Narrative Transportation in Concept Tests For Really New Products: Are All Protagonists Equally Convincing?

Ellis A. van den Hende, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands
Dirk Snelders, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands
Darren W. Dahl, University of British Columbia, Canada

Narratives have been shown to evoke imagination easier than other evaluation formats. We apply this finding to early concept testing of really new products. We compare narratives with conventional bulleted lists on their effects on product evaluation, and show how this is mediated by transportation (i.e. a melding of attention, imagery, and feelings). Two experiments with seniors show that narratives lead to more transportation, and imagery of the product and the portrayed user (the protagonist). Transportation mediates the effects on product evaluation, whereas imagery of the product does not, and imagery of the protagonist only when the protagonist is liked.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13359/volumes/v35/NA-35

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyight.com/.
consumption. The end goal, according to many, was to assert a control over a situation even at the cost of suffering more pain, both physical and emotional, accompanied with financial losses. Such behavior is contradictory to the hedonic assumptions underlying most consumer behavior that individuals seek to maximize their pleasure and minimize any associated pain/losses. This suggests that there is more to negative emotions than identified in the extant marketing literature and the concept of spite must be examined as a motivator.

In identifying the Consumption Emotions Set (CES), Richins (1997) identified seventeen categories of emotions out of which Envy is one category comprised of envy and jealousy as its dimensions. However, the findings from the present exploratory research suggest that among the negative emotions, spite may be a much stronger emotion than envy and jealousy and might be the primary motivator behind some of the consumption decisions resulting from negative emotions. Literature in psychology has differentiated between envy and jealousy and examined their role on individual actions and feelings—schadenfreude (Hareli and Weiner 2002; Smith et al. 1996; Smith and Kim 2007). Surprisingly, to the best of our knowledge, no distinction is been made among envy, jealousy and spite or the role of spite has been examined in consumption. “Spite implies a particular kind of hostile motivation.” (Lazarus 1991, p. 227), and appears to be a more intense negative emotion than envy and jealousy and its role on consumption and public policy implications must be examined more systematically.

References
James, William (1884), “What is an Emotion?” Mind, 9 (34), 188-205.

Narrative Transportation in Concept Tests for Really New Products: Are All Protagonists Equally Convincing?
Ellis A. van den Hende, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands
Dirk Snelders, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands
Darren Dahl, University of British Columbia, Canada

When consumers are asked to evaluate really new products, they are helped by mentally simulating product use (Hoeffler 2003). Here we apply this finding to early concept testing, in which really new product concepts are presented to consumers. We propose that presenting such concepts in a narrative format may stimulate mental simulation. While reading a narrative of another consumer (the protagonist) who uses a new product, consumers are thought to place themselves in the events taking place. The result is a melding of attention, imagery and feelings, known as narrative transportation (Green and Brock 2000).

Narratives evoke imagery more easily than non-narrative formats (Deighton, Romer, and McQueen 1989), including bulleted lists of product characteristics (Adaval and Wyer Jr 1998). Applied to concept testing, we propose that a narrative format will enhance transportation and, through this process, to a more empathic (i.e., higher) evaluation of the new product. A potentially moderating factor is the portrayal of the protagonist, whose (mis)match or similarity to the reader might influence the degree of connection that is felt, and thus of the level of transportation (Green 2004). We will investigate this with senior consumers in two experiments that both make use...
of a concept product that was pre-tested as highly innovative (Ebook; an electronic book). Senior consumers were chosen because they constitute an important and growing market in which the acceptance rate of highly innovative products tends to be low.

Experiment 1

Participants (n=85) from activity centers (aged 55-80) were asked to evaluate the Ebook in a take home questionnaire. The design was a 2 (format: narrative vs list) x 2 (protagonist ethnicity: reader match vs reader mismatch) between subjects design. The narrative was written first. The bulleted list was constructed later by removing the protagonist, the temporal order of events, and their logical interrelatedness (after Adaval and Wyer 1998). In the ethnicity match condition the protagonist was Matthew, who had recently moved from the US to the Western country of the reader, and in the mismatch condition this was Mohammed who had moved from Morocco. In the instruction it was stated that the text originated from a forum, and was by someone who had written about the protagonist and his product.

