



Advertising Effectiveness on Brand Judgment and Consumer Preference in Purchasing Decision in Pakistan

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Abstract

The research investigates the advertising effectiveness on brand judgment and consumer preferences in Pakistan. Advertising is often seen as an efficient but sometimes ineffective external influence on buyer behavior in making the purchase decision. Marketers are therefore seeking ways to make advertising more effective. This paper provides a theoretical framework explaining how advertisements (ads) can influence attitude and purchase intentions by activating an identity with one's gender group to influence purchase decision in both gender groups. A gender group identity is an example of a social identity in which one sees oneself as a member of his or her gender group. Data were collected from 400 respondents by using the simple random technique; Structured Questionnaire was developed to get reliable results. The response rate was 90% in urban areas and 70% in rural areas; 80 percent of the respondents were male and 20% were female. This paper posits that favorable outcomes may be carried over to associated ads and brand judgments. This paper has also aligned social identity theory with the integrated tradition of understanding gender. The results show that advertising has positive impact on brand judgment, preferences among various brands in purchase decision, and behaviors consistent with group norms triggering an in-group bias. The readiness or ease with which a gender group identity becomes salient may depend on how strongly a person identifies with one's gender group. In this paper, it is argued that ads that activate identification with one's gender group will have a more favorable impact on future brand and ad judgments than ads that do not activate this identity. The study draws from three areas of the literature to support the propositions: advertising effectiveness; brand judgment; and consumer preferences. The study reveals that advertising has positive impact on brand judgment in respect of purchase decision in Pakistan.

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Introduction

Advertising is typically considered as one of many external influences on buyer behavior. Some may argue that it does not always have as much impact on behavior as other external influences such as salespeople, culture, family, reference group, and social and situational influences. Additionally, as consumers become bombarded with more and more advertisements, many claim that ads have little or no influence on their judgments or actions. In spite of these criticisms, advertising is considered an efficient way of reaching many consumers. Therefore, marketers continue to seek ways to increase the influence of advertising on their audience. For instance, an ad could be linked to another source of external influence such as one's gender group. While most external influences have been well studied, the potentially powerful influence of gender group

identity has received little attention. The question to be explained is: how can the activation of a gender group identity favorably link ad and brand judgments? This paper provides a theoretical foundation explaining how ads may influence attitudes and purchase intentions by activating an identity with one's gender group. The activation of a gender group identity influences that identity gaining salience over other existing identities. Given that individuals hold many social identities simultaneously, it is necessary that the context (ads) bring the desired social identity to the forefront. In other words, the ads must make a gender identity salient in order to have the desired effect. This paper posits that ads which activate identification with one's gender group will have a more favorable impact on future brand and ad judgments than ads that do not activate this identity. The foundation for this likely influence is

based on social identity theory, ad processing, and gender research.

Gender group identity activating ads

This section attempts to discuss the dynamics involved in using gender group identity to influence ad and brand judgments by providing a theoretical underpinning for the notion that ads can prime identification with a gender group and cause that identity to become salient. This requires an understanding of the concept of gender identity from a social identity perspective. A social identity approach to understanding gender influence on advertising results is also consistent with marketing literature on ad processing. Marketing literature identifies categorization, elaboration, and congruency as three important concepts in ad processing. Categorization theory holds that individuals automatically attempt to match new stimuli with an evoked category description. If a gender group identity is activated by an ad, then the product depicted in the ad may become linked to the gender category thereby triggering the use of category attributes in evaluating the product. Elaboration facilitates the categorization of stimuli. Gender group activating ads would require an advanced type of elaboration known as semantic analysis. A semantic analysis requires the spreading of an activated concept to other related concepts held in memory. It is anticipated that the expectancies generated by the gender group depicted in the ad would be used to create expectancies about the products depicted in the ad. A key factor in this process, however, is congruency. Congruency refers to a match between the stimulus and the category prototype or exemplar. The closer the fit between the gender depicted in the ad and the prototype a person holds of his/her gender, the more likely that the appropriate gender schema will be activated and the more likely it is that those schema evaluations will be used to evaluate the targeted product.

