In two studies, the authors provide evidence that ad context can be used to alter the elaboration threshold for both males and females. The findings suggest that in a competing ad context (a series of ads for similar goods), females were better able to resolve an extremely incongruent product (an extremely odd-looking camera), and males, counter to their natural predisposition for item-specific elaboration, processed information in a relational manner. In both instances, their extremity of evaluation was enhanced. However, in the unrelated ad context (a series of ads for disparate goods), all gender differences in elaboration were extinguished.

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Context as a Source of Clarity: The Effects of Ad Context and Gender on Consumers’ Processing of Product Incongruity
Theodore J. Noseworthy, University of Western Ontario, Canada
Seung Hwan (Mark) Lee, University of Western Ontario, Canada
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ABSTRACT
In two studies, the authors provide evidence that ad context can be used to alter the elaboration threshold for both males and females. The findings suggest that in a competing ad context (a series of ads for similar goods), females were better able to resolve an extremely incongruent product (an extremely odd-looking camera), and males, counter to their natural predisposition for item-specific elaboration, processed information in a relational manner. In both instances, their extremity of evaluation was enhanced. However, in the unrelated ad context (a series of ads for disparate goods), all gender differences in elaboration were extinguished.

Marketers of an extremely novel product face a challenge when deciding how best to promote their new offering. One key question is whether they want consumers to compare the new product to others of its ilk (that camera is different!), or to allow the new product to stand on its own (is that a camera?). We argue that a competing ad context (several ads for similar goods) will cue relational elaboration and facilitate the processing of an extremely incongruent product. Conversely, an unrelated ad context (several ads for disparate goods) will cue item-specific elaboration, making it difficult to process extreme incongruity. Furthermore, we believe these effects will vary by gender. As researchers have argued that females are more amenable to relational elaboration, we predict that they will have little difficulty resolving extreme incongruity in a competing ad context. Males, on the other hand, due to a natural predisposition for item-specific elaboration, should find the task decidedly more difficult.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND
Consistent with previous research, we define product incongruity as the degree of fit (or lack thereof) between a product and its respective product category (Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Peracchio and Tybout 1996). An example might be a circular (rather than square) laptop computer. Research has shown that the act of resolving product incongruity can enhance consumers’ extremity of evaluation (Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Peracchio and Tybout 1995; Stayman, Alden, and Smith 1992). This phenomenon has been coined the schema congruity effect (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989).

Mandler (1982) cautioned that enhanced evaluations only occur when consumers can successfully discern the incongruent object and fit it into an existing schema. When incongruity levels rise past a certain threshold, the ability to elaborate diminishes exponentially (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). The task is then often too taxing, resulting in negative evaluation (“I can’t understand it, so I don’t like it”). This nonmonotonic effect has proven to be very robust (Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Peracchio and Tybout 1996; Stayman et al. 1992).

While the schema congruity effect has been extended to predict consumers’ processing of anthropomorphized products (Aggarwal and McGill 2007), brand extensions (Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren 1994), taste (Stayman et al. 1992), and new product attributes (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), research has yet to explore whether the advertisement context itself can affect the robust nature of the phenomenon. Moreover, literature has yet to examine how incongruity is actually processed when accommodation occurs. Thus, we turn to Einstein and Hunt’s work (1980) for some insights into the cognitive underpinnings of the different types of processing.

Research on elaboration suggests that there are at least two types of cognitive processing: item-specific and relational (Einstein and Hunt 1980; Hunt and Einstein 1981; Klein, Loftus, and Shell, 1994; Malaviya, Meyers-Levy, and Sternthal 1999). (Please note that the prior work has used elaboration and processing as synonyms. Perhaps the term should be elaborative processing, but for simplicity, we follow the prior linguistic convention.) Item-specific processing emphasizes attribute information that is distinct to a particular claim (Meyers-Levy 1991). This involves the generation of precise associations to a particular product, in isolation of other products (Malaviya, Kisielius, and Sternthal 1996; Malaviya et al. 1999). In contrast, relational processing emphasizes shared themes among disparate goods (Meyers-Levy 1991) and focuses the consumer on the category in which the target product holds membership (Malaviya et al. 1999; Malaviya et al. 1996).

