

Persuasive Effects Depending on the Type of Creative Ads in Social Media and User Sensitivity and Empathy

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SNS 미디어의 크리에이티브 유형과 사용자의 민감성 및 공감적 이해에 따른 설득 효과

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to investigate the difference in advertising effect of visual rhetoric type of Facebook ads depending on the user sensitivity and level of empathy. The experiment was designed as a between-subjects factorial design (visual rhetoric type) \times 2 (brand sensitivity) \times 2 (level of empathic understanding). The results of the experiment performed to analyze the strategies of Facebook ads for ads effectiveness can be summarized as follows: a three-way interaction effect for persuasive effects was found among the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity, and empathic understanding for both types of visual rhetoric. Breaking down it by type of rhetoric, no interacting effect was observed between brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels for the visual simile ads in most of the dependent variables. For the visual metaphor ads, however, the brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels were found to have interaction effect in all dependent variables.

Key Words : Social media, Visual rhetoric, User sensitivity, User empathy, Persuasive strategy

요약 본 연구는 사용자의 민감성과 공감적 이해 수준에 따른 페이스북 광고의 시각적 수사유형에 대한 효과를 분석하는데 그 목적이 있다. 피험자간 요인설계(시각적 수사유형) \times 2(브랜드 민감성) \times 2(공감적 이해도)로 설계하였다. 페이스북 광고의 광고효과를 실험을 통해 분석한 결과는 다음과 같다. 페이스북 광고의 두 가지 유형에서 동일하게 시각적 수사, 브랜드 민감도, 공감적 이해에서 3원 상호작용 효과가 나타났다. 시각적 수사 유형의 경우, 시각적 직유 광고에 대한 브랜드 민감도와 공감적 이해도 간에 상호작용 효과가 나타나지 않았다. 그러나 시각적 은유 광고의 경우 브랜드 민감도와 공감적 이해도가 모든 종속변수에서 상호작용 효과가 있는 것으로 나타났다.

주제어 : 사회적 미디어, 시각적 수사, 사용자 민감성, 사용자 공감적 이해, 설득 전략

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1. Introduction

The growth and development of Facebook are shown in the diversity of Facebook ads users are exposed to. However, increase in Facebook ads is not a decisive factor that determines its efficacy as a social media platform. Considering that Facebook advertising style is also an important factor that makes users' responses amplified or dampened, as do changes of media, the creative strategies employed by Facebook ads can also be a clue to the growth of the media.

Creative advertising strategies are a direct cause of consumer response. Metaphorical design elements proposed by ads are not limited to analog media or digital media. Similes and metaphors as a creative clue leading to the advertised products have been widely used in traditional analog media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, irrespective of the type of product[1-3]. Social media platforms have also been making frequent use of these advertising techniques as their advertising design components. Unlike above-the-line (ATL) advertising, it is essential for below-the-line (BTL) advertising to garner the attention and recognition of consumers during a fleeting moment of exposure; for this purpose, nonverbal elements are generally used. Nonverbal forms of expression have been a primary means of persuasion as a creative advertising strategy.

One may guess that Facebook ads, which are used in this study as experimental media, would present a wide variety of visual forms as creative advertising elements; in reality, however, they do not. In an environment where a flood of "look-at-me" messages are swirling in four directions, competing for exposure space and time and user's attention, any attempts at verbal explanation can only be met with high

consumer resistance[4-6].

Only a simple and clear key point presentation can catch a potential consumer's attention, as demonstrated by many studies in which visual images elicited more positive interest than written texts did. Despite the explosive growth of Facebook both in the number of users and diversity of its user base, there is little strategic research on its creative visual advertising style. There have been empirical studies on the experiences and psychological attributes of Facebook users, but there is a lack of research on the creative visual types of Facebook ads and the consumer's prior experience with them[7].

The explosive growth of active users of social media platforms assures their high potential as advertising media. With regard to the impact of social media, it is too early to guarantee they will have temporary or cumulative effects. Evidence-based research on the behaviors of social media users will have to be conducted continuously to reduce the risk of irrational inference or emotional decision-making.

