Assessing Consumer Reaction to New Product Ideas: Does It Matter Where You Live and How Old You Are?

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At a certain moment, when a new product is introduced into a market, sales increase rapidly (the takeoff point). Prior research shows that the patterns of new product take off and time to takeoff vary in different European countries and across product categories (Tellis, Stremersch, and Yin 2003). This prior research suggests that so called brown goods take off faster than white goods and that cultural characteristics such as need for achievement, industriousness and uncertainty avoidance partly explain these differences in takeoff patterns. We build on this work by studying how individual level cultural variables and age affect how people respond to new product ideas. The underlying theme is that cultural variables and age affect the kind of information consumers use to understand a new product.

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impressions (i.e. femininity) were considered most undesirable by men. Interestingly, neither men’s nor women’s impression of another person were affected by the very product men sought to avoid.

References

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We address this problem by categorizing new product information in two different ways. One way to categorize product information is to separate factual information from emotional information. Companies can launch their product by providing comprehensive factual information or by attaching features of the product to emotional benefits.

According to socioemotional selectivity theory, as people age, regulating feeling states becomes more important than priorities such as acquiring knowledge (Carstensen 2006). As a result, older adults prefer and have better recall for emotional information than factual information, whereas younger adults prefer and have better recall for factual information than emotional information (Fung and Carstensen 2003; Williams and Drolet 2005). What has not been tested is whether older adults will actively seek out emotional vs. factual information. Based on their research, we predict that older adults will search for emotional information about product attributes, while younger adults will search for factual information about product attributes.

Another way to categorize product information is by the type of goals the product can help consumers achieve. Consumers with a promotion orientation are concerned about achievements and winning, whereas consumers with a prevention orientation are concerned about security and not losing (Higgins 1997). Product information can be categorized in the same way. Promotion information highlights achieving desirable outcomes (e.g., toothpaste that whitens your teeth) whereas prevention information emphasizes avoiding undesirable outcomes (e.g., toothpaste that prevents cavities; Wang and Lee 2006). Consumers are not only more persuaded by information that is compatible with their orientations, they are also more likely to actively seek out compatible information (Wang and Lee 2006). As people age, they shift their regulatory orientations. Elderly adults are more likely to adopt a prevention orientation whereas younger adults in general take on a promotion orientation (Lockwood, Chasteen and Wong 2005). Therefore, we hypothesize that elderly adults will search for prevention information and younger adults will search for promotion information.

From a theoretical perspective, a key contribution of our research is how consumers’ age interacts with both information content (factual vs. emotional) and information orientation (promotion vs. prevention) in determining willingness to purchase a new product. We divide information into four categories—factual promotion information, factual prevention information, emotional promotion information, and emotional prevention information.

Although our hypotheses suggest that older adults will favor emotional prevention information, while younger adults will favor factual promotion information, there is ambiguity about how each age group will related to factual prevention information or emotional promotion information. Specifically, although younger adults prefer factual promotion information, they may not respond well to factual promotion information. Similarly, whereas elderly adults prefer emotional prevention information, emotional promotion information might not engage them. In such situations where information content and information orientation are competing, we hypothesize that the cultural influence, in the form of chronic regulatory focus, will break the tie.

Chronic regulatory focus varies across cultures. In particular, North American consumers have a chronic promotion orientation, whereas East Asian consumers have a chronic prevention orientation (Aaker and Lee 2001; Briley and Aaker 2006). We hypothesize that consumers’ chronic orientations will dominate the information content when information content and information orientation are competing, such that promotion oriented consumers, such as those typically found in North American, will prefer emotional promotion information (even if they are young) and prevention oriented consumers, such as those found in East Asia, will prefer factual prevention information (even if they are elderly).

One hundred and thirty seven US undergraduates participated in Study 1. They read definitions of factual vs. emotional information and then completed a quiz to make sure they understood the difference. Participants could not advance the program until they answered