

PETS IN ADVERTISING OR HOW TO INFLUENCE CONSUMERS?

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ABSTRACT. Animals have always played an important role in the history of humanity. We only have to think of prehistoric cave paintings, or the relationship between our grandparents and animals, or recall the iconic films Alpha or Hachi, A Dog's Tale. However, it is important to note that the nature of the relationship between animals and humans has changed over time. Whereas in the past their relationship was mainly characterised by respect: maintaining their personal independence; nowadays this relationship has taken on a different dimension, as pets – in most families – live in the same household, receiving the same level of attention as the rest of the family. The primary objectives of this study are (1) to identify the product/service categories that are not targeted at dogs and pets, but they appear as the primary communicators in the promotion of the product or service, (2) to identify the characteristics that fundamentally define this type of advertising.

Keywords: pets, advertisements, parameters, message

JEL classification: M37

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Introduction and Review of Literature

Who is the target segment? This is a question that fundamentally defines marketing. It is also true that the approach to the relationship between target segment and products advertised is complex, since advertising must influence not only the target segment, but also those who play a significant role in influencing the purchase decision. Another key question concerns the purpose of the purchase. As noted in the literature, the purpose of a purchase can be functional or symbolic: however, the main success of a brand is based on emotions and the way the brand connects with society (Olins, 2010). It is also known that emotions evoked by commercials depend to a large extent on the way they are communicated, on the content of the message and on the agency, i.e. „who” sends the message. As pets are nowadays (in the majority of households) treated as full members of the family, like children or friends (Mueller et al., 2020), their role is becoming increasingly important from a commercial point of view. Table 1 provides a structure of secondary data on the variables that form the trend in the relationship between pets and retail.

Table 1: Total number of pets, the number of retail outlets 'targeting' pets and the sales value recorded by them: 2021

	UK	Germany	France	Italy	Spain	Poland
Total number of pets*	60391,8	126604,5	64459,7	64768,6	17915,8	20692,6
Total number of dogs	10772,5	11005	7911,6	8728,6	6692,6	7936,3
Total number of cats	8438,2	15861	14741,2	10077	7037,1	3519
Other pets	41181,1	97738,5	41806,9	45963	5719,1	7704,2
Number of retail outlets 'targeting' pets	4046	2867	1039	5909	2198	3755
Total value of sales	5605,4	4772,5	4480,9	3304,8	1619,3	1198,2
Dog food**	2692,6	2204,1	2025,4	1535,9	961,2	595
Cat food	2292,2	2281,8	2141	1611,5	543,6	568,7
Other pet food	620,6	286,6	314,5	157,4	114,5	34,5

* Expressed in thousand, ** retail sales value: in million US dollars

Source: Statista.com

The data structured in the table suggest the following:

- Number of retail outlets for pets:
 - (1) is not directly proportional to the number of pets,

- (2) is not always proportional to the value of sales: interestingly the UK is ranked 4th in terms of the number of pets, yet it is ranked 2nd in terms of the number of retail outlets targeting pets, while it also has the highest value of sales. Spain is the most balanced in terms of the three variables.
- The total number of dogs, as pets, is the lowest in Spain, still more food was sold to them than to cats.

The number of pets is not necessarily a proportional indicator of value statement, as the extent and frequency of pet food purchases also depends to a large extent on the owner's attitude towards pet food. What is certain, however, is that the attitude of households towards pets has created new needs for which there is now a large market: their presence is therefore more than justified in terms of their inclusion in marketing communications.

