

A study on the message appeals (hard-sell vs. soft-sell) on the lids of take-out coffee cups on Korean golf courses

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: This study reviews the purchase intentions of customers who buy coffee in regards to the message types expressed on the take-out coffee cups used on golf courses in Korea.

Methods/Statistical Analysis: To test of this research, the experiment stimulus item of 2(message type: soft-sell vs. hard-sell) 2(writing method: printed vs. hand-written) was produced and the differences in respondents when their golf career (long vs. short) was taken into account for the 2×2×2 matrix. In the end, 155 copies of the survey were used for analysis.

Findings: The findings were as follows: 1) Attitudes were more favorable to soft-sell messages than hard-sell messages on coffee cups. 2) For hard-sell messages, there was a difference in attitude depending on golf career (long < short), but for soft-sell messages, there was no difference in attitude depending on golf career, indicating that golf career had a moderating effect. 3) The moderating effect of

how the message was written was also verified. For hard-sell messages, the attitude towards printed messages were more favorable, while for soft-sell messages there was no difference across the way message was written, indicating a moderating effect of the way the message is written. Lastly, 4) the attitude towards the messages on the coffee cup was found to have a positive effect on the intention to purchase take-out coffee.

Improvements/Applications: When drafting a marketing strategy for take-out coffee on golf courses, the various type of customers and situations as well as coffee itself, would have to be taken into account.

Key Words : Soft-Sell, Hard-Sell, Golf Career, Attitude to Messages, Purchase Intention.

1 Introduction

As golf becomes more main stream, the number of people enjoying golf has also rapidly increased. Golf clubs generate revenue through starting houses or shade houses (snack points), in addition to the usage fees for the course and cart. Take-out coffee sold on golf courses is popular as it can be enjoyed not just before the workout but also during. However, there is usually only one brand of coffee offered to customers. This means customers' decisions concern only whether to purchase the coffee, not which brand to purchase. Therefore, those in charge of marketing coffee must focus on generating a desire for the product category itself and increase this potential desire for the coffee category. That is, a communication strategy must be established to have customers see coffee purchases as a way to make the atmosphere more desirable or as conducive to reducing the day's scores. Since only a single brand and single item type of take-out coffee is offered on golf courses, a means must be provided to distinguish one's coffee from a fellow golfer's. Most golf courses write numbers, special signs (e.g. star, circle, heart, clover), or text (e.g. Eagle, Hole-in-one, Be-happy, I love you) on the coffee cup lid. When such markings are used as a tool to trigger desire for the product category in addition to being used as a distinguishing tool, it can become an effective marketing communication

tool. But thus far, studies on this topic have been lacking. As such, this study seeks to collect the marking methods used on golf courses, categorize them and review the communication effects of each category. In particular, messages will be categorized into soft-sell messages that may not be directly associated with golf scores but can help create a more favorable atmosphere for the day, and hard-sell messages that can encourage one to lower the day's scores. The communication effects of such messages, customers' attitudes to such attitudes and the difference in their coffee purchase intention will be reviewed. We also seek to review whether attitude to messages are moderated by the length of golf career or the way messages are written, i.e. whether they are printed or hand-written. Lastly, whether the attitude towards messages on the lid of the take-out coffee cups affects purchasing intention will be analyzed.

2 Theoretical background and Hypotheses

2.1 Types of appeal messages

Appeal messages refer to the appeal made to customers so that one's arguments or conclusions are accepted. There are various types of appeal messages. Since the degree of message acceptance, that is, the persuasion communication effects can vary depending on the appeal message, the selection of appeal message is a very important decision to be made.

Appeal messages can be categorized into direct or indirect appeals, appeals to reason or to emotion and many other ways. In this study, they are categorized into soft-sell and hard-sell messages to review the communication effects between these two types. According to Muller (1986), soft-sell messages aim to improve the atmosphere through beautiful and emotional things. They may not be specific or explicit but they are often interesting. Meanwhile, hard-sell messages seek to persuade using clear information [1]. Okazaki, Muller, & Taylor(2010)[2] further expanded on the concept of hard-sell and soft-sell messages in advertisement, by categorizing reasonable and clearly factual things as hard-sell messages, while emotional, implicit, descriptive and image-based things

as soft-sell tools. His analysis can be summarized as follows [Table 1].