2. Consumer's sensitivity and empathic understanding of advertising messages

The sensitivity of an individual, when applied to exposure to ads, can be defined as an instantaneous and sensuous reaction to an advertising message[8,]. Given that a sensuous reaction—even if formed immediately after the exposure to a stimulus cue—depends on individual sensitivity formed prior to the current event, it stands to reason to interpret it as a response determined through prior experience, not a sequential reaction. In other words, although the sensitivity of an individual to an object takes a form of a horizontal reaction occurring as a result of analyzing the

mean value of various stimulus cues, it should eventually be understood as a reaction manifested according to a prepared personal scenario.

At first glance, user experience of sensitivity seems to have a simple and clear system, but it is not as simple and clear as it looks to present its attributes, because the reach of sensitivity extends beyond a separated object[9].

In particular, although the elements of the advertising message are presented individually and independently, the user's interpretation is the result of gauging the interactivity and complexity of each element. This makes it a great challenge to give a clear-cut explanation of the user's sensitivity. What is clear, however, is that the distortion of sensuous reactions can be reduced by presenting advertising elements less likely to be met with the user's resistance rather than extracting specific stimulus cues conducive to efficient and effective reactions corresponding to the user's sensitivity.

Brand sensitivity is a cumulative user experience accumulated through brand use over time. The term "sensitivity" is generally used in the a sense tantamount to "high sensibility" in the area of sensory research; however, sensitivity should not be used interchangeably with sensibility[10]. Mention of sensitivity when referring to the user's emotion, it means the emotional attribute of being susceptible to minor stimuli or events and being easily excited[11]. If a user's experience shows sensitive reactions to certain visual or verbal stimulus cues, it means that the reactions are displayed according to the user's personal scenario.

Previous studies have shown that psychological attributes of the user act as a moderating variable in the communication process and moderate the result of

interpretation. According to the findings of previous studies, user reactions are determined by the combination of the stimulus elements of the advertising message and the psychological characteristics of the user. To date, however, there are hardly any experimental studies exploring the use of social media platforms, which have gained a firm foothold in our lives, and individual users' psychological characteristics. Specifically, despite the fact that users' empathic understanding plays a crucial role in successful advertising, there is a lack of research exploring this aspect in relation to social media.

"Emphatic understanding of the user" is the extent to which the user feels emotional affinity to the advertising message. Affinity to the advertising message means getting immersed and assimilated in the ad, becoming its protagonist, i.e., substituting the ad's situation for one's own. Most ads offer use experiences through brand exposure and lead the viewer to the mood empathy and acceptance. Formation of active empathy with the ad can be achieved by its acquisition of the advertised brand. The environment of brand acceptance imposed by the ad leaves only a faint trace in the user's memory before long, but the environment of the advertising that provokes empathy is nestled in the user's memory in an unfading image[11]. The role of the protagonist in the ad becomes complete only when the user accepts or acquires the empathized brand ingrained in the heart.

Empathic understanding as the user's psychological attribute can be an essential moderating variable in the context of using social media. If the most prominent attribute of new media is voluntary participation, empathetic understanding can strengthen the voluntary participation, giving rise to a synergistic effect[16,17]. Eventually, the user's

brand sensitivity and empathic understanding are closely interactive user attributes, although they are separate user variables[18,19]. In particular, given that the types of visual advertising rhetoric provided by social media can have the effect of amplifying friendly reactions or prompting unfriendly reaction through these user attributes, it would be more effective in setting up reasonable strategies to examine the user attributes as interactive components instead of inputting them as separate moderating variables.

3. Creative advertising strategies and visual metaphors

The reason for the frequent use of visual metaphors in creative advertising is the effect of ingenious metaphors in provoking the consumer's inherent curiosity for novelty. Although creative elements of a visual metaphor have completely different meanings from those of the advertised product, they should have positive meanings that can be easily associated with the product. The curiosity for the ad induces the consumer to look closely at the product information and evaluate it in detail.

