The effect of animated images on persuasion: The mediator role of hedonic responses and the moderator role of product category

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Résumé
Cette communication a pour objet de mettre en valeur le rôle médiateur des réponses hédoniques, issues du modèle expérientiel, dans la relation entre les images animées par ordinateur des annonces publicitaires télévisées et les réponses attitudinales des individus. Ce papier tente également de mettre en exergue le rôle modérateur de la catégorie de produit. Nous avons dans cet objectif été amenés à manipuler deux catégories d'annonces publicitaires opposant le caractère animé ou pas de l'image. Nous avons également eu recours à deux catégories de produits : un produit de forte implication et un produit de faible implication.

Mots-clés : images animées, hédonique, imagerie mentale, émotion, immersion, implication, catégorie de produit.

Abstract
This paper aims to highlight the mediator role of hedonic responses in the relation between animated images and attitudinal responses. It has another objective which is to show off the moderator role of product category. To this purpose, we have manipulated two categories of advertising opposing computer animated to non-computer animated images. We have also seen two product categories: a high involvement product and a low involvement one.

Keywords : animated images, hedonic, mental imagery, emotion, immersion, implication, product category, involvement.
Introduction

Animated images are still being an unexplored universe. It gives free expression to imagination. It carries up spectator in an imaginary world dreamed by the artists. Advertising is one of the favourite fields of animated images. These propose a trip through unreal pictures all while keeping an anchorage in the reality, which represents an invaluable differentiation in comparison with the competitors. Advertisers and consumers are very attracted by animated images but we can observe that the creation reminds intuitive. Despite the passion for this new form of creative form of pictures and the vast possibilities it offers, no research in advertising –to our knowledge- has leaned over these special pictures. The mystery of their effects on the persuasion of the consumer remains entire.

Research on consumer behaviour have often studied images effects through the information processing theories. The literature concerning the effects of iconic stimuli on attitudinal responses seems not very abundant in comparison with the literature on the effects of images on the memory and learning. Moreover, cognitive approach was always used for the comprehension of attitude formation. The emotional states, neglected until the years 80, allow nevertheless a better comprehension of certain consumption aspects (Zajonc and Markus, 1982; Holbrook et Batra, 1987; Oliver, 1993; Graillot, 1994). The consumer behaviour contains in fact elements of sensation and pleasure, that deserve to be studied for themselves and not only through the direct relations they can have with buying decisions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook and al., 1984).

From this perspective, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) elaborated a conceptual framework. This framework highlights the variables that allow to better explain the consumer behaviour in some particular domains where the experience lived by the individual can be more important than product or service attribute objectives (Bourgeon and Filser, 1993, p.312). This framework called experiential by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) includes individual fantasy, feelings and fun.

This paper joins this approach and tries to understand the effects of animated images on attitudinal responses through the experiential view.

The aim of this communication is to show the superiority effect of the animated pictures in comparison with the non animated pictures in attitude formation. For this to do, we base our study on the literature relating to the experiential perspective. We propose more precisely to understand the formation of attitudinal responses, thanks to the mediator role of hedonic responses, developed in the experiential model, in the relation between the advertising animated pictures and individual attitude. Moreover, we will try to show in this paper that the effect of animated images in television advertising is more important in the case of low product involvement than in the case of high product involvement.

This article will first develop a presentation of the relation between advertising persuasion and experiential treatment as it appears in the literature on the experiential model. Then the conceptual framework and the hypotheses of the research will be presented. The methodology applied and finally the practical and theoretical implications will be detailed (The results of this research and other developments will be presented in the full article).
Experiential treatment and advertising persuasion

The cognitive models of advertising persuasion (the models of cognitive structure and cognitive responses, the dual models, the theory of matching resources, the alternative elaboration models) appeared incomplete. While neglecting the emotions and the specificities of the individuals, these models seem to present gaps. That’s why consumer research has been oriented towards the experiential dimension of the persuasion.

This paragraph relies on the syntheses of the literature on advertising persuasion proposed by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) and Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999) to explain the advertising persuasion from an experiential view. In their approach, the authors open new ways all while showing the complementarity of persuasion theories.

The characteristics of the experiential approach

According to the researchers in social psychology, two types of processing allow a better understanding of consumer behaviour facing different communication types: the experiential processing opposed to the rational or analytic processing. Thus, emotions and personal experiences would have more effect on the persons that adopt experiential processing. On the other hand, the factual elements and the logical arguments would have more effect on the individuals that process information in an analytical way (Epstein and al., 1996).