Table 1: Hard-sell vs. Soft-sell

Hard-sell		Soft-sell	
Thinking	Rational	Feeling	Creative
	Logical		Instinctive
	Analytic		Imaginative
	Factual		Abstract
	Concrete		
Explicitness	Precise	Implicitness	Insinuation
	Explanation		Appealing
	Convincing		Subjective
	Persuasion		Expressive
	Instructive		
Fact	Educational	Image	Entertaining
	Descriptive		Interpretive
	Realistic		Playful
	Evidence-based		Impression-based

When such appeal message types are applied to the text messages written on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses, reason-based texts such as ‘Eagle’, ‘Hole-in-one’, ‘Single’ or ‘Buddy’ that are directly associated with golf performance or golf scores can be categorized as hard-sell messages. Meanwhile, emotional messages such as ‘I love you’, ‘Beautiful flower’, ‘Smiling flower’, ‘A pleasant day’ and ‘Wishing you good luck’ that are not directly associated with golf or golf scores can be categorized as soft-sell messages.

Meanwhile, the ultimate benefit that customers seek to acquire through the purchase or consumption of products or services can be categorized as functional, symbolic or experiential. Functional benefits are related to the need to resolve an issue through the purchase or usage of a product or service. Symbolic benefits are related to the need to show off one’s social status or self-image through the purchase or usage of a product or service. Experiential benefits are related to the positive atmosphere of happiness or joy acquired through the consumption or use of a product or service [3]. When viewed from the perspective of an amateur golfer, the benefits from the sport are rather symbolic or experiential than functional. Most golfers who come to golf courses are amateurs who enjoy games with friends to promote their relationship or health. Therefore, to generate a desire for the single-brand coffee category

on golf courses, it can be assumed that these golfers would prefer soft-sell messages that can help create a more favorable atmosphere for the day rather than hard-sell messages that can help reduce one's scores. As such, the following hypothesis was established.

H1: The attitude to soft-sell messages on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses will be more favorable than the attitude to hard-sell messages.

2.2 Interaction Effect of Golf Career

According to construal level theory, an individual's construal level to the same event or object varies according to his perceived psychological distance [4]. That is, when the psychological distance to a particular event or object is perceived farther, a high-level construal occurs, while when the psychological distance is perceived as closer, a low-level construal occurs [5]. High-level construal is goal-oriented, abstract, simple and consistent. Meanwhile, low-level construal is process-oriented and thus sees objects or events as secondary or superficial, leading to an inconsistent and specific construal [6]. The characteristics of high-level construal and low-level construal can be summarized as follows [Table 2] [7].

Table 2: Categorization of high-level construal and low-level construal

High-level construal	Low-level construal
Abstract	Concrete
Simple	Complex
Structured, coherent	Unstructured, incoherent
Decontextualized	Contextualized
Primary, core	Secondary, surface
Superordinate	Subordinate
Goal relevant	Goal irrelevant

When construal level theory is applied to golf career, those with a longer golf career would have a farther psychological distance from when they started golf. Therefore, they are likely to lean towards high-level construal. Moreover, they will likely seek symbolic or experiential benefits rather than functional benefits. Meanwhile, a shorter golf career would have a closer psychological distance perceived from when they started golf and are likely to show low-level construal. The benefits they seek, too, would likely be more functional rather than symbolic or experiential. Therefore, those with

a longer golf career would have a high-level construal towards take-out coffee on golf courses, too. Since those with a longer golf career would seek symbolic or experiential benefit while functional benefits are already secured, they can be presumed to be more favorable regardless of the appeal message type on the coffee cup. Meanwhile, those with a shorter golf career would have a low-level construal towards take-out coffee on golf courses. It can be presumed that such low-level construal would show a more favorable attitude to hard-sell messages with specific terms affecting golf scores, as opposed to abstract soft-sell messages. As such, the following hypothesis was established.

H2: The attitude towards the appeal type of the messages marked on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses would be moderated by the length of golf career.

H2a: As for hard-sell appeal messages, the attitude will be more positive when golf career is shorter.

H2b: As for soft-sell appeal messages, there will be no difference in attitude across different length of golf career.

2.3 Interaction Effect of how to Write Message with

In general, the way a message is written can be categorized into hand-written messages and printed messages. Hand-written messages are likely to transfer the writer's emotions to the reader. Moreover, it can have the reader's gaze linger longer and provide reliability on the information source [8]. Therefore, product information such as product features, price or materials written by hand can increase acceptability by the customer, stimulates their intention to purchase and have a positive effect on revenue [9]. When this is applied to messages marked on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses, hand-written messages can increase the symbolic and experiential benefits through emotional transference, but would not increase functional benefits such as score-related benefits valued by amateur players. Meanwhile, printed messages that leave out emotion can increase benefits related to performance more so than hand-written messages. Therefore, hand-written messages would be more appropriate to soft-sell messages rather than hard-sell messages. However, since golf as a sport provides experiential

benefits, it can be presumed that regardless of the appeal message type, customers would be favorable to the message on the take-out coffee cup. Meanwhile, printed messages are more appropriate to hard-sell messages. As such, the following hypothesis was established.

