



Breaking Through the Clutter: The Role of Controversy in Enhancing Brand Attitude - the Case of Entel and Susy Diaz

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Abstract. This article examines Peruvian consumers' trust in controversial famous characters used in advertising by analyzing a series of Entel brand advertisements with a focus on the impact of Susy Diaz as a brand ambassador. The study found that Susy Diaz's presence in Entel's advertising generated a positive brand attitude due to her relatable and humorous portrayal, resulting in increased interest in purchasing Entel's products and viewing more advertising from the brand. The study argues that controversial characters like Susy Diaz create a deeper and more long-lasting connection with consumers because they evoke emotional responses and positive associations in consumers' minds, leading to a higher likelihood of them engaging with the brand and its products. Moreover, when executed appropriately, controversy in advertising can help break through the clutter of competing messages and gain consumers' attention, resulting in greater brand recall. The study's findings have important implications for marketers and advertisers seeking to connect with Peruvian consumers. By using relatable and humorous characters, brands can enhance their appeal and create a positive brand attitude among consumers, leading to increased sales and brand loyalty. However, it is important to balance the use of controversial characters with the brand's overall image and messaging to avoid any negative associations. In conclusion, this study highlights the value of controversial characters in advertising and provides insights that can be applied by marketers seeking to improve their brand's connection with consumers. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on effective advertising strategies and consumer behavior in emerging markets like Peru.

Keywords: Advertising with controversial characters · brand attitude · buyer journey

1 Introduction

In recent years, we have seen a surge in advertising campaigns featuring well-known figures that do not conform to the standard and could be called “controversial”. However, as Edstrom, Kenyon, and Svensson [1] note, current audiences could remember thanks to globalization and digitization that is occurring in the world.

Attempting to explain the success behind these characters, Rebeka [2] states that famous figures not only generate trust in audiences by affecting their brand decision, but also the sum of positive experiences generates an effect on their purchasing priority. Authors such as Eunjin, Duffy, and Thorson [3] mention that using influencers is much more cost-effective than creating a commercial campaign.

There are few studies that strictly address the use of controversial well-known figures to generate positive brand attitudes. Influencers and celebrities have been discussed in various studies, but the value of only “well-known figures” in advertising campaigns has not been discussed.

Therefore, it would be worthwhile to conduct a qualitative analysis and delve into the theory of how these figures generate such a positive attitude in people, affecting brand attitude. This study would help in the understanding of future research focused on well-known figures in advertising campaigns. The objective is to identify the reason why controversial well-known figures generate a positive attitude. The question would be, why do controversial well-known figures presented in advertising campaigns generate a positive attitude in people? The purpose is to identify how these positive attitudes affect advertising campaigns and where these attitudes come from that consumers give to influencers when promoting brands.

2 Theoretical Framework

Boneta [4] notes that due to the increasing demand for information, the internet has become a crucial element in advertising campaigns and overall communication strategies. Not having a digital strategy can result in a lack of brand presence. On the other hand, digital advertising has enabled campaigns to have a global reach, providing many benefits.

Regarding influencers, various authors (including Saini, Gupta, Verma, Muskaan, Zak, and Hasprova) have introduced the term SMI, or social media influencer, to describe individuals whose fame stems from their digital presence. Marketing through SMIs is often more precise and closer to audiences, as it provides a more organic perspective on a product, as stated by Muskaan [5].

It’s crucial to recognize that the value of influencers lies in their ability to provide information to consumers who may not trust traditional advertising, as opposed to merely promoting products [6]. By understanding this, businesses can more effectively employ SMIs in their marketing campaigns and establish meaningful relationships with their target audience.

Quoting McCracken [7], celebrities who choose to advertise for a particular brand are commonly referred to as “famous persons” who utilize their popularity to endorse or promote a product or service. Muskaan [5] further contributes to this theoretical framework by acknowledging that celebrities are renowned and recognizable individuals who bring their established name to the table when entering into a commercial relationship with a brand.

On the other hand, according to Palacio and Santana [8], we can determine the validity of celebrity advertising through the credibility method which analyzes both cognitive and affective components. Hence, following Palacio and Santana’s formula, trust, expertise, and attractiveness of the celebrity are the three fundamental pillars for a successful campaign. Additionally, Palacio and Santana mention that the ability of an advertising campaign to captivate the consumer depends on prior planning.

