

Çevrimiçi Reklamlarda Tüketicinin Reklamı Kendisiyle İlişkilendirmesinin ve Marka Tipinin Marka Tutumuna



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Öz

Bu araştırmanın temel amacı çevrimiçi reklamlarda öz imlemenin (referanslama) ve marka tiplerinin marka tutumuna etkisini incelemektir. Bu amaçla 2x2 denekler arası bir deney tasarımı uygulanmıştır. Değişkenler reklam tipi (öz referanslama olan/öz referanslama olmayan) ve marka kişiliğiydi (samimi/heyecan verici). Veriler “Qualtrics.com” kullanılarak farklı sosyal medya platformları aracılığıyla bir anket bağlantısı üzerinden toplanmıştır. Toplam 245 kullanıma uygun anket elde edilmiştir. Sonuçlar reklam tipi ve marka tipi arasında anlamlı bir etkileşim olduğunu göstermiştir. Marka tipi samimi olduğunda öz imlemenin marka tutumuna olumsuz bir etkisi olduğu belirlenmiştir. Sonuçlar aynı zamanda bir reklam öz-referanslama içeriyorsa heyecan verici bir markaya olan tutumun samimi bir markaya göre daha yüksek olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öz-imleme, marka kişiliği, çevrimiçi reklamcılık

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The Effects of Consumer Self-referencing and Brand Type on Brand Attitude In Online Advertising

Abstract

The primary aim of this research is to determine the effect of self-referencing and brand types on brand attitude in online advertising. For this purpose, a 2×2 between subjects experimental design was implemented. The variables were advertising type (self-referencing vs no self-referencing) and brand type (sincere vs exciting). Data were collected through a survey link distributed online via different social media platforms by using “Qualtrics.com”. A total number of 245 qualified surveys were obtained. The results revealed that there is a significant interaction of ad type and brand personality. It is found that when the brand type is sincere, self-referencing would have a negative effect on brand attitude. Results have also shown that, when an ad is with self-referencing, attitude towards to the brand for an exciting brand would be higher than a sincere brand.

Keywords: Self-referencing, brand personality, online advertising

Introduction

The increasing competition in the business world requires a company to have more competitive advantages than other companies in order to compete in global trade. The real competition of marketers in the market for products is to attract the attention of consumers, and one of such strategies in marketing is advertising. Advertising is a powerful promotional tool for businesses to attract consumers to their products (Dinu and Dinu, 2018). The role of advertisement is to draw attention to products that enable long-term relationships with consumers or to convey a well-defined message designed to bring products to customers’ mind and change belief about the product. Advertising is a common weapon in all marketing tools due to the positive effects on consumers’ purchasing behavior.

Today, online advertising has become one of the most important types of advertising and is found primarily on company websites designed to promote their products, as a banner or in emails, games, websites and social media platforms. Therefore, it is interesting to learn more about the features of online advertising that affect the attitude and interest of the consumer in online purchasing.

Another concept affecting consumer behavior is consumer self-concept. It is indicated in the literature that consumers purchase and consume products that are compatible with their core concepts. Self-referencing, one of the concepts that this research focuses on, takes place when the person processes the information with himself or by associating personal experiences. “While self-concept represents the frame of reference, self-reference refers to a cognitive process where information conveyed is related to one’s self-concept.” (Hesapçı et al., 2016). The process of relating information to oneself can affect product evaluations (Debevec and Romeo, 1992) or brand evaluations as well. Research suggests that self-referencing increases persuasion when message contents or product features are strong (Burnkrant and Unnava, 1989). Another research on self-referencing reveals that when advertisers are encouraged to associate their advertising messages with them, the persuasive effects of advertising increase as well (Debevec and Iyer, 1988).

