

CREATIVITY VIA CARTOON SPOKESPEOPLE IN PRINT ADS

Capitalizing on the Distinctiveness Effect

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ABSTRACT: Although some research has examined the effects of animation in interactive advertisements, no research has investigated consumer responses to animated effects or cartoon spokespeople in print ads. Distinctiveness theory suggests that an ad can be considered *distinctive* if it has atypical traits that differentiate it from other marketing stimuli. Distinctiveness theory should be readily applied to advertising research, as advertising agencies and clients continuously strive to make their advertisements different, noticeable, and memorable to consumers. Our research applies distinctiveness theory to a creative caricature or cartoon spokesperson in print ads in a between-subjects experiment. Results of the study reveal that compared with a human spokesperson in the same advertisement, the creative use of cartoon spokespeople in print ads leads to more positive consumer advertising outcomes, including attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention of the advertised brand. The implications for practitioners and directions for future creativity and distinctiveness research are discussed.

When an advertisement is successful, viewers notice, recall, and, it is hoped, consider the ad's message. Advertisers employ many tactics and techniques to increase consumer advertising interest in their ads, including the use of creative appeals, which has shown to be a profitable strategy (O'Connor, Willemain, and MacLachlan 1996). Creativity, the foundation of effective advertising strategy (Zinkhan 1993) and arguably the most important facet of advertising success (El-Murad and West 2004), is a process of imagination, expression, and association (Blasko and Mokwa 1986; O'Quin and Besemer 1989). Within the field of advertising, creativity is used to grab attention, increase ad memorability, and enhance persuasive appeals that will ultimately drive future consumption behavior (Bell 1992).

Dimensions of creativity include novelty (i.e., divergence), resolution, and elaboration and synthesis (O'Quin and Besemer 1989). Applied to advertising design, novelty pertains to the originality of the ad (i.e., are the ad stimuli and ad design unique or different from other advertisements?); resolution is the logical aspect of the ad (i.e., will the advertised product solve the practical needs of the targeted viewer or consumer?);

and elaboration and synthesis are the degree of construction and craft of the ad (i.e., is the message well built and lucid?). Because creativity in advertising is important, and perhaps vital, to successful communication strategies, a challenge faced by advertisers is choosing the appropriate type of creative stimulus to incorporate into ads to generate favorable outcomes. Using a cartoon spokesperson as the creative stimulus, our research examines this question in a print ad context.

What constitutes effective creative advertising is a popular topic of conversation among advertising professionals (White and Smith 2001). An important aspect of creative strategy in ads pertains to the use of animated images, scenery, and characters to support and draw attention to the ad and advertised brand. Although animated characters have long been used and considered the stars of their commercials for consumer grocery products (e.g., California Raisins, Joe Camel, Tony the Tiger) (Bell 1992), advertisers of consumer high-involvement products have also employed animated or cartoon characters in their advertisements (Callcott and Lee 1994). For example, iPod, Esurance (a car insurance company), Market Probe (a marketing research firm), Salesgenie (a firm specializing in sales leads), and Charles Schwab use animation in their ads as a means to separate their ads from advertising clutter, increase attention, and better appeal to their targeted customers.

Although the use of cartoon spokespeople has been increasing in the past decade, research regarding animation in ads has lagged this advertising trend (Diao and Sundar 2004; Phillips and Lee 2005). Other advertising researchers have called for additional research on creative advertising (e.g., the deployment of animation in ads and the impact of creative appeals on viewer responses to creative advertisements) (Amabile 1982; Chan Lin 1998; White and Smith 2001). As these arguments

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suggest, our knowledge regarding animation effects in print ads is deficient. To help fill this research lacuna, we assess viewer ad responses by devising an experiment where one print ad is manipulated from a photograph of a human actor to a cartoon actor.

