

# HOW THE ADVERTISING FORM EFFECTIVENESS BARIES BY CONSUMER GENDER IN SERVICE ADS

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**Abstract:** How to effectively convey the product's or service's message in the ad to the consumers is really a challenge. Recently, more and more service ads use the narrative, that is, to convey the service's message to consumers in a narrative-based form. Narrative-based form advertisements are more and more popular and being capable to communicate effectively with consumers. However, we can not conclude that an attribute-based form advertisement is less effective than a narrative-based form advertisement, while there are still many successful service advertisements conveying the product's message to consumers in an attribute-based form nowadays. Hence, this study uses consumer gender as the moderating variable. We try to find out whether the advertisement format affects differently the attitude toward ad and purchase intention between female and male consumers. This study uses a quasi-experiment employing a between-subjects design with the experimental treatment: advertisement form (attribute-based versus narrative-based). A French restaurant is recommended in the experimental ads. MANOVA and univariate ANOVA are used to test our hypotheses. The results show that when the consumer are females, the narrative-based form ad is more effective than the attribute-based ad; when the consumer are males, the attribute-based ad is significant more effective than the narrative-based ad.

**Key words:** advertising form, narrative, narrative-form advertisement, gender

## INTRODUCTION

Theories of consumer judgment implicitly assume that, when people evaluate products, they examine the implications of each piece of information separately and then sum or average these implications to form an overall judgment (Anderson, 1981; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Thus, many researches argue that such multi-attribute approaches are useful to forecast consumer's demand, and effective to persuade, that is, to enhance consumer's attitude and purchase behavior through product's attributes (Meyer and Sathi, 1985; Corstjens and Gautschi, 1983; Shocker and Srinivasan, 1979).

However, purchasing decisions do not always involve a piecemeal computational procedure. Much of the social information that people acquire in daily life is transmitted via narrative, that is, in thematically and temporally related sequences (Adaval and Wyer, 1998). Thus, some other potential buyers may often try to imagine the sequence of events that surround the purchase and use of a product in various situations and the consequences of this use (Adaval and Wyer, 1998). Recently, more and more researches discuss the role of narratives in advertising; that is, using narrative-based advertising appeals to persuade consumer (Durgee, 1988; Deighton, Romer and McQueen, 1989; Stern, 1994; Adaval and Wyer, 1998; Mattila, 2000; Green and Brock, 2000; Escalas, 2004, 2007). Some of these researches argue that narrative-based form is especially persuasive in service ads (Adaval and Wyer, 1998; Mattila, 2000).

According to the past research, consumers of various segments give different ratings to service advertisements when the information is conveyed in a attribute-list or narrative form (Mattila, 2000). Past researches have shown that the information processing differences between men and women. For example, men and women seem to give different weights to the salient attributes (Fischer and Arnold, 1994; Holbrook, 1986) and information sources (Meyers-Levy, 1988) while evaluating products. In biological research, male brains are more functionally lateralized and female brains are more integrated (Everhart et al., 2001; Saucier and Elias, 2001). Furthermore, Kiecker, Palan and Areni (2000) discuss how gender differences in information processing influence the content analysis of narrative texts, and they find that males and females had divergent interpretations of the same narratives. Thus, consumer gender seems to play an important role while using attribute-based or narrative-based form advertising. Thus, we use gender, which is frequently used as a basis for market segmentation for a significant proportion of products and services, as the moderating variable.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Attribute-Based Process**

The basic form of the multi-attribute attitude measurement model can be represented by Fishbein's (1963) formulation. In that model, each attribute are weighted and summed to yield an index of overall affect, or attitude, which play important roles on consumers' decision. Algebraic multi-attribute models of attitude and product evaluation provide a rough approximation of the type of processing consumers might do when they engage in effortful processing (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Green and Wind, 1973; Shocker and Srinivasan, 1979; Wilkie and Pessemier, 1973). In this type of processing, consumers review the information available from an advertisement, package, or some other source, evaluating each piece of information separately (Sujan, 1985). Through some kind of attribute integration process, consumers make the final judgment.

