“Effects of Self-Affirmation and Individualistic-Collectivistic Appeals on Open-Mindedness and Advertising Effectiveness”

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Consumers often resist information that conflicts with their preexisting attitudes or beliefs. Resistance to advertising is common, even when advertisers attempt to communicate important and novel messages. This research focuses on a new advertising technique called self-affirmation, which attempts to enhance consumers' self-perceptions to reduce resistance to persuasion. Two experiments explored the impact of self-affirmation on consumers’ open-mindedness to advertising and overall advertising effectiveness. This research offers the first demonstration of embedded self-affirmation working within an advertising message. Results support the usefulness of self-affirmation as a technique to reach consumers who are ordinarily highly resistant to advertising’s persuasive appeals.

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(i.e., reward condition) as when they think they didn’t do well (i.e., consolation condition). As expected, the predictors in consolation condition expected to enjoy the truffles less than those in reward condition. However, the experiencers’ actual enjoyment did not differ systematically between the two conditions.

Our findings suggest that a lack of justification does not limit the immediate pleasure of indulging and that a better reason does not make an indulgence more enjoyable, in contrast to what consumers expect.

References:

**Effects of Self-affirmation and Individualistic-collectivistic Appeals on Open-mindedness and Advertising Effectiveness**

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

**Background and Scope**
Psychological research has demonstrated how self-affirmation in one domain leads people to be more open-minded and acknowledge the merits of counterattitudinal messages they would otherwise reject. Affirmation-induced openness to counterattitudinal information works because open-minded people are more objective (less biased) and more sensitive to argument strength, and thereby judge an argument on its merits. (Correll, Spencer and Zanna, 2004). Little research has been published within the consumer research or marketing literature about self-affirmation and its effects on consumer cognitions and behavior. It is hypothesized that self-affirmation will result in more open-mindedness and elaboration on information about an advertised product.

**Theoretical Basis:**
Psychological literature suggests close-mindedness stems from an individual’s concern for self-regard; in effect, a person resists and rejects conflicting information to protect a sense of self-worth derived from their “right” beliefs and attitudes. Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988; Steele, Spencer and Lynch, 1993), suggests that every person strives for positive self-regard, and draws on personal successes within a constellation of domains for its achievement. One of its crucial tenets is that the ultimate goal of a defensive reaction is the security of the global sense of self-worth.

Individual differences among consumers in their need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski and Webster, 1996) may differentially affect consumers’ responses; people who have a strong need for Cognitive Closure often will “seize” and “freeze” without elaborating on the full information available. It is expected that NFCC will moderate the relationship between self-affirmation on open-mindedness and advertising effectiveness.

**Potential Contribution**
This research contributes to extant literature in several ways. First, it expands what little is currently known about how self-affirmation works to influence consumer behavior. Second, it adds to literature focused on information processing in high involvement product categories. Finally, this research contributes to the understanding of the circumstances in which there is an opportunity for more unbiased consideration of products by considering the cognitive processing of the open-minded consumer.

**Research Methodology**
A sequence of experiments has been conducted to test the effects of self-affirmation on consumers’ responses to advertising regarding high involvement products. Respondents were recruited to participate in an experiment about the effects of advertising content on consumer elaboration, cognitions, and intentions. Subjects were randomly assigned to a treatment cell, received a disclosure sheet about the study, and then were asked to view an ad promoting a high involvement product. (The actual headings and phrases in the ad stimuli varied based on cell assignment). Reactions to the advertisement and trait and state measures were then collected.

Study 1 was designed test the impact of positive self-affirmation (ego inflation) on consumers’ responses to advertising. A hypothetical on-line job search portal was selected as the advertised product representing high involvement categories. Study 1 involved the use of a 2 x 2 experiment of the self-affirmation treatment condition versus a neutral condition by high/low need for cognitive closure. After viewing one ad, subjects first performed an open-ended thought listing. They next rated the advertising as to its effectiveness and were then asked to simulate a job search by rating their interest in a series of job postings. Next they were asked a series of questions about their attitudes and beliefs. Students from undergraduate business classes participated in the research in exchange for class participation credit. A total of 160 respondents completed Study 1.

