CHARACTERISTICS OF PORTRAYED EMOTIONS IN COMMERCEALs: WHEN DOES WHAT IS SHOWN IN ADS AFFECT VIEWERS?

The impact of two variables reflecting emotions portrayed in commercials are investigated. Emotional flow is investigated by examining the impact of commercials which portray a changing pattern of emotions by the characters in the commercial (dynamic ads) versus those that portray the same emotions throughout the course of the ad (static ads). Emotional integration is investigated by examining the impact of ads which show a causal connection between the advertised brand and the emotions the character experiences (high emotional integration) versus those that do not (low emotional integration). A study investigating these variables shows that both influence empathy, feeling responses, involvement in and perceived relevance of the commercial, ad attitudes, and self-brand image congruity. Furthermore, these variables combined are shown to have significant effects on the purchase intentions of two key consumer segments.

Emotional advertising is a subject of growing interest to advertising managers and researchers given its potential for increasing the effectiveness of marketing communications (Agres, Edell, and Dubitsky, 1990). Emotions portrayed by actors in ads may communicate hedonic product benefits and enhance attention to the ad. Emotional responses aroused within viewers have been found to affect consumers’ reactions to ads (Edell and Burke, 1987; Thorson and Page, 1987), enhance attention to the ad (Olney, Holbrook, and Batra, 1991), affect brand attitudes (e.g., Aaker, Stayman, and Hagerty, 1986; Edell and Burke, 1987), influence brand memories (Thorson and Page, 1987), and determine the nature and extent of brand differentiation (Holman, 1984).

Despite rapidly emerging insight into the role of emotion in advertising effectiveness, much remains to be understood about how advertising executions influence the extent of emotional processing in viewers and how they affect more “downstream” measures of advertising effectiveness like brand attitudes, brand image, and choice behavior. Indeed, a special conference on emotional advertising sponsored by the Marketing Science Institute (Yoon, 1991) highlights the need for research on emotions in advertising.

One aspect of advertising executions potentially relevant to emotional information processing concerns the nature of emotions portrayed by characters in the ad. Stout, Homer, and Liu (1990) investigated the relation-

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ship between emotions portrayed in ads and those elicited by viewers. They found that, in some cases, what was depicted in the ad also affected what viewers felt in response to the ad. Although the results of this study are intriguing, we know relatively little about what is shown affects what viewers feel and what the impact of such ad-portrayed emotions are on other aspects of advertising effectiveness.

We identify two constructs related to the portrayal of emotions in ads: emotional flow and emotional integration. Both are hypothesized to influence the nature and intensity of consumers’ emotional responses to ads. They are also hypothesized to affect involvement with the ad, brand relevance, ad attitudes, self-brand image congruity, and purchase intentions.

**Ad Portrayed Emotions**

**Emotional Flow.** Emotional flow is defined as the extent to which emotions portrayed in a commercial are perceived to change in their nature and/or intensity during the course of the commercial. We conceptualize change in emotions as following Russell’s (1980) circumplex model of emotions. This emotion theorist represents emotions in two-dimensional space, with emotions described in terms of their valence (positive versus negative) and their degree of arousal (high versus low arousal). Thus, an emotion like “pleasure” is positive and high in intensity, while “boredom” is an emotion that is moderately negative and low in intensity.

With respect to emotional flow, ads that show the characters’ emotions as changing, either going from positive to negative or negative to positive, from high arousal to low arousal or low arousal to high arousal, would represent commercials in which emotional flow is dynamic. With ads perceived as static, the emotions portrayed by actors do not change during the ad, either in their intensity or in their nature. Although we can conceptualize flow as existing on a continuum, for sake of simplicity here we classify ads as being dynamic versus static in flow.

There are several indications in the literature that perceived flow may be an important variable. First, Thorson and Friestad (1984) investigated the differential effects on recall of ads classified as emotionally neutral, positive, negative, or poignantly. Poignant ads were defined as those that contained notable changes in portrayed emotions. They found that poignant ads were rated as more emotionally intense and performed significantly better in terms of recall.

Thorson (1991) identified a variable called emotional flow which represented not what was portrayed in an ad but rather what viewers felt in response to an ad. Emotional flow was indicated by changes in the valence and intensity of emotions consumers experienced while watching a commercial. Thorson found that the intensity of consumers’ emotional responses influenced attention, ad and brand liking, and learning. However, Thorson examined evoked, not portrayed emotional flow, and her results tended to focus on intensity as opposed to flow per se.

Finally, Agres (1991) discusses having a large set of television advertisements coded for, among other things, the extent to which the presentation of emotions is “dynamic” or “static” in terms of flow. While he does not indicate the exact purpose of this coding, the fact that the coding was conducted at all suggests that the concept of emotional flow is of interest to advertising researchers.

