Executive Summary

Effectiveness of Animal Images in Advertising
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The effectiveness of showing animal images compared to displaying human models in advertisements and the effectiveness of using animals for further marketing instruments such as brand names, mascots, logos, product packaging designs, slogans, and product shapes has rarely been investigated in the academic research. Moreover, the characteristics of the animals used (e.g., species, pose, age, and beauty) for creating effective advertising have been ignored to date. This lack of research is surprising because many companies use animal images for promoting their brands and products.

Our findings indicate that advertising practice can benefit from showing animals instead of human models. In particular, we recommend using animals in advertising as follows.

Both pets and undomesticated animals are found to be superior to human models in eliciting positive emotions such as pleasant surprise and happiness/joy. Furthermore, they are advantageous in evoking pleasant feelings of entertainment. If advertisers aim to induce such positive affective states in consumers, they should consider using animal images. Famous examples of this strategy are the commercials entitled “Buster, the Boxer” promoting John Lewis and “Lost Puppy” promoting Budweiser beer. The animals’ cuteness additionally positively influences feelings of entertainment.

If the advertiser aims to enhance message credibility, we recommend using images of pets instead of depictions of undomesticated animals.

Although we recommend using animals in advertising and in particular cute animals (infantile animals or cute species) and pets, we advise practitioners to be careful when showing animals as role models. People easily link and compare themselves to images of role models and might feel insulted. Therefore, we recommend against using animals such as the retailer Netto did in its “Netto Cats” commercial.