According to Anderson (1974) and Fiske (1982), products are evaluated on an attribute-by-attribute or piecemeal basis: products are perceived to be made up of discrete attributes, with each attribute having a distinct subjective value. The assumption is that decision maker combines the pieces of information to determine the overall value of the product under consideration. That is, they examine the implications of each piece of information separately and then integrate these implications using computational procedures (Anderson, 1971, 1981; Fishbein, 1963; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Such multi-attribute models form the foundation of most marketing strategies developed during 1980-2000 (Mattila, 2000).

### **Narrative-Based Process**

Schank and Abelson (1995) propose that individuals may formulate judgments based on self-constructed narratives, that is, on stories constructed from personal experiences and later stored in memory to provide the basis for forming judgments about other people as well as about events and objects, including service experiences and consumptive products. According to Adaval and Wyer (1998), a holistic processing strategy is likely to be used to construe the implications of the narrative information, that is, recipients may evaluate its implications based on the sequence of events as a whole. In advertising, advertisers appear to be implicitly aware of the power of narratives because many ads tell stories (Escalas, 1998).

Ads that are in the form of a narrative may prime narrative processing by encouraging viewers to think in narrative form by focusing on the narrative elements and being drawn into the narrative rather than analyzing brand attributes or critiquing the ad, and ads that tell stories are able to involve and entertain consumers (Escalas, 2004). Further, Green and Brock (2000) find that stories persuade via transportation, which is defined as "immersion into a text," that is, the extent to which individuals become "lost" in a story. Transportation is proposed as a mechanism whereby narratives can affect beliefs, and it is contrasted with analytical processing. Consequently, analytical elaboration leads to attitude change via logical consideration and evaluation of arguments, whereas transportation leads to persuasion through reduced negative cognitive responding, realism of experience, and strong affective responses (Green and Brock, 2000). Thus, under conditions of narrative transportation, affective responses influence persuasion rather than the systematic analysis of message strength (Escalas, 2007)

Adaval and Wyer (1998) propose that the advantage of narratives might be due to the intensity of the affect that they elicit. This positive affect elicited by narrative information might in turn influence consumers' information strategies. A research in psychology suggests that happy moods are associated with heuristic information-processing strategies, whereas sad moods are associated with systematic elaboration of information (Clore, Schwarz and Conway, 1994). Positive affect has been reported to induce less systematic attention to stimulus information (Forgas, 1998).

Alba and Hutchinson (1987) assert that expert consumers tend to have well-defined, domain-specific knowledge structures, these consumers are likely to attempt to match product attributes with their existing knowledge structures. If the new information cannot be easily understood in light of existing knowledge, the consumer is likely to attempt piecemeal information processing, separately evaluating each feature of the service or product (Adelson, 1984). Because novice consumers tend to have less developed domain-specific knowledge structures (Mitchell and Dacin, 1996), these consumers might not be prone to attempt to match the new information with their existing knowledge structures unless the information is presented in a format that prompts them to do so. In addition, Adaval and Wyer (1998) propose that new information presented in a narrative format is easy to understand because it is structurally similar to life experience. Further, Mattila (2000) assert that presenting information in a narrative format would help novice consumers comprehend the ad message, resulting in more holistic information processing by these consumers.

### **Gender**

For decades, scientific studies have attempted to delineate the fundamental similarities and differences between the sexes (Deaux and Kite, 1987). Gender differences are normally attributed to sociological and/or biological sources. From a socialization perspective, men and women have different sorts of communication and interaction with various social agents (Fischer and Arnold, 1994; Helgeson and Fritz, 1998; Moschis, 1985), different worldviews (Brunel and Nelson, 2000;

Gilligan, 1982), and often occupy different social roles and are subjected to different social pressures (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Wood, 1991).

Past empirical studies have demonstrated significant gender differences across a variety of tasks and traits. For example, men often perform better than women on spatial orientation tasks while females normally score better than males on verbal or linguistic tasks (Burstein, Lew and Lissy, 1980; Deaux and Kite, 1987; Meyers-Levy, 1989). In advertising, these differences are especially important because gender is frequently used as a basis for market segmentation for a significant proportion of products and services.

Past research often portrays males as more analytical and logical in their processing orientation while females are characterized as more subjective and intuitive (Broverman et al., 1968). In addition, Poole (1977, 1982) found that males conceptualize items in terms of physical attributes whereas females use more evaluative concepts. Similarly, Haas (1979) reports that females' language reflects an interpretive mode that is subjective and evaluative, while males' language reflects a selective concentration on readily available, objective states.

