



ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 11 E. Superior Street, Suite 210, Duluth, MN 55802

Consumers' Response to Advocacy Advertising: a Process Model of Consumer Skepticism, Empathic Response, and Prosocial Behavior

Robert Madrigal, University of Oregon, USA

Johnny Chen, University of Oregon, USA

Monica LaBarge, University of Montana, USA

Namika Sagara, University of Oregon, USA

In order to be effective, advocacy advertising relies on establishing an emotional connection with consumers. Two studies examine an empathic hierarchy and subsequent coping responses. In study 1, blame (people vs. oil company) and self-blame (moderate vs. high) were manipulated to elicit empathic responses. Appeal type (emotional vs. cognitive) and peer advocacy (single vs. group) were manipulated in study 2. Results indicate that consumer skepticism (i.e., ad credibility, inferred manipulative intent) predicts empathic response (i.e., sympathy, empathy) which, in turn, impacts empathic emotions (anger, guilt, worry, hope). Each emotion predicted active coping aimed at alleviating the aversive situation.

[to cite]:

Robert Madrigal, Johnny Chen, Monica LaBarge, and Namika Sagara (2009), "Consumers' Response to Advocacy Advertising: a Process Model of Consumer Skepticism, Empathic Response, and Prosocial Behavior", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 36, eds. Ann L. McGill and Sharon Shavitt, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 731-732.

[url]:

<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14672/volumes/v36/NA-36>

[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/>.

Consumers' Response to Advocacy Advertising: A Process Model of Consumer Skepticism, Empathic Response, and Prosocial Behavior

Robert Madrigal, University of Oregon, USA
Johnny Chen, University of Oregon, USA
Monica LaBarge, University of Montana, USA
Namika Sagara, University of Oregon, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Advocacy ads are often produced by organizations wishing to promote a particular position on an issue. These ads typically feature a call to action such as asking consumers to write letters to public officials, donate money, protest, volunteer, or boycott a company's products. Advocacy ads are expected to be most effective when they create an emotional response in consumers that is premised on feelings of empathy for the affected parties. We build on Escalas and Stern (2003) by exploring in greater detail the process associated with empathic response. We contend that consumers' empathic emotional reactions will reflect a mixture of discrete emotions that directly predict related to a set of active coping behaviors aimed at attenuating the stressful situation. Implicit in the hypothesized model is the ability of empathy to mediate the influence of sympathy on each emotion. We also expect that each emotion will mediate the direct effect of empathy on active coping.

We propose a hierarchical model in which consumers' skepticism (ad credibility and inferences of manipulative intent) toward an advocacy ad influences their empathic response (i.e., sympathy and empathy) toward the affected parties featured in the ad which then, in turn, predicts specific empathic emotions (anger, hope, worry, and guilt). Both are considered antecedent to empathic response because if it is unlikely that viewers will have sympathetic feelings to an ad if they believe the ad is not credible and/or if they consider it to be manipulative (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005).

Two studies examine an empathic hierarchy and subsequent coping responses. In study 1, blame (people vs. oil company) and self-blame (moderate vs. high) were manipulated to elicit empathic responses. Structural equation modeling was used to assess the fit of the proposed model to the data. The hierarchical model provided an excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2=38.82$, $df=34$, $p=.26$; $RMSEA=.022$; $SRMR=.04$; $CFI=.99$). Two alternative models were examined. The first was identical to our final model except that the positions of empathy and sympathy were reversed. The model tests for the possibility that reactions to the ad affect feelings of empathy initially and that this then predicts sympathy which, in turn, influences the discrete emotions. The resulting model provided a very poor fit to the data ($\chi^2=147.61$, $df=34$, $p<.001$; $RMSEA=.12$; $SRMR=.093$; $CFI=.90$). We also considered the sequence reported by Bagozzi and Moore (1994) having each discrete emotion (hope, worry, guilt, and anger) related directly to empathy, and empathy predicting active coping. This sequencing resulted in a poor fitting model ($\chi^2=69.45$, $df=24$, $p<.001$; $RMSEA=.095$; $SRMR=.11$; $CFI=.93$).

