

Chapter Twenty-Six

Consumer Behavior

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The Consumer Domain: An Introduction

The broad field of consumer behavior spans many of the topics of interest to social psychologists – from micro-level events (e.g. psychophysiological responding to advertisements) to macro-level processes (e.g. family decision making; organizational buying behavior). Indeed, the breadth and volume of work in consumer behavior easily fills an entire handbook (e.g. Robertson & Kassarjian, 1991). This chapter is not intended to cover that field comprehensively. Instead, we focus on highlighting selected principles of consumer information processing (CIP) relevant to intraindividual, social psychological theories. The articles cited are not intended to be comprehensive either, and for some topics we cite review papers or a small subset of research articles for the sake of brevity.

Consumer research has been greatly influenced by social psychology. A citation analysis of the field's leading journal, *Journal of Consumer Research*, revealed that, when comparing individual disciplines, social psychology has had a greater impact than even marketing or economics (Leong, 1989). With a growing interest in CIP, research in social cognition has become a primary source of influence. In the first section of this chapter we give a brief overview of the encoding, inference, and memory processes that relate to consumer judgments and decisions. It will become clear that, regarding the underlying cognitive processes, consumer judgment does not differ much from social judgment.

Naturally, however, research on consumer cognition has focused on some themes central to consumer behavior. Below, we select some of these topics to give more detailed insight. The selection of topics is meant to illustrate the relevance of social cognition to the consumer domain.

Having pointed out the many parallels between the consumer literature and the social cognition literature, in the second section we turn to the differences. In particular, we are concerned with what social cognition can learn from the consumer domain. We will point to some areas where consumer research could inspire a more complete understanding of

human information processing and, thus, balance the overwhelmingly one-sided interdisciplinary exchange more equally.

1 How Consumers Make Product Judgments

Consumers are daily exposed to a host of product-relevant information. Depending on their involvement and cognitive resources they attend to it, encode it, make inferences from it, and may use the results of their processing for a product evaluation or even decision. Because product choices and judgments are at least partially memory based (Alba, Hutchinson, & Lynch, 1991) they are then dependent on which brands and which brand-beliefs and brand-related affective responses were stored and are retrieved from long-term memory at the time of judgment. Even when external information is available, memory may play a role. For example, when consumers are exposed to a range of brands and packaging claims in the supermarket, they may nevertheless recall past product experiences, TV commercials, or reviews from consumer organizations, or they may attend more to the brands that they recognize. Thus, consumer choices and judgments often depend to a large extent on the accessibility of relevant information (e.g. Baker & Lutz, 1988; Feldman & Lynch, 1988) and how the activated information is used. However, as distinct from social cognition research, CIP research tends to focus on trying to understand the effects of a specific marketing-relevant variable, for example advertising execution or brand familiarity, on the product judgment, rather than understanding the cognitive processes *per se*. The following overview reflects this orientation to some extent.

Encoding

Independent of whether the judgment is stimulus based or memory based, in order to be considered for a product decision the information must have been perceived. Moreover, the more processing capacity is devoted to a stimulus for comprehension and elaboration, the greater is its later accessibility. Consequently, much of traditional theorizing in advertising postulated that grabbing consumers' attention is the key to effective advertising (e.g. Lewis, 1898; Rossiter & Percy, 1987) and researchers often focused on factors that capture consumers' attention (see O'Guinn & Faber, 1991).

A few caveats should be noted, however. First, our review will show that, although selectivity and intensity of attention are often positively correlated, the opposite is also true. Whereas some factors of a stimulus may catch consumers' attention, they may be detrimental to more intense processing and elaboration. Ads using sexual stimuli are a good example (Severn, Belch, & Belch, 1990). Second, some attention-grabbing executions may create negative affect. Recent Benetton campaigns, which have featured war casualties and AIDS victims, are an example. Indeed, a growing body of research suggests that consumers resent attention-grabbing advertising (e.g. Campbell, 1995; see also section 2, below). Third, and perhaps most importantly, focal attention may not be necessary for information to be perceived and be influential at a later time, as will be discussed later.

What elicits attention and elaboration?

Whether a brand, an ad, a package, or any product information catches consumers' attention depends on where (when) it is placed, the goals, involvement, and cognitive resources of the consumer, and the characteristics of the stimulus. Placement is one of the most basic factors, and consequently consumer researchers were interested early on in placement effects (for a review see Wilkie, 1994, ch. 8). In magazines the most prominent spot is the back cover, in TV it is the first commercial in the commercial break. In cultures that read from left to right and from top to bottom, information presented in the upper-left corner receives greatest attention compared to other positions. In supermarkets, brands have a better chance of being chosen when placed at eye-level than on a lower shelf, presumably because they attract more attention at eye-level.

This example, however, also illustrates that much depends on the search strategies of the consumer. A consumer highly motivated to find the least expensive brand may also search the less prominent shelves. Models of consumers' external information search have identified four main factors: motivation, ability, perceived costs, and perceived benefits (Moorthy, Ratchford, & Talukdar, 1997; Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). Consumers engage in more search processes when the costs of making a suboptimal decision are high and the benefits of extended search are high. For inexpensive, or repeatedly purchased products, or when the market is perceived as homogeneous so that more search will not detect decisively better alternatives, search is low. External search processes also depend on a consumer's product or market knowledge. Moderately knowledgeable consumers will engage most in external search processes. Consumers with low knowledge lack the necessary representations to make use of the acquired information. Consumers with high knowledge, on the other hand, tend to rely more on their stored knowledge. Finally, spontaneous attention is also influenced by the consumer's current goals. A hungry consumer will be more likely to notice a restaurant than a consumer not looking for a bite to eat.

