In Search of Kinship: Within Group Deviation in Print Advertisements

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Identifying the Black Sheep From the Ordinary: Social Categorization and Within Group Deviation in Print Advertisements Tracy R. Harmon University of South Florida The present study employs an extension of ingroup favoritism, using the black sheep hypothesis where subjects judge likable ingroup members more positively than similar outgroup members, while judging unlikable ingroup members more negatively than similar outgroup members. Positioned in an advertising context, this empirical study provides evidence of both ingroup favoritism and within group derogation of unlikable ingroup members. The evidence suggests that the recipient’s overall evaluation of the advertisement is mediated by the spokesperson’s similarity to the recipient and general likeability.

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the same function in persuasion. Analyses of variance for product evaluation (attitude toward the product) and cognitive responses confirmed our theoretical predictions and allowed us to support hypotheses H1, H2 and H3.

In conclusion, we were able to show in this study that individual differences in NFC and mindfulness lead to significant differences in how consumers respond to persuasive messages. Especially, it is important to note that the introduction of the Mindfulness construct expands our understanding of the routes that lead to persuasion, and outlines routes that were previously deemed unlikely (central processing of a message under low expertise). Future research, however, should investigate further the nature of the processing styles that high mindful novice engage in (e.g., item specific, relational etc.). Also, it would also be important to consider the role of mindfulness in situations where consumers are repeatedly exposed to a message. In these situations, do high mindful consumers notice small change in information more than other consumers do, and are they more likely to update (keep constructing) their attitudes over time (as opposed to retrieving already formed attitudes)? Thus, the next step in our on-going program of research targets longitudinal studies designed to explore how consumers (characterized by mindfulness and NFC respectively) respond differently to multi-exposed messages. These questions can be investigated by exposing respondents to multiple instances of a similar message, with a slight alteration to the message content at a later exposure (for example a change in price), and then showing that this later change gets incorporated in the judgments of the high mindful respondents, but not for high NFC respondents. Also, we believe that this line of research has potential in providing some insights on the constructive vs. retrieval-based perspectives on attitude formation.

References


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From a social influence perspective, Grier and Deshpande (2001) suggest that academics and practitioners seek to better understand how social context and individual characteristics influence consumer response to marketing communications. By addressing the perceived likeability of spokespersons presented in marketing communications, the factors of social identity will emerge allowing for a better understanding of how social identity strongly impacts consumer receipt of marketing communications. The biggest implication for this research is that marketers will be able to construct their strategy in a manner that not only has homogenous appeal for targeted groups but it appeals to the overall heterogeneous market. The lack of empirical data that addresses the deviant norms expressed by a spokesperson of the ingroup, and how it impacts the recipient’s evaluation is the motivation for our research question: What happens when consumers reject an ad because the spokesperson undermines the ingroup norms? It is suspected that the consumer will garner an unfavorable attitude of the advertisement and the spokesperson based on the salient ingroup norms, and ingroup derogation for the unlikable target will occur.

Social identity theory (SIT) offers a social-psychological perspective of group formations and inter/intragroup relationships. According to SIT, individuals tend to classify themselves and others into various categories, such as religious affiliation, gender, ethnicity, and organizational affiliations. Social identity theory attributes the general form of intergroup behavior such as ethniccentrism, stereotypic intergroup attitudes, and intergroup differentiation to social categorization and self-esteem processes. Where the categories are defined by the prototypical characteristics derived from the group members (Turner 1985). Social categorization serves two functions 1) it cognitively segments and orders the social environment, allowing individuals to defines others around them, and 2) it enables the individual to define himself within the social environment. When members of a particular group differentiate ingroup members from the outgroup, and simultaneously differentiate between specific likable and unlikeable ingroup members, the “black sheep effect” occurs. Ingroup members who conform to the ingroup prototype or consistently maintain group norms validate their social identity, and therefore attract favorable reactions. However, in contrast members of the ingroup who do not conform to ingroup norms, exercise deviant (norm undermining) behavior. Participants. One hundred and twenty-three undergraduate students from a major Southeastern University participated as a part of a class requirement.
Participants were exposed to all levels of treatment, and the stimuli were counterbalanced to prevent learning effects. Participants were presented with a booklet of print advertisements for a fictitious brand of digital cameras. After viewing each ad, participants responded to a questionnaire that contained all of the dependent measures. The print stimuli were a series of eight advertisements for a digital camera. All advertisements were identical with the exception of the socially categorized model. The models in the advertisements were chosen from stock photos of non-celebrity models. The order of advertisements was counterbalanced according to the various treatment conditions.

