Chapter 82
Cultural Perspectives on Advertising Perceptions and Brand Trustworthiness

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ABSTRACT

The creation of a trustworthy brand identity through advertising has received relatively little attention in European marketing research. Thus, in this chapter, we explore this relationship by undertaking focus group research in the UK and Italy to identify the characteristics of print advertisements perceived as portraying a trustworthy image. The results show that advertisements that are simple, straightforward and clear are perceived as being more trustworthy. However, findings in this chapter also show some differences between our national samples in relation to factors such as colour perception and consumer ethnocentrism. Young consumers are also quite critical of current advertising efforts in building a trustworthy brand image. A discussion of potential solutions and future research directions is provided.

INTRODUCTION[1]

In the current turbulent environment, each global company is interested in examining the factors that affect the perception and evaluation of corporate brands. Among these, the appropriateness of the attitude towards brands emerges as a point of parity and intrinsic interest. Starting from a literature review on brand trustworthiness, and related elements, the moderating role of these issues is studied within different

contexts in a preliminary empirical research. The purpose of this study is to explore how young adults (18-23 years and in university education), and also a sub-segment of Generation Y, evaluate advertising and brands in relation to trustworthiness. Specifically, we explore perceptions of trustworthiness from two groups of consumers in the UK and Italy. Generation Y are widely recognised as an important consumer group worldwide in terms of their aggregate spending (Cui, Trent, Sullivan, & Matiru, 2003) and is also known for their sceptical attitude towards advertising and media (Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle, & Attmann, 2011). Hence this group of consumers is particularly interesting to research in order to identify which aspects of advertisements assist in portraying a trustworthy brand image or not. We also explore the reasons for trusting specific brands and compare advertising perceptions between two cultures that share some cultural dimensions whilst they also differ on others based on dimensions of the GLOBE project (Javidan & House, 2001). The chapter is structured as follows: firstly, a conceptual view of brand trustworthiness is provided followed by a description of the research study including methodology, analysis and discussion of the findings, main contributions of the study, and, finally, conclusions.

BACKGROUND

The importance of corporate image associations in brand evaluations is well-established in the literature (Gürham-Canli & Batra, 2004). A number of such corporate image associations have been identified over the years as innovativeness, dynamism, imaginativeness, quality of goods and services, perceived honesty and trustworthiness, social responsibility, investment value, quality of management, helpfulness and friendliness, and conservative versus informal corporate culture (see e.g. Dowling, 1986; Ambler, 1997). Research has shown that consumers are likely to pay particular attention to associations of innovation, trustworthiness and corporate social responsibility (CSR). An experiment by Gürham-Canli and Batra (2004) demonstrated that consumers are more likely to use such diagnostic information as innovativeness and trustworthiness than other types of associations when there is a higher risk of product failure. In this chapter we concentrate on the importance of brand trustworthiness in the evaluation of advertising information about experience products and service brands as these are considered to be of higher perceived risk compared to consumables. Higher perceived risk generally leads to risk reducing strategies such as more evaluation of product alternatives in purchase situations, trial, and deeper processing of product information in advertisements and other promotional material (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005). Essentially, trustworthiness relates to an overall assessment of brand (image) credibility and a trustworthy brand reputation can have a positive impact on brand equity (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Gounaris & Vlasis, 2004). For example, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) examined 107 brands and found that brand trustworthiness had a strong impact on brand loyalty in both its forms i.e. attitudinal loyalty and purchase loyalty which then led to increases in market share and premium pricing. Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2004, 2005) also found a positive relationship between brand trust, brand loyalty and brand equity. Hence, brand trustworthiness leads to many positive outcomes for the brand owner. It is therefore important to establish how it can be created.

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