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Preliminary Master Thesis

The impact of messages – How retail companies can change consumer attitudes

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Executive Summary

Previous research on branding has mainly focused on the fast-moving consumer goods sector and the research on the retail sector is more narrow than other fields. This paper proposes a relevant research question where the aim is to find out how retail companies should use advertisements in digital platforms to stand out in a positive way and thus change consumers brand attitude.

Previous research has touched upon several topics that helped the authors to form a proper research proposition and eight hypotheses. Further, secondary data will be used to specifically analyze retail companies that have managed to stand out and change consumers brand attitude and purchase intentions in a positive way. Thus, these cases will be analyzed to see if we can find some commonalities between retail companies that succeed with use of message in digital communication platforms. Results of the study will be useful for retail companies as it will provide guidance to how retail companies should form and communicate messages on digital platforms.

The preliminary paper consists of three parts. The first part is an introduction of the topic and highlights the importance of the study. The second part consists of a literature review where advertisement effectiveness, attitudes, purchase intentions, emotions, behavioral targeting, personalized communication, and social media are discussed. There exists a gap in the literature of the retail industry when it comes to what communication actually works and how a company can change consumer attitudes in the most efficient way by forming good messages in digital communication platforms. The third part describes the design of the study and the process.

1.0 Introduction

Retail is a major sector in Norway where companies spend millions of NOK annually on advertising. However, research related to branding, advertising effectiveness, and communication within this sector is limited. So far, most of empirical research address narrow and industry-specific issues, such as fast-moving consumer goods and high-technology industries. Past research highlights the lack of contribution in the retail sector, and especially when it comes to the impact of message types or media selection as it addresses critical concerns needed by both practitioners and advertising scholars (Stafford & Day, 1995). Stafford and Day (1995), studied the area of how rational and emotional messages appeals to consumers. They found evidence that a rational message appeal generated higher levels of attitude toward the ad than an emotional appeal. However, concerning when the study was conducted, and as the extensive development of the technology has brought digital platforms to a new level, shifted the role of the different platforms, and extended the expectations of consumers, this study can be seen as fairly undated.

Businesses and consumers have witnessed a shift from crafting a general message to tailoring messages to fit various media platforms and different consumers. However, although most retail businesses are having a presence on various communication channels, there is a big distinction between businesses that manage a big shift in business performance as a result of the formed message. According to Jones-Mitchell (2016) companies spend more time on which social and digital platforms to use in marketing campaigns than to focus on the core message that they are communicating. This often lead to mixed signals in the different channels and very often small results. The area of digital marketing communication has been well studied by several researchers. However, despite an increased number of studies around its effectiveness and possibilities, the field lacks knowledge around the message that is communicated in digital platforms. Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana and Islam (2017), study support this view by arguing the message as the most important predictor in perceiving the value of the advertisement.

Based on this, we aim to fulfil a gap in retail advertisement effectiveness and the factors that affect consumer attitudes by conducting a study to uncover similarities between companies that managed to change attitudes and become the preferred choice over their competitors. To the authors knowledge, this topic has not been studied in any previous work.

In conclusion, we propose the following research question for our study:
How can retail companies use advertisements on digital platforms to stand out in a positive way and thus change consumers brand attitude?

Our contribution to existing research is to shed light over advertising effects on a critical marketing outcome: the consumers change in attitude towards the brand through communication in digital platforms.

2.0 Literature Review

The following section will provide a review of past research and other theoretical aspects that are relevant for this study. Important findings regarding attitude change, advertisement effectiveness, emotions and moods, and digital advertisement will be discussed. As outlined in the introduction and the research question, this paper will study retail companies use of message in digital communication platforms. Bovée, Thill, and Schartzman (2004), define communication as the process of sending and receiving messages.

2.1 Advertisement effectiveness

Firms invest in advertising to create awareness for new products, prices, and special offers. However, there are many possibilities to deliver ads to a targeted market segment. Nowadays, firms have the ability to reach a large audience and target consumers that both have a relative preference for a firm's product, and consumers that have a relative preference for the competitor's product. A study by Rosa-Branca Esteves and Joana Resende (2016), add new findings to the literature suggesting that firms should either advertise intensively to its strong market where consumers have a relative preference for the products, or more intensively to its weak market where consumers have more preference for your competitors.