Moreover, as noted by Castillo, B [9], the concept of mass media such as the popular platform “YouTube” and internet networks have allowed the figure of the famous person to take a step forward in terms of connecting with consumers.

On the other hand, authors such as Dhruv, S; Sharma, M; Gupta, S and H, Verma [10] mention that the importance of the famous person, whether an influencer or a celebrity or both, lies in the fact that ultimately the flow is celebrity - brand image - brand loyalty, thereby resonating with the consumer’s mind. However, we must also highlight that some authors, such as Meksi, A & Kaouther, B [11], have conducted studies on the use of famous personalities to generate a better brand attitude and demonstrated that including a famous person does not necessarily improve the advertising campaign.

2.1 Advertising with Controversial Characters

Ting and Cyril [12] studied that when it comes to the X or Y generation, they still consider campaigns for products such as alcohol, condoms, or feminine care controversial due to the secrecy surrounding them and their limited advertisement.

However, Waller [13] makes an important deduction in his study on what makes advertising controversial and offensive. He states that, according to his research, there are no products that are inherently offensive and controversial. In fact, he mentions that it is a group of elements that A or B advertising must have to become offensive.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to mention a method to identify advertising with controversial characters in a general way. According to Rossiter and Percy [14], as cited in Waller, one of the few methods that we can use to define controversial advertising and its results is by using the < Exposure -> Processing -> Communication Effects -> Action > method. Before explaining this method, we must know that the intention of this type of advertising is always to generate more controversy and increase public awareness, thereby increasing the numbers.

2.2 The Use of the Character Susy Diaz in Peruvian Advertising

The Peruvian advertising industry reflects the country's conservative nature, making it challenging for new trends to be accepted. Susy Diaz, a well-known Peruvian figure, has made a name for herself in the entertainment industry by creating trends on television and social media. Diaz's primary goal is to entertain and create content that entertains her audience (Fig. 1). In 2017, a commercial was launched featuring Diaz making fictitious apologies for her previous music career in Peru, which received mixed reviews (Fig. 2).

However, the second commercial in 2018, which included Diaz playing a musical instrument in a comedic spot for Entel's social media community, (Fig. 3) was well-received, despite her not speaking a single word (Fig. 4). Diaz's presence in these commercials shows the potential for controversial figures to be utilized effectively in advertising campaigns (Fig. 4).



Fig. 1. Susy Diaz fictitiously calls various people and asks for forgiveness for her career as a musical artist. By Entel for Youtube, 2017.

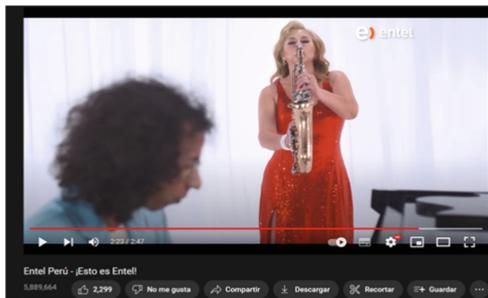


Fig. 2. Susy Diaz has a brief appearance playing a saxophone for an Entel commercial where a song is played to reinforce that Entel has the best social media community. By Entel for Youtube, 2018.



Fig. 3. Users commenting positively on the video, referring to Susy Diaz’s calls or praising the use of the character. By Entel for Youtube, 2017.



Fig. 4. Users commenting positively on the video, referring to Susy Diaz being a correct choice for the advertisement or making positive comments about her appearance. By Entel for Youtube, 2018.



Fig. 5. Susy Diaz giving money to people, and we can see her buttock painted with the number “13”. Photo for Diario el Comercio, Grupo El Comercio, 2000.

3 Methodology

To analyze how controversial characters can generate positive brand attitude about advertising campaigns and thus measure this subjective attitude about Entel’s campaigns with Susy Diaz, qualitative research was conducted (Fig. 5). This type of research allows us to address the subjective and analyze how people identify the characters in the campaigns (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Susy Diaz is writing several tweets about her diets. By Susy Diaz for Twitter, 2018.

