DOES EMOTIONALITY IN NON-PERSONAL BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS MATCH EMOTIONS EXPERIENCED IN ORGANISATIONAL BUYING?

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ABSTRACT

Considering the substantial role emotions play in organisational buying and selling and the presence of emotive advertising in business-to-business marketing communication, the purpose of this paper is to examine the existing body of knowledge in order to reveal if and how emotionality in non-personal business-to-business marketing communications matches emotions experienced by members of buying centres in purchasing situations. Emotionality in terms of emotional advertising content is used in this paper to describe the portrayal of emotions in non-personal promotional tools, not the emotions evoked by advertising and felt by recipients. Further research is requested to identify emotions in organisational buying situations and to detect the strategic use of emotion-laden content of non-personal communication suitable to the target audience and complementing personal communication by salespeople in business-to-business contexts.

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THE RELEVANCE OF EMOTIONS IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS MARKETING

Building relationships and communicating emotionally between buyers and sellers can lead to differentiation of increasingly comparable offers and augment purchase intentions (Bagozzi, 2006; Erevelles and Fukawa, 2013; Geiger and Finch, 2011; Gupta, Melewar and Bourlakis, 2010; Kroeber-Riel, 1984; Zehetner et al., 2012). Thus, linking products and services to emotions by using emotional content in non-personal communication tools can enhance emotional differentiation from competitors and thus target branding receptive organisational buyers (Bausback, 2007; Gelbrich, 2007; Lynch and de Chernatony, 2007; Mudambi, 2002). Stimuli in advertisements are seen as an influential factor in organisational purchasing decisions (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997), although Fill (2006) states that rather than advertising it is sales promotion and personal selling which deliver persuasion and differentiation. Backhaus and Voeth (2010) again recognise the necessity to create target-group specific communication and incorporating emotional and rational appeals in advertising messages and in early models of organisational buying behaviour, for example of Shet (1973) or Webster and Wind (1972), advertising plays a role in terms of creating perceptual distortion regarding offers of selling organisations. However, it is unclear, if the portrayal of

emotions in advertising is employed strategically and reflects emotions experienced by organisational buyers in purchasing situations.

Webster and Keller (2004) point out that by purchasing products and services buying centre members not only aim to solve their organisation's problem but, in addition, aim to achieve their own individual goals. Consequently, organisational buying serves rational and emotional needs, and recent research emphasises the role of emotions in personal selling (Erevelles and Fukawa, 2013), and in organisational buying behaviour and in business relationships (Bagozzi, 2006; Gupta, Melewar and Bourlakis, 2010; Lynch and de Chernatony, 2007; Paulssen, 2009; Schafmann, 2000; Tähtinen and Blois, 2011; Zehetner et al., 2012). In accordance, the presence of emotional components in business-to-business print advertising can be confirmed (Salander, 2010; Voeth and Niederauer, 2008). Conversely, little is known about if and how emotions experienced by buying centre members during the decision making processes and in relation to purchases are reflected employing emotional components in promotional tools. While interpersonal buyer-seller-communication allows an assessment of the buyer's emotional information and for the salesperson to adapt accordingly (Drollinger and Comer, 2013; Wiatr Borg and Johnston, 2013), an adaptation of non-personal marketing messages to emotions experienced by organisational buyers in the context of purchasing decisions is yet unclear (Salander, 2010). In order to detect research findings which contribute to an understanding of intentional employment of emotionality in non-personal communicational tools, literature will be reviewed concerning emotions experienced by buyers in organisational purchasing situations and the use of emotional stimuli in business-to-business print advertising.

EMOTIONAL CONTENT IN PROMOTIONAL BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

To begin with, a clarification of terms seems necessary, since emotions in advertising are frequently used to express emotions evoked by advertising or even affective responses to advertising (e.g. Erevelles, 1998; Poels and Dewitte, 2006; Stewart, Morris and Grover, 2007). However, emotional characteristics of advertising messages must be distinguished from the elicitation of emotions through advertising stimuli. The former are conveyors of emotions in advertising. They refer to the portrayal of emotions or emotion-laden components as part of the advertising execution and are termed *emotionality* in this paper (Salander, 2010). Rather than focusing on the elicitation of emotion, emotionality delineates "what is happening in the film" (Agres, 1990, p. 7) and is used by others referring to advertising execution (Brader, 2006; Ray and Batra, 1983; Zeitlin and Westwood, 1986).

Non-personal communication tools such as online and print advertising in trade journals are important in business-to-business marketing communications and are, in addition to personal forms of communication like selling and trade fairs, commonly used in organisational marketing (Backhaus and Voeth, 2010; Fuchs, 2012; Reinecke and Hoeft, 2012). Organisational customers rely on impersonal, commercial information sources like advertisements during early stages of the purchasing process and also when searching for alternative suppliers or when facing challenging purchase decisions (Johnston and Lewin, 1996; Moriarty and Spekman, 1984). Marketing communications can build awareness of, and knowledge about, the business-to-business product and evoke brand preferences related to knowledge about the brand (Baumgarth, 2012; Gilliland and Johnston, 1997; Gupta, Melewar and Bourlakis, 2010; Lasogga, 1998; Mitchell and Olson, 1981). For example, positive