Brand personality (Aaker, 1997), a concept that this research examines, is defined as “a set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Aaker (1997) has developed a framework that explains the five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and robustness. However, this research focused on two types of brand personality, and these were identified as “sincere” brands and “exciting” brands. Sincere brands are characterized by features such as authentic, genuine, honest, healthy, original and cheerful. Exciting brands are characterized by being bold, following the latest fashion and being exciting. Brand personality can be considered as a subset of brand image (McCracken, 1989) and also enables consumers to express themselves (Belk, 1988). Therefore, there must be a match between the self-image of

the individual and the perceived brand personality; this is a convergent perspective of brand personality (Sirgy, 1982).

The associative learning theory (ALT) claims that “memory is a network, consisting of various nodes connected with associative links” (Collins and Loftus, 1975; Yoon and Kim, 2015). If specific elements such as a message and a brand in an ad are related, these are joined by an associative network which can be defined as a perceived linkage. This “linkage reflects congruity, which is defined as a match or fit between ad stimuli such as product, spokesperson, message, and brand” (Lee and Schumann, 2004). Various researchers have examined the effects of congruity between different ad related factors on consumer attitudes. For instance, Jung et al., (2011) examined consumer responses to product information-shopping goal congruency. Misra and Beatty (1990) examined the effects of celebrity-brand congruity. Kamins and Gupta (1994) examined the effects of spokesperson-product image congruity. Priester et al. (2004) studied the fit between sponsor and brand. A common finding of these studies is that congruity results with more positive responses whereas incongruity causes more negative responses. Congruity between an advertisement and established associations for the advertised brand is referred to as ad-brand congruity (Nagar, 2015). Incongruity refers to advertising information that does not conform to consumers’ expectations and their perceptions of what is relevant, according to their previous knowledge of a brand (Dahlen et al., 2005; Heckler and Childers, 1992).

Although extant research suggests that self-reference affects persuasion (Debevec and Iyer, 1988; Meyers-Levy and Peracchio, 1996) moderating factors of self-reference have not been identified. This research proposes brand personality as a moderator of the effects of self-reference and tries to determine how self-referencing works for different brand personalities (i.e. sincere, exciting). Specifically, this study tests the effects of self-reference on brand attitudes when the ad is not congruent with the brand. In the context of online advertisements, the effects of congruity and self-referencing are not completely understood yet. Thus, another contribution of this study is that the aforementioned effects are investigated in an online medium.

In the following parts of the paper, theoretical framework and hypotheses are given, followed by the methodology and findings.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Previous studies on self-referencing show that ads with self-referencing affected brand attitudes more positively than ads without self-referencing (Ahn and Bailenson, 2011; Ahn et al., 2017; Debevec and Iyer, 1988; Perkins and Forehand, 2012). Therefore, when exposed to self-referencing ads compared to non-self-referencing ads, attitudes towards the brand are expected to be more positive.

What about the effect of brand personality? Previous research has not examined the impact of the brand type when self-referencing is used. This research focused on two types of brand personality: Sincere and exciting. Sincere brands are characterized by qualities such as down-to-earth, real, honest, wholesome, genuine and cheerful, and are also portrayed as consistent and trustworthy (Aaker et al., 2004). On the other hand, exciting brands are perceived as daring: (daring, trendy and exciting), spiritedness: (spirited, cool, young), imagination: (imaginative, unique) and contemporary: (up-to-date, independent, contemporary), thus exciting brands are characterized as unique and remarkable (Aaker, 1997).

Sincere brand personalities have traits such as nurturance, warmth, family orientation and traditionalism (Aaker, 1997), and these characteristics are positively related to relationship strength). Sincerity can also spark inferences of partner trustworthiness and dependability (Aaker, 1999). Studies also show that this supports feelings of vulnerability and the growth of relationships (Moorman et al., 1993). This is consistent with the notion that consumers form stronger relationships with sincere brands relative to exciting personalities. Specifically, compared to the young and trendy characteristics of the exciting brand, the sincere brand is perceived to provide inherent advantages in encouraging strong relationships, and also foster more positive perceptions of partner quality, which provides strength benefits (Aaker et al., 2004). Sincere brands are

considered warmer. Since sincere brands are more reminiscent of our family and friends than us, the characteristics of a sincere brand will not be compatible with self-referencing. Therefore:

H1a: For a sincere brand, self-referencing will have a negative effect on brand attitude compared to no self-referencing.

