

The Moderating Role of Sport Service Type on the Relationship between Ad Message Type, Service Trial Promotion and Consumers' Ad Responses

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Sport is a major aspect in American cultural identity and engaging in sport-related activity has been a widely embraced phenomenon over the years (Shoham, Rose, & Kahle, 1998). Although scholars in the fields of marketing and advertising have devoted a lot of time to studying and gauging effective advertising strategies for service offerings, few researchers have focused exclusively on sport-related service facilities. The primary purpose of the current study was to examine the influence of message appeal on affective (i.e., pleasure and arousal; Mehrabian & Russell, 1995) and cognitive responses (i.e., attitude toward ad, attitude toward brand, and future intention) to sport services advertisements. The secondary purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of service trial promotion on subjects' responses to the advertisements. This investigation also examined the moderating effects of sport service types. This part of the study was done in order to determine which types of ad message appeals are more appropriate for two different sport service types (i.e., artificial wall climbing and fitness center).

In order to address the study's research questions, the current study utilized a 2 X 2 X 2 between-subjects, quasi-experiment factorial design: message appeals, service trial promotion (presence of service trial promotion vs. absence of service trial promotion), and types of sport service. Among other types of message appeals and sport services, this study investigated affective versus cognitive message strategies as well as a high-risk sport facility (i.e., artificial wall climbing) versus a low-risk sport facility (i.e., fitness center). The study also attempted to control for external variables which could have influenced the subjects' responses. For example, based on the calls for research, the current study controlled the involvement factors because personal involvement with a specific sport might have influenced a subject's evaluation of an ad that uses the sport image. Likewise, the current study used black and white ads to control for color effects, while both ads used the same image (i.e., same building) in order to control for preferences for certain image.

The current study consisted of three phases of data collection. First, a small pilot study (n = 40) was conducted not only to establish the reliability and validity of scaled measures but also to assess the validity of manipulations. Secondly, prior to exposure to ad stimuli, pretest measures were gathered from subjects (n = 160) in an effort to collect data concerning relevant antecedent variables. The pretest instruments included measures of involvement with two sport types (i.e., fitness and wall climbing) and demographic factors. Finally, after the random assignment of treatment conditions, subjects (n = 160) were asked affective as well as cognitive ad responses. Ad stimuli and questionnaires were administered by employing the online survey method with a web-based survey program. Among the key findings, through the utilization of analysis of covariance, the results revealed the influence of ad message strategy (rational appeal vs. emotional appeal) on subjects' emotional and cognitive ad responses. Further, the ANCOVA highlighted the message effects which were moderated by the type of services. The results also illustrated the influence of the promotional trial. This presentation – in addition to explaining the results of the study – will include a discussion of the applied and theoretical implications of the findings along with future directions for research.