

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ABOUT THE ROLE OF BRAND USER STEREOTYPES ON ADVERTISING EFFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on social cognitive theory and self congruity theory, this study examines the role of brand user stereotypes (in advertisements) on developing favorable intentions toward the ad (and thus toward the brand). Moderating effects of product involvement level within this relationship was also explored. Using qualitative methodology, five focus groups were conducted. Results support that brand user stereotypes in ads operate on advertising efficiency through the self-congruity theory. However, regardless of involvement level, consumers prefer to see a reflection of their ideal selves' rather than actual selves through the stereotypes. Also, this is also one among few studies that emphasized brand user stereotypes should be consistent with not only the ideal selves of consumers but also the social gender role perceptions of them in creating advertising efficiency.

Keywords: Advertising Efficiency, Brand user Stereotypes, Self Congruity Theory, Social Gender Perceptions

JEL Classification: M31, M37

REKLAMLARDA YER ALAN TİPİK MARKA KULLANICILARININ REKLAM ETKİNLİĞİNDEKİ ROLÜNE YÖNELİK KALİTATİF BİR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada, bir marka kullanıcısının reklamdaki tipik tasvir ediliş biçiminin, reklama (dolayısıyla da markaya) ilişkin olumlu tutum geliştirme üzerindeki rolü sosyal bilişsel teori ve öz-kimlik uyumu teorisi açısından incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, bir marka kullanıcısının reklamdaki tipik tasvir ediliş biçiminin reklama ilişkin olumlu tutum geliştirme üzerindeki rolünün, o ürüne duyulan ilgi düzeyinden etkilenip etkilenmediği de ayrıca araştırılmıştır. Araştırmada kalitatif metodoloji kullanılmış ve beş odak grup çalışması yürütülmüştür. Sonuçlar, marka kullanıcısının reklamdaki tipik tasvir ediliş biçiminin, öz-kimlik uyumu aracılığıyla reklam etkinliği yaratabileceğini göstermektedir. Araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre tüketiciler, reklamda izledikleri tipik marka kullanıcısında ideal kimliklerinin yansımaları görmeyi, aktüel kimliklerinin yansımaları görmeye tercih etmektedirler. Üstelik bu durum, ürüne duyulan ilgi seviyesi ne olursa olsun değişmemektedir. Bir başka ifadeyle, katılımcılar düşük seviyede ilgi duydukları ürünlerin reklamlarında bile, kendilerinin ideal kimliklerini yansıtan bir marka kullanıcı tasviri ile karşılaşmak istemektedirler. Bildiğimiz kadarıyla bu çalışma, bir reklamın gereken etkinliği yaratabilmesi için, reklamda yer verilen tipik marka kullanıcısının, hedef kitlenin ideal kimlik algısının yansısı toplumsal cinsiyet algıları ile de uyumlu olması gerektiğini vurgulayan ilk çalışmalar arasındadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Reklam Etkinliği, Tipik Marka Kullanıcısı, Öz-kimlik Uyumu Teorisi, Toplumsal Cinsiyet

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1. Introduction

Role of the stereotyped portrayal of brand users on the development of self-brand connections for targeted audience has been widely known. Thus understanding the links between brand user stereotypes and advertising efficiency has been an important research question in marketing literature. However, most of the past literature approaches to the stereotypes as a socio-cultural indicator from a macro perspective and evaluate it as a cultural element which has the social purpose of convincing us that how we are, want to be, or should be. Since stereotypes are derived from society at large, and therefore they can be seen as a reflection of prevailing cultural values (Manstead and McCulloch, 1981 from Arima, 2003:81), there are a lot of studies that using advertisement stereotypes in order to depict both the roles and the role changes over time and between cultures. A remarkable part of the literature revealed that men and women were depicted differently in advertisements (Dominick and Rauch, 1972; Courtney and Whipple, 1974; McArthur and Resko, 1975; Furnham and Shofield, 1986; Harris and Stobart, 1986) as parallel to main gender stereotype: men at work and women at home (Arima, 2003:88). Although, actual roles that women have fulfilled in society have been mainly changed after 1970s and 1980s, the portrayal of men and women in television advertisements did not reflect this change. In other words, although it is not consistent with the reality, the advertisements exaggerates the difference on some points and insist on depicting the stereotypical gender role and little progress of women, not only in USA (Russo, et al., 1982; Bretl and Cantor, 1988) but also other countries that have completely different cultural orientations like Japan (Arima, 2003), and Turkey (Uray and Burnaz, 2003; Karaca and Papatya, 2011).