As exciting brands have characteristics such as uniqueness and independence, self-referencing should fit better with exciting brands. Exciting brands have the young, unique and trendy characteristics, they are often viewed as attractive, appealing, and capable of generating interest and trial (Altschiller, 2000: cited in Aaker et al., 2004). Exciting brand personality consumers are often avoidant consumers because they value independence and self-reliance hence are not desirous of intimate relationships. Thus, it is most likely to reflect the brand with their self-concept. Aaker et al., (2001) indicated in their past research that, consumers who value self-assertion and independence tend to have a higher preference for brands that reflect the exciting personality trait. Therefore:

H1b: For an exciting brand, self-referencing will have a positive effect on brand attitude compared to no self-referencing.

As discussed in the literature above, in an ad with self-referencing consumers associate ad information to their sense of self. In this case, when an ad includes self-referencing, the consumer is expected to process the information of the ad by relating the message to him or herself. Thus, the cognition that creates links between the information in the message and the information from the memory of the consumer demonstrates favorable thoughts and positive feelings transferred to the stimuli (e.g. ad) (Bosmans et al., 2001; Debevec and Romeo, 1992). Since self-referencing has been found to influence evaluations of an ad as well as the evaluations of the product/brand featured in the ad, the consumers' ability to self-reference should be deemed relevant to marketers. Some researches revealed that individuals who are high in self-referencing have more positive attitudes toward the ad and product/brand and thus more favorable purchase intentions than those with no or low self-refer-

encing (Debevec and Romeo, 1992; Perkins and Forehand, 2012). When an advertisement contains self-referencing, the affection associated with the self is then transferred to the ad, resulting in positive attitudes.

As the characteristics of exciting brands are compatible with self-referencing, this study expects that an ad that is with self-referencing, brand attitude for exciting brands will record higher than sincere. Therefore:

H1c: For an exciting brand, when an ad includes self-referencing, the brand attitude will be higher compared to a sincere brand.

Methodology

In this section, research methodology will be presented and the data collection method and data analysis will be explained by giving information about participants and sample, data collection as well as the research design.

Participants and Procedure

For this study, the “experimental research” method was used by using students as a sample. Experimental design is “the process of carrying out research in an objective and controlled fashion so that precision is maximized and specific conclusions can be drawn regarding a hypothesis statement” (Bell, 2009). The aim of an experiment is to establish the effect that an independent variable has on a dependent variable. Thus, experimental design was suitable with the aim of this research. In behavioral experiments that are focused on maximizing precision and control use of student samples is appropriate because of homogeneous sampling requirements (Thomas, 2011).

A total of 387 people participated in the study. However, some participants failed to complete the questionnaire, which were considered invalid. A final sample of two hundred and forty five (245) participants was recruited for this experiment from Turkey and abroad which were all university students. The implemented design was 2 (brand personality: exciting vs. sincere) \times 2 (ad type: self-reference vs. non self-ref-

erence). Hair et al. (2010) suggested that the minimum recommended sample size should be 20 observations per cell group. The sample met this minimum requirement. There were 57 participants in the sincere brand x non-self-referencing condition; 58 participants in the sincere brand x self-referencing condition; 65 participants in the exciting brand x non-self-referencing condition, and finally 65 participants in the exciting brand x self-referencing condition.

Out of the total number of 245, 128 participants were males and 113 were females. 7 seven people did not specify their gender. 181 had at least a college degree. 115 were between ages 25 and 30.

Data Collection

In this study, data was collected through a survey link distributed online. It was distributed to students to voluntarily fill the questionnaire created using “Qualtrics.com”. Surveys were distributed via email and via social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp). Since the study focuses on online advertisements, online survey method was necessary. There are several advantages of online surveys such as reduced implementation time; reduced surveying costs once an electronic data collection system is developed is in place; easy to send reminders to non-respondents; and simplicity of importing data into data analysis programs. There are several disadvantages. These include: different screen configurations; difficulty of sampling e-mail addresses; and the quicker, sometimes instantaneous, decision not to respond (Evans and Mathur, 2006).

