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A Systematic Review of Unconventional Advertising Strategies for Business Proliferation

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Abstract: Via a systematic review of the literature on unconventional advertising, this article presents a systematic discussion on the unconventional advertising strategies in the modern world. A total of 21 articles ultimately met the inclusion criteria and were coded for the literature synthesis. The cumulative findings and propositions of unconventional advertising have been extracted and synthesized into three salient themes to discuss the unconventional advertising strategies. The themes are: i) ambient advertising, ii) viral advertising, and iii) ambush advertising. This paper is hoped to provide useful insights into the current strategies employed in unconventional advertising for business proliferation.

Keywords: Ambient advertising, ambush advertising, guerrilla advertising, marketing strategy, unconventional advertising, viral advertising.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising has become essential to the society and economics. Companies and organizations have been using advertising as a tool to strengthen brand equity and increase profits for the last few centuries. However, the advertising industries have experienced dramatic changes due to the advancement in technology throughout the years. Thus, in order to keep up in this fast-paced competent world, advertisers have begun to use different approaches to reach their audience.

One of the many types of advertising used by advertisers nowadays is Guerrilla Advertising. Being referred by different names including stealth marketing, viral marketing, buzz marketing, street marketing, ambush marketing and ambient marketing, guerrilla advertising is “an advertising strategy that focuses on low-cost unconventional marketing tactics that yield maximum results” (Levinson, 1984, p.34). Guerrilla advertisers have the abilities to reach their consumers at the most unexpected place and time. It depends

on the advertisers' creativity and imagination to grab consumers' attention so that it creates a memorable experience for the audience to remember their brand.

Although the guerrilla concept has already existed for 33 years, which was first coined by Jay Conrad Levinson in 1984, it has just achieved its recognition as a new concept recently in the advertising and marketing industry. More and more advertisers are using guerrilla advertising in order to survive in this modern era where every company competes vigorously to gain public attention.

Via a systematic review of the literature on unconventional advertising, this paper aims to discuss the unconventional advertising strategies used in guerrilla advertising. The overarching research question to be addressed is: What are the unconventional advertising strategies employed in guerrilla advertising? Three themes emerge from the review which are: (i) Ambient Marketing, (ii) Ambush Advertising, and (iii) Viral Advertising.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Definition of Guerrilla Advertising / Unconventional Advertising

People have been using the term "guerrilla advertising" and "guerrilla marketing" interchangeably. Advertising is a component of marketing. Although the two terms have some distinct features, they serve the same function that is to increase sales and to explain the value of product or service to target customers. Levinson (1984) highlights that guerrilla marketing is effective for small businesses because it is simple to understand, easy to implement and outrageously inexpensive.

Traditional advertising and marketing was never actually boomed until the early of the 1900s. Important media, such as the television, radio and print have been used widely by advertisers to promote their products and services. The nature of the advertisements focuses more on educating consumers rather than entertaining and interacting with them. At some point, advertisers ran out of idea to attract their audience while the consumers were also tired of being advertised to. This has led to the emergence of guerrilla marketing. This type of advertising strategy originates from guerrilla warfare and is related to tactics used by armed civilians. As pointed out by Margolis and Garrigan (2008), "guerrilla tactics, in terms of their militaristic roots, were created by armies who did not have the resources to reach their political and military goals through traditional methods" (p. 16). As a result, they have to look at the resources available and get creative with how they chose to approach and engage.

Inspired by the same principles used in the warfare, guerrilla advertising strategies utilize minimal opportunities and resources to extract maximum output without needing a large amount of money. Guerrilla advertisements are more like a pleasant surprise than an unexpected shock. It touches the emotions of the consumers, aiming to make the target audience to relate their first emotion and reaction to the advertisement. These advertising strategies are argued to be effective in positioning the products in the mind of audience, striking them at a more personal and memorable way.

Characteristics of Guerrilla Advertising

Levinson (2011) puts forth five characteristics of guerrilla advertising.

- i) Unexpectedness - The chosen location to run the advertisement need to be totally unexpected and has a surprise element in it. Being unexpected is the main core of guerrilla advertising, it

tackles the emotional reactions of the off-guard consumers, creating a memorable experience for the consumers and it is the best way to grab their attentions.