Despite the existence of these studies, use of stereotypes on marketing communication practices is not just an issue of cultural studies. The relationship between advertisement efficiency and brand user stereotypes in advertisements is still relatively under researched in in the current marketing literature when compared the acknowledged significance of the concept in the world of consumption. Thus, in which situations stereotypes will create desired results in advertising efficiency are still needed to be examined. In this context, the main question of this study is that does the congruity between brand user stereotype of ad and self-image always create a favorable attitude toward the ad with respect to both ideal and actual parts of the selves. Since the current literature also emphasize the role of product involvement level on information processing (and, thus on advertising efficiency), the moderating role of product involvement level on *the relationship between stereotype-self image congruity and attitude toward the ad* was also explored. To our best knowledge, there is no previous study examining *stereotype - self image congruence, product involvement, and advertising efficiency* concepts together. So exploring consumers' perceptions toward the congruence between the stereotypes and their self images, this study gives a real-life example of how stereotypes can be used successfully in

creating advertising efficiency with respect to different levels of product involvement.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Background

Stereotype can be defined as the product/brand user image the audience has about the typical use of the product (Johar and Sirgy, 1991: 24). This image can be created by the users of the product throughout different stages of the product life cycle. However, today marketers realize that if a successful communication process can be created through proper stereotyping, the advertisement will be understood more easily and then target audience will react to the product/brand in a desired manner. In this context, knowing the critical importance of stereotyping on advertising effectiveness today marketers have more efforts than consumers in creating desired stereotype perceptions as a part of the strategic positioning process.

The role of stereotypes in advertising efficiency mainly based on the two way function of the stereotype. Stereotypes that developed by advertisers not only depict a user image that reflects the common characteristics of target audience but also creates a reference point (Hong and Zinkhan, 1995:55) which target audience compared themselves. Moreover as Bandura states in social cognitive theory (2001), the presentation of stereotypes on advertisements are likely to play an active role as a socializing agent. From a theoretical viewpoint, this situation is mainly based on self-congruity that links the psychological construct of an individual's self-concept with the symbolic consumption theory (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967:22).

Rosenberg defined self-concept as "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979:7). Self construct researchers claimed that the self-concept is multidimensional. Although different dimensions of the construct were claimed by different researchers (Sirgy, 1980), traditionally it has been conceptualized as having two dimensions (e.g., Dolich, 1969; Belch and Landon, 1977; Belch, 1978): The actual self-concept, "the way a person actually 'really' sees himself to be, and "ideal self-concept," the way a person would ideally ("like to") be (Ross, 1971:38).

Symbolic consumption theory (Levy, 1959; Baudrillard, 1981; McCracken, 1986) mainly suggests that the products are not only bought for functional attributes but also the cultural meanings it conveys. Such a social construction of consumption enables people to consume ways that enhance or maintain their self-concepts (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Dolich, 1969; Kleine et al., 1993; Graeff, 1997; Heath and Scott, 1998; Hogg, et al., 2000; Banister and Hogg, 2004; Lee et al., 2009) and thus products, brands, and those users have become symbolic tools for self-enhancement.

