Chapter 16


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ABSTRACT

Narrative advertising has emerged as a popular advertising practice to communicate an authentic and engaging brand story. New media platforms such as YouTube and video advertising have allowed advertisers and marketers to tell longer brand stories. Scholars have attempted to explain the effectiveness of narrative advertising and storytelling execution through narrative transportation or self-referencing perspective. This chapter employs a combination of critical literature review and a case study approach. This book chapter provides an assessment of current practices and theoretical explorations in narrative advertising. The authors conclude this chapter by providing two best practices in narrative advertising to explain this popular advertising practice and explore its implications for the advertising and marketing communications industry.

INTRODUCTION

Narrative advertising has recently attracted a lot of attention among advertising and marketing communications practitioners and researchers (Bacon, 2013; Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2008, 2009, 2013; Lien & Chen, 2011). However, using narratives in advertising and marketing has long been studied...
as early as 1998, when Escalas (1998) first published a survey of television advertising in the U.S. and found that 62% of them include some types of narrative structure. In essence, narrative advertising creates a brand story that audience finds relevant to their life. The increasing popularity of video advertising on YouTube, in particular, its long-form video format, enables advertisers to develop an elaborately-told brand story to better engage consumers (Parekh, 2010). For example, Lady Gaga’s 9-minute “Telephone” video campaign includes storytelling scenes such as a lesbian kiss, expletives, graphic violence, mass murder and nudity and the ad has been questioned for its suitability for television (Daily Mail Monitor, 2010; Parekh, 2010). This narrative advertising campaign has, however, generated over 28 million views on YouTube (Parekh, 2010). The popularity of longer narrative advertising is partially due to its abilities to better engage consumers than traditional 15-, 30-, or 60-second advertising formats (Parekh, 2010). Furthermore, longer narrative contents do not necessarily cost more for advertisers than traditional television advertising (Parekh, 2010). The enhanced engagement with narrative advertising is likely to generate what is commonly known as “narrative transportation” to persuade consumers (Kim, Lloyd, & Cervellon, 2016).

Storytelling, an execution technique, is often related to narrative advertising. Both terms refer to how a brand provides “consistent and compelling content to build a picture” of a brand (Bacon, 2013, n.p.) by telling an emotionally-engaging story. Storytelling is important to create a brand’s identity through this compelling narrative (Bacon, 2013). A brand storytelling agency, Aesop, surveyed 1,500 adults in U.K. to identify which brands best tell their story (Bacon, 2013). Among these top 10 storytelling brands are Apple, Cadbury, Walkers, Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, Marks & Spencer, Kellogg’s, Heinz, Fairy, and IKEA (Bacon, 2013). Specialized agencies on storytelling such as Narrative have been created to capitalize on this opportunity (Swant, 2017). The Shorty Awards winning agency, WP Narrative, advertises its strengths in “tap[ping] into the zeitgeist of what’s next, and the convergence of culture, technology and media consumption to create stories that resonate, engage, and entertain” (WP Narrative, n.d., https://wpnarrative.com/). The recent emergence of digital advertising has generated a new practice of narrative advertising, also known as sequential advertising pioneered by Facebook (West, 2013). This new form of digital narrative advertising enables “each advertising message informs the next one” (West, 2013). Similarly, WP Narrative has also employed a variety of emerging media technologies such as artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IOT), augmented reality, virtual reality, and data visualization to create engaging brand stories (https://wpnarrative.com/). With these technological advancements, some advertisers are experimenting with digital storytelling with programmatic dynamic delivery of highly personalized advertising messages (Perrin, 2018).

Objectives of This Chapter

This book chapter provides a critical review of academic studies in narrative advertising and multi-platform storytelling. The authors attempt to summarize and critique how these three areas of literature would generate insights to help advertising and marketing communications practitioners to develop more effective narrative advertising campaigns. The authors conclude this chapter with two best practice examples of narrative advertising in generating consumers’ brand awareness, perception, liking, and conversation with the advertised brand, Mr. Clean and Honey Maid.
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