

HOW DO FIGURES OF SPEECH, CUE RELATEDNESS, AND MESSAGE INVOLVEMENT AFFECT CONSUMER ATTITUDE PERSISTENCE?

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Attitude persistence research in consumer behavior has been predominantly associated with high- rather than low-involvement processing (Jones, 2008). However, with the recognition that advertising information is often processed in low-involvement conditions, researchers have been concerned with how consumers' brand attitudes are formed initially and how these attitudes endure over time when consumers are not motivated to process an advertising message (Wang & Muehling, 2010). It has been suggested that nonverbal peripheral cues (e.g., pictures) affect information recall and attitude formation under the low-involvement condition (Ang & Lim, 2006).

Unlike past studies, in this study we were concerned about the role of verbal peripheral cues – particularly figurative advertising headlines – in attitude formation and persistence. We hypothesized that verbal peripheral cues might yield a different impact on brand attitudes both immediately and over time, because figures may invite elaboration and thereby increase cognitive activity that enhances memory (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Informed by the elaboration likelihood model, in this study we were also concerned with the role of involvement in the persuasion process, that is, the extent to which an individual is willing and able to think about the position advocated and its supporting materials. Also on the basis of the assimilation-contrast theory, we explored the role of cue relatedness in the persuasion process in terms of fit, relevance, appropriateness in an advertisement between peripheral cue, and target product.

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Participants were 158 Master of Business Administration students (M age = 25.6, male = 48%) at a university in northern China. A fictitious brand named *Blueprint* was created presented in a single print advertisement. Data were collected in two stages with an interval of one week, to measure initial and delayed attitudes. Participants were asked to either provide comments on a new product advertisement (high-involvement condition) or review the advertisement for spelling errors (low-involvement condition). Relatedness was manipulated by varying the relevance level between the headline and the target brand. Initial brand attitudes were assessed using three 7-point semantic differential scales and the delayed attitudes were measured using the three original scales and two additional 7-point Likert scales (Sengupta, Goodstein, & Boninger, 1997).

Results of an analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that delayed brand attitudes were more positive under the high-involvement condition than the low-involvement condition ($M = 2.97$ versus 2.69 , $F(1, 156) = 2.846$, $p < .05$); highly relevant headlines had a greater impact than less relevant headlines on initial ($M = 3.54$ versus 3.01 , $F(1, 156) = 8.602$, $p < .05$), and delayed attitudes ($M = 3.14$ versus 2.52 , $F(1, 156) = 15.742$, $p < .001$). In addition, the mixed-model ANOVA results indicated a significant three-way interaction between involvement, relatedness, and time of presentation ($F(1, 153) = 15.53$, $p < .001$).

The results suggest that the use of figures of speech can enhance both attitude formation and persistence; however, for our participants the enhancement of attitude persistence was limited to a high-involvement condition and a highly relevant headline. These findings suggest that figurative headlines can serve as strong arguments rather than peripheral cues in the persuasion process, and that figures help consumers employ more elaboration to process advertising messages and thereby decrease the degree of decay in attitudes over time. To deepen the understanding of attitude persistence, in future research product category and prior knowledge should be examined as covariates.

Keywords: brand attitude, figure of speech, message involvement, cue relatedness.

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