The Role of Ease in Consumers’ Emotional Judgments

Derek Rucker, Northwestern University, USA
Pablo Brinol, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain
Richard Petty, Ohio State University, USA

This work examines the role of ease or fluency in emotional judgments. In particular, this research focuses on how the ease accompanying consumers’ thoughts about their own emotional experience influences emotional judgments and thereby the subsequent influence of emotions on consumer behavior. Drawing upon a burgeoning literature on metacognition, we examine how the ease with which emotional events are experienced influences consumers’ affective judgments. We find that the subjective ease accompanying the generation or reporting of emotion inducing events influences the degree of emotion experienced. Implications for consumer behavior, emotion, and metacognition are discussed.

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The Role of Power in Consumer Persuasion
Pablo Brinol, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain
Derek Rucker, Kellogg School of Management, USA
Richard Petty, Ohio State University, USA
Carmen Valle, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain
Alberto Becerra, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an increased interest in studying the effects of power over different consumer behaviors and cognitive processes, including the context of consumer decision making (Flurry and Burns 2005; Roedder-John 1999; Webster 1996), marketing (e.g., Berthon, Pitt, Ewing and Bakkeland 2003; Hunt and Nevin 1974, Rosenberg and Stern 1971) and purchasing behavior (Joy, 2001; Ruth, Ones, and Brunel 1999; Rugimbana, Donahay, Neal, and Polonsky 2002), choice of selling and influence tactics (Anderson, Lodish, and Weiz 1987; Gaski and Nevin 1985; Keith, Jackson and Crosby 1990; Kim and Hsieh in press; Mallalieu 1998), and budgeting (Henry 2005).

Despite this importance, very little research has been done relating power and persuasion (e.g., Festinger and Thibaut 1951; French and Raven 1959). The present research provides a first and initial step to address this gap by examining whether power can influence consumer attitudes by affecting the confidence people have in their own thoughts.

Building on previous research demonstrating that power is associated with approach tendencies (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003), we argue that greater levels of power might be associated with increased confidence in one’s thoughts. Because power singles action, individuals can be confident in and rely upon whatever thoughts they have in response to an advertisement.

This reasoning leads to the prediction that if power does influence the confidence with which people hold their cognitive responses (study 1) to an advertisement, we would expect high power to increase thought effects on attitudes relative to low power (Brinol, Petty, and Tormala 2004). One way in which the direction of the thoughts (favorable or unfavorable) in response to the ad can be manipulated is by varying the quality of the arguments contained in the ad (study 2). Another approach to vary thought-direction consists of asking consumers to think about positive and negative aspects of a given proposal (study 3). If power does influence the confidence with which people hold their cognitive responses to advertisement, we would expect power to increase thought-direction (e.g., argument quality) effects.

This finding would be important because it would a) suggest an entirely unexplored role for power in the persuasion process, b) introduce a new variable for the existing work on self-validation, and c) provide a completely new mechanism for the literature of power.

Experiment 1

Eighty-two participants were first exposed to a printed advertisement promoting a new cell phone containing either strong or weak arguments. Argument quality was varied in this study to lead participants to generate mostly positive or negative thoughts toward the consumer product. After participants read the ad and wrote their cognitive responses about it, power was experimentally induced using the same role-playing technique described in experiment 1. Finally, all participants reported their attitudes toward the product.

If power does influence the confidence with which people hold their thoughts, we would expect power to increase the argument quality effects, that is, more persuasion with the strong than the weak ad. In line with this self-validation hypothesis, we found that the effect of argument quality on consumer attitudes was greater when consumers had high rather than low confidence in their cognitive responses. Thus, with relatively high confidence, consumers relied on their thoughts in forming attitudes, but with relatively low confidence, consumers did not use their thoughts to judge the product (producing a lower attitude-thought correspondence). Experiment 3 turned to examine the proposed mechanism as well as test the plausibility of rival explanations.

Experiment 2

In order to manipulate the direction of participants’ thoughts (i.e., negative or positive), sixty-eight participants were asked to write arguments supporting or opposing a new university policy. After listing their arguments, we manipulated power by asking participants to remember two situations in which they had power over others (high-power condition) or two situations in which others had power over them (low-power condition). Then, participants rated the confidence they had in their arguments about the policy and their attitudes towards the policy.

We predicted and found a significant interaction between power and direction of thoughts generated. High-power participants reported more positive attitudes toward the policy than low-power participants when they wrote pro-arguments, and high-power participants reported less positive attitudes toward the policy than low-power participants when they wrote counter-arguments. It was also confirmed that power affected participants’ confidence in the validity of their own thoughts and this in turn mediated the observed differences in attitudes.