Consumer's involvement in information activates the processing of the advertising message. This active information processing is attributable to the curiosity provoked by the visual metaphor of the ad. If the novelty of the meaning of the visual metaphor is solved, the consumer gets the satisfaction of problem-solving, doubling the persuasive effect of the metaphor. In order for the creative visual metaphor to bring about positive results, it should be constructed in a manner decipherable by the consumer. Even if the visual metaphor of the ad has stimulated the

consumer's curiosity, who then tries to extract elaborate information from the ad, excessive difficulty in deciphering the metaphor can evoke anxiety in the consumer's mind[1,12,13]. The metaphor should be hence constructed in a way to generate meanings without much difficulty because increase in anxiety of the consumer may lead to a negative evaluation of the product.

4. Research Hypothesis

Facebook is different from other social media platforms in that "friends" tend to share long-term relationships driven by photo and video sharing or message posting based on their personal relationships. Facebook users choose products or manufacturers through aggressive search. Once a friendship is established, information spreads by voluntary and continuous communication. Aggressive Facebook users play an important role in establishing and expanding connections such as daily sharing and mapping[15]. Therefore, in exploring a Facebook page, all these factors should be taken into account: experience of using it, level of trust in advertising messages, and type of metaphoric design. Based on these considerations, the following research hypotheses were formulated and experimentally analyzed:

Hypothesis 1. The persuasive effects (user's participation behavior, user's civic engagement, advertising attitude, corporate attitude) of Facebook ads will vary depending on the type of creative advertising (simile/metaphor).

Hypothesis 2. The type of visual rhetoric of Facebook ads and the level of brand sensitivity will have an interaction effect with respect to persuasive effects.

Hypothesis 3. The type of visual rhetoric of Facebook ads and the level of empathy will have an interaction effect with respect to

persuasive effects.

Hypothesis 4. The type of visual rhetoric of Facebook ads and the level of brand sensitivity and the level of empathy will have an interaction effect with respect to persuasive effects.

5. Methodology

5.1 *Participants and factor design*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the difference in advertising effect of visual rhetoric type of Facebook ads depending on the user sensitivity and level of empathy. The focus of this study is on determining the interaction effect of the three variables: visual rhetoric type, brand sensitivity, and level of empathic understanding. Accordingly, the experiment was designed as a between-subjects factorial design 2 (visual rhetoric type: simile/metaphor) \times 2 (brand sensitivity: high/low) \times 2 (level of empathic understanding: high/ low). ANOVA was used to test the outcomes. A total of 176 university students participated in the study.

5.2 *Selection of the experimental ads*

Facebook ads were used as the experimental ads for college students. Existing ads with a low exposure to the subjects were chosen; specifically, car ads explicitly using visual simile and metaphoric elements. Car ads were considered suitable because the mood of the ads is geared towards emotional appeal rather than rational decision-making and contained a wide variety of visual expression types. By selecting car advertisements from existing advertisements, the head copy and visual expression elements were newly produced so that the distinction between visual similes and visual metaphors could be clearly revealed.

5.3 *Measurement tools*

For the purpose of this study, brand sensitivity is defined as the extent to which the brand is considered important in evaluating the product. Brand sensitivity is an emotion of sensitively reacting to the brand value. It measures the extent to which consumers put their trust in the brand name and rely their judgement on it, thus reducing their own uncertainties in product choice. As the brand sensitivity scale, the items used in Rodgers and Schneider(1993) were used after reconstruction[14]. The 4-item brand sensitivity scale is rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Brand sensitivity was categorized into high and low levels based on the median value (50%) of the sum total of all mean values.

User's empathic understanding is the form of understanding and explanation obtained by imagining the role of a social actor when understanding or explaining his/her behavior. A 4-item tool rated on a 7-point Likert scale was used to analyze the users' empathic understanding[15]. User's participation behavior was rated in three subcategories of communicativeness, sympathy, and compliance. User's civic engagement was evaluated using the rating value obtained from a 3-item tool consisting of word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior, feedback, and helping others rated on a 7-point Likert scale[16]. Advertising likeability, corporate attitude, and purchase intention were rated using a 3-item tool rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

6. Experimental Results

6.1 *User's participation behavior*

As shown in Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the user's participation behavior. ANOVA was performed to determine whether there are statistically significant

differences in user's participation behavior depending on the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity level, and empathic understanding level. The results are presented in as shown in Table 2. A significant three-way interaction effect was found among the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity, and empathic understanding($F=4.14$, $p < .05$). Additional analysis was performed to examine more in detail the three-way interaction effect among the type of visual rhetoric($F=50.99$, $p < .001$), brand sensitivity, and empathic understanding($F=97.59$, $p < .001$) for both types of visual rhetoric.