Study Design and Measures

The 2×2 between subject design was used. The bases for ad types were “self-referencing” and “non-self-referencing”; whereas the bases for brand types were sincere and exciting.

For self-referencing, methods adapted from Burnkrant and Unnava (1995) were used. The participants were exposed to a message with either self-referencing or non-self-referencing in the content. A message

that does not have self-referencing was as follows: “HELLO! NARDO digital watches brand was made for a sincere or heartfelt audience. The NARDO brand is a sensible brand designed for EVERYONE. Whereas the message for self-referencing was as follows: “HEY! NARDO was made for an audience looking for excitement. The NARDO brand is considered to be exciting, trendy and designed for YOU.” A written advertisement was created to change the brand personality of the imaginary brand NARDO. The page included photos, written content and a brand label. The detailed procedures of Aaker et al. (2004) were followed to manipulate both sincere and exciting brands. For example, font color (soft brown vs red), images (sitting dog - jumping Dalmatian dog), photo (smiling couple vs sports woman), content (family picnic and snowy mountains) and advertising slogan (“Because Life Is Too Meaningful to Let You Pass It By” vs. “Because Life Is Too Exciting to Let You Pass It by”).

After seeing the ad, the participants were asked to write about the ad they had seen, and they were required to define the brand Nardo. This question was used to verify that participants paid attention to the ad and also to strengthen the effect of manipulation. A 5-item, 7-point semantic differential scale (Baker and Kennedy, 1994) was used to measure consumers’ attitude towards the ad. Participants were asked to present their candid opinions on how to rate ads on a 7-point (Bad/Good, Dislike/Like, Unpleasant/Pleasant, Boring/Interesting, Not Likeable/ Likeable, Unappealing/ Appealing) with a (Cronbach’s alpha of 0.93), which indicates a high level of internal consistency.

After this question, participants responded to the 8-item Brand Personality Scale adapted from Aaker (1997). The scale includes five personality factors: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. This study employed the dimensions of sincerity and excitement to measure brand personality. An 8-item, 7-point scale was applied to measure the two brand personality dimensions (Sincere: Cronbach $\alpha = 0.86$ vs Exciting: Cronbach $\alpha = 0.85$). Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agree with the statements relative to the brand’s

(NARDO) traits. Sincerity traits were cheerful, down-to-earth, wholesome, and honest. Excitement traits were spirited, daring, up to date, and imaginative. Also, a 5-item, 7-point semantic differential scale (Coulson, 1989) was applied to measure consumers' attitudes towards the brand (NARDO). Participants were asked to give their opinions on how they rate the NARDO brand (Bad/Good, Unpleasant/Pleasant, Unlikeable/Likeable, Inferior/Superior, Unfavorable/ Favorable (Cronbach's alpha of 0.93). The study concluded with a brief demographic survey.

Findings

It was checked whether the attitudes towards advertisements change according to different conditions. The results showed that the interaction effect of the ad type and brand type on the attitudes towards the advertisement was not significant; The F value is 0.90 while the p value is 0.34. Here, the p value is greater than 0.1 ($p > 0.1$), therefore the result showed no significant difference between different conditions in terms of attitude towards advertising (exciting brand = 4.16 vs. sincere brand = 3.71; $t = 1.54$, $p = 0.13$); (self-referenced ad = 3.85 vs. non-self-reference ad = 4.02; $t = 0.56$, $p = 0.58$).

To investigate the interaction effect, a 2x2 GLM (generalized linear model) was carried out in the SAS program, which included advertising type (self-referencing vs. non-self-referencing) and brand personality (brand type) (sincere and exciting) among the subjects. Both the ad type and the brand personality are coded as follows: Brand type - (0 = Sincere, 1 = Exciting), Ad type - (0 = self-referencing, 1 = self-referencing). The results revealed that there was a significant interaction between the type of advertising and brand personality; F Value = (3.98) and $p = (0.047)$. No other significant effects were observed. To explore the two-way interaction, further analyses were conducted. The LSmeans analyses were used to see the differences between the conditions.