Traditionally, the use of animation is considered synonymous with animated characters (Phillips and Lee 2005), but advancements in computer technology have allowed animation to be a more flexible advertising component, including interactivity, visual product demonstrations, and verbal testimonies (Callcott and Lee 1994; Chan Lin 2000). On the Web, animation and animated characters are the de facto advertising standard (Diao and Sundar 2004), and are considered to be a highly effective attention-getting device (Sundar and Kalyanaraman 2004). Advertisers have even employed simulated animation within loop-animated banner ads to display a sequential series of images and increase consumer attention (Lohtia, Donthu, and Hershberger 2003). Although the widespread use of Internet advertising animation has led to increasing ad complexity (Geissler, Zinkhan, and Watson 2006), it increases consumer attention and advertisement recall (Chan Lin 1998). Animated banner ads also lead to more accurate recall and quicker consumer click-through responses than nonanimated banner ads (Li and Bukovac 1999). In addition, creative advertising in the form of three-dimensional advertising enhances ad presence, product knowledge, brand attitude, and purchase intention (Li, Daugherty, and Biocca 2002).

To offer insight into animation effects in advertising, we investigate viewer responses to a cartoon or animated character versus a human spokesperson within the same print advertisement. Specifically, we evaluate viewers' assessments of ad creativity (Ad_{creat}), attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), attitude toward the brand (A_b), and purchase intention of the advertised brand (PI_b).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Distinctiveness Theory

Distinctiveness theory suggests that certain facets in the environment capture people's attention, get noticed, and are perceived as missing, absent, or different from other stimuli (McGuire 1984). Unlike the Web, caricature characters in print media are not ubiquitous, and due to their relative uniqueness, ads with cartoon characters should garner more attention from viewers than similar ads using nonanimated spokespersons. Psychological and marketing research reveal that individuals use distinctiveness rules as a means to establish and maintain some differentiation from others (e.g., Appiah 2001; Grier and Deshpandé 2001; Vignoles, Chrysochoou, and Breakwell 2000). Distinctiveness studies show that an individual's personal traits such as ethnicity will only

be perceived as important when that person recognizes his or her ethnicity to be different from others and when these distinctive traits are an important part of the person's self-concept (McGuire 1984). Surprisingly, distinctiveness theory suggests that people feel better about themselves when they have moderate similarity to others rather than high or low similarity (Snyder and Fromkin 1980). For example, Snyder and Fromkin found that providing feedback to respondents of moderate similarity to others led respondents to report higher levels of self-esteem than did respondent feedback of high or low similarity. Distinctiveness findings imply that ads that sketch human spokespeople may produce better consumer responses than ads using spokespeople who are demographically matched to the target audience.

The other dimension of distinctiveness theory concerns the mechanism by which environmental stimuli capture a person's attention (McGuire 1984). The distinctiveness of an object, thing, or person is context-specific. To be considered distinctive, a stimulus must develop and sustain clear boundaries that differentiate it from other entities (Brewer 1991). An advertisement can be considered "distinctive" if it has unique traits that distinguish it from other ad stimuli. The advertising distinctiveness will be the element of the advertisement that captures viewers' attention and ultimately leads to better ad recall than the nondistinctive components (Phillips and Lee 2005). Distinctiveness also has the capacity to influence cognitive and behavioral responses toward the source of distinctiveness (Vignoles, Chrysochoou, and Breakwell 2000).

When a distinctiveness effect is present in ads, the ad becomes different from other ads in the environment. Different or distinct stimuli are capable of attracting and holding viewers' attention, and ultimately, influencing their responses to the ad (Diao and Sundar 2004; Gati and Tversky 1987; Nairne et al. 1997; Neeley and Schumann 2004). Researchers have found that compared with ads with no animation, animated Internet advertising produces more favorable attitudinal responses toward the character and the Web site, as well as higher levels of perceived entertainment (Phillips and Lee 2005). Other Web-related research shows that animation contributes positively to the consumer elaboration process, increases character and Web site liking, and enhances the Web site entertainment value (Chan Lin 2000; Dehn and van Mulken 2000; Phillips and Lee 2005). Animated agents in computers have also been posited to lead to more efficient problem solving, understanding, and learning, as well as more time spent with the system than when animation is not used (Dehn and van Mulken 2000). These Internet-based findings suggest that animation and cartoon spokespeople may generate similar positive consumer outcomes in other advertising media.