- ii) Creativity - Marketers or advertisers have to be creative and innovative when it comes to guerrilla marketing or advertising. A guerrilla strategy could only be successful when it is able to draw consumers' attentions effectively.
- iii) Cost effective - Guerrilla campaign usually involves low cost advertising tactics as compared to the traditional marketing campaigns. It creates an immediate impact on the customers and converts it into sales.
- iv) Interactivity - Relationships are an important factor with companies adopting guerrilla marketing techniques. The relationships are sustained through interactions. Most campaign involve some sort of interactions with their customers on a personal level.
- v) Simplicity- Guerrilla marketing or advertising should be as simple as possible. It avoids excessive usage of jargons that might confuse the consumers. The guerrilla technique would fail if consumers do not understand the messages being delivered.

METHOD

Search Procedure and Inclusion Criteria

This systematic review was conducted with the multidisciplinary literature on unconventional advertising. The keywords used were “unconventional advertising”, “guerrilla advertising”, “ambient advertising”, “ambush advertising” and, “viral advertising”. The words “advertising” and “marketing” were used interchangeably in this paper as advertising is a component of marketing.

The inclusion criteria for this systematic review are: a) All articles must be in English, b) Content relevance, that is, the articles can provide a possible answer for the overarching question and c) years of publication: 2010-2017. The articles that were reviewed are all from the Scopus and Web of Science databases.

Initial online searches of the data pool had identified 50 articles (for unconventional advertising / marketing), 20 articles (for guerrilla advertising / marketing), 27 articles (for ambient advertising/marketing), 39 articles (for ambush advertising / marketing), and 89 articles (for viral marketing). The abstract of each article was read before congregated selection. The duplicated articles were removed and 21 articles were retained for the final literature synthesis for this paper.

Coding Procedure

We paid extra attention to the articles that examine the forms of unconventional advertising in the modern world and also could provide a possible answer to the overarching question when the process of literature research and initial content coding was conducted. An initial coding framework was form to categorize articles into different themes based on the different strategies of unconventional advertising. With the use of the content comparative method, the data coded form each article were constantly compared to reanalyze the studies and provide new insights.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Prior studies agreed that advertising has been too overwhelming nowadays that consumers are constantly trying to resist it. Due to the effects of advertisement clutter, individuals often feel a certain 'information overload', especially when it comes to messages used in commercial communication (Buljubašić, I., Ham, M., & Pap, A., 2016). Traditional media is no longer effective in this case and marketers as well as advertisers have to search for new ways to promote their products and services. In recent years, many have succumbed to the attractions of unconventional marketing approaches to achieve this differentiation "while bearing lower costs on average compared to conventional communication initiatives" (Saucet & Cova, 2015, p. 65)

Three themes have emerged from this review, presenting the three types of unconventional advertising strategies in the modern world. The themes include (a) ambient, (b) viral, and (c) ambush strategies. The overarching question of this review is: What are the unconventional advertising strategies in the modern world?

Theme 1: Ambient Advertising

According to Hutter and Hoffmann (2011), ambient advertising (also ambient media) intends to "surprise consumers by placing unconventional advertisements often at unusual locations in the target group's social environment" (Hutter, 2015, p. 33). Suyar and Banyar (2015) state that "ambient media represents alternative carriers of adverts, most often of indoor or outdoor character, which differs from usual campaigns by its originality, usage of different than usual formats or sizes, but also by their placement on unusual or non-traditional places" (p. 49) .

The surprise effects in ambient advertising is essential in drawing its consumers' attention to the product or services that is being promoted. Hutter and Hoffmann (2014) highlight the role of surprise evoked by ambient media for raising consumer attention and to intensify information processing in order to resolve incongruence, which leads to a positive attitude towards the advertisement model. Their research also reveals that "surprise is additionally an amplifier for consumers' accompanying evaluation of the ad (such as creativity) [and] while surprise has no valence, it raises attention which intensifies good or bad ad evaluations" (Hutter & Hoffmann, 2014, p.107). In the process of examining the positive effect of surprise on advertisement, the researchers invited 333 participants to a laboratory experiment and exposed them to photographs and questionnaires. They found that simultaneously evolution of the effect of surprise on advertisement is based on incongruence resolution and positive affect as well as the amplifying effect for accompanying evaluations, such as creativity.

