

## Consumers' Information Processing and Attitude Toward an Ad: The Moderating Role of a Product Type

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*Background and Purpose.* Theories of psychology of persuasion conceptualize that consumers form attitudes towards an ad based on the level of information processing through either cognitive or affective responses to ad cues (Sirgy, 1982). Marketers employ various executional cues to create an ad for their brands. The literature suggests that ad executional cues can be divided into two major categories: affect-laden and functionality-laden. Affect-laden ad cues, such as sexual sources and the attractiveness of the source, tend to appeal to consumers' hedonic needs. Functionality-laden executional cues, such as argument strength, expertise of the source, and number of rationales provided, tend to appeal to consumers' utilitarian needs. Previous studies suggest that the product type, functional or symbolic, may appeal to consumers' fundamental consumption needs and that congruence/ incongruence between ad executional cues and product type may affect consumers' level of information processing and the attitude toward an ad. Furthermore, the branding literature suggests that promotion of a brand should be based on what types of products it offers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the moderating role of product type in determining the level of consumers' information processing and attitude toward an ad for affect- versus cognition-laden ad cues.

*Theoretical Framework and Propositions.* According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the type of ad cues that consumers are likely to use in forming an attitude depends on the expected information processing route, which is either central or peripheral. Consumers follow a central route through meticulous consideration of available information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983). The central route of persuasion stimulates a decision maker's cognitive responses to integrate issue-relevant information into an overall evaluation. Consumers can follow a peripheral route- ad contents are evaluated based on surface-level characteristics rather than product related information- to attitude change to bypass the cognitive load of diligently interpreting product-related information. Given that functional products generally appeal to utilitarian needs, functionality-laden ad cues will be processed more intensively when they stimulate cognitive responses via a central route. On the other hand, as symbolic products appeal to self-expressive needs, affect-laden executional cues will be processed more intensively when they stimulate affective responses via a peripheral route.

Consumers form their attitude in two ways: (1) via attitude adjustment, which is formed based on past perceptions about an attitudinal object and (2) via value expression, which is formed due to congruence or incongruence between actual self-image and the ideal image evoked by an attitudinal object (Katz, 1960). Attitudes towards functional products are likely to be formed via attitude adjustment because of the activation of utilitarian needs (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989); therefore, consumers will form a favorable attitude towards an ad when the ad

cues are functionality-laden and the product is functional. In the same way, attitudes towards symbolic products will be formed via value expression because of the activation of a self-concept; therefore, consumers will form a favorable attitude towards an ad when the ad cues are affect-laden and the product is symbolic. Thus, the following is proposed:

*P1. The effect of ad executional cues (functionality-laden vs affect-laden) on the level of information processing will be moderated by the product type. For a functional product, consumers' information processing will be higher when the ad cues are functionality-laden (vs. affect-laden). For a symbolic product, consumers' processing will be higher when the ad cues are affect-laden (vs. functionality-laden).*

According to self-schema theory, salient self-schema for the utility of a functional product is more relevant to self-conception about the fitness-for-purpose (Cacioppo, Petty, & Sidera, 1982). Therefore, when consumers form or change attitudes toward an ad, they will find ad cues to be more persuasive when the cues are relevant to utilitarian aspects of a functional product (i.e., when congruent) than when the ad cues are relevant to self-expressive aspects of a functional product (i.e., when incongruent). In the same way, because symbolic products are more relevant to users' personality and group status, ad cues for symbolic products will be more persuasive when the cues promote self-expressiveness. Therefore, the following is proposed:

*P2. The effect of ad executional cues (functionality-laden vs affect-laden) on the attitude toward an ad will be moderated by the product type. For a functional product, the effect of functionality-laden cues on the attitude towards an ad will be stronger than that of affect-laden cues. For a symbolic product, the effect of affect-laden cues on the attitude towards an ad will be stronger than that of functionality-laden cues.*

*Implications.* The findings of this study will enhance the theoretical understanding of the moderating role of a product type on the effect of ad executional cues on level of information processing and attitude towards an ad. This research will help marketing practitioners develop a more persuasive advertising strategy depending on what type of product they are promoting and how their advertising can facilitate consumers' information processing to form more favorable attitudes towards the ad.

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