Temporal Construal, Categorization Processes, and Brand Extension Evaluation

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Two objects can be grouped into a category based on either their perceptual similarity (feature matching) or conceptual coherence (underlying cause). In one study, we identified temporal construal as a moderator of the use of these two bases (perceptual vs. conceptual) for classifying objects into a category. In another study, we extended our findings to develop successful brand extension strategy for dissimilar extensions (e.g., Heineken resort) or extensions which have little similarity to the parent brands.

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studies as well (Cohen, Pham, and Andrade 2008). Participants were placed into high and low chronic positive affect groups via a median-split procedure.

Two fictitious ads for Kodak digital cameras were adapted from the literature: one nostalgia ad and one non-nostalgia ad (i.e., control) (cf. Muehling and Sprott 2004). The ads featured a picture of a group of boys posing after a backyard basketball game on a summer afternoon. The two ads were comparable in visual format, color, illustration, length of ad copy, description of product features, and placement of brand logo, but differed in several important ways. Nostalgic cues replaced comparable, though non-nostalgic, cues in the headline (“Re-live the Moment” for the nostalgia ad versus “Capture the Moment” for the control ad), in the date inserted below the dominant picture (“Last day of Summer, August 28, 1998” versus “Last day of Summer, August 28, 2009”), in several statements placed in the ad copy (e.g., “It was a time like no other. . . . Remember?” versus “A moment just like this. . . . A stop in the action”), and in the tag line (“And, Kodak was there” versus “And, Kodak is there”). It is important to note that the highlighted product features (e.g., 10.2 MP, 3X optical zoom lens, etc.) were held constant across the two ads.

A set of two-way ANOVA analyses were conducted on the dependent measures including purchase intention, brand attitude, ad attitude, and ad-aroused positive emotion. Standard scale items were borrowed from the literature. Our hypotheses were all supported. A two-way ANOVA on intention to purchase revealed a significant interaction effect between ad appeal and viewers’ chronic positive affective state (F(1, 133)=6.47, p<.05). Subsequent pair-wise comparisons showed that, when participants were in a high chronic positive affect, those who viewed the nostalgia ad had a higher intention to purchase the advertised product (M=4.28) than those who viewed the non-nostalgia ad (M=3.75) (t (133)=2.00, p<.05). On the other hand, when participants were in a low chronic positive affect, those who viewed the nostalgia ad reported an intention to purchase the advertised product (M=3.52) comparable to those who viewed the non-nostalgia ad (M=3.92) (t (133)=1.59, p=.11). Similar results were found on other dependent measures.

REFERENCES
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Extended Abstract
Categorization involves treating two or more distinct entities as equivalent (Medin 1989). Research in categorization has shown that perceptual similarity and conceptual coherence often serve as the two most common bases for judging the equivalence and subsequent categorization of objects into a particular group. For example, a robin and a nightingale can be classified into the same category of bird since they are perceptually similar such that both have feathers, wings and beak. In contrast, children, money, photo album and pets cannot be grouped together based on their physical appearance (i.e., perceptual similarity), but they may form a group based on their conceptual coherence (e.g., “things to take out of one’s house in case of fire”) (Barsalou 1983).

The basic difference in the above two types of categorization (which we term as perceptual and conceptual categorization, respectively hereafter) is that perceptual categorization involves mainly feature-matching among the category members, while conceptual categorization requires the identification of causal relationships or conceptual relatedness among the category members.

Various factors (e.g., cultural background and expertise) are found to moderate use of perceptual similarity or conceptual coherence in forming groups (Murphy and Medin 1985). We propose that the way an individual construes an event in time (near vs. distant future)—temporal construal of an individual, as another factor moderating the use of the two bases of categorization. Temporal construal
theory proposes that events which are closer to the present (e.g., taking a trip tomorrow) are likely to be construed as containing more concrete, peripheral and situation specific details of the event. Conversely, construing the same event six months from now leads to the consideration of more abstract, central and goal related features of the event (Trope and Liberman 2003). Thus, we propose that more concrete (abstract) features or perceptual similarity (conceptual relatedness) will be used for forming a group when one thinks in near (distant) future terms.

In the first study participants’ temporal construal was manipulated by asking them to enlist the thoughts while thinking of taking an exam either tomorrow (near future prime) or six months from now (distant future prime). Then they were presented with a focal brand (Nike) and asked to pick three brands from a set of ten brands (Asics, Hush puppies, Timberland, Prince, Wilson, Casio, Polo Ralph Lauren, Dr Scholl’s, Caterpillar and Esprit) that forms a “coherent” group with the focal brand. The meaning of the word “coherent” was neither defined nor explained to the participants. Supporting our propositions, we found participants in the near (distant) future prime used perceptual (conceptual) similarity for forming a “coherent” group with Nike—as is evident in the analysis of the following dependent measures, (i) reasons for forming the group (ii) listing of common characteristics between Nike and the chosen brands (iii) the thoughts which went through the participants’ mind as they were making the choices and (iv) names given to the chosen group.

Recent research has demonstrated that the way in which products are categorized influences subsequent decision making in an unrelated context (Ulkuemen, Chakravarti and Morwitz forthcoming in JMR). For example, the purchase of a new type of candy at the checkout counter is influenced by a prior categorization task—categorizing a DVD into a narrow (e.g. comedy movie) vs. a broad category (e.g., movie). Arguing on a similar vein, we posit that categorizing objects on perceptual similarities or narrower categories (e.g., Nike running shoes) vs. conceptual coherence or broader categories (e.g., Nike for sports) will influence a subsequent decision making task later in the study—evaluation of an ad. In a second study, supporting our hypothesis we find that participants in the near (distant) future prime evaluated the ad promoting brands’ perceptual similarity (e.g., NIKE RUNNING SHOES) more favorably than the one promoting brands’ conceptual coherence (e.g., NIKE EMPOWER YOURSELF) (F (1,105)=14.41, p<0.00).

In a third study, we seek to extend our findings in the context of brand extensions, as extensions are often evaluated on the basis of similarity to the category that the brand stands for (Boush and Loken 1991). However, extensions like Jeep strollers and Godiva ice-cream are notable exceptions to the above logic. Bridges, Keller and Sood (2000) argues that as long as the target customers are able to find an explanatory link between the extension and the parent brand, perceptual similarity is not deemed necessary for evaluating an extension’s similarity with the parent brand. We propose that consumers’ ability in finding such exploratory links will be enhanced when they are primed with distant vs. near temporal orientation.

The hypotheses was tested in a 2 (temporal orientation–near vs. far) × 2(type of brand extension–perceptual similarity vs. conceptual coherence) between subjects design. Johnson & Johnson skin care lotion (perceptually similar to the line of J & J lotion) and stuffed toys (conceptually related to the brand–a brand known for babies) were used as experimental stimuli. As expected, J&J stuffed toys was more similar to the parent brand in the distant (vs. near) future prime (M=6.44(1.20) vs. M=4.07(1.88), p<0.00) and the participants listed more exploratory links between stuffed toys and the J&J brand when they were in the distant (vs. near) future prime. However, due to the obvious similarity of the skin care lotion to the J&J brand no differences either in similarity judgment or listing of exploratory links was found was observed across conditions.

Findings of our research contribute to the categorization literature by identifying temporal construal as another factor influencing such a process. Categorization is found to be the basic cognitive mechanism underlying several key decision making processes like consideration set formation (Desai and Hoyer 2000), brand extension evaluation (Boush and Loken 1991) and assimilation and contrast (Levy 1993). Thus, future research may explore temporal construal as a key factor moderating the above cognitive factors and its attendant marketing implications.

References