Despite the fact that several brands use pets in their product promotion, there are relatively few scientific articles that investigate the relationship between the presence of animals and purchase intention: i.e. how the inclusion of pets in commercials affects consumer behaviour (Lancendorfer et al., 2008; Jia et al., 2022). Animal symbolism is very broad (Darab et al., 2016), and consequently advertisers have to selectively associate certain animals with certain product categories (Spears et al., 1996). Horses, dogs and wolves are symbols of masculinity, friendship and freedom (Braunwart, 2015). When animals in advertising are given human characteristics, they become anthropomorphic (hybrid) "representatives". These types of animals can convince potential customers of almost anything, and consequently can have a significant impact in terms of sales volume (Lennklo, 2010). In fact, the representation of animals in commercials serves a strategic purpose, since they are used to communicate the values that are the main pillars of a brand. Not surprisingly, the most frequently featured animal is the dog (Stone, 2014), as dogs in commercials can be interpreted as family members (Lerner & Kalof, 1999) and thus shape attitudes towards the commercial (Lancendorfer et al., 2008). In this type of commercials, content is paramount, given the plot and context (Mueller et al., 2020), as people are more likely to recall positive information than stories with a negative connotation (Stone, 2014). Furthermore, there is also the possibility that the brand that is the subject of the commercial remains in the background, playing an invisible role in both the dog's life and the context of the commercial (Brooks, 2018). Brands that feature pets in their commercials need to be aware of the demographic characteristics of the owners in order to successfully target them, e.g. cat owners are older and more educated than dog owners (James et al., 2004). At the same time, the fact that the values that are specific to a culture play a significant role in the way commercials are created and perceived should not be overlooked (Hirschman, 2003).

Material and Method(s)

Research objectives

This study is based on the following research questions:

- (1) What is the message of commercials featuring dogs and pets?
- (2) What are the parameters that play a significant role in the promotion of products and services involving dogs and pets?
- (3) What is the commercial based on?
- (4) How do viewers perceive commercials featuring dogs and pets?

Methodology of research

- (A) The concept of 'pets' is reduced to dogs. Furthermore, the term 'dog' was used on the grounds that not all commercials included in the analysis contained an image that would have suggested that the dog in the advertisement was a pet.
- (B) The video-sharing website YouTube was used to identify commercials featuring dogs.
- (C) The commercials were identified using the keywords "dogs in commercials".
- (D) The international brands included in the analysis by product category are the following:
 - Vacuum cleaner: Rowenta (Silence Force 4A), Philips (SpeedPro Max Aqua), Bosch (Bosch cordless vacuums).
 - Vehicles: Subaru (Ski Trip), Volkswagen (Woofwagen), Chevrolet (Maddie), Buick (Woof).
 - Clothing: Skechers (Super Bowl Commercial – Go Run Mr. Quiggly!), DKNY (#GoodMorningDKNY).
 - Beer: Bud Light (Banned Superbowl Commercial Good Dog Bad Dog), Budweiser (Someone Waits For You At Home).
 - Services: Amazon (Amazon Prime TV ad – Dog), Travelers Insurance (Dog commercial).
- (E) The commercials were analyzed via content analysis. The content analysis of the commercials was based on the following criteria:
 - The actors in commercials. In this case, the classification is based on the following roles: main characters, supporting characters and extras. Main characters are those whose needs are served by the product being advertised: they are the primary users of the advertised product. Further characters are those whom the

target segment is addressed to, and/or who play a significant role in the lives of the main characters. The supporting characters are the persons whose presence is necessary regarding the use of the product, as well as the family members³ whose presence in the household may have an influence on the choice of the parameters of the product being purchased. Extras are those who complete the work process, but whose representation is incomplete (e.g. their face or upper body is not visible), or they are just simply present.

- The message of the commercial.
- Parameters that represent value to the target segment.
- The main pillar of the commercial.

(F) The analysis of audience reviews was based on the Budweiser commercial⁴. This commercial was chosen because a strong sense of social responsibility can be identified through the campaign message. The analysis of audience reviews⁵ was based on the following variables:

- What is the message of the commercial?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of the commercial?
- What emotions did the commercial trigger in viewers?
- Which types of attitudes can be identified based on the reviews?