H3: The attitude to messages on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses would be moderated in accordance with how the message is written.

H3a: As for hard-sell messages, the attitude would be more positive when printed as opposed to hand-written.

H3b: As for soft-sell messages, there would be no difference in the attitude to messages in accordance with how the message is written.

2.4 Attitude Toward Messages and Purchase Intention to take-out Coffee

In general, attitudes (emotions) are formed based on the knowledge (cognition) of an object's traits, which then generates an intention to act (behavior) [10]. However, according to Krugman, when engagement with the product is low or when the customer feels there isn't much difference between the products offered, or when the perceived risk of a product purchase is low, a low-engagement hierarchy forms the attitude. That is, the attitude is formed through cognition-behavior-emotion [11]. For take-out coffee on golf courses, not only is engagement low, but customers does not have a choice of brand. The perceived risk is also low, leading to a low-engagement hierarchy attitude towards messages. Therefore, it can be presumed that the coffee purchase intentions will be shown based on such attitude (emotions).

H4: The attitude towards messages marked on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses will have a positive effect on the intention to purchase coffee.

3 Empirical Analysis

3.1 Stimuli Development and Data Collection

To review the attitude to messages and intention to purchase depending on the appeal message type on take-out coffee cups, the following stimulus production process was carried out. First, the photos of messages on the lids of take-out coffee cups on 5 golf courses in Daegu, Gyeongbuk were collected. Two FGIs (Focus Group Interviews) were then conducted on the researchers at the GBC (Global Brand Communication) Lab and categorized the types of appeal messages into hard-sell, soft-sell and neutral appeal messages. The following summarizes this categorization[Table 3].

Table 3: Types of appeal messages

Soft appeal message	Hard appeal message	Neutral appeal message
Pretty flowers Laugh flowers	Eagle	Names(000,000,000,000)
A laugh day	Hole In One	Number (1,2,3,4)
Good luck	Buddy	Alphabet (A, B, C, D)
I love you	Single	Pattern (☆ , ♦ , ♥ , ☺)
Happy Day	Albatross	
Have a nice day	Super Shot	
Be careful of cold		
God bless you		
Smile		

From the above table, four messages each were selected from the soft-sell message type and the hard-sell message type, while excluding the neutral message type. Given that these messages were either hand-written or printed, two additional categories of the method of marking were added to create 4 types of questionnaires [Figure 1]. Golf career that would be used as an additional moderating variable was added as an open-ended question.

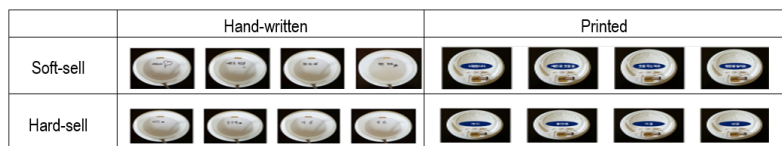


Figure 1: Stimuli

The questionnaire was conducted on visitors of golf courses in Daegu, Gyeongbuk in Korea. To improve the response rate and

quality of responses, a small gift was given to participants. A total of 209 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. After excluding 54 copies with insufficient responses, 155 copies were used for final analysis. Respondents were 67% male and 33% female, with most of them aged 30 or older. Thus the sample fit the study purpose. The sample characteristics of the 155 respondents were as follows [Table 4].

Table 4: Sample Characteristics

Items		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	female	51	32.9
	male	104	67.1
Age	Under the 20s	0	0
	21-30	0	0
	31-40	18	11.6
	41-50	84	54.2
	Above the 50s	53	34.2

3.2 Manipulation Check and Measurements of Variables

First a manipulation check was conducted on the type of appeals in the stimuli (soft-sell vs. hard-sell). The nine items from the soft-sell appeals and hard-sell appeals categorized by Shintaro, Mueller, & Taylor (2010) that were deemed fit were used (soft-sell: 5, hard-sell: 4) [12]. (soft-sell: cronbach’s alpha=.778, hard-sell: cronbach’s alpha=.856). The results are as seen in [Table 5].