H1: Targeted ads will increase brand preference

McQuarrie and Mick (1996, p 425), studied the effect of rhetorical figures in advertising, and defined a rhetorical figure as an "artful deviation". In other words, it occurs when the expression deviates to some extent from the expectation and the original meaning. Incongruity is one factor that attracts attention and thus keeps the reader interested (Berlyne, 1971). Figurative rhetoric language usage is more memorable and sticks to the mind of the recipient in a different manner than pure information and facts. McQuarrie and Mick (1996), divided modes of figuration into schematic mode and tropic mode. Schematic mode occurs when the text contains excessive regularity or order, while tropic mode occurs when there are irregularities or deficiency in the text. Schemes are overcoded in the sense that they add internal redundancy to advertising messages, such as the use of repetition or rhyme in a text to increase the memorability. A trope, on the other hand, are undercoded in the sense that it is incomplete and lack closure. Tropes therefore invites elaboration and takes more time to process by the recipient.

H2: Use of Rhetorical figures will increase the effectiveness of the ad

In intensified markets, marketers are turning towards producing more creative ads to overcome consumers perceptual barriers, gain their attention and enhance attitudes towards their brands. A study of advertising creativity by Ang, Lee, and Leong (2007) found interesting results regarding ad effectiveness. Advertising creativity is conceptualized as a function of novelty, meaningfulness, and connectedness. In an advertising, novelty and meaningfulness involves info centric aspects, whereas connectedness relates to the perspective of audience. According to this study, the relationship between the three dimensions reflects the ad's effectiveness. Results of the study revealed that novel and meaningful ads generate higher ad recall, more favorable ad attitudes, and more positive feelings, relative to non-novel and meaningful ads. Moreover, novel and non-meaningful ads elicit higher recall, more favorable attitudes toward non-claim elements, and negative feelings, and less favorable ad attitudes toward claim elements than non-novel and

non-meaningful ads. Contrary to ads that did not connect with the audience, connected ads elicited high ad recall, more favorable claim elements under meaningful ads and vice versa, and higher levels of non-claim elements and warm feelings under both meaningful and non-meaningful ads. However, as ad campaigns often focus on being novel and forget to be meaningful and connected ads, creative ads do not always result in a more favorable brand attitude and purchase intention.

Online advertising was defined by Harker (2008, p 296) as, "Any form of commercial content available on the internet, delivered by any channel, in any form, designed to inform customers about a product or service at any degree of depth". Online advertising consists of three primary constituents; display advertising, search engine optimization, and search engine marketing. Several studies have found that there has been an increase in the negativity in consumers perceptions of online advertising (Chatterjee, 2008; Shavitt, Vargas, and Lowrey, 2004). A study conducted by Li, Edwards, and Lee (2002), found that pop-up and banner advertisements are perceived to be intrusive by consumers. Such advertisement was seen as interrupting and intruding to their tasks and lead to irritation among a vast majority of consumers. From a company perspective, such negative effects can potentially lead to lower brand attitudes in a short-term perspective. The study by Truong and Simmons (2010), found that consumers distinct between helpful and misleading internet advertisements, which is dependent on the level of perceived intrusiveness in digital advertisement. The helpful advertisements were emails related to specific and recent information about the products, whereas misleading advertisements were related to banner and pop-up advertisements with product that were unavailable. However, properly conducted online advertising can lead to improved perception and increased credibility of a given product (Sundar and Kim, 2005).

Drèze and Hussherr (2003), found that consumers rarely focus on advertisements, which past research has referred to as "banner blindness" (Benway, 1998). The presence of advertisements, both static and animated, were found to increase the time to conduct searches (Burke et al, 2005). The static advertisements are more likely to be remembered than animated ones. Yoo and Kim (2005), found that use

of moderate animation impacts the effect on advertisement recognition rates positively as well as brand attitude measures. According to Goldstein, Suri, McAfee, Ekstrand-Abueg, and Diaz (2014), animation, questionable reputability, and poor aesthetics were found to be perceived as annoying advertisements. However, this study also found that annoying advertisements received more significantly more attention, but that it at the same time decreases switching costs. It is therefore important to be aware of the consequences of the advertisement and take into account consumers sensitivity to advertisements.