Results and Discussions

The results of the content analysis are presented in the following part. Based on the criteria noted in the research methodology section (E), as a first step, the analysis of the commercials (Table 2) of the vacuum cleaner brands included in the research was carried out. Traditionally, women have been the target segment for vacuum cleaners, but with the emergence of the modern man, traditional households (and roles in households) are changing. Furthermore, the fact that the family structure itself is constantly changing makes it important not only to define the target segment, but also to identify the family members who play an important role in the decision process when purchasing a particular product (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

3 Including pets.

4 The reviews were analysed between 21st February 2023 and 26th February 2023:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56b09ZyLaWk>.

5 A total of 461 reviews on this commercial were submitted.

Table 2: The main pillars of vacuum cleaner brand advertising

International vacuum cleaner brands		
Rowenta - 2017	Bosch – 2019	Philips - 2020
Who are featured in the commercial?		
Main characters: 8 puppies. Supporting characters: a childless /carrier-oriented couple – there are no products in the room that could indicate the presence of children.	Main characters: a little girl, a pet. Supporting characters: a father.	Main characters: a woman as a household manager, Supporting characters: a little boy, a pet. Extras: a husband.
What is the message of the commercial?		
For a given brand, the needs of pets are the priority.	It was meant to illustrate the simplicity of cleaning. The cleaning has the characteristics of a building block (the little girl is the initiator of the cleaning, the way of cleaning is tailored to her).	The household manager meets the daily challenges in a professional way to provide a safe environment for the family. Cleaning is an assembly line (mother starts, father continues).
Parameters that represent value to consumers		
„Extreme silence”.	Performance. Simplicity. Tranquility. Comfort. Speed. Durability (designed for life).	Simplicity. Efficiency. Speed. Convenience. Innovation.
What is the commercial based on?		
Cuteness.	Playfulness.	Professionalism.

Source: Authors' work, based on:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdfCyCt40xs>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uATYxMydfoY>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86oToV6ZHZA>

The target segment for all three commercials is the modern woman and the modern man. The message of the commercials, however, varies depending on whether they target households with or without children, what is the role of the woman and the man, or the role of the pets in these households. Comfort, speed, power/efficiency, tranquility are the parameters that primarily define both Bosch and Philips vacuum cleaner brands in terms of the values they represent. The low level of perceived impact, durability and innovation are identified as differentiating values for the commercials included in the analysis.

It is important to note that the main characters of the commercials determine to a considerable extent the criteria that constitute the main pillars of the analysed commercials, since:

- (1) the Bosch commercial is based on playfulness, as the father is unobtrusively assisting in the cleaning process from the background, and he is accompanied by the pet; however,
- (2) the Philips commercial is based on professionalism, as it is aimed at women who organise the daily household chores in a professional way: the commercial is also focused on the pet when it comes to buying a household product of this type,
- (3) Rowenta commercials build on the cuteness factor, prioritizing the needs of pets as the trigger in the purchase decision.

The second step was a content analysis of the vehicle brands (Table 3).

Table 3: The main pillars of car brand advertising

International car brands			
Subaru - 2012	Volkswagen - 2013	Chevrolet - 2014	Buick - 2015
Who are featured in the commercial?			
Main characters: different dog breeds	Main characters: pets. Supporting characters: pet owners. Extras: other people.	Main characters: a pet and its owner. Supporting characters: family members, the female main character's friend/ love.	Main characters: pets (different dog breeds) Supporting characters: pet owner.
What is the message of the commercial?			
The vehicle advertised is tested and approved by dogs.	Everyone can find their ideal vehicle, which can reflect the personality of both the owner and the pet.	A Chevrolet is a life-long companion: present at life's decisive events, just like your pet.	An ideal model for women.
Parameters that represent value to consumers			
Reliability.	Variety.	Trust.	Large interior space.
What is the commercial based on?			
Fact-finding character.	Fact-finding character.	Emotions.	Fact-finding character.