Discussion

Across different manipulations of all the variables, we predicted and found that power can influence consumer attitude change by affecting the confidence with which consumers hold their own thoughts in response to an ad. As a consequence of the link between power and confidence (study 1), power was shown to increased argument quality effects in a classic paradigm of persuasion consumer research (study 2) and the persuasive impact of the direction of thoughts on a traditional self-persuasion paradigm (study 3). Of most importance, we demonstrated for the first time that the effects of power on consumer judgment can be mediated by...
changes in thought confidence (Experiment 3). Taken together, these findings are important not only because they provide an entirely unexplored role for power in the persuasion process, but also because they highlight the importance of power as a new variable to consider when studying the consumer of persuasive attempts.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Corrective advertising is one means by which regulators address problems that arise from misleading ads. However, research has found it to be a double-edged sword: Corrective advertising is somewhat effective in correcting false beliefs (Wilkie et al. 1984), but it can also have undesirable effects by undermining valid beliefs about other product benefits (Mazis and Adkinson 1976) and by damaging the firm’s reputation (Armstrong et al. 1982; Johar 1996).

This paper reports the findings of three studies that suggest the undesirable punitive effects of corrective advertising are much broader than previously thought: Correction of a misleading ad diminished the persuasiveness of subsequent ads from not only the offending firm (specific effects), but also from unrelated second-party firms (generalized effects). This occurred regardless of whether the correction was attributed to an independent regulator or the firm itself, in response to both subtle and blatant instances of advertising deception, across both similar and very different product categories, and regardless of the strength of the arguments in the second ad. Correction also undermined the reputation of both the offending firm and other firms, even when these firms had a positive prior reputation. Together, these findings imply that correction may be a less appealing remedy to deceptive advertising than previously thought, in that it has the potential to seriously compromise the effectiveness of future advertising concerning other products from the same firm, and also undermines the ability of other, unrelated firms to promote their products.

Our studies also identify the mechanism responsible for these effects. Specifically, they demonstrate that corrective advertising can cause consumers to feel tricked or fooled, leading to a defensive bias in the way that they process subsequent ad claims. Exp 1 finds that correction of one advertisement undermined the perceived trustworthiness of subsequent advertisers, which in turn had a negative effect on the resulting product attitudes. Exp 2 builds on these initial findings by offering more direct evidence of a defensive bias: Under objective processing, strong arguments should be less vulnerable to distrust than weak ones (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), yet the distrust induced by the ad correction had a negative impact on attitudes regardless of the strength of the arguments in the second ad. Further, these effects were not cognitively mediated, suggesting that the underlying process is heuristic/automatic rather than systematic/effortful. These findings are consistent with the predicted defensive stereotyping mechanism (Darke and Ritchie 2006), where negative stereotypes are evoked to undermine the credibility of the subsequent advertiser, leading to more negative attitudes, and thereby reducing the threat of being fooled.

Exps 1 and 3 also examined the role played by the source of the correction, and found there were negative effects on subsequent attitudes regardless of whether the correction originated from an independent regulator or the company itself. Exp 3 also found that correction by a regulator prompted more negative perceptions of the offending firm than corrections from the firm itself. Together, these findings suggest that the source of correction is relatively unimportant when it comes to product evaluations, but that there may be more subtle effects of the corrective source on the reputation of the offending firm.

Firm reputation proved to be a complex moderator of the effects of corrective advertising. Exp 1 considered the reputation of the offending firm–specifically whether it was well-liked–and found that it made little difference in terms of whether the distrust caused by ad correction generalized to second-parties. Exp 2 manipulated the reputation of the subsequent second-party advertiser, comparing an unknown firm to one that was previously trusted by subjects, and again found that firm reputation was ineffective in stemming the negative effects of correction. Exp 3 further examined firm reputation and discovered that a positive reputation can offer some protection against correction-induced distrust, but only when the second firm’s ethics are endorsed by an independent regulator. This is consistent with the notion of subtyping in the stereotyping literature (Taylor 1981), whereby stereotypes are deemed not to fit certain members of the category (i.e., this is not the typical kind of advertiser).

From a theory-building perspective, our findings build on existing work concerning deceptive advertising and defensive stereotyping (e.g., Darke and Ritchie 2006) by better specifying important boundary conditions. Specifically, we find that the distrust arising from deceptive advertising is less likely to generalize to ads from firms that are endorsed by an independent regulator, as well as to product information provided by an independent, trusted source (i.e., Consumer Reports). This is consistent with predictions made by Rotter (1967), who suggested that specific sources of trust should be preferred to more general sources. Interestingly, however, it appears that the specific information must come from an independent source in order to be effective.

