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PAPER PRESENTATION

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Perception of humanness in advertisement

Workshop: Consumer behavior issues
Type of paper: Empirical

Abstract:

It is enough to turn a page in a magazine or look at smiling faces from billboards to realize that the human(nes)s is a promotional tool frequently used by marketers. Making a product/brand resemble a human being (e.g. drawing a face, giving a name) can trigger anthropomorphism (i.e. ascription and treatment of non-human entities as if they are human). This practice can be beneficial for the brand and lead to better evaluations and attitudes.

We argue and show that the anthropomorphism can also be triggered in a less explicit manner.

Using an experimental design, we find that an advertisement representing a product and a real person (i.e. model) leads to higher ascription of humanness to the product (Study 1) and to the brand (Study 2 & 3). This anthropomorphism of the product/brand than leads to better evaluation of the advertisement.

At the same time, these advertisements lead to dehumanized perceptions of a model, regardless of type of the advertised product (smartphone (Study 1), ice-cream (Study 2), shampoo (Study 3)) or physical features of a model (Caucasian (Study 1-3), African (Study 2)). These studies are the first step toward empirical and theoretical integration of the anthropomorphism and the dehumanization, phenomena that have been researched separately so far. On a broader level the aim of this thesis project is to addressing the use of humans and humanness in marketing communications and provide insights on potential (unexpected) drawbacks of this practice.