Although the literature has yet to explore the two types of elaboration in terms of the schema congruity effect, there is research that suggests that product evaluations can be enhanced when the ad context evokes both item-specific and relational processing, as opposed to when one of these is dominant (Malaviya et al. 1996; Malaviya 2007). Because item-specific processing enables consumers to focus on the particular features and attributes of the product, and relational processing enables consumers to access the product category, together they increase the persuasive impact of the ad. Malaviya (2007) coined this phenomenon the dual elaboration hypothesis. It seems plausible that the dual elaboration hypothesis could help explain the processing of incongruent product information.

If we are to test our idea that consumers’ processing influences the resolution of extreme incongruity, we must also explore whether specific circumstances encourage one type of processing over another. We will further explore one of the more obvious and well-defined dichotomies that has been shown to be associated with different modes of processing: gender (Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991).

Researchers have demonstrated that men and women process information differently (Kempf, Lacziak, and Smith 2006; Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). McGuiness and Pribram (1979) found, for example, that males processed objects in terms of physical attributes, whereas females processed objects in terms of interpretive concepts. This distinction became the catalyst for the selectivity hypothesis (Meyers-Levy 1989; Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991), which proposed that women engage in more elaborative processing, unless extrinsic motivational factors prompt men to do so as well. Putrevu (2001) also argued that men are more likely to perform item-specific processing, focusing on attributes, and refraining from drawing relationships among message cues. In
contrast, women are more likely to relationally process, actively exploring interrelationships among message cues (Kempf et al. 2006; Putrevu 2001).

Meyers-Levy and Sternthal (1991) found that when cued to elaborate on an incongruent event, woman were more deliberate and attentive in their processing than men. They concluded that women tend to elaborate on incongruity, and thus facilitate similarity judgments, whereas men were less responsive to such subtle cues. Similarly, Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran (1991) found that females were indeed more likely to elaborate than males, however, when the task became taxing these differences were eliminated. These studies did not examine the schema congruity effect, nor was that their intent. Moreover, neither study explored the ability of advertising context to enhance a gender-related predisposition in elaboration. This is the goal of our research.

As discussed, a key tenet of the dual elaboration hypothesis is that when both forms of elaboration cue simultaneously, the process should enhance consumers’ extremity of evaluation (Malaviya 2007; Malaviya et al. 1996). Accordingly, if males are naturally predisposed to item-specific elaboration, and an ad context is introduced that facilitates relational elaboration, males will engage in both types of processing; this will increase evaluation extremity. We predict, however, that this phenomenon will only manifest for males. If females have a natural predisposition for relational elaboration, an ad context featuring competing products would only serve to augment their dominant processing style (relational).

\[ H1: \] Males will view a competing ad context more favorably than an unrelated ad context. Females will not differ in evaluations, regardless of ad context.

Item-specific elaboration is more likely to happen when a target ad is presented with ads that belong to unrelated categories, whereas relational elaboration is more likely to happen when a target ad is presented alongside competing ads that make the product category more salient (Malaviya 2007). In part, we propose to replicate Malaviya’s findings. However, we posit an underlying gender difference he did not examine. Specifically, we predict that males will engage in more item-specific elaboration when the target ad is positioned with unrelated goods, but not when the ad is positioned with competing goods. Conversely, because females are already oriented towards relational elaboration, we predict this will hold across both conditions.

\[ H2: \] Males will demonstrate a greater propensity for item-specific elaboration when the ad is viewed within an unrelated context than a competing context. Female will use relational elaboration, regardless of ad context.

**STUDY 1: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CONTEXTUALLY DERIVED PROCESSING**

**Method**

**Design.** A total of 125 university students (51% females) were recruited to participate in the study for course credit. Participants were assigned to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 (advertising context: unrelated vs. competing) x 2 (gender) between-subject factorial design.

**Stimuli.** The manipulation of advertising context followed prior procedures (Malaviya 2007). In the unrelated condition, the target advertisement (Minox camera) was placed with three unrelated ads from disparate product categories (Hawth Beer, Nexus Bags, and ProPal Calculators). In the competing condition, the target advertisement was placed with three competing ads from the same product category (Nexus, ProPal, and Hawith cameras). Both ad context manipulations had identical copy and consistent visuals in terms of size, spacing and positioning within the ads. The ad placements were counterbalanced to control for order effects, and the color schema and fonts were counterbalanced to control for preference. A pre-test (n=43) confirmed that there were no discrepancies in comprehensiveness, informativeness, and familiarity among the ads (Fs<1). Moreover, post-test analyses verified the absence of order effects (F<1).