For managers, our work once again sounds a cautionary note about the consequences of misleading advertising, and the need to avoid it. Revelations of deceptive advertising have the power to adversely affect advertising as a whole, not just the specific firm involved in the deception. For regulators, our findings suggest that careful consideration must be given to the punitive effects that such practices can have in reinforcing negative stereotypes about advertising in general. Further, the evidence suggests that regulators also may have some role to play in protecting firms against the unintended consequences of correction; namely by publicly endorsing ethical firms. Our findings also imply that the broad distrust that is induced by corrective advertising may actually harm—not aid—consumer welfare, by decreasing the likelihood the consumer will recognize valid information. Corrective advertising is thus a tool that must be used judiciously, so as to strike a balance between the cost of erroneous product beliefs in the marketplace and the potential damage that correction can do to advertising as a whole, to honest advertisers in particular, and to consumers themselves.

REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent years have witnessed a steady increase in creativity research in marketing, especially in the strategy literature (e.g., Andrews and Smith 1996; Im and Workman 2004; Moorman and Miner 1997). However, with the exception of a handful papers, creativity research in a consumer/advertising context is scarce (e.g., Burroughs and Mick 2004; Zinkhan 1993). Even these few papers only focus on the effects of ad creativity on a limited set of outcome variables such as recall/recognition and attitude.

A primary goal of the present paper is to provide process explanations of how creative ads work by proposing an integrative structural model to capture the impact of perceived advertising creativity on consumer ad processing and response. A second objective is to investigate the mechanisms through which creative ads are effective in reducing consumer resistance to persuasive messages. A third objective is to delineate the boundary conditions of the effects of advertising creativity. A fourth goal of the paper is to expand the list of outcome variables currently focused upon by the creativity literature. Specifically, cognitive responses, affective responses and conative responses will be examined (e.g., MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986).

In the current paper, creative ads are defined as ads high in both divergence and relevance. In an advertising context, divergence refers to the extent to which an ad contains elements that are novel, different, or unusual in some way. While divergence is deemed as the central element to the definition of creativity, the ad also must be relevant—it must be meaningful, appropriate or valuable to the audience.

For the structural model, perceived advertising creativity is proposed to affect ad response variables (cognitive, affective and conative responses) via two routes. In the cognitive route, perceived advertising creativity activates an open-minded approach of information processing (heightened desire to postpone closure), which in turn leads to fewer negative statements and more curiosity statements about the brand. Accordingly consumers’ brand attitude is more favorable and their intentions to view the ad again and purchase are enhanced. In the affective route, the positive affect engendered upon viewing creative ads affects downstream ad processing and response variables by (1) indirectly affecting consumers’ desire to postpone closure (2) directly transferring to brand attitude and intention to view the ad again.

The proposed structural framework was examined in a 2 (divergence: high vs. low) x 2 (relevance: high vs. low) x 2 (exposure conditions: directed exposure vs. incidental exposure) experiment. Participants were asked to review an ad embedded in an entertainment news program and provided their answers to a set of questions aiming to measure their ad processing and ad responses. The proposed structural relationships received good empirical support (9 out of 12 hypotheses were supported), providing reasonable support that desire to postpone closure plays the key mediating role in explaining the effect of perceived advertising on ad processing and response variables. Both cognitive route and affective route were found to impact consumers’ ad processing and responses.

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Endowment Effect as Inertia Equity in Brand Switching

Geweiy Ye, Towson University
Curtis Haugtvedt, Ohio State University
W. Fred Van Raaij, Tilburg University

Abstract

Little research has investigated the behavioral aspect of brand inertia in brand switching based on behavioral decision theory. The present research employs endowment effect to conceptualize the inertia element of brand switching (e.g., from brand A to B). Past research normally separately assesses consumers’ willingness to accept (WTA) to give up brand A and the willingness to pay (WTP) to acquire brand B. The effect postulates that the WTA is normally larger than the WTP. The present research proposes a joint assessment of the endowment effect in brand switching. It uses the price reduction (i.e., inertia equity) that just overcomes brand inertia to measure the difference between WTA and WTP. Empirical evidence demonstrates and strengthens the conceptualization of endowment effect as inertia equity in brand switching.

References


Relationship Proneness–The Concept, Its Dimensions and Indicators

Alberto Marcari, LUISS Guido Carli University, Italy
Claudio Barbaranelli, University of Rome La Sapienza, Italy
Michele Vecchione, University of Rome La Sapienza, Italy

Introduction

In the last decades, research has highlighted the existence of a wide spectrum of approaches to buyer-seller exchanges, ranging from transactional to relational (for instance, Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987). In search for explanations of such a wide spectrum, reference is sometimes made to the individual attributes of both buyers and sellers, pointing towards their inclinations to engage into or to shy away from relationships. As far as buyers are concerned, researchers have evoked the existence of “relational”, “long-term oriented” or “transactional”, “short-term oriented” customers (Garbarino and Johnson 1999)—meaning that some of the customers are eager to engage in stable relationships and interactions with their suppliers, while others are more prone to establish arm’s length transactions.

