Links Between the Psychological Impact of Advertisement Breaking Stereotypes, Self-congruence and Brand Attitude

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Abstract. Stereotypes are an integral part of the societal context, encompassing many different social and demographic groups. According to Bordalo et al. (2016), there are three broad approaches to stereotypes, one of which is sociological, most commonly used in the field of marketing research. From a sociological point of view, stereotypes are seen as fundamentally incorrect and degrading generalizations of group characteristics. Accordingly, breaking stereotypes in advertising is a reflection of social change and movements such as feminism and racial equality. It is no secret that advertising, as a sales promotion tool, is playing an increasingly important role in the social context, so the popularity of non-stereotypical advertisement such as 'femvertising' makes it necessary to study the effects of advertisement breaking stereotypes. An empirical study was conducted, to study the links between the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, self-congruence and brand attitude.

Key words: *advertisement breaking stereotypes, the psychological impact of advertising, self-congruence, brand attitude, breaking gender stereotypes.*

Introduction

Relevance of the article

Throughout the years the role of advertising has shifted from a sales promotion tool to not only an element of marketing, but also a part of the societal and cultural background. Stereotypes are an integral part of the social context, encompassing the main components of the societal construct - racial and political groups, gender, demographic groups and situations (Bordalo et al., 2016). The manifestation of breaking stereotypes in advertising is considered to be a direct response to the systemic changes taking place in the society. Growing consumer potential and influence is the driving change in brand strategies and values to meet the ever-growing needs of consumers. Belonging to a brand's target audience or market segment leads to brand developers increasingly choosing to break one or another social stereotype or identify with social initiatives (Champlin et al., 2019). In this way, brands relate to the relevant social groups, which often do not feel adequately represented in the media using traditional stereotypical portraits. Inappropriate, and sometimes unethical, stereotyping of social groups provides a basis not only for an ethical dilemma but also for questioning the effectiveness of advertising. When choosing a product or service, the consumer seeks not only to meet physical or utilitarian needs, but also to feel a kind of representation - the consumer must imagine himself using the product, which is especially difficult when the consumer image in advertising does not match the real buyer (Vinjamuri, 2015).

Level of problem investigation

The psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes on consumer attitudes toward a brand has not been extensively explored in research, while it is widely used in advertising. The analysis of the scientific literature revealed the fragmentation of said research. Consumer self-compliance research focuses on consumer relationship with the brand (Malär et al., 2011; Huber et al., 2018) or on the relationships between self-congruence and compulsive consumer behavior (Japutra et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of research examining the links between consumer self-congruence and brand attitudes. Regarding the topic of psychological effects of advertising, there is a tendency to study the psychological effects of advertisement breaking stereotypes on consumer behavior (Nandi et al., 2019; Zawisza, 2019; Varghese, & Kumar, 2020), but there is a lack of research analyzing the links between psychological effects of advertisement breaking stereotypes and consumer behavior.

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Scientific problem

It is important to examine the aspects of advertisement breaking stereotypes and how they influence the consumer's attitude towards the brand through the process of psychological impact on the consumer's self-congruence. The results obtained from this research could be applied in the future in order to optimize and improve the effect of the advertisement breaking stereotypes.

For the reasons discussed above the scientific question is formed: what are the links between the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and brand attitude?

Object of the article: links between the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and brand attitude.

Aim of the article: to theoretically and empirically examine the links between the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and brand attitude.

Objectives of the article:

- 1. To reveal the problems and relevance of research on the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and attitude towards the brand;
- 2. To conceptualize the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, to examine the aspects of psychological impact and their impact on consumer self-congruence and brand attitude;
- 3. To conceptualize consumer self-congruence and examine its impact on consumer attitude towards the brand;
- 4. To develop a methodology for researching the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and brand attitude;
- 5. To carry out an empirical study of the links between the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and brand attitude;
- 6. Based on the results of the empirical study, provide summary, conclusions and recommendations.

Methods of the article. Systematic and comparative analysis of scientific literature were conducted as well as secondary source analysis, quantitative empirical research (online survey), statistical data analysis using Microsoft Office Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software, with application of statistical analysis methods: descriptive, cross-factor and regression analysis.

