Introduction

Advertisers can overcome ad clutter by crafting creative ads that differ meaningfully from contemporaneous ads; when successful, favorable viewer responses toward the ad and advertised brand often ensue. In the current milieu, textese—also known as txt-speak, txtese, chatspeak, txt, txtspk, txtk, txto, texting language, txt lingo, online lingo, SMSish, txtslang, txt talk, netspeak, texted English, or netling—might serve as an effective distinctiveness-making device.

Roughly 25% of U.S. adults regularly send text messages from cell phones (Christopherson 2010). Textese argot (e.g., LOL for ‘laugh out loud’, IMHO for ‘in my humble opinion’, and YOYO for ‘you’re on your own’) on social media and blogging websites is ubiquitous. Textisms (i.e., letter and number homophones like ‘b’ for ‘be’ and ’8r’ for ‘later’, contractions like ‘txt’ for ‘text’, non-conventional spellings like ‘nite’ for ‘night’, pictograms like ‘<3’ for ‘love’, and emoticons like ‘😊’ for ‘happy’) appear increasingly in phone-based and non-phone-based writings of children and young adults (Rosen et al. 2010). Previous mobile marketing campaigns suggest that textese offers a creative and effective tool for delivering terse messages about products.

Outdoor advertising has become a major component of many ad campaigns. Outdoor ads are prominent—especially at sporting events—due to their efficiency, exposure frequency, tangible response, local presence, reach, and visibility. Billboards ads, placed strategically in urban and rural areas, are an effective alternative and/or leveraging tactic to other marketing communication elements.
The $182 billion dollar sport travel market continues to grow at an unprecedented rate; for example, 27% of all round trips of 160 or more kilometers are sport-related trips (Horrow and Swatek 2011). With many fans traveling to view sporting events year-round, one main objective for companies that market through sports (i.e. companies that use sports to sell non-sport products) should be to develop outdoor and virtual (i.e. signage visible to TV viewers but not fans in attendance) ads that are effective in and around sport venues. Sporting event ads that incorporate textese may appeal to targeted viewers because ad memorability is a prerequisite for ad efficacy, advertising is an important component of sport sponsorship, and textese is common in daily written communication but novel in ads. To assess the likely efficacy of textese in outdoor and virtual ads viewed during live and televised sporting events respectively, we conducted an experiment.

Because the efficacy of ads with textese is unknown despite the growing use of textese by consumers, ad researchers have called for its study (e.g., Sierra et al. 2012). Hence, we compared viewers’ responses to an ad with textese to the same ad with traditional language copy on the following: ad hipness, ad novelty, attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the ad, emotional response toward the ad, intent to purchase the advertised brand, perceived brand trust, and ad persuasiveness.

**Textese in Ads and Outdoor Advertising**

Prior research on ads with textese has examined both viewer acceptance and outcome effects. Negative correlates of acceptance include privacy concerns and advertising surfeit; positive correlates include control, trust, enjoyment, context, usefulness, entertainment, pecuniary incentive, social influence, and ease of use (e.g., Merisavo et al. 2007). Attitudes toward ads with textese relate positively to ad credibility, information content, and perceived entertainment (Tsang et al. 2004). Regarding outcome effects, responses pertaining to ad novelty, attentiveness to the ad, attitude toward the ad, intent to purchase the advertised brand, and perceived brand trust are more favorable for print ads with textese than print ads with traditional language copy (e.g., Sierra et al. 2012). Moreover, personalized, interactive, and SMS mobile ads boost brand awareness (Smutkupt et al. 2011).

Successful outdoor ads have common executional factors, such as effective location, readability, message clarity, visual appeal, name identification, and clever creativity. For example, excessive copy—even if it appears in the corners of outdoor ads—is ineffective because it muddles central promotional messages. Outdoor ads
placed near purchase locations often boost consumption (Taylor et al. 2006). In general, outdoor ads are both pervasive and effective. For example, the healthcare industry uses outdoor ads because they are noticed, are viewed favorably, and increase patronage and re-patronage intentions. As any sport fan can attest, advertisers often place their brand messages at sporting events.

Relative to unoriginal ads, novel ads can prompt greater ad recall, greater brand recognition, and more positive attitudinal and emotional responses (Ahn and La Ferle 2008). Highly creative commercials enhance unaided recall and print ads deemed novel by viewers produce more favorable attitudinal responses and behavioral intentions toward the ad and brand (Heiser et al. 2008). Creativity also can manifest within an advertiser’s media choice or format, with different or new ad executions increasing ad credibility and improving viewers’ attitudes toward the ad. For example, SMS promotions boost ad recall, positively affect brand responses, augment ad awareness, and encourage favorable responses toward the advertiser (Wouters and Wetzel 2006). Moreover, the use of appropriate textese in mobile and print media ads leads to favorable advertising outcomes (Sierra et al. 2012; Tsang et al. 2004).