As further examples of these different orientations, females are found to use more adjectives than males (Entwisle and Garvey, 1972), to engage in more creative, associative, imagery-laced interpretation (Wood, 1966), and to provide greater interpretation of stimuli in terms of feeling and motivation (Gleser, Gottschalk and Gottschalk, 1959). Meyers-Levy (1989) concluded that females, due to their more interpretive, inferential orientation, consider a broader scope of information than males, including "nonobservable conditions or subjective, perhaps affective considerations that may more thoroughly explain that which is readily discernible."

In addition, Wodak (1981, 1986) and Dressler, Wodak and Pleh (1990) found that narrative capacity is regulated by socially and culturally acquired rules. In particular, they noted that boys and girls in America Western society organize their Story-telling in different ways. Girls tend to express their feelings, whereas boys provide descriptions. Their main claim is that "women are socialized toward holistic, Gestalt-like thinking and speech behavior . . . and they prefer narrations . . ." (Dressler et al., 1990, p. 242), whereas men prefer descriptive sentences because they are socialized toward analytical thinking and speech behavior. Thus, we propose that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Compared with attribute-based form, narrative-based form causes more positive attitude toward advertisement in service ads when consumers are female.

H<sub>2</sub>: Compared with attribute-based form, narrative-based form causes higher purchase intention in service ads when consumers are female.

H<sub>3</sub>: Compared with narrative-based form, attribute-based form causes more positive attitude toward advertisement in service ads when consumers are male.

H<sub>4</sub>: Compared with narrative-based form, attribute-based form causes higher purchase intention in service ads when consumers are male.

## METHOD

Based on the theoretical framework, this study uses a quasi-experiment employing a between-subjects design with two advertisement form experimental treatments include (attribute-based versus narrative-based) and gender (female versus male). The two dependent variables are attitude toward the advertisement and purchase intention.

### Stimulus Materials

We design an A4 size print advertisement with a French restaurant as the recommendation object. The name of the restaurant is French Living. The upper part of the print advertisement presents two photos about the restaurant and simple data of the restaurant, such as address and telephone number. The middle part shows the descriptions of the restaurant with attribute-based form or narrative-based form. The lower part presents some pictures of the dishes. For both the narrative-form and attribute-form advertisements, the same pictures and similar information from a real-life restaurant advertisement were included.

A list of attributes demonstrating the restaurant was employed in the attribute-form advertisement. The attributes of the restaurant recommended in the advertisement are described point by point in a list (Mattila's 2000). In contrast, the narrative-form advertisement included a short story stressing the temporal sequence of the service experience (Adaval and Wyer, 1998; Escalas, 1998).

### Dependent Measures

The dependent measures in this study are attitude toward advertisement and purchase intention. This study used five-items, 7-point scale whose bipolar anchors were *bad/good*, *dislike/like*, *not interesting/interesting*, *irritating/not irritating*, and *unconvincing/convincing* to measure attitude toward advertisement of his study (Mattila, 2000). We use two items to measure purchase intention in this research. They are: *After reading this advertisement, I am willing to dine in the restaurant. After reading this advertisement, I would take this restaurant into consideration if I want to dine in a French restaurant.* In this part, seven-point

Likert scale is used to measure (1: extremely disagree, 7: extremely agree). The Cronbach's alpha for Attitude toward Advertisement and Purchase Intention were .932 and .896, respectively, which suggested a high internal consistency among the items in each dimension.

### Sample and Data Collection

To examine the hypotheses, subjects were recruited from the internet. Participants were asked to browse one of the experiment advertisements on the Web page, then fill out the questionnaire on another Web page, which includes the items that measure attitude toward advertisement and purchase intention and subject demographics. A total of 625 questionnaires were collected.

### ANALYSIS AND RESULT

To test the hypotheses, a MANOVA was run with gender, and advertisement form as the factors, and attitude toward advertisement and purchase intention as the dependent variables. Multivariate F (based on Wilks'  $\lambda$ ) statistics for gender ( $F = 3.376, p=0.035$ ), advertisement form  $\times$  gender ( $F=9.288, p=0.000$ ). In addition, we also use separate univariate ANOVA to test the hypotheses. The results are shown in Table 1.

