Developing Positive Attitudes and Strong Goals to Purchase Products of Fantasy

R. Justin Goss, University of Texas at San Antonio, USA
Ian M. Handley, Montana State University, USA
Brett M. Runnion, Montana State University, USA

Fantasy Realization Theory suggests that individuals can fantasize about a positive future, dwell on the negative aspects of reality that impede a desired future, or mentally compare each. Further, individuals use personal expectations to determine if they should adopt a goal to achieve a positive fantasy, but only when they compare fantasy with reality. We predicted and found that participants’ who fantasized about a desired product and compared that to a negative reality would form more positive attitudes, plans, and intentions in regard to purchasing products if they read a persuasive advertisement containing strong, versus weak, arguments.

[to cite]:
R. Justin Goss, Ian M. Handley, and Brett M. Runnion (2010), "Developing Positive Attitudes and Strong Goals to Purchase Products of Fantasy", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 37, eds. Margaret C. Campbell, Jeff Inman, and Rik Pieters, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 806-807.

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15100/volumes/v37/NA-37

[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.
Two names were used: one common and one uncommon. After reading the feedback, all participants were asked to estimate the percentage of the restaurant’s customers that shared the same opinion as presented in the form.

We obtained a significant interaction between opinion valence and anonymity. People in the negative condition estimated the opinion to be less general in the identified condition (43% of the population of customers) than in the anonymous condition (53%; F(1,109)=4.16, p<0.05). In the positive condition, there was no significant difference between estimates based on identified and anonymous opinions (55% vs. 53% respectively). The significant difference found in the negative conditions is consistent with more dispositional attributions being made when the name was presented than when it was absent. The lack of a significant difference in the positive conditions might have happened because people did not generate causal attributions. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that negative events generate more spontaneous causal attributions than positive events (Gilbert & Malone 1995). This happens because negative events are usually unexpected, especially given our scenario where participants acted as the restaurant manager. Positive events can lead to spontaneous causal attributions, however, if they are unexpected (Kanazawa 1992). In study 2 we lead participants to engage in causal attributions by using expected versus unexpected reviews. In addition, we measure Need for Cognitive Closure (NFCC), an individual characteristic that should influence the extent to which people make causal attributions (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem 1993; Webster & Kruglanski 1994).

Study 2

The second study was a 2 (reviews: expected vs. unexpected) x 2 (anonymity: anonymous vs. identified) between-subjects factorial. Participants (n=144) were told they would read a product review purportedly picked at random from Amazon.com. Participants read a review confirming or disconfirming prior-experimentally manipulated—expectations. Anonymity was manipulated just like in study 1. In addition to percentage estimates, we measured the predictability and need for order and structure subscales of the NFCC Scale. We predicted that individuals high in these scales will make more dispositional attributions because dispositional attributions make the world seem more predictable.

We obtained a 3-way interaction between NFCC, expectedness, and anonymity. There was no effect of anonymity among individuals low in NFCC. Among individuals high in NFCC, there was a significant interaction between expectedness and anonymity (F(1,63)=8.17, p=.006): unexpected anonymous reviews were estimated to represent 59.8% of consumers who had used the product whereas unexpected identified reviews were estimated to represent 43.9% of consumers (F(1,34)=3.08, p=.058). Expected reviews showed the opposite pattern: identified reviews were estimated to represent 82.5% of consumers whereas anonymous reviews were estimated to represent 64.6% of consumers (F(1,29)=4.9, p=.035). Whereas the results for unexpected reviews are in accordance with our predictions, those of expected reviews were not predicted.

We showed that anonymity increases perceived representativeness of opinions. Our results suggest that causal attributions underlie the effect. In future studies we will test the process by directly manipulating ease of attribution and how these inferences influence attitudes and choice. This research contributes to the literature in representativeness judgments and word-of-mouth.

Bibliography

Developing Positive Attitudes and Strong Goals to Purchase Products of Fantasy

R. Justin Goss, University of Texas at San Antonio, USA
Ian M. Handley, Montana State University, USA
Brett M. Runnion, Montana State University, USA

Individuals often fantasize about obtaining better products such as a better car, a new HDTV, or a dream vacation. Yet, as ubiquitous as such fantasies are, they are often times not realized. Oettingen (1996) has suggested that how individuals think about the future may be important in understanding how they come to set, and commit to, goals to achieve fantasies. In her Fantasy Realization Theory (FRT), Oettingen (1996) offers three ways an individual might deal with fantasies about the future, ultimately influencing goal formation and commitment. Two of the possibilities create a readiness to act that is independent of individuals’ expectations, whereas the third entails an expectancy-based readiness to act.
First, individuals may largely disregard positive fantasies about the future and instead dwell on a negative reality that blocks a desired future. In this case, individuals experience no need or direction in which to act. Therefore, their expectations about achieving the fantasy do not heavily influence goal formation or strength.

