

**THE IMPACT OF HARD SELL AND SOFT SELL
ADVERTISEMENTS IN ALTERING VIEWERS ATTITUDE
AND PURCHASE INTENSION TOWARDS BRANDS**

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ABSTRACT

In a world of fierce competition and emergence of brands literally on a day to day basis, advertisements are working as a powerful tool for grabbing the attention of the customer and persuading them to buy products and services. This study will basically help Researchers and promoters to understand how appeals work and what kind of appeals will change the attitude of a customer and also the intention to purchase a product. Thus, it is important for the marketers to understand the concept of advertising appeals and the model which will actually help the advertiser to get the desired outcome. This research focused on respondents having knowledge of marketing and advertising as well as those who are not exposed to the field of advertising. A conceptual model was proposed and tested to find the impact of hard sell and soft sell advertisements tactics adopted by marketers on consumers and the outcome it has on the sale of the product.

Key Word: Advertising appeals, Brand Promotion, Consumer attitude, purchase intention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India is one of the emerging economies in the global market, particularly after 1990's India's growth in the consumer market is tremendous. As the second highest populated country, India is the target market for producers worldwide. The Main tool which assists any manufacturer to reach his customer is advertisement. These days we see advertisement for anything and everything from bar soap to a cup of tea. But the question remains, whether these advertisements fulfil what they are intended to achieve, do they use the right kind of appeals? Are they really effective? To what extent these advertisements drive a consumer to purchase a product? Thus an Advertisement should accomplish its objective as well as it should adhere with the social and cultural norms of India. Indian advertisers generally prefer to use either the "hard sell appeal or soft sell appeal" in their ad promotion content. With advertising spending taking a down turn and many studies attempting to study different reasons, it is important to understand what consumers on the receiving side of the ads think about advertising. It is also important to further find out if consumers have different perceptions toward different appeals. Literature on advertising suggests that measuring soft sell appeal and hard sell appeal would give a solution for consumer perception. This study is designed to provide a deeper understanding of the concept of "soft sell" and "hard sell". Generally, advertising scholars and practitioners, as well as consumers, have a sense that "hard sell" refers to a more direct approach to selling, with the focus on encouraging a quick sale, whereas "soft-sell" approaches are more subtle and indirect. In spite of the widespread use of the terms "hard sell" and "soft sell," the academic literature to date has no widely accepted definition of either "hard sell" or "soft sell". The study is designed to contribute to the literature in multiple ways. First, the study proposes a clear conceptualization of "hard-sell" and "soft-sell" appeals, and how they are distinct from other types of appeals. Second, the study contributes by developing a measurement scheme to capture hard-sell and soft-sell appeals. The goal is to develop an instrument with sound statistical properties, which subsequent researchers can use to compare the effectiveness of these appeals and other appeal types with regard to national culture, product category, or media type, and in specific instance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 SOFT SELL APPEAL AND HARD SELL APPEAL

A soft-sell appeal is one in which human emotions are emphasized to induce an affective (feeling) reaction from the viewer. These appeals tend to be subtle and indirect, and an image or atmosphere may be conveyed through a beautiful scene or the development of an emotional story, or via some other indirect mechanism. A *hard-sell appeal* is one in which the objective is to induce rational thinking on the part of the receiver. These appeals tend to be direct, emphasizing a sales orientation, and often specifying the brand name and product recommendations. There is often explicit mention of factual information, such as comparisons with competing products or specific distinguishing features of the product that give it an advantage in performance or some other dimension relevant to consumers (Mueller 1987). Among advertising professionals, there has long persisted a debate over which advertising strategy is best: hard sell or soft sell. Indeed, advertising agencies have often been classified according to which of these two selling orientations underlies the shop's philosophy. Hard-sell advertising uses a direct "reason why" approach that informs the headline, body copy and visual components of the advertisement, all of which focus attention on how the consumer can directly benefit from using the advertised product. The assumption about consumer decision-making underlying this approach is that such decisions are rational and reasoned. Soft-sell advertising, on the other hand, is more subtle and indirect. Instead of emphasizing rational benefits, such ads attempt to influence the consumer by evoking positive emotional responses that are then associated with the advertised brand or service. Ad elements that are humorous, warm and friendly are used to elicit those responses. The assumption about consumer decision-making underlying the soft-sell strategy is that such decisions are based on feelings (Beard 2004).

