The Role of Prior Knowledge in Advertisement Evaluation

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This research investigates how prior knowledge influences consumers’ evaluation of advertising messages. Results from a lab experiment reveal that when message processing motivation is low, subjects evaluate more positively the advertisement whose salient feature matches the accessible knowledge about the advertised product. When message processing motivation is high, subjects do not rely on their prior knowledge to make judgments. A second experiment is planned to test the external validity of the findings and to provide managerial implications for marketing communication practitioners.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12762/volumes/v34/NA-34

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The Role of Prior Knowledge in Advertisement Evaluation

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Extended Abstract

As an important construct in consumer research, prior knowledge has garnered researchers’ attention for more than two decades. Previous research traditionally focuses on prior knowledge’s impact on consumers’ information search, information processing and learning behaviors. Very few studies (e.g. Roehm and Sternthal 2001) have directly explored the role of prior knowledge in advertisement evaluation. The attempted contribution of this research is to broaden our understanding in this area by investigating the processes by which knowledge has its impact on consumers’ evaluation of advertising messages.

The angle from which this study looks at prior knowledge is different from past research in which knowledge is often operationalized as a dichotomous variable (i.e. high vs. low or objective vs. subjective). This study distinguishes itself by focusing on knowledge accessibility and its applicability in judgment. Advertising messages are usually seen or heard by consumers for a very brief period of time. It is unlikely that consumers will mull over their stored knowledge before forming impressions of the ads. In these circumstances, the accessible knowledge ought to play a major role in making judgments. What remains unclear is the interaction between the accessible knowledge and the salient features of the messages to which they attend.

Higgins (1995) proposes that the relation between the stored knowledge and stimulus information depends on whether the perceivers have a priori expectancies or goals. When expectancies or goals are absent, only those salient features of the stimulus that match stored knowledge are relevant. When expectancies or goals are present, “both features that match and features mismatch stored knowledge are relevant” (p.137). Armed with the popular persuasion models such as Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), I translate Higgins’ proposition into the following research hypotheses: (1) when message processing motivation is low, consumers will give more positive evaluations to the advertisement whose salient feature matches their accessible knowledge about the advertised product; (2) when message processing motivation is high, consumers will not rely on their accessible knowledge to make judgments. There will be no significant difference between the evaluations of matched and mismatched advertisements.

A 2 (processing motivation: low vs. high) x 3 (knowledge accessibility: match vs. mismatch vs. control) between-subjects laboratory experiment was conducted to test the research hypothesis. In the experiment, student subjects’ prior knowledge about a specific product feature was made accessible by a priming task. A no-prime control condition was also included. After the priming, subjects were presented with a print newsletter that contains the focal advertisement. Subjects’ processing motivation was manipulated by instructing them either to produce a detailed evaluation (high motivation condition) or to provide reading time estimation (low motivation condition).

The results confirmed the hypothesis. Under the low processing motivation condition, matched ads received more favorable evaluations and the mismatched ads were judged worse than those in the no-prime control condition. Under the high processing motivation condition, no significant difference was found across all conditions.

A second study is proposed to test the external validity of the findings from the first study and to provide managerial implications of this research to marketing practitioners.

References


I Self Gift Therefore I am: An Examination of Self-construal and Consumers Attitudes Towards Self-gifting

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Extended Abstract

Up until the last decade, gift giving theory and research had been primarily dyadic or interpersonal in nature (e.g. Belk, 1979). Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that people may sometimes give gifts to themselves, and suggested that the self- gift phenomenon may be widely occurring in American society (Mick and DeMoss, 1990a, 1990b). More specifically, it appears that gifts to oneself are ubiquitous, at least in American society. (Mick and DeMoss, 1990b). Other research has substantiated the notion that self-gifts are a fairly common and important phenomenon particularly in western consumer
behavior (e.g. Faure and Mick, 1993). According to social researchers, Western individuals have become increasingly self-oriented in their purchases and consumption behavior (Mick, DeMoss and Faber 1992), and an example of this phenomena has been labeled self-gifts. Similarly, McKeage et al. (1993) believe that people have been giving gifts to themselves since the early beginnings of self-indulgence.

Self-gifting is clearly prevalent in western consumer behavior. The question then becomes whether the propensity to self gift is confined to the United States, or a more widespread phenomenon. For example, it is well established that people with different cultural backgrounds may behave differently and have different reactions to similar situations. More specifically, research has shown that different cultural identifications have an impact on the way people think, feel, and behave (e.g. Markus and Kitayama, 1991). How does this effect self-gifting behavior? This research proposes to answer this question by investigating whether self-gifting is a universal phenomenon or one simply confined to Western societies by examining consumers self-construal and attitude towards self-gifting.

Overall, it has been suggested that self-gifts represent a complex class of personal acquisitions that offer intriguing insights on self-directed consumer behavior (Mick and DeMoss 1990b). “Self gift theory will likely benefit from drawing on additionally relevant psychological research” (Mick and DeMoss, 1990b p. 329) since “with rich and complex qualities, self-gifts provide a window through which consumer behavior can be viewed in some of its most adaptive, dramatic and personal significant forms” (Mick and DeMoss, 1990b p. 331).