2.2 Attitudes

Attitudes have a central role when it comes to understanding why various types of interpersonal and mass communication influence human behavior (Priester, Wegener, Petty, and Fabrigar, 1999). Attitudes consists of evaluative reactions to a certain stimulus and thus serve as a key driver for a brand choice (Nedungadi, 1990), and it is therefore important to understand factors that leads to attitude change towards products and brands. Attitude was defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p 222) "*A person's attitude is a function of his salient beliefs at a given point in time*". Effortful cognitive elaboration serves as a driver and results in a strong attitude (Haugtvedt and Petty 1992). The level of elaboration is affected by involvement (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981), rhetorical figures (Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker, 1981), and the use of second-person pronouns (Burnkrant and Unnava, 1989).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model, hereby ELM, states that changes in attitudes arise from one out of two possible routes depending on the degree of activity regarding elaborative information-processing: the central and the peripheral route. The central route consists of extensive and effortful elaborative processing activity about the message, which can lead to more resistant, persistent, and behavioral change than induced changed through the peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). The peripheral route requires less effort and is a non-elaborative process that involves low cognitive effort. The level of elaboration varies and is dependent on the target's motivation and ability (Petty and Wegener, 1999). Moreover, consumer specific, such as the context of the advertisement, and situational factors affects the target's degree of motivation and ability (Samuelsen,

2004). Issue involvement and need for cognition are among these variables (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979; Haugtvedt, Cacioppo and Petty, 1982). The high issue involvement is connected to consequences, personal connections, and level of personal relevance. Haugtvedt, Petty and Cacioppo (1982, p 116) defined the need for cognition as a "tendency or an individual to engage in and enjoy thinking".

The central and peripheral routes can also affect the effectiveness of an advertisement. According to Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983), quality has a greater impact on attitudes under high-involvement rather than under low-involvement. Furthermore, celebrity status has a greater impact under low-involvement rather than high-involvement. Incorporating the ELM, under high-involvement, attitudes toward an advertisement are affected via the central route, whereas under low-involvement, attitudes toward the advertisement are affected via the peripheral route.

> *H3: The level of involvement will have an impact on the effectiveness of the ad.*
> *H4: High involvement consumers are more likely to change the brand attitude*
> *H5: Ads processed through the central route is more likely to change the consumers attitude*

2.3 Purchase intentions

 Among Nedungadi (1990), several researchers have found evidence that consumers only consider a small proportion of available alternatives when making purchase choices. According to Nedungadi, a consumer's consideration set is defined as the set of brands brought to mind on a particular choice. Businesses have the ability to influence and shape consumer memory of brands, and furthermore influence brand choice. However, advertising cues that help consumers retrieve and consider a target brand can simultaneously increase the likelihood of considering other similar competitors. An increased probability in retrieval will translate into a positive choice effect only if competitors are not

concurrently included in the consideration set. Therefore, businesses have to be aware not to formulate messages that lead consumers to competitors.

When evaluating the effect of an advertisement, the targets mood when being exposed for the ad can affect the shopping intentions. William R. Swinyard (1993) has studied how consumer mood, involvement level, and the quality of shopping experience affect purchase intentions. He argues that even though mood is beyond the marketers control, it is still noteworthy as it may affect responses to marketing stimuli in unintended ways. This is relevant to our study as the mood the communication or the message evoke influence the choices consumers do when it comes to whom they will like to buy from later (Swinyard, 1993). Moreover, Swinyard highlights the ELM theory developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1983) to explain that involved people are more motivated to devote cognitive effort required to evaluate the true merits of a product, and thus expected to process more relevant information. One of Swinyard's (1993) top arguments is that shoppers in a good mood are usually more involved in their shopping and can associate their positive mood state with the selected store. Results of Swinyard's study revealed that there is an interaction between mood and involvement, and shopping intentions. In high involvement shopping situations mood affects the shopping intention, whereas in low involving shopping situations mood had no significant effect on the shopping intention. Moreover, involved consumers react more strongly to both good and bad shopping experiences.