At this point, self-congruity has a critical role on determining if a product/brand is appropriate for individuals' self-enhancement with regard the meanings and cultural values it conveys. Self-congruity is described as the match between product-user image and the audience's self-concept (Ogilvy 1963; Myers

1976; Munson and Spivey 1981; Sirgy 1982; Johnson 1984; Johar and Sirgy, 1991). The role of self-congruity on advertising effectiveness thus persuasion arises through a psychological process in which the audience focuses on source cues and matches these cues to their self-concepts. In this context, one can expect that the greater the congruence between the product image and the audience's self-image, the greater the possibility of persuasion (Johar and Sirgy, 1991:26). In other words, a matching advertising appeal, compared to non-matching appeals, may lead consumers to subsequent behaviors favorable to the product advertised (Zinkhan and Hong, 1991).

To summarize stereotyping has an important advertising tool that may affect attitudes and behaviors toward the brand, especially when it connotes an association with self (Sirgy, 1986; Zinkhan and Hong, 1991) it can be expected to play a central role in influencing advertising effectiveness. However, when compared the acknowledged significance of it's in the world of consumption, the topic is still rarely investigated in the consumer behavior literature. From a broader perspective, a review of the marketing and communications literature highlights that the understanding the links between the self-congruity and consumer behavior has been an important research question in marketing literature. So amount of literature on the effects of self-congruity on consumer behavior has steadily grown (see Aguirre Rodriguez et al., 2011 and Hossany and Martin 2012 for a detailed literature review for self-image congruence in consumer behavior). Findings generally indicate that self-congruity plays an important role on purchase motivation (Malhotra, 1988; Mehta, 1999), facilitates favorable attitudes and behavior toward brands (Sirgy 1982; Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Ericksen 1996; Sirgy et al. 1997; Kressman et al., 2006; Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008) and is positively related to customers' product evaluations (Graeff, 1996) and satisfaction (Sirgy et al., 1997; Jamal and Marri, 2007).

On the other hand, the majority of the past literature on the stereotypes used in ads has examined only the stereotypical portrayals and the changes on it from a macro perspective (McArthur and Resko, 1975; Furnham and Bitar, 1993; Wee et al, 1995; Kang, 1997; Arima, 2003; Wolin, 2003).

Interestingly, the relationship between attitude toward the ad and product/brand stereotype- self-image congruity has been studied rarely. As one of these, Brock et al. showed that message effectiveness can be increased by matching appeals to recipients' self-schemas (1990). Hong and Zinkhan (1995:74) shows that advertising expressions employing appeals consistent rather than inconsistent with the target audience's self-concept are more effective in terms of influencing favorable intentions. Also extending the self-concept to intercultural base, past researches show that people evaluate more positively ads that are congruent with their own culture as an element of self-concept (e.g. Gregory and Munch, 1997; Torres and Briggs, 2005; Shen and Chen, 2006). Similarly, Bjerke and Polegato (2006) show how the self-concept differentiates peoples' perceptions towards

advertisements. Trampe et al. (2009) provided evidence for the self-activation effect of ads: Placing products in an advertisement context can activate the self, and as a consequence, ads can exert self-evaluative effects on consumers. Ahn and Bailenson (2011:103) empirically confirmed that “self-endorsing, a new form of advertising strategy that presents the self as an endorser by using the brand, is an effective mode of persuasion” and “the favorable brand attitude and purchase intention triggered by self-endorsing is mediated by the self-referencing effect.”

However, when compared the acknowledged significance of it, the studies that examining the efficiency of advertisement through the stereotypes are still limited. Thus in which situations stereotypes will create desired results in advertising efficiency are still needed to be examined. As one of these topics that is needed to be examined, although different dimensions of the self claimed by different researchers, with respect to actual and ideal parts of the selves, do product-brand stereotype and self-image congruity always create a favorable attitude toward the ad, and brand is still limitedly understood and rarely investigated. Similarly, from the literature, we know that the level of involvement (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989) is also expected to affect which ad cues receive attention, and thus advertising efficiency. So we can expect that the higher the involvement level of the product, the more attention is focused in ad (MacInnis and Jaworsky, 1989:5). Based on this assumption it can be claimed that the role of stereotypes on advertising efficiency should not be analyzed without reference the role of involvement level. To our knowledge, there is no previous study examining two concepts together.