Certainly, characteristics of the presented information play an important role in capturing attention, and this may be what many view as advertising's prime objective: creating eye-catching executions. Not surprisingly, vivid information is more likely to be noticed than pallid information, and indeed, in advertising, a picture may be worth a thousand words, at least in terms of creating attention, eliciting recall, triggering inferences, and influencing judgments (e.g. Childers & Houston, 1984; Mitchell, 1986; Smith, 1991). When it comes to drawing attention, salience may actually be more important than vividness. In general, ads that are unusual, surprising, novel, or incongruent with expectations will capture attention, but such effects of novelty wear off with repetition (e.g. Calder & Sternthal, 1980).

Whereas vivid and salient information certainly attracts more selective attention, some research suggests that the advantage of vivid and salient executions is due to the greater elaboration that they elicit (e.g. Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991; Goodstein, 1993). On the other hand, catching attention may also be at the cost of comprehension and elaboration. For example, Houston, Childers, & Heckler (1987) found better recall for ad information when the picture and verbal information were discrepant, but only when ad recipients had plenty of time to process the ad and not if presentation time was short. This example

demonstrates that whether elaboration occurs, and thus how an advertisement's execution affects judgment, both depend on consumers' cognitive resources (e.g. Keller & Block, 1997) and, of course, personal involvement (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984).

Retrieval

We mentioned above that product choices often do not occur at the time that brand-related information is presented. Thus, most choices rely on the information recalled at the time of judgment, which is why retrieval processes are of prime interest in consumer research (for a review see Mitchell, 1993). Note, however, that recent literature also attests to the influence of information that is not explicitly recalled, as will be discussed later.

When consumers form a judgment at the time of information encoding, they may later simply retrieve the stored judgment rather than construct it anew by retrieving product attributes (Srull, 1989). However, although consumers may be able to retrieve a previous judgment, they may conclude that it is not adequate for the present situation (e.g. their current goals or alternatives) and may try to retrieve or acquire information that allows for a new judgment or adjust the previous one (Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988). As with external search processes, the extent of internal (memory) search increases with involvement and with cognitive resources, as described earlier.

Certainly, a prime factor in information retrieval is the accessibility of the information. We have already mentioned some variables that affect the accessibility of product-related information by way of attention and elaboration. Accessibility of brand-related information also depends on how it is organized in memory. Bichal & Chakravarti (1983) distinguish between brand based structures, which facilitate brand comparisons, and attribute based structures, which facilitate attribute based comparisons. The manner in which information is stored in memory depends on the goals present at encoding. In addition, prototypical brands within a product category (e.g. Ward & Loken, 1986) and recently or frequently activated brands or brand information (attributes or judgments) also enjoy an accessibility advantage (e.g. Berger & Mitchell, 1989; Nedungadi, 1990). Frequent or recent activation of a brand in a particular usage situation increases the association of brand and usage situation, so that activation of the latter may activate the brand (Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991). Recency and frequency are of particular relevance because both can be manipulated through amount of advertising.

But not all information accessible in the judgment situation is the result of marketing efforts. Consumers may also recall past experiences. In particular, they may be likely to recall negative product experiences (Schul & Schiff, 1993) given that such experiences are usually unexpected and may be more extreme.

In general, the theories and models popular in CIP postulate a positive relationship between the accessibility of diagnostic information and its impact on judgment (Baker & Lutz, 1988; Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Kisielus & Sternthal, 1984). If a piece of information comes to mind, its evaluative implications will affect the judgment in the respective direction. However, in line with social cognition findings that the retrieval of information does not necessarily predict how the information is used for the judgment (see chapter 11, this volume), recent research in the consumer domain also challenged this assumption. As

we will illustrate below, accessible information may also elicit contrast effects in product evaluation (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1997; Wänke, Bless, & Schwarz, 1998, in press-a, in press-b). Moreover, the impact of information depends not only on whether it comes to mind but also how it comes to mind. Evaluations of brands, products, and services were more in line with the implications of retrieved information when consumers experienced the retrieval as easy compared to when the retrieval felt difficult (Wänke & Bless, in press; Wänke, Bless, & Biller, 1996; Wänke, Bohner, & Jurkowsch, 1997). When retrieval is experienced or merely anticipated as difficult, the impact of the evaluative implications may even reverse.

Consumer interpretations and inferences

Consumers are active information processors in that they interpret information, categorize it, generate counterarguments and draw inferences from it (for a review, see Kardes, 1993). Whether and how consumers make inferences about missing information is a particularly well-researched topic (see Kardes, 1993). Not surprisingly, only rather knowledgeable consumers notice when relevant product information is missing, whereas less knowledgeable consumers do so only when prompted, for example when competitor brands carry the respective information. Once consumers detect that relevant information is missing, they may use the available information to make specific inferences, as described below. If, however, the available information does not lend itself to specific inferences or consumers are not able or willing to make those inferences, they may form cautious and moderate judgments that are held with low confidence.