2.2 FEELING VERSUS THINKING

The first set of dimensions proposed are feeling and thinking. Many prior studies have examined the degree to which an ad aims to induce feelings or emotions rather than rational thoughts, and several theories support the notion that persuasive communication is influenced by both feelings and thoughts. Cognitive response theory, for example, suggests that thoughts and feelings, labeled "cognitive responses," are thought to affect attitude formation and change (Petty, Ostrom, and Brock 1981). Thus, it follows that the type of cognitive response an ad attempts to

induce is relevant to an attempt to persuade the consumer. Similarly, the theory of reasoned action proposes that there is both a cognitive and an affective component to persuasive communication (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). The Foote, Cone, and Belding (FCB) Matrix, a well-known framework for product classification, classifies products according to whether the purchase decision is high or low involvement and involves cognitive (thinking) or affective (feeling) information processing (Vaughn 1980, 1986). The FCB grid was extended by Rossiter and Percy (1997), who argued that product and brand attitude classifications should be based on underlying purchase motives—both informational and transformational. With both of these frameworks, there is a recognition that some ads attempt to convey information to consumers to help them develop a preference, while others appeal to emotions, or “transformational motives.” Clearly, prior discussions of soft sell and hard sell have touched on the notion of the appeal being related to inducing either cognitive processing (thinking) or affect (feeling). Intuitively, it makes sense that hard-sell appeals rely more on the “thinking” aspect than the “feeling” aspect. Conversely, soft-sell approaches rely more heavily on the emotive aspect, appealing to feelings.

2.3 IMPLICIT VERSUS EXPLICIT

Prior discussions of hard-sell appeals clearly suggest that the degree of directness of such messages is a feature that distinguishes them from soft-sell appeals. A primary characteristic of hard-sell appeals is that they are direct and designed to induce action, whereas soft-sell appeals are less direct. Thus, the second set of dimensions proposed is implicitness and explicitness. Advertisements can create either overt meaning or latent meaning (Williamson 1978). When attempting to create overt meaning, advertisers convey the message very directly via explicit communication. According to McQuarrie and Mick (1996), rhetorical approaches can be used to determine how to express a thought most effectively in a given situation. In advertising, messages can be designed, either through the use of rhetoric or by other means, to emphasize objective product features. This type of advertising message tends to offer explicit meaning. In contrast, latent meaning is created less directly. One of the most effective means of creating latent meaning is by using metaphors. McQuarrie and Phillips define a metaphor as “a type of indirect claim because claims are made in a figurative way rather than in a literal way—the advertising message is not stated outright but only implied” (2005, p. 8). In indirect persuasion, illustrations are often used to convey figurative claims. The use of advertising illustrations has increased even more rapidly than the use of verbal aspects in commercial messages (Phillips and

McQuarrie 2003). Pollay's (1985) research revealed that in the course of the twentieth century, illustrations came to occupy an ever-increasing portion of magazine ads, while at the same time, the number of words decreased steadily. Pollay proposed that this was suggestive of a move toward a more soft-sell approach.

2.4 IMAGE VERSUS FACT

The third set of dimensions proposed is image and fact. According to Leiss, Klein, and Jhally (1997), there are two basic advertising formats: product-information format and product-image format. In the former, which is consistent with a hard-sell approach, the product is the centre of attention, and the focus of the ad is on explaining the product and its function. Thus, factual and objective elements are the essence of this format. In contrast, in the product image format, "brand name and package play an important part, but the product is given special qualities by means of a symbolic relationship that it has to some more abstract and less pragmatic domain of significance than mere utility" (Leiss, Klein, and Jhally 1997, p. 244). The product image format is consistent with the soft-sell approach. Here, the product becomes embedded or "situated" in a symbolic context that imparts meaning to the product beyond its specific elements or benefits. In essence, this dimension suggests that hard-sell approaches will rely on more objective, factual information, whereas soft-sell approaches will attempt to build an image to help convey meaning.