**Procedure.** Participants were provided with a booklet that consisted of a series of the four fictitious ads and a questionnaire. After examining the ads, participants evaluated the target camera (Minox) on five seven-point evaluation items (bad/good, likeable/unlikeable, few/many unique features, low/high performance product, lacks/offers important benefits).

Next, in accordance with the procedures outlined by Malaviya et al. (1996), participants were asked to list as many thoughts as they could about the target ad. A two-minute time limit was imposed during the thought-listing task to increase the likelihood of capturing only the most accessible thoughts (Cacioppo and Petty 1981). The thoughts were coded by two unaffiliated judges, both of whom were unaware of the research hypotheses. The judges were instructed to rate any thought that relates to the target ad as item specific (e.g., “I like the flash on the Minox”), and any thought that relates to the product category (e.g., “digital cameras are more stylish than other cameras”) or usage (e.g., “it’s good to take on vacation”) as relational. The two coders’ results were consistent (r=.87). All outstanding disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Participants also responded to demographic questions, including measures of their knowledge and expertise with cameras, as well as their familiarity with the (fictitious) brands. Post-test analyses confirmed that these variables had no influence (Fs<1).

**Results**

ANOVAs were conducted on a 2 (context) x 2 (gender) between-subject factorial design. Table 1 reports all treatment means and standard deviations for experiment 1.

**Product Evaluation.** A factor analysis confirmed that all evaluation items loaded on one factor. Thus, the items were averaged to form an internally consistent measure (alpha=.91). A two-way ANOVA indicated the presence of a main effect of advertisement context; participants rated the target product more favorably in the competing ad context (M=4.33) than in the unrelated ad context (M=3.63), (F(1, 121)=10.41, p<.005, \( \omega^2 = .07 \)). As predicted (hypothesis 1), a planned comparison revealed that male participants viewed the target ad in the competing context more favorably (M=4.21) than in the unrelated context (M=3.53), (F(1, 121)=8.83, p<.005, \( \omega^2 = .06 \)), whereas females did not significantly differ in their evaluations across ad context conditions (F<1).

**Elaboration Index.** Consistent with prior research, an elaboration index was constructed by taking the difference between the number of item-specific thoughts and the number of relational thoughts, divided by the total number of thoughts (Malaviya 2007; Malaviya et al. 1996). Zero indicates an equal number of item-specific and relational thoughts, a positive number indicates more item-specific thoughts, and a negative number more relational thoughts.

A main effect of ad context was observed; participants scored the unrelated context as more item-specific (M=.09) and the competing context as more relational (M=.04), (F(1, 121)=3.86, p=.05, \( \omega^2 = .02 \)). A main effect of gender was also observed; males pro-
cessed more in an item-specific manner (M=.10), females in a relational manner (M=.06), (F(1, 121)=5.75, p<.05, $\omega^2=.04$). As predicted (hypothesis 2), these main effects were qualified by an interaction between gender and context (F(1, 121)=4.07, p<.05, $\omega^2=.02$). Simple effects tests revealed males processed the unrelated ad context as more item-specific (M=.23) and the competing ad context as more relational (M=.03), (F(1, 121)=7.87, p<.01, $\omega^2=.05$). Females processed both contexts in a relational manner (M_{Unrelated}=.10 vs. M_{Competing}=.05), (F<1).

### Discussion

In this study, we offer additional support for claims that advertising context can alter consumers’ elaboration (Malaviya 2007; Malaviya et al. 1996). An unrelated context can cue more item-specific than relational processing, whereas a competing context can cue more relational than item-specific processing. We also support existing theory on gender differences in processing (Meyers-Levy 1989; Putrevu 2001). Males were more likely to engage in item-specific processing, whereas females were more likely to engage in relational processing. The contribution of this study, however, is in the interaction between the two. Processing predispositions were moderated by advertisement context; males tended to process in an item-specific manner when the ads were presented within an unrelated ad context, but not within a competing ad context. Females tended to process in a relational manner regardless of the context.