Several strategies for how consumers may spontaneously or intentionally go beyond the information given have been investigated (see also Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Most simply, consumers may assume that the brand possesses a particular attribute at the same (average) level as other brands, provided the variance among these other brands is low. Equally basic, consumers may infer an attribute level from the overall product evaluation, as a sort of halo effect. Subjective theories, for example that high price signals high quality, are another source of inferences. Consumers may also draw inferences from category membership. A large CIP literature, for example, has looked at how consumers' product evaluations are influenced by the fact that the product carries a brand name about which they already have well-formed expectations (see below).

Of course, consumers are not infallible when relying on heuristics or even systematic strategies when evaluating brands (for a review of potential biases see Kardes, 1993). One interesting and obviously misleading heuristic was documented by Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto (1994). In their study, nondiagnostic but differentiating brand attributes increased brand evaluation, especially under high price. Apparently, consumers inferred that if an attribute is advertised it must be valuable.

If consumers can be prompted to generate inferences themselves, this can bring a number of benefits to the marketer. Consumer inferences may be more memorable (Moore, Reardon, & Durso, 1986) and less subject to counterarguing and reactance than explicitly stated information. Indeed, self-generated arguments and inferences are more persuasive and enduring (Sawyer & Howard, 1991; Shavitt & Brock, 1990), and attitudinal judgments

based on self-generated inferences are more accessible than judgments involving less cognitive effort (for a review see Kardes, 1993). Accordingly, advertisements often leave claims open to inference.

However, relying on consumers' inferences is risky to the extent that consumers need sufficient knowledge, involvement, and cognitive resources to make spontaneous inferences (e.g. Johar, 1995; Sawyer & Howard, 1991). Moreover, the ease with which consumers make a particular inference may also play a role. Self-generated product benefits are only more persuasive than presented benefits when this generation is experienced or anticipated as easy (Wänke, Bless, & Biller, 1996; Wänke, Bohner, & Jurkowitsch, 1997), whereas difficult benefit generation backfires. Not surprisingly, prompting self-generated responses also backfires when those responses are unfavorable to the brand (Shavitt & Brock, 1986).

Choice

Consumer research is at least as interested in choice as in product judgment. This concerns not only how judgments affect actual behavior, but how information processing feeds into selections among multiple alternatives. One might assume that consumers form or retrieve a judgment about each alternative and subsequently choose the best brand. However, the range of alternatives may influence which attributes are attended to and how they are weighted. In addition, comparison processes introduce their own dynamics (e.g. Dhar & Simonson, 1992; Wänke, Schwarz, & Noelle-Neumann, 1995). Consequently a large literature in consumer research builds on research in behavioral decision making (for a review see Bettmann, Johnson, & Payne, 1991), which to a large extent is guided by exploring violations of presumably rational principles.

For example, although, logically, the relative choice between A and B should not be affected by adding C to the range of options, the likelihood of choosing product A increases versus product B when a product C is added that is (at least partly) inferior to A and makes A look good by comparison (Huber, Payne, & Puto, 1982; Tversky & Simonson, 1993). Choices also should not depend on how the alternatives are presented (framing effects), but they do. Consumers gladly accept a discount for paying cash instead of using their credit card (framing as a gain) but resent paying an extra fee for charging goods to their credit card (framing as a loss).

Recent research in consumer choice has begun to pay more attention to affective factors in decision making, in particular, research investigating predictions about future reactions and choices (e.g. Kahneman & Snell, 1992) and research involving hedonic choices (e.g. Dhar & Wertenbroch, 1997). One general finding is that people are surprisingly poor at predicting their own future hedonic reactions to products or experiences. Obviously, this deficit greatly affects the quality of consumer decisions as far as future outcomes are concerned, and it suggests that marketing strategies should be sensitive to the time lag between the purchase decision and actual consumption.

Highlighted Topics in Consumer Information Processing

Brand extensions

The overwhelming majority of new products are launched under an already-established brand name. This way marketers avoid the forbidding costs of creating a new brand image, exploiting instead an existing brand image in the hope that consumers will transfer existing brand beliefs to the new launch (for a review see Shocker, Srivastava, & Ruekert, 1994). In investigating the conditions for successful extensions, consumer research has built upon the assumption that consumers need to categorize the extension as a brand member in order to derive affect or beliefs from the brand membership. Consequently, research has focused on the antecedents of brand categorization.

Whether a new product is categorized as belonging to an existing brand was initially assumed to depend on the characteristics of product and brand, and how both contributed to category fit. This fit was assumed to facilitate the transfer of brand liking and/or the transfer of more specific brand beliefs. Most research looked at fit in terms of the product category (e.g. canned soup fits better as an extension of a food brand than a floor wax; Boush & Loken, 1991), the brand image (e.g. bracelets fit better with Rolex, which is associated with status products, than with Timex; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991), or other kinds of relatedness (technology, manufacturing processes, etc.; Herr, Farquhar, & Fazio, 1996).

Other research showed that product categorization was not necessarily a function of the nature of the brand or product and inherent in their features but could also be manipulated by external factors, such as supplying consumers with specific category labels for grouping products together (Wänke, Bless, & Schwarz, in press-a). Moreover, whether a particular model was included or excluded from the brand representation could be influenced by marketing strategies (Wänke, Bless, & Schwarz, 1998).