Psychology studies have shown that information associated with different individuals is easier to memorize (Leyens, Yzerbyt, and Rogier 1997). Similarly, increased memory and

recall of salient stimuli is optimal under conditions of moderate distinctiveness (Brewer 1991). Such discernible differences may be necessary for advertisements to be considered divergent, logical, and well crafted. It appears, then, that ad distinctiveness is cognitively evaluated. Thus, increasing elaboration of a *distinctive* stimulus should lead to increased elaboration of the creativity dimensions (e.g., originality, resolution) associated with the *distinctive* trait. In this sense, the distinctiveness and perceived creativity associated with advertising stimuli should be linked in consumers' minds.

Creativity

Conceptualizations of creativity and ad creativity encompass dimensions such as artistic, usefulness, uniqueness, relevance, connectedness, meaningfulness, and divergence of thought (Ang, Lee, and Leong 2007; Smith and Yang 2004). In their content analysis of creativity studies within business, psychological, and educational publications, Plucker, Beghetto, and Dow (2004) noted that creativity constructs frequently contained elements of novelty and usefulness that could or did change thinking within a particular social context. Creativity is considered an interactive process that generates new or useful solutions to consumer needs, wants, and/or problems. Different solutions and divergent thinking, in turn, can change people's attitudes or thinking about their environment (Csikszentmihalyi 1999).

The interactive and process nature of creativity, its ability to change attitudes and thinking, and its ability to trigger cognitive processes all reinforce the importance of utilizing creative techniques within consumer promotional media. Novel and meaningful ads that viewers could connect with, for example, elicited higher ad recall and more favorable attitudes toward the ad compared to non-novel, nonmeaningful, and nonconnecting ads (Ang, Lee, and Leong 2007). In addition, creative commercials enhance unaided recall, and creativity in the form of media choice has a favorable effect on ad credibility and attitudes toward both the ad and brand (Dahlén 2005; Till and Baack 2005).

Advertising creativity has been likened to fine art, where judgment of excellence is in the eyes of the beholder (White and Smith 2001). Promotional creativity has traditionally been measured by awards issued by judges within the advertising profession. A number of advertising practitioners and researchers have used judges and industry experts to assess advertising creativity, and have used these opinions as an appropriate proxy for creativity as perceived by consumers (Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002; White and Smith 2001). These researchers have discovered significant relationships between expertly judged creative executions and consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, White and Smith (2001), in a multi-group study of creativity judgments, noted that consumers

consistently rated different ads as more creative than advertising professionals. Confirming earlier findings by Kover, Goldberg, and James (1995), White and Smith found that consumers did not necessarily rate unexpected or surprising ads as creative. Only advertisements that are surprising and match product expectations or solve a problem were rated by consumers as creative. Given the above differences between experts and consumers, it may be important for consumers to directly assess and rate advertising creativity and expectation levels within advertising creative research.

HYPOTHESES

Ang and Low (2000) investigated the effects of creative ad treatments on traditional advertising outcomes. Their study explored the role that emotions and surprise (unexpected and expected ad conditions) have on consumer attitudes toward the ad and brand as well as purchase intentions. Ang and Low demonstrated stronger attitudinal outcomes in the unexpected condition for ads generating both positive and negative emotional states (except A_b with negative emotions). These findings suggest that emotions may operate independently from the level of creativity in consumer ads. The unexpected advertising condition containing an unexpected pictorial element in a Sunbloc ad in the Ang and Low experiment may have initiated consumer cognitive processes just as a distinct spokesperson would in a creative ad. In their experiment, creativity is measured by a subject creativity index and linked to emotional valence, making it difficult to gauge ad creativity and consumer emotional levels independently.