In marketing, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) proposed an approach based on experience, integrating thus the emotional dimensions. Indeed, the elements linked to the consumer experience present a real interest in the explanation and the comprehension of consumer behaviour (Sheth, 1979; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook and al., 1984). Consumer behaviour holds aspects of sensations and pleasure that deserve to be studied for themselves, outside of the direct relations they can have with purchase decisions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook and al., 1984). According to certain authors, the traditional models of analysis of consumer behaviour prove themselves inapplicable in fields where the emotion constitutes a key element of the behaviour. Thus, products consumed for their own qualities and not those consumed for attributes linked to their functionality as leisure activities, cultural activities, social activities, sports, etc. are part of these domains not satisfied by the traditional explanations (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Lacher and Mizerski 1995). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) underline, in fact, that consumer research has neglected for a long time fantasies, feelings and fun in the consumption experience as for example the leisure consumption, sensation seeking, variety seeking, or hedonic responses (Lacher and Mizerski, 1995) even if today the researchers are more interested today in these aspects.

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) note and deplore the absence of these emotional dimensions in the processing models knowing that the emotions can, better than the cognitive variables, explain certain aspects of the behaviour (Havlena and Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook and Batra, 1987; Bourgeon and Filser 1993).

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) have therefore elaborated a conceptual framework putting in opposition the variables and explanatory elements of the consumer behaviour in situations where the attributes of the consumed product are important (example: the purchase a computer), and the one that influence the behaviour in the situations where the lived experience is more important than these attributes (example: at a concert).
Through this approach, the authors showed that the experiential analysis of the behaviour is different from informational processing models according to the stimulus, to the effect on experiential response variables, on emotional global responses and on individual variables (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Bourgeon 1992; Bourgeon and Filser, 1993; Bourgeon and Filser, 1995).

This research takes advertising as the field of application. If we consider that advertising spots can be watched because of the pleasure they can bring, advertising appears in this case as being part of the application fields studied through experiential view. Thus, this research brings from this approach the elements allowing the explanation of the consumer behaviour in a hedonic communication context. Indeed, the stimuli are non verbal (animated pictures) the benefits are intangible (pleasure and satisfaction), the responses are hedonic (mental imagery, emotion, immersion) and the attitude is studied as a global emotional response. Furthermore, animated pictures, are different from ordinary pictures by their unreal, imaginary character. Thus, they open the way to experiential processing since experiential approach is especially interested in imagination, fantasies (Klinger, 1971) and dreams (Singer, 1966).

**Conceptual framework and hypotheses**

The conceptual framework proposed in this paper is presented in figure 1:

![Conceptual framework](image)

Eight hypotheses follow from this framework:

**H1**: The animated images in advertising by comparison to the non animated images in advertising have a significant positive effect on mental imagery.

**H2**: The animated images in advertising by comparison to the non animated images in advertising have a significant positive effect on emotion.

**H3**: The animated images in advertising by comparison to the non animated images in advertising have a significant positive effect on immersion.

**H4a**: A positive mental imagery has a significant effect on Aad.

**H4b**: A positive mental imagery has a significant effect on Ap.

**H5a**: A positive emotion has a significant effect Aad.
H5b: A positive emotion has a significant effect on Ap.

H6a: A positive immersion has a significant effect on Aad.

H6b: A positive immersion has a significant effect on Ap.

H7a: The animated images in advertising by comparison to the non animated images in advertising have a significant positive effect on Aad.

H7b: The animated images in advertising by comparison to the non animated images in advertising have a significant positive effect on Ap.

H8: The animated images in advertising by comparison to the non animated images in advertising have a stronger positive effect on the hedonic responses of individuals in the case of low involvement products (in comparison with high involvement products).

Methodology

4 advertising spots for an electric car and 4 for a mayonnaise sauce have formed the experiential plan of this research. The animated announcements were selected among advertisements presented in the festival IMAGINA 1997 (France). They have been manipulated to assure a homogeneity in the length, the music, etc. The choice of the non animated announcements was guided by animated withheld advertisements. Several manipulations were necessary for that the different variables are checked and that the comparisons can be done. The animated character is the independent variable that we have therefore handled according to two methods. Thus, we broadcasted to every group at the time of the experiment, 2 advertising announcements with animated pictures or 2 announcements with non animated pictures. The only varying variable was, for every group, the product category.

560 questionnaires were collected in a sample of students. Questions that measure mental imagery, emotion, experience, Aad and Ap were presented on Likert or semantic differential scales (7-points).

Practical and theoretical implications

The first contribution of this research concerns directly the advertising agencies. The results will have repercussions on advertisers studies and commercial choices. The first aim of our research is actually to elaborate a new theoretical framework for advertising. This framework have for goal to allow the advertisers to make better adaptation to the “new technological” means used in advertising images and then to use technological creation in better conditions, because iconic stimuli are essential elements in the advertising television communication. On the other hand, we will probably advise advertisers to consider in their creation emotions, fantasies, dreams, experience and all variables that can affect hedonic responses.

From a theoretical view, this research uses experiential theory in an advertising context. Usually, this approach have been used for explaining leisure activities like theatre, cinema, etc. This research is one of the first application to advertising field.

Finally, this research represents one of the first studies of the effect of animated images in advertising communication.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


