts the trap with its limbs and an inspirational music plays while the tagline says 'Nolan's cheese-seriously strong'. This ad creates the arousal in the form of danger to the mouse's life. The mouse not dying due to the strength given by the cheese depicts the safety judgement.

In general, this type of humour requires a stress-inducing stimulus, affective uncertainty created by the stimulus, and a safety judgement at the end. This type of ad generates an affective response towards the subject that is under stress (Khandeparkar & Abhishek, 2017). The individuals who respond positively to affective evaluation of ads will evaluate these ads better than individuals who are capable and wanting to use their cognitive resources to evaluate the options presented to them (Speck, 1991).

4. Discussion

Advertisers invest millions of dollars to produce and telecast ads with the hope of attracting their audiences' attention. Therefore, it is important that these ads be positively evaluated by the viewers. In order to be effective, its viewers must successfully process an ad, which increases the chances of developing a positive

attitude towards it. Certain ads require significant cognitive resources to process them successfully while others are processed easily without needing significant cognitive resources. This review article studies the factors that dictate the availability of the consumers' cognitive resources.

The ELM helps us in understanding that consumers' product category involvement dictates that degree of motivation needed to process complex messages. A higher involvement will lead to a greater amount of cognitive resources while a lower involvement leads to lesser amount of cognitive resources that are required to process a particular advertising message. In addition, as per the mood as information theory and ELM, the mood of the consumers also influences the availability of their cognitive resources. A bad mood hinders their ability to process complex information whereas a good mood enables it.

Consumers' individual characteristics also influence their cognitive resources. Individuals with a lower need for cognitive will not be highly inclined towards processing complex advertising messages whereas individuals with a higher need for cognitive will be able to process them. Gender also plays an important role in processing of advertising messages. Past research has demonstrated that males are inclined towards rational appeals whereas females tend to be inclined towards emotional appeals.

This article also studies the humour types that will be suitable for different consumers. Consumers with a greater degree of cognitive resources will effectively be able to process the complex humour appeal like the incongruity resolution humour. On the other hand, consumers with a lower degree of cognitive resources will find arousal safety ads be effective. Since humour is the most commonly used advertising appeal, it is important for managers to understand their types and the content in which they will be effective.

5. Implications

The evaluation style of the consumers plays an

important role in their judgement of a particular ad. Advertisers should ensure that their brand is preferred over the competition; therefore, they have to influence their target consumers better than the competition. Studying the characteristics of their target consumers and their preferences will help marketers in designing ads that influence their consumers the most. Certain consumers rely on heuristics to judge a particular brand offering while others are involved in centrally processing the information provided to them about the brand offering.

Marketers should be able to identify the conditions under which consumers will evaluate an ad cognitively or affectively. They should design their ad campaigns according to their target consumer's preference of evaluation. This will lead to a positive attitude towards the ad that will transfer to the brand, as per ATH. The factors that lead to a particular route for evaluation should be studied and used to design the ads or place the ads in the appropriate context. The viewer's product category involvement is capable of dictating the evaluation style of the consumers. In addition, individual traits like need for cognition are helpful in focussing on the amount of rational arguments over peripheral cues. Gender differences also play a significant role, as men tend to be cognitively driven, whereas, women respond to affective messages and develop relationships with brands due to emotional stimuli.

The audience's mood is an indication of the amount of cognitive resources they are capable of expending while processing the ads. As per the elaboration likelihood model, bad mood hinders the cognitive capacity of the viewers, as they are preoccupied with the process of solving the problem that leads to the bad mood. However, individuals in a good mood are capable of processing information cognitively.

Humorous ads are the most common type of advertisements used by marketers (Khandeparkar & Abhishek, 2017). However, their effectiveness is contingent on their successful evaluation. An audience that lacks cognitive resources may not understand

complex themes. Therefore, managers must ensure that such themes are placed in contexts that do not preoccupy their cognitive resources. We propose that incongruity resolution ads be placed in contexts that elicit a good mood. Additionally, such ads are suitable for audience with a high product category involvement who has a high need for cognition. On the other hand, arousal safety ads are suitable for any context, as they do not require significant cognitive resources.

6. Conclusion

The human brain evaluates messages based on a combination of affect and cognition. However, one can dominate the other depending on several factors. This article identifies some of these factors and studies how they influence the human brain. Managers can control certain factors like ad placement, which can help them in maximising the effectiveness of their ads. However, managers cannot control certain factors like product category involvement, need for cognition and gender. In such a case, they must adapt to their audiences' preference by altering the content of the ad to maximise its effectiveness. Humour is a double-edged sword. Some may find it highly effective while others will not be able to appreciate it. This paper discusses the factors that dictate the evaluation of two types of humorous appeals to maximise their effectiveness.

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