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How can the word “NEW” evoke consumers' experiences of novelty and interest?



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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role advertising cues play in inducing subjective perceptions of product novelty and how they can evoke consumer interest toward an advertisement. Specifically, it uses behavioral and psychophysiological measures to: (1) investigate the effect of novelty cues on consumers' subjective appraisal of novelty; (2) demonstrate that novelty cues may evoke the emotion of interest; and (3) differentiate the effect of the emotion of interest on liking and arousal. Across two experimental studies, we demonstrated that simply adding the word “new” in an advertisement increases behavioral (i.e., viewing duration) and psychophysiological responses (i.e., cardiac activity) of interest. However, the word “new” did not evoke liking and arousal. This suggests that novelty cues in an advertisement will make the consumers perceive the product to be novel and further evoke consumer interest.

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1. Background

The use of newness cues (e.g., the word “new”) in advertising suggests that the products are perceived to be innovative, exciting, and interesting. However, the high failure rate of new products would suggest otherwise reflecting an ambivalent attitude toward product newness. Indeed, prior research has shown that product newness is a poor predictor of market performance (Story et al., 2015; Szymanski et al., 2007).

Most of the extant literature has considered product newness as an objective property of a product, instead of an attribute that is dependent on the consumer's perception and interpretation (e.g., Rubera and Kirca, 2012). For instance, Garcia and Calantone (2002) reviewed the conceptualization of product newness in the existing literature and refined the conceptualization of product newness as a discontinuity in marketing and/or technological factors. Although it is proposed that product newness incorporates a “newness to customers” dimension, they emphasized that it is a reflective construct whereby newness to customers is only an indicator but not a predictor of product newness. Thus, product newness is never dependent on the consumer's viewpoint. Similarly, various studies (e.g., Rubera and Kirca, 2012; Szymanski et al., 2007) reported that almost the entire literature in this area has measured newness based solely on the perspective of

managerial raters—not from a consumer perspective.

The concept of perceived newness has therefore been defined as the extent to which the product is perceived to be different to an existing product (Moreau et al., 2001), offer meaningful benefits (Alexander et al., 2008), or change consumption patterns (Olshavsky and Spreng, 1996). This complex conceptualization of perceived newness may differ markedly from the consumer's subjective perception that a product is simply new. For instance, the same food product can be perceived as new simply because it is served in a different restaurant, plated in a different form, or rarely consumed by the consumer. Indeed, the effects of subjective newness from the viewpoint of the consumer, has received little, if any, research interest. Drawing on the subjective appraisal literature, this paper therefore addresses this research gap by examining the antecedent and consequence of consumers' subjective perception of product newness.

Building on this premise, this study aims to examine the effect of: (1) novelty cues on consumers' subjective perception of newness, regardless of the objective property of the advertised product; (2) novelty cues in evoking emotion of interest toward the advertisement; and (3) the emotion of interest to liking and how it is distinct from arousal through using behavioral and physiological assessments.

The paper is structured in the following way. First we present the relevant literature. Specifically, the topics include (1) subjective appraisal of novelty is distinct from product newness; (2) appraisal of novelty can be triggered by simple advertising cues; (3) novelty appraisal evokes emotion of interest but not liking; and (4) the psychophysiology of interest is different to

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arousal. This led us to develop relevant research questions and hypotheses pertaining to the effect of novelty cues on consumers' interest toward an advertisement. This is then followed by a description of the two studies conducted to test the hypotheses. A general discussion of the findings and implications concludes the paper.

2. Theoretical underpinning and hypotheses development

2.1. Newness vs. novelty

The existing research literature on new products has offered new insights to the field of marketing. However, its scope is limited to the consumers' bottom-up processing of newness where efforts are concentrated to the search of product attributes that guarantee new product success. A major role of marketing communications, on the other hand, is to change consumers' top-down processing of the product, such as their subjective perceptions and evaluations of brand information.

The subjective perception of product newness is highly similar to the novelty appraisal process studied in psychology. According to Novelty Categorization Theory (Förster et al., 2010), a stimulus or an event is novel if it does not fit with one's existing mental categories. Novelty is therefore a subjective interpretation that a stimulus is conflicting with an expectation, is something not previously experienced, or lacks familiarity. Novelty, from the perspective of psychology, is simply the consumer's perception or interpretation that a product is new, regardless of its features. This is markedly different from most existing studies in marketing that have conceptualized product newness from an objective perspective instead of a consumer perspective. Drawing from the novelty literature, we propose that simply advertising a product to be new without changing the product's physical features will inform consumers that the product is unexpected and unfamiliar, thus evoking a top-down novelty appraisal toward the advertised product. Specifically, we hypothesized that:

H₁. An advertising cue of novelty will enhance consumers' subjective appraisal of novelty toward the advertisement and the advertised product.