Nevertheless, very little research has been devoted to the analysis of this orientation, and of its antecedents and consequences, if it isn’t for some pioneering efforts and a few noteworthy exceptions (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroeder and Iacobucci 2001; Odekerken-Schroder, De Wulf and Schumacher 2003).

Such an orientation is meant to be a stable trait of individuals and has been termed “relationship proneness”, defined as a conscious tendency to engage in relationships.

“Relationship proneness” has been associated with an interest for stable exchanges, and has been measured in terms of willingness “to be a regular customer” and “a steady customer”, and for “going the extra mile” to buy at the same shop (De Wulf et al., 2001). But, occasionally, a different approach has creeped into and different items have been used, without much discussion, related to the existence of personal contact and special treatment (“looking for personal contact with the personnel” and “making efforts in order to be treated in a special way”) (as in De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder 2000). This is an important undertaking, since relations are multidimensional, and it is therefore very important to work out their different facets and to better understand how those facets relate to each other.

Researchers have also dealt with a whole host of constructs related to the antecedents and consequences of relationships. On the one hand, in keeping with evidence from social psychology, showing that relationships are influenced by stable traits of personality of the partners involved (Robins, Caspi and Moffitt 2000), they are suggesting that also buyers-sellers relationships are influenced by those traits (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004). On the other hand, they have addressed the complex web of links between the propensity to engage in relations (relationship proneness) and behavioral intentions or relationship outcomes (De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder 2000; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder and Iacobucci 2001; Odekerken-Schroder, De Wulf and Schumacher 2003).

Research objectives

Our research objectives are threefold.

First of all, we want to analyze the 3+2 items that have been associated originally to relationship proneness (De Wulf et al., 2000; 2001), and that have been referred to above, to uncover their links.
Secondly, we want to explore the many aspects of relations, that add to the ones which have already been focused upon and that have been associated to interpersonal relations in the literature in socio-psychology (Fiske, 2000). Finally, we relate relationship proneness to personality traits, and in particular to basic traits (Big Five) and narrower dimensions (sociability and approval motivation).

Methodology
We develop a scale of relationship proneness, trying to capture the many-sided facets of relations; we end up with a compact and parsimonious 14-items scale, referring to the relationship to hairdressers. We measured the Big Five with a short version of the Big Five Questionnaire (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Perugini, 1993). Sociability is measured as in Cheek and Buss (1981); approval motivation as in Martin (1984). We run the traditional correlation and factor analysis. The sample is a convenience sample of 220 subjects, with diverse socio-demographic characteristics.

Results
When the 3+2 original items are pooled together and factor analyzed, 2 factors emerge, accounting for 68% of variance, with the 3 initial items loading on the first factor and the other 2 on the second.

When factor analyzing our 14-items scale, 3 factors emerge—social/interpersonal dimension, preferential treatment and reassurance, explaining 51% of variance. Correlations among factors ranged from .26 (social/interpersonal and preferential treatment) to .46 (social/interpersonal and reassurance).

When the 3+2 original items are pooled together with our 14 items, 4 different factors emerge, with the 3 items loading on a factor by themselves, and the other 2 splitting on 2 different factors (social/interpersonal and preferential treatment).

The social/interpersonal dimension was significantly correlated with traits of extraversion (r=.21), friendliness (r=.18) and sociability (r=.30). Preferential treatment and reassurance were respectively correlated with extraversion (r=.20) and approval motivation (r=.34). Relationship proneness and social/interpersonal dimension were significantly correlated (r=.30). These two dimensions showed the only relevant associations with satisfaction, respectively r=.27 for social/interpersonal and r=.35 for relationship proneness. An alpha level of .01 was used in all significance test.

Managerial implications:
We suggest that managers need to analyze the multi-dimensional nature of buyer-supplier relationships and to identify their different facets, and the relations among them.

We have established clearly that the orientation towards repeated and stable relationships is different, and can be treated differently, from the willingness to establish personalized relations; but also that they are related to a certain extent. This same orientation is not linked to the willingness to receive a special treatment and reassurance from one’s own supplier.

We have also established that there is a significant relation between personality traits and orientation towards relations, implying that buyers will establish the same kind of relation across categories and across suppliers.

Limitations and extension for further research:
Although it has been widely used in research, we are aware that results may not be directly generalizable, because of the idiosyncratic nature of the service setting. Therefore a wider research approach is required, in order to feature in differences across categories (in the service sector and otherwise) and different approaches towards categories by consumers.

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