Original Article

Emotions, attitudes and memorability associated with TV commercials

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ABSTRACT This paper aims to identify the effect of selected advertising on consumers by assessing their emotions, attitudes, understanding and memory. An online survey combined with experimentation design was conducted among people aged 20 or over. Four selected TV commercials were used in the experiment, and the measurements of emotions, attitudes and memorability were calculated based on variables derived from previous studies. A final sample of 120 respondents was used for analysis. The result shows that different levels of emotions such as warmth, love, longing and desire, happiness and amusement were elicited by different TV commercials. The most memorable advertisements were those that evoked the most positive feelings and were the best understood. However, in this study none of the commercials scored higher than three out of five for memorability. This reflects an overload of media exposure in modern society, meaning that most advertisements have limited impact. Age was found to significantly affect a person's interpretation and emotional experience of a TV commercial.

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INTRODUCTION

In the multi-media age, marketers have a wide range of means in reaching and communicating with their target audience. As a result, there is a tendency for consumers to be overexposed to audio and visual marketing messages, information, texts and graphics. To deal with this, consumers are becoming accustomed to screening out and ignoring uninteresting advertisements, especially

those that lack innovation.¹ In turn, advertisers are challenged as never before to get their messages across in order to stand out in this overexcited information overload. If an advertising concept is to be successful, it has to be original and emphasise information, such as product characteristics, features and factual contents, and to communicate persuasive selling propositions that distinguish its product from competitors'.² However, as the disparity between products is narrowing, informative advertising is not as effective in creating a differential effect. The

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actual product benefits are no longer the principal factors that appeal to consumers. The emerging emphasis is the emotional additive benefit, known as 'consumer end-benefit' or 'emotional attachment', which is used to retain customers.³⁻⁵

This paper aims to identify the effect of selected advertising on consumers by assessing their emotions, attitudes, understanding and the probable remembrance of the advertising.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertising contents can be grouped as informative and/or emotional. Puto and Hoyer⁶ defined informative advertising as advertising that conveys factual, arguably verifiable or logically relevant information to the product, by which it educates consumers in the evaluation of the product attributes after viewing this kind of advertising. Very often, informative advertising limits the content of the message to the actual product characteristics and provable or comparable messages, such as clinical tests or price information. In contrast, emotional advertising aims to transfer stimuli to the audience in an attempt to elicit their feelings, and tries to trigger an emotional response from the consumer when exposed to the advertisement.⁷ Advertising is designed to influence behaviours and evoke responses. Consumers' behaviours and responses are determined by their attitudes towards the advertisement. 'Attitude' is one of the most frequently used variables in researching advertising effectiveness.⁷ As the attitude towards the advertisement has a direct impact on the attitude towards the brand, advertisers try to create positive attitudes towards the advertisement by evoking a favourable or positive emotional state in the consumer. Therefore, the positive association of the emotional state is most desired.^{8,9} Furthermore, attitudes towards the advertisement can be distinguished in a cognitive or an emotional element. While the first component concerns the consumers' conscious response to the advertisement, the second is determined by the emotional response to it. In a cognitive response, a consumer builds a positive attitude towards the advertisement because he is,

for example, convinced by a credible reasoning. In an emotional response, the consumer prefers an advertisement because it elicits a positive feeling in him such as love, joy or nostalgia.¹⁰

Emotions

A review of the literature has shown that emotions can be reflected in different forms: (i) physiological change, (ii) spontaneous or expressive behaviour, including facial expressions, gestures or posture and (iii) subjective experience, including feelings such as joy, sorrow, fear, envy, anger or pride.¹¹ This study will focus on the subjective experience of emotions.