As demonstrated by its name and definition, one of the predominant aspects of self-gifting is the direct focus on the self. Clearly, if people view the self differently, they will react differently to self-gifting. Taken together with the recommendation above by Mick and DeMoss (1990), we propose to draw on the psychological research of Markus and Kitayama (1991) that identified two dimensions of the self that can be used to characterize consumer’s self-construal as well as explain and identify differences between cultures: independence and interdependence.

According to Markus and Kitayama, self-construal can be conceptualized by the degree of independence/interdependence that a person possesses. They further state that all people contain both an independent and interdependent self, but that the culture in which they are bought up in influences which one dominates. For example, Europeans and Caucasian Americans are typically said to be independent because they tend to emphasize the individual whereas people from Asian cultures are typically interdependent because they tend to emphasize the group as more important than the individual. People with independent self-construals strive to develop and express their unique characteristics, whereas people with interdependent self-construals place value on harmonious relationships with others and acceptance in their community. Those with well-developed independent self-construals gain self-esteem through expressing the self and validating their internal attributes, whereas harmonious interpersonal relationships and the ability to adjust to various situations are sources of self esteem for the interdependent self-construal (Singelis 1994). After reviewing an extensive array of studies, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that these independent and interdependent views of the self influence cognition, emotion, and motivation and help to explain individual differences between cultural groups.

It seems reasonable then to propose that consumers’ self-construal will have an impact on their attitude and likelihood to self-gift. More specifically, it seems that people with an independent self-construal will be more likely to self-gift, as they tend to have self-benefiting motivations, such as the need to achieve, self-enhance, or affiliate. Conversely, people with an interdependent self-construal will be less likely to self-gift as they tend to derive their motivations from what benefits others and a group as a whole, such as the need to be agreeable to others, to accommodate to their needs, and to restrain one’s own wishes or wants.

To test the above propositions, a survey was distributed to 84 college students in the New York area that measured their self-construal, attitude, subjective norm, and likelihood to self-gift and some other demographic information. As predicted, subjects with high independent self-construals had a significantly more favorable attitude towards self-gifting, and subjects with high interdependent self-construals had a significantly less favorable attitude towards self-gifting (Mindependent=5.37, Minterdependent=4.87; p<.01). We also tested subjects’ attitude towards self-gifting advertisement slogans (e.g. “The perfect little thank me” (Andies candy) and “Because I’m worth it” (L’Oreal). Overall, Independents had a significantly more favorable attitude towards self-gifting slogans and Interdependents had a significantly less favorable attitude towards them (Mindependent=6.42, Minterdependent=5.98; p<.018).

The results of this research have important implications for managers, particularly when choosing an international advertising strategy. It will help companies who market their products in the United States using self-gift appeals in their advertisements decide whether they should use these messages in other countries or need to modify them to successfully sell their products. Based on our study, it seems that they cannot standardize these ads for countries that have consumers typically classified as having Interdependent self-construal. However, the results of this analysis provide some direction to marketers as to what appeals they should use. More specifically, rather than the slogans used in the United States that emphasizes the worth of the individual, (i.e. you deserve it), to better target Interdependents, the slogans should emphasize family and friends and their happiness.

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Advances in Consumer Research (Volume 34) / 417


Anomie Goes Online: The Emo Microculture

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Abstract

Whether the palliative is jazz or emo, it is common for fringe youth microcultures to identify with a musical genre that gives voice to feelings of alienation. However, the place where these youth connect – their “touchspace” – has morphed from yesterday’s coffeehouse to today’s website. The purpose of this first stage project is to chronicle how adherents of the emo microculture relieve alienation by finding and communicating with other “like me” participants. As part of a larger project focusing upon youth microcultures centered on the common theme of anomie, we are collecting data from a variety of sources to identify emergent themes relative to communication, ritual, and resistance within this new cyber-mediated anomie microculture.

Introduction

Back then, they were hanging out in the coffee shop. In the 1960 British movie Beat Girl, “teenage bad girl” Jenny sneaks out of the house to hang out with her “beatinik” pals at the local coffee shop where they talk about alienation and jazz.4

Today, they are commiserating on the Internet. In this excerpt from a typical interview with an “emo kid,” a girl who could be Jenny’s daughter says:

“...I had a bit of an abusive childhood, and I was the fat ugly kid in class until high school...My best friend Nina—the one who introduced me to emo bands seemed to think I didn’t like her...That brought me down real hard...Music has always helped me out. Nina and I are a lot alike, and the first thing we found out about each other was that were it not for music we’d probably both either be stuck in a crisis center or dead by now. I rely a lot on music to get me through the day. When I get home from school the only things I do are go online and listen to music.” (Greenwald 2003, p. 307)

4A plethora of online sources richly document the experience of beatniks and other youth microcultures, cf. for example (http://www.stim.com/Stim-x/0896August/Automedia/beatinik.html)