Although self-identifying and defining oneself in terms of a group is thought to indicate levels of high levels of group identification (Terry and Hogg 1996) several measures have been developed to gauge an individual's strength of identification with a group (Biernat, Green and Vescio 1996; Ethier and Deaux 1994; Terry and Hogg 1996). However, strongly one identifies with one's gender group is expected to impact salience. A strong identification with one's gender group increases the likelihood of gender salience; gender identity is highly salient in women. As discussed earlier, social identity salience is believed to be the result of accessibility and fit. Gender rates high on both accounts. A gender identity is thought to be highly accessible (Deaux 1992) because it is a central part of one's self-definition. It is an identity with which the individual has a great deal of past experience; it has a high emotional and value significance, along with

age and race, and represents a higher hierarchical level. Gender also rates high on contextual fit. One of the key elements of contextual fit is comparative aspects between groups (Turner 1987). The greater the distinctions are between groups, the more likely one is to identify with one's social group rather than the out-group.

Gender group identity salience and strength

It is argued in this paper that ads which contain depictions of the gender group will prime gender salience. In social identity theory, salience is the psychological significance of the social category. In other words, it refers to the identity that is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of group membership on behavior. Salience is believed to be the result of accessibility and fit. Accessibility is the readiness of an individual to use a particular self-category, and fit is the degree to which the stimuli in the given context actually match the criteria which define the category. Gender is believed to rate high on both accessibility and fit. A strong identification with one's gender group may further enhance the accessibility of a gender group identity.

Ad and brand judgments

Social identity provides a fresh approach to understanding the influence of gender identity on ad processing. Identifying with a social group such as one's gender group has been shown to create an in-group bias favoring the norms and prototypes of the group, leading to attitudinal and behavior conformity. This paper argues that these favorable outcomes may be carried over to associated ad and brand judgments. Employing the use of social identity activation in ads may increase the value of advertising dollars. Bem's Gender Schema Theory offers us some insights into these meanings in a gender category. This theory explains the process of sex typing through which a society metamorphoses male and female into masculine and feminine (Bem 1981). A gender schema is a cognitive structure of what it means to be male and female. According to Bem's Gender Schema Theory, from early in life, individuals categorize people, objects, and behaviors as masculine or feminine, and usually have pre-set notions as to what is appropriate for each gender (Kolbe and Langefeld 1991). The sex-role stereotypes become internalized to varying degrees among individuals in a society and new or incoming information is processed in relation to the existing schemas. Appropriate gender stereotypes are learned from a variety of sources, including advertising. However, some researchers note that much of advertising contains idealized images and can create unattainable or aspirational perceptions of gender expectations that can have a negative impact on self image (Martin and Gentry 1997; Martin, Gentry and Hill 1999; Richins 1991). This appears to be especially detrimental for pre-adolescent and adolescent females.

Individuals concerned about sex typing regulate their behavior so that it conforms to the culture's definitions of gender appropriateness (Schmitt, Leclerc and Dubé-Rioux 1988). West and Zimmerman (1987) point out that we expect and want to know the sex category of those around us and we presume that others are displaying it for us, in as decisive a manner as they can, so that we can act accordingly. In their words, gender is something "we do" in order to make life more manageable. Although Schmitt, Leclerc, and Dubé-Rioux did not find the support they expected for gender schema theory, as we will see later in this paper, the salience of one's gender (a situational characteristic) may have a stronger influence on behavior than whether or not one is a sex-typed individual (a personality characteristic).

Ad content

Ads designed according to the target customers must convey or bring to mind membership in one's gender group. This is accomplished through context, contrast of social groups, and identification. Context- one's self-concept, consists of numerous concurrent social group or category identities. Across time and different situations, different identities come to the forefront. Social identity, then, is situational or contextually based. "Different situations tend to 'switch on' different conceptions of self so that social stimuli are construed and social behavior controlled in the appropriately adaptive manner" (Turner, 1982, p. 20). Turner (1994) further argues that self-categorizing is inherently variable, fluid, and context dependent, in as much as self-categorization is socially comparative and is always relative to a frame of reference. Similarly, shifts in social identification are totally dependent on context, a result of the particular distribution of people and attributes in the environment (Deaux 1996).

Ad processing

Marketing literature identifies categorization, elaboration, and congruency as the important concepts in ad processing. Categorization theory holds that people naturally divide their world into categories that enable them to efficiently understand and process information in the environment (Sujan, 1985). When a new stimulus is encountered, the perceiver automatically attempts to match it with an evoked category description. The evoked category attributes, links and exemplars are used to aid in the evaluation of the new stimulus (Goodstein 1993). A gender group identity can be an example of such a category. It may be that if a gender identity (a social category) is activated, then the product depicted in the ad may become linked to the category, thereby triggering the use of category attributes, etc. in the evaluation of the product. In this case, the perceiver would be responding to the category level rather than on the basis of the individual attributes of the product (see Sujan, 1985).