To replicate and extend Ang and Low's (2000) research, we propose to measure consumers' direct assessment of ad creativity and evaluate the impact of advertising creativity level on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Thus, we propose the following three creativity hypotheses:

H1: Print advertising that is perceived as more creative will generate more favorable A_{ad} responses.

H2: Print advertising that is perceived as more creative will generate more favorable A_b responses.

H3: Print advertising that is perceived as more creative will generate more favorable PI_b responses.

Social psychologists have consistently found that people tend to like other people who are very similar to themselves (e.g., Condon and Crano 1988; Singh et al. 2007). This similarity is driven by a need for internal cognitive consistency and a personal desire to feel rewarded and reinforced with individuals holding similar attitudes and opinions (Hogg, Hardie, and Reynolds 1995). People also desire to be different and distinct from others, however, particularly with the peer groups they associate with (Duck, Hogg, and Terry 1998). Researchers have

noted that moderate levels of distinctiveness or dissimilarity from others is often associated with higher values of personal self-esteem (Snyder and Fromkin 1980) and higher confidence in the accuracy of an individual's social comparisons to the other groups (Schwartz and Smith 1976). These findings suggest that consumers will welcome a familiar, yet distinct spokesperson promoting a good or service.

In their assessment of on-line distinctiveness, Li and Bukovac (1999) posit that animated banner ads are significantly different from static ads and are more likely to attract consumer attention. Their study shows that the use of animation decreases click-through response times and increases recall of the banner ads. In addition, animated banner advertisements elicit orienting, additional consumer cognitive processing, and better ad recall (Lang et al. 2002). These findings indicate that distinctive, interactive stimuli in Web-based ads can change attitudinal and behavioral responses for on-line consumers. We posit that similar effects will be operating within traditional forms of advertising. In print media, a distinct cartoon or caricature spokesperson should also have an impact on consumer attitudes and behavioral responses (e.g., A_{ad} , A_b , and PI_b). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4: Print advertisements with distinctive cartoon spokespersons will generate higher A_{ad} responses than identical ads with human spokespersons.

H5: Print advertisements with distinctive cartoon spokespersons will generate higher A_b responses than identical ads with human spokespersons.

H6: Print advertisements with distinctive cartoon spokespersons will generate higher PI_b responses than identical ads with human spokespersons.

METHOD

Sample

Undergraduate business students from a southwestern U.S. university were solicited to be respondents during regularly scheduled classes. A total of 160 students took part in the experimental study. We controlled for the possibility of carryover effects by counterbalancing the order of presentation of the stimulus ads (Smith 2000). We checked for carryover effects by asking study participants to document their best guess of the experimental hypotheses following exposure to the ads. Roughly 12% of study participants suggested ideas approximating the experimental hypotheses and their responses were eliminated from the analysis. Thus, a final sample of 141 respondents was used in the experiment. Fifty-three percent of the participants are male. The age range of the sample is between 18 and 33 ($M = 22.44$ and $SD = 2.86$). Regarding class standing, juniors (59%) and seniors (36%) dominate the

sample. Seventy-two percent of respondents are single, and 27% are married. Students were given extra credit for their efforts and informed that their responses were anonymous.

Design

To offer needed insight into animation effects in print ads, the advertising experiment employed a randomized subject assignment of two different creative executions (i.e., human versus sketch or cartoon) within a between-subjects design. To enhance external validity, a real athletic shoe advertisement was used and digitally modified to vary the creative execution and the brand name. A total of four different creative executions for each type of print ad endorser (i.e., human and cartoon) were pretested with a total of 35 respondents who did not participate in the study. Each ad was rated for likability and credibility of the endorser (Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg 2001). From each pair of four, one creative execution was identified as having the highest rating by all respondents. These two ads were used in our two experimental conditions.