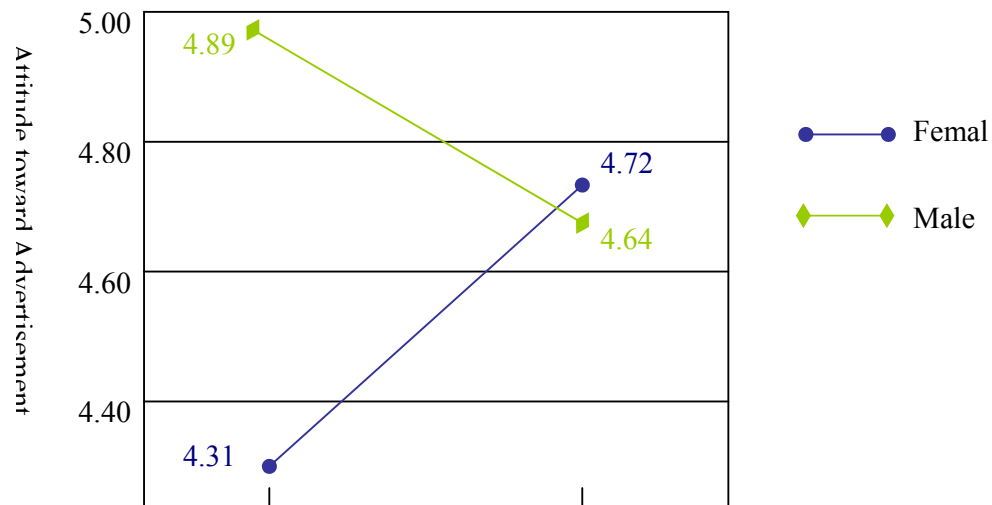
	Aad		Purchase Intention	
	F	Significance	F	Significance
<i>Main effects</i>				
Gender	6.461	.012	5.546	.019
Ad form	1.824	.177	.751	.386
<i>Two-way interactions</i>				
Ad form $\times$ Gender	15.306	.000	17.623	.000

Table 1: Results of Univariate ANOVA models

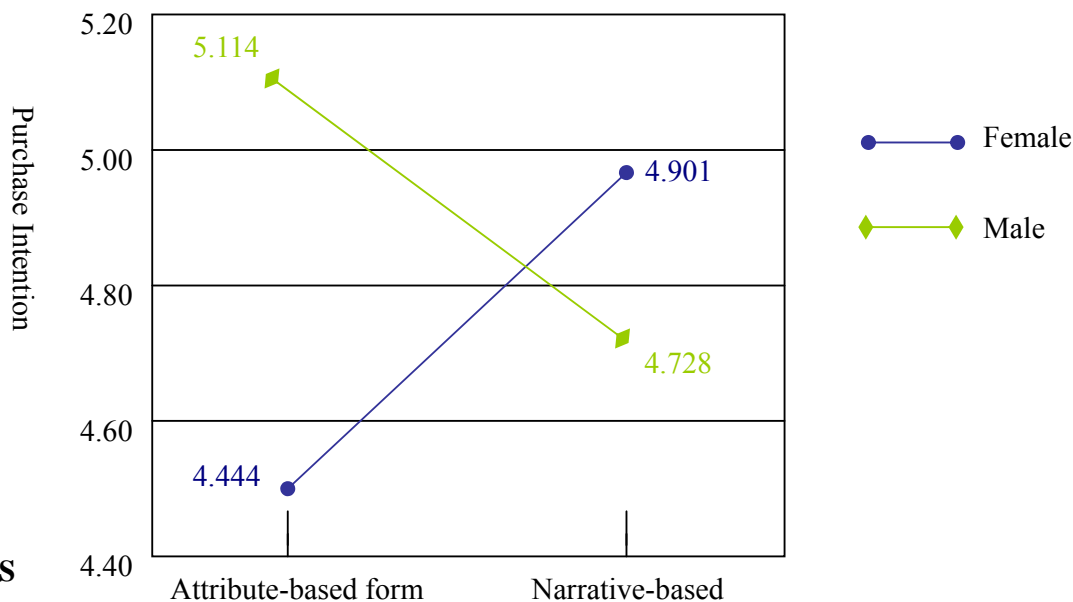
According to the test results, male get significantly higher attitude toward the advertisement ( $M_{\text{male}} = 4.716, M_{\text{female}} = 4.462; F = 8.01, p < .05$ ) and purchase intention ( $M_{\text{male}} = 4.892, M_{\text{female}} = 4.612; F = 5.62, p < .05$ ) than does female.

