THE IMPACT OF NEED FOR COGNITION, AND SENTIMENTAL HUMOUR ON ADVERTISING AND BRAND ATTITUDE: DOES NEED FOR AFFECT INFLUENCE THE RELATIONSHIP?

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Abstract:
In much of the advertising studies, cognition has long been known as the major driver to process advertising message besides forming desirable attitudes. However, the engagement of emotions that has been limited in its discussions to advertising could also function as the driver to message processing and contributor to attitude formation. The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of need for cognition (NFC), and sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude when need for affect (NFA) moderates the relationship. The study will be conducted through a quantitative factorial experimental design with a random selection and distribution of participants into different control and treatment groups. The study proposed three main hypotheses, firstly, there is an indirect effect of NFC on brand attitude through advertising attitude. Secondly, the effect of NFC on advertising and brand attitude is moderated by NFA. Finally, the effect of Sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude is moderated by NFA. The study will contribute to the use of factorial experimental method in advertising, will serve as advertising guidelines for advertising firms and policy makers such as the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission and finally, the study will contribute to the theoretical establishment that can be used for future research extension.

Keywords: Advertising attitude, Brand attitude, Marketing research, NFC, NFA, Sentimental humour

1. Introduction

To promote brands, the global advertising industry has engaged itself in the use of various advertising strategies implementing diverse messages and appeals. In most of the Western countries, humour appeals, and messages are most dominant and are accepted by the Western society. In Asian countries, especially Malaysia, a more rational and emotional appeals are being used in advertisements and are considered more acceptable. Nonetheless, the evolution of humour worldwide has led to the adoption and implementation of humour in many of the Malaysian modern advertisement efforts. Humour thus, has become the trend in cosmetics and foods advertisements in Malaysia and are followed by other industry players. Despite the fact that humour messages and appeals used in advertising has been considered as a
successful strategic tool to persuade and draw attention (Eisend, 2009), however, the response to humour by Malaysian consumers are indefinite. Brands such as Qu’Puteh and Watson that had used skin colour as their main theme to advertise their beauty product despite being humorous, has mostly led to detestation on the brand. Hence, hatred toward brand by consumers may become a big concern for local advertisers and businesses. Moreover, differences in culture, in way of thinking, in how people perceive things, and differences in how people handle their emotions may dampen their evaluations of not just the advertising, but also the brand advertised. Therefore, the question in this study deals with whether consumers are able to process the humour advertising message cognitively and emotionally in order to form favourable brand evaluation. This is because good brand evaluations require the ability and motivation to process messages or information contained in the advertisements (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In essence, processing an advertising message may not be an easy task as consumers are human and human are affected by their thought process and state of unstable emotions (Gross & John, 1997). Fundamentally, consumers are different psychologically and behaviourally in their response to a message and stimulus.

In general, it has been discussed that the disparities in consumers level of ability to cognitively and emotionally process humour advertising message may lead to unfavourable evaluations of the advertising and brand (Eisend, 2009, 2018; Mulligan & Scherer, 2012; Crawford & Gregory, 2015; Jurca & Madlberger, 2015). Although advertising may seem entertaining and persuasive, the interpretations by consumers may vary and may at times hurt brand (Newton, Wong, & Newton, 2016; Weinberger, Swani, Yoon, & Gulas, 2017; Yoon, 2015; Yoon & Tinkham, 2013). The inadequate empirical evidence on the effects of need for cognition (NFC) and sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude, and that need for affect (NFA) functions as an influencing mechanism to message processing has formed the purpose of this study.