2.2. Novelty and interest

Consumers desire novelty as it is human tendency to be curious. Litman (2005) suggested that curiosity is an innate trait that predisposes humans to seek new and interesting stimuli. Learning new information is innately rewarding because it resolves feelings of uncertainty and satisfies the desire of newness (Litman 2004; Litman and Silvia, 2010). Thus, curiosity may encourage approach and explorative behaviors toward novel stimuli or information. Curiosity is, however, a trait that predisposes consumers to seek for novelty. Given that one's trait is relatively stable, advertising cues of novelty should have little effect on curiosity.

Interest, on the other hand, is an affective state that has been shown to relate to curiosity and learning (see Ainley (2006) for a review). Interest is an evolutionarily adaptive emotion that enables people to develop a broad set of knowledge, skills, and experiences (Silvia, 2008). Interest therefore evokes curiosity-based behaviors, such as exploration, information seeking, and learning of new information. For instance, readers spend more time reading and elaborating on interesting texts (Ainley et al., 2002). People are also more likely to try novel food if they perceive the food as interesting (Martins et al., 2005).

In advertising, consumers' interest is a strong predictor of viewing duration and purchase intent (Mathur and Chattopadhyay,

1991; Olney et al., 1991; Stapel, 1994). Interestingness of an advertisement may also enhance consumers' attitude toward the advertisement and the advertised brand (Alwitt, 2000). However, the antecedent of interestingness in advertising has not been thoroughly examined and psychological theories pertaining to the emotion of interest have not been previously considered. This is unsurprising given that much research has only focused on advertising strategies that evoke other positive emotions such as joy and surprise (e.g., Teixeira et al., 2012).

Silvia (2005) showed that an individual's novelty-complexity appraisal is a necessary precedent of the emotion of interest. An appraisal is a person's cognitive evaluation and interpretation of an event or a stimulus. Novelty-complexity appraisal is therefore consumers' subjective perception of novelty. In Silvia's study, people's novelty-complexity appraisal predicted their interest (i.e., self-reports and viewing duration) toward random polygons, visual art, and poetry. Thus, an interesting stimulus such as an interesting product must be subjectively appraised or perceived to be novel or complex. Given this, we extend the current literature on advertising interestingness by examining whether interest can be evoked by a novelty cue. Extending from Silvia's work (2005), we propose that simply adding a novelty cue in an advertisement should increase consumers' novelty-complexity appraisal and in turn, evoke interest toward the advertisement. Accordingly, we proposed that:

H₂. A novelty cue in an advertisement will evoke the emotion of interest.

2.3. Interest versus liking

Positive responses such as liking toward an advertisement has been widely explored in the extant literature, thus one may question the importance of studying the emotion of interest in advertising. Prior research has suggested that advertisement liking and the arousal of pleasure both generate advertisement interestingness. However, research on emotion has shown that pleasure and interest are two distinct emotions (Silvia, 2006, 2008). In fact, interesting stimuli are not necessarily pleasant. For example, people report higher interest toward novel, disturbing paintings when compared with pleasant pictures (Turner Jr. and Silvia, 2006). Disturbing stimuli may therefore stimulate one's interest despite their negative affective valence. This shows that people approach novel stimuli not because of pleasantness but because of interestingness.

Consistent with this notion are decades of research demonstrating the mere exposure effect, whereby people generally prefer familiar and repeatedly presented advertisements in comparison to novel advertisements (for a review, see Bornstein (1989), Fang et al. (2007) and Schmidt and Eisend (2015)). This effect is robust even if the exposure toward the advertisement or the brand information is incidental and unconscious (Baker, 1999; van Reijmersdal et al., 2007; Ferraro et al., 2009). Repeated exposure of an advertisement may also reduce consumers' viewing duration (i.e., interest) toward the advertisement (Pieters et al., 1999). In fact, consumers tend to associate familiarity but not novelty to liking in a heuristic manner (see Monin (2003) for a review). Thus, familiarity is associated with liking whereas novelty is related to interest. Applying this notion to marketing research, we therefore propose that:

H₃. A novelty cue evokes interest but may not necessarily enhance consumers' liking toward the advertisement.

2.4. Interest versus arousal from advertising creativity

In advertising, novelty has been considered as a dimension of

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