Source: Authors' work, based on:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koLrsIDaKrc>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I958KJ6kqBg>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t6bLugtjkQ>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzszijld81Q>

In the case of vehicles, from the four commercials in the analysis only one features its target segment as the main character (Chevrolet). The other three commercials either lack the human element entirely (Subaru) or feature it as an extra (Volkswagen) or as a supporting character (Buick). Despite the fact that the latter brand features only women, it does so in a way that appeals to men⁶. The Chevrolet brand builds on emotions, presenting a life mosaic that influences consumer behaviour. The message of the commercials included in the analysis varies depending on which parameter is considered most important/predominant for the target segments, but in all cases they are conveyed through the dog, the pet.

Sports and outfit are two topics that form the basis of several commercials, and the next step was to carry out a content analysis of commercials related to these two areas (Table 4).

Table 4: Main pillars of outfit-related brand advertising

International advertising for sports footwear and clothing	
Skechers (2012)	DKNY (2017)
Who are featured in the commercial?	
Main characters: a specific breed of dog (bulldog) Supporting characters: another breed of dog (greyhound), trainers, Extras: audience.	Main characters: a pet and its owner. Supporting characters: men and women of different age groups.
What is the message of the commercial?	
The functional purpose of sports shoes is highlighted in the commercial. Choosing the right sports shoes is the key for success.	The commercial illustrates the potential effects of uniqueness. At the same time, the DKNY logo on the collar reflects the diversity of the brand's offer.
Parameters that represent value to consumers	
Efficiency/Success.	The promise of an attractive look.
What is the commercial based on?	
Humor.	Awareness raising/boldness.

Source: Authors' work, based on:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6KdpQhGcLc>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vglHrUky7dQ>

⁶ Peugeot's (3008-5008) 2023 spot, on the other hand, is aimed at of young adults as its target segment, who still live in their orientation family, based on the "take back your parents' car without being noticed" function.

When buying a Skechers brand the functional objective is paramount. However, its symbolic meaning cannot be completely excluded. Nevertheless, in the case of the DKNY commercials, the symbolic role is more important than the functional one. Consequently, effectiveness and customisation may well be combined depending on what the primary purchase objective is.

The fourth step was a content analysis of the beer brand commercials included in the analysis (Table 5). In the traditional approach, the target segment of alcoholic beverages is men, although it is worth noting that some (recent) changes can be identified in this segment, as there are some beverage brands promoted by women (e.g. Johnnie Walker: Milla Jovovich, 2021; Heineken Silver, 2022).

Table 5: Main pillars of beer brand advertising

International beer brands	
Bud Light (2009)	Budweiser (2014)
Who are featured in the commercial?	
Main characters: two different breeds of dog. Supporting characters: owners of the dogs.	Main characters: a pet and its owner. Supporting characters: friends.
What is the message of the commercial?	
The commercial suggests that appearance can be deceptive.	A dog is more than just a pet: it's a solid point in your life. It is the consumer, the individual, who makes the decision: we are responsible for our family, for the society.
Parameters that represent value to consumers	
"Accomplishment"	Trust.
What is the commercial based on?	
Humor.	Emotions.

Source: Authors' work, based on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yuzi6Ys-jNc>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56b09ZyLaWk>

The Bud Light commercial builds on the humor by drawing attention to the possibility that "accomplishment" is not always just about physical fitness. In the case of the Budweiser brand, on the other hand, the commercial is based on emotions. It illustrates events that emphasise the importance of trust and responsibility. In the following, the reviews on Budweiser will be structured according to the criteria noted in the research methodology (section F). The Budweiser commercial (1) draws attention to the risk of drink-driving and its potential dangers, (2) calls attention to responsible behaviour. At the same time, it highlights the fact that (3) there is always a choice, which is individual.

