



In the mood for action: When negative program-induced mood improves the behavioral effectiveness of TV commercials



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ABSTRACT

We tested the influence of program-induced mood on advertising effectiveness at judgmental (product evaluation), conative (purchase intention), and behavioral levels. Study 1 used a 2 (Induced-mood: positive vs. neutral vs. negative) × 2 (Brand attitude: favorable vs. unfavorable) design. Brand attitude had a stronger influence on product evaluation when mood was positive, compared to neutral or negative mood. Study 2 used a 2 (Induced mood: positive vs. negative) × 2 (Brand attitude: favorable vs. unfavorable) × 2 (Quality of product arguments: weaker vs. stronger) design. For positive mood conditions, evaluation and intent were influenced by brand attitude rather than by arguments quality, reflecting top-down processing. The reverse was found for negative mood conditions, reflecting bottom-up processing. Study 3 focused on stronger arguments only, and assessed whether participants attended the product launch event. Behavioral data revealed higher advertising effectiveness for negative mood conditions, because of higher elaboration of product information.

1. Introduction

In the market place, brands need to renew and update their product-line to maintain their appeal, face innovation from competitors, and meet new consumer expectations. For instance, Apple launched a new version of its smartphone every year (from the very first iPhone, launched in 2007, to the 2017 iPhone 8), car-manufacturers regularly launch new versions of their vehicles (seven different versions of the Volkswagen Polo since 1975), and Levi's 501 has known many iterations since its beginning. To make these strategies successful, marketers are concerned about the best way to air commercials that promote a new product. Here we focus on one particular aspect of this airing, namely the mood participants are incidentally in. To illustrate the manuscript's particular focus, consider the following question: Would marketers prefer to have their advertising campaign aired in the midst of a happy or sad movie scene, for instance, when Romeo and Juliet meet and instantly fall in love *versus* when Romeo and then Juliet die?

On the one hand, research suggests that airing a commercial in a positive mood context could be preferable, because positive (compared to either negative or neutral) mood triggers positive evaluative responses toward both the commercial and the advertised brand or product (for a review, see Brown, Homer, & Inman, 1998). On the other hand, mood states are known to tune the nature of processing such that negative mood induces greater message elaboration compared to either

positive or neutral mood (for a review, see Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Because high compared to low message elaboration leads to the formation of attitudes that are more accessible, more resistant, and more predictive of effective behavior (for a review, see Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995; Rucker, Petty, & Priester, 2007), evaluative responses formed in conditions of negative mood may predict related behavior well, thus increasing the commercial's behavioral effectiveness. In other words, when considering commercial processing and its behavioral outcomes rather than its declarative outcomes only (e.g. attitudes, evaluations, or intentions), airing a commercial in a negative rather than positive mood context may prove beneficial because of higher elaboration. This gap has not yet been studied even though it entails important managerial implications, since behaviors are the major level in hierarchical models of ad effectiveness (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999).

The present research aims to account for the gap between divergent findings observed at the declarative *versus* the behavioral level of ad effectiveness. To that end, we propose a conceptual framework that integrates several lines of research that focus on mechanisms implied in mood effect on ad processing and its behavioral outcomes. To capture such mechanisms, we carried out the following experimental setting: a new version of a car from an existing product line clearly associated with a favorable *vs.* unfavorable parent brand is presented *via* a TV commercial that delivers visual information about this product. This

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commercial is embedded in a TV program that elicits a positive, neutral, or negative mood state. Participants are provided with arguments in favor of the product; these arguments are weak or strong. In this context, individuals may rely on either or both of these information sources—parent brand attitude and/or product information—when evaluating the product and displaying behavior. It should be noted that this setting is different from what is generally referred to as brand extension research, since the new product explicitly belongs to an existing product line that participants know well. This setting is also not a classic instance of product line extensions, since the new product is a continuation instead of a line stretching. In addition, making both product and brand information accessible is a way to address limitations regarding the external validity of brand extension research, resulting from the fact that participants have very little information about the product (see, [Klink & Smith, 2001](#)).

We suggest that taking into account incidental mood states may help to understand when product and when brand information is relied on. In that context, we posit that beyond the nature of available information (brand- vs. product-related), what matters is the way the available information is processed. According to the mood-and-general-knowledge model ([Bless, 2000](#)), negative mood states trigger a bottom-up processing that is data-driven in the sense that it consists in a detailed examination of relevant information (such as specific product information in the present setting). Positive mood states, in contrast, trigger a top-down processing that is heuristic and schema-driven as it relies on general knowledge (such as brand attitude in the present setting). Thus, we argue that negative mood fosters attention to and elaboration of product information rather than brand information, leading to the formation of evaluative responses that are more predictive of actual behavior. As a result, and perhaps counter-intuitively, higher advertising effectiveness at the behavioral level can be expected when commercials are aired in negative mood contexts.