On the surface, it may seem that males and females respond differently in a competing ad context. There is, however, an alternate explanation. The competing context might have equally contributed to relational processing for both genders, but because females are oriented that way (Meyers-Levy 1989), the impact of ad context could have been far more obvious for males (sort of like a ceiling effect). This is supported by our finding that males viewed the competing context more favorably than the unrelated context, whereas females did not differ in their evaluations. Consistent with the dual elaboration hypothesis (Malaviya 2007; Malaviya et al. 1996), male evaluations may have increased because of their natural predisposition for item-specific processing in conjunction with a competing ad context that encouraged them to engage in relational processing. This line of reasoning would also explain why evaluations did not change for females (both their predisposition and the ad context reinforced only relational processing). Thus, female evaluations did not benefit from aggregating two styles.

What is perhaps more interesting than individual differences, is the suggestion that ad context may enhance a predisposed processing style. In particular, evidence from study 1 alludes to the possibility that females may be able to extend their elaboration thresholds given the proper contextual stimulus. This brings us back to our initial research question: What happens when the advertising context incorporates inconsistent or incongruent information? Could a context help give an object membership? Researchers have yet to test product incongruity across varying ad contexts. Perhaps individuals use context to enhance their cognitive elaboration when accommodating incongruity. This would suggest that the ad context might raise a consumer’s elaboration threshold to accommodate a level of incongruity that might be otherwise too taxing to resolve (extreme incongruity).

It has been argued that extreme incongruity results in negative evaluations due to one’s inability to accommodate an object at the superordinate level (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Given that females have an elaboration threshold that can tease out fine distinctions (Meyers-Levy 1989), they should be better equipped to utilize the ad context to handle extreme product variations. We predict that if assisted through a competing ad context, females will be able to process levels of incongruity that males cannot distinguish.

**H3:** Females will view an extremely incongruent product more favorably in a competing ad context than in an unrelated ad context. Males will not differ in their evaluations of an extremely incongruent product, regardless of ad context.

If females are better equipped to use a competing ad context, they should demonstrate a greater propensity for relational processing when appraising an extremely incongruent product. In contrast, if male elaboration thresholds are such that they are unable to process extreme incongruity regardless of the context, then males should revert to item-specific processing.

**H4:** When an extremely incongruent product is positioned within a competing context, females will engage in more relational (vs. item-specific) processing, whereas males will engage in more item-specific (vs. relational) processing. When an extremely incongruent product is positioned within an unrelated context, there will be no difference in processing between males and females.

### Table 1

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Note: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.
STUDY 2: THE EFFECTS OF CONTEXT AND GENDER ON THE ACCOMODATION OF INCONGRUENT GOODS

Method

Design. In total, 286 students (49.7% females) participated in the study for course credit. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of 12 experimental conditions, creating a 2 (advertising context: unrelated vs. competing) x 2 (gender) x 3 (product congruity: congruent vs. moderately incongruent vs. extremely incongruent) between-subject factorial design.

Stimuli. We used the same ad context manipulation as described in study 1. Given the nature of the manipulation (unrelated vs. competing), two pre-tests were conducted to secure the product congruity manipulation within-subjects (n=40; 50% females) as well as between-subjects (n=130; 44% females). Using real digital cameras that were newly introduced to the market, a preliminary examination (n=52) reduced the initial selection (five cameras) to three by excluding any camera that did not significantly vary in perceived typicality (three 7-point scales anchored by not at all/very unique, very unlikely/very likely, and (matches) not at all well/very well). Similar to previous work (Campbell and Goodstein 2001), the pre-test items loaded on one factor and were averaged to form an internally consistent measure (ω=.67).

The between-subjects pre-test confirmed a main effect of camera type on perceived typicality (F(2,124)=37.43, p<.001). The within-subjects pre-test replicated the effect (F(1.93, 73.17)=263.46, p<.001). Planned/repeated comparisons verified that camera #1 (standard) was viewed as more typical (M_Between=5.30 and M_Within=6.15) than camera #2 (ultra thin) (M_Between=5.53, F(1, 124)=7.31, p<.01 and M_Within=5.85; F(1,38)=5.22, p<.05), which in turn was rated far more typical than camera #3 (round) (M_Between=2.97; F(1,124)=37.22, p<.001 and M_Within=2.63; F(1,38)=257.22, p<.001). There was no effect of camera order in the within-subjects pre-test (Fs<1). More importantly, there was no effect of gender on measures of evaluation, price perception or perceived typicality in either pre-test (Fs<1). Both pre-tests confirmed that the standard camera was seen as congruent, the ultra-thin camera as moderately incongruent, and the round camera as extremely incongruent.