Until recently, the focus on the antecedents of brand categorization came with a neglect of the consequences. The literature generally assumed that high fit resulted in high acceptance of the extension. But Broniarczyk & Alba (1994) demonstrated that even if brand beliefs are transferred to the extension, these attributes may not necessarily be desirable for the extension. Consumers may want different attributes in a compact car than in a sportscar. Other research challenged the previously held assumption that a failure to categorize the extension as a brand exemplar would merely decrease the transfer of brand beliefs. Wänke, Bless, & Schwarz (1998) found contrast effects; the brand extension was evaluated lower on brand beliefs when its inclusion in the brand was undermined as compared to when no information about its parent brand was given. It is argued that the brand and its previous models can serve as a standard of comparison against which the new model is measured. These results imply that an unsuccessful extension strategy may not only fail to exploit the brand image but may actually backfire. On the other hand, beliefs in opposition to the existing brand image may be useful for different positioning goals.

The reverse influence – how the brand extension affects perceptions of the parent brand – has mainly been studied from the perspective of diluting brand image (e.g. Loken & Roedder-John, 1993; Park, McCarthy, & Milberg, 1993). Again, the literature has fo-

cused on the category fit, and again one may assume that other influences may affect categorization processes. Moreover, categorization models suggest that including an extension into an existing brand category will result in assimilation of the parent brand to the evaluation of the extension, but exclusion from the existing brand category may result in contrast (e.g. Wänke, Bless, & Schwarz, in press-b).

Research on brand extensions parallels stereotype research in social psychology as far as the dynamics of categorization are concerned. In fact, market research often treats brands as personalities, rendering the parallels rather appealing. The parallels make brand extensions an excellent domain for the study of social psychological categorization models.

Mood effects on consumer judgments

Affect plays a role in many consumer topics, particularly in advertising, both as a dependent variable and an independent variable (for a review see Agres, Edell, & Dubitsky, 1990). A prime question in applied research is how affective states influence purchase behavior. Because purchase behavior is the complex end result of different factors, there is no clear answer to this question and it may depend very much on the product category.

For example, on the one hand the popular saying “when the going gets tough, the tough go shopping” suggests that bad mood states may increase purchase behavior overall. This belief is supported by studies that find increased consumption of what Gardner (1994) calls “mood-ameliorating” products, such as cigarettes and cookies, or at least more favorable attitudes towards such products (for a review see Gardner, 1994). On the other hand, the literature also suggests that consumers judge products more favorably when happy (Isen, Shalke, Clark, & Karp, 1978) and more negatively when sad (Axelrod, 1963). Products presented with stimuli inducing a happy mood are liked better than products associated with an unhappy mood, unless consumers are aware of the source of their mood (Gorn, Goldberg, & Basu, 1993). Moreover, happy mood may also induce less systematic processing of advertising (e.g. Batra & Stayman, 1990) and consequently a less critical product evaluation (for a general review of mood and information processing see chapter 18, this volume). In combination, this would suggest that the increased desire for some products following bad mood may be countered by the tendency toward more critical product attitudes.

One of the topics that has raised the most interest is the effect of moods induced by a TV program on the processing of commercials shown in the program. In other words, is advertising more effective when placed in a sitcom, a drama, or a documentary? A recent meta-analysis of relevant studies (Mattenklott, 1998) reveals ambiguous results for the effect of program induced mood on ad recall. Happy and funny programs seemed to be superior to extremely sad and depressing programs (e.g. about the Nuremberg trials) but inferior to neutral programs. It is argued that sad material is more involving than happy material and consequently distracts more from processing the ads that interrupt it. The programs that are affectively more neutral may increase the degree to which the commercials stand out, and thus the commercials are better recalled later (if one can assume that viewers stay tuned to the program – see below). As this illustrates, mood effects as elicited by TV programs are hard to distinguish from effects of arousal elicited by these programs. A study that separated arousal from valence (Pavelchak, Antil, & Munch, 1988) measured

recall for ads shown during the Superbowl in the winning, losing, and a neutral city and found that recall remained unaffected by the valence of the emotion but was negatively related to the intensity of the emotion (i.e. arousal and extremity of emotion).

With regard to program effects on judgment, sad mood seems to decrease the liking for an advertised product (Axelrod, 1963; Yi, 1990). Interestingly, one study (Kamins, Marks, & Skinner, 1991) also looked at the affective tone of the commercial and found that the positive effect of happy programming only emerged for a happy commercial. A sad commercial, an appeal to drug abusers to seek professional help, was liked better when placed in a sad than in a happy program. In line with findings by Martin, Abend, Sedikides, & Green (1997), one may argue that consumers found the appeal more moving when in a sad rather than happy mood and consequently evaluated it more favorably.

Cross-cultural differences in advertising

As new global markets emerge, and existing markets become increasingly segmented along ethnic or subcultural lines, the need to communicate effectively with consumers who have different cultural values has never been more acute. Thus, it is no surprise that cultural differences are gaining increased attention in consumer research, as they are in social psychology.