- A. Positive aspects of the commercial are as follows:
 - the message of the commercial, its impact does not diminish over the years,
 - a message is best conveyed by animals,
 - the message is both powerful and multi-focal: it not only raises awareness of the importance of avoiding drink-driving, but also reflects the multidimensional nature of responsibility,
 - the effectiveness of the commercial is delivered by the “happy ending”,
 - the commercial is not only objective and to the point, but also emotional in a way that provokes reflection.
- B. Negative aspects of the commercial are as follows:
 - stereotyped, insensitive, does not take into account the needs of the pet,
 - catchy,
 - the commercial only focuses on one pet (the dog).
- C. Emotions triggered in the audience by the commercial:
 - anxiety (worry),
 - happiness,
 - energetic (pride in the brand),
 - playfulness (relief).
- D. The adjectives used by the audience in the reviews:
 - wonderful,
 - good, absolutely great, the best,
 - beautiful, beautiful and sad at the same time,
 - cute,
 - stunning.
- E. Attitudes towards the commercials:
 - like,
 - love,
 - adoration,
 - despise.

In the case of the two service brands included in the analysis, the following were identified: (1) the Amazon commercial illustrates two stages in the individual system of purchasing decisions: one is the identification of the problem and the other is the decision to purchase in order to ensure that the pet receives the best care (2) Travelers Insurance addresses, via pets, those potential consumers who are reluctant to receive insurance services (Table 6). Insurance is, indeed, a very sensitive area, since ‘the real value of the price of the service is often not perceived by the customer at all or only after a long time’ (Veres, 2005, p. 291).

Table 6: The main pillars of service brand advertising

International service brands	
Amazon (2018)	Travelers Insurance (2010)
Who are featured in the commercial?	
Main characters: an injured puppy and its owner. Extras: other dogs and their owners.	Main characters: a pet. Extras: owner, other people, other dogs.
What is the message of the commercial?	
Amazon provides an instant solution to the problems that arise.	It draws attention to the possibility of personalising the insurance service.
Parameters that represent value to consumers	
Trust. A diversified offer.	Customisation. Reliability.
What is the commercial based on?	
Emotions.	Emotions.

Source: own, based on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vERc4bg98X4&t=58s>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk2B8988ws0>

Trust and reliability are two parameters which evolution over time implies a much more complex process for services than for physical products. At the same time, the variety of offers and the possibility of customisation can play a significant role in persuading potential users to make a purchase.

Conclusions

Families have always been a favorite target segment for marketers, as they purchase for more than one person, whether they are buying for the orientation family or for their own family. In fact, the structure of families and the relationships within them are not the same as they used to be: the direct effect of this is reduced to the needs that arise when new members - pets - are added to the household. Continuous monitoring of these changes is more than necessary, since the supply structure must be in accordance with current market demands.

In the commercials included in the analysis, the following phenomenon was found with regard to the roles played: for all brands, except for Philips, the main character is played either by dogs or pets, or pets and their owners: this phenomenon can most probably be explained by the fact that the brands included in the analysis sought to build trust by including dogs and pets. Trust is the cornerstone of the relationship between brands and consumers (McEwen,

2008). In the case of the Budweiser commercial, a very deep form of trust is found, as the brand openly accepts the evidence that the product they offer can be the trigger of tragic events, if consumers are not careful enough. Furthermore, the commercial has generated not only positive, but also negative feelings in the audience, or a combination of both.

Our analysis is consistent with:

(a). with the results of Stone's (2014) research, as the Budweiser commercial still enjoys remarkable ratings⁷ today, as the story of the commercial is staged in a way that provides the audience with playfulness (excitement) and then a well-deserved sense of relief at the end,

(b). with the conclusions of Brooks (2018), as the brand name was found in only 14 comments.

The use of dogs and pets in advertising is very varied and diverse. At the same time, paying attention to details proves to be an essential requirement when it comes to directing, as viewers analyze these details from the point of view of pets, being pet owners themselves. Furthermore, pets can (now) be interpreted as influencers: adding a new impetus and 'freshness' to marketing (Myers et al., 2022).

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