As hypothesized members of the respective socially categorized ethnic group classified themselves more favorably than other groups as a whole. This is consistent with the phenomenon of ingroup favoritism. In addition, the black sheep hypothesis held across all treatments for the respondents in the Caucasian and Asian categories. For Hispanic respondents the black sheep effect was supported except for the evaluation of the Caucasian target. Respondents in the African American category did not exhibit the black sheep effect. They evaluated the deviate ingroup member more favorably than outgroup deviates, which is not in support of the black sheep hypothesis. Additionally, ingroup favoritism was only shown among Asian respondents, thus H1 is supported for that group only. The other three groups evaluated themselves less favorably than members of the outgroup.

**Consumer Conflict Management Strategies in Everyday Service Encounters**

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The nature of services creates a context in which disagreements between consumers and service providers are likely to occur. A growing body of research has been devoted to complaint behavior in services (e.g., Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987; Goodwin and Ross 1989; Tax, Brown, and Chandra 1998), but relatively little research focuses on a broader range of conflicts in services. We draw on an established literature of conflict management, to examine conflict behavior in everyday consumer service interactions.

Conflict, defined as an “interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities” (Rahim 2002); has been studied extensively in the contexts of organizational life (e.g., labor relations) and economic exchange (e.g., channel conflict and buyer/seller negotiations). Rahim (2002) identifies six conditions which are likely to produce conflict: (1) Activity that is incongruent with needs and interests, (2) Incompatibility of behavior, (3) Differences in attitudes and values, (4) Exclusive preferences in joint activities, (5) Contention for limited resources, and (6) Interdependence in the performance of activities. Relating these conditions to the unique characteristics of services, such as intangibility, heterogeneity, and co-production, suggests that many services are likely to generate conflict between provider and customer. However, it is not clear how service providers and consumers manage such conflict.

In general, conflict management strategies refer to the specific behavior patterns one applies in conflict situations (e.g., Pruitt and Rubin 1986; Rahim 1983). Conflict management strategies/styles can be categorized into five types based on one’s level of concern for self and concern for others (e.g., Rahim and Bonoma 1979). These five styles are integrative/problem solving (high concern for self/high concern for other), obliging/accommodating (low self/high other), dominating/contending (high self/low other), avoiding (low self/low other), and compromise (moderate self/moderate other).

**Research question 1:** What conflict management styles do consumers use in everyday service interactions?

A number of authors have suggested the role of multiple motives in conflict resolution (e.g., Carnevale and Pruitt 1992). Recently, Ohbuchi and his co-authors proposed multiple goal theory (Fukushima and Ohbuchi 1996; Ohbuchi and Tedeschi 1997), which considers social motives, as well as resource (economic) motives, in interpersonal conflicts. Economic exchanges in services involve resource issues (money, time), but also are likely to involve social motives. Ohbuchi and Tedeschi’s (1997) research suggests that in everyday interpersonal conflicts (non-business), social motives are often activated in addition to resource (economic) motives.

**Research question 2:** In everyday minor conflicts with services providers, are social motives important and are they as important as economic motives?

Fukushima and Ohbuchi (1996) also suggest a relationship between motives and conflict management strategies.

**Research question 3:** In the resolution of minor conflicts with service providers, are consumers’ resolution tactics related to their motives?

If both social and economic motives are activated in service conflict situations, the choice of resolution strategy is likely to be influenced by the mix (combination) of motives expressed by each customer. Therefore, it would be expected that the level of activation of various motives (profiles) would vary between the different categories of conflict strategies employed.

**Research question 4:** Does the mix of motives (mean levels of activation) vary across alternative conflict resolution strategies employed?

A study was conducted to exam these research questions. The participants were 70 undergraduate students enrolled in business related courses at a large Midwestern University. Students were given a scenario in which they had been confronted by a video rental store about...