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## **Affect Intensity, Gender and the Expression of Emotion in Response to Advertising Appeals**

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**ABSTRACT** - The affect intensity measure (AIM) Larsen (1984) has been positioned primarily as a unidimensional construct measuring the characteristic strength with which people experience both positive and negative emotions (Larsen and Diener 1987). However, recent reexaminations of the factor structure of the AIM have demonstrated that people do not experience positive emotions with the same fundamental intensity as negative emotions (Weinfurt, Bryant and Yarnold 1994; Bryant, Yarnold and Grimm 1996). Since these findings seem to challenge Larsen's (1984) notion that the AIM is, in fact, a unidimensional construct, one of the objectives of this study is to reexamine the dimensions of the factors that comprise the AIM and to determine the manner in which these factors measure the intensity of positive and negative emotions.

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# Affect Intensity, Gender and the Expression of Emotion in Response to Advertising Appeals

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## ABSTRACT

The affect intensity measure (AIM) Larsen (1984) has been positioned primarily as a unidimensional construct measuring the characteristic strength with which people experience both positive and negative emotions (Larsen and Diener 1987). However, recent reexaminations of the factor structure of the AIM have demonstrated that people do not experience positive emotions with the same fundamental intensity as negative emotions (Weinfurt, Bryant and Yarnold 1994; Bryant, Yarnold and Grimm 1996). Since these findings seem to challenge Larsen's (1984) notion that the AIM is, in fact, a unidimensional construct, one of the objectives of this study is to reexamine the dimensions of the factors that comprise the AIM and to determine the manner in which these factors measure the intensity of positive and negative emotions.

Another relevant issue that has received insufficient attention in the consumer behavior literature is the role of gender with respect to affect intensity. A plethora of research has already shown that women characteristically score higher on measures of the intensity of both positive and negative emotions (Diener, Sandvik, and Larsen, 1985). Interestingly, Bryant, Yarnold and Grimm (1996), using a subset of 27 AIM items, found that women had higher scores on measures of negative reactivity, and were more emotionally reactive to negative stimuli than to positive stimuli. In contrast, men seemed to be more emotionally responsive to positive stimuli than to negative stimuli. The validity of these findings should be confirmed because of the critical implications for the relationship between affect and gender in the context of consumer behavior and advertising. Reviewing the empathy literature, Hoffman (1977) indicated that females do indeed appear to be more empathic than males, in that, they seem to be more adept at assessing another person's affective and cognitive perspective. However, Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) questioned these conclusions on the grounds that the presumed gender differences were actually a function of the method used to measure empathy. But even this conclusion by Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) seems to be implausible in light of the previous findings that indicate that females tend to express stronger emotionality than do men on the presumption that women are socialized to be more emotionally expressive (Brody and Hall 1993).

The questions facing researchers in consumer behavior and advertising are interesting. Previous research has shown that when consumers were exposed to emotionally charged advertising appeals, high affect intensity individuals, compared to their low intensity counterparts, manifested significantly stronger emotional responses to the message. In response to non-emotional ads, however, there were no significant differences in the strength of the emotions expressed by high versus low affect intensity respondents (Moore, Harris and Chen 1995). Moreover, what is still not clearly established is whether women will respond with stronger emotions and higher levels of affect intensity when exposed to emotionally charged advertising appeals. On the basis of prior research that has indicated that women do manifest significantly higher levels of affect intensity than do men (Diener, Sandvik and Larsen 1985; Bryant, Yarnold and Grimm 1996), there seems to be compelling theoretical justification to predict that gender may have an important influence in the determination of consumers' response to advertising appeals.

## Objectives of the Study

One of the primary objectives of this paper is to investigate the relationship between gender and affect intensity, and the implications of this relationship for advertising and consumer behavior research. Study 1 examines the factor structure of the affect intensity measure and its relationship to gender. Study 2 investigates the extent to which affect intensity and gender influence the strength of the consumers' emotional response to emotional versus non-emotionally charged advertising appeals.

## Subjects and Procedure

A total of 740 undergraduates (331 males and 409 females, aged 20-24) were administered the 40-item AIM (Larsen 1984). Each item was measured using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1=never, 2=almost never, 3=occasionally, 4=usually, 5=almost always, 6=always).

## Data Analysis Procedure

The focus of the data analysis was a comparison of the model fitting capability and the factor structure of the 42 item AIM scale (Larsen 1984) versus the AIR three-factor model (Bryant et al. (1996). Using the method employed by Bryant et al. (1996), the same 27 items that comprised the AIR three-factor model were selected. Maximum-likelihood confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on both the 42 item AIM scale as well as the 27 item model using LISREL 8.53 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989).

## Results

Three consistent factor groupings emerged: positive affectivity, negative intensity and negative reactivity. These factors were highly consistent with what Bryant et al. (1996) called the Affect Intensity Reactivity model and have therefore demonstrated a high degree of test-retest reliability for the AIR model. Therefore, the 27 item three-factor version of the AIM scale may conceivably serve as a more efficient instrument for measuring the intensity of positive and negative human emotions.

*Gender Differences.* In this study women consistently scored higher than men on each of the three AIR factors. However, we did not find support for the notion that men are more emotionally reactive to positive events than to negative events.

## STUDY 2

It is already known that women experience more intense emotions than men and display a greater tendency to seek out emotional experiences (Allen & Haccoun, 1976; Larsen & Diener, 1987). In the context of advertising, there is no conclusive evidence that affect intensity interacts with gender to influence the message recipient's emotions and attitudes.

## Subjects and Design

Ninety one subjects participated in a mixed-model repeated measures ANOVA design. There were two grouping factors: (a) Affect Intensity: high and low; and (b) Gender: male and female. Type-of-ad (emotional vs. non-emotional) served as a within-factor. Three different ads were nested in each of the two ad type conditions thus making it a nested factor.

**Results**

In response to the emotional ads, women displayed significantly stronger empathic emotions than men, and were more willing to help the victims featured in the message appeals. No significant effects occurred for the non-emotional ads. There were no significant Affect Intensity x Gender interactions for most of the measures for the emotional ads.

The main effects for affect intensity is consistent with prior research in advertising (Moore, Harris and Chen 1995). It also supports Larsen's (1984) original work that demonstrated that when people are exposed to an affect producing stimulus, those who are temperamentally predisposed to experience their emotions with great intensity will consistently manifest these higher levels of emotions. However, when confronted with a non-emotional stimulus, these individual differences tend to disappear (Larsen, Diener and Cropanzano 1987).

In general, the fact that higher scores for women over men were most significantly associated with the Negative Reactivity factor in Study 1 raises several theoretical questions: For example, it seems possible that specific dimensions of emotional intensity may have greater power to activate a stronger response from women than from men and this underscores the need for more systematic research on gender differences in the marketplace.

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