Such findings suggest novel ads can augment consumers’ attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral responses toward the ad and brand. Hence, we posited that ads with textese placed at sporting events will outperform otherwise identical ads with traditional language copy in viewers’ responses about ad novelty, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, emotions toward the ad, perceived brand trust, ad persuasiveness, and intent to purchase the advertised brand.

Our Study

We showed student participants an ad for a fictitious athletic shoe that relied on either textese or traditional copy. (See the Figure for examples of these ads.) To provide the appropriate context, we told participants that they would be viewing ads typically seen at sporting events. Afterward, they responded to a questionnaire about the ad and advertised brand.

Findings

Based on our controlled study, ads with textese placed at sporting events (e.g., parking lot tents, concession stand promotions, and the playing field) should outperform otherwise identical ads with traditional language copy in viewers’ responses about ad novelty,
attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, emotions toward the ad, perceived brand trust, ad persuasiveness, and intent to purchase the advertised brand. In essence, such ads should foster favorable cognitive, emotive, and behavioral viewer responses toward the ad and advertised brand.

Trust is axiomatic to efficacious marketing communications (Ball et al. 2004). We examined the effect of using textese on perceived brand trust; specifically, whether consumers’ brand trust arises from first-time exposure to communication (e.g., novel and hip) from an advertiser. The results show that textese leads to higher perceived brand trust than the same ad with traditional copy; hence, viewers cognizant of an advertiser’s efforts to communicate creatively in ‘their’ language, through the use of textese in promotional materials, should have higher trust in the advertised brand.

Related to this finding, consumers identify with groups, things, and time periods based on their rarity. As advertisers promote their product’s distinctive appeal, favorable viewer responses may ensue. For example, ethnically identifying with an ad based on a model’s apparent ethnicity leads to favorable attitudinal and behavioral responses toward the ad and advertised brand (Sierra et al. 2009).

**Managerial Implications**

Favorable ad-related responses may ensue when textese is embedded in outdoor or virtual ads seen during live and televised sporting events. Fans attending a sporting event may be exposed to ads with textese placed in lasting media (e.g., game programs) and/or transient media (e.g., Jumbotrons); for example, sport organizations that work with companies like Foursquare (a location-based social networking website for mobile devices) could use textese to notify fans about special post-game promotions by retailers and service providers proximate to the arena/stadium. Likewise, virtual ads with textese would be less cluttered and more noticeable. Textese also may enhance the notability of established brand slogans; for example, translating billboard slogans from conventional English (e.g., *This Bud’s For You*) into textese (e.g., *This Budz 4 U*) may increase trust perceptions in the ad and brand, which in turn may enhance brand and ad responses.

Ads with a mix of traditional copy and textese can generate favorable consumer responses. As such, including such copy in ads may help to break through ad clutter, reach consumers cognitively and emotionally, and increase perceptions of company trustworthiness.
References


Figure
Textese and Traditional Copy Ad
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Dr. Michael R. Hyman is Distinguished Achievement Professor and Ph.D. Coordinator of Marketing at NMSU. He is Executive Editor of NMSU Business Outlook and Marketing Ethics Section Editor for Journal of Business Ethics. Attesting to his writing compulsion are 80 academic journal articles, 45 conference papers (10 which won a ‘best paper’ award), four co-authored/co-edited books, 25 other academic contributions, and 30 non-academic works. He is known for his collection of Looney Tunes shirts, inability to chip a golf ball correctly, encyclopedic knowledge of classic Hollywood movies, overly neat office, and loyalty to the New York Yankees.

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Dr. Harry A. Taute (Ph.D. New Mexico State University) joined the faculty at Utah Valley University in 2005. Prior to earning his Ph.D., Dr. Taute spent twenty years in the telecommunications industry. His experience includes product and marketing management, advertising, promotion, personal selling, and sales management. Dr. Taute conducts academic research on non-verbal behaviors in the sales presentation, emotional information management in advertising response, brand management, and subjects related to sports marketing. His work has been published in the Journal of Advertising, Psychology & Marketing, Journal of Marketing Education, Journal of Product and Brand Management, and the Journal of Brand Management.