2.5 ADVERTISING CREDIBILITY OR BELIEVABILITY

In Literature, rare attempts have been made to define and measure advertising credibility and generally have been considered to be closely related to the believability of the ad-claims. MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), defined advertising credibility as "consumer's perceptions of the truthfulness and believability of advertising in general." Their conceptualization and measurement of advertising credibility suggest that the construct refers to consumer's generalized beliefs in the integrity of advertising claims (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). Herbig and Milewicz (1995) suggested that credibility is related to the extent to which, what is said matches with what is done. In other words, if the product claims confirm with the performance, the credibility increases. Credibility exists when one can confidently use past actions to predict future behaviour (Herbig and Milewicz, 1995). This conceptualization is similar to one of the determinants of Ad credibility given by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), i.e. ad-claim discrepancy (discussed below). Distinguishing between advertising credibility and ad credibility, MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch (1986), posited credibility of Ad refers to how truthful or believable the

audiences perceive the assertions made about the brand to be. The authors discussed the determinants of Ad Credibility: 1) the perceived claim discrepancy of the ad; 2) the credibility of the advertiser and; 3) the credibility of advertising in general. (Adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989) Perceived Ad claim discrepancy is the degree to which the message recipient perceives a discrepancy between what is being claimed about the brand in the ad and the actual characteristics or benefits of the brand (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). The exaggerations in the ad may lead to consumer think that the ad is not credible. Message content is the evaluated by the customers keeping in mind the past experiences and/ or information with respect to the advertised brand. Advertiser Credibility is the perceived truthfulness and honesty of the sponsor of the ad. "If the sponsor is credible, this ad is for the sponsor" s brand; therefore, the ad is credible. Advertising credibility represents consumer's perception of the truthfulness and believability of advertising in general, not simply the particular Ad in question. It is one of the several perceptual dimensions along which consumers may assess advertising as institution.

Bae, Wright and Taylor (2001), gave the revised model of advertising credibility. They included the media credibility as a dimension of advertisement credibility. Their results also suggested that media credibility has positive impact on attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention. They concluded that advertisers can enhance the effectiveness of their advertisements by selecting a credible medium (Bae, Wright and Taylor, 2001) with recognition of the influence of credibility on effective advertising, many researchers have attempted to conceptualize and measure the construct in a variety of contexts: source credibility, ad content credibility or message credibility and media credibility.

2.6 ADVERTISEMENT IRRITATION

Public perceptions of advertising have been studied for decades, and findings show that consumers' attitudes toward advertising as an institution are usually more favorable than unfavorable (Bauer and Greyser 1968; Ducoffe 1996; Sandage and Leckenby 1980). Many consumers recognize not only the negative societal effects of advertising, but also the positive economic impact of the advertising industry. However, individual advertisements differ from advertising as an institution of society, and research indicates that the content and tactics of certain ads "offend or "irritate" consumers (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985; Bauer and Greyser 1968; Wells, Leavitt, and McConville 1971). An irritating ad is often one that is "provoking, causing displeasure and momentary impatience" (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985, p. 48). Irritation in response

to ads has been defined as more negative than dislike (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985) but less negative than of- fensiveness, which is often caused by moral concern about the content of an ad (Bauer and Greyser 1968). Causes of ad irritation can be broadly classified into three categories: ad content, execution, and placement. First, Bauer and Greyser (1968) found that ads are perceived as annoying (a synonym for irritating) if their content is untruthful, exaggerated, confusing, or insults the viewer's intelligence. Second, ads are deemed irritating to the degree that they are poorly executed. Poorly executed ads are judged to be irritating if they are too loud, too long, or too large (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985; Bauer and Greyser 1968). Third, consumers are likely to get irritated when there are too many ads or when the same ad appears too frequently (Bauer and Greyser 1968). When consumers are irri-tated by advertisements, they are likely to avoid them.