As seen in Figure-1 below, for the sincere brand (brand = 0), there is a significant difference between self-referencing advertising condition ($M = 3.64$) and non-self-referencing advertising condition ($M = 4.58$), t

= 2.19 and $p = 0.03$ and DF is 241. This result showed that self-referencing (SR) has a negative effect on the sincere brand, and this result is also compatible with H1a.

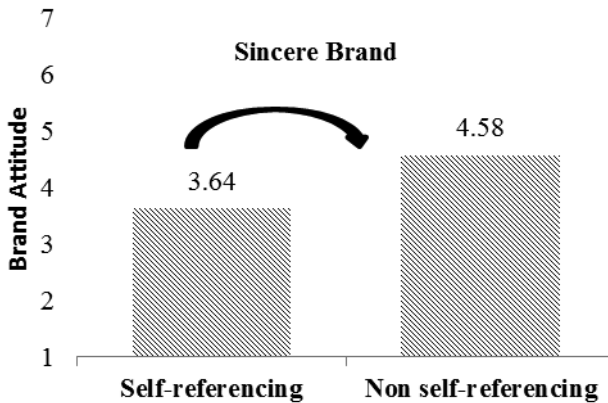


Figure 1: Effect of Self-referencing for the Sincere Brand

Analysis for the exciting brand showed that the ad type does not have a significant effect on brand attitude since ($p = 0.562$). This result does not support the second hypothesis (H1b) proposing that advertising with self-referencing for an exciting brand, has a positive effect on brand attitude compared to non-self-referencing advertising. However, it was observed that self-referencing has a slightly positive effect on attitude.

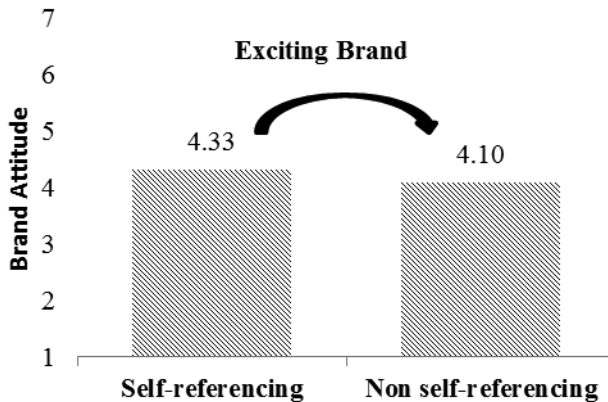


Figure 2: Effect of Self-referencing for the Exciting Brand

In addition, the study also revealed a marginally significant difference between the sincere and exciting brand when the ad type is self-referenced (SR) ($t = 1.68, p = 0.094$). The mean value for the sincere brand is 3.64, and 4.34 for the exciting brand. For ads with self-referencing, the attitude towards exciting brands is higher than those of sincere brands (see Figure 3). This result is consistent with the third hypothesis (H1c), which states that; when an ad includes self-referencing, the brand attitude for an exciting brand will be higher than a sincere brand.

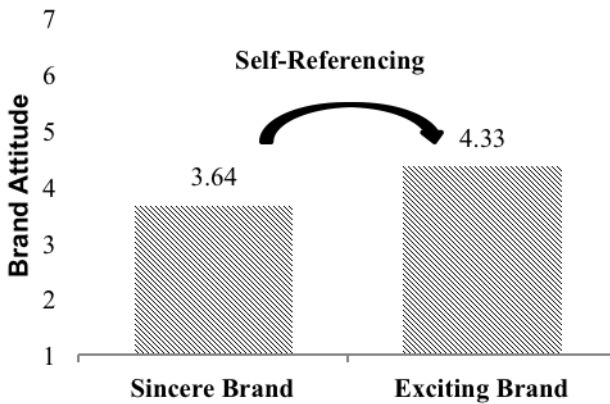


Figure 3: Effect of Self-referencing Advertising on Brands

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how self-referencing and brand types in online advertising will affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand. A number of key findings have emerged in the process.