Table 1. Results of ANOVA of user's participation behavior

Sources	sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Type of visual rhetoric(A)	23.23	1	23.23	50.99 ***
Brand sensitivity(B)	.03	1	.03	.07
Empathic understanding(C)	44.46	1	44.46	97.59 ***
(A)×(B)	.29	1	.29	.64
(A)×(C)	.01	1	.01	.03
(B)×(C)	.75	1	.75	1.65
(A)×(B)×(C)	1.89	1	1.89	4.14 *
Error	151.70	333	.46	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 2. Interaction effect of brand sensitivity and empathic understanding with respect to user's participation behavior depending on the type of visual rhetoric

Sources	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Empathic understanding X Brand sensitivity at Type of visual rhetoric(Simile)	.14	1	.14	.25
Empathic understanding X Brand sensitivity at Type of visual rhetoric(Metaphor)	2.33	1	2.33	6.82**

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

As a result, whereas no interaction effect was observed between brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels in the simile group, the metaphor group showed interaction effect between the brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels as shown in Table 2.

With regard to user's participation behavior, this can be interpreted as meaning that the Facebook ads using metaphors have higher advertising appeal with consumers with low brand sensitivity($M=2.90$) $M=2.30$) when they had low empathic understanding level and with consumers with high sensitivity($M=4.09$) $M=3.78$) when they have high empathic understanding level.

6.2 User's civic engagement

As shown in Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation for civic engagement. ANOVA was performed to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in user's civic engagement depending on the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity level, and empathic understanding level($F=5.40$, $p < .05$).

Table 3. Results of ANOVA of civic engagement

Sources	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Type of visual rhetoric(A)	29.22	1	29.22	56.01 ***
Brand sensitivity(B)	.05	1	.05	.09
Empathic understanding(C)	39.85	1	39.85	76.39 ***
(A)×(B)	.01	1	.01	.01
(A)×(C)	.13	1	.13	.25
(B)×(C)	1.45	1	1.45	2.78
(A)×(B)×(C)	2.81	1	2.81	5.40 *
Error	173.72	333	.52	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 4. Interaction effect of brand sensitivity and empathic understanding with respect to civic engagement depending on the type of visual rhetoric

Sources	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Empathic understanding X Brand sensitivity at Type of visual rhetoric(Simile)	.12	1	.12	.19
Empathic understanding X Brand sensitivity at Type of visual rhetoric(Metaphor)	3.85	1	3.85	9.58**

***p< .001, **p< .01, *p< .05

As shown in Table 4, a significant three-way interaction effect was found among the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity level, and empathic understanding level. The main effect of the type of visual rhetoric($F=56.01$, $p < .001$) and empathic understanding level($F=76.39$, $p < .001$) was also found to be statistically significant.

Additional analysis was performed to examine more in detail the three-way interaction effect among the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity, and empathic understanding for both types of visual rhetoric. As a result, whereas no interaction effect was observed between brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels in the simile group, the metaphor group showed interaction effect between the brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels.

With regard to civic engagement, this can be interpreted as meaning that the Facebook ads using metaphors have higher advertising appeal with consumers with low brand sensitivity($M=2.93$ > $M=2.29$) when they had low empathic understanding level and with consumers with high sensitivity($M=4.08$ > $M=3.56$) when they have high empathic understanding level.

Table 5. Results of ANOVA of advertising likeability

Sources	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Type of visual rhetoric(A)	28.21	1	28.21	47.27 ***
Brand sensitivity(B)	.00	1	.00	.01
Empathic understanding(C)	41.49	1	41.49	69.52 ***
(A)×(B)	.01	1	.01	.01
(A)×(C)	.52	1	.52	.87
(B)×(C)	1.96	1	1.96	3.29
(A)×(B)×(C)	4.38	1	4.38	7.33 **
Error	198.75	333	.60	

***p< .001, **p< .01, *p< .05

6.3 Advertising likeability

As shown in Table 5 presents the mean and standard deviation for advertising likeability. ANOVA was performed to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in advertising likeability depending on the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity level, and empathic understanding level. The analysis results are presented in Table 6.