Comparisons between individualistic cultures (e.g. North American and Western European countries) and collectivistic cultures (e.g. Asian, Latin American, and African countries; see chapter 2, this volume, for a general discussion of these concepts) have yielded sharp distinctions between these cultural types in the advertising appeals that tend to be used, as well as in the processing and persuasiveness of those appeals. For instance, American advertisers are often exhorted to focus on the brand's attributes and advantages (e.g. Ogilvy, 1985), based on the assumption that consumer learning about the brand precedes liking and buying the brand (e.g. Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

In contrast, as Miracle (1987) has suggested, the typical goal of advertisements in Japan appears very different. There, ads tend to focus on "making friends" with the audience and showing that the company understands their feelings. The assumption is that consumers will buy once they feel familiar with and trust the company. Because Japan and other Pacific Rim countries are "high context" cultures that tend toward implicit and indirect communication practices (Hall, 1976), Miracle suggested that the mood and tone of commercials in these countries will be particularly important in establishing trust. Indeed, studies have shown that ads in Japan rely more on symbolism, mood, and aesthetics and less on direct brand comparisons than do ads in the US (e.g. Hong, Muderrisoglu, & Zinkhan, 1987).

This is not to suggest that advertisements in collectivist societies use a "soft sell" approach in contrast to a "hard sell," information-driven approach in the West. Information content in the ads of collectivist cultures can be very high, sometimes higher than in the US (for a review see Taylor, Miracle, & Wilson, 1997). It is more an issue of the type of appeal that the information is supporting.

For instance, a content analysis revealed that in Korea, compared to the US, magazine ads are more focused on family well-being, interdependence, and harmony, and are less

focused on self-improvement, independence, and individuality (Han & Shavitt, 1994). However, as one might expect, the nature of the advertised product moderates these effects. Cultural differences emerge strongly for products that tend to be purchased and used with other persons (e.g. groceries, cars). Products that do not tend to be shared (e.g. health and beauty aids, clothing) are promoted more in terms of personal, individualistic benefits in both countries.

The persuasiveness of appeals appears to mirror cultural differences in their prevalence. An experiment by Han & Shavitt (1994) showed that appeals to individualistic values (e.g. "Solo cleans with a softness that you will love") are more persuasive in the US and appeals to collectivistic values (e.g. "Solo cleans with a softness that your family will love") are more persuasive in Korea. Again, however, this effect was much more evident for products that are shared (laundry detergent, clothes iron) than for those that are not (chewing gum, running shoes). Zhang & Gelb (1996) in an experiment in the US and China found a similar pattern in the persuasiveness of individualistic versus collectivistic appeals. Moreover, this effect was moderated by whether the advertised product is socially visible (camera) versus privately used (toothbrush).

As to the role of culture in the processing of ad information, research is in its infancy. What is known suggests that general models of cognitive processing and cognitive responding are useful frameworks across cultures (e.g. Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Shavitt, Nelson, & Yuan, 1997). However, cultural differences emerge in the diagnosticity of certain types of information. For instance, Aaker & Maheswaran (1997) showed that consensus information regarding other consumers' opinions is not treated as a heuristic cue by Hong Kong Chinese (as it is in the US; Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991), but is instead perceived and processed as diagnostic information. Thus, collectivists resolve inconsistency in favor of consensus information, not brand attributes. This would be expected in a culture that stresses conformity and responsiveness to others' views. Yet cues whose (low) diagnosticity does not vary cross-culturally (e.g. number of attributes presented) elicit similar heuristic processing in the US and Hong Kong.

2 What Distinguishes the Consumer Domain from Other Social Domains?

In this section, we discuss some of the important and often unrecognized differences between the consumer domain and other social domains, and why those unique aspects may invite some expansion of social cognitive theories.

Distinction 1: Marketing Messages Have Important Implicit Effects

Marketing communications often influence consumers via mechanisms that are implicit and unconscious. In psychology, interest in implicit social cognition is rapidly increasing (see chapter 7, this volume). Nevertheless, although there are exceptions, most studies of

communication and persuasion focus on conscious and explicit processes of message evaluation. Explicit processes are relevant in cases where focal attention is directed to the message. Indeed, in laboratory persuasion experiments, participants often have little choice but to so direct their attention. However, in the real world, hundreds of messages compete daily for our attention. Most of them are hardly noticed, yet they may well influence later judgments. Interest in implicit processes in the consumer domain predated much of the social cognition research on the topic. In a classic paper, Herbert Krugman (1965) hypothesized that consumer judgments and purchase decisions may often be influenced by incidental learning of advertising information (see also Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984). Moreover, a repetitive TV ad campaign may not only effect the “overlearning” of unattended product information, it may also change the *structure* of product perceptions. Thus, repeated exposure to an ad for, say, a soft drink may gradually shift the attributes that are salient in evaluating the beverage from “refreshing taste” to “youthful” or “modern.” These shifts may not be detected by standard attitude measures. Indeed, they may not even be noticeable prior to a behavioral decision. As Krugman suggested, “the purchase situation is the catalyst that reassembles or brings out all the potentials for shifts in salience that have accumulated up to that point. The product or package is then suddenly seen in a new, ‘somehow different’ light although nothing verbalizable may have changed *up to that point*.” To assess such effects, “one might look for gradual shifts in perceptual structure, aided by repetition, activated by behavioral-choice situations, and *followed* at some time by attitude change” (Krugman, 1965, pp. 354–355; italics in original).