In advertising, consumers often engage themselves in self-referencing, which is known as the process by which consumers apply the advertisement's relevance to themselves to judge its usefulness (Debevec and Iyer, 1988). Self-referencing is practiced by encouraging consumers to relate a product or situation to their experiences or self. However, Debevec and Romeo (1992) found that individuals who are high in self-referencing have more positive attitudes towards advertisements and products, and consequently have more favorable purchase intentions

than individuals who are low in self-referencing. Previous studies on self-referencing show that ads with self-referencing affect brand attitudes more positively than non-self-referencing ads (Ahn and Bailenson, 2011; Ahn et al., 2017; Debevec and Iyer, 1988; Perkins and Forehand, 2012). Therefore, people's attitudes towards the brand are expected to be more positive when exposed to self-referencing ads compared to non-self-referencing ads.

According to some research, the behavior of a brand is consistent with the brand's personality, therefore consumers tend to interpret a more authentic and legitimate brand behavior (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The authenticity of a brand is a unique part of its brand identity and reflects how consumers maintain the essence of a brand, thus, the most essential or most vital part of some idea or experience (Beverland, 2005). For instance, if consumers see exciting brands as unorthodox (independent of behavior or thought) and unpredictable, and also see sincere brands as consistent and trustworthy (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2004), they should see an exciting brand as more authentic when associated with sensory disconfirmation, and see a sincere brand as more authentic when associated with sensory confirmation (Sundar and Noseworthy, 2016). However, it is found that exciting brands can benefit from sensory disconfirmation on a peripheral aspect of the product (e.g., on the packaging), even when the disconfirmation is perceived to be negative, whereas sincere brands benefit from peripheral sensory confirmation, more so than even positive peripheral sensory disconfirmation (Sundar and Noseworthy, 2016).

It is concluded that for the sincere brand, where consumers feel strong ties with the brand, self-referencing will have a negative impact on the brand attitude compared to the non-self-referencing situation, because of the nature of its reliability. The results show that in the absence of self-referencing, the attitude towards the sincere brand is higher than in the case of self-referencing. Consumers trust that sincere brands are often consistent and trustworthy or dependable. Sincere brands are more down-to-earth. Swaminathan et al. (2009) described "connection" and "affection" as feelings of warmth and friendship that consumers have

towards a brand and these may typically be associated with the sincere brand. As it is mentioned in the literature, self-referencing is seen as the degree to which consumers relate an ad to themselves, therefore a competent and sincere brand personality can increase consumers' intentions to continuously use the product or brand.

When consumers are attached to a product and or brand, they do no longer consider the external information concerning the subject; as such the effect of self-referencing is not a matter of concern to them because of the nature of sincerity and therefore the study proved that self-referencing (SR) has a negative effect on the sincere brand.

The study also hypothesized that, for an exciting brand, self-referencing will have a positive effect on brand attitude compared to non self-referencing. As a result of the study, it has been observed that self-referencing has a slightly positive effect, although not statistically significant, for exciting brands. It is discussed that self-referencing is seen as a cognitive (the mental process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through experience and thought processing strategy where a consumer relates message information to his or her self-structure) (Burnkrant and Unnava, 1995). Previous studies suggest that one of the effects of self-referencing is the generation of favorable cognitive responses, or positive thoughts while the ad is being viewed (Debevec and Iyer, 1988; Burnkrant and Unnava, 1995). The responses to cognition reflect an association between the information in a message and information from memory (Cacioppo et al., 1982).