Izard¹² summarised nine primary emotions: interest, enjoyment, surprise, distress, disgust, anger, shame, fear and contempt. These primary emotions have been developed in the course of evolution due to biological survival behaviours and the need for social adaptations, and are therefore anchored in the predisposition of human beings. The emotions all differ with regard to the subjective experience and are very often displayed through facial expressions. Similarly, Plutchik¹³ identified eight primary emotions: anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, acceptance and joy. In spite of 'acceptance', the emotions of Plutchik are aligned with those identified by Izard. In comparison, one is biologically oriented and the other is social. Zeitlin and Westwood's¹⁴ study bridged these two schools of thought in differentiating different types of emotions; for instance, 'disgust' is related to 'anger' and is functionally the opposite of 'acceptance'. The findings suggested that all other emotions (secondary emotions) are mixtures of two or more primary emotions. For instance, 'curiosity' derives from the mixture of acceptance and surprise, or 'guilt' from the primary emotions fear and joy. See Table 1 for more components of secondary emotions.

The table gives an overview of only some emotions. There are additional ones, such as sorrow, belonging, security, jealousy, boredom, amusement, happiness and so on. Important to mention are also the following states of feeling: warmth, humour, eroticism, shock, horror, credibility, passion, trust and hope, which are

Table 1: Components of some secondary emotions

	Joy	Acceptance	Fear	Surprise	Sadness	Disgust	Anger	Anticipation
Aggression	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓
Curiosity	—	✓	—	✓	—	—	—	—
Disappointment	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—
Embarrassment	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—
Envy	—	—	—	—	✓	—	✓	—
Guilt	✓	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—
Hate	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—
Love	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—
Misery	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—
Optimism	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓
Pessimism	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	✓
Pride	✓	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—
Prudishness	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	—	—
Sentimentality	—	✓	—	—	✓	—	—	—

Source: Zeitlin and Westwood.¹⁴

Table 2: A summary of emotional appeals

	Positive	Negative
Appeals: Emotions evoked	<i>Humour:</i> Joy, happiness, amusement ¹⁹ <i>Warmth:</i> Love, friendship, caring, tenderness ²⁰ <i>Sex:</i> Sexual ²¹ <i>Passion:</i> Enthusiastic <i>Nostalgia:</i> Sentimental ²² <i>Indulgence:</i> Pleasure, guilt ¹⁹	<i>Fear:</i> fearful; ²⁰ discomfort ²¹ <i>Shock:</i> Sadness, sympathy, disapproval ²²

often used by advertisers to increase levels of attention and awareness.^{15,16}

Emotions in advertising

Emotions play an important part in the response to the effect of TV advertisements, or other forms of media communication, on consumers. The emotional response of a viewer has an influence on the attitude towards the advertisement and the brand.¹⁷ An emotional appeal increases the advertisement's ability to draw attention, and enhances the attractiveness of the product, the message and the brand recall.¹⁸ A selection of appeals that are often used by advertisers to elicit an emotional response are identified in Table 2. They can be distinguished as positive and negative appeals. However, it is important to mention that the list of emotional appeals is long, and that advertisements usually evoke more than one emotion.

Memorability of emotional advertising

Tools to increase the memorability of advertisements are repetition, jingles or slogans.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that consumers pay the most attention at the beginning of the ad, whereas the end of the commercial is the most important part for memorability.²³ It is also found that not only do emotional responses to advertisements have a positive impact on message recall, but also that advertisements that evoke emotions are more likely recalled than informative commercials.²⁴ The level of involvement with the product, as well as the familiarity with the brand, has a positive effect on remembering an advertisement.²⁴ A further aspect is the mood of the viewer. In general, it can be said that how the message content is processed and memorised depends on the consumer's state of feeling. If the viewer is in a negative mood, for example feeling anger, sadness or frustration, a strong message content can be better processed and remembered than a weak one. Viewers in a positive mood seem to differentiate less between strong and weak message contents.²⁵

After having identified the reason and effect of emotional advertising, as well as different types of

message appeals and the aspect of memorability, the next section discusses the methods used in the empirical data collection.