Recent research has yielded robust evidence that incidental exposure to information may affect consumer judgments and that it is not necessary that the consumer recollect the initial exposure or material (e.g. Janiszewski, 1993; Shapiro, MacInnis, & Heckler, 1997). In a typical study, consumers are exposed to advertisements, brand names, or packaging stimuli while their focal attention is directed elsewhere. In line with prior research on mere exposure effects (see Bornstein, 1989), these preattentive exposures elicit greater subsequent liking for the ad or brand, and even an increased likelihood of including the advertised product in a consideration set for a hypothetical purchase (Shapiro, MacInnis, & Heckler, 1997). Moreover, although behavioral effects of unattended ad exposure have not yet been demonstrated, recent findings in social cognition have shown that direct behavioral effects of incidentally encountered stimuli are possible when those stimuli prime existing stereotypes (e.g. Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). Thus, it seems likely that preattentively processed marketing messages could elicit behavioral effects when they activate existing product-user stereotypes or usage-related concepts in memory.

At a somewhat higher level of processing involvement, in which focal attention is directed at comprehending but not evaluating brand claims, simple repetition of ad claims heightens their perceived validity (e.g. Hawkins & Hoch, 1992; see also Hasher, Goldstein, & Toppino, 1977). Thus, existing research provides substantial support for Krugman’s (1965) theorizing, at least in terms of the repetition-induced “overlearning” of information that receives little or no focal processing. The evidence is all the more impressive given that these studies typically rely upon explicit attitudinal measures.

Because a large proportion of the consumer information to which we are exposed is not elaborated or even perceived consciously, the consumer domain provides a prime field for further research on preattentive processes. In particular, studies are needed to examine the

processes by which unattended messages can alter the structure of product or topic perceptions. Can repeated, preattentive exposures to an ad campaign influence not only whether a brand is liked but also whether the characteristics claimed in the ad (e.g. "youthful") become more salient and drive that evaluation? If the salience of advertised characteristics does indeed increase as a function of preattentive ad exposure, does it influence the basis on which one compares and selects (e.g. choosing the brand that is perceived to be "most youthful")? At what point, if ever, are these effects recognized by the consumer? In line with Krugman (1965), we suggest that research in this area will yield the strongest evidence to the extent that it relies on implicit measures of attribute salience, the behavioral choices that reflect relative salience, and other indirect measures.

Distinction 2: Marketing Messages Communicate via Non-verbal Channels

Social psychological research on message processing and persuasion has focused mainly on the processing of verbal information to the relative neglect of other modes of communication. But marketers use pictures, fonts, logos, colors, layouts, and other visual elements to draw attention, evoke associations, and convey meanings. The same is true for the use of music, jingles, sounds effects, and other auditory stimuli, as well as for fragrances and textures (e.g. "smooth as silk"; see Solomon, 1992). All of these non-verbal modalities may affect judgments directly. They may affect the processing of verbal information by distracting from, facilitating, or biasing it. They may serve as recall or recognition cues for brand information. But most importantly they may carry meaning in their own right.

Many CIP studies of non-verbal inputs have been inspired by psychological constructs and theories. For example, the role of attractive photographs or pleasing music in influencing brand attitudes via classical-conditioning or mood-eliciting processes has been explored (e.g. Gorn, Goldberg, & Basu, 1993; Stuart, Shimp, & Engle, 1987), as has the role of visual inputs as cues that can provide product information in simplified form (e.g. Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Other work has paid greater attention to the unique qualities of these modalities and the ways in which they influence processing (e.g. Kellaris, Cox, & Cox, 1993; MacInnis & Park, 1991), as well as convey meaning (Phillips, 1997; Scott, 1990, 1994). It is on these latter effects of non-verbal inputs that we focus. We review a sampling of this large literature below, focusing primarily on the role of visual elements.

Visual elements are critical in virtually all forms of marketing communications and influence consumer perceptions in multiple ways. For instance, the colors used on packaging and in ads can directly influence product perceptions through their symbolic meanings and cultural associations. Gold lettering on a wine bottle conveys wealth and elegance, whereas yellow packaging for snack food connotes "fun" (for a review see Solomon, 1992).

CIP researchers have also shown that the effects of visuals on judgment and recall depend on the match between the degree or nature of the visual presentation and several other factors, such as the consumer's decision-making style (Meyers-Levy & Peracchio, 1996) and the level of visual imagery associated with the product information (Unnava &

Burnkrant, 1991). The effects of ad visuals also depend on the congruity or consistency between the verbal and visual elements in the ad (e.g. Smith, 1991; see Kellaris, Cox, & Cox, 1993, for similar conclusions regarding the congruity of verbal and musical elements). The function of the product attitude may also influence the way certain visual depictions are processed. Shavitt, Swan, Lowrey, and Wänke (1994) showed that pictures of spokespersons convey social-image information that may be centrally processed when the product evaluation serves a social-identity function.

In a number of studies, researchers have investigated the effects of visual elements such as the camera angle of ad photos, the use of color in ads, and ad layout characteristics (e.g. Meyers-Levy & Peracchio, 1995, 1996). Under low motivation to process the ad, consistent with dual process models of persuasion, the general finding is that visual elements can act as peripheral cues. However, under higher motivation to process, the effects are more complex because visual elements can either enhance or impede attempts to evaluate the product. For instance, full color ads may outperform black-and-white ads when processed peripherally, but may swamp the available cognitive resources needed to scrutinize ad claims when processing more elaborately (see MacInnis & Park, 1991, for similar conclusions regarding the effects of musical elements on information processing).