Attempt to contribute to fill these gaps provided the impetus for this research. Thus based upon symbolic consumption and self-theories two key questions are addressed:

(i) With respect to actual and ideal parts of the selves, do product-brand stereotype and self-image congruity always create a favorable attitude toward the ad and brand?

(ii) If so, for what levels of product involvement?

3. Methodology and Research Design

“How and in which situations brand user stereotypes can create advertising efficiency?” describes the main question of this study. From a methodological point of view, rather than making generalizations, the goal of this study is to create a better understanding about the relationships between stereotypes, self-congruity, and advertising efficiency. Within this context, some selected advertisements were examined by using focus groups, a suitable method for in-depth exploration of issues surrounding topics where there is little information (McDonald, 1993; Neuman, 2006).

First, a preliminary study was conducted to select advertisements will be used in this research. So, advertisements of any brand that exhibit brand user stereotypes, which reflect the ideal and actual selves of the brand users respectively, in a clear way was researched. When researching, different advertisements of same brands were searched as a part of research design in order to avoid any possible bias concerning the two different brands those are widely known by consumers before. By doing so, it was ensured that when watching the advertisements, respondents' former perceptions based on different brands do not interfere with the results of the current study. At the end of this research, six different versions of Mr. Muscle advertisements were chosen. After selecting the advertisements, focus groups were designed to explore meanings derived from advertisement, from consumers' point of view.

As recommended by Calder (1977), focus groups were structured in a way that ensures a range of consumers from various socio-economic backgrounds. Until the saturation point was reached (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 158) five focus groups were conducted in Trabzon City ranging in size from eight to ten participants in each group. Composition of each group was mainly homogeneous in terms of participants' common characteristics and socio economic positions to maximize interaction. Since the purpose of focus groups was to generate information rather than statistical generalization, purposive sampling method was used, and participants were recruited from a sample that believed broadly to represent the population. Discussions were moderated by the author and lasted between eighty and ninety minutes. During the group discussions, a semi-structured interview guide developed in accordance with the general themes constructed from the literature. This guide was composed of open-ended questions, and also a questioning route was designed in a way that stimulating discussion. Before conducting focus groups, the interview guide and questioning route was pretested with convenience sample of consumers (N = 6) to test for ease of use, appropriateness and content validity. The final version of this guide can be seen on Table 1. After required corrections on interview guide, five focus groups were conducted in a number of locations around Trabzon city in March 2012. Total of forty four consumers participated in this study. After obtaining permission, all discussions were recorded. Also respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire involving demographics and product involvement level questions at the end of the discussion. Verbatim transcripts of the discussions were analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

Table 1: Focus Groups Interview Guideline

1. General opinions and feelings toward the ads. (Both one by one and also in a comparative way)
2. What do you think about the ad? Why?
3. Do you like the ad? Why?
4. What do you think about the stereotype that used in this ad? Why?
5. Do you like this stereotype? Why?
6. Do you think that when you watch ads, you compare this stereotype with yourself? Why? How?
7. Do you think that the stereotypes used in these ads explain yourselves? Which ones? How?
8. Do you think that the congruity between yourself, and stereotype can affect your overall attitude toward the ad? Why? How?
9. Do you think that such a congruity may affect your brand purchase decision in some way? Why? How?
10. Can you claim that general evaluations toward the ads you watched here have an important role in your brand purchase decision? Why? In which situations?
11. Did you ever avoid from a brand because you really do not like the ad? Share your experiences. Do you think that stereotypes used in ads can be an important factor in your general evaluation?
12. Did you ever buy a brand because you were really impressed from the ad? Share your experiences. Do you think that stereotypes used in ads can be an important factor in your general evaluation? How? In which situations?

