

The Parody Attack Ad Influences the Ad Effect: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Need for Humor and Anti-Commercial Consumer Rebellion

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ABSTRACT—Parody is an effective advertising method in Taiwan, which can indeed reduce consumers' positive attitudes toward the brand if the parody attack ad reveals a true brand defect. In addition, consumers favor parody ads containing humorous elements, and they prefer images over text because images can more directly deliver ad messages. This research investigates whether the two moderating variables, the need for humor (NFH) and anti-commercial consumer rebellion (ACR), play a moderating role among consumers' attitudes toward parody ads, their attitudes toward the brand parodied, and their purchase intention. The two personal traits, NFH and ACR, lead to positive moderating effects. The 396 participants in this research were graduate and undergraduate students in Taiwan, and the results showed that the moderating result was that these two personal traits do cause positive moderating effects. This research proposes a framework describing how the parody attack ad influences the ad effect. Future studies could use this framework to examine the effect of parody ads on the effects of adverts, and explore the moderating effects of NFH and ACR on the effectiveness of adverts.

Keywords— Parody attack ads, Anti-commercial consumer rebellion (ACR), Need for humor (NFH)

1. INTRODUCTION

Statistics show that over 24% of the ads broadcasted during the TV prime time and 35% of the radio ads adopt humor to deliver messages (Weinberger et al., 1995), which means humorous ads are highly accepted by the general public. According to Speck (1987), over 60% of the commercial ads resort to humor in an effort to increase product purchasing. Another study finds out 69% of the 113 CLIO award-winning ads are humorous. Humorous ads are often on the winning list of Cannes Lions Ad Festival and Chicago Ad Award (Weinberg et. al, 1995; Madden and Weinberger, 1982). It can thus be said that resorting to humor is an effective, widely accepted approach in ad marketing. According to Madden et al. (1988), more positive impact can be produced in humorous ads than in non-humorous ads. Audiences' attention on the ads can be improved if the ads are humorous (Weinberger et al., 1995; Weinberger and Gulas, 1992), and audiences will better remember the brand featured by the ads (Spotts et al., 1997). Arias-Bolzmann et al. (2000) also discover that humorous ads enhance audiences' positive attitude toward the ads and brand.

Lou and Wang (2014) was pointed out that parody is an effective advertising method in Taiwan. Parody is defined as an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect. The primary intention of parody in advertising is to play with humor to favor brand evaluation (positive attitudes), recall, and recognition (Jean, 2011). Some ads use parody to promote one brand as better than the parodied brand (a take on a comparison ad). In other ads, parody is used to promote social welfare rather than a brand message. These types of ads serve very different purposes. Mocking the brand can be achieved by changing the characteristics (e.g., words, images) in the original ads. Parody attack ads are just one type of parody ad (Lou and Wang, 2014).

In this research, the focus will be on the extent to which moderating variable in Taiwan impact of these parody ads. This research is follow-up research onto the work of Lou and Wang (2014), and this research investigated whether the two moderating variables, the Need for humor (NFH) and Anti-commercial consumer rebellion (ACR), play a moderating role among consumers' attitudes toward parody ads, their attitudes toward the brand parodied, and their purchase intention.

2. HUMOROUS AND PARODY ADS

Speck (1987) categorizes humorous ads into five types: (1) Comic wit: humor in an inconsistent or incomplete way, (2) Sentimental humor: humor with a sense of warmth, (3) Satire: humor either in an inconsistent and incomplete way or in a contemptuous manner, (4) Sentimental comedy: humor either in an inconsistent and incomplete way or with a sense of warmth, and (5) Full comedy: humor in an inconsistent and incomplete way, with a sense of warmth, and in a contemptuous manner. Speck believes that satire is the best way to help audiences understand the ad messages while the full comedy can most gain audiences' attention. This classification on humor types is so complete that researchers on humorous ads mostly follow Speck's theories.

Spotts et al. (1997) classify Speck's theories and categorize humorous ads into three types. The first type is affective-oriented, in which humor is created by releasing emotions that have been held back. In an affective humorous ad, a nervous beginning is usually followed by a soothing and stable ending. As the nervous feeling is gone, humor is created. The second type is cognitive-oriented, which is based on the incongruity-resolution theory. In a cognitive humorous ad, incongruous messages are delivered. When audiences notice the inconsistency between the ad messages and their expectations, they try to find out an answer in the ad. Once the answer is found, humorous effects are achieved. The third type is social-oriented, which is based on the superiority theory. Humor is the outcome of realizing how one is more superior to the others. In a social humorous ad, the superior ones are usually the audiences. By mocking, attacking, belittling, and making a fool of others, humor is produced.