Procedure. Participants were instructed that the purpose of the study is to learn their opinions about different advertisements. Each research participant was asked to review a seven-page booklet (visual and editorial content) at his or her own pace and to complete the accompanying tasks. In line with experiment 1, the booklets consisted of either four camera ads (competing) or four disparate ads (unrelated), with the target camera ad being the incongruity manipulation in both contexts. On average, it took respondents 10-15 minutes to complete the task.

Participants first evaluated the target camera (Minox) on 10 seven-point items (bad/good, dislike/like, few/many unique features, low/high performance product, poor/good picture quality, lacks/offers important benefits, not useful/useful, not superior/superior, difficult/easy to use, and poor/good lens quality). Embedded with these items were three seven-point typicality items (listed previously). Lastly, participants were asked to complete the same thought task listed in study 1. In addition to the procedures described in the first experiment, the two unaffiliated judges were required to further record whether respondents—if prone to engage in relational processing—were dissimilarity-focused (“this camera looks easier to use than other cameras”) or similarity-focused (“digital cameras are easy to use”; Kim and Meyers-Levy 2008).

Results

ANOVA as conducted on a 2 (context) x 2 (gender) x 3 (product congruity) between-subject factorial design. Table 2 reports all treatment means for experiment 2.

Perceived Typicality. In line with our pre-test results, the three typicality items loaded on one factor and were averaged to form an internally consistent measure (ω=.71). A planned comparison using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .017 per test (.05/3) indicated that the congruent product was perceived to be far more typical (M=5.43) than the moderately incongruent product (M=3.82), F(1,274)=123.52, p<.001, ω²=.18, which was in turn seen as far more typical than the extremely incongruent product (M=2.62), F(1,274)=68.4, p<.001, ω²=.10. The average typicality of the two incongruity conditions combined (M=3.21) was significantly lower than that of the congruent condition (M=5.43), F(1,274)=322.01, p<.001, ω²=.47. Thus, the congruity manipulation was perceived as intended.

Product Evaluation. Consistent with prior research (Malavija 2007), the 10 evaluation items loaded on one factor and thus were averaged (ω=.85). An ANOVA revealed a three-way interaction of advertising context, product congruity, and gender on product evaluation (F(2, 274)=3.74, p<.05, ω²=.02). Simple effects tests revealed that product evaluations varied by gender. Specifically, when the target ad was evaluated by male participants, a significant main effect of product congruity emerged (F(2, 274)=10.88, p<.001, ω²=.06). Consistent with the schema congruity effect (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), planned contrasts revealed that males perceived the moderately incongruent product more favorably (M=5.41) than both the congruent product (M=4.03), F(1,274)=6.25, p<.05, ω²=.02, and the extremely incongruent product (M=3.63), F(1,274)=21.32, p<.001, ω²=.07.

In contrast, when the target ad was evaluated by female participants, a significant interaction between product congruity and ad context emerged (F(2, 274)=3.25, p<.05, ω²=.01). Simple effects revealed that the nature of the interaction was such that the schema congruity effect manifested for females only in the unrelated ad context (F(1, 274)=7.30, p<.005, ω²=.04); females evaluated the moderately incongruent product (M_Uniformed=4.67) more favorably than both the congruent product (M_Uniformed=4.43, p<.05, ω²=.01) and the extremely incongruent product (M_Uniformed=3.63), F(1,274)=14.55, p<.001, ω²=.04). There were no differences in female evaluations across the product congruity conditions in the competing ad context (Fs<1). As predicted (hypothesis 3), a planned comparison confirmed that females viewed the extremely incongruent product more favorably in the competing ad context (M=4.23) than in the unrelated ad context (M=3.63), F(1,274)=4.97, p<.05, ω²=.01. Thus, the absence of the schema congruity effect in the competing ad context was due to female participants evaluating the extremely incongruent product on par with the moderately incongruent and congruent products.