As shown in Table 1, the advertisement form  $\times$  gender interaction has a significant effect on attitude toward advertisement and purchase intention ( $F = 14.38, p < .01; F = 16.16, p < .01$ , respectively). We then use the simple main effect test to examine the attitude toward advertisement and purchase intention of different advertisement form on measurement variables in female and male condition respectively.

The female respondents rate narrative-based advertisement condition with higher attitude toward advertisement than attribute-based advertisement condition (female:  $M_{\text{female, narrative-based ad}} = 4.726, M_{\text{female, attribute-based ad}} = 4.315; F = 12.21, p < .01$ ). On the contrary, the male respondents rate narrative-based advertisement condition with lower attitude toward advertisement than attribute-based advertisement condition (male:  $M_{\text{male, story-based ad}} = 4.641, M_{\text{male, attribute-based ad}} = 4.899; F = 3.85, p < .05$ ). The results of the significant advertisement form  $\times$  gender interaction effect on attitude toward advertisement were shown in Table 4 and Table 5, and depicted in Fig. 1. These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2.



Next, the results of the significant advertisement form  $\times$  gender interaction effect on purchase intention were depicted in Fig. 2. The female respondents rate narrative-based advertisement condition with higher purchase intention than attribute-based advertisement condition (female:  $M_{\text{female, narrative-based ad}} = 4.901$ ,  $M_{\text{female, attribute-based ad}} = 4.444$ ;  $F = 10.661$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When the gender is male, respondents rate story-based advertisement condition with lower purchase intention than attribute-based advertisement condition (male:  $M_{\text{male, story-based ad}} = 4.728$ ,  $M_{\text{male, attribute-based ad}} = 5.114$ ;  $F = 6.112$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These findings support Hypotheses 3 and 4.



## DISCUSSIONS

Although narrative-form advertisement is an effective way to communicate with consumers, its influence on different consumer segments could vary (Mattila 2000). In this study, we use consumer gender as the moderator, trying to find out if the effectiveness of advertisement forms (attribute-based and narrative-based form) varies with consumer gender.

Our experiment shows that advertisement form (attribute-based and narrative-based form) varies with consumer gender. Figure 2: Interaction Effect of Advertisement Form  $\times$  Gender on Purchase Intention. Our experiment shows that advertisement form (attribute-based and narrative-based form) varies with consumer gender. The results imply that the effectiveness of different advertisement form varies by consumer gender: when the consumers are female, a narrative-based advertisement causes more positive attitude toward advertisement and higher purchase intention than does an attribute-based advertisement; when the consumers are male, an attribute-based advertisement causes more positive attitude toward advertisement and higher purchase intention than does a narrative-based advertisement. These results are consistent with our expectations. They are also consistent with past researches proposing that male readers are more likely to be detached and tend to see a story from the outside (Bleich, 1988), whereas female readers are more likely to be participatory and tend to experience a story from the inside (Flynn, 1988). In addition, the results of this research are closely meeting with early research that demonstrating males to be analytical and logical and females to be subjective and intuitive in their processing orientation (Broverman, Klaiber, Kobayashi and Vogel, 1968)

Service advertisers today are faced with the challenge of communicating the intangible benefits of a service to their target market (Mattila, 2000), and the real difficulty lies in choosing an appropriate message strategy (Mittal, 1999). Based on the results, we suggest that if the consumers of the target market are mainly females, advertisers might present the information of the service effectively in a narrative-based form. On the other hand, if the target market is composed mainly by males, advertisers might present the information of the service effectively in an attribute-based form.

There are some limitations of this study. First, our samples are almost drawn from the internet, and most of them are college and graduate school students between 20 and 30 years old. More samples of widely distributed demographics are needed in the future research. Secondly, because this investigation is limited to a single study, replications and extensions to other types of services or goods are needed. Thirdly, the conclusions of this study are based on using print advertisements; future research may examine the effects of different forms of TV ads rather than print ads. Finally, there are some other factors that may affect the results we don't control at first, such as consumer expertise or consumers' mood. More research is needed in understanding more completely the role of narratives in service advertising.

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