3.1 Research Design

The model proposed by Rossiter and Percy (as cited in Waller) was used for this research. The “Exposure -> Processing -> Effects of communication -> Action” model allows us to understand how a consumer reacts when exposed to controversial advertisements. Building upon the model, we will now delve deeper into each stage of the proposed process:

- a) Exposure: This stage refers to the moment when the consumer is exposed to the advertisement via various media channels. It is important to define the type of product being advertised, such as social, political, or sexual, and the type of execution, which could be controversial, delicate, or fear-inducing.
- b) Processing: During this stage, the consumer assimilates the advertisement and experiences an emotional response. Positive emotions identified by the authors include attention, humor, and liking, whereas negative emotions include disgust, lack of attention, indifference, offense, or irritation.
- c) Effects of communication: This stage occurs immediately after processing and involves the consumer’s response to the controversial advertisement. This response will shape the consumer’s permanent attitude towards the brand. Positive effects include increased awareness, positive attitude, and favorable perception of the advertisement. Negative effects include lack of awareness, negative attitude, and unfavorable perception of the advertisement.
- d) Action: The final stage involves the consumer’s decision-making process after viewing the advertisement. This includes defining what actions the consumer will take with the new awareness of the brand. Positive actions may include purchasing the product or recommending it to others, while negative actions may include ignoring the message, boycotting the brand on social media, or complaining about the advertisement to others.

Overall, this model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how consumers respond to controversial advertisements, which can be valuable for marketing professionals and advertisers alike.

3.2 Sample

As a research method, in-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of 20 young adults (7 women and 13 men) between the ages of 19 and 26. These individuals reside

in metropolitan Lima and represent various socioeconomic statuses. The participants were randomly selected by approaching individuals who expressed voluntary interest, and the entire interview process was conducted via Zoom virtual meetings. Participants were required to have been exposed to at least some of Entel's advertising but should not be students or professionals in the field of advertising and marketing. This group was considered ideal for the study as they belong to a generation that has undergone significant changes, with social media being their primary communication medium.

By employing in-depth interviews, the researchers aimed to gather comprehensive insights into the participants' attitudes and perceptions towards Entel's advertising. The study's age range was selected based on the participants' exposure to current trends and their ability to adapt to the changing technological landscape, particularly in the realm of social media.

Moreover, by representing diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, the study aimed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Entel's advertising affects different groups of consumers. The inclusion of individuals who are not professionals in advertising or marketing was important to ensure that the participants' responses were not influenced by any specific industry knowledge, providing a more accurate reflection of the general public's perception of the brand.

Overall, this study's research methodology was designed to generate insightful and reliable findings on how Entel's advertising is perceived and received by consumers from various socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby contributing to the body of knowledge in the field of advertising and marketing.

3.3 Data Collection and Procedure

The methodology utilized in this study involved conducting in-depth interviews with participants using a structured set of questions limited to the specific case study (Table 1).

4 Results

Category 1. It was found that the use of Susy Diaz as a brand ambassador was successful in generating a positive brand identification with values related to humor. Participants reported experiencing positive emotions in relation to the Entel brand. Multiple participants associated the brand with positive emotions and a communication style focused on humor. One interviewee expressed this sentiment as follows:

They are different, that is, they are colorful, they are more entertaining than a normal spot. Like those in these chains, these ads of "buy your cost this washing machine or vacuum cleaner", which is the same commercial but with different products. (E13. P2, P2)

Participants mentioned that the advertisements featuring Susy Diaz were "different" and more entertaining to watch due to their unique narrative characteristics. One interviewee provided an example of this:

Table 1. Brand and ad description, ad content description, and destination URL based on Entel's campaigns with Susy Diaz

Branding & Ad	Description	URL
Entel: Susy Díaz knows it, with Entel Unlimited talk to any operator! (2017)	Susy Diaz calls in a spot to all Peruvians asking forgiveness for having had a bad singing career. Promoting a line.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r-on4BI8_M
Entel: This is Entel! (2018)	Susy Diaz comes out singing, a branding spot and not commercial.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzMwweQLjII
Entel: Renew with Dimitree 'Susy Diaz' (2019)	Susy Diaz at Christmas and talking about Entel offers.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaRudLuwgOE
Entel: Buy online with the Susy Diaz of your conscience! (2021)	Susy Diaz presents offers as a funny conscience.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eavg4K79tRw

Source: Own creation

It made me laugh, didn't it? Not a laugh of embarrassment, but a laugh that I liked a lot. It's a pleasant laugh, an entertaining laugh. I don't know how to explain it. It's not someone else's shame, it's maybe satisfaction, but I don't know how to say it. (E3. P2, P1)

The identification of laughter as a primary emotional response, coupled with the entertainment value derived from the use of the character in the spots, leads us to conclude that a significant number of interviewees found the ads entertaining as they elicited laughter through the character's portrayal.