1. Theoretical background

In today's societal context, stereotypes can be defined as "the public acceptance of beliefs about the characteristics of members of a social group". Meanwhile, advertisement breaking stereotypes, which has become a direct social reaction to stereotypes, has been around for many years and is widely implemented in marketing strategy. With the change in social norms such as gender stereotypical roles and bias against social minorities, advertising has become not only a means of promoting a product, but also a channel for disseminating social statements. The aim of a modern brand is not only to impress the consumer with a good price and a quality product, but also to maintain a continuous dialogue and one or another political / social / religious status, thus creating a relationship with the consumer. According to Kotler (2003), there are two types of consumer engagement factors used to communicate with consumers. These factors are categorized into rational or informational and emotional or transformational factors. Breaking stereotypes in advertising, in this case, can be considered an emotional factor in attracting consumers, as this phenomenon, in many cases, affects the consumer's psychological processes and perceived self-congruence.

Eisend et al. (2014) considered Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions theory to explore the effectiveness of gender stereotypes and their manifestations in advertising in humorous and non-humorous contexts. The results of the study showed that the perception of stereotypical gender roles in advertising directly correlates with the element of humour: respondents rated the manifestations of non-stereotypical gender roles in a humorous context better. According to researchers, women are more likely than men to feel positively about breaking gender stereotypes. However, the results of this study

are only applicable to Germany, according to the Hofstede (2011), a country with relatively high individualism and masculinity index. When assessing the breaking of gender stereotypes in advertising, it is important to take into account the national and cultural attributes of the respondents. Zawisza et. al. (2016) explored the influence of socio-cultural aspects of the country in their study of the impact of advertisement breaking male gender stereotypes and included a sample of Polish, South African, and British respondents. Representatives of all three nationalities reported positive reaction to a nonstereotypical male role, which refutes the general belief in the effectiveness of traditional gender norms in advertising in countries with a relatively low level of egalitarianism. According to both research results, it is clear that it is not possible to state unequivocally whether sociocultural aspects influence the impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes on consumer psychological responses and behavior. This is because there is a lack of comprehensive research to show that socio-cultural aspects influence an individual's attitudes towards advertisement breaking stereotypes.

Another example of breaking gender stereotypes in advertising is the popularity of female empowerment advertising (femvertising), which emerged in 2013 along with the fourth wave of feminism. According to Drake (2017), this advertising has a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward the brand, the intention to buy, and the emotional connection it creates. However, research in the field of femvertising is fragmented, and according to Drake (2017), given the social context, it is important to investigate the impact of women's empowerment advertising topics (gender equality in the workplace, body positivity, etc.) on consumer attitudes towards the brand and consumer behaviour. Champlin et al. (2019) found that brand social responsibility and the implementation of social messages are especially relevant for brands in which millennials are one of the main target age groups. A similar study was conducted by Kapoor, & Munjal (2019) investigating the effects of self-consciousness on emotional and behavioural responses in the case of femvertising. According to the authors, as women's purchasing power grows, especially in countries like India, more and more brands are focusing on this specific consumer category. The feminist movement and advertising remain one of the most popular advertising trends today, so it is important to understand the impact this advertising has on consumers and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Consumer self-congruence is a theory of advertising perception and emotional connection to a brand that states that the consumer compares the concept of self-perception to the potential image of the consumer of the product / service (Astakhova et al., 2017). According to researchers, there are usually two types of consumer self-congruence – actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence. Astakhova et al. (2017) focused on the relationship between actual and ideal consumer self-congruence and either harmonious or obsessive brand passion. This study revealed that the compatibility between the consumer self-congruence and brand personality leads to a positive consumer relationship with the brand. In their work, Nandi et al. (2019) investigate the effects of breaking gender stereotypes in the context of Indian advertising. The study was conducted on a comparative basis, comparing the effectiveness of advertisement breaking stereotypes and traditional advertising. The study uses a hierarchical scale of effects (Lavidge, & Steiner, 1961), which consists of cognitive, emotional and conative elements. The results revealed that brand awareness is significantly higher in the case of advertisement breaking stereotypes than in the case of traditional advertising. The results of the study show an improved consumer perception of the brand through the use of breaking stereotypes. The authors noted that advertisement breaking stereotypes promoted word-of-mouth (WOM), given that advertisement breaking stereotypes has a greater impact on the consumer as well as provoking reasoning. However, stereotypes and the breaking of them do not always have a positive psychological effect on consumers' attitudes towards the brand, so there is a need to investigate the impact of breaking stereotypes on consumers' self-congruence and links to brand attitude.