2.7 PERCIEVED VALUE

Dodds and Monroe (1985) proposed that the relationship model of price, quality and perceived value and mentioned that perceived value is an important factor in consumers' purchasing decision process, and consumers will buy a product with high perceived value. Dodds and Monroe (1985) and Zeithaml (1988) contended that consumers will evaluate what they give and what they get in their subjective perception when they are buying a product/service. According to Utility Theory, the probability of purchase intention will increase, when consumers acquire more benefits than they pay for a product (Dickson & Sawyer, 1990). Thaler (1985) also considered that perceived value is an important antecedent to influence consumer purchase intention because it is the composition of transaction utility and acquisition utility. Swait and Sweeney (2000) used logic models to analyze the influence of customer perceived value on consumer purchase intention in retailing industry and found that different perceived value customers have different purchase behavior. In fact, many researchers considered perceived value an important factor for marketing companies (Chen and Quester, 2006; Cornin et al., 2000; Pura, 2005). It is because perceived value can be a differentiation and competitiveness to a company. (Treacy & Wiersema, 1993; Heskett et al., 1994; Ravald & Gronroos, 1996). Furthermore, consumer can transfer their attitudes and feelings from an advertising endorser to product and create perceived value. Thus, if consumers can receive trustworthy perceived value in the process of product/service consumption, it will create a good brand image, loyalty, profit and competitiveness to a business.

2.8 PURCHASE INTENTION

Purchase intention is the implied promise to one's self to buy the product again whenever one makes next trip to the market (Fandos & Flavian, 2006; Halim & Hameed, 2005). It has a substantial importance because the companies want to increase the sale of specific product for the purpose to maximize their profit. Purchase intention depicts the impression of customer retention. There are certain functions of the brand which have a strong influence on the purchase intention of the customer's i.e. brand image, product quality, product knowledge, product involvement, product attributes and brand loyalty. This study will show the purchase behavior of the customers that how general public attract to make purchase of the branded product and also reveal the important aspects which are quite necessary to capture the purchase intention of the customers. This research helps to categorize that among these aspects which factors have significant effect on the purchase intention of the patrons. In this wondrous world where penetration in the market in the presence of competitors is very problematic and challenging, it is very much important to determine the exact features which the consumer wants. It will help the marketers to focus on the features of the product that are significant and are positively correlated with purchase intentions of the customers. The customer driven approach is applied to find out the perception of users to have an exact idea about preference and desires.

3. Research Methodology:

This was a descriptive survey study intended to establish the association of customers with the advertisement appeals and to find their attitude and intention level to purchase a particular product or brand after showing them an advertisement. It was necessary to carry out primary research to collect the required information for this research. A survey in the form of questionnaire was preferred research method and this was used to collect data on the different research hypothesis. The method of data collection is by using personally administered questionnaire; the main reason behind this is that it is possible to get fully completed questionnaire in a short amount of time. The population here includes college going students (post graduate and undergraduate) in Coimbatore. The sampling design used here is non probability sampling. A convenience sampling method was used and sample respondents from colleges were collected. Some respondents were having technical knowledge about advertisement and some without advertisement knowledge were taken as sample population. The

total sample size here is 103 Respondents. The tools used here are Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS v 17.0), Visual PLSS, Mendley, G Power 3.