METHODOLOGY

A survey combined with experimentation design was conducted to assess the advertising effect on the respondents. Screening through the TV commercials aired in the United Kingdom and archived in creativeclub.co.uk between January 2004 and July 2006, four TV commercials were selected based on their duration (40 seconds), advertising elements, themes and assumed emotions that they evoke (see Table 3). Experimentation involves manipulation of the TV commercials (independent variables, A_1 , A_2 , A_3

and A_4) for the purpose of measuring the changes of audiences' emotions, attitudes and perceived levels of memorability of the commercials (dependant variable, see Table 4).²⁶ Two focus groups were used to help in finalising the dependent and independent variables and in pre-testing the experiment before the actual fieldwork. The experimentation was implemented in the form of a web survey among people aged 20 or over. The questionnaire was used as an instrument to record the outcomes of the experiment. The variables were derived from the literature to measure respondents' emotions, attitudes towards the commercial and their memorability. The questionnaire was posted on the author's personal website and four selected

Table 3: Four selected TV commercials

	<i>Advert 1 (A_1)</i>	<i>Advert 2 (A_2)</i>	<i>Advert 3 (A_3)</i>	<i>Advert 4 (A_4)</i>
Brand	Baci	British Airways	Nescafé	Nike
Company	Nestlé	British Airways	Nestlé	Nike
Broadcasted	UK	UK	UK	UK
First appeared	5 February 2005	1 May 2004	16 November 2004	9 February 2006
Last appeared	6 March 2005	2 June 2005	1 April 2006	7 March 2006
Duration (seconds)	40	40	40	40
End line	Hazelnut wrapped in chocolate. Chocolate wrapped in love.	British Airways – The way to fly.	The coffee lovers' coffee.	Can you honestly tell me I am not an athlete?

Table 4: A list of dependent variables

<i>Dependent variables</i>			
<i>Emotions (5-point interval scale)</i>	<i>Attitudes (5-point bipolar scale)</i>	<i>Memorability (5-point interval scale)</i>	<i>Attitudes toward the brand (5-point bipolar scale)</i>
Humour	Boring/Interesting	Understanding	Uninvolving/Involving
Warmth	Bad/Good	Memorability	Boring/Interesting
Sex/Eroticism	Dislikeable/Likeable		Not needed/Needed
Passion	Not funny/Funny		Unexciting/Exciting
Longing/Desire	Unpleasant/Pleasant		Dislikeable/Likeable
Interest/Curiosity	Uninformative/Informative		Unfamiliar/Familiar
Enjoyment/Amusement	Not entertaining/Entertaining		The brand means nothing/a lot to me
Happiness	I feel negative/positive towards the commercial		
Surprise			
Admiration			
Jealousy			
Love			
Pride			
Belonging			
Trust			
Feeling of freedom			
Hope			
Boredom			
Self-empowerment			
Relaxation

commercials were posted on YouTube. Referral sampling was used for this survey, requesting respondents to introduce other potential audiences to participate in the survey. Respondents were given clear instructions on the questionnaire; at the same time, they were to open another browser on YouTube logging on to a pre-set account to view the commercials. The snowball effect generated 150 responses, but there were 120 final valid cases for analysis. The total length of time for filling in the questionnaire was about 40 min.

RESULTS OF ANALYSIS

Sample profile and pre-experimental state

The sample consisted of 120 valid responses. More than half of the respondents were 'feeling good' (56.7 per cent) before answering the questionnaire, while 43.3 were 'feeling alright'. ANOVA analysis did not detect any significant difference in the state of respondents' feelings and the demographics. Almost half of the respondents were aged between 25 and 34 (46.7 per cent), 22.5 per cent were aged 20–24 and 12.5 per cent were aged 35–44. Of the total sample, 53.3 per cent were female and 46.7 per cent were male. The married respondents comprised 30.8 per cent and 69.2 per cent were single. The occupations cover a wide range of groups, but with larger numbers of students (37.5 per cent) and professionals (25.8 per cent) than the rest (see Table 5). This is consistent with Internet usage and users' profiles and is attributed to the fact that it is a web-based survey.