After reading the concept, participants filled in questions about product evaluation (two items), transportation (12 items, (adapted from Green and Brock 2000) and a manipulation check (one item assessing the protagonist’s similarity to the reader). Exploratory factor analysis of transportation showed four subscales: transportation, protagonist imagery, product imagery and attention. Of these, attention had an alpha=.7 and will not be discussed further.

After a successful manipulation check on (mis)match, the first result showed a format x ethnicity effect on product evaluation ($F=4.29, p<.05$), with the narrative match condition more positively evaluated than the other three conditions ($Z_{\text{contrast}}=2.00, p<.05$). A format x ethnicity effect in the same direction was found on the transportation subscale ($F=3.78, p=.05$). In addition, ethnicity had a main effect on the transportation subscale (match>mismatch, $F=5.28, p=.05$). Finally, there was an effect of format on both imagery subscales, with narrative higher than list (protagonist imagery: $F=25.59, p<.001$; product imagery: $F=2.99, p=.08$). Mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny 1986) shows that transportation mediates the interaction effect of format by ethnicity on product evaluation. A Sobel Test of this indirect effect is marginally significant ($Z=1.64, p=.05$, one-sided).

Experiment 1 shows that respondents are transported most by a matching protagonist in the narrative. It is this that leads to a higher product evaluation—not the evoked imagery. However, some mismatches may be more acceptable to the reader than the one used here. In addition, the (moderated) effects of format may be related to the fact that less protagonist information was present in the list than the narrative. Experiment 2 addresses these two issues.

Experiment 2

In this laboratory experiment 92 men from a household panel participated, aged 55-75. A 2 (format: narrative vs protagonist-list) x 2 (protagonist age/gender: reader match vs reader mishmatch) between subjects design was used. For format, the same level of protagonist information was now present in both the narrative and list, so the two conditions only differed in the temporal order and logical interrelatedness. In the protagonist age/gender manipulation, the matched protagonist was a man, always three years younger than the reader to avoid guessing. The mismatch was a woman of 23. We pretested protagonists’ names so that they suited their age. Procedure and measures were similar to experiment 1.

After a successful manipulation check on (mis)match, we found a format effect on product evaluation (narrative>list, $F=4.24, p<.05$). We found format effects in the same direction on all transportation subscales (all alpha’s>.70, transportation: $F=5.28, p<.05$; protagonist imagery: $F=33.74, p<.001$; product imagery: $F=6.60, p<.05$). A mediation analysis with the three transportation subscales as mediators revealed transportation and protagonist imagery as mediators of the format effect on product evaluation. Separate Sobel Tests showed an indirect effect for both variables (transportation: $Z=2.16, p<.05$; protagonist imagery: $Z=4.02, p<.001$).

Discussion

The two experiments show that narratives lead to a higher evaluation than lists in concept tests, and that this effect is mediated by transportation. Mediation corroborates a finding of Escalas (2004) in advertising, where transportation was found to mediate the effect of mental simulation on attitude towards ad and brand. We also find that product imagery does not mediate evaluation, and protagonist imagery only in experiment 2. An explanation for this last effect might be that the protagonist in experiment 1 was liked less in the mismatch than the match ($F=13.47, p<.001$), while in experiment 2 she was liked more in the mismatch than the match ($F=5.34, p<.05$). Thus, the transportation subscale mediates the (moderated) format effect on evaluation, and protagonist imagery mediates only when the protagonist is liked.

The difference between experiment 1 and 2 in the evaluation of the mismatch narratives can also be explained by protagonist liking. Earlier it was shown that a lack of familiarity with the protagonist reduces transportation (Green 2004). However, we show that a reader-protagonist mismatch does not reduce transportation when the protagonist is liked by the reader. Thus, it seems that transportation, which implies that the reader simulates being the protagonist, is determined more by liking than similarity, which is relevant for concept testing.

References