In what follows, we review the literature on mood and ad processing as to its behavioral outcomes, and then derive our set of hypotheses, which we test with three experiments. Study 1 uses a 3 (Program-induced mood: positive vs. neutral vs. negative) \times 2 (Brand attitude: unfavorable vs. favorable) design to address the role of mood in ad effectiveness, based on declarative measure only (advertised product evaluation). In Study 2, program-induced mood (positive vs. negative), brand attitude (unfavorable vs. favorable) and quality of arguments (weaker vs. stronger) are manipulated to investigate further mechanisms involved in ad processing and ad declarative effectiveness. Study 3 varies induced mood (positive vs. negative) and brand attitude (unfavorable vs. favorable) to focus on behavioral outcomes of commercial elaboration.

2. Theoretical background

Mood states have been defined as specific affective subjective experiences or feelings (e.g., [Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1994](#)). Compared to emotions, mood states are less intense (e.g., [Isen, 1987](#)), less salient, tend to last longer, and are not related to a specific object (e.g., [Clore & Ortony, 2000](#)). Furthermore, individuals are often unaware of the cause or the source of their mood ([Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984](#)). Mood states are incidental if caused by a source other than the judgmental target (as in our setting, where the TV program causes the mood state, but what is evaluated is the target product), or integral if emanating from the target itself (such as when the target product itself causes the mood state; e.g., [Bodenhausen, 1993](#)). Several accounts have been proposed to explain the impact of mood states in contexts that bear similarity to product launches. Here we briefly review four, including research on brand extension, since much of pertinent prior research has been conducted in this domain.

2.1. Mood and categorization processes

If a new product is *not* perceived as assigned to the brand, brand information is not relevant (e.g., [Bless & Schwarz, 2010](#)). The situation is likely different, however, when the new product is perceived as being assigned to the brand. Mood comes into play by affecting the likelihood that the new product is perceived as an exemplar of the brand. In particular, in the case of brand extension it has been shown that positive relative to neutral mood states increase the likelihood that an extension product is categorized into the brand ([Barone, Miniard, & Romeo, 2000](#)). Presumably, this is because positive mood increases the flexibility in categorization processes ([Isen & Daubman, 1984](#)). Indeed, positive mood increases the perceived similarity between the core brand and the extension product, and thus facilitates transfer of the brand attitude to the product. These effects were shown for extension products moderately similar to the brand; for very similar or dissimilar products, no bolstering effect of mood was observed ([Barone et al., 2000](#)). Moreover, these effects were observed only when brand attitude is favorable ([Barone & Miniard, 2002](#)), because positive mood does not lead to increased accessibility of information related to a negatively connoted category ([Isen, Niedenthal, & Cantor, 1992](#)). Against this background, mood likely plays a critical role *via* categorization processes when the association between the product and the brand is unclear. However, when a new product is clearly assigned to a specific brand (as in our case, since the product is not a brand extension, but falls within an existing product-line), categorization is not? evident [Hmm – should it say “not evident” here?], so that mood effects on categorization likely play a negligible role.

2.2. Mood as direct information

A second line of research has focused on how mood states directly change evaluations by serving as a source of information (e.g., [Pham, 1998](#); for a review, see [Greifeneder, Bless, & Pham, 2011](#)). Research in this tradition builds on the affect-as-information account (e.g., [Schwarz & Clore, 1983](#); for a review, see [Schwarz & Clore, 2003](#)), which holds that mood states may be relied on as a source of information in itself. For instance, when evaluating an advertised product, individuals may ask themselves “How do I feel about it?” and then rely on this feeling in evaluation. This process is inferential in nature (rather than automatic, see [Pham, 2004](#); [Schwarz, 2004](#)), and known to be moderated by several variables (for an overview, see [Greifeneder et al., 2011](#)). Perhaps most important in the present context is evaluative malleability, which holds that affect-as-information effects are more likely when judgments are evaluatively malleable, that is, when it is not necessarily clear whether something is good or bad (e.g., [Gorn, Goldberg, & Basu, 1993](#)). Consistent with this reasoning, [Gorn, Pham, and Sin \(2001\)](#), for example, observed that mood states influence the evaluation of an affectively ambiguous ad, but not the evaluation of an ad with a clearly pleasant affective tone. Malleability may further arise as a function of the amount of other information provided. For instance, [Bakamitsos \(2006\)](#) observed direct mood effects when no information about the product's attributes is provided, but not when additional product information is given. These findings have critical implications for the current set-up. Because the brand is clearly favorable or unfavorable, and because strong or weak arguments in favor of the products are available, both the brand and the product do not meet the precondition of evaluative malleability. Hence, against the background of existing theorizing and evidence, no direct effects of mood on brand or product should be observed in our context.

2.3. Mood and evaluative extremity

A third account has focused on how mood states affect the extremity of evaluations ([Adaval, 2003](#)). This account holds that individuals in a positive compared to negative mood state are more likely to elaborate

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