Study 2 further examined the impact of self-affirmation on advertising effectiveness. A total of 52 undergraduate marketing students received only the affirmation treatment advertisement, and were also asked additional questions related to self-esteem and locus of control.
in addition to the other dependent variables and ratings from Study 1. This phase allowed more in-depth analysis of the relationship between individual differences related to self-esteem and effects of self-affirmation on advertising effectiveness.

Study 3, which is in process now, is designed to examine self-affirmation’s effects on advertising, in conjunction with individualistic/collectivistic appeals. In a 3 x 2 x 2 experiment, consumers will react to advertising that includes self-affirmation by individualistic or collectivistic appeals by high/low Need for Cognitive Closure. A minimum of 30 respondents per cell is planned (240 respondents.) The study is being conducted for hybrid/alternative fuel vehicles as the context for a public service announcement ad. The approach will be identical to that used in Study 1. Medialab software is being used to administer the survey in Study 3, allowing the ad to be presented as a prototype for a 30-second television ad. After viewing one ad, subjects are being asked a series of questions related to their attitudes and beliefs about hybrid/alternative fuel vehicles. Then they will give reactions to the advertising’s effectiveness and asked a series of questions about their general attitudes and beliefs, including an individual difference measure related to individualism/collectivism.

Variables of Study:
The following variables will be included.

- Independent Variables of “Affirmation Condition (positive affirmation, control)” and “Type of Appeal” (Individualistic, Collectivistic) will be tested.
- A Mediating Variable (Openness/Skepticism) will be assessed.
- The Dependent Variable is “Persuasion to Consider the Advertised Product.”
- Moderating Variables are:
  - Individual Trait Differences related to Preference for Individualism/Collectivism
  - Individual Differences on Need for Cognitive Closure (NFCC)

Analysis involved using ANOVA/ANCOVA and special procedures to test for mediation/moderation as outlined in Baron and Kenny (1986).

Hypotheses
The hypothesized relationships among variables are as follows:

H1: Affirmations will lead to more openness.
H2: More openness leads to more elaboration.
H3: More elaboration leads to more persuasion.
H4: “Individualism” will intensify the results: Individualistic appeals will be stronger than collectivistic appeals among “Individualists”, and Collectivistic appeals will be stronger than individualistic appeals among “Collectivists.”
H5: People low in NFCC will respond better to positive affirmations.

Experimental Stimuli
All advertising stimuli were pretested prior to conducting the experiments. The following headlines are being provided as illustrations of the advertising conditions to be tested.

Studies 1 and 2: On-line Job Search Portal
- Self-Affirmation Treatment Condition 1: “Smarter People Find the Best Jobs” (positive self-affirmation treatment condition)
- Neutral Control Condition: “People Find the Best Jobs” (represents non-affirmation condition)

Study 3: Hybrid/Alternative Fuel Vehicles
- Affirmation Treatment Condition/Individualistic Appeal: “You can work hard and do whatever it takes to overcome challenges and to accomplish your goals. You are smart. When faced with difficult and important decisions, you carefully analyze which choice is the right one for your unique situation. Your can make more informed decisions. You can act now to make a difference for your future.”
- Affirmation Treatment Condition/Collectivistic Appeal: “We Americans work hard and we do whatever it takes to overcome challenges and accomplish our goals. Americans are smart. When faced with difficult and important decisions, we carefully analyze which choice is the right one for our unique situation. We can make more informed decisions. We can act now to make a difference for our future.”
- Control: No affirmation language

References
Consumer Weighting of Hedonic and Utilitarian Dimensions across Judgments
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Extended Abstract
A fundamental assumption in the theory of choice is that of procedure invariance which suggests that individuals have well-articulated preferences and beliefs that remain constant regardless the method of elicitation. However, studies of decision and judgment show that people do not have well-defined values and beliefs and often construct these during the elicitation process (Fischoff, Slovic & Lichtenstein, 1980; Shafer & Tversky, 1985; Tversky, Sattath and Slovic, 1988; Schkade and Johnson, 1989). Thus, different elicitation procedures highlight different aspects of options and may result in inconsistent responses, or preference reversals.