Since self-structures are believed to represent a network of cognitive generalizations about self (Markus, 1977), activating self-structures through self-referencing should affect cognitive responses. Thus, self-referencing of ad information by a consumer should result in the positive feelings which the consumer associates with his or her self-structure being transferred to the ad. This, in turn, should result in more favorable thoughts about the ad (Sujan et al., 1993; Burnkrant and Unnava, 1995). This result is in line with the current study. It is not surprising that an exciting brand personality has built its roots around qualities of energy and

youthfulness which is often seen as very attractive, appealing, as well as being capable of generating interest and trial in this current generation. Fournier, (1998) stated that exciting brands are particularly special and remarkable when targeting the young demographic structure. Because exciting brands are known to have originality and remarkable features, consumers try to distinguish their unique personalities from others. Since it is known that exciting brands have characteristics of uniqueness and attention-getting, consumers therefore seek to differentiate their unique personalities from others. Exciting brands sometimes encourage consumers to “expect the unexpected” through their more flexible and lively spirit. They are generally associated with the characteristics of activity, strength, and stimulation (Fraser and Banks, 2004) and is considered up-to-date (Bellizzi et al., 1983).

Moreover, as brand attitude is defined as the consumer’s overall evaluations of a brand which can either be positive or negative, attitudes as mental states used by individuals (Aaker et al., 2004) are formed as the result of the consumer’s experience with the brand they used. Consumers therefore have both emotion and cognition judgments. However, self-referencing is a result of transferring the effect from memory to the brand. This happens only when the link between the brand and the autobiographical memory is clearly stated in the ad. The attitudes and intentions of consumers will be positively influenced by the extent to which they self-reference an ad. Therefore, it is realized that when an ad includes self-referencing for an exciting brand, there will be positive attitudes towards that brand as compared to when the ad has no self-referencing.

In this study, it has been proven that when advertising is accompanied by self-referencing, there is a marginally significant difference between the attitude towards sincere and exciting brands. This finding also supports the notion that the characteristics of exciting brands are compatible with self-referencing.

Despite the useful findings of the current study, this research is limited to one study, and future research should replicate the results using

other products or brands, among various age groups. Second, ad stimuli in this study are confined to the ad message, and brand. Further studies can examine other ad elements that may influence consumer responses. Findings of the study may not fully generalize to situations in which consumers are exposed to an ad several times. Future research may be conducted taking multiple exposures into account.

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Extended Summary

The Effects of Consumer Self-referencing and Brand Type on Brand Attitude In Online Advertising

Previous studies on self-referencing show that ads with self-referencing affected brand attitudes more positively than ads without self-referencing (Ahn and Bailenson, 2011; Ahn et al., 2017; Debevec and Iyer, 1988; Perkins and Forehand, 2012). Therefore, when exposed to self-referencing ads compared to non-self-referencing ads, attitudes towards the brand are expected to be more positive.

What about the effect of brand personality? Previous research has not examined the impact of the brand type when self-referencing is used. This research focused on two types of brand personality: Sincere and exciting. Sincere brands are characterized by qualities such as down-to-earth, real, honest, wholesome, genuine and cheerful, and are also portrayed as consistent and trustworthy (Aaker et al., 2004). On the other hand, exciting brands are perceived as daring: (daring, trendy and exciting), spiritedness: (spirited, cool, young), imagination: (imaginative, unique) and contemporary: (up-to-date, independent, contemporary), thus exciting brands are characterized as unique and remarkable (Aaker, 1997).

Sincere brand personalities have traits such as nurturance, warmth, family orientation and traditionalism (Aaker, 1997), and these characteristics are positively related to relationship strength). Sincerity can also spark inferences of partner trustworthiness and dependability (Aaker, 1999). Studies also show that this supports feelings of vulnerability and the growth of relationships (Moorman et al., 1993). This is consistent with the notion that consumers form stronger relationships with sincere brands relative to exciting personalities. Specifically, compared to the young and trendy characteristics of the exciting brand, the sincere brand is perceived to provide inherent advantages in encouraging strong relationships, and also foster more positive perceptions of partner quality, which provides strength benefits (Aaker et al., 2004). Sincere brands are considered warmer. Since sincere brands are more reminiscent of our family and friends than us, the characteristics of a sincere brand will not be compatible with self-referencing. Therefore:

H1a. For a sincere brand, self-referencing will have a negative effect on brand attitude compared to no self-referencing.