Manipulation Check

Prior to data collection, participants in a focus group were solicited to evaluate the manipulations used in the test ads (Krugman et al. 1994; Laczniak, Muehling, and Grossbart 1989) (i.e., an ad with a cartoon character is noticeably distinct from an ad with a human actor). Results from the focus group exercise (i.e., nine of nine participants, including three business faculty, two graduate business students, and four undergraduate business students) in which each participant viewed both test ads corroborate these assumptions. To further validate the animation versus human manipulation used in the test ads, three, seven-point semantic differential scale items were used (McKirnan, Smith, and Hamayan 1983). Each respondent indicated the degree of similarity between the ad spokesperson and themselves on bipolar anchor scales of "very similar" and "not at all similar." Using independent sample t tests, significant differences between mean scores were found (overall lifestyle: sketch character, $M = 5.1$, human character, $M = 3.1$, $t[139] = -8.49$, $p < 0$; appearance: sketch character, $M = 5.1$, human character, $M = 2.6$, $t[139] = -10.68$, $p < 0$; and basic values: sketch character, $M = 4.8$, human character, $M = 2.7$, $t[139] = -8.80$, $p < 0$). As expected, the caricature spokesperson was viewed as significantly different from the human endorser; thus, the manipulation was effective.

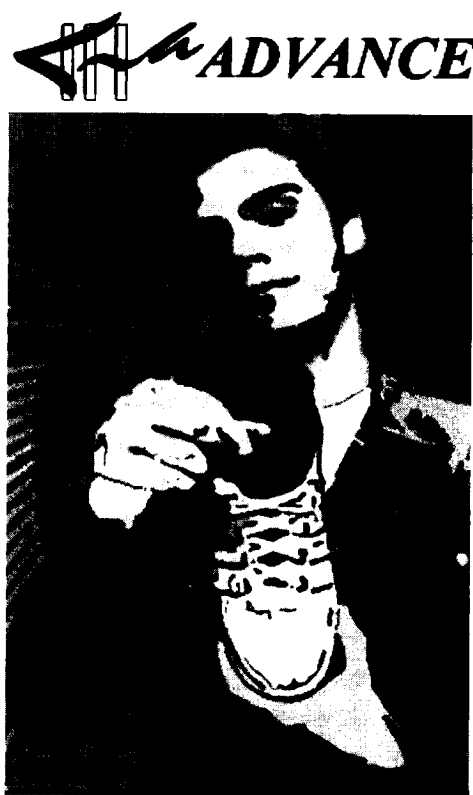
Stimuli

Every study participant was exposed to one of the treatment ads and two filler ads randomly sequenced. To avoid bias associated with using ads for existing products, a fictitious athletic

FIGURE 1
Normal or Human Spokesperson Ad



FIGURE 2
Sketch or Cartoon Spokesperson Ad



shoe brand—"Advance"—appeared in the test ads. To enhance internal validity, only the creative execution differed among ads; the same copy was included in all ads and the model and featured product were positioned similarly (see Figures 1 and 2). The two ads were identical in their layout and their one line of copy: "Advance." Because animation is an intricate stimulus used to differentiate the ad, researchers have argued that pictures should be emphasized more than words (Auken and Lonial 1985); thus, an ad was chosen that contained minimal copy. Two filler ads were included to disguise the purpose of our study. The products used in these ads (i.e., athletic shoes and soft drinks) were chosen because of their relevance to the sample population (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989).

Stimuli consisted of full-page color photographic advertisements randomly sequenced. One of the two advertising types was placed in a binder along with the filler ads. Each participant was randomly assigned a binder containing only one of the two advertising types: human ($n = 73$) versus cartoon ($n = 68$) and the two filler ads.