Second, individuals can think about positive fantasies without considering current situations that may impede their fantasy-realization. As a result, they experience no need to act (i.e., overcome impediments), and therefore their expectations about achieving the fantasy do not heavily influence goal formation or strength.

Third, individuals may contrast a positive fantasy with a negative reality that blocks the potential realization of that fantasy. In doing so, the desired future becomes something that is to be attained, and the negative reality becomes something that must be altered. In this case, a necessity to act is produced. If individuals’ expectations for attaining the fantasy are high (low), then a goal will (will not) be formed.

Prior FRT research has investigated pre-existing expectations for fantasy realization (Oettingen et al. 2001). In the current research, expectations for fantasy realization were manipulated by presenting participants an advertisement in which strong arguments made electronic products seem easily attainable or weak arguments made electronic products seem less attainable. That is, we took advantage of the idea that strong, persuasive arguments are those that communicate a highly desired (or undesired) outcome is likely (expected) if one adopts what is advocated within the message (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Based on FRT, we reasoned that participants who mentally contrast product fantasies and negative realities should consider the expectations within arguments, and form stronger goals to, and more favorable attitudes toward, purchasing an electronics product when doing so is supported by strong versus weak arguments. Further, argument strength will not affect the positive- or negative-only conditions. In the present experiment, goals strength was operationalized as expectations, plans, motivation, and attitudes regarding purchasing a fantasy electronic product.

To test our hypotheses, undergraduate participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 3 (Mindset Type: Positive Fantasy vs. Negative Reality vs. Mental Contrast) X 2 (Advertisement Quality: Strong vs. Weak) factorial design. Following Oettingen et al. (2001), participants first listed 4 positive fantasies about owning a desired electronics product and 4 negative realities standing in the way of that fantasy. Participants were then induced to either consider only positive fantasies about owning a desired electronics product, dwell on negative realities that stand in the way of buying the product, or mentally contrasting both. Participants were then presented with an advertisement that offered either excellent incentives (strong arguments) or lackluster incentives (weak arguments) for buying the electronic product from an advertised store. We then administered a questionnaire measuring participants’ expectations, plans, motivation, and attitudes regarding purchasing a fantasy electronic product.

For all dependent measures, planned comparison confirmed significant differences between participants who received the strong versus weak advertisement, but only for the mental-contrast conditions. Therefore, for ease of presentation, the fantasy and negative-reality conditions were combined and compared to the mental-contrast condition. As predicted, participants in the mental contrast condition who received a strong versus weak advertisement demonstrated more positive attitudes, higher expectations, and stronger motivation and plans (goals) about buying a fantasy electronics product. Further, participants in the positive-fantasy only and negative-reality only conditions did not differ on these measures, regardless of which persuasive advertisement they received.

These results demonstrate that Fantasy Realization Theory can be used to predict consumer attitudes, expectations, and motivations. Specifically, by prompting consumers to contrast their present reality against a positive consumer fantasy, marketing managers can more successfully create positive consumer attitudes, expectations, and motivations by presenting strong arguments for purchasing a product.

We predict that individuals in the mental-contrast conditions will generate more positive thoughts in response to the strong versus weak advertisement, whereas individuals in the other conditions will not. This idea follows from FRT which suggests that only individuals who mentally contrast reality and fantasy consult their expectations (in this case provided by advertisement arguments) to determine goal commitment. Further, as is commonly observed in persuasion research (Petty and Wegener 1998), these thoughts should mediate the relationship between mental set and ultimate consumer attitudes. We also predict that only individuals in the mental-contrast conditions will indicate in their thought listings more plans and reports of intentions to purchase a fantasy product after reading strong versus weak advertisements. Importantly, this would provide evidence that individuals in this condition spontaneously devise plans and intentions in response to expectations, an effect not yet observed but consistent with FRT.

Selected References
Fishbein, Martin and Icek Ajzen (1975), Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.


Celebrity Endorsements and Advertising Effectiveness: The Importance of Value Congruence
Eda Gurel-Atay, University of Oregon, USA
Lynn Kahle, University of Oregon, USA

A number of companies use celebrities in advertisements to promote different kinds of products. Indeed, millions of dollars are spent on celebrity contracts each year by assuming that the benefits of using celebrities will exceed the costs. Given the popularity and importance