emotions experienced by the audience during exposure to films scenes with placement of business-to-business brands led to recall effects and cognitive responses (Lord and Gupta, 2010). Despite these insights, technical or service advantages of industrial products and services are frequently seen as the main possibility to achieve differentiation in business-to-business markets (Gawantka, 2006), even though informational business-to-business advertising is being regarded as more and more interchangeable (Kroeber-Riel and Esch, 2011). Contrastingly, research indicates that intangible aspects of industrial offers such as reputation or low risks and emotional dimensions are important (McDowell Mudambi et al., 1997; Michell et al., 2001; Shaw et al., 1989) and that advertising with primarily informational content fails to successfully build brands (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997; Heath et al., 2009) and is less effective in business terms than emotional content, even for more 'rational' products (Geuens, de Pelsmacker and Faseur, 2011). However, several authors (e.g. Cutler and Javalgi, 1994; Turley and Kelley, 1997) refer to the former picture of the rational organisational buyer and recommend the use of rational appeals only. Hence, extensive research is required since communications research has largely neglected emotional components in business-to-business advertisements (Erevelles, 1998; Gilliland and Johnston, 1997; Kroeber-Riel, 1980; LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009; Young, 2006).

Recent research indicates that business-to-business print advertising predominantly employs emotional stimuli like humour, trustworthiness/reliability and pride/success (Salander, 2010). The employment of emotional stimuli like trustworthiness and reliability or pride and success reflect their relevance in an organisational context (Lasogga, 1998; Schafmann, 2000; Zehetner et al., 2012). However, fear as an advertising stimulus does not play the role that others (e.g. Gelbrich, 2007; Naccarato and Neuendorf, 1998) attributed to it.

Organisational purchasing targets the organisation's needs and serves not individual consumption. However, in the business-to-business context buying decisions are determined by rational as well as emotional elements (e.g. Bagozzi, 2006; Bausback, 2007; Gelbrich, 2007; Lynch and de Chernatony, 2007, 2004; Schafmann, 2000; Zehetner et al., 2012). Emotional motives in organisational decision-making can involve the need for friendship and social needs, for prestige and career security (Gelbrich, 2007; McPhee, 2002; Schafmann, 2000; Webster and Keller, 2004; Weinberg, 1995). Accordingly, a successful communicative positioning of business-to-business brands could use emotional values such as a charismatic image, trustworthiness, tradition and security as well as rational values (Bausback, 2007).

Organisational purchasing contains antecedent activities such as determining the supplier-base, confirming a bidding competition, creating tools for managing buying activities, for minimising risks, for the evaluation and comparison of potential business partners, and finally forming contracts (Svahn and Westerlund, 2009, p.174), with accompanying feelings of happiness and excitement about challenging projects and anger and negative tension in cases of high-risk projects (Zehetner et al., 2012). The frequency of buyer-seller contact significantly affects the buyer's perception of trust and expertise of the salesperson and credibility of the supplier can be supported by advertising (Belonax, Newell and Plank, 2007). Moreover, actively building trust reduces the vulnerability of buyer-seller relationship (Friend, Hamwi and Rutherford, 2011). Research indicates the importance of emotional aspects when evaluating suppliers and in establishing long-term supplier-relationships, specifically when organisational buyers miss rationality in terms of calculability and predictability (Zehetner et al., 2012, p. 224). Intrapersonal and interpersonal emotions

experienced by buying centre members during decision making processes have impact on buyer-seller relationships and include positive emotions like pride, empathy, emotional wisdom in terms of managing interpersonal relationships, and attachment, while negative emotions refer to social anxiety, guilt, shame, embarrassment, envy, and jealousy (Bagozzi, 2006). The positive – negative dichotomy is also used by Zehetner et al. (2012), who observed feelings of personal and corporate success, pride and positive excitement as positive aspects of emotions perceived in organisational buying situations, and anger, annoyance, mistrust, nervousness and fear as negative aspects. In addition, the authors report emotional aspects found in organisational buying behaviour to be relevant for organisational selling in terms of supportive appeals in non-personal marketing communications. Thus, on one hand these insights shed a light on the role of emotions in organisational buying and selling, and on the other hand point out that the investigation of emotionality in business-to-business marketing communications, with a focus on print advertisements for products and services, deserves more attention.

CONCLUSION AND EMERGING DIRECTIONS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of intentional employment of emotional themes relevant to the target audience, this paper highlights the presence of emotionality in organisational purchasing and in business-to-business promotional tools. However, the issue of matching emotionality in non-personal marketing communications with emotions perceived in organisational buying has previously received little attention. This is surprising, considering the importance of advertisements in the promotional mix of business-to-business marketing communications and the recognition of the relevance of emotions in organisational purchasing. Consequently, this paper postulates an agenda for future research addressing the following issues:

- More insight is needed to detect emotional techniques employed in business-to-business print advertising and the type and style of stimuli used in emotion-laden advertisements.

- How does emotionality in non-personal business-to-business marketing communications relate to emotions perceived in organisational buying situations, and how can business-to-business marketers identify them in accordance with their promotional concept?

- Do different aspects of buyer-seller relationships like frequency of contact, duration of the relationship, interpersonal and intrapersonal emotions, and attachment affect the choice of advertising stimuli?

- Does consistency of emotions experienced and emotional components displayed play a role in information processing?

The substantial presence and relevance of emotions in organisational buying behaviour and in non-personal marketing communications call for future research, addressing emotions used in communication tools and emotions experienced during the buying process. Conclusively, the question of emotional stimuli that matter to organisational buyers and reflect their purchasing experience aims at understanding the strategic employment of emotionality and should be investigated systematically.

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