Chapter 9
Exploring the Effectiveness of Storytelling in Advertising Through Eye–Tracking

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ABSTRACT

From a marketing perspective, storytelling involves creating, through advertising and communication strategies, an image of the company, brand, and products that makes it different from the competition. Advertising literature has shown that good stories have a way of inspiring, entertaining, explaining, and convincing, and can engage the emotional, attentional, and cognitive schemes of the customers. This is the first research that defines and makes an overview of the evolution of eye-tracking systems in the field of advertising which employs storytelling techniques. Particularly, the current chapter identifies the evolution of topics and relations between them, within the field of advertising research. The current study, therefore, advances an agenda for future research and constitutes a starting point for academics and professionals working in the field of advertising who intend to resort to eye-tracking techniques.

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, storytelling constitutes the action of telling a story. In its more traditional version, a story is defined as a reimagined and narrated experience with enough depth and emotion so that the audience can remember it as a real experience (Simmons, 2015). From the marketing perspective, storytelling involves creating the image of the company, brand and products that makes it different from

the competition through advertising and communication. In this marketing-oriented context, if we speak about telling stories, the firm is the storyteller and the market is the audience (Väre, 2014). By building the business idea of a company around a story, and, hence, affecting the emotions of the consumer, the organization can achieve a crucial position. As explained by Salzer-Mörling and Strannegard (2004), "good stories have a way of inspiring, entertaining, explaining and convincing, and can engage emotional, attentional and cognitive customers' schemes" (p. 24).

To create a good story, traditional advertising research has developed innumerable models with the aim to clear up the most important steps in drawing the consumers' attention. Specifically, *attention, interest, desire, action* is the hierarchy of effects proposed by the well-known AIDA scheme to describe the process of designing a persuasive story/advertising (Strong, 1925). This scheme inspired multiple models that, similarly, positioned attention first in a sequence of responses which ultimately lead to purchase. Although there is little evidence of a temporal sequence of advertising effects (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999), these schemes have contributed to highlighting *attention* as one of the key cognitive processes of interest for communication research. Gaining the consumers' attention is becoming more and more challenging in today's highly competitive markets and crowded advertising platforms. Yet, attention is a scarce resource and the quantity of stimuli daily calling for consumers' attention substantially exceeds the individuals' limited processing capacities. Therefore, it is essential for stories told through advertisements to be visually attractive compared to those of the competitors and to hold attention in a way that effectively communicates brand messaging.

In this context, enhancing storytelling effectiveness will rely on our understanding of the psychological mechanisms through which consumers attend to advertising, the factors that influence visual attention and how this, in turn, relates to other facets of the consumers' response (Casado-Aranda, Sánchez-Fernández, & Ibáñez-Zapata, 2020). To fill this gap, the eye-tracking tool has become increasingly popular in recent years. The eye-tracking system is a device that allows a recording of the movements of the eyes when exposed to an object of interest, namely a text, an image or other visual material. In the field of advertising and storytelling, eye-tracking systems facilitate the record of the movements of a consumer's eyes during behavioral processes, thus providing insights into the cognitive processes underlying the consumer behavior (Meißner & Oll, 2019).

To date, literature in the advertising and storytelling fields has long evidenced the outcomes (cognition, affect and behaviour) of the effects of individual (consumer goals or familiarity) and stimulus factors (advertising design) on visual attention (fixation number, viewing order or pupil size). Nevertheless, a full overview of the main papers, topics and relations among keywords and the most frequent themes in the use of eye-tracking when exploring advertising effectiveness remains unknown.

Hence, with the aim to clarify the main findings of recent eye-tracking research on advertising and storytelling persuasiveness, this chapter aims to: i) give an overview of the evolution of the use of eye-tracking in advertising and storytelling research; ii) advance the themes that are worth considering in future storytelling and advertising research by using eye-tracking; and iii) identify the main relations between the most frequent themes in the use of eye-tracking when exploring advertising effectiveness.

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