A study by Wegener, Petty and Klein (1994), found that messages framed positively are more persuasive when the audience is happy (versus sad), and messages framed negatively are more persuasive when the audience is sad (versus happy). The findings are explained by claiming that good outcomes seem better and more likely to occur when you are in a good mood. Contrary, bad outcomes seem worse and more likely to occur while you are in a sad mood. Taking these findings into account, companies can enhance the communication with consumers by adjusting the message to the consumers mood at that time. Hence, companies do not know or can control consumers mood, and it will therefore be difficult to serve consumers digital messages that are based on mood.

Bagozzi, Goponath, and Nyer (1999) have studied the influence of mood states on memory, and divided the effects into three categories: retrieval, encoding, and state depending learning. Firstly, affect has been shown to influence retrieval of information, where people in a positive mood at the time of retrieval have shown superior recall of positive learning during encoding (Bagozzi, Goponath, and Nyer, 1999). Moreover, the accessibility of material influences other cognitive processes such as evaluations, decision making, and subsequent behaviors. Second, state of mood has also shown exhibit encoding effects where the affective state at the time of learning is associated with superior memory for similar valenced material. This is somewhat supported by Nasby and Yando (1982), who found that positive mood at the time of learning lead to an improved recall of positive material at a later point in time regardless of the mood state at the time of recall. To relate this to our research, these results show that by communicating positive material in messages, consumers in a positive mood at the time of learning will recall your message later, independent on what kind of mood state they are in. This can be valuable as consumers in a bad mood can still choose your company when they take the final decision of purchasing a product due to the recalled message you communicated when the consumer was in a positive mood. Third, when stimulus of the message lacks meaning, contextual cues such as affective states at the time of learning are more strongly encoded with the learned material.

H6: Positive mood is likely to increase purchase intentions

2.4 Emotions

An important contribution of James (1980, 1950) was the recognition that arousal plays an essential role in emotions. Bagozzi, Goponath and Nywer (1999), argues that different stimuli lead to different bodily responses. This is interesting to our study as this finding suggests adding stimuli in the communication message can lead to different bodily responses. Bagozzi (1994), studied the aspect of arousal in marketing settings and found that arousal increase the associations between attitudes and positive beliefs, and decrease the association between attitudes and negative beliefs.

Based on content, most advertisement can be divided into either thinking ads or feeling ads (Bagozzi, Goponath and Nywer, 1999). In thinking ads, the focus is placed on either product attributes or savings in time or money. However, in feeling ads the concentration is placed on the emotions one will experience through use or ownership of a product.

Emotional brand attachment is an emotional bond between a person and a brand. Managing to create emotional brand attachment can lead to higher levels of consumer loyalty and increase the company's financial performance (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, Nyffenegger, 2011). The feelings that a brand generates have the potential to strongly differentiate one brand from another. In the studied area of emotional brand attachment and brand personality researchers have found evidence in the importance of matching a brands personality with the consumers self. The researchers divide consumers self into consumers actual self and consumers ideal self. In digital communication messages business can try to correspond closely to how consumers actually see themselves, or a message that bring consumers closer to an ideal vision of themselves. There are many examples of retail businesses that both form their message to fit consumers actual self and ideal self in their digital communication. Unilever's Dove is a good example of a company that have taken extensively use of consumers actual self in their digital communication. The company uses models who are more average in appearance and thereby correspond more closely to how the majority actually see themselves. Contrary are cosmetic companies often communicating that using their products will make you more attractive and beautiful, bringing you closer to an ideal version of yourself. However, the study of Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffnegger, found differences in which of the two strategies that are most effective and how to strengthen emotional brand attachment. A key concept to manage emotional brand attachment is self-congruence, which is the fit between the brand's personality and the consumers actual or ideal self. Results from the study showed a strong positive relationship between actual-congruence and emotional brand attachment. As emotional brand attachment leads to several benefits for the company, this study suggests that companies should aim for actual self-congruence, and thereby form the message so that consumers perceive a fit between the brands personality and the him/herself. However, in low involvement

purchases, the study found a relationship between emotional brand attachment and ideal self-congruence. This implies that a message relating to consumers ideal self can be effective for low involvement purchases, which is very interesting to this study as it investigates the retail industry. As message is a central part of a company's digital communication (Jones-Mitchell, 2016), it can be formed to better apply to consumers self and enhance affective, attitudinal and behavioral consumer responses. To manage this, it has to be a perceived fit between consumers ideal or actual self (Malär et al. 2011).