4. Findings

The respondents' demographics are displayed in Table 2. Fifty-two percent of the participants were female. Almost half of the sample (48%) had a graduate degree from a university (this item also includes university students) and single (45%). Again, half of the sample is between 23 and 30 years. A high proportion of the sample (39%) is full or part time employed, and an additional one third (36%) is the student.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=44)

	N	%		N	%
Gender			Age		
Female	23	52	<18	-	-
Male	21	48	18- 22	10	23
Total	44	100	23-30	22	50
Marital Status			31-40	9	20
Single	20	45	41 +	3	7
Married	24	55	Total	44	100
Total	44	100	Employment Status		
Education			Employed (Full or part time) (Excluding students)	17	39
Primary School (1-8 grades)	5	11	Not employed	5	11
Secondary school (9-12 grades)	12	27	Student	16	36
University (13-16 grades)	21	48	Housewife/ Retired/Enable to work	6	14
Post Graduate (above grade 17)	6	14	Total	44	100
Total	44	100	Product Involvement Level		
			High	13	30
			Low	31	70
			Total	44	100

In terms of involvement, the majority of the respondents (70%) explained a low involvement level of the product. Only one-third of the respondent who was mainly the housewife stated high involvement.

With the aim of constructing a composite picture of the relationship between stereotypes and self-congruity, selected advertisements, that are picturing actual and ideal selves of brand users respectively through the stereotypes, were presented to the participants. Before presentation, brand awareness and brand recall levels of respondents were also explored. Results showed that all of the respondents are aware of the brand, Mr. Muscle. When asked to describe TV ads of the brand before watching advertisements, most of the respondents could explain the last campaign of the brand with an animated orange super hero suddenly leaps into the kitchen where a woman struggles with difficult tasks. After watching the advertisements, however, most of the respondents expressed that, despite they know the brand, they don't remember watching some of these advertisements before. Specifically younger respondents could not remember the TV commercials of Mr. Muscle in 1994-96 that was brought out an advertising campaign with the slogan "Mr Muscle, Loves the Jobs You Hate". As a result only a few of respondents expressed that they could remember all the advertisements they watched. Then the discussion that followed centered on the evaluations toward the advertisements in accordance with the interview guideline. Within this context, participants were asked to evaluate advertisements as both separately and comparatively. All discussions proceeded in an open and pleasant atmosphere. Consumers were motivated to be a part of the discussion and found pleased for sharing their experiences and feelings with other participants. When required, the advertisements were presented again so that respondents can more freely express and expand on their thoughts and feelings about the topic under investigation. The focus groups resulted in several different aspects concerning how and in which situations stereotypes can create advertising efficiency.

The general findings of this study support the role of brand user stereotypes in ads on favorable attitude and behavior toward the ad and the brand. Results imply that brand user stereotypes in ads operate on advertising efficiency through the self-congruity mechanism. When watching ads consumers compare brand user stereotypes with themselves knowingly or unknowingly and make evaluations based on this comparison. So if they think that the stereotype is not consistent with their own identity perceptions, then they may be oblivious to the ad or may exhibit an unfavorable attitude (or behavior) toward the ad and brand.

Furthermore, research results show that in obtaining some desired results toward the ad and brand, brand user stereotype must be consistent with not only the self-perception of the consumer but also the cultural background, she/he lives. As a part of this cultural background, social gender plays an important role on likeability of brand stereotypes. Supporting this finding, in all focus groups interviews the same result is obtained that the classical stereotype of Mr. Muscle, which describes actual self of a weedy looking spectacled man, usually dressed in a string vest and shorts in

bathroom, kitchen, and saloon in a humorous way, is found annoying. Despite that some of the respondents were smiling and laughing during the advertisement, when they asked to like the advertisements, they clearly stated that they laughed because of the absurdity in advertisement; however they don't like the advertisement at all. Almost half of the men respondents from different focus groups stated that despite they clean or help to clean their own homes, after seeing this ad, they didn't want to buy this brand. As another evident, most of the women respondents stated that they didn't like the advertisement. One woman respondent stated that she didn't want to see such a man neither in this ad nor in anywhere else in the everyday life. Furthermore, when asked to respondents to evaluate advertisements that picturing brand user stereotype as woman and man comparatively, the ads that using women stereotypes were evaluated as more favorable. So, it can be claimed that since the general characteristics of Mr. Muscle man are not consistent with the relevant gender role perception of Turkish society, the stereotype was found completely annoying.