Category 2: The use of a humorous character strengthens brand positioning in the minds of consumers for a longer period of time. Our findings indicate that the presence of Susy Diaz as a character in Entel's advertising campaigns enables the brand to maintain a stronger presence in consumers' minds over an extended period. Using humorous messaging values strengthens communication and reinforces the brand's staying power in the minds of consumers:

Yes. Why is it done to me.... It makes me curious, interesting. These types of advertising spots, which are through comedy that are to make you laugh, do not show you the information or what they want to sell you if they do not go with a funny way. They show their promotions in a funny way. (E7. P3, P2)

This shows that interaction with the character demonstrates a connection to the consumer's mind and memories. Another participant said:

At least for next month. I think I'm going to keep the brand in my mind. And if they continue to reinforce it, surely, I will remember. (E16)

Even other participants have not hesitated to associate the direct recall of the brand with the emotion of laughter.

Category 3: *The use of non-traditional characters that align with the value of “humor” increases consumers’ willingness to purchase in a shorter period.* Our findings suggest that incorporating values related to humor through the use of Susy Díaz leads to a greater willingness to purchase over time. While consumers may not show an immediate interest in buying Entel’s products or services, their interest and attitude towards the brand improved over an undefined period, pointing towards an upcoming purchase:

Maybe in the very distant future, but. Not now. Right now, it’s not that by seeing a commercial I’m going to buy magically. But in the future if I can be influenced to buy the brand, from what I saw. (E3, P4, P1)

This shows us that participants also maintain their rational thoughts about the brand despite watching emotional spots. Another interviewee stated:

Maybe in the future.... Yes, considering the prices and evaluating all the possibilities, maybe yes. I’m identifying something positive in their advertising spots. (E7, P4, P1)

Other consumers also commented that they would be open to receiving more offers and on this they even enunciated sentences such as those affirmed by the following participants:

It may be in the future according to how things go., at a percentage level I am 10% convinced that perhaps in some way I will buy algo de Entel. Above all, I am more inclined to a chip to see how about its 5G network in Lima. (E17, P4, P1)

Yes, because that’s where the plans appear. So, how does the joke stick with you? You connect it with the brand, and it automatically makes you want to know more. (E14, P4, P1)

This field study demonstrated that the interviewees not only have a greater willingness to choose the brand for their next purchase, but also exhibit greater willingness and less rejection towards future advertising campaigns.

Category 4: *The use of advertising featuring the character Susy Díaz generates word-of-mouth, thereby increasing brand presence beyond the product and its services.* Our study demonstrates that consumers who have been exposed to such advertising are more receptive to engaging in brand dialogue and are more likely to propagate brand messaging to new levels of communication.:

Yes, the truth is, as I repeat, it is as iconic. It’s funny to mix current things with current memes and put a character like that in because they know it’s going to be talked about. Whether positive or negative, they know that they are going to talk and remember this brand of cell phones for using it. (E5, P4, P2)

The interviewees sparked conversations beyond the realm of advertising. Moreover, when asked about their interest in seeing more of this type of advertising, their response was overwhelmingly positive, citing various desirable characteristics they wished to see more of:

Yes, because they are quite creative. I think they're creative because they're different from others, they have a very interesting shape, and they love their target audience.

5 Conclusion

Controversial characters have the potential to generate positive attitudes towards a brand due to consumers' previous experiences with them. In the case of Susy Diaz, she successfully reinforced the comedic values of a brand, resulting in a positive attitude among consumers, which in turn can lead to greater brand recall and loyalty. As Rossiter and Percy [14] noted, consumers respond to groups of advertising spots featuring a character with clearly marked attitudes, and the positive responses were nearly instantaneous in this study.

Consumers today are savvy about marketing and advertising strategies, and they readily identify brands that use humor and comedy, such as Entel phone brand. The interviewees in our study showed sustained interest in both the character and the brand, even after viewing the advertising spot, with their interest being driven primarily by the character's comedic appeal. While this study was limited to young people aged 18–25 in Lima, further research could explore the potential connections between other character types and different age groups.

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