Parody is defined as an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect. Such comic effect does not necessarily have to convey defect. A brand can be attacked by changing the characteristics of the original ads. For other ads, parody is intended to promote social welfare rather than promote a brand message (Lou and Wang, 2014). Parody attack ads are produced not only by competitors, but also by anti-commercial organizations such as Adbuster Media Foundation in Canada, or Internet users who are unhappy with certain brands.

3. NEED FOR HUMOR (NFH)

Consumers' response to an ad shows an interaction between their traits and the ad's characteristics. Cline, Machleit, and Kellaris have defined a new personal trait called the Need for Levity (NFL) measured by the extent to which a person desires humor and novelty (Cline et al., 2011). Both a sense of humor and a tendency to pursue levity are encompassed by this trait. Four dimensions are considered in measuring the need for levity: internal humor, external humor, internal whimsy, and external whimsy. This research focuses on the two-humor-related dimensions, which represent a need for humor.

Humor preference refers to individual or cultural influences on the appreciation of humor. One's preference for certain types of humor represents one's social and mental outlook (Crawford and Gressley, 1991). This idea can be explained by both the advantage theory and the misattribution theory of humor. When making a comparison between their present and the past, or between themselves and others, individuals may feel a sense of superiority and thus prefer humor from a perspective of superiority. Conversely, if individuals realize they are not as superior as they had assumed, they will prefer humor that relates more to depreciation and retaliation (Zillmann et al., 1993). Different humor preferences imply individual and cultural differences, as people recognize themselves in the context of social and cultural networks (Franzini, 1996).

As Gelb and Zinkhan (1985) point out, the fact that everyone defines "interesting" differently must be taken into account. Individual differences in humor incorporate humor appreciation, humor creativity, humor reception, and humor preference. The need for humor (NFH) is a measurement of the differences between individuals in their response to humor. Cline (1997) defined the NFH as individuals' tendency to create or seek humor. According to Cline and Kellaris (2007), the NFH moderates how well a person memorizes a humorous ad. Audiences with higher NFH levels are better at memorizing the content of humorous ads (Cline and Kellaris, 2007).

Following the early research on humor in advertising numerous studies have attempted to explain the relationship between humor and ad outcomes. Accordingly, the goal of our research is to provide a clearer picture of parody's role in advertising by examining important personality traits that shape the effects of NFH on consumers' recall, as well as the processes underlying such effects. This research focuses on how the NFH moderates consumers' response to parody attack ads. As Punj and Stewart (1983) note, individual difference variables, like the NFH, are the best predictors of consumer behavior. Each individual's background, living environment, and education shape their personal traits, and the way they understand and relate to humor. People's response to parody ads is based on their NFH. As Cline et al. (2003) note, consumers' NFH determines to what extent they are influenced by humor. Consumers with higher NFH levels have more positive attitudes toward humor stimulation, and a more negative attitude toward brand parodies, than those with lower NFH. Thus, the following hypotheses were tested:

H₁: Consumers' NFH levels have a positive moderating effect on their attitude toward the ad when fact to parody attack ad.

H₂: Consumers' NFH levels have a positive moderating effect on their attitude toward the brand when fact to attack parody ad.

4. ANTI-COMMERCIAL CONSUMER REBELLION (ACR)

Most consumers have had the experience of being discontented with certain brands, products, or services. More and more consumers have begun to rebel against commercial marketing after realizing that capitalism and commercial activities have detrimental consequences for the global economy, politics, culture, and the environment. Marketing strategies are believed to be the culprits for these negative effects. Sociologists define rebellion as resistance against institutionalized social norms. According to McKee (1969), rebellion means to abandon social norms that once were accepted by the public, and to create a series of social norms encompassing new cultural goals and institutional meanings. The anti-commercial consumer rebellion (ACR) is built on similar principles. Graham Austin, Plouffe, and Peters (2005) define the anti-commercial consumer rebellion as a type of voluntary rebellion against institutionalized marketing strategies.

Rebellion acts from aggressive anti-commercial consumers may be destructive or even violent. During the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in Seattle, protesters had serious conflicts with police outside the building. They protested against brands like Nike, GAP, and Starbucks, claiming that they threaten the survival of local businesses in manufacturing or marketing. Some local people, no longer able to afford long-term deficits, chose to shut down their businesses. To call attention to this inevitable damage to local culture, similar protests are launched every time a WTO conference is held.