A significant three-way interaction effect was found among the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity level, and empathic understanding level($F=7.33$, $p < .01$). The main effect of the type of visual rhetoric($F=47.27$, $p < .001$) and empathic understanding level($F=69.52$, $p < .001$) was also found to be statistically significant.

Table 6. Interaction effect of brand sensitivity and empathic understanding with respect to advertising likeability depending on the type of visual rhetoric

Sources	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Empathic understanding X Brand sensitivity at Type of visual rhetoric(Simile)	.26	1	.26	.34
Empathic understanding X Brand sensitivity at Type of visual rhetoric(Metaphor)	5.65	1	5.65	13.24***

***p< .001, **p< .01, *p< .05

As shown in Table 6, additional analysis was performed to examine more in detail the three-way interaction effect among the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity, and empathic understanding for both types of visual rhetoric. As a result, no interaction effect was observed between brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels in the simile group. However, as shown in Table 9, the metaphor group was found to have interaction effect between the brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels.

With regard to advertising likeability, this can be interpreted as meaning that the Facebook ads using metaphors have higher advertising appeal with consumers with low brand sensitivity($M=2.97 > M=2.26$) when they had low empathic understanding level and with consumers with high sensitivity($M=4.13 > M=3.42$) when they have high empathic understanding level.

7. Conclusion

There may be difference in the level of accepting concrete and abstract metaphoric messages between Facebook users and non-users. This difference stems from clear differences between traditional media and social media in the method of information transfer, process of assimilating information and sharing it, and method of dissemination information. While admitting that visual metaphor is a persuasive rhetoric as an advertising message cue, there is a need to set up expression strategies at a more detailed level, taking into account users' different response patterns depending on the degree of adaptability.

The results of the experiment performed to analyze the strategies of Facebook ads for advertising effectiveness can be summarized as

follows: a three-way interaction effect for persuasive effects was found among the type of visual rhetoric, brand sensitivity, and empathic understanding for both types of visual rhetoric. Breaking down it by type of rhetoric, no interacting effect was observed between brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels for the visual simile ads in most of the dependent variables. For the visual metaphor ads, however, the brand sensitivity and empathic understanding levels were found to have interaction effect in all dependent variables. In case of interaction effects as well, stronger persuasive effects were found when the brand sensitivity was low when the empathic understanding level was low. Also, more positive influence was observed when the brand sensitivity level was high at the high empathic understanding level.

The implications of the study results are threefold. First, similes used in Facebook ads have vertical effects regardless of the user's predispositions. Similes are more simple in expression and more straightforward in meaning than metaphor such that the user's predisposition does not come to the fore. Facebook users usually log onto the site with specific purposes. They may not pay much attention to ads to concentrate on the information sought and to avoid the unpleasant experience of being exposed to annoying ads. Because no attention is given to advertising messages, it may be assumed that the user's predispositions do not affect the advertising effects. In the case of metaphors, however the users' empathic understanding level and brand sensitivity were found to interact with each other and exert positive influence on the persuasive effects of the ads.

This finding suggests that ads that offer cues appealing to user's sense experience—however

short the exposure time is—stimulate his/her brand sensitivity or empathic understanding. Visual metaphors in Facebook ads cannot be said to have stronger persuasive effects than visual similes. Therefore, as the second implication it may be noted that the fact that visual metaphors stimulates the user's psychological inclination or earlier experience and elicits sympathetic emotions is an important point of considerations in setting up creative advertising strategies.

Lastly, there is a need to set up strategies for visual metaphoric message cues tuned to different Facebook user experiences and to take into account the level of trust the user puts in the ads. Even if an advertising message is well constructed to share positive and sympathetic emotions with the viewers, no desirable result can be expected if the user avoids ads per se or does not trust them. To find out whether the user finds ads reliable or not is the first step of persuasion that may decide the success or failure of the ads. Considering the significant difference in the ultimate behavior between those who have favorable attitude towards ads and those who are highly critical of them, this point should be reflected in the creative advertising strategies to avoid a boomerang effect.

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