Consumer Processing of Advertising For Really New Products

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New product marketers must understand when their product’s psychological newness is an asset (or liability) for consumer learning about their products. Here, a dual mediator model is proposed wherein psychological newness affects consumers’ elaboration of new product messages indirectly by increasing both consumers’ curiosity about the product and skepticism about the message claims. In three studies (planned), credibility of the message source, social distance to the message source, and time to product adoption are expected to moderate the relationship between psychological newness and skepticism—dampening skepticism and increasing message elaboration.

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FIGURE
Prime-consistent choice as a function of delay and prime-reg. focus congruence

For consumers, really new products offer exciting new benefits but are also accompanied by uncertainty and behavior change (Hoeffler 2003). Recent research suggests that because of the extreme benefits and constraints characterizing really new products, firms would do better positioning their really new products as more incremental innovations (Alexander, Lynch, and Wang, forthcoming). Yet, really new products can convey the unexpectedness that allows a product idea to stick with consumers (Heath and Heath 2007) beyond the initial buzz. It seems that by downplaying a product’s newness, marketers may lose a significant advantage their products have when consumers initially learn about new products.

The current research examines how a product’s psychological newness affects consumers’ elaboration of new product messages. A dual-mediator model (illustrated in Figure 1) is proposed wherein psychological newness affects new product message content elaboration indirectly by affecting consumers’ curiosity and skepticism about the new product message’s content. Psychologically newer products increase consumers’ curiosity (P1) through their unexpected and original benefits and features. As product curiosity increases, consumers’ elaboration of the product message (P4) is also expected to increase. Product newness also increases consumers’ skepticism (P2) about the product’s ability to deliver the claimed benefits. As message claim skepticism increases, consumers’ curiosity about the new product (P3) and the elaboration of the product message (P5) decrease because the value (and validity) of the message’s content is questioned. Depending on the product and the particular context, product newness can lead to an increase, decrease, or have no overall effect on elaboration of message content.

Three studies are planned to validate the proposed model and to examine contexts in which the relationship between a product’s psychological newness and message claim skepticism (P2) is moderated. By identifying contexts in which psychological newness’ effect on skepticism is dampened, marketers can increase message elaboration.

Study 1 examines how marketers may lower consumers’ message claim skepticism by avoiding marketing hyperbole and providing more balanced product messages that acknowledge the potential costs/constraints inherent in new products. The extreme costs characterizing really new products likely reinforce consumers’ efforts to resist marketers’ persuasive messages, increasing consumers’ skepticism towards message claims more than do the more moderate costs of incrementally new products. Balanced product messages,