An assessment on emotions influenced by the advertisements

The highest level of emotions elicited during the experiment were 'Warmth' (4.06) by Baci's (A_1) commercial, followed by 'Passion' (3.98) elicited by Nike (A_4), 'Admiration' by Nike (A_4), 'Longing/Desire' (3.76) by Baci (A_1) and 'Feeling of Freedom' by British Airways (A_2). Of the four TV commercials, Baci (A_1) has the highest overall mean score (2.24). Yet, as commercials are usually designed to elicit only particular types of

Table 5: Respondents' profiles $n=120$

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Per cent (%)</i>
<i>State of mind</i>	
Feeling good	56.7
Feeling alright/average	43.3
Feeling bad/worse than average	0
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	46.7
Female	53.5
<i>Age</i>	
20–24	22.5
25–34	46.7
35–44	12.5
45 and over	18.3
<i>Marital status</i>	
Married	30.8
Single	69.2
<i>Occupation</i>	
Student	37.5
Professionals	25.8
Retired	11.7
Manager/Executive	9.2
Secretary/Clerk/Office worker	8.3
Entrepreneur	7.5

emotions based on the theme, as a result the overall mean may not convey an accurate account of how successful these commercials were in eliciting emotions. Based on the top three mean scores of each of the commercials, Baci still scored the highest and Nike the second.

The strongest emotions evoked by Baci's (A_1) commercials were 'Warmth' (4.06), 'Longing/Desire' (3.76), 'Love' (mean = 3.76), 'Happiness' (3.39) and 'Passion' (3.38). For British Airways (A_2), only 'Feeling of Freedom' (3.69) and 'Relaxation' (3.04) scored above 3. For Nescafé (A_3), 'Humour' (3.57) and 'Love' (3.57) scored equally high, followed by 'Enjoyment/Amusement' (3.38). For Nike (A_4), the strongest emotion elicited was 'Passion' (3.98), followed by 'Admiration' (3.78) and 'Interest/Curiosity' (3.04) (Table 6).

The results were further analysed based on the respondents' profiles to identify whether or not the selected commercials had different levels of influences on the respondents with different demographic profiles. The significant differences were identified among different age groups. The variables with significant differences are

Table 6: Emotions elicited by selected commercials $n=120$

Emotions	Means: Pair-sample t-test			
	1=Emotion has not been elicited at all; 5=Emotion has been elicited very strongly			
	Advert 1 (A_1)	Advert 2 (A_1)	Advert 3 (A_3)	Advert 4 (A_4)
Humour	1.20	0.72	3.57	0.84
Warmth	4.06	2.62	3.42	1.14
Sex/Eroticism	2.13	0.86	1.91	3.01
Passion	3.38	1.48	2.73	3.98
Longing/Desire	3.76	2.74	2.84	2.24
Interest/Curiosity	2.87	2.34	2.67	3.04
Enjoyment/Amusement	3.23	2.58	3.38	2.98
Happiness	3.39	2.98	3.46	2.70
Surprise	2.53	1.23	2.97	1.48
Admiration	1.58	1.04	1.23	3.78
Jealousy	0.58	0.63	0.98	1.43
Love	3.66	1.93	3.57	0.78
Pride	0.76	0.97	0.76	2.17
Belonging	1.28	0.97	1.90	1.01
Trust	2.08	2.76	1.89	1.29
Feeling of Freedom	1.06	3.69	0.91	3.02
Hope	2.83	1.87	2.29	1.23
Boredom	0.72	1.55	0.96	0.83
Self-empowerment	1.15	0.88	0.95	2.84
Relaxation	2.52	3.04	2.25	0.74
Overall mean score	2.24	1.84	2.23	2.03
Top three means total	11.48	9.71	10.52	10.80

summarised in Table 7. For example, there is a significantly higher level of 'Warmth' elicited by Baci's commercial among those aged 20–24. British Airways elicited a significantly higher level of feeling of 'Relaxation' among those aged 45+ than any other age groups.

