Appraisal Theory of Emotions and Advertising Rhetoric: a Model of Consumer Reactions

Pia A. Albinsson, New Mexico State University, USA

A new model, the Emotional Appraisal and Reactions Model (EARM), which builds on appraisal theory of emotions is presented and thereafter empirically tested through a 3 (Rhetoric: None, scheme, trope) x 3 (Emotional Appeal: None, hope, fear) factorial experimental design using a public service advertisement campaign. Results generally support the hypotheses that depth of processing, memory and persuasion are increased when rhetorical works are combined with emotional appeals in print advertising. This indicates that the EARM has the potential to extend earlier appraisal and coping models presented in consumer research. Future research directions and implications are discussed.

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Our central research question focuses on the relationship between brand personality (Aaker, 1997) and geographic personality. Do professional sports teams (as brands, held within the set of brands in a league) have brand personalities that take on some of the associative traits of the geographic locales in which they play? For example, are the NY Giants perceived as exciting partly because they are located in “the city that never sleeps?” Are the Steelers viewed as tough and hard-working because they play in the blue-collar, working-class town of Pittsburgh? Similarly, across leagues, are the Los Angeles Lakers thought of as glamorous and sophisticated because they are so relatable to the glitz of Hollywood? The answers to these questions would seem to have direct implications for corporate communication decisions for both sports marketing and tourism marketing.

The scope of our research question necessitated four versions of a four-part survey. Our desire was to test the brand personality characteristics of the ten most recent Super bowl teams (and cities). Data were collected from a total of 382 university students in five different locations (Indianapolis, Chicago, Seattle, Oakland, and Charlotte). This design allowed for the testing of “self-other congruence” (Funder and Colvin, 1997) with respect to those with direct city experience and those without such experience. Subjects in the test locations should take an insider’s view with regards to their cities/teams. They were asked about their home cities/teams as well as two others (inclusive of those just mentioned as well as New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay, and Philadelphia).

In general, fans do ascribe personality traits to both teams and cities. Moreover, measurements of the two constructs tend to correlate. Correlation coefficients ranged from .189 (the Ruggedness of Charlotte and the Ruggedness of the Panthers) to .623 (the competence of Pittsburgh and the competence of the Steelers). Interestingly, cities whose teams had recently participated in the playoffs were seen as more exciting (as were their teams). With regards to self-other congruence, perceptions between the insiders (with city experience) and the outsiders (without city experience) were quite different. In almost every case and across all five dimensions, city insiders consistently displayed lower ratings of the trait characteristics.

So, fans as consumers of sport likely tend to use geographic personality as a guide in formulating associative team/brand images. However, we should note that each of the five dimensions has a positive connotation. That is, people would probably like to think of their teams and their cities as sincere, exciting, competent, sophisticated, and rugged. Perhaps then, it should come as some surprise that city insiders relayed a downgraded view of their city’s/teams’ personalities compared to outsiders. Alternatively, perhaps the insider’s viewpoint is simply more realistic, while the outsider’s viewpoint has been romanticized by various media. Regardless, we found no evidence of self-other congruence from this perspective.

In the future, given that personality evaluations seem to fluctuate according to win-loss records, it would be interesting to find out if fans go through a form of brand personality updating (Johar, Sengupta, and Aaker, 2005) from season to season. Perhaps, brand personality characteristics are not as resistant to change as widely believed, especially within the seasonal context of professional sports.

Finally, this research points to a number of other questions. In terms of the direction of the relationship for example, since the Chicago Bears are viewed as a tough, rugged, and mostly unsophisticated team, does this contribute to our views of the city of Chicago? Or, to the contrary, do we see Chicago as the birthplace of violent gangland behavior, the home of chilling lakeshore winds, and a place where only truly tough and rugged people could live; and consequently these opinions of the city shape our brand-image associations for the Bears? Moreover, how can we resolve brand image differences within the same city and across sports? Continuing with our Chicago example: Do the White Sox have a similar brand image as the Cubs? Or, looking across sports, do the Bears have a similar brand image as the Cubs? Thus, it appears that there are a great number of analytical intricacies yet to be explored.