Clearly, then, visuals are more than mere affect or simple cues that are easily processed. Researchers who analyze the meaning that pictures convey from a rhetorical standpoint have offered a distinct viewpoint on the processing and interpretation of visuals. For instance, Scott (1994) suggests that some psychological research on the effects of visuals has tended to view visuals as simple reflections of reality that require little interpretive activity. However, as she points out, viewers actively interpret visual material based on extensive past experience with pictorial stimuli. These experiences render visuals a shared symbol system, like language, that communicates not through resemblance to reality but through pictorial *conventions*. Viewers' interpretations are sensitive to context and to stylistic mannerisms in the visual depiction. Thus, for instance, a picture of a fluffy, black kitten paired with a package of toilet paper would elicit a metaphorical interpretation ("soft as a kitten"; Mitchell & Olson, 1981), but paired with an allergy medicine would elicit very different inferences, and rendered in Halloween style would trigger still other associations (see Scott, 1990, for similar conclusions regarding the rhetorical role of music in advertising).

We suggest that psychological understanding of information processing and persuasion would be enhanced by a greater focus on non-verbal elements, particularly by taking into account the rhetorical richness of those elements.

Distinction 3: Product Evaluation is Not the Only Goal of Consumers

Social psychological research on information processing focuses principally on the goal of forming valid attitudes or judgments toward objects or message topics. The result is that the knowledge derived from this voluminous literature consists largely of principles about how messages influence recipients' attitudes toward advocated positions. This is a very important body of knowledge, and earlier we discussed the profound influence it has had upon consumer research in general.

However, the assumption that the goal of topic-attitude validity drives message processing implies that people typically approach marketing communications with the goal of extracting brand information. Actually, their goals may be much broader, including the hedonic motives served by ad exposure. The notion that people can enjoy ad exposure may seem odd to psychologists, who typically study and view ads as (often unwelcome) carriers of product information. However, in a recent national survey, most respondents reported that they like to look at the advertisements to which they are exposed (Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998). Indeed, data on the structure of advertising attitudes have repeatedly shown that the hedonic experience associated with ad exposure contributes greatly to driving public attitudes toward advertising, sometimes more so than do perceptions of the usefulness or trustworthiness of ad information (see Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998).

Recognizing that enjoyment is a primary basis for evaluating advertising can draw attention to other CIP facets than those that assume argument based discourse. As Wells (1988) points out, many ads are not lectures but dramas. Ads with dramatic elements appear to be processed differently than argument based ads, eliciting persuasion via empathy rather than argument evaluation (Deighton, Romer, & McQueen, 1989). Dramatic appeals are effective to the extent that they generate feeling responses and a sense of verisimilitude to their stories.

The use of storytelling and entertainment as persuasive strategies is neither new nor limited to commercial appeals. Further social psychological research on these processes would illuminate our understanding of the persuasive effects of narratives in editorials, political speeches, charity appeals, as well as ads.

Distinction 4: The Message Itself is a Target of Judgment

As already noted, consumer researchers have recognized that consumers have other goals pertaining to persuasion events besides the formation of valid topic attitudes. Among these goals are the evaluation of the message itself and those responsible for it. Therefore, consumer research has emphasized recipients' reactions to the *enterprise* of advertising persuasion – focusing upon advertisements and the practice of advertising as attitude objects.

Attitude toward the ad

In a recent commercial for Kellogg's Special K cereal, a series of middle-aged men appear on screen, each bemoaning some aspect of his physical build. The ad gently parodies women's obsession with their weight by having the men speak in feminine clichés (e.g. "I have my mother's thighs. I just have to accept that."). The intended audience, health- and weight-conscious women, is likely to find the ad hilarious, if somewhat mocking. Yet, although the emphasis on weight-control is consistent with Special K's established positioning strategy in the highly competitive breakfast-cereal market, virtually no information about the cereal itself is presented in the commercial. How, then, can we conceptualize the likely persuasive impact of this campaign?

One might view the effects of this campaign as illustrating simple affect transfer or classical conditioning. One might consider the humorous nature of the ad as constituting a peripheral cue to product evaluation, although what would be cued by the humor is not clear. Or one might consider that ad viewers are processing this ad more thoughtfully, drawing inferences about the company based on the rhetorical strategy it has chosen. All of these inferences, perceptions, affective reactions, and the resultant *attitudes toward the ad* may ultimately influence perceptions of the advertised brand in a variety of ways.

The attitude-toward-the-ad construct (A_{ad}) has been extensively researched in CIP. A_{ad} has been conceptualized in ways that parallel other attitude definitions (for a review see Cohen & Areni, 1991). Thus, A_{ad} can be formed either via the central or the peripheral route and can be based on affective or cognitive factors. The key assumption is that the consumer's A_{ad} is distinct from her attitude toward the brand (A_{brand}), and that A_{ad} mediates the effect of an ad on A_{brand} under certain conditions (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). A number of mediational models have been proposed, and research has yielded evidence for different mechanisms by which A_{ad} might mediate advertising effects on A_{brand} (see Cohen & Areni, 1991).