Respondents' attitudes towards the advertisement

Generally speaking, there are positive attitudes shown towards Baci, British Airways, Nescafé and Nike ($\text{mean} > 3$). Of the four selected commercials, Baci's scored the highest (4.25) when respondents were asked to self-assess their overall negative or positive attitudes towards the commercials, followed by Nike (3.90). Moreover, Baci's commercial was rated the most likeable commercial, with a mean of 4.19 (Table 8).

The attitudes were further analysed according to the respondents' demographic profiles. Women rated Nike's commercial significantly higher than men. Baci's commercials were rated higher among secretaries, clerks and office workers than respondents from other occupations. Those who were married perceived Baci's as more entertaining than any other groups.

Table 7: Significant differences in emotion elicited by age groups

Emotions	Means: Pair-sample t-test and ANOVA			
	1=Emotion has not been elicited at all; 5=Emotion has been elicited very strongly			
Age groups	20–24	25–34	35–44	45+
A_1				
Warmth	4.41	4.07	3.33	4.09
Sex/Eroticism	1.63	2.13	1.80	2.95
Relaxation	2.11	2.45	2.33	3.32
A_2				
Sex/Eroticism	0.56	0.73	0.40	1.86
Interest/Curiosity	1.93	2.18	2.40	3.23
Relaxation	2.93	2.75	2.80	4.09
A_3				
Humour	3.41	3.71	4.07	3.05
Trust	1.89	1.89	2.93	1.18
A_4				
Interest/Curiosity	3.26	2.71	2.87	3.73
Admiration	4.30	3.29	3.73	4.41

$P < 0.01$.

Again, significant differences in attitudes towards the commercials were observed among respondents belonging to different age groups (See Table 9). Nescafé (A_2) had a similar influence

Table 8: Attitudes towards the selected commercials

Attitudes	Means: Pair-sample t-test 1=Very negative; 5=Very positive			
	Advert 1 (A ₁)	Advert 2 (A ₂)	Advert 3 (A ₃)	Advert 4 (A ₄)
Boring/Interesting	3.88	2.76	3.71	3.80
Bad/Good	3.89	3.02	3.67	3.93
Dislikeable/Likeable	4.19	2.90	3.81	3.83
Not funny/Funny	2.31	1.77	3.62	1.98
Unpleasant/Pleasant	4.13	3.44	3.67	3.62
Uninformative/Informative	2.00	2.09	2.27	2.09
Not entertaining/Entertaining	3.98	2.92	3.89	3.93
I feel negative/positive towards the commercial	4.25	3.34	3.74	3.90

Table 9: Significant differences in attitudes towards selected commercials

Emotions	Means: Pair-sample t-test and ANOVA 1=Very negative; 5=Very positive			
	20–24	25–34	35–44	45+
Age groups				
A ₁				
Not entertaining/ Entertaining	3.96	3.75	3.93	4.59
A ₂				
Boring/Interesting	2.48	2.52	2.60	3.82
Bad/Good	2.85	2.86	2.93	3.68
Dislikeable/Likeable	2.63	2.82	2.47	3.73
Not entertaining/ Entertaining	2.48	2.73	3.13	3.77
I feel negative/Positive towards the ad	3.11	3.23	3.13	4.05
A ₄				
Interest/Curiosity	4.19	3.46	3.53	4.36
Bad/Good	4.22	3.61	3.80	4.50
Unpleasant/Pleasant	4.11	3.45	3.87	4.45
Uninformative/ Informative	2.07	1.82	2.07	2.82
Not entertaining/ Entertaining	4.44	3.45	4.00	4.50
I feel negative/Positive towards the ad	4.11	3.57	3.87	4.50

$P < 0.01$.

on different age groups, which generated similar attitudes after viewing. The commercials generated significantly different attitudes with respect to different variables, and are summarised in Table 9. British Airways' commercial appealed significantly more to the older audience than the young.