Figure 1: Example Frames from Mr. Muscle Advertisement with the Slogan “Mr Muscle, Loves the Jobs You Hate”



Research results also show that consumers don't like to the ads that depicting them as living difficulty through brand user stereotypes even though this picture is consistent with their actual self-perceptions. As an evident to this finding, most of the women respondents (N=19, 83%) clearly stated (through not only their explanations but also their body language responses) that despite the images in these advertisements showing woman in bathroom or kitchen as coping with difficult tasks reflect their actual life, still they didn't like these advertisements. They commonly stated that these advertisements reminded them the jobs they didn't want to do, and they do not prefer to be viewed in such situations in their actual life. Therefore, reminding bad experiences and creating a reference point for self-comparison, they didn't like these ads. Providing evidence to this claim, respondents were asked to compare two different versions of similar ads in terms of attitude toward the ad. In the first advertisements, a woman as brand user stereotype was viewed as dealing with the difficult tasks, while in the second ads only the problem that have to be handled with was seen without a brand user stereotype. Results show that the attitudes toward the second ads are higher than to the first ads.

Moreover, when consumers were asked to evaluate all advertisements, they watched comparatively, it is found that regardless of the level of product involvement, consumers clearly prefer the advertisements that exhibiting their ideal selves rather than actual selves. So, it is seen that through brand user stereotypes, people are more voluntary to face their own ideal selves on ads rather than actual selves.

Figure 2: Example Frames from the Mr. Muscle Advertisement Picturing Brand User Stereotype with the Actual Self



General findings of this study support the role of brand user stereotypes on attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand regardless of product involvement. However, findings don't support a similar relationship between brand user stereotypes and developing behavioral intentions toward the brand. Results show that, the role of brand user stereotypes on favorable behavioral intentions more clearly emerges with the high levels of product involvement. Of course, the results of this study are not generalizable. However, at least, it can be implied that when product involvement is low, even if brand user stereotypes can create a favorable behavioral intention toward the brand, this impact occurs through indirect mechanisms.

5. Discussion

This qualitative study tries to deepen our understanding of the role of stereotypes and its underlying psychological mechanisms in advertising efficiency. Generally, research results once more confirms that *“when it comes to making advertising decisions, a careful, fact-based scrutiny of the dynamic details of how consumers are feeling, thinking, processing, and behaving is essential in forming effective advertising solutions”* (Darley and Smith, 1995 from Wolin, 2003:111).

Prior studies have emphasized the significance of brand user stereotypes in advertising efficiency. Findings of this study support previous findings and suggest that brand user stereotypes in ads operate on advertising efficiency through the self-congruity mechanism (Brock et al., 1990; Hong and Zinkhan, 1995; Gregory and Munch, 1997; Torres and Briggs, 2005; Bjerke and Polegato, 2006; Shen and Chen, 2006; Trampe et al., 2009; Ahn and Bailenson, 2011). More in detail, findings have three important implications.

First, regardless of product involvement levels, consumers prefer to see a reflection of their ideal selves' rather than actual selves through the stereotypes in ads.

This finding is consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001) suggesting that people are not expected to accept unquestioningly the behaviors of the characters that is perceived to similar themselves, instead they tend to motivated by the behaviors of the characters that is perceived as desirable ones. This also explains another finding of this study: In some situations, actual self-congruity may create some undesired results in advertising efficiency. Despite reflecting actual selves of consumers, brand user stereotypes that are seen as coping with difficult jobs are not welcomed by the consumers. Reminding bad experiences and creating a reference point for self-comparison were commonly sighted reasons for not liking the advertisements and so unfavorable attitude toward the ad and the brand. In this context, if there is a definite need to exhibit some difficulties which product user is experienced for unique sale proposition, in such situations this difficulty should be presented without a brand user stereotype. As an example, rather than presenting a person that is trying to unclog a clogged sink, only clogged sink should be presented.

