How to Affect Brand Attitude with Authenticity in Advertising

Yun-Chia Tang, Hung-Chang Chiu

Abstract—Authenticity in advertising is the cornerstone of modern marketing. Despite research advances related to the role of authenticity in marketing, it remains unclear why customers respond to authentic brand stories. The results show that different personality traits will moderate the influence of different authenticity on the levels of emotion. Whether indexically authentic or iconically authentic advertisements were shown to extroverts, open people and agreeable people, they will evoke more positive emotions. When neurotic people and conscientious people see the iconically authentic advertising rather than the indexically authentic advertising, they will produce more negative emotions. In addition, the emotion evoked by advertising had significant positive impact on brand attitude evoked by advertising had significant negative impact on brand attitude. These findings provide some managerial implications and directions for further research.

Keywords—Advertising, authenticity, emotion, personality traits.

I. INTRODUCTION

ADVERTISING, a persuasive communication through the mass media to create positive brand attitude, provides an effective way to communicate with customers [14], because a persuasive advertising makes audiences believe it is real and conceivable. Theoretically, advertising also is a potent tool for communicating authenticity to customers [6]. However, because some advertisers use exaggerated or fake claims, consumers may be skeptical, and authenticity is an important precondition for companies, to demonstrate their trustworthiness [26].

Despite the advance though, some questions remain. First, what is the relationship between advertising authenticity and consumer responses? Although previous studies conceptualize authenticity in brand stories [15], [16], we do not understand exactly why or when customers respond to authentic brand stories.

Second, different customers evaluate stories differently. Personality traits influence consumers' emotional responses to advertisements [36]; [22] argues that the relationship between consumer personality and advertisement might determine consumer behavior. Personality traits already have been used to predict decision making [13]; recent psychology research also proposes that personality traits relate to social cognitive perspectives or specific affective experiences [45]. Therefore,

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we explore how different personality traits influence judgments of advertising authenticity.

Although a few advertising elements appear in previous studies related to narratives [16], we find little research that considers how different personality traits influence judgments of advertising authenticity. From a business perspective, understanding the elements of authentic advertising and how they affect brand attitudes can help managers design authentic stories that increase consumer trust.

II. THEORETICAL ISSUES

A. Authenticity in Marketing

Authenticity is a cornerstone of contemporary marketing, business, and modern culture [21], [23], [27]. Researchers use the term "authenticity" in various contexts to describe historical artifacts [16], ideals [41], business [26], or advertising [20]. Thus it can take on different connotations [16]. The most frequent association refers to genuineness, reality, or truth [2], [7], [10], [27], [34], [35]; the word often is used to depict an object deemed as the genuine version instead of an imitation [4].

Thus we classify authenticity broadly into two categories: indexical and iconic [15], [16], [19]. Indexical authenticity is a real thing, with a factual connection to history; when an object is perceived as similar to the original's physicality, it instead implies iconic authenticity [16]. The two types are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily held by an object at the same time [3], [25].

B. Emotion in the Response to Advertisements

Attitude toward the advertisement comprises emotional aspect [5], [38]. The role of emotion is of interest to marketing researchers. Because of the important role of emotions and affect in advertising, abundant research discusses the influence of emotion from different perspectives e.g., [1], [18], [30]. For example, emotional response mediates the effect of advertisements [32]; the emotion evoked by an advertisement influences attitude toward that ad [1], [5]. Advertisers frequently use humor, warmth, horror, shock, eroticism, passion, credibility, trust, or hope to increase levels of consumer attention and awareness [28]. All of these emotions can be distinguished as positive or negative, and advertisers use them to evoke an emotional response.

C. Personality Traits

Personality psychologists have established five dimensions (Five-Factor Model) that account for most individual differences in personality traits [10], [12], [37], [45]:

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neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness to experience (O), agreeableness (A), and conscientiousness (C), or OCEAN [33]. These personality traits may influence consumers' emotional responses to advertisements [36], though previous advertising studies focus on only selected dimensions among these five factors [8]. Instead, we rely on all five factors in our attempt to clarify the relationship between personality traits and consumers' emotional responses to advertisements.

Neuroticism implies a propensity to feel negative emotion, such as anxiety, anger, hostility, depression, and vulnerability [10]. In an advertising context, indexical authenticity cues use a relatively strong verification of meaning, such as the focal brand, certification, or source [16]. Iconically authentic advertisements instead emphasize a general match between expectations and the whole perception. When neurotic people read an advertisement that lacks abundant information to prove its claims, they likely suspect those claims. Without satisfying evidence of authenticity, they experience negative emotions, such as feeling worried, suspicious, and uneasy toward the advertisement. Several studies find a direct positive relationship between neuroticism and negative emotions [11], [24], [31], [40]. Thus, when an advertisement appears not believable, consumers likely sense negative emotions.

H1. Advertisements with iconic authenticity produce more negative emotions than those with indexical authenticity among neurotic people.

Extraversion: Extroverts tend to feel assertive, gregarious, active, and novel and pursue excitement [10]. Moreover, extroverts tend to be sociable, warm, and cheerful; they experience more positive affect and react more strongly to positive emotions [10], [17], [29]. Therefore, when extraverts see an advertisement, whether it provides iconic or indexical authenticity, they should sense novelty and develop positive emotions toward the advertisement; because they believe the advertisement.