Not all consumers are so aggressive in expressing their dissatisfaction against consumerism and capitalism. In 2003, over 50 million consumers in the United States registered their phone numbers on the government's "Do Not Call" list to avoid marketing calls. The registration did not lead to serious conflicts, like the protests outside the WTO conference, but it did indicate that many consumers rebel against marketing, and choose not to shop in big chain malls or buy over-marketed products. When levels of anti-commercial consumer rebellion (ACR) are high, consumers display more resistance to marketing. An assumption of this study was that consumers' purchase intention would be more likely to be influenced in a negative manner. Thus, the following hypothesis was tested:

H₃: Consumers' ACR levels have a positive moderating effect on the influence of parody attack ads on purchase intentions.

5. RESEARCH MODEL

In this research, following Lou and Wang (2014), whether consumers' emotions influence their attitudes toward the ad, attitudes toward the brand featured in the ad, and purchase intentions are analyzed. Furthermore, this research to discuss the moderating effect of the two personal traits, NFH and ACR lead to positive moderating effects (Cline et al., 2003; Graham Austin et al., 2005). Figure 1 shows the research model.

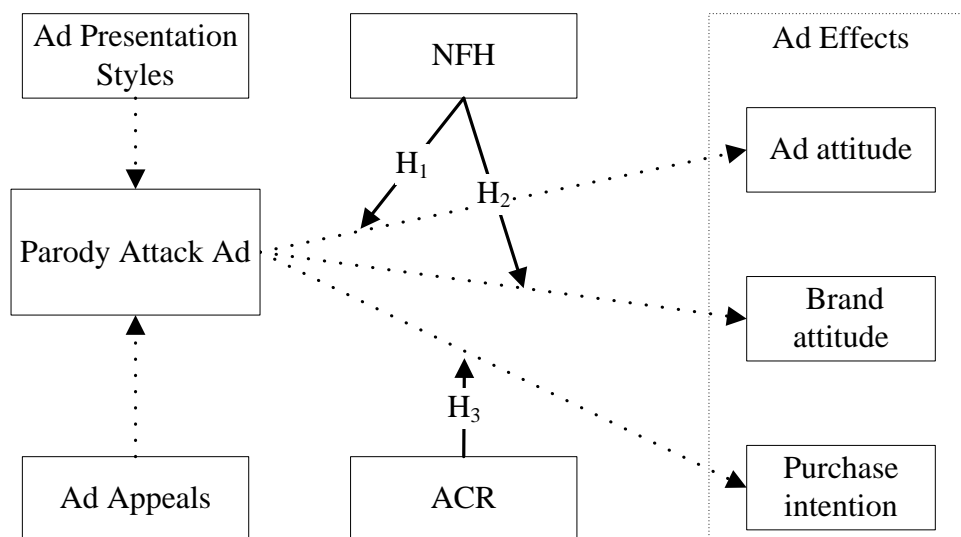


Figure 1: Research framework

6. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The participants were sampled from a University (Taiwan). Experiments were carried out for 10 days. Each participant will watch the different groups of three print ads and fill out the questionnaire. The experimental time takes approximately 20 minutes, in order to avoid other factors affect the experimental results. During the ten-day sampling, the participants were chosen randomly and divided into two groups. Some of the parody ads used in this experiment came from the Internet, and some were made by the researchers. The focus of this research is print ads, which can include either text or images. Each group completed three phases. First, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire of ACR and NFH. Second, participants were exposed to the original ad than asked to fill in questionnaires. Third, participants were exposed to parody ads that varied in presentation or appeal than asked to fill in questionnaires (attitudes toward the ad, attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions).

In the presentation of parody ads section, an ad containing only text is considered a text-intensive ad. An ad containing mostly images is an image-intensive ad. To take a parody ad featuring McDonald's as an example, an ad containing only the slogan "I'm fat" is a text-intensive ad. In contrast, an ad that shows the back of a boy who became fat because of McDonald's is an image-intensive ad. The image-intensive ad reads "There's a little M in everyone," implying that America suffers from the problem of excessive obesity because of fast food empires such as McDonalds. The text is featured on the back of an obese man showing the effect of such food on people.¹ Those ads are parody attack ads, conveying the message that fast food has serious negative effects on consumers in America and globally, and pointing out that people still continue to eat this kind of food regardless of their knowledge of how bad the food actually is for people.