Procedure

To minimize hypothesis guessing, students were told that the study's goal was to obtain consumer reactions to print ads.

Respondents were given a binder (either with a human or cartoon ad), two filler ads, and a questionnaire. After thoroughly examining the ads, the researcher asked each respondent to return the ads and then complete the questionnaire.

Pertaining to the test ad they received, respondents answered four semantic differential seven-point scale measures pertaining to the four studied constructs: advertising creativity (Ad_{creat}), attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), attitude toward the brand (A_b), and purchase intention for the advertised brand (PI_b). Previously developed measures were used to assess all four constructs. We briefly discuss the measurement instruments.

Ad_{creat} is an individual's assessment regarding the three dimensions of advertising creativity (i.e., novelty, resolution, and elaboration and synthesis) and was measured with three, five-item subscales previously used to assess consumer perceptions of magazine ad creativity (O'Quin and Besemer 1989; White and Smith 2001).

A_{ad} is defined as a tendency to respond either favorably or unfavorably to an advertising stimulus during ad exposure and has been found to be a situation-constrained construct (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). A_{ad} was measured with a six-item scale used in Holmes and Crocker (1987) that assessed attitudes toward ads for high- and low-involvement consumer products.

TABLE I
MANOVA: Distinctiveness and Advertising Outcomes

Experimental descriptive statistics			
Factor	Spokesperson	Mean	SD
A_{ad}	Human	2.58	.99
	Cartoon	4.48	.67
A_b	Human	2.53	1.04
	Cartoon	4.41	.90
PI_b	Human	2.58	.99
	Cartoon	4.75	.78

Notes: MANOVA = multivariate analysis of variance; A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_b = attitude toward the brand; and PI_b = purchase intention for the brand.

A_b pertains to individuals' internal assessment of a brand (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Spears and Singh 2004) and was measured with a five-item scale used in Grier and Deshpandé (2001). This scale was originally employed to measure brand attitudes in print advertisements.

PI_b are planned individual actions relating to the purchase of a brand (Bagozzi et al. 1979) and was measured with a compiled six-item scale used in Holmes and Crocker (1987) and MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986), which assessed purchase intentions for high- and low-involvement products in television commercials.

RESULTS

Factor structure, using maximum likelihood estimation, and reliability results were adequate (i.e., no significant cross-loadings were apparent, item loadings were $>.60$, and α levels were $>.70$) for the standardized multi-item scales of Ad_{creat} (all three dimensions loaded on the same factor), A_{ad} , A_b , and PI_b (i.e., no significant cross-loadings were apparent, item loadings were $>.60$, and α levels were .931, .880, .896, and .887, respectively).

We examined the relationship between perceived advertising creativity and advertising outcome variables (H1–H3) with correlation analyses. The effect of creativity is significant and positive for attitudes toward the advertisement, $r(141) = .871, p < .001$, consistent with H1. Moreover, the effect of creativity is significant and positive toward brand attitude, $r(141) = .874, p < .001$, consistent with H2. Lastly, there is a significant and positive relationship between purchase intention and perceived creativity, $r(141) = .780, p < .001$, supporting H3. Consumers rating print ads as more creative are likely to report more positive advertisement outcomes. Because prior research has shown a hierarchy of effects between consumer attitude toward an advertisement and brand and purchase intention (e.g., Ang and Low 2000; Torres, Sierra,

and Heiser 2007), we also examined the relationships between advertising creativity and ad outcomes with the prior causal outcome(s) partialled out. These results point to positive and significant relationships between advertising creativity and A_{ad} , A_b , and PI_b with prior outcome variables partialled out, $r(141) = .30, p < .001$. For example, the partial correlation between Ad_{creat} and A_b controlling for A_{ad} is .555 ($p < .001$), and the partial correlation between Ad_{creat} and PI_b controlling for both A_{ad} and A_b is .315 ($p < .001$).