Table 5: Manipulation for stimuli

stimuli	n	Appeal type	mean	S.D	t	P
Soft-sell	101	Soft-sell	3.69	1.218	1.933	.05
		Hard-sell	3.36	1.079		
Hard-sell	54	Soft-sell	3.38	1.217	-4.473	.00
		Hard-sell	4.65	1.694		

As seen in Table 5, stimuli manipulated into a soft-sell(hard-sell) type were perceived as a soft-sell(hard-sell) appeals message more than a hard-sell(soft-sell) appeals message, succeeding in manipulation checks (Soft-sell:MS=3.69,MH=3.36,p<.05; Hard-sell:MS=3.38,

MH=4.65, $p < .05$) The attitude towards messages which was a moderating variable was measured using a 7 point Likert scale on the 5 questions that were translated and revised from the tool by Holbrook & Batra(1987) (cronbach's alpha=.931). The results of manipulation checks on stimuli were as follows [13]. The purchase intention was measured using a 7 point Likert scale on the three questions translated and revised from Marks & Kamins(1988). The purchase intention for take-out coffee, which was a dependent variable had a cronbach's alpha=.884[14].

4 Hypothesis Test

4.1 Results of Hypothesis 1

H1 reviews the customer's attitude towards soft-sell messages and hard-sell messages on lids of take-out coffee cups on golf courses. Therefore the soft-sell messages and hard-sell messages were set as independent variables and the attitude to coffee was set as a dependent variable to conduct a t-test. The results are as seen in [Table 6].

Table 6: Attitude to coffee by appeal type of message

Appeal message	n	mean	S.D	t	P
Soft-sell	101	5.08	1.19	4.89	.00
Hard-sell	54	4.07	1.29		

The analysis shows that the attitude had a higher score to soft-sell message than to a hard-sell message (MS=5.08, MH=4.07, $p < .05$) thus, hypothesis 1 is supported.

4.2 Results of Hypothesis 2

H2 reviews how the effect that the appeal message type marked on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses has on attitude to messages is moderated by the length of golf career. To that end, the appeal message type was set as an independent variable and the golf career as a moderating variable. The attitude to message was set as a dependent variable to conduct ANOVA analysis and it seen in [Table 7, Table 8], [Figure 2].

Table 7: Correlation between appeal message type and golf career

Items	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Square of mean	F	P
Appeal message (A)	32.120	1	32.120	21.691	.000
Golf career (B)	1.656	1	1.656	1.118	.292
A*B	6.916	1	6.916	4.670	.032

Table 8: Moderating Effect by golf career

Appeal message	Golf career	n	mean	S.D.	t	P
hard-sell	High	31	3.78	1.28	-1.916	.060
	Low	23	4.45	1.23		
soft-sell	High	51	5.19	1.20	.961	.339
	Low	50	4.96	1.17		

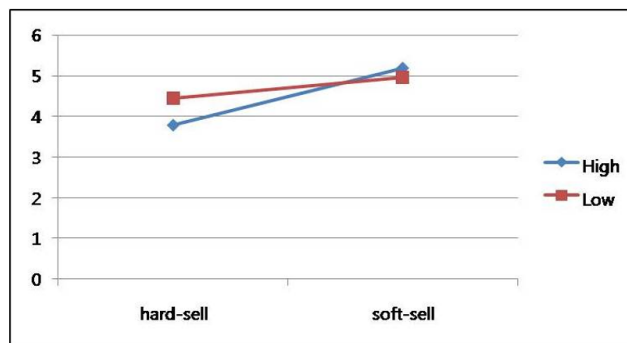


Figure 2: Moderating Effect by golf career

The analysis shows that the correlation between appeal message type and golf career is significant ($F=4.670, p<.05$), supporting H2. More specifically, for hard- sell messages, those with a shorter career scored higher in attitude to message than those with a longer golf career (MCH =3.78, MCL=4.45, $p<.10$). Meanwhile, for soft-sell messages, there was no significant difference across different length of golf career (MCH =5.19, MCL=4.96, $p>.10$).

4.3 Results of Hypothesis 3

H3 reviews whether the effect of the appeal message type marked on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf course on the attitude to the message is moderated by the way the message is written (hand-

written vs. printed). To that end, the appeal message type was set as an independent variable and the way the message is written was set as a moderating variable. The attitude to message was set as a dependent variable to conduct an ANOVA analysis. The results are as seen in [Table 9, Table10], [Figure 3].