In two studies we examined situations that involved trade-offs between utilitarian and hedonic dimensions across three elicitation methods: choice, pricing and liking. Previous work by Hsee et al. (2003) shows that when decision makers are faced to trade-offs between cold and hot factors they exhibit a systematic inconsistency between predicted experience (i.e., a liking judgment) and choice. They suggest that individuals weight more hot factors when predicting their experience, but place more emphasis on cold or rational factors in choice. Hsee and Zhang (2004) provide further evidence that easy-to-quantify attribute differences (i.e. quantitative differences) are weighted more in a joint evaluation mode (e.g., choice) than in single evaluation mode (e.g., predicted happiness judgments). For example, individuals overpredict the experiential difference between easy to quantify differences such as having an annual salary of $60,000 and an annual salary of $70,000 and between living in a 3,000 sq ft house and a 4,000 sq ft house, but are less likely to overpredict the experiential difference between doing an interesting and a tedious job or between having to walk to work and having to drive to work.

In study 1 we used a stimulus composed of two attributes, a utilitarian and a hedonic attribute. Individuals made 240 judgments of three types: choice, pricing (essentially a matching judgment when participants had to price one of the option with the objective of matching a second option in value) and liking. The decisions were made in two consumer categories, cars and apartments, and were framed as acquisition decisions. In addition, we manipulated the size of the trade-off by including three levels of utilitarian and hedonic attributes. Consistent with the prominence hypothesis, we expected that utilitarian attributes would be weighted more in choice than in pricing (matching) and liking decisions, since they seem more important and provide a better justification for choice. In agreement with Hsee et al. (2003), we predicted that options described as high on hedonic dimensions, would be rated higher in liking judgments than options described as high on utilitarian dimensions. Our first prediction, the prominence of utilitarian attributes in choice in comparison to pricing and liking, was confirmed when the size of the trade-off was large. Thus, utilitarian attributes were weighted more in choice than in pricing \( t(79)=25.93, p<.001 \), or liking \( t(79)=5.19, p<.001 \). However, when the size of the trade-off was small, individuals placed greater weights on utilitarian attributes in liking judgments than in choice \( t(79)=10.95, p<.001 \) or pricing \( t(79)=10.25, p<.001 \). In conclusion, although decisions were largely driven by high utilitarian values, the size of the trade-off had an impact on the weights assigned to hedonic attributes in a joint evaluation context. Hence, smaller trade-offs resulted in increased weighting of hedonic attributes in choice and pricing decisions.

Study 2 tested whether framing a decision in terms of a loss (forfeiture) or a gain (acquisition) may further moderate attribute weighting across elicitation procedures in situations when the size of the trade-off is large. Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000) suggest that in choice, hedonic attributes receive a greater weight in forfeiture than in acquisition decisions, due to more extensive elaboration in a forfeiture context. In agreement with Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000), we expected that in forfeiture, options described as high on hedonic attributes would better predict preferences across elicitation methods in comparison to options described as high on utilitarian attributes. Our data presented only partial support for this hypothesis. We found that framing a decision as a forfeiture results in a greater weighting of hedonic attributes in liking judgments \( t(83)=9.50, p<.001 \), consistent with an elaboration hypothesis. It can be concluded that individuals anticipate more regret associated with forfeiting a high hedonic option than with a high utilitarian option. This effect was not present in choice or pricing judgments. However, we found that, hedonic attributes were weighted more when individuals made pricing judgments in an acquisition context \( t(83)=7.44, p<.001 \) than in forfeiture. This suggests that in acquisition, individuals expect to pay more for high hedonic options than for high utilitarian options. However, it is possible that the null effect for choice was caused by the nature of the stimulus. On each choice screen, participants were presented with three options: a reference option, which provided the acquisition or forfeiture frame, and two choice options. It is possible that individuals used decision short-cuts and failed to take into consideration the reference item in choice. Further studies are necessary to rule out this potential explanation.

References
Dimensions of Attitude Towards A Sales Promotion Offer

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Extended Abstract

Walk into a supermarket and you will not be surprised to see a great many products on promotion of one kind or the other. Promotions have rightfully become the ubiquitous element of consumers’ shopping experience with US marketers spending more than $100 billion in the form of annual promotional expenditure (Kerin et al, 2003).

The present study contends that consumers’ responses towards various sales promotions depend on their attitudes towards a given sales promotion and such attitudes depend on the intrinsic characteristics of a given promotional offer. Blatteberg and Neslin (1990). They define a sales promotion as “an action-focused marketing event whose purpose is to have a direct impact on the behavior of the firm’s customers.”

