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## **Product Involvement Vs. Product Motives As Moderators of the Effects of Ad-Evoked Feelings: an Analysis of Consumer Responses to 1,100 Tv Commercials**

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Analyses of consumer responses to 1,100 TV commercials show that contrary to standard ELM predictions, in realistic settings, the influence of ad-evoked feelings on brand attitudes does not depend on product involvement, but on the types of motives associated with the product category, with greater influence of feelings for hedonic products than for utilitarian products.

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# Product Involvement vs. Product Motives as Moderators of the Effects of Ad-evoked Feelings: An Analysis of Consumer Responses to 1,100 TV Commercials

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Many studies have shown that ad-evoked feelings have a positive influence on consumers' brand attitudes (e.g., Brown, Homer and Inman 1998; Burke and Edell 1989, Holbrook and Batra 1987). While these effects of ad-evoked feelings thus seem well established, three things are striking: (1) the limited pool of ads in each study, raising issues of selection bias (e.g., Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty 1986, Burke and Edell 1989, Stayman and Aaker 1988), (2) the fact that unknown brands are often used (e.g., Burke and Edell 1989, Derbaix 1995, Miniard et al. 1991), and more importantly, (3) the fact that product category effects are not considered, even though academics and advertising practitioners generally assume that the effectiveness of emotional advertising appeals depends on the product category (e.g., Adaval 2001, Batra and Stephens 1994, Johar and Sirgy 1991, Malhotra 2005, Morris et al. 2002, Rossiter, Percy and Donovan 1991). The purpose of this research is to revisit the role of feelings on brand evaluations using a much more comprehensive and representative set of existing commercials (addressing the issue of potential selection bias, fictitious ads and unfamiliar brands) and testing whether these effects depend—as previous experimental lab research would suggest—on the level of involvement and the type of motives, hedonic versus utilitarian, associated with the product category.

Although a dual role of affect has been theorized by several researchers in the sense that ad-evoked feelings automatically transfer to brand attitude under low involvement, whereas under high involvement feelings are assumed to impact brand attitudes by biasing brand cognitions (e.g., MacInnis and Park 1991, Miniard et al. 1991, Petty et al. 1993, Olsen and Pracejus 2004), other researchers suggest that emotional advertising works better for low than for high involvement products (e.g., Lautman and Percy 1984, Morris et al. 2002, Rossiter et al. 1991). Indeed, it is a classic prediction of dual-route models of persuasion such as the ELM (Petty and Caccioppo 1986) that feelings should have lower influence on persuasion under conditions of high elaboration likelihood than under conditions of low elaboration likelihood. Our studies will test whether this theoretical prediction holds when the source of involvement comes from the product category being advertised rather than from an external manipulation, as in typical persuasion research.

Another stream of research on the effects of affective states in consumer judgments and decisions suggests that affect is more likely to be relied upon when consumers have hedonic motives than when they have utilitarian motives (Pham 1998)—a finding that has been replicated in multiple subsequent studies (e.g., Adaval 2001, Yeung and Wyer 2004). According to a feeling-as-information explanation (Schwarz and Clore 1983, 2007; Pham 1998), this is because feelings are perceived to be more relevant in light of hedonic/experiential motives than in light of instrumental motives. This finding raises the question of whether similar moderating effects would occur in typical advertising exposure settings when the type of motives comes not from an external manipulation (as in previous studies) but simply from the product category being advertised.

Therefore, previous experimental laboratory research makes very clear predictions about the moderating effects of involvement and types of motives on the effects of feelings on attitudes and evaluations. However, it is not clear whether these predictions would

hold in typical ad exposure settings where the primary source of involvement or type of motives is not an experimental manipulation, but merely the product category being advertised. The purpose of this research is thus to submit these two lab-derived theoretical predictions to a large-scale “external reality check.”

Study 1 examines how the emotions evoked by 413 TV commercials (featuring 294 different brands across 93 different product categories) influence the brand evaluations of a representative set of 907 adult consumers. Each respondent evaluated a set of about 20 commercials and each commercial was evaluated by 40 to 60 respondents. After seeing each commercial, respondents rated their (1) attitude toward the ad (Aad) (3 items,  $\alpha=.96$ ), (2) their cognitive assessments of the ad's content (2 items,  $\alpha=.90$ ), and (3) their attitudes toward the advertised brand (Ab) (2 items,  $\alpha=.86$ ). These Aad, cognitive assessments (CogAss), and Ab responses were averaged across respondents for each ad to form 413 aggregate ad-level dependent-variable observations. The emotional content of each ad was assessed on a 15-item emotional scale by an independent group of 12 judges who were blind to the study's hypotheses ( $\alpha=.97$ ). To control for the possibility that ratings of emotional responses to the ads may reflect some other aspects of the ads, such as their originality or creativity, the same 12 judges also rated all the ads in terms of their originality (5 items,  $\alpha=.99$ ). Finally, the 93 product categories represented in the ads were coded by another set of six judges. This second set of judges were given the names of the product categories and asked to rate them on 5 'product category involvement' items ( $\alpha=.94$ ) and 5 'utilitarian/hedonic product motive items' ( $\alpha=.95$ ). Inter-judge reliabilities were high for all items and for all judges.

The results of a series of regressions show that, even after controlling for respondents' Aad and cognitive assessments of the ad and for the ads' originality, the emotional content of the ads had a significant positive influence on consumers' brand attitudes ( $\beta=.236, t=4.93, p<.001$ ). Further, the results suggest that, contrary to what one would predict based on a peripheral-route explanation of affective influences, the effects of emotions on brand attitudes did not depend on the level of involvement associated with the product category ( $\beta_{\text{Emotion} \times \text{Involvement}}=.014, t<1$ ). However, the effects of emotions on brand attitudes were significantly moderated by the type of motivation associated with the product categories ( $\beta_{\text{Emotion} \times \text{Hedonic}}=.112, t=3.03, p<.01$ ).

A second study was carried out (1) to assess the robustness and generalizability of the first study's findings, and (2) to address a limitation of the first study by controlling for brand familiarity effects. To this end a different set of 687 TV commercials were evaluated by a different sample of 427 consumers, keeping the design and methodology largely identical to Study 1. This time the impact of the emotional content of the ad on consumers' brand attitudes was fully mediated by Aad. However, the results concerning the product category motivational factors remained identical as in Study 1. Again product involvement did not and utilitarian/hedonic product motive did moderate the impact of emotional ad content on brand evaluations. The latter finding is consistent with recent theoretical suggestions that the selective reliance on feelings as a function of their relevance is quite flexible (Pham 2004).

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