Hutter (2015) also found that ambient advertising is able to trigger a surprise effect. The results of his study confirm that ambient advertising is significantly more effective than conventional outdoor advertising especially in raising attention. Ambient advertisements are able to gain consumers' attention by triggering a surprise effect and stimulate positive attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand. Based on the evaluation of the effects of conventional and unconventional advertising in detail, "the degree of perceived surprise is higher for ambient advertising than for conventional outdoor advertising" (Hutter, 2015, p.42).

Theme 2: Viral Advertising

Porter and Golan (2010) state that "viral advertising relies on provocative content to motivate unpaid peer-to-peer communication of persuasive messages from identified sponsors" (p. 31). Compared to traditional

media advertising, viral advertising is gaining popularity among advertisers because of its lower cost, better targeting, and faster diffusion relying on consumer collaboration and “word-of-mouth” (Sabri, 2015). The success of viral advertising campaigns may then depend on the advertising appeal, as well as the emotional reactions that it triggers. Effective viral advertising needs to contain surprise element (Southgate *et al.*, 2010) and elicit high-arousal emotional reactions, either positive or negative (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Brown *et al.*, 2010; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Henke, 2013).

Companies are increasingly reaching out to their consumers via social network sites (SNSs). SNS marketing campaigns are extensively used for promoting brands, products and services (Voorveld & Noort, 2014). Taboo and controversial advertisements are commonly used by advertisers and marketers to grab their consumer’s attentions. A taboo appeal “involves visually or verbally presenting a taboo topic (such as suicide, murder, deviant sexual practices, or explicit sex) to promote a product that is not in itself taboo” (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012, p. 870). According to Petrescu and Korgaonkar (2011), “to penetrate clutter and attract consumers’ attention, viral advertising relies then on controversial, provocative, and taboo appeals” (p. 211). When a person gets emotionally triggered, they tend to remember better.

Sabri (2015) investigated the effectiveness of controversial taboo advertisements. A total of 189 participants were involved and each of them was assigned randomly to four advertisements. After that, they were required to answer a questionnaire on controversial taboo advertisement. The study found that the “viral context undermines the taboo perceptions of controversial advertising and perceived subjective norms advocate against purchasing the brand” (p. 9).

Another type of viral advertising strategy that has been gaining its popularity in recent years is flash mobs. Salmond (2010) defines flash mobs as a “semi-spontaneous community that briefly congregates in a public place, performs an unusual and seemingly pointless act, then disperses, often for the purposes of entertainment, satire, and artistic expression” (p.95). The potential value in branded flash mobs lies in the viral power of the Internet (Mills, 2012) as flash mobs are typically organized via social media platforms such as Facebook, and YouTube, or through specialized websites such as www.theflashmob.ca (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011).

Grant, Bal, and Parent (2012) examined the influence of an operatic flash mob on consumer behaviour and consumer experience in a public market. Data were collected through in-depth unstructured interviews and observations in order to measure the audience’s emotional reaction in an attempt to find contextual results from the effect of the flash mob on shoppers’ moods. The study shows that the flash mob enhanced consumers’ arousal, connectedness and positive emotions, as well as consumer-to-consumer interaction.

Theme 3: Ambush Advertising

Ambush advertising is “a form of associative marketing which is designed by an organization to capitalize on the awareness, attention, goodwill, and other benefits, generated by having an association with an event or property, without the organization having an official or direct connection to that event or property” (Chadwick & Burton, 2011, p.714).

Dickson, Naylor, and Phelps (2015) found that majority of the consumers in New Zealand do not favour non-industry specific acts of ambush advertising because they believe that ambush companies should not engage in this kind of practices as it is unethical. However, surprisingly the level of annoyance

was low among consumers. The study also shows that consumer's attitudes and perception does not differ according to age, gender or location of residence. Finally, consumers' attitudes does not differ based on the industries that uses ambush advertising. The study was conducted using questionnaires that were distributed to participants via email.

CONCLUSION

Due to the phenomenon of advertising clutter, consumers nowadays have become experts in avoiding advertisement messages, therefore, in order to fix this problem, marketers and advertisers should be innovative and creative in delivering the messages to their consumers. In this literature review, three salient themes have emerged in regards to the strategies of unconventional advertising: ambient, viral, and ambush strategies. Further studies should be carried out in order to clarify the impacts of each unconventional strategy on consumer behaviour and the development of the business advertised.

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