The Effect of Social Trust on Consumers’ Memory of Ads

Aiyin Wang, McGill University, Canada
Ulf Bockenholt, McGill University, Canada

Drawing on the extant trust and distrust literature (Schul and Mayo 2004; Priester and Petty 1995) and the “depth of processing model” (Craik, Lockhart and Jacoby 1976), we propose that a low trust mind-set deepens the level of ad information processing and in turn improves memory of ads. In addition, the effect of the level of trust is qualified by type of messages (Darke and Richie 2007). Preliminary results suggest that, as expected, participants with low trust mind-sets are significantly higher in memory accuracy of ad information than participants with high trust mind-sets when the message type is about objective attributes rather than subjective claims. Theoretical contributions and implications for practitioners are discussed.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14526/volumes/v36/NA-36

[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.copyright.com/.
options before using pro-leader processing to build support for an option to be selected. Rather, we found that both types of processing occur early in the choice process, and that the greater the number of options, the earlier they occur.

References

The Effect of Social Trust on Consumers’ Memory of Ads
Aiyin Wang, McGill University, Canada
Ulf Böckenholt, McGill University, Canada

Conceptualization
Social trust—opinions about whether one’s fellow man can be trusted—have become important because of its observable consequences on economic exchanges (Warren 1999). A high level of social trust is commonly believed to encourage economic growth, because it reduces “transaction costs” resulting from social interactions. In contrast, a low level of social trust is argued to lead to economic barriers because of the lack of mutual confidence (Arrows 1972). In the marketing domain, marketing communication might be less effective to consumers with low levels of social trust because they tend to be more “defensive, watchful and vigilant” (Lewicki, McAllister and Bies 1998; p. 446). Consequently, they are more likely to scrutinize received information, and hence are less vulnerable to persuasive messages. However, as many advertisements receive little attention, this task can be valuable to the marketers. For instance, when the primary goal of the ad is to have consumers memorize some improved features of a new line of product, consumers with low level of social trust may look at the ad more carefully and therefore memorize better the features mentioned on the ad.

The extant literature suggests that people process information differently under different levels of trust (Schul and Mayo 2004; Priester and Petty 1995). Specifically, this research suggests that a low trust mind-set motivates individuals to engage in more elaboration of the received messages than those with high trust mind-sets; even when the trust mind-set is unrelated to these messages. When information is processed at a deeper level by elaboration, recall and recognition of this information can also be enhanced as suggested by the “depth of processing model” (Craik and Jacoby 1976). Accordingly, consumers with mind-sets that are low in trust might be better at memorizing information in ads.

In this research, we are primarily concerned with high and low trust mind-sets induced by positive and negative generalized social trust (i.e. opinions about whether one’s fellow man can be trusted) rather than ad-related trust. We expect that the activation of different levels of trust mind-sets will affect consumers’ information processing style. That is, consumers with low trust mind-sets process ad information deeper than consumers with high trust mind-sets by securitizing the ads and possibly generating counter-arguments. We suggest that, this process will in turn improve the recall of ad information because of deeper information processing. Furthermore, we expect the effect of levels of trust mind-set on memory to be qualified by the type of messages provided in the ads (Darke and Ritchie 2007). Specifically, we expect that the effect of level of trust will be less pronounced when the type of message is about subjective claims as opposed to objective attributes.