H7: Use of emotions will increase brand attitude

2.5 Behavioral targeting

According to Summers, Smith, and Reczek (2014), behavioral targeting is an Internet-based advertising strategy that uses a consumer's online actions to tailor digital ads for that person. The researchers propose that behaviorally-targeted ads can act like a social label, reinforcing the implications of past actions, and changing consumer beliefs about themselves. This is because consumer believe the targeting algorithms conclusion to fit their personal preferences or style. However, the statement is sensitive to two moderators. First, the consumer has to perceive the ad as self-relevant and feel that it is behavioral targeted. Second, it will not be effective if the consumers do not like behaviorally-targeted ads. Consumers have different preferences when it comes to the source of information. When the consumer like the source where they receive the ad, they are more likely to perceive the ad as valid information and respond in accordance of it.

2.6 Personalized communication

Personalizing communication to consumers has recent years been facilitated by electronic marketing communications technology. Hence, academic research of whether personalized messages really enhance consumers acceptance of marketing messages vary. Aligned with Hoffman and Novak (1996), the term personalization refers to a specialized flow of communication that sends different recipient distinct messages tailored to their individual preferences or characteristics. When communicating with personal messages, companies can choose to tailor the message based on consumer information, such as

demographics, psychographics, or purchase histories. Hence, consumers reaction to such personal messages may differ from what intended. White, Zahay, Thorbjørnsen, and Shavitt (2008), argue that marketers have to be aware not to threaten consumers perceived ability to avoid being closely observed. The authors highlight that this may lead to personalization reactance, meaning psychological resistance in response to subjectively inappropriate personalization. Yet, firms can decrease consumers concerns that a personalized message is inappropriately personal by increasing the perceived fit between the offer and consumers personal characteristics. Even though it is often assumed that firms are good at finding the right fit between provided products and the specific consumers, the fit still vary in the extent to which fit is justified to the consumer. Moreover, perceived utility is an important driver of attitudes, intentions, and actual use of the promotional message. The authors suggest that consumers reactions to personalized messages are similarly influenced by whether the perceived utility, or the perceived benefit, manage to offset the psychological "costs" of receiving inappropriately personal messages. Finally, the study argues that companies that wants to deepen customer relationships through personalization should maximize perceived utility before sending highly distinct personalized messages.

H8: Personalized and behavioral targeted communication increases purchase intentions

2.7 Social media

According to Nielsen (2010), traditional advertising strategies and tactics are not as efficient when it is coupled with social media. Social media have led to a shift in communication structure from mass communication to a more interactive and digital communication (Khang, Ki, and Ye, 2012). Companies are allocating more expenditures on social media programs, it is important to understand how the use of these programs affect the consumer-brand relationship. According to Hudson, Huang, Roth, and Madden (2016), social media usage is positively related to brand relationship quality. The effect is especially apparent when consumers associate the brand with human characteristics. Furthermore, the study also found that social media programs can have an impact on the bottom line when they succeed in customer-brand interactions in a meaningful way.

3.0 Methodology

In the following section, research design will be discussed concerning data collection, acquisition of participants, experimental procedure, and result analysis. The topic will mainly be researched by using secondary data that are provided by the Norwegian company Penetrace, which will be supplemented through information regarding which companies that have managed to successfully change their consumers attitude toward the brand in a more positive way compared to the competitors.

3.1 Data collection

In collaboration with Penetrace AS, the data will consist of brand preference scores among retail companies obtained from their database within a period of five years. The paper aims to analyze around 20 cases from the Norwegian market within the time period. The data will be used to uncover cases where retail companies have managed to change consumers attitude and preference toward the brand through communication in digital platforms.

The primary data will mainly consist of secondary data, and it will be used to identify cases where companies have been able to change consumers attitude through communication during the specified period of time. The competitors of the successful stores will also be analyzed to see if there is something those stores did not do versus those who succeeded. The data will be supplemented and supported by information obtained by in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews will be conducted with advertisements agencies, media agencies, and other people that were involved with the successful campaigns/advertisements that we are using as cases.

3.2 Result analysis

To test the results found by comparing the cases, an experimental study in a laboratory will be conducted. This way, we will see if the results found in the cases is possible to replicate in a study in order to increase the validity of our study.

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