Understanding and memorability of the commercials

The respondents were asked to self-assess their understanding and memorability of the selected

commercials. Respondents attached higher understanding to Baci's commercial than the other three (see Table 10). There was no significant difference in terms of the level of understanding of the commercials among different gender, age groups, family status and occupations, nor in the state of feelings before responding to the questionnaires. Although respondents indicated that they would remember Baci's commercial better than others, none of the commercials scored higher than 3 on the mean, which means that none of the commercials used in this study won a strong tendency to be remembered.

Correlation was used to examine whether there was a relationship between emotions and the memorability of the advertisements. The range of emotions that showed a significant level of correlation with memorability are (1) Baci – 'Love'; (2) British Airways – 'Warmth', 'Sex/Eroticism', 'Passion', 'Longing/Desire', 'Enjoyment/Amusement', 'Happiness', 'Surprise', 'Love', 'Trust' and 'Relaxation'; (3) Nescafé – 'Admiration', 'Surprise' and 'Hope'; and (4) Nike – 'Passion', 'Interest/Curiosity', 'Enjoyment/Amusement', 'Admiration' and 'Jealousy'. In other words, the findings showed a significant positive correlation between emotions and memorability with respect to some dimensions of emotions but not others.

Similar statistics were applied to identify whether or not there is a correlation between understanding of the commercial and attitudes. The findings showed that the better the advertisements were understood, the more positive the respondents' attitudes were towards

Table 10: Understanding and memorability of the commercials

	Means: Pair-sample t-test			
	Advert 1 (A ₁)	Advert 2 (A ₂)	Advert 3 (A ₃)	Advert 4 (A ₄)
Understanding	3.43	2.77	3.17	2.87
5=Understood completely; 1=Do not understand at all				
Memorability	2.77	1.39	2.27	2.15
5=Very memorable; 1=Not memorable at all				

the commercial. The commercials that were perceived to be better, more likeable, more pleasant and more entertaining were better understood.

CONCLUSIONS

This study signifies the methodological design of the experimentation in examining the commercials' impact on respondents' emotions and attitudes based on a web survey, and was facilitated by a video sharing website in presenting selected TV commercials. The experiment design using a web survey has been widely used in commercial marketing research practice, but not in academic research. This study attempts to show the viability of experimentation design using a new research medium. However, it is worth noting that this type of research is likely to be skewed towards heavy Internet users who are familiar with Internet-sharing websites, and are comfortable or enjoy staying online for an extended period of time. For example, this experiment took an average of 40 min to complete, and among the samples, there are higher proportions of participants who were single, aged between 25 and 34, and were students and professionals (see Table 5).

The result of this study shows that different levels of emotions were elicited by different advertisements. In this study, Baci's commercial was most effective in evoking positive emotional responses, such as warmth, longing/desire and love. It also generated a relatively higher level of positive attitudes to the commercial. Older audiences had more positive attitudes towards the British Airways' commercial than the younger groups, and it is suggested here that this may be consistent with the interests and purchasing power of the respective groups. In addition, the result shows that there is a positive correlation between

the attitudes towards the advertisement and the memorability. Similarly, the analysis also indicated that the higher the understanding of the advertisement, the higher the memorability. However, none of the commercials used in this study scored higher than the mid-point on the scale. This reflects a diminishing effect in modern society owing to an overload of media exposure. The finding of this study shows that age is the most important demographic variable, in that it presents a significant differentiation factor in predicting the differences in interpretation and perception of the commercial. The levels of a range of emotions elicited by different commercials are rated differently among different age groups. The older audiences are significantly different from the young.

The weakness of this study was that the time required for completing the questionnaire was longer than what one would normally expect. As a result, 30 responses were incomplete and were removed from the analysis. For future study, the design can be simplified to enable the response time to be shortened.

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