Method
To test these hypotheses, we conducted a 2 (level of trust: high trust vs. low trust) x 2 (type of messages: objective attributes vs. subjective claims) mixed factorial design. One hundred and six university students were randomly assigned to either a high trust mind-set condition, or a low trust mind-set condition. All participants were asked to read a flyer which contained the manipulation of the high or low trust mind-set, and three experimental ads for three products. In the high trust mind-set condition, participants read a wallet dropping story from Reader’s Digest (Mutz, 2005) with a trust-inducing content prior to the presentation of the printed ads. In the low trust mind-set condition, participants read the same wallet dropping story but with a distrust-inducing content. Involvement of the products was measured before the mind-set manipulation, and products with the highest and lowest involvement were selected for analyses. Each ad contains two types of information, objective attributes and subjective claims (e.g. “Ultra-Fiber fiber supplement is a source of natural fiber” vs. “Taking Ultra-Fiber fiber supplements, you will live healthier, better than ever!”). Need for cognition (Priester and Petty 1995) and general trust toward advertising (Darke and Richie 2007; Obermiller, Spangenberg and Maclachlan 2005) were measured as possible covariates for all the participants before presentation of the flyer. Subsequently, participants were asked to perform a recognition task regarding product attributes and claims made in the ads. Finally, purchase intentions were measured for all participants.

4Although there is debate on viewing trust and distrust as bipolar or two separate constructs, in the present research we assume that low trust refers to distrust and high trust refers to trust.
5In this condition, the story only reports about the people who try to return the wallet after finding it.
6In this condition, the story only reports about the people who kept the wallet after finding it.
Results
In order to dissociate memory accuracy from criterion shifts in the recognition of true and false statements, we conducted a signal detection theory (Green & Swets, 1966) analysis. Accuracy of memory (how well a person discriminates between correct and false statements) was estimated by the distance measure d. Results from a 2(level of trust) x 2(gender) x 2(product) x 2(types of message) ANOVA showed a significant two-way interaction of level of trust and message type (F(1, 102)=4.647, p-value=0.033). Specifically, when the message type is about objective attributes, participants with low trust mind-sets are higher in memory accuracy (d=1.12) than participants with high trust mind-sets (d=0.83; F(1, 104)=5.854, p =0.017); whereas when the message type is about objective claims, there is no difference between the two groups. There is also a main effect of message type (F(1, 105)=7.037, p=0.009), where objective attributes (d=0.97) are better memorized than subjective claims (d=0.79) for both groups in which participants have either high or low trust mind-sets. In summary, when the messages are objective attributes, participants with low trust mind-sets perform better in the recognition task than participants with high trust mind-sets. This result is consistent with the hypothesis that activation of a low trust mindset triggers more careful processing of ad information and builds a stronger memory for participants with low- to high-trust mind-sets. However, when the messages are subjective claims, the level of trust did not have an effect on memory accuracy any longer, which supported the prediction that message type moderates the effect of level of trust. In addition, all participants memorized better the objective attributes than subjective claims. This result suggests that objective attributes may receive more attention than subjective claims, and that these attributes are scrutinized more by participants with low trust mind-sets than those with high trust mindsets. Subjective claims, on the other hand, may activate the negative stereotypes towards advertising in general (Darke and Ritchie 2007), and hence receive little attention from participants. Further analyses on possible covariates suggest that neither need for cognition nor general trust is correlated with the dependent variable d. The effect of level of trust on purchase intention is not significant for both products. This may due to the lack of a main effect of level of trust on memory accuracy. A significant difference in purchase intentions may be obtained in a future design in which stimuli ads contain only objective attributes as messages.

Contribution
Although much attention has been paid to the effect of low trust on information processing, little is known about its effect on memory. In addition, possible boundary conditions that qualify this effect have not been sufficiently discussed. The results of our research contribute to the theory of trust and distrust by suggesting that, when the ad information is about objective attributes, consumers with low trust mind-sets memorize ad information better; whereas when the ad information is about subjective claims, this effect weakens considerably. Second, research in consumer behavior has focused mostly on manipulating stimuli (ads)-relevant trust, and did not consider effect of sets memorize ad information better; whereas when the ad information is about subjective claims, this effect weakens considerably. In this article, we offer insights into how different levels of social trust can influence consumers’ information processing. Finally, our research offers also insights for practitioners by suggesting that low level of trust can enhance memory of certain type of ads information, whereby increase the effectiveness of marketing communication. From consumers’ perspective, our research adds to their knowledge of persuasion by indicating that distrust does not always reduce the influences that ads impose on them.

References