The primary purpose of the study 2 was to replicate the findings in study 1 using a different set of stimuli. In study 2, appeal type (emotional vs. cognitive) and peer advocacy (single vs. group) were manipulated. First, the ad either made an emotional or cognitive appeal. People may be moved to action due to the effects of either appeal type, yet little is known about how these approaches are likely to influence consumers' empathic responses. Second, past research has shown that people are more likely to help a victim represented as a single person than a group (Kogut and Ritov 2005; Slovic 2007), but nothing is known about a single versus multiple

endorsers of an issue. In addition, we examined two related concepts thought to influence empathic responses. First, respondent sex was included as a predictor in study 2 as prior research has assumed that women show greater empathy than men (Argo, Zhu, and Dahl 2008). Second, humanitarianism-egalitarianism (HE) was also considered as a predictor. HE is concerned with the "ideals of equality, social justice, the concern for others' well-being" (Katz and Hass 1988, 894) and is thought to contribute to people's coping behavior and feelings.

The overall structural configuration of the model in study 2 was consistent with study 1 except that two additional latent variables (HE and Gender) had been introduced and allowed to load across all endogenous variables. The resulting model provided excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2=581.40$, $df=205$, $p<.001$; $RMSEA=.038$; $SRMR=.069$; $CFI=.99$) and also replicated our initial findings and lend support to our proposed model that describes the underlying relationship between consumer skepticism, feelings, and coping behaviors.

The current research expands our knowledge of the processes underlying consumers' empathic response to advertising and its consequences. We focused on advocacy advertising because of its reliance on connecting emotionally with consumers. Results indicate that respondents' skepticism toward an ad directly affects their empathic response which, in turn, gives rise to a set of discrete empathic emotions that each individually predict specific actions aimed at coping with the situation. Our results support the temporal sequence outlined by Escalas and Stern (2003). Consistent with their view, we found that a model specifying a direct effect from sympathy to empathy outperformed one in which those effects were reversed. Moreover, significant indirect effects of sympathy on each emotion through empathy were found. Our results also indicate that the influence of empathy on active coping is mediated by each of the empathic emotions. Finally, we also contribute to the research on empathy by providing an alternative to the variable sequencing reported by Bagozzi and Moore (1994). In contrast to their hypothesized ordering, we found that our model predicting an empathy→emotion→coping sequence provided a better fit to the data than their emotion→empathy→coping hierarchy.

REFERENCES

- Argo, Jennifer J., Rui (Juliet) Zhu, and Darren W. Dahl, "Fact or Fiction: An Investigation of Empathy Differences in Response to Emotional Melodramatic Entertainment," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34 (5), 614-23.
- Bagozzi, Richard P. and David J. Moore (1994), "Public Service Advertisements: Emotions and Empathy Guide Prosocial Behavior," *Journal of Marketing*, 58 (1), 56-70.
- Cotte, June, Robin A. Coulter, and Melissa Moore (2005), "Enhancing or Disrupting Guilt: The Role of Ad Credibility and Perceived Manipulative Intent," *Journal of Business Research*, 58 (3), 361-68.
- Escalas, Jennifer E. and Barbara B. Stern (2003), "Sympathy and Empathy: Emotional Responses to Advertising Dramas," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (4), 566-78.

732 / Consumers' Response to Advocacy Advertising

- Katz, Irwin and Glen R. Hass (1988), "Racial ambivalence and American value conflict: Correlational and priming studies of dual cognitive structures," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55 (6), 893-905.
- Kogut, Tehila and Ilana Ritov (2005), "The Identified Victim Effect: An Identified Group, Or Just a Single Individual?" *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 18 (3), 157-67.
- Slovic, Paul (2007), "If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act: Psychic Numbing and Genocide," *Judgment and Decision Making*, 2 (2), 79-95.