The distinctiveness experiment examined the effects of human and cartoon advertising characters on the outcome variables of A_{ad} , A_b , and PI_b . The experimental descriptive statistics highlight significant changes in the means between the two spokesperson treatment conditions for the dependent variables (see Table 1). With a sample size of 141, there was adequate power for the experiment (power = .997).

Because the advertising outcome variables are interrelated and have been shown to exhibit hierarchy of effects in a number of advertising studies (e.g., Torres, Sierra, and Heiser 2007), a MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was performed to test the response differences to the spokespersons on the variables collectively (i.e., H4–H6). Consumers in the cartoon spokesperson group yielded more positive responses toward all three of the hypothesized outcome constructs. The MANOVA exhibited a positive overall effect, with Hotelling's $T^2 = 1.737, F(4, 137) = 68.90, p < .001, Wilks's \lambda = .365, \eta^2 = .635$, and statistically significant effects for all three dependent variables. Consistent with H4, the participants who reviewed the cartoon spokesperson generated more favorable attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}): cartoon, $M = 4.07, SD = .67$, versus human, $M = 3.05, SD = .99, F(1, 139) = 149.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .553$. Supporting H5, participants exposed to the cartoon ad also responded more favorably toward the brand (A_b): cartoon, $M = 3.53, SD = .99$, versus human, $M = 3.25, SD = 1.04, F(1, 139) = 114.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .485$. Finally, consistent with H6, the cartoon ad was more favorably viewed for purchase intention for the brand (PI_b): cartoon, $M = 4.08, SD = .78$, versus human, $M = 3.05, SD = .99, F(1, 139) = 150.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .554$.

A mediation analysis examining perceived ad creativity and advertising outcome variables revealed that creativity fully mediates the effect of the type of spokesperson on advertising outcomes ($b_{indirect} > .23, Sobel z > 2.80, p < .001$; Baron and Kenny 1986). As indicated earlier, the MANOVA revealed that the first criterion for mediation was supported by a significant effect of spokesperson on advertising outcome variables, $F(4, 137) = 68.90, p < .001$. A t test of the second criterion yielded significant mean differences in perceived ad creativity between the human and cartoon spokesman (cartoon, $M = 4.46$, versus human, $M = 2.56, t = 14.33, p < .001$). Correlation analysis provided support for the third criterion showing a significant effect of advertising creativity on outcome variables ($r = .78, p < .001$). Finally, when creativity was entered as a prediction

variable with the spokesperson condition, the spokesperson became nonsignificant, $B = .012$, $t(141) = .164$, $p = .870$.

DISCUSSION

This study explored consumer responses to advertisements that consumers rated as creative (i.e., consumers rated print advertisements with a cartoon character as more creative than identical ads with a human spokesman). Print advertisements that were considered creative by consumers received significantly higher attitudinal and purchase intention ratings than less creative ads. Creative ads have been identified as containing elements of newness and divergent thinking (Marra 1990). Our experiment showed that when creative ideas are applied to print advertisements and noticed by consumers, they can produce large effect sizes and significant attitudinal and purchase intention changes.

We examined one creative execution by isolating and examining distinctiveness between different spokespersons in print advertisements. Our research shows that cartoonization of human spokespersons can produce creative and distinctive advertising outcome effects. Distinctiveness through separateness from others has the capacity to positively influence cognitive and behavioral-tendency outcomes toward the source of distinctiveness (Vignoles, Chryssochoou, and Breakwell 2000). For example, people recognize and recall differentiated personality traits better than undifferentiated traits (Leyens, Yzerbyt, and Rogier 1997). This research is a first step toward operationalizing and examining the distinctiveness concept in cartoon-related print advertising, and offers insight into its effects on pertinent ad response constructs. Our results provide evidence that consumers display more positive responses for A_{ad} , A_b , and PI_b when distinctive cartoon characters are used as spokespersons than when the ad uses human spokespersons.