Data collection methodology

The data were collected from 400 respondents residing both in rural and urban areas by using the simple random technique. The response rate was 90% from urban areas and 70% from rural areas. A structured questionnaire was used to analyze the response of the consumers from different parts of Pakistan. Data were measured by the five points likert scale.

Results and discussion

Table 1: Response analysis

GENDER	MAL /URBAN	FEM /RURAL	MAL E/RURAL	FEM ALE/RURAL
RESPONSE TO QUESTIONNAIRE	95	90	80	60
BRAND AWARENESS	90	80	70	40
PURCHASE DECISION	80	75	60	30

The results of the response analysis show that in urban areas where customers are more conscious about the brand loyalty, they are waiting for the availability of the brand when brand is short in the market. The response rate in both genders in urban areas is more effective and advertising has direct relation to the consumers. In rural areas of Pakistan, however, people are not conscious about the brand and brand loyalty because of the cost conscious market in rural areas where people are more price conscious compared to the value of the brand.

Conclusion

The advertising has a positive impact, in general, on the customers in purchasing decisions in Pakistan. However, the results of the research show that the brand awareness in rural areas of Pakistan is not positively linked to the brand as compared to the urban areas, where people are more conscious about the brand loyalty. Advertising is an effective tool in making brand awareness among customers in Pakistan. Social identification tends to lead to the perceived similarity of members, mutual attraction between members or social cohesion, mutual esteem, emotional empathy, altruism and cooperation, and attitudinal and behavioral uniformity (Turner 1982). Therefore, according to social identity theory, a salient social identity should result in outcomes consistent with and favorable toward the activated social identity. The

findings of the present study show that ads that activate a social identity (e.g., gender) are more likely to result in favorable judgments than ads that do not activate a social identity. Favorable ad and brand judgments could include such outcomes as brand inclusion in a consideration set, likelihood of purchase, attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand. The activation of a gender identity includes the identification of the prototype. This prototype would include both the members of the social category and group norms. The group norms dictate that using the depicted brand is a normal or expected part of group members' behavior. One's gender identity is believed to be a very central (well learned and rehearsed) part of one's self-schema. Identities such as gender, for example, are thought to be very accessible, salient in more situations, and therefore more likely to influence behavior (Deaux 1992). This should facilitate the schema activations inherent in semantic elaboration and therefore increase the likelihood that the brand would be included in a consideration set.

It is possible that identification with one's gender group could result in a less than favorable judgment or negative impact. For example, a negative portrayal of femininity could activate a gender group identity but result in a negative brand judgment. However, advertisers are likely to prevent this by pretesting ads for a favorable response before placing the ad. Some might also argue that, for example, a woman might not view the gender identity manipulation positively, perhaps viewing the presence of a male as too traditional for a feminist. In this case, female gender identity may not be activated.

Contributions And Directions For Further Research

This conceptual paper has provided an alternative view of gender as a self-concept that is based upon defining oneself as a member of a gender group. Identifying with such a group has been shown to create an in-group bias favoring the norms and prototype of the group, leading to attitudinal and behavioral conformity. This paper argues that these favorable outcomes may be carried over to associated ad and brand judgments. This paper has also aligned social identity theory with the integrated tradition of understanding gender. It draws from the individualistic tradition by capitalizing on the differences between men and women in ad processing. It brings in the international tradition by showing how a social identity is socially constructed and aligns with Bem's Gender Schema Theory. This paper posits gender as a potential ad content factor that would enhance ad processing, thereby increasing the influence the ad has on future judgments. Whereas previous studies indicate that an ad pairing a product with a relevant picture increases processing; this conceptual integration leads the way in investigating the value of activating a particular schema i.e. one's gender identity. Brands depicted in ads designed to activate a gender

identity are expected to show a greater likelihood of being included in a consideration set than brands in ads that do not activate such an identity, and they are expected to be evaluated more favorably. Such findings would indicate that activating a social identity such as gender could have more connections with related concepts. This paper uses social identity theory to offer an understanding of how activating a gender group identity in an ad can influence the outcome of viewing that ad and shows how a social identity perspective fits well within the integrated tradition of understanding gender.

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