

An Effect of Conformity Psychology on the Advertisement Effectiveness

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Abstract

It is usually that some people who did not plan to buy anything walk into e-mart, but walk out with something in hands. Obviously, these people were stimulated and the result is purchasing something maybe are not really needed. As a consumer, sometimes we are interested in what somebody else is using, and sometimes we cannot help trying a kind of new drink when we found many of people around are drinking it. In this paper, conformity psychology's effect in the advertisement will be checked in the hope of helping improve the advertisement effectiveness.

Keywords: *conformity, psychology, advertisement, effectiveness*

1. Introduction

In a commercial society, consumers are exposed to all kinds of advertisements every day. Asian important media for consumers to get information about products, advertising is communication used to influence individuals to purchase products or services. With the development of social media, the forms and contents of the advertisement have also advanced a lot, and the competition in the advertisement field is getting increasingly fierce. What's more, the function of recording on digital video recorders allows users to record the programs for later viewing, enabling them to fast forward through commercials. Facing the internal and external challenges, the advertisement-makers have to make all effort to make advertisements more effective. As consumers, we all know that not all of advertisements are successful, that is, only parts of them can cause consumers' attention and lead the consuming behaviors. Successful advertisements require a great diversity of knowledge and skills. There is a very close relationship between the success of advertisements and consumers' psychology[1]. In this paper, conformity psychology's effect in the advertisement will be checked in the hope of helping improve the advertisement effectiveness.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2-1. Conformity

(1) Conformity psychological phenomena

American psychologist Solomon Asch conducted a famous experiment that demonstrated conformity [2]. In this experiment, 50 university students were recruited and were told that the experiment was done for studying visual perception. In this experiment, subjects were divided into 8-10 groups and in each group only one college student was real subject while all others were confederates. The groups were asked to decide which of the bars on the right was the same length as the one on the left, and the procedure was repeated 18 sets of bar. In this experiment, confederates had been instructed to give incorrect answers on the 12 of 18 trials. In addition, the only real subject in each group each trial was asked to decide the next to the last. The results were 37 of the 50 subjects conformed to the majority at least once, and 14 of them conformed on more than 6 of the 12 trials, and also some subjects didn't conform even once.

The biggest advantage of experiment method is its evidence of causality. Asch's experiment undoubtedly provides the best evidence of the existence of conformity psychology[2]. Conformity is the process by which an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are influenced by other people. This influence occurs in both small groups and society as a whole, and it may be the result of subtle unconscious influences, or direct and overt social pressure. For example, when somebody was invited to join a dinner, during the dinner, he/she found there are several folks besides the plate and did not know which one to start. And then he/she will look around the other people and follow most of other people how to do, because he/she don't wish to obtain pressure because picking up wrong folk or being different from others. Conformity also occurs by the "implied presence" of others, or when other people are not actually present. For example, people tend to follow the norms of society when eating or watching television, even when they are at home by themselves.

(2) Stages of conformity psychological phenomena

There are three stages during the development of conformity, including compliance, identification and internalization [3]. As the initial stage of conformity, compliance is expedient, temporary and skin-deep. In the second stage, individuals willingly identify others' opinion, information from others or rules made by others, and the identification were not caused by external factors. Then when the conformity develops into the final stage---internalization, individuals have accepted the others' opinion, information from others or rules made by others as a part of own attitude system.

(3) The causes of conformity

However, what factors exactly cause this human being's psychological phenomenon? Harvard psychologist Herbert Kelman argued conformity was mainly caused by social influence[4]. People often conform from a desire to achieve a sense of security within a group—typically a group that is of a similar age, culture, religion, or educational status. Any unwillingness to conform carries with it the very real risk of social rejection. In this respect, conformity can be seen as a safe means of avoiding bullying or deflecting criticism from peers. Conformity is often associated with adolescence and youth culture, but it affects humans of all ages. Most of other psychologists agree with that there are three sorts of impetus that cause conformity, the first one is the need for obtaining accurate information; the second one is the need for being accepted and liked by other members of the same group; the last one is the need for avoiding or decreasing the pressure from group or society. Although peer pressure may be viewed as a negative trait, conformity can have either good or bad effects depending on the situation. Peer pressure leading to drug or alcohol abuse is harmful, but driving safely on the correct side of the road is a beneficial example of conformity. Conformity influences the formation and maintenance of social norms and allows society to function smoothly and predictably. That means, as a special psychological phenomenon, conformity can be used to some extent to bring profit to people. In the field of advertising that has huge relationship with psychology, conformity may be well used to obtain better advertising effectiveness and more revenue, which exactly is the purpose of this paper.