2. Empirical investigation

Advertisement breaking stereotypes exists as a phenomenon of social change. Gender stereotyping in advertising, according to many researchers (De Meulenaer et al., 2018; Castillo – Mayen, 2014; Mensa, & Bittner, 2020), has a negative impact on both consumer self-esteem and psychological status,

e.g. self-confidence. A study by Eisend (2010) showed that gender stereotypes in advertising depend on gender-related changes in social development and values, and not the other way around. According to Chu et al. (2016), the manifestation of unconventional gender roles in advertising implies social change in the context of stereotypical gender roles. According to Pérez, & Gutiérrez (2017), certain advertising strategies demonstrate progressiveness in the context of gender equality, but in other cases, advertising messages only exacerbate inequality by reproducing pre-existing stereotypes.

In order to determine the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, three aspects of the impact of advertising on the consumer are analyzed: cognitive, emotional and behavioral (Jokubauskas, 2007). Hawkins, & Mothersbaugh (2010) in the emotional nature model predict that the emotional response of the consumer arises from psychological changes caused by marketing factors. In this case, it can be stated that the aspects of psychological effects on the consumer distinguished by the authors (Kotler, 2007; Jokubauskas, 2007; Dolak, 2007; Hawkins, & Mothersbaugh, 2010; Lavidge, & Steiner, 1961) are similar in terms of their function. All authors distinguish between emotional, cognitive and behavioural (action) aspects. Therefore, in developing the conceptual research model, it was decided to rely on the aspects of psychological effects identified by the researchers.

An analysis of the scientific literature has shown that consumer behaviour and self-congruence theory distinguishes two main types of consumer self-congruence: (1) actual self-congruence and (2) ideal self-congruence (Astakhova et al., 2017; Japutra et al., 2019). Malär et al. (2011) developed a research model in order to examine, which the consumer's self-congruence — actual or ideal — is more influential on the brand in creating an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer. According to the authors, emotional attachment to a brand reflects the connection between the consumer and brand and the feelings the consumer cherishes for the brand. These feelings can be attachment, passion, and connection. All three moderating variables used in the model have a strong motivating effect on the relationship between consumer self-congruence and emotional attachment to the brand. Based on the literature analysis, it can be stated that in order to determine the links between the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and brand attitude, the conceptual model should distinguish between two possible types of consumer self-congruence: actual and ideal.

The consumer's attitude towards the brand can be either positive or negative. Sheeraz et al. (2016) closely associate attitudes with brand credibility and distinguishes attitudes toward the brand as a mediating variable in the relationship between brand credibility and the intention to buy. Sandhu et al. (2018) explored the relationships between consumer self-congruence, brand attitudes, and intention to buy by constructing a linear conceptual study model and, in contrast to the authors discussed earlier (Astakhova et al., 2017; Japutra et al., 2019; Huber et al., 2018; Malär et al., 2011), do not distinguish between types of consumer self-congruence. In the study, the researchers found a positive effect of consumer self-congruence on brand attitudes and a positive effect of brand attitude on consumer's ideal, actual and the brand image has had a positive effect on brand attitudes, loyalty, and attachment (Malär et al., 2011). This theory implies that consumers choose products that allow them to better stand out from those around them and help them better articulate their self-esteem. The study confirmed the existing effect of consumer self-congruence on brand attitude.

3. Research

After conducting an extensive literature review and research, the relationship between theoretical constructs are established, the hypotheses are formed and a conceptual research model is created (see Fig. 1). In total, there were 14 hypotheses formed, of which three main blocks can be distinguished:

H1(H1a, H1b, H1c) – Advertisement breaking stereotypes has a positive psychological effect (through the emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects) on the consumer's brand attitude.

H2(H2a, H2b, H2c) – Advertisement breaking stereotypes has a positive psychological effect (through the emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects) on the consumer's actual self-congruence.

H3(H3a, H3b, H3c) – Advertisement breaking stereotypes has a positive psychological effect (through the emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects) on the consumer's ideal self-congruence.

H4 – Actual self-congruence has a positive effect on brand attitude.

H5 – Ideal self-congruence has a positive effect on brand attitude.

As is evident from the presented research framework, there are four main constructs present in this research. These are (1) Aspects of the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, (2) Actual self-congruence, (3) Ideal self-congruence and (4) Brand attitudes. The hypotheses described above aim to test what the links are between these constructs. Research was conducted in order to test these hypotheses and determine what links there are between the psychological impact of advertisement breaking stereotypes, self-congruence and brand attitudes.



Fig. 1. Research model

Aim of the research is to identify the links between the psychological effects of advertisement breaking stereotypes, consumer self-congruence and brand attitude.