2. Literature Review

Need for Cognition (NFC)
A message processing of an advertising requires effort and ability to do so. Hence, the need for cognition (NFC) which is well-known as an issue relevant to thinking, function as medium to process such messages. the NFC is therefore defined as effort or motivation an individual partakes to process a message, information or contents rigorously (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Accordingly, advertising messages or information characterized by peripheral cues, attractive sources, message strength, and types of product categories are processed cognitively to form good response to advertising and brand (Pantoja, Rossi, & Borges, 2016; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Olsen, Slotegraaf, & Chandukala, 2014). Understanding that the cognitive ability is primarily evaluated by the need for cognition (NFC), preceding studies that have examined the engagement of NFC in advertising revealed favourable correspondences in its impact on advertising and brand attitude (Eisend, 2018; Spielmann, 2014; Walter, Cody, Xu, & Murphy, 2018; Yoon, 2015; Yoon, 2018). Similarly, contemporary evidences indicated that consumers with high NFC or high level of thinking favoured advertising and brand involving verbal and textual messages more than that entailing visual and audio messages (Burton, Gollins, McNeely, & Walls, 2018; Vashisht, Royne, & Sreejesh, 2019). On the other hand, consumers with low NFC favoured advertising and brand owing to the appealing cues presented such as sound, visual, colour as well as humour appeals (Kim, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2018; Myers & Jung, 2019). In this sense, the outcome is deemed accurate as those with high NFC prefer advertising messages entailing
stringent messages or information, while those with low NFC fancy ingenuous and attractive sources such as humour (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In view of the above-mentioned literatures, the NFC is also found to influence brand attitude directly and indirectly (Cyr, Head, Lim, & Stibe, 2018; Limbu, Huhmann, & Peterson, 2012; Scherer & Moors, 2018; Spielmann, 2014). Such is in line with previous research that has correspondingly evidenced advertising attitude as a mediator between NFC and brand attitude (Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006; Spielmann, 2014, Eisend, 2009). Nonetheless, although the aforesaid effects have been immensely studied, there are still scarce number of studies that focused on the effect of NFC on advertising and brand attitude in the humour advertising context in Malaysia. Therefore, it is hypothesised that;

H1a: There is an indirect effect of need for cognition (NFC) on brand attitude through advertising attitude.
H1b: There is a significant difference in consumers’ response to need for cognition (NFC) for low and high product involvement

Need for Affect (NFA)
In regard to forming good attitude toward brand advertised, it is known through prior literatures that persuasion and message processing of an advertising is solely driven by the cognitive ability. On this view, there is inadequate empirical evidence that assesses emotions as drivers for message processing to an advertising message (Kitchen, Kerr, Schultz, McColl, & Pals, 2014; Petty & Brinol 2015; Warren, Carter, & McGraw, 2019). Hence, the need for affect (NFA) being an embodiment of emotions is found to regulate processing of information and messages, thus leading to forming changes in attitude and behaviour of an individual (Batra & Ray, 1986; Gross & John, 1997; Holbrook, 1984). Likewise, earlier research on the influence of NFA on brand attitude have also been empirically studied (Bakhtiyari, Ziegler, & Husain, 2016; Cartwright, McCormick, & Warnaby, 2016; Hamelin, Moujahid, & Thaichon, 2017; Phua & Kim, 2018). Contemporary evidence on the studies of NFA in advertising implies that optimistic and positive emotions that result from viewing advertisements with a happy message or contents leads to forming a more positive attitude towards the advertising and brand (Bakhtiyari et al., 2016; Choi, Rangan, & Singh, 2016; Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016; Poels & Dexitte, 2019). On the contrary, negative emotions that are developed upon viewing intimidating advertising messages or contents encouraged an unconstructive and negative attitude response towards the brand advertised (Lewis et al., 2019; Lancelotti & Thomas, 2018; Hamelin et al., 2017; Kujur & Singh, 2018).

In light of the past findings, it has also been evidenced that consumers with high emotions or NFC would rather respond favourably to advertising and brand that contains peripheral cues such as humour appeals, images or attractive sources, and low product types rather than technical or textual advertising (Nikolinakou & King, 2018; Poels & Dewitte, 2019; Raza, Bakar, & Mohamad, 2018). Such understanding is true as those with high NFA possess a more impulsive response to their emotions and are easily attracted towards the peripheral cues or attractive sources presented in the advertisement and brand (Bitter & Obermiller, 1985). NFA is also found to have a direct effect on brand attitude (Raza et al., 2018), and it can also mediate between an antecedent and an outcome variable (Poels & Dexitte, 2019). Notwithstanding the recognised direct and indirect effects of NFA on advertising and brand attitude, very few studies that addressed the influence of NFA as a moderator between the
effect of need for cognition (NFC) on advertising and brand attitude. Therefore, it is hypothesised that;

H2a: The effect of need for cognition (NFC) on advertising and brand attitude is moderated by need for affect (NFA)
H2b: There is a significant difference in consumers’ response to need for affect (NFA) for low and high product involvement

