

COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY. THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING MESSAGES ACCORDING TO PERSONALITY TRAITS

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Abstract

In most cases, the persuasive communication of the information contained in advertisements is carried out according to gender or age characteristics and to the target group's interests. In this article we are analysing the idea according to which there is a connection between messages and the receiver's personality profile (Hirsh, Kang and Bodenhausen, 2012). Therefore, we asked a research population to assess a five-version advertisement of a mobile phone. The advertisements were created in order to correspond to each of the personality superfactors of the Big Five model. Also, the students filled in a personality survey (the Romanian version of the Big Five model). The findings show that adjusting the messages to individual personality could be a way to increase the message's impact and to highlight the potential of the communication strategies centred on personality traits.

Keywords: communication, messages, personality, advertisement

Messages, advertisements and personality

The communication of advertising messages is a major field of activity and an essential component of the global economy. It is believed that psychology plays an essential role in the identification of the strategies used for improving the effectiveness of persuasive communication. (Cialdini, 2007, Petty, Cacioppo, 1996). Such a strategy consists in building messages according to receivers' characteristics. Since this can be easily tested and it is recognisable in advertisements, whose informative text should be concise and supported by the force of an idea (Moldoveanu and Miron, 1995, Balgiu and Adîr, 2009), we have focused on the small-sized text. In general, the message of advertisements was adapted to gender and age characteristics, but also to audience's interests. A new hypothesis is emerging, that is the necessity of the congruence between the advertising message and the personality type. Hirsh, Kang and Bodenhausen (2012) explored this possibility by analysing the effect of the congruence message-person obtained by framing the persuasive messages in the personality traits which are mentioned in the Big Five model: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience. Each of the five personality dimensions also reflects an aspect of the motivational system. For example, the Extraverts are sensitive to

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rewards and social attention, the individuals with high Agreeableness value common goals and interpersonal harmony, the Conscious persons value personal fulfilment, tidiness and effectiveness, those defined by high Neuroticism are sensitive to uncertainty and threats, and the individuals Open to experience value creativity, innovation and intellectual stimulation. (McCrae and Costa, 1997).

Method

Subjects: 89 students in the technical field (58 boys and 31 girls) with age average $M = 21,26$, $A.S. = 1,32$

Hypothesis The impact of a persuasive message is congruent with the receiver's personality profile.

Materials

– Secondly, there have been used five types of advertisements in textual form, for a mobile phone called XPhone. The text in the advertisements was manipulated so that each advertisement could highlight motivational aspects related to one of the five personality superfactors, for example for Extraversion. "XPhone is the result of everything they've learned so far, a phone designed for strong, active, outgoing people like you. With the new XPhone, you'll always be where the excitement is. You're the life of the party, and the XPhone will keep you in the spotlight. Experience the fun and rewards of the latest technology, and express yourself to the world. Get in touch with your social side and harness the power of the XPhone to get you more of the attention you deserve." For Self-actualization: "XPhone is the result of everything they've learned so far, pushing the envelope of innovation. With the new XPhone, you'll have access to information like never before, so your mind stays active and inspired. Designed with intelligence and sophistication, the XPhone helps you channel your imagination wherever it leads you. Broaden your horizons with the latest technology, and discover the world in ways you never thought possible. Get in touch with your creative side and the XPhone."

The subjects evaluated each advertisement using a scale of five points (1 – strong disagreement – 5 – strong agreement) answering the following six items 1 – I think this advertisement is persuasive; 2 – This is an effective advertisement; 3 – After I have seen this advertisement, I would buy this product; 4 – I like this advertisement; 5 – After I have seen this advertisement I would like to know more about this product; 6 – After I have seen this advertisement I would like to learn more about this phone.

In the end we built an average of the answers provided for the six statements.

Results and discussions

In the statistical analysis we preferred the method proposed by Hirsh et al. (2012) which consists of comparing the correlation indexes. Therefore, on the one hand, we correlated each of the five superfactors with the choices which correspond to the respective factor. The difference between the two types of correlations shows that the correlation indexes are bigger in the first correlational analysis in comparison with the second one. Under these conditions, we obtained the following results: for Extraversion (r .difference = .25, $t = 1,85$), for Maturity (r . difference = -.29, $t = - 3,80$), for Agreeableness, (r . difference = .20, $t = 1,50$), for Consciousness (r . difference = .13, $t =$

1,20), for Auto-actualization (r . difference = .18, $t = 1,21$). All the results are calculated at $p < .005$. We can notice that the evaluations for each advertisement are congruent with the corresponding personality factors, with the exception of the Maturity superfactor. It is possible that this result could be caused by the difference in content between the Neuroticism factor in the Big Five Aspects Scales – the tool which was used in Hirsh et al. (2012) research and the Maturity one from the survey, which was administered to the Romanian population. The Neuroticism factor is, in its structure, a negative one, usually defined as a tendency to easily experience unpleasant emotions such as anger, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression or vulnerability. To the same extent, Costa and McCrae (1990) – the authors of the Big Five model– define Neuroticism as a general tendency to experience fear, sadness, guilt and disgust. The Maturity factor from the ABCD-M (Minulescu, 2008) survey focuses more on adaptability, generosity and on aspects which involve the lack of social anxiety, control over negative emotions.

The congruence between the other four factors: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Actualisation and the evaluation of the corresponding advertisements is promising for building messages in correlation with personality traits.

Conclusions

In the above-mentioned study we investigated the importance of adapting advertising messages to personality traits. We could consider that this way of building messages has a significant impact when they are congruent with the receiver's personality traits. In other words, the effectiveness of building messages increases with the adaptability to the receiver's unique traits. The investigation suggests that the way of building messages according to individuals' personality profile may bring about an effective persuasive campaign. Given the fact that building messages according to individuals' traits seems to be an innovative technique, we can recommend the sales websites which collect data about individuals to give importance to personality traits.

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