Narrative Transportation For Product Evaluation: Can Consumers Make the Difference?

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Narrative transportation (i.e., immersion into a story) has shown positive results in both psychology and marketing studies. In our product evaluation research with narrative scenarios, increased transportation experienced by the consumer (i.e., the reader) helps to surrogately experience the product and helps to list more benefits. Our results indicate that for some products transportation will increase evaluation, but for others it does not. Transportation, as opposed to what previous literature suggests, provides diverse consumer evaluations.

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likelihood will decrease. On the other hand, those in the neutral prime condition will be more likely to choose with the largest group who has made the same choice.

Our results will provide a convincing demonstration of the role of motivation in guiding the interpretation of social influence information. These findings present useful extensions into other areas of marketing research, including the diffusion of innovations, hot products, as well as the role of individual and decision-level situational factors in influencing decision making.

References

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Abstract
Narrative transportation (i.e., immersion into a story) has shown positive results in both psychology and marketing studies. In our product evaluation research with narrative scenarios, increased transportation experienced by the consumer (i.e., the reader) helps to surrogately experience the product and helps to list more benefits. Our results indicate that for some products transportation will increase evaluation, but for others it does not. Transportation, as opposed to what previous literature suggests, provides diverse consumer evaluations.

Visual imagery has shown to facilitate consumers’ evaluation of a product (e.g., Hoeffler 2003). One way to facilitate imagination is by using narratives. When reading a narrative, people get lost in the story and experience what the main character experiences. This process is called narrative transportation (Green and Brock 2000). The narrative experience allows readers to have a vivid image of what they read, they feel what the character is feeling, and thus forget the world around them. Solely positive effects of transportation have been reported so far; we aim to extend these findings by showing that transportation can also result in diverse and negative evaluations.

Various studies show that transportation changes the beliefs of the reader. For example, Green and Brock (2000) found that after reading a murder story, increased narrative transportation resulted in a change of beliefs of real world statements (e.g., penalties for murder). Transportation also resulted in more positive evaluations of advertisements (e.g., Escalas 2007). Extending previous research, we will provide deeper understanding of the effects of narrative transportation for product evaluation research with consumers.

We propose that transportation increases differences in product evaluations and predictions of product success. Transported readers should not evaluate all products equally. These readers recognize differences in attractiveness of products. When using product scenarios (i.e., narratives in which a main character is using a product) to evaluate the potential success of products in a new market, increased transportation on the part of the reader facilitates surrogately experiencing the new product. The more the reader gets transported, the more experience is gained and the more benefits are perceived. Perceiving the benefits allows for consideration of these benefits. People who were less transported have not experienced the benefits and will give a lower evaluation. We expect that differences in evaluations and success predictions will be present between people who were transported to a greater extent versus people who were transported to a lesser extent, but this will depend on the valence of the focal product. Transportation facilitates picking up the differences in valence of products. Thus, consumers who are more transported into a scenario about a product that is new to the market will not evaluate all products equally. Thus, we predict an interaction, rather than a main effect, where transportation heightens evaluations for products with high potential market success more than those with a lower likelihood, rather than boosting evaluations for all products.

Products were selected with various levels of success in other markets than the market of the participant population. Pretesting with experts from industry confirmed two food products distinct in level of predicted success on the target market. A scenario was written in which a main character was either eating a special microwaveable ice cream (pretested as a less attractive product for the target market) or drinking a special fruit juice (pretested as a more attractive product for the target market). Both storylines were identical, except for the focal product. Numbers of product features and benefits were balanced. Transportation was manipulated directly (increased vs decreased) through instructions (see Green and Brock 2000), and the two scenarios were used (ice cream vs fruit juice) in a between subjects design (n=107). Levels of transportation (adapted from the Green and Brock 2000 scale), success prediction and product evaluation were measured.