Objectives of the research:

- 1. Describe the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample;
- 2. To substantiate the constructs of the conceptual model;
- 3. To determine the psychological impact (emotional, cognitive and behavioural) of advertisement breaking stereotypes on the consumer's attitude towards the brand;
- 4. To determine the psychological impact (emotional, cognitive and behavioural) of advertisement breaking stereotypes on consumers' actual and ideal self-congruence;
- 5. To determine the impact of actual and ideal self-congruence on consumer attitudes toward a brand.

Research methods. In order to empirically test the hypotheses, the quantitative type of study was chosen. The survey uses an online questionnaire, which allows for relatively quick and efficient collection of relatively representative information and easy systematization of the data obtained.

Survey sample: after review, a total of 342 questionnaires were used in the study. Of the respondents, 84% were young women.

The research data analysis and the discussion of the results

The respondents were asked to carefully read and fill out a questionnaire, which consisted of two main parts: a Volkswagen "eGolf" 2019 video ad and questions regarding the advertisement and respondents' immediate reaction to it and a second part, consisting of SEB bank video ad and questionnaire regarding it. These particular advertisements were chosen as a stimul, because of very different gender role representation seen in them. The Volkswagen ad was said to perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes by showing men engaged in adventurous activities in contrast to a woman in a care-giving role (ASA, 2019), whereas the SEB bank advertisement features a female impowering narrative. The two promotional videos were selected based on the practice of other research (Nandi et al., 2019; Zawisza et al. 2016), where respondents are shown two ad groups – advertisement breaking stereotypes and traditional (stereotypical) ad campaigns. After reviewing one video advertisement at a time, respondents filled out a questionnaire, which consisted of a number of inquiries, designed to determine the psychological impact of the ad, the respondent's self-congruence towards the brand and brand attitudes.

I. The results of the study revealed that advertisement breaking stereotypes has the most psychological effect in terms of behavioural aspect, while the emotional aspect has the opposite effect on the consumer's attitude towards the brand as well as on actual and ideal self-congruence. Actual and ideal self-congruence positively affect brand attitude. These results may be due to the distribution of questionnaire responses, as most scales have an average of 3. The study uses 5 and 7 point Likert-type scales, where 3 or 4 means "Neither agree nor disagree". It can be argued that because of this distribution of responses most links between the constructs can be described as moderate.

II. It is also important to mention that due to the chosen subjects of the study – retail banking (SEB) and light electric vehicle (VW e-Golf) sectors – the results of the study can only be applicable in the case of these market fields. In addition, the majority of respondents were young women (under the age of 35), therefore the results of the survey cannot be interpreted as representative of all socio-demographic groups. However, regarding advertising targeted specifically at this socio-demographic group, it can be argued that the phenomena of breaking stereotypes in advertisement has a positive effect on consumer behaviour (desire to purchase a product or service) and brand attitudes. This falls back to Eisend et al. (2014) study, according to which women are more likely than men to feel positive about breaking gender stereotypes.

Conclusions

Advertising, over a long period of its existence, has evolved from a purely sales promotion tool into an important component of the societal context. Another integral part of this context is stereotypes. Although stereotypes are not a categorically negative phenomenon, nowadays, in many cases their manifestations hurt one or another group in society. According to Castillo – Mayen (2014), gender stereotypes form the basis of discriminatory behaviour and affect women more often than men. While commercial advertising campaigns seem to have nothing to do with social issues and emerging movements, this is not true. In order to purchase a product or service, the consumer identifies with the imaginary (or depicted in the advertisement) user of the product / service. This can be difficult when the consumer image used in advertising does not match the image of the real buyer (Vinjamuri, 2015). Accordingly, in order to relate to the consumer, promote his positive attitude towards the brand and to create positive associations in the consumer's consciousness, the brand ideology, views and social image must be in line with the values and views of the target audience. The results of the study revealed that young women (under the age of 35) more often than men feel negative emotions associated with the promotional ad of Volkswagen eGolf. The young, proactive 21st century consumer wants to be seen and represented, which is why breaking stereotypes and women-empowering ads are effective (e.g., the "Like a Girl" campaign, according to Forbes with huge success and 80 million views). Based on the results of this study, it is recommended to apply aspects of advertisement breaking stereotypes in order not only to attract the target consumer (women, under the age of 35), but also to build a relationship with them and contribute to the creation of a tolerant, progressive society.

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