In the appeal of parody ads section, For example, in a parody attack ad targeting UPS, consumers have to rely on FedEx rather than UPS to deliver goods. The ad is artfully showing FedEx's superior cargo capacity by highlighting UPS's functional defects.² The ad shows a FedEx truck carrying a UPS truck on its trailer, which makes it appear as if two full-sized UPS semi-trucks are contained within the FedEx trailer. FedEx is demonstrating their superior cargo capacity by implying that their trucks could really carry two UPS semi-trucks.

In contrast, in a parody attack ad targeting Apple, the comparison between one emaciated child and the slimness of the iPad indicates that starving children are waiting for assistance while consumers are rushing for consumable electronic devices. This ad highlights moral defects.³ This is a design parody of Apple Computers, featured in Adbusters magazine. It shows someone holding an iPad and then handing it to a starving child. The byline "Thinner than ever" compares the iPad design, which keeps getting slimmer, with the child, who is getting thinner because he is starving. This fake ad conveys the message that, while our consumer goods are getting smaller and more attractive, some children are suffering from starvation due to serious social and political problems.

Those parody attack ads are examples of skilled graphic design. They usually reference commonly known advertisements, but usually will add their own perspective on the subject matter. Parody attack ads usually use the same typefaces and layout of the original ad, but will add their own pictures or drawings. The designer's intent is usually to convey a social or political message through humor. These ads often contain puns or ironic statements, to try to represent the "truth" about a product or company that sells consumer goods.

7. HYPOTHESIS TESTING AND DISCUSSION

There were 396 valid questionnaires (196 for the ad presentation group and 200 for the ad appeal group). The ACR and NFH's items on the questionnaire were developed in prior research and have adequate reliability and validity on a 7-point Likert scale (Cline et al., 2003; Graham Austin et al., 2005). Cronbach's α coefficients were all above 0.7 and AVE were all above 0.5 in this study. The main effect has been confirmed by Lou and Wang (2014) between presentation style and ad appeals are supported on attitudes toward the ad, attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions. This research in order to examine the moderating effect is combining the parody attack ads to two factors design. The presentation group transform to original ad attitude vs. parody attitude. Also, the appeal group transform to original brand attitude vs. parody brand attitude and original purchase intention vs. parody purchase intentions. In moderating effect of this research, using a regression analysis (dummy variable), this study examined if consumers' attitudes toward ads (measured by brand and purchase intention) were positively or negatively influenced by the parody ads. The two personal traits NFH and ACR led to positive moderating effects. Consumers with high NFH had stronger positive attitudes toward the ad parodied and brand. Consumers with high ACR had stronger negative purchase intention.

¹ See more information about ad graphic design. Retrieved Jan 30, 2015 from <https://www.adbusters.org/content/theres-little-mcdonalds-everyone>

² See more information about ad graphic design. Retrieved Jan 30, 2015 from <http://infotruck.blogspot.tw/2012/05/trucking-industry-news-usa.html>

³ See more information about ad graphic design. Retrieved Jan 30, 2015 from <https://www.adbusters.org/content/thinner-ever>

The relationship between consumers' NFH and their attitude toward the ad was significant according to the regression equation ($t = 3.723, p < .001$; Table 1). Regarding the NFH, the interaction term (dummy \times NFH, 0 = non-parody ad, 1 = parody ad) was significant, indicating that the NFH does play a moderating role. The positive β coefficient (0.395) and t-value indicates that the moderating effect was positive, supporting H₁. The relationship between consumers' NFH and their attitude toward the brand was significant according to the regression equation ($t = -2.126, p < 0.05$; Table 2). Regarding the NFH, the interaction term (dummy \times NFH, 0 = non-parody ad, 1 = parody ad) was significant, indicating that the NFH does play a moderating role. The negative β coefficient (-0.204) and t-value shows that the moderating effect was positive on attitude toward the brand, supporting H₂.

The relationship between consumers' ACR and their purchase intention was significant according to the regression equation ($t = -3.327, p < .001$; Table 3). Regarding the ACR, the interaction term (dummy \times ACR, 0 = non-parody ad, 1 = parody ad) was significant, indicating that the ACR does play a moderating role. Given the negative β coefficient (-0.398) and t-value indicates that the moderating effect was positive on purchase intention, supporting H₃.

Overall, consumers' attitudes toward the ad and brand, and their purchase intention, were significantly different after they were exposed to parody attack ads (Lou and Wang, 2014). The result for the moderator testing in the two groups was the same. First, compared to consumers with high NFH, those with low NFH had a more positive attitude toward the ad parodied, and a negative attitude toward the brand parodied. Second, compared to consumers with low ACR, those with high ACR had a more negative purchase intention. Therefore, H₁, H₂, and H₃ are supported.