Elaboration Index. Following the same procedures outlined in study 1, participants’ thoughts were catalogued by two unaffiliated coders (κ=.91) and an index was calculated. Consistent with the first experiment, a main effect of advertising context emerged; partici-
pands processed the unrelated context as more item-specific (M=.02) and the competing context as more relational (M=.05), (F(1, 274)=5.10, p<.05, \( \omega^2=.01 \)). Similarly, there was a main effect of gender; males processed more in an item-specific manner (M=.02), females in a relational manner (M=.05), (F(1, 274)=4.58, p<.05, \( \omega^2=.01 \)). The effects were qualified by a three-way interaction of advertising context, product congruity, and gender (F(2, 274)=4.96, p<.05, \( \omega^2=.03 \)). Closer examination revealed that the nature of the interaction varied by the level of product congruity. Specifically, when respondents evaluated the congruent target product, a significant interaction between gender and ad context emerged (F(1, 274)=4.90, p<.05, \( \omega^2=.01 \)). In line with study 1, simple effects tests revealed that males processed the unrelated ad context as more item-specific (M=12) and the competing ad context as more relational (M=.09), (F(1, 274)=7.06, p<.01, \( \omega^2=.02 \)). In contrast, females processed both the unrelated and competing congruent ad context in a relational manner (M_{Unrelated}=.06 vs. M_{Competing}=.02), (F<1).

As predicted, the pattern of effects were reversed when participants evaluated the extremely incongruent product; females processed the unrelated ad context as more item-specific (M=.02) and the competing ad context as more relational (M=-14), (F(1, 274)=4.46, p<.05, \( \omega^2=.01 \)). In contrast, males processed both the unrelated and competing extremely incongruent ad contexts in an item-specific manner (M_{Unrelated}=.06 vs. M_{Competing}=.06), (F<1). Males and females did not significantly differ in their elaborations between the unrelated or competing moderately incongruent ad contexts (p>.05).

### Discussion

In this experiment, we not only replicate effects from study 1, but we also offer additional support for the nonmonotonic relationship between product congruity and product evaluation (vis. the schema congruity effect; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). The contribution of this study, however, lies in the interaction between context, gender, and incongruity. Consistent with past examinations (viewing a product in isolation from comparable goods), the schema congruity effect was robust in the unrelated ad context. In the competing ad context, however, the phenomenon only manifested for males. The lack of effect for females, coupled with the increase in relational elaboration as the product increased in perceived typicality, supports our core proposition: using the competing ad context, females were able to extend their processing to accommodate an extremely incongruent product. They properly understood it within its product category and evaluated it more positively.

### General Discussion

The two experiments here provide strong evidence that advertising context can be used to facilitate consumers’ ability to accommodate incongruent goods. Malaviya (2007) illustrated the merits of the dual elaboration hypothesis. We were able to replicate and extend his framework to provide evidence that ad context can be used to alter the elaboration threshold of both males (experiment 1) and females (experiment 2), and do so in different ways. Furthermore, the two experiments not only replicated the schema congruity effect (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), but they also lent support to the notion that males and females differ in their elaboration strategies. Our findings suggest that given a context that facilitates a means of comparison, women can resolve what would otherwise be too difficult (an extremely odd-looking camera). Additionally, given that same contextual cue, males will adopt a processing strategy that is antithetical to a natural predisposition (they will begin to relationally process information, instead of processing in an item-specific manner).

In line with the selectivity hypothesis (Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991), when the task alone was too difficult (unrelated), all gender differences in elaboration were extinguished. However, when the task was accompanied by a context that facilitated a means of comparison (competing), the differences re-emerged and were even more dramatic. These findings have important implications for marketing practice. Both males and females seemed to enjoy the product the most when it was at least moderately incongruent, and when the product was in a context of similar goods that helped to classify it. Indeed, such a technique could be used in product placement on retail shelves, end of aisle displays, and special features in magazines and newspapers. What is perhaps more interesting, however, is the idea that a competing context could be used to facilitate the introduction of an extremely incongruent good. In such a scenario, the results of this study would caution that marketers be sensitive to gender variations in elaboration.

### Table 2

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Note: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses; Elaboration = elaboration index
tion, which seem to gain in severity as the product becomes increasingly novel. Future research will have to explore limits of this phenomenon.

REFERENCES