A variety of factors are thought to influence A_{ad} . Pictures, music, and other non-verbal elements influence A_{ad} , and some of the studies of non-verbal elements cited earlier have conceptualized these elements as influencing A_{brand} via their impact on A_{ad} (e.g. MacInnis & Park, 1991; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). In addition to executional factors, Lutz (1985) hypothesized a variety of other antecedents of A_{ad} , including the ad's credibility, attitude toward the advertiser and toward advertising, and the recipient's mood state. Recent evidence has supported the impact of some of these factors on A_{ad} (e.g. Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

Ad skepticism

Research on ad skepticism has included studies of public opinion toward ad trustworthiness and believability of ads as well as research on the factors that elicit skeptical responses. Public opinion toward advertising has long been a focus of survey research (for a review see Calfee & Ringold, 1994). Many of these surveys point to widespread and enduring skepticism about advertising, coexisting with a belief in the utility of advertising information. Indeed, when focused upon their own experiences and personally relevant decisions, survey respondents view advertising as more reliable and express greater confidence in it than when rating the trustworthiness of advertising in general terms (Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998).

A number of factors affect the skepticism with which a message is received. For instance, certain attention-getting tactics in advertisements (e.g. the delayed identification of the product being advertised) may tend to invite consumer skepticism (Campbell, 1995). The effects of these tactics on persuasion appear to be mediated by inferences that the ad is attempting to manipulate, or unfairly persuade, the recipient. Once those inferences are triggered by structural features of the ad, resistance to persuasion may result.

Also, some people are more likely than others to respond skeptically to advertisements. Obermiller & Spangenberg (1998) showed that reliable individual differences in ad

skepticism exist, and that one's degree of ad skepticism predicts the degree to which one responds unfavorably to ads. Ad skepticism is not unrelated to the more general social psychological construct of influenceability (see Rhodes & Wood, 1992). Indeed, as with individual differences in influenceability, individuals higher in ad skepticism tend to be higher in self-esteem. However, Obermiller and Spangenberg showed that ad skepticism does not reflect a general tendency to disbelieve communications. It appears instead to be associated with consumers' implicit theories about the marketplace.

Persuasion knowledge

The above research examples demonstrate the value of considering that advertising is a shared sociocultural experience with which consumers have extensive experience and about which consumers develop extensive folk knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). They recognize that advertisements are designed to persuade, and that the visuals, music, and copy all are crafted with particular rhetorical intentions.

Thus, consumers likely approach advertisements with the goal of "sizing up" the qualities of the message and the agent behind it. Indeed, drawing such inferences can be important to making effective marketplace decisions. The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM; Friestad & Wright, 1994) focuses on these processes. According to the PKM, consumers over time develop personal knowledge about the tactics that persuasion practitioners use. In any persuasion episode, the consumer deploys her available knowledge about the topic, the agents, and about persuasive tactics in general in order to evaluate the situation and guide her responses to it. The model has some relevance to the social psychological literature on forewarning of persuasive intent (e.g. Haas & Grady, 1975) and on attribution-theory accounts of persuasion (e.g. Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978), but focuses in greater detail on lay knowledge about persuasion processes in general, as well as on the accumulation and impact of that knowledge.

Friestad and Wright theorize that persuasion knowledge may interact with and qualify the effects of other variables on persuasion. For instance, individual differences in persuasion knowledge may moderate the effectiveness of particular persuasive tactics. Also, the awareness or labeling of an agent's action as a "persuasion tactic" may prompt changes in the processing and effectiveness of the message, as well as in a consumer's construal of persuasion attempts in general. A number of studies have yielded data congenial to the PKM. For instance, extensive research has indicated that consumers draw specific, predictable conclusions about marketers and their products from particular ad campaign elements (conclusions that are unstated and possibly unintended by the advertiser). Kirmani (1997) demonstrated that the number of times an ad is repeated serves as a signal to the quality of an unfamiliar brand. However, at very high levels of repetition, consumers perceive the expenditure as excessive and infer that "something must be wrong" with the brand. This relationship between repetition and quality perceptions is mediated not by irritation and boredom (as implied by information-processing views of repetition; e.g. Batra & Ray, 1986; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979) but by perceptions about the manufacturer's confidence in the brand.

These findings point to the importance of recognizing that the consumer's task in

responding to an ad campaign is much more complex than the evaluation of specific message arguments. The consumer responds to a broader set of message factors whose implications for judgment are often inferred through the use of extensive folk knowledge about the persuasion enterprise.

Conclusion

Clearly, social-cognition principles have translated very well into the consumer domain. Above, we have reviewed the substantial evidence for some of these principles in the consumer context. However, despite overlap in these domains, it should be stressed that consumer research is not simply social psychology applied to products instead of persons. Each field focuses on questions specific to its domain. That is, social-cognitive models have generally been designed to illuminate processes in the perception of persons, social groups, or social/political issues. CIP models have attempted to address issues that are salient in the marketplace of products and messages.

So far, the interdisciplinary exchange has been rather one-sided, but above we have pointed out a number of arenas where opportunities exist for more balanced exchange. Being cognizant of the unique features of the consumer domain will serve both to enhance knowledge about consumer behavior and to stimulate expansion of basic social-cognitive models.

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