Different sales promotional tools serve different objectives. Some promotions such as in-store display and ‘two-for-one’ help generate un-planned purchases (Inman et al, 1990; McClure and West, 1969) and Mulhern and Padgett (1995) show how retail promotions induce consumers to buy regular priced merchandise. Sales promotions are also used to increase store traffic (Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan, 1998; Lichtenstein and Bearden, 1989) increase number of visits to the store (Walters and Rinnie, 1986) and reduce retailers’ inventory carrying costs by inducing consumers to stockpile (Blattberg, 1981; Soo Ong, 1999).

Prior research has studied the variations in consumers’ responsiveness to deals by product category, market, and type of consumer (Blattberg et al 1995). Evidently, there hasn’t been much of an attempt, bearing a few exceptions, to study the differences in consumers’ responsiveness to different promotions arising out of variation in the intrinsic characteristics of a promotional offer. We propose that consumers view promotions as a bundle of some combination of these attributes and each promotional offer represents a unique bundle of attributes. Based on literature review, the initial set of attributes viz. monetary benefits, non-monetary benefits, efforts needed, risk involved, ambiguity of benefits, imprecision in benefits, benefit delay, and effort delay were identified.

Monetary benefits are defined as the economic incentive offered by a promotion, the basic purpose of promotions is to offer an economic inducement to consumers for making the purchase of the product on promotion (Blattberg and Neslin, 1990). Many research findings suggest that consumers do respond to sales promotions for benefits other then monetary savings viz. joy of getting a good deal, the hedonic value of a free gift etc. (for a comprehensive analysis see Chandon et al, 2000). Some promotions involve immediate expense of efforts at the time of availing promotional offer e.g. early bird incentive, clipping coupons, entering in a lucky draw (sometimes entries for draws can be sent at a later date) etc. Sometimes consumers exert efforts in advance of the promotional benefit viz. registering for frequent flyer programs. Research in behavioral decision theory explicates procrastinating behavior by reasoning that future efforts are substantially discounted (Akerlof, 1991; Loewenstein, 1996). A promotional offer may offer an incentive at future date after the purchase is made with or without any additional conditions. Promotions like price-discounts are instantly received at the time of purchase but the benefits of many promotions arise only at a later date. The winners of contests, sweepstakes etc. are determined much after they have made their purchases. The ‘worthiness’ of all promotions is not easily determinable e.g. win a dinner with a TV star. Ambiguity also arises when the promotion is attached with many qualifications. Some promotions like lucky draws are risky where in the consumer may not gain anything and finally, in some instances the benefits offered are imprecise e.g. all items with red tags on sale, up to 75% off etc.

A composite scale representing all eight dimensions was developed and presented to 57 undergraduate students. The same scale was used for each of the seven most widely used consumer promotions viz. Coupons, Mail-in-rebates, Lucky draws, free gifts, price breaks, Contests, etc. The popularity of different sales promotions was assessed through literature review and consultations with an expert. The underlying dimensions were then identified by factor analysis techniques. The study also incorporated measures for testing convergent validity and criterion / predictive validity.

Based on the recommended scale development procedures (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988), the data analysis began with checking the dimensionality underlying the attitude towards sales promotions. The procedure undertaken involved factor analysis (both exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analysis), inter-item correlations (across entire scale and more importantly within each facet) and validity tests for criterion and convergent validity. The six components derived by factor analysis have eigen values of more than 1 and collectively they explain 67% of the total variance. All the components have alpha more than 0.6 except monetary benefits, which has alpha of 0.56. To ascertain the criterion validity the correlations between perceived dimensions and the predicted likelihood of use of that sales promotion were measured. Except Effort-delay (.05 level) all the correlations are significant at .01 levels providing a strong support for criterion validity. Finally, based on the empirical analysis the identified factors are 1) Perceived effort-return benefit, 2) Benefit transparency representing the degree of precision in stating the promotional benefits and the clarity with which the promotional benefits are communicated 3) Non-monetary benefits 4) Effort delay 5) Risk impact and 6) Perceived monetary benefits. We also discuss the explanation and interpretation of these derived dimensions.

References