Table 9: Correlation between appeal messages and the way messages are written

Items	Sum of square	Degree of freedom	Square of mean	F	p
Appeal message (A)	44.433	1	44.433	30.558	.000
The way the message is written (B)	10.046	1	10.046	6.909	.009
A*B	4.653	1	4.653	3.200	.076

Table 10: Moderating Effect by making type of message

Appeal message	Making type	n	mean	S.D	t	p
hard-sell	hand	17	3.42	1.04	-2.627	.011
	printed	37	4.36	1.29		
soft-sell	hand	47	4.98	1.25	-0.753	.453
	printed	54	5.16	1.13		

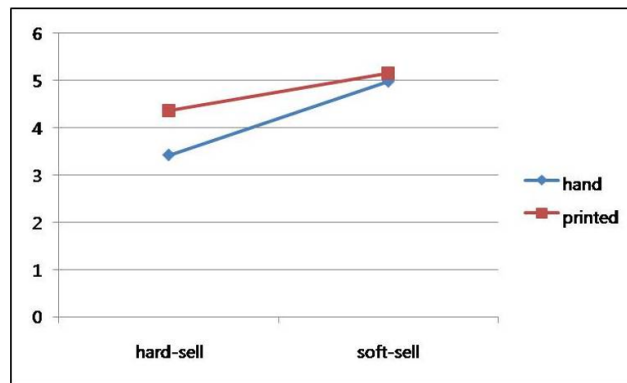


Figure 3: Moderating Effect by making type of message

The analysis shows that the correlation between the appeal message type and the way the message is written is significant ($F=4.653$, $p>.1$), supporting H3. More specifically, in hard-sell

appeal messages, those printed had a higher attitude score than those hand-written (MHW=3.42, MPW=4.36, $p < .05$). Meanwhile, in the soft-sell appeal message, there was no significant difference across the way the message was written (MCH=4.98, MCL=5.16, $p > .05$).

4.4 Results of Hypothesis 4

Reviews how the attitude to messages marked on the lids of take-out coffee cups on golf courses affect the coffee purchase intention. To that end, messages were set as independent variables, while coffee purchase intention was set as dependent variable to conduct a regression analysis. The results are as seen in [Table 11].

Table 11: Purchase Intention according to the Attitude of Coffee

Independent variable	Dependent variable	S.D	β	t	p	Statistics
Attitude toward coffee	(constant)	.355		4.026	.000	R= .581 R2= .338
	Purchase	.072	.581	8.836	.003	modifiedR2= .334 F=78.072, p=.000

The analysis shows that the attitude to messages affects coffee purchase intention ($=.581, p < .05$), supporting H4.

5 Conclusion

This study was inspired by the messages marked on the lid of take-out coffee cups on golf courses and seeks to review whether such messages stimulate consumers' emotions and lead to final purchase intentions. The moderating effect of golf career and the way the message was written was also verified. The findings can be summarized as follows. First, there was more positive attitude towards soft-sell messages rather than towards hard-sell messages (H1). Second, it was reviewed whether customers' attitudes could be moderated by the length of golf career or the way the message is written. As anticipated, customers' attitudes varied according to such moderating variables (H2, H3). Third, a more positive attitude to coffee was associated with a higher intention to purchase (H4).

Such findings can be summarized as follows. Factors that affect customer attitudes were not just the inherent characteristics of the coffee itself. The appeal messages on the lid of coffee cups were also a key factor. That is, the messages on the take-out coffee on golf courses were deemed more positive when they were soft-sell messages. However, customers with a shorter golf career showed a more positive attitude towards hard-sell messages. Printed messages were found to be more effective than hand-written messages for hard-sell messages. As seen above, the appeal message type, length of golf career and the way the message is written provide various factors in promoting take-out coffee on golf courses. This study indicates the need for a marketing strategy that caters to the customers who visit golf courses.

6 Implication and Future Agenda

The study is limited in that it was conducted on the beverage intake culture of Korea, and more specifically on a golf course. Moreover, for soft-sell messages, a strong contrast in results was not found for length of golf career or the way the messages were written. This seems to be due to the fact that the emotional effect of soft-sell messages had such a strong effect on customers. Given the unique environment of golf courses (where leisure and exercise are the goal), participating in a questionnaire might have been felt annoying. Only a small number of copies were retrieved, making the findings less likely to be representative. Various responses to appeal messages which are a form of marketing communication occasionally bring about new findings. Responses taken from various venues other than golf courses, such as coffee shops or restaurants would also be interesting. As such, the researchers hope that the study findings can be generalized or lead to practical conclusions.

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