**Sentimental Humour**

Sentimental humour is one of the humour types deriving from Speck’s humour taxonomy. The sentimental humour is based on the notion of arousal-safety humour mechanism which refers to humour that instils a sense of arousal yet safe (Speck, 1991). The implementation of sentimental humour has expanded from its use in comedy shows into the field of marketing, specifically in promoting brand through advertisements. With this, vast number of studies has been conducted on the effect of sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude when consumers engage certain level of emotional stance (Eisend, 2009). In essence, prior studies found that sentimental humour with its aroused yet safe humour conditions produced more positive response to advertising and brand attitude when consumers are positive in their emotions (Korgaonkar, Petrescu, & Gironda, 2016; Galloway, 2009; Schwarz, Hoffmann, & Hutter, 2015; Das, Galekh, & Vonkeman, 2015; Spielmann, 2014). Conflictingly, even though sentimental humour that may sometimes engage tension arousal may seemed inappropriate, the outcome still demonstrates favourable response to advertising and brand attitude (Das et al., 2015; Galloway, 2009). This is without a doubt true due to the fact that sentimental humour although exert tension-arousal, are still considered safe to promote advertising and brand (Spielmann, 2014).

Nonetheless, although the said effects of sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude have been greatly studied, the influence of consumers’ state of emotions or need for affect (NFA) in forming favourable advertising and brand attitude is still understudy. Though it is known that humour can directly influence emotions or NFA (Das et al., 2015; Vanden, Bergh, Lee, Quillian, & Hove, 2011; Galloway, 2009), and NFA can influence attitudes by becoming directly associated with each other (Petty, Fabrigar, & Wegener, 2003; Petty & Brinol, 2015; Eisend, 2018), there has been very little number of studies that examine the effect of sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude when NFA moderates the relationship. Therefore, it is hypothesised that;

H3a: The effect of Sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude is moderated by need for affect (NFA)
H3b: There is a significant difference in consumers’ response to sentimental humour appeals for low and high product involvement

**3. Method**

This study will use a quantitative factorial experimental design comparing control and treatment conditions of advertising. Participants will be randomly selected and placed into different control and treatment groups (see Table 1). Advertising stimuli in the form of digital videos will also be adopted from www.adsoftheworld.com that can also be accessed from YouTube. The selected advertisements will represent non-humour and sentimental humour
portraying consumer product, and luxurious product. The study will use products with recent and real brand name available in market to engage realism effect.

Table 1: Placement of participants per experimental conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental conditions</th>
<th>Stimuli (Advertising elements)</th>
<th>Humour types</th>
<th>Low product involvement</th>
<th>High product involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Non-humour</td>
<td>Advertisement A</td>
<td>Advertisement B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>Sentimental humour</td>
<td>Advertisement C</td>
<td>Advertisement D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The advertisements will be validated through a series of pre-tests to ensure reliability and validity of the selected ads. The engagement of pre-testing is important as it generates validation of stimuli or materials used in causal studies (Vargas, Duff, & Faber, 2017). The study will also utilise the Analysis of Variance such as T-Test to conduct the manipulation checks, and the two-way ANOVA to compare differences between the control and treatment groups of advertisements.

In regard to the questionnaire, a set of validated questionnaires will be given to the participants in each group to be answered subsequently after watching the ads. The questionnaire data containing all related constructs will be analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Hayes PROCESS Macro version 3.4 will be used to analyse the cause and effect relationship, as well as to analyse the mediation and moderation effect.

4. Conclusion

The effects of need for cognition (NFC), and sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude, moderated by need for affect (NFA) will be examined experimentally. The study based on the proposed hypotheses postulated the following; firstly, advertising attitude mediate the effect of NFC on brand attitude. Secondly, the study postulates that NFA moderates the effect of NFC on advertising and brand attitude. Finally, the study postulates that the effect of Sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude is moderated by NFA. These proposed hypotheses therefore denoted that the effects of NFC and sentimental humour on advertising and brand attitude can be influenced by consumers’ NFA or emotions in general.

In conclusion, this study hopes it can contribute to the engagement of factorial experimental design and method of collecting data. The study is also optimistic to contribute in fulfilling the gap in that cognition and emotions can both process humour advertising message in order to form good attitudinal response to the advertising and brand. In line with the government’s stringent policy on digital advertising, this study hopes that the findings of this study may serve as reference for advertising firms and agencies to strategize new ways to promote brands. This study may also aid multimedia regulator such as MCMC (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission) to establish or to refurbish the existing policies on advertising in Malaysia, that can benefit both advertisers and consumers. This study may however be limited in a sense that it will be focused only on humour appeal advertising. Future studies should engage various advertising appeals such as fear or emotional appeals which are also under-studied in Malaysia. The study will only use a
quantitative factorial experimental design comparing between control and treatment groups. Therefore, future studies can alternatively use a factorial or even a quasi-experimental design that engages comparisons between more levels of independent controlled and treatment groups that would allow multiple comparisons.

References


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