Our study makes a meaningful contribution to cartoon-related advertising research. First, our research is the first attempt to investigate the effects of cartoon or caricature spokespersons in print ads on ad effectiveness constructs (e.g., A_{ad} , A_b , and PI_b). We find that ad distinctiveness influences advertising-related attitudes and purchase intentions through advertising creativity as a mediating variable. In addition, our study further corroborates the distinctiveness effect in advertising when distinct spokespersons are employed in print ads (Brewer 1991; McGuire 1984). The findings also provide evidence that sketching human spokespersons may be an effective method for creating distinctive spokespersons. Second, both the creativity and distinctiveness effect sizes are large, with perceived creativity fully mediating the distinctiveness effect of ad spokesperson. The findings reveal that distinctiveness for advertising spokespersons triggers a positive attitude toward the ad and perhaps an immediate purchase intention boost. Thus, distinctiveness may also work when applied to

other advertising creative elements such as text-messaging copy, interactivity, and ethnic cues.

Implications

Our results offer marketers some suggestions for more effective advertisements with spokespersons. First of all, in print ads, responses to A_{ad} , A_b , and PI_b are more favorable when consumers are exposed to cartoon spokespersons than when they are exposed to normal spokespersons. Marketers may capitalize on this distinctiveness effect by using animation in their campaigns across other noninteractive (e.g., in-store, outdoor) and interactive (e.g., Internet, television) advertising media. Such strategies should lead to favorable cognitive and behavioral responses among viewers when the cartoon character is viewed as similar, yet distinct, from the target audience. Second, because advertising creativity is three-dimensional, marketers may opt to emphasize some or all creativity dimensions in their integrated marketing campaigns (Sasser, Koslow, and Riordan 2007), depending on the product advertised. For everyday essential products, ads could emphasize the resolution aspect of creativity, whereas the elaboration and synthesis component of creativity could be stressed for more complex products such as technological goods. Third, to encourage customers to ethnically identify with ads and featured brands, cartoon or animated characters used as spokespersons in the ads should display physical traits similar to targeted ethnic groups (Brumbaugh 2002).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our research is not without limitations. First, the standard caveats regarding the use of a student sample, a single medium (i.e., print), a single advertised product, a single test ad, and a single treatment condition pertain (Winer 1999); thus, additional research with nonstudent samples, nonprint media, nonapparel consumer products, and multiple test ads and treatments is needed to establish external validity. Second, the four scales we used for data collection may not be equally valid across all samples, cultures, and exchange settings. This factor can affect the measurement properties of the constructs and their relationships with one another. Third, we assume using human actors in ads will always be the norm. As a result, ads that incorporate cartoon characters will maintain their distinctiveness. Fourth, although distinctiveness theory proved effective in this study, more advertising research using it as a framework is needed to generalize its explanatory power.

This study offers promising avenues for future research. The test ads used in our study contained minimal copy. Additional research is needed to examine whether the amount of text used in an ad influences the creative and distinctiveness effects when ad animation is used (Chan Lin 2000). Future

research could assess the effects of various forms of animation such as avatars and animated interface agents (Dehn and van Mulken 2000) across a broad range of media (e.g., in-store displays, outdoor) with differing product types and categories. Since animation operates with different ad design elements such as images, scenery, and characters, future research could examine whether viewer responses to an ad vary based on where animation is applied in the ad. For example, are favorable responses to an ad the result of scenic animation or character animation? To examine the effects of animation on different demographic groups, future research could assess the usage and effectiveness of animated spokespeople for different age markets. It is possible that adults and children respond differently to cartoon compared to noncartoon print ads (Bush, Hair, and Bush 1983). Finally, there is mixed evidence that distinctiveness may differentially affect Western more than Eastern cultures (e.g., Green, Deschamps, and Paez 2005; Ho 1995). Thus, additional research is necessary to uncover potential cultural variations in the distinctiveness effect in advertisements.

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