4. Analysis

4.1 Testing hypotheses for soft sell advertisement

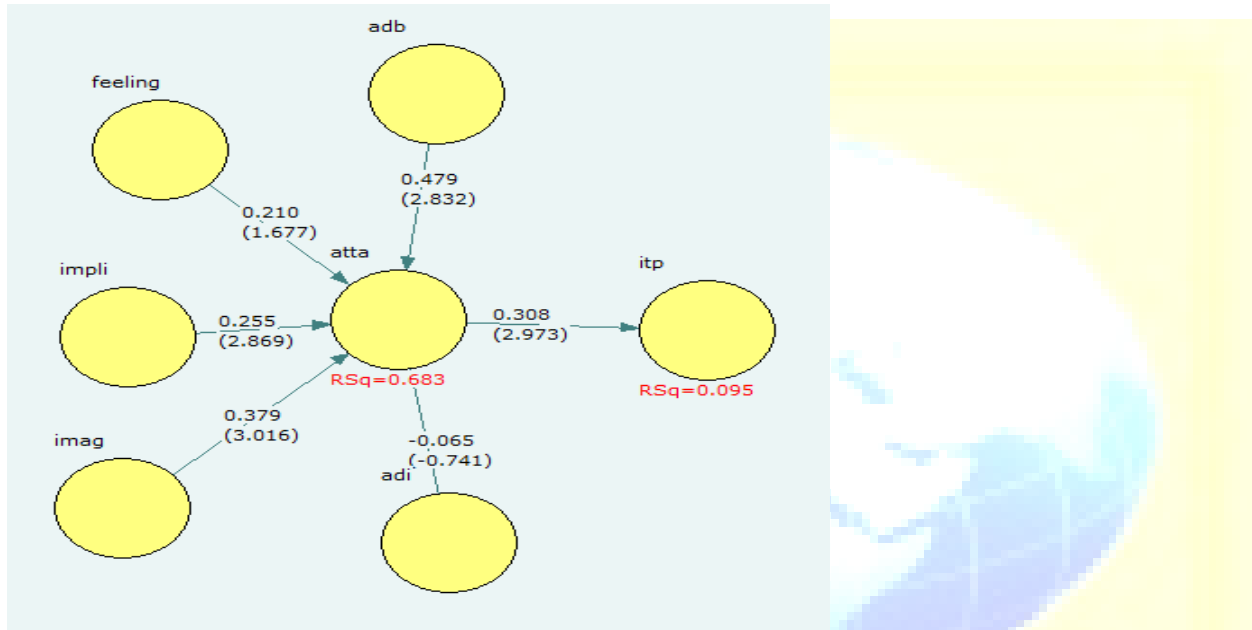


Fig 1: Testing Hypotheses (Soft Sell)

(Abbreviations: abd= advertisement believability; feeling=feeling towards the ad; imply= implicitness; imag= image; adi= advertisement irritation; atta= attitude towards the ad; itp= intension to purchase)

Interpretation:

Beta value of constructs image, attitude towards the advertisement, intention to purchase constructs were 0.379, 0.479, 0.308 which is greater than 0.3 articulates that it is having positive correlation. Some constructs like feeling implicitness and advertisement irritation is negatively correlated because it is less than 0.3 the values were 0.210, 0.255, -0.065. Regression coefficient: soft sell advertisement has created 68.3% of positive attitude towards the advertisement. Only 9.5 % of the respondents have the intention to purchase the brand.

Table1: Boot strap summary (Soft Sell)

	Entire Sample Estimate	Mean of Subsamples	Standard Error	T-Statistic
feeling->attitude towards the advertisement	0.21	0.1864	0.1252	1.6772
Implicitness> attitude towards the advertisement	0.255	0.253	0.0889	2.8694
Image> attitude towards the advertisement	0.379	0.4782	0.1257	3.0156
Advertisement irritation> attitude towards the advertisement	-0.065	-0.1176	0.0877	-0.7409
Advertisement believability> attitude towards the advertisement	0.479	0.37	0.1691	2.8322
attitude towards the advertisement >intention to purchase	0.308	0.3871	0.1036	2.9727

Interpretation:

The T-statistic value of the constructs Implicitness and attitude towards the advertisement, Image and attitude towards the advertisement, Advertisement believability and attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the advertisement and intention to purchase are significant because the value of statistic 2.8694, 3.0156, 2.8322, 2.9727 which is greater than the required value of 2.

The T-statistic value of feeling and attitude towards the advertisement, Advertisement irritation and attitude towards the advertisement is not significant because their values 1.6772, -0.7409 is less than 2. Beta value is positive

4.2 Testing hypotheses for Hard sell advertisements

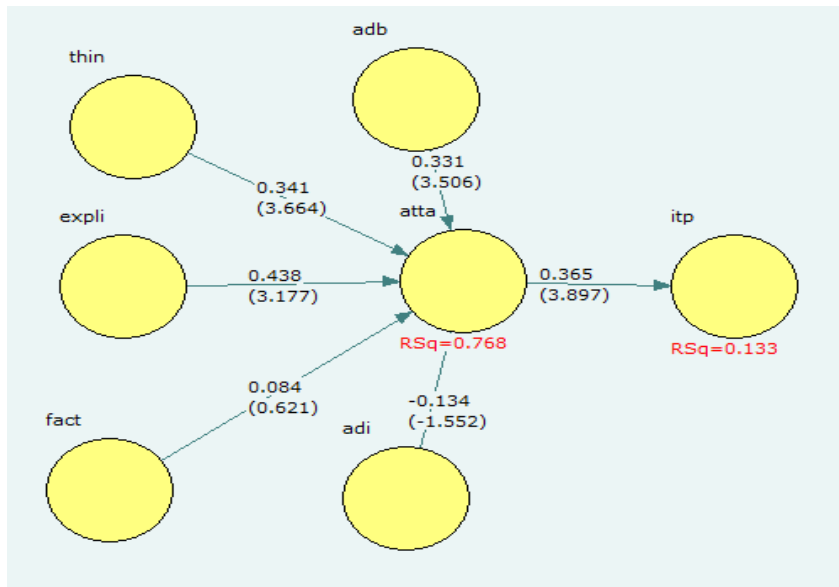


Fig 2: Testing Hypotheses (Hard Sell)

