Strategic Use of
Collective Memory in Advertising:
The Case of Cathay Pacific Airways’ 60th Anniversary Ads

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how collective memory could be strategically utilized in advertising to appeal audience. Specifically, the study aimed to ascertain the success of this strategy by tracing the mechanism of how “collective memory” advertising works.

A representative campaign, Cathay Pacific Airways’ 60th Anniversary campaign, that made use of the strategy effectively, was selected as the case to be studied thoroughly. Two creatives of the campaign, and twenty-four members of the target audience, were invited to join the study. Through careful analyzing of the interview transcripts and the relevant texts of the campaign, this study had successfully provided a holistic picture from creative production, to audience’s reaction and the effects of the strategy had on the audience’s attitudes towards the advertised brand and services.

From the perspective of creative production, it was found that collective memory cues could be strategically introduced in advertising stories through three steps: setting main story themes, searching collective memory cues and materializing the collective past into the commercials. From the perspective of audience’s reaction, it was identified that difference in life experiences would prompt audience to be resonated by the commercials through two ways: synchronically-experienced resonance and inspired resonance. From the perspective of the effects of the strategy, it was discovered that audience’s perception towards the advertised brand could be influenced cognitively and affectively by the strategy.

It is suggested that preferences for brands or products could be enhanced through creating emotional attachments to the brands by connecting individuals to previous experiences (Fournier & Yao, 1997; Holbrook, 1993; Holbrook & Schindler, 1994, 1996, 2003; Goulding, 2002; Thomson et al., 2005). “Collective Memory” advertising
is therefore an important advertising strategy that facilitates these connections and to make them become more salient. Thus, the significance of this study was twofold:

Theoretically, it enriched the advertising research by examining “collective memory” advertising from the perspective of media framing process and in particular, proposing a model that described the entire mechanism of “collective memory” advertising.

Practically, it found out what and how cues from collective memory schemata could be solicited and imported into the nostalgic stories so as to elicit audience resonance. This provided insights for advertising creatives who would like to employ collective memory as their communication strategy, especially in the Hong Kong market.
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