Second, findings imply that in order to create advertising efficiency through an advertising scenario, brand user stereotypes should be consistent with not only the selves of consumers but also the cultural background they live. Because as many scholars have asserted, people naturally think in story-like form (Bruner, 1986; Shank, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1991; Adaval and Wyer, 1998) and consumers try to map incoming narrative ad information onto their stories in memory; they compare the ad story to their own personal experiences, searching for stories with similar goals, actions, and outcomes (Escalas, 2004). So in response to an ad that tells a story through stereotypes that consumers are not familiar, then consumers may not create a link between the ad and their own world, although they are even aware of the absurdity used in the advertisement. Results show that general characteristics of Mr. Muscle Man with a weedy looking spectacled man, usually dressed in a string vest and shorts are not consistent with the respondents' current social gender role perceptions at all. Findings of another study also support this finding and shows that Mr. Muscle Man is found annoying at UK too, because of the similar reasons (Gough and Peace, 2000). This is why Mr. Muscle Man advertisement campaign with the slogan "Loves the jobs you hate" was really not liked. This finding is also consistent with Arima's studies (2001, 2003) suggesting that although the depiction of "men at work and women at home" in advertisements is just a stereotypical depiction and inconsistent with the reality in Japan, the Japanese audience expects that depiction of men and women to correspond to traditional stereotypes, and they respond positively to such depictions. Japanese audiences prefer male main characters to be office workers or specialists and women to be housewives. Thus when creating an advertising scenario, cultural codes reflected by brand user stereotypes should be carefully evaluated and localized when needed. To sum up, as Wolin emphasized (2003:111);

"Advertising is sold on the basis of demographics of the audience expected to view the advertisements. Gender, or the social and cultural meanings associated

with the maleness and femaleness imposed and expected by the society (Alvesson and Billing, 1997), is a critical factor in developing marketing strategy via advertising messages emphasizing information that is thought to persuade the male or the female target. Consistent with gender strategy, discerning gendered advertising effectiveness differences is of paramount importance to advertisers."

Results also showed that product involvement level moderates the relationship between the brand user stereotypes and behavioral intentions toward the brand. More in detail, regardless of product involvement level, brand user stereotypes in advertisements may lead favorable attitude toward the ad. However, in creating favorable behavioral intentions toward the brand, besides proper brand user stereotypes in advertisements, high level of product involvement is also required. This result supports that the level of motivation (thus involvement) is an important antecedent of information processing from advertisements (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989), and implies that although the properly positioned advertisements are liked by target audience and thus attract greater mental processing effort, the most desired outcome of an advertisement may only be achieved if the advertisements are viewed in ideal circumstances (Fam and Waller, 2006).

To summarize the insights gained from this exploratory investigation support that with respect to actual and ideal parts of the selves, product-brand stereotype, and self-image congruity may not create a favorable behavior toward the ad and brand all the time. In obtaining desired results, ideal self-congruity, high levels of product involvement and proper cultural codes that brand user stereotype carries appear as prominent variables of this relationship. To our best knowledge, this is among the few studies exploring the role of self image congruity, product involvement level and, social gender perceptions on advertising efficiency. However, there are some limitations to this study that need attention as well. First of all, this is an exploratory study conducted on a sample of 44 respondents. Therefore, despite reveal the range of consumer opinions and attitudes, at this point, we are unable to generalize our conclusions for the broader population. So the key next step is to validate the findings using a larger-scale survey with random sample. Also, despite that six different versions of Mr. Muscle advertisements were used in this study, only one brand (and, so only one product category) was studied. Thus, in order to confirm validity of this research, further research is needed to compare the results across not only other product categories/brands that have different levels of involvement but also different cultures. Finally, because of the measurement difficulties inherent in the research design, our findings were based on focus group discussions in a room setting. Given the complexity of the actual environment, discussions of respondents about six different advertisements may not fully reflect all their behavioral intentions. Thus, the magnitude of these findings may differ from those that exist in the actual marketplace for actual brand advertisements.

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