(Abbreviations: adb= advertisement believability; fact=factual content; expli= explicitness; thin= thinking logically; adi= advertisement irritation; atta= attitude towards the ad; itp= intension to purchase)

Interpretation:

Beta value of thinking, explicitness, attitude towards the advertisement, intention to purchase constructs are 0.341, 0.438, 0.331, 0.365 which is greater than 0.33 articulates that it is having positive correlation. Some constructs like fact and advertisement is negatively correlated because it is less than 0.3 the values were 0.084 and -1.552. Regression coefficient: hard sell advertisement has created 76.8% of positive attitude towards the advertisement. Only 13% of the respondents have the intention to purchase the brand.

Table 2: Boot strap summary (Hard Sell)

	Entire Sample	Mean of Subsamples	Standard Error	T-Statistic
Thinking>attitude towards the advertisement	0.341	0.3356	0.0931	3.6642
explicitness> attitude towards the advertisement	0.438	0.4041	0.1379	3.1772
fact> attitude towards the advertisement	0.084	0.1778	0.1353	0.6209
Advertisement irritation> attitude towards the	0.331	0.2962	0.0944	3.5061

advertisement				
Advertisement believability > attitude towards the advertisement	-0.134	-0.1419	0.0863	-1.552
attitude towards the advertisement > intention to purchase	0.365	0.391	0.0937	3.8973

Interpretation:

The T-statistic value of the constructs Thinking and attitude towards the advertisement, explicitness and attitude towards the advertisement, Advertisement irritation and attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the advertisement and intention to purchase are significant because the value of statistic 3.6642, 3.1772, 3.5061, 3.897 which is greater than 2. The T-statistic value of fact and attitude towards the advertisement, Advertisement believability and attitude towards the advertisement is not significant because the values are 0.6209 and -1.552 which is less than 2.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings from this research suggest that some of the items mentioned under constructs like feeling, implicitness and image under soft sell advertisements are given maximum priority by the respondents, the opinions where correlating with the items available under the construct. The items which are attracting consumers' attention were direct, indirect and entertaining factors. Advertisement has largely influenced people to think that its relating to the advertisement, hence creating advertisement according to these items will attract the customers. From the usage of statistical tool we were able to find the association and influence between various factors. Respondents were influenced by the image factor which created an interest towards the brand viewing on soft sell advertisement; the education level of the respondents also influences the purchase of the particular brand which was shown in the advertisement.

In hard sell advertisement we can see that age and education level of the respondents influences the factor thinking, fact in the minds of respondents who viewed the advertisement eventually created interest towards the brand.

From testing and validating the model it was found out that soft sell advertisement has created 68.3% of positive attitude towards the advertisement. Only 9.5 % of the respondents have the

intention to purchase the brand, but hard sell advertisement has created 76.8% of positive attitude towards the advertisement. Only 13% of the respondents have the intention to purchase the brand.

From these modeling and testing techniques we can come to a clear understanding and conclusion that hard sell advertisements are creating positive attitudes in the minds of consumers resulting in intentions to purchase the brand. Hard sell factors are working more effectively than soft sell factors among the population of the region selected for this study.

6. CONCLUSION

This study made some contributions to the understanding of certain terminologies like soft sell appeal, hard sell appeal, advertisement believability, advertisement irritation, respondent's intention to purchase after viewing the advertisements and also we can clearly analyze the factors which are affecting the respondent's attitude and their intention to purchase the particular product. Overall, this research pointed out the criteria to measure soft sell advertisement and hard sell advertisements. The results of this study were particularly important for encouraging and supporting Advertisers and Marketers from a different perspective and to get into the mind of the consumer. From the casual model table we can clearly say that hard sell advertisement appeals and hard sell advertisements are attracting a lot of respondent. We can now suggest advertisers and marketers to focus on creating more hard sell advertisements to generate greater brand impact in the market.

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