References

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Theories in consumer psychology on emotions used in advertising research have predominantly concentrated on two dimensions: valence and arousal. Measures of valence and arousal are used, respectively, to evaluate the degree of positive and negative feelings towards an ad and a person’s physiological level of excitement following exposure. The valence-arousal theory has been criticized for not measuring emotions that have distinct characteristics, but belong to the same valence (Lerner and Keltner 2000). For example, the difference between fear and anger or hope and happiness are hard to differentiate with the valence measures. In addition, these measures fail to specify whether emotions of the same valence differ in influencing consumer decision making and persuasion. Appraisal theory of emotion provides more emotional dimensions compared to the valence-arousal dichotomy and offers more detailed understanding of the antecedents and consequences of each emotion (Reisenzein and Hofmann 1993). Current research on emotion has found that emotions of the same valence differ in their antecedent appraisals (Smith and Ellsworth 1985; Roseman 2001). Appraisals also center on the individual consumers’ assessment of their current situation with respect to well-being (Ruth, Brunel and Othenes 2002). In recent years, appraisal theories of emotions have been used by marketers to examine consumers’ response to different health preventive advertising
Another research stream that has shown to increase processing outcomes, such as persuasion, is advertising rhetoric. This relatively new area of research includes verbal and visual rhetorical works. Ads utilizing rhetorical works have been shown repeatedly to enhance ad processing and brand attitude goals (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 2003; Mothersbaugh, Huhmann and Franke 2002; Tom and Eves 1999; Toncar and Munch 2001). Research on advertising rhetoric has, to date, been concerned with only cognitive aspects; the interface with emotional appeals or appraisal theory has not yet been explored. By studying both advertising rhetoric and the appraisals of emotional appeals, interaction effects can be explored to find the most efficient combination to induce systematic emotional influences on persuasion.

The purpose of this paper is to use existing knowledge of appraisal theory of emotion and combine this with recent research findings on advertising rhetoric to develop a more encompassing model of appraisal theory, namely the Emotional Appraisal and Reactions Model (EARM), which builds on appraisal theory (e.g., Lazarus 1968; Rogers 1975) and extends the ordered protection motivation model (Tanner et al. 1991) and the appraisal tendency framework (ATF) (Lerner, Han and Keltner 2007).

The EARM includes seven parts: (1) Information sources, (2) Relevance Appraisal and Ad Stimuli Appraisal, (3) Felt Emotion(s), (4) Secondary Appraisal, (5), Revised Felt Emotion(s), (6), Reaction(s), and (7) Personal and Social Norms and Values. The information sources in the EARM differ from previous coping models in that it includes positive and negative emotional appeals in addition to the more commonly examined fear appeal. It also includes advertising rhetoric (e.g., rhetorical works) in addition to ad characteristics, brand information and environmental benefits or threats. Since appraisal theory of emotion stresses that the individual consumer appraises each event based on his current situation, in regards to his well-being, several moderators are accounted for in the model. As in former appraisal models consumers go through an initial appraisal phase. The EARM divides this initial appraisal into two parts where the consumers appraise the information sources for overall relevancy and congruency of their desired state of well-being in addition to responses to the ad stimuli itself. The consumers, then in turn, appraise their own ability to handle the specific information based on their specific coping mechanisms. The last part of the model, reactions, includes both behavioral intentions and actual behavior in response to the ad stimuli.

The EARM is tested through an experiment which manipulates the presence and type of emotional appeal (i.e. hope, fear, and neutral) and verbal rhetorical works (i.e. trope, scheme, and nonfigurative) in a public service announcement (PSA) promoting a website endorsing a healthy lifestyle. Besides the emotional appeals and the verbal rhetorical works manipulated in the headlines and sub headlines all other elements of the target communication is held constant across conditions. In addition, several mediating and moderating variables were tested. Study 1 measured several dependent variables (depth of processing, memory and persuasion (behavioral intentions) while Study 2 measured only persuasion (actual behavior of visiting the advertised website) through a follow-up survey administered seven days later to the same participants as in Study 1. Results generally support the hypotheses that the dependent variables of depth of processing, memory and persuasion are increased when combining emotional appeals with advertising rhetoric in print advertising.

This research has useful implications for researchers, practitioners and consumers since it extends previous research streams in consumer research. The EARM contributes to researchers’ understanding of how emotional appeals indirectly influence consumer reactions to ad stimuli, as well as assist practitioners in designing more effective ads and spending their limited ad budgets more efficiently. Future research needs to explore different combinations of advertising rhetoric and emotions to find the combination that is most effective in inducing desired preventive health behavior.

References