2-2. Advertising effectiveness

There is a progress of making decision which we cannot see but can judge from the consuming behaviors. Decision-making is the cognitive process of selecting a course of action from among multiple alternatives. There is no doubt that there are psychological factors imposing effect during this progress of "problem recognition-information searching-purchasing-evaluation". Due to the close relationship between advertising and psychology, there develop an important branch of psychology called "psychology of advertising" which focus on the how the two be related and how to take use of the consumers' psychology to improve the advertisement effectiveness.

In a generalized sense, advertisement effectiveness is defined as the degree to which the objectives of an advertisement or advertising campaign have been achieved that include all the direct and indirect achievements, mainly being consist of communication effect, economic effect and social effect. Communication effect refer to whether the advertisement information has been received by consumers and to which degree has been received. Economic effect refers to the economic benefit or economic lose caused by the advertisement. Social effect is the advertisement effect on the social culture and social ethic etc. In a narrow sense, advertisement effectiveness just refers to the economic benefit or economic lose caused by the advertisement, that is, whether the advertisement make consumers to purchase or not. The narrow definition is adopted in this paper.

2-3. Involvement

Although consumers are exposed to lots of advertisements everyday, to the individual consumer there are limited advertisements that would show interest to. And also maybe you have the following purchasing experience: sometimes you will buy something without much consideration although there are many alternative choices and even there are better ones while sometimes you won't make the final decision unless you did many comparisons between different choices and thought again and again; also sometimes there exist differences even you buy same things at different situation because one is for yourself and the other is for your friend's birthday gift. The factor that causes these differences is involvement.

Involvement is defined as "in given situation, perceived personal importance/interest/relevance about given subjects", and can be divided into two categories—high involvement and low involvement. Different involvement will cause different decision-making progress, different information-dealing progress and attitude-forming progress, all of which will cause different consuming behaviors. Therefore, it is important to measure the level of relevant consumers' involvement before make advertisements or assess the advertisement effectiveness.

2-4. Literature on conformity

The searching result shows that studies on conformity psychology are not as many as imagined. You argued that conformity can work in a positive way when conform toward the right direction, as well as in a negative way when conform toward the wrong way that is called "blind obedient" [5]. He also pointed out three ways to guide conformity psychology to work in a positive in the situation of army; Hou at the basis of Solomon Asch's experiment analyzed the causes of conformity psychology, three stages of the development of conformity psychology, the advantages and disadvantages of conformity psychology, as well as the factors that can cause changes to this psychology[3]. He pointed out that conformity psychology will be affected by individual factors, other people factor and also social cultural factors. Thus, according to him, conformity psychology phenomenon can be different due to different social cultures. Tang took use of some typical cases as example to explain that conformity psychology can work in a prosocial way as well as in a antisocial way, and pointed out the significance of conformity psychology is to find the regulation and make

the society more reasonable and harmonious[6]; Xian made an analogy between the conformity psychology and the sheep flock phenomenon [7]. In the sheep flock, all other sheep will start to move toward the same way once if one of the sheep move and regardless of if there is a wolf in that way or there is better grass in another way. Also particularly pointed female will be more likely to conform others than male.

2-5. Literature on conformity and advertisement effectiveness

Fewer papers apply conformity psychology on the field of advertisements. Both Wen and Sun's paper and Zhang's paper pointed out four approaches to improve or strengthen the advertisement effectiveness [8][9]. Conformity is the process by which an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are influenced by other people. The first way is optimizing the quality of the "other people", that is, using more "opinion leaders" in the advertisement that have more powerful influence like celebrities; the second way mentioned in the papers is enlarging the size of "other people", that is, using more people that using or recommend the product in the advertisement; the third one is making the "other people" more proper, that is, using the "other people" whose characteristics are more similar to the characteristics of the product and consumers. The last way is making the "other people" collective, that is, using the "other people" to create a collection that the individual consumer is attracted to join in. The two papers have common limitations. First, both papers are based on theoretical reference rather than scientific prove; second, two papers discuss the approaches in a general way, however, the practical application is more complicated, even conformity is proved to have effect on advertisement effectiveness, it is not the only factor have effect on. Therefore, for scientific rigor and more practical significance, a research considering consumers factor and product factor is required.

3. Method

The paper aims to examine whether conformity psychology have an effect on the advertisement effectiveness or not? In addition, for more practical significance, in this research involvement and gender will be added as the second and third independent variable. That is, the effect of conformity will be checked respectively in the high-involvement advertisement and low-involvement advertisement when the participants are divided into groups by gender. In this paper, experiment and group focus were adopted.

3-1. Measurement

As mentioned before, there are three independent variables--- involvement (high, low), gender (male, female) and conformity (with, without), and one dependent variable-advertisement effectiveness in this research.