As exciting brands have characteristics such as uniqueness and independence, self-referencing should fit better with exciting brands. Exciting brands have the young, unique and trendy characteristics, they are often viewed as attractive, appealing, and capable of generating interest and trial (Altschiller, 2000: cited in Aaker et al., 2004). Exciting brand personality consumers are often avoidant consumers because they value independence and self-reliance hence are not desirous of intimate relationships. Thus, it is most likely to reflect the brand with their self-concept. Aaker et al., (2001) indicated in their past research that, consumers who value self-assertion and independence tend to have a higher preference for brands that reflect the exciting personality trait. Therefore:

H1b. For an exciting brand, self-referencing will have a positive effect on brand attitude compared to no self-referencing.

As discussed in the literature above, in an ad with self-referencing consumers associate ad information to their sense of self. In this case, when an ad includes self-referencing, the consumer is expected to process the information of the ad by relating the message to him or herself. Thus, the cognition that creates links between the information in the message and the information from the memory of the consumer demonstrates favorable thoughts and positive feelings transferred to the stimuli (e.g. ad) (Bosmans et al., 2001; Debevec and Romeo, 1992). Since self-referencing has been found to influence evaluations of an ad as well as the evaluations of the product/brand featured in the ad, the consumers' ability to self-reference should be deemed relevant to marketers. Some researches revealed that individuals who are high in self-referencing have more positive attitudes toward the ad and product/brand and thus more favorable purchase intentions than those with no or low self-referencing (Debevec and Romeo, 1992; Perkins and Forehand, 2012). When an advertisement contains self-referencing, the affection associated with the self is then transferred to the ad, resulting in positive attitudes.

As the characteristics of exciting brands are compatible with self-referencing, this study expects that an ad that is with self-referencing, brand attitude for exciting brands will record higher than sincere. Therefore:

H1c. For an exciting brand, when an ad includes self-referencing, the brand attitude will be higher compared to a sincere brand.

For this study, the “experimental research” method was used by using students as a sample. Data was collected through a survey link distributed online. It was distributed to students to voluntarily fill the questionnaire created using “Qualtrics.com”. A total of 387 people participated in the study. However, some participants failed to complete the questionnaire, which were considered invalid. A final sample of two hundred and forty five (245) participants was recruited for this experiment from Turkey and abroad which were all university students. The implemented design was 2 (brand personality: exciting vs. sincere) \times 2 (ad type: self-reference vs. non self-reference). To investigate the interaction effect, a 2x2 GLM (generalized linear model) was carried out in the SAS program, which included advertising type (self-referencing vs. non-self-referencing) and brand personality (brand type) (sincere and exciting) among the subjects. The LSmeans analyses were used to see the differences between the conditions.

For the sincere brand (brand = 0), there is a significant difference between self-referencing advertising condition ($M = 3.64$) and non-self-referencing advertising condition ($M = 4.58$), $p = 0.03$. This result showed that self-referencing (SR) has a negative effect on the sincere brand, and this result is also compatible with H1a. Analysis for the exciting brand showed that the ad type does not have a significant effect on brand attitude since ($p = 0.562$). This result does not support the second hypothesis (H1b) proposing that advertising with self-referencing for an exciting brand, has a positive effect on brand attitude compared to non-self-referencing advertising. the study also revealed a marginally significant difference between the sincere and exciting brand when the ad type is self-referenced (SR) ($t = 1.68$, $p = 0.094$). For ads with self-referencing, the attitude towards exciting brands is higher than those of sincere brands (see Figure 3). This result is consistent with the third hypothesis (H1c).

In this study, it has been proven that when advertising is accompanied by self-referencing, there is a marginally significant difference between the attitude towards sincere and exciting brands. This finding also supports the notion that the characteristics of exciting brands are compatible with self-referencing, but not with sincere brands.