Table 1: The Moderating effect of NFH on attitude toward the ad

	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
NFH	2.25	7.00	5.25	0.98
DV: Attitude toward the Ad		Beta	t	Sig
Step 1	Dummy variable	0.618	19.029	0.000
$R^2 = 0.382; \Delta R^2 = 0.381$				
Step 2	Dummy variable	0.234	2.209	0.028
	Dummy * NFH	0.395	3.723	0.000
$R^2 = 0.387; \Delta R^2 = 0.385; R^2 \text{ change} = 0.005; P < 0.028$				

Table 2: The Moderating effect of NFH on attitude toward the brand

	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
NFH	2.67	7.00	5.25	0.98
DV: Attitude toward the Brand		Beta	t	Sig
Step 1	Dummy variable	-0.691	-23.400	0.000
$R^2 = 0.478; \Delta R^2 = 0.477$				
Step 2	Dummy variable	-0.497	-5.185	0.000
	Dummy * NFH	-0.204	-2.126	0.034
$R^2 = 0.482; \Delta R^2 = 0.480; R^2 \text{ change} = 0.004; P < 0.034$				

Table 3: The Moderating effect of ACR on purchase intention

	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
ACR	2.67	7.00	5.25	0.980
DV: Attitude toward the Ad		Beta	t	Sig
Step 1	Dummy variable	-0.659	-21.438	0.000
$R^2 = 0.435; \Delta R^2 = 0.434$				
Step 2	Dummy variable	-0.270	-2.259	0.024
	Dummy * ACR	-0.398	-3.327	0.001
$R^2 = 0.439; \Delta R^2 = 0.437; R^2 \text{ change} = 0.005; P < 0.024$				

8. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research investigated whether the two moderating variables base on research with Lou and Wang (2014), the NFH and ACR, play a moderating role among consumers' attitudes toward parody ads, their attitudes toward the brand parodied, and their purchase intention. We showed that these two personal traits do have positive moderating effects. In other words, consumers with high NFH can better understand the humor in parody ads, a finding which agrees with the research of Cline et al., (2003). Additionally, consumers with high ACR already rebel against commercialized brand marketing. When exposed to parody ads, and a greater understanding of the defects of the brand, they develop a much more negative attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. This conclusion supports the findings of Graham Austin

et al., (2005).

This research proposes a framework describing how the parody attack ad influences the ad effect. Parody ads seem to have positive effects on attitude toward ads, but negative effects on attitudes to the brand and purchase intention. Past research has emphasized the growing effects of ad communication, but has not focused very much on the effect of negative ads. This research suggests that there is a relationship between consumers' attitude toward the parody ad and their attitude toward the brand in parody attack ads. The findings also indicate that ACR has a negative effect on purchase intention, and NFH has a positive effect on attitudes toward the brand and the ads parodied. In addition, ACR may have a negative effect on consumers' attitude toward their purchase intention. Future studies could use this framework to examine the effect of parody ads on the effects of adverts, and explore the moderating effects of NFH and ACR on the effectiveness of adverts (Figure 2).

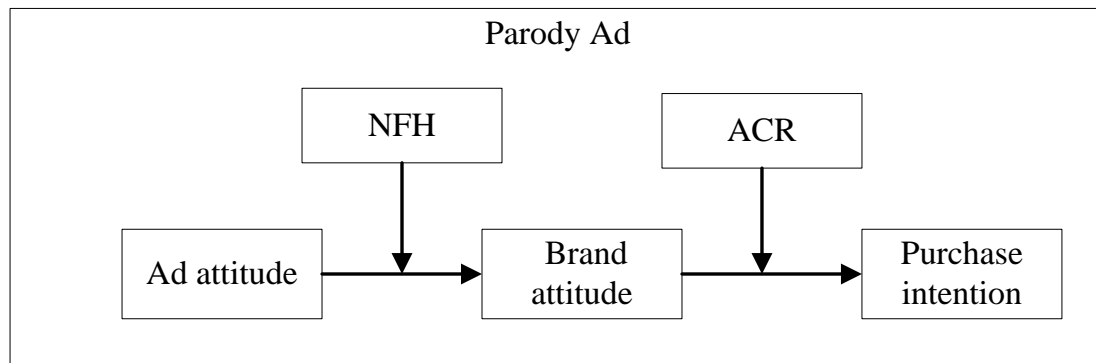


Figure 2: Future research framework

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