H2. Both iconic and indexical authenticity in advertisements produces positive emotion among extroverts.

Openness to experience: Open people tend to be open-minded, intellectual, sensitive, imaginative, curious, and flexible in their thinking. They probably have experienced a variety of emotions, have broad interests, and prefer variety [10]. When they see an advertisement, whether it offers iconic or indexical authenticity, they should feel curious [10] [39]. Because they are willing to try different things, and they likely express positive emotions toward the advertisement. Accordingly, we propose:

H3. Both iconic and indexical authenticity in advertisements produces positive emotion among open people.

Agreeableness: Agreeable people are described as acquiescent, altruistic, straightforward, trusting, gentle, kind, sympathetic, warm, and helpful [10], [29]. Moreover, agreeableness relates positively to leader emergence and evokes positive emotions toward advertisements [9]. Scholars have uncovered positive links between agreeableness and positive emotion but a negative relation to negative affect [10] [42]. Therefore,

H4. Both iconic and indexical authenticity in advertisements

produces positive emotions among agreeable people.

Conscientious: Finally, conscientious people tend to be responsible, thorough, organized, reliable, hardworking, careful, scrupulous, and self-disciplined [10], [29]. According to these traits, when conscientious people see an advertisement that lacks information to prove that its claims are real, they will not believe it unless the claims appear totally authentic. Therefore,

H5. Iconic authenticity in advertisements produces more negative emotions than indexical authenticity among conscientious people.

D. Relationships among Advertising Authenticity, and Emotion

Brand attitude is central to marketing. Emotions evoked by an advertisement influence attitudes toward both the advertisement and the brand [1], [5]. Therefore, marketers need to create positive attitude toward the ad by evoking a positive emotional state among consumers [28], [44]. Accordingly, we propose:

H6. Emotions evoked by advertising relate positively to brand attitude.

The model we propose examines the relationships among advertising authenticity, emotion, and brand attitude; we propose authentic advertising influences brand attitudes through emotion. Thus, we include these elements as mediators of the relationships between brand attitude and advertising authenticity in our research model.
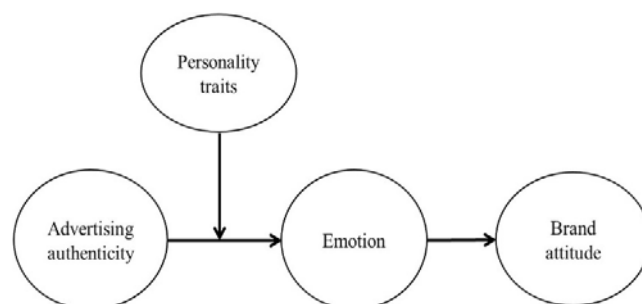

Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

We adopt an experimental design to examine the effects of indexical and iconic authenticity, using three print advertisements to describe the same product that are high in indexical authenticity, high in iconic authenticity, or not authentic. Advertising authenticity offers an effective method to communicate information, in that the advertisement prompts consumers to pay attention to the product. Vivid information also can compensate for an overall lack of information and increase people's confidence in their own evaluations [43].

A. Results

Ninety-seven participants, randomly assigned to one of the three print advertisements, filled out the questionnaire. Thus for each condition, we obtained at least 30 responses. The results of a post hoc test show that for the indexically authentic print

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advertisement, indexical authenticity (M = 4.5) was significantly greater than that in the iconic authenticity (M = 2.9, p < .05) or low authentic (M = 2.1, p < .05) conditions. For the iconically authentic print advertisement, iconic authenticity (M = 4.0) was significantly higher than it was in the indexical (M = 3.1, p < .05) and low (M = 2.1, p < .05) authenticity conditions.

To control for occupations and social class, we recruited the sample from among undergraduate and graduate students and randomly assigned them to three conditions. In return for their participation, respondents were entered into a lottery for the chance to win a movie ticket or gift card. They had to read one of the three print advertisements and respond to the measurement items related to iconic and indexical authenticity, emotions evoked by the print ad, brand attitudes, personality traits, and demographics. The respondents spent an average of 15 minutes completing the questionnaire. The coefficient alphas were .92 for authenticity, .92 for emotion, .96 for brand attitude, .89 for extraversion, .86 for agreeableness, .84 for conscientiousness, .85 for neuroticism, and .81 for openness to experience.

IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Authenticity in advertising is critical for business, because it is a cornerstone for building trust in the modern world. Personality traits also influence consumers' emotional responses to advertisements. The present study therefore provides some key strategic implications for companies that are seek to enhance their customers' brand attitudes, especially in terms of which type of authenticity should be their focus for customers with varying personality traits.

First, the emotion evoked by advertising has a positive influence on brand attitude; therefore, marketers should work to increase customers' positive emotions if they hope to improve customers' brand attitudes.

Second, each personality trait evokes different levels of emotion in response to the different types of authentic advertisements. The results thus indicate that marketers should customize their advertising, through the skillful use of indexical and iconic cues. Marketers might analyze the personality traits that dominate among their customers or target customers, then provide different types of authentic advertising to appeal to them and achieve their intended advertising effect. So in practice, marketers need to combine indexical with iconic authenticity and manipulate them with different weights to design the optimal advertisements.

Third, this study would be aroused the interesting to investigate other story elements, such as reversal and humor [7], and how they affect brand attitudes.

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