(1) Involvement

To measure the level of involvement, Zaichkowsky's PII was applied. The experiment was conducted in Korea, thus, the Korean language version of was adopted. To find out products that will be used in the experiments, self-administered questionnaire papers were be given to the 50 randomly selected college students in Seoul. Considering the universality of using, computer and coke were chosen. The results were scored, and the individual score will range from 12 to 84. The closer to 12, the lower the level of involvement is, while the closer to 84, the higher the level of involvement is. Through this pretest, computer and coke were verified as high-involved and low-involved conducts. And to ensure the efficacy of the experiment, one computer brand and one candy brand that have not enter into Korean market were selected.

(2) Conformity

Conformity is a complex psychological phenomenon, considering the time and money limit; here "advertisement with conformity" is defined as the advertisement that contains contents suggests the large population of existed consumers while "advertisement without conformity" is defined as the advertisement that does not contain such contents.

(3) Advertisement effectiveness

Advertisement effectiveness was defined as "the economic benefit or economic lose caused by the advertisement, that is, whether the advertisement make consumers to purchase or not." In addition, the measurement of the advertisement effectiveness will be finished through a self-administered questionnaire inquiring the participants' purchasing intention.

3-2. Experiment design

The factorial design is as shown as the following table:

Table 1. Factorial design

Level	Male	Male	Female	Female
	Conformity(+)	Conformity(-)	Conformity(+)	Conformity(-)
High-involvement	I	II	III	IV
Low-involvement	V	VI	VII	VIII

In addition, as mentioned before, there will be eight experiment groups. In this research, 90 participants recruited randomly will be divided in to eight groups each were shown the corresponding advertisements in different classrooms at the same time.

Group I consists of 10 males who will be shown the computer advertisement which contains contents suggest the large population of existed consumers.

Group II consists of 10 males who will be shown the computer advertisement without conformity.

Group III consists of 10 females who will be shown the computer advertisement in which several persons appear.

Group IV consists of 10 females who will be shown computer advertisement without conformity.

Group V consists of 10 males who will be shown the candy advertisement which contains contents suggest the large population of existed consumers.

Group VI consists of 10 males and will be shown the candy advertisement without conformity.

Group VII consists of 10 females and will be shown the candy advertisement which contains contents suggest the large population of existed consumers.

Group VIII consists of 10 females and will be shown the candy advertisement without conformity.

3-3. Focus group

After watching the advertisements, focus group was organized in the unit of each group. Participants were instructed to talk freely and loudly under the frame of the main topic: talk about the feeling about the advertisement you watched, such as the aspects that you do not like, or the merits in your opinion that attract you to purchase the product, and the impression you formed about the product.

4. Results

Each Participant are encouraged to talk freely, and during the 1 hour-lasting discussion, the organizer was only taking the role of recording participants' talks and observing their face and gestures. Some important findings are present followed:

Table 2. Purchasing intention statistics

Group	Advertisement effect/purchasing intention	
	Positive	Negative
I	3	7
II	2	8
III	3	7
IV	2	8
V	7	3
VI	5	5
VII	10	0
VIII	6	4

Group I consists of ten male college students, they were shown one commercial of A computer which contain implicit message of "A computer is one of the most popular computer brand among college students in China". Three of them said they are willing to buy the computer. "I got to know this computer brand for the first time, but I would like to buy it. I want to change a new computer, the old one does not work very well. It seems that many Chinese college students prefer this brand, I am a student too, I prefer a computer that price is reasonable, good-looking and well-functional. In the commercial, the computer is colorful and customers have different options, and I prefer green." (participant A) "Maybe I will try it. There are several students appear in the advertisement, they are young, energetic and good-looking. It is attractive." (participant B). Obviously, conformity exert effect on the advertisement effect. The message of "A computer is one of the most popular computer brand among college students in China" and several college students appear in the advertisement play positive effect on purchasing intention. Conformity is psychological phenomenon that people's fear of disconnection with other social members and cause minority to follow the majority's behaviors. It happens at all people of all age, especially connected with youth culture. To amplify the advertisement effect, the advertise makers should put proper "majority" in the advertisement. When the customers feel belong to one group or majority, then their willingness to follow the majority will be stronger. College student is the one of the main target customer in computer market. Thus, it is more proper to put students "majority" in the advertisement than housewife "majority". On the other hand, following the majority can reduce the risk of failure purchasing.

Group II consists of ten male college students, they were shown one commercial of a computer which does not contain any content get involved with conformity. Two of them expressed positive purchasing intention. "I heard this computer brand before, but have never used or even watched any commercials. Most Korean students are using Samsung or LG, you know, both of them are national brands. But as you know, China's economy is rapidly developing. Korean people cannot lead a life without "China-made" products now. Before, we do not like "China-made" and perceive it as the equivalence to "bad quality". But now I think we should change our mind. Maybe this brand will be cheaper than Samsung or LG, and the product looks not bad in the commercial." (participant A) When face a new product, in the situation of absence of conformity,

customers will be more likely to judge the product considering other factors, like price, function and country of origin.

Groups I-IV watched commercials of the same computer brand. According to table 2, it is interesting that comparing group I & II with group III & IV, there is no gender difference at purchasing intention. In other words, there is no difference between the effect of high-involved product advertisement on male and female customers. Both men and women are rational when make a decision to purchase a high-involved product. Their motivation of purchasing can not be so easily stimulated, comparing the low-involved product. The biggest motivation comes from their needs. They need a channel to acquire comprehensive information about the product that supports them to make comparisons. One participant in group I expressed, "the advertisement is not bad, the models are pretty, but it is not persuasive enough to make me buy a computer I have never heard before. There even no models I know in the commercial."(participant A). One female participant in group IV said, "I am sorry but I will not buy this computer, the reason is simple: I do not need a new one currently. But I can talk about the feeling about the commercial. I think a product can not enter into a new market unless it finds a breaking point. Concerning the computer market, there are so many mature brands in Korea, like Samsung and LG, or even Japanese brand Sony. It is a long way to go for the Korean people to accept a new computer brand. May be a Chinese celebrity who Korean people well know can work".

Comparing with high-involved product, conformity can work better in low-involved product advertisement. Group Vis consist of ten male college students, they were shown one commercial in which hundreds of people run after a Chinese female celebrity who is running while eating A vitamin candy. 7 participants said they would buy the product. "the commercial is very energetic. I like sports. The various colors and people running appear in the commercial make it very energetic. I think this commercial is a successful one for vitamin candy."(participant A) " in addition to one female celebrity, there are hundreds of people appear in the video. They are all running after the product, which give me a psychological hint that this product is popular and has good quality." (participant B). In group VII, even all 10 participants expressed positive purchasing intention. One girl said, "I like sweat food. Eating yummy candy is enjoyable and meanwhile I can take supplements of the vitamin. Why not?" (participant A) "the advertisement is interesting. Hundreds of people hurry to chase one product. They keep running and look healthy and athletic. The product is so many people's choice. I also would like to have a try. By the way, I know that a female celebrity, she attended the 2015 Busan International Film Festival. I got to know that she is one of the most influential actresses in China. She is pretty "(participant B).

5. Conclusion and Discussions

In sum, according to this experiment results, some suggestions for advertisers are proposed: first, conformity exert more effect on female than male in the situation of low-involved product. It is suggested that take the good advantage of conformity psychological phenomenon in the commercial of low- involved product whose target are female. And their psychological trend of following the majority will decline when confront high-involved product. Both men and women are rational when make a decision to purchase a high-involved product. Taking house-consumption for example, generally speaking, it is very difficult for the house commercial to stimulate customers' purchasing desire. The biggest motivation comes from their needs. House commercials do not attract people do not desire to consume, but people have the desire will search for commercials actively. Thus, comparing the utilization of conformity, commercials that contain complete information that help buyer to make comparison and decision will be more critical.

Second, as mentioned before, individuals follow majority to avoid pressure caused by disconnection, particular they will choose to follow the majority they can find belonging. When the individuals hope to become members of some group or they perceive to belong to some group, then their willingness to follow the group will be stronger. Thus, it is important to find the proper "group"/"majority" when apply conformity in commercial. It is suggested to construct the concept of "we" and make the target consumers to behavior as "us".

Third, in addition to the appropriateness of the "majority", the quantity of "majority" should also be highlighted. Asch's experiment provided evidence that there is bigger possibility for 3-5 persons to cause conformity than 1-2 persons. A lot of empirical studied also proved the positive relationship between the quantity of "majority" and the possibility of conformity. Thus, the advertising copy such as "one pot can be sold per second in Korea" can stimulate plenty of Chinese customers to visit the chain store of Korean pot-boiled food in China.

Fourth, several participants in the focus group mentioned celebrity's positive impact on advertisement effect. Celebrities are adored by people, their traits (appearance, talents, hobbies, etc) represent the mass's choice. Taken in this sense, the celebrity is "majority". There is no quantitative advantage seemingly, however, adopting celebrity in the commercials reflects qualitative advantage. To some extent, the celebrity is "opinion leader" of one group or groups. Take Wyeth milk powder of China as example, several celebrity couples from different fields appear in the advertisements, which is a good example of combination of the quantity and quality of "majority".

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