**Emotional Integration.** Emotional integration is defined as the extent to which the ad portrays a link between the brand, on the one hand, and the emotional responses of the ad’s characters on the other. In ads for which emotional integration is high, the brand is perceived as a causal agent to the characters’ emotions in the ad. For example, an advertisement that depicts not only the brand but also clearly portrays the ad’s characters as experiencing an emotional benefit or outcome from brand use, is high in emotional integration. Emotional integration is a relatively new construct in advertising and was recently introduced to the advertising literature by MacInnis and Stayman (1993). The potential for this construct is strong, however, as MacInnis and Stayman (1993) found that commercials varied widely in the level of emotional integration they exhibited. They also found that high emotional integration influenced feeling responses, perceptions of the brand’s relevance, and brand attitudes, particularly for ads using negative appeals.

Although not discussed in MacInnis and Stayman (1993), others have developed ideas similar to the emotional integration construct. Reynolds and Rochon (1991), for example, propose that effective ads are those that draw a link between the product and the benefit it has to offer. Since emotions are often either a benefit themselves, or an outcome of experiencing a benefit, emotional integration may be one way of creating this product-benefit linkage.
The Potential Impact of Emotional Flow and Integration

We hypothesize that one way in which emotional flow and emotional integration “work” in advertising is to provide a connection between the brand and the viewer. Establishing these “bridging experiences” has long been regarded as a fundamental process underlying successful advertising (Krugman, 1967). The diagram in Figure 1 provides a schematic for representing how these experiences may be established. The schematic depicts three core elements: the brand, the ad’s characters, and the viewer.

According to the model developed here, the ultimate goal of the ad is to create strong linkages between the brand and the viewer (Krugman, 1967) (link 3 in Figure 1). Thus, the ad should convince consumers that the brand is relevant to them, should influence how good they feel about buying and using the brand (called here “self-brand” image congruity”), and should influence their predispositions toward purchasing that brand. We propose that these “ultimately effects” are facilitated by advertising which (1) creates linkages between the brand and the ad characters on the one hand (link 1 in Figure 1) and (2) creates connections between the ad

characters and the viewer on the other (link 2 in Figure 1). With respect to this schematic, we propose that perceived emotional flow and perceived emotional integration are useful in creating these linkages in several ways.

Establishing Brand/Character Linkages. First, ads that are high in emotional integration may facilitate connecting the brand with the ad characters since they explicitly depict the product as a cause of the emotions the character experiences (link 1 in Figure 1). This linkage may be further facilitated when ads are dynamic because dynamic ads may create a more dramatic emotional association between the brand and the ad’s characters. Thus, in this scheme, emotional integration and emotional flow are elements that explicitly create a link between the brand and the characters in the ad. They are thus managerially controllable tools for establishing a brand-character relationship.

However, we propose that the effects of emotional flow and integration are useful beyond the mechanical creation of this relationship. As explored below, they are also useful in stimulating or establishing the other two relationships represented in Figure 1.

Enhancing Character/Viewer Linkages. First, emotional flow and integration may influence responses that indicate a connection between the characters in the ad and the viewer (link 2 in Figure 1). Several constructs noted below may indicate this linkage.

Empathy. Empathy reflects the extent to which viewers experience the same emotional response as characters in the ad. Aaker and Stayman (1989) propose that empathy involves not only emotional (vicarious) empa-

thy but also cognitive empathy, which is seen as an “understanding of the situation of others.” To the extent that viewers in the ad both understand what the characters in the ad are feeling and vicariously take on the feelings of the characters as their own, there appears to be a clear linkage between the characters in the ad and the viewer.

While empathy may clearly indicate the existence of a linkage between the ad’s characters and the viewer, less is known about what stimulates empathic processing. We propose that empathy should be enhanced when emotional integration is high since high integration shows a causal relationship between the viewer and the product. The demonstration of this emotional relationship should thus provide greater opportunity for processing to be empathic. In addition, because dynamic ads portray a range of emotions, they are more likely to contain elements that resemble dramas (Wells, 1989; Deighton, Romer, and McQueen, 1989). Specifically, they contain a storyline and a plot which may create more opportunity for consumers to place themselves in the context of the ad and thus vicariously experience what the character experiences. Thus we expect that the greater the emotional integration and the more dynamic the emotional flow, the greater the empathy consumers experience.

Intensity of Feelings. Another indicator of a connection between the ad’s characters and the viewer (link 2 in Figure 1) reflects the intensity of feeling responses that are generated while viewing the ad. To the extent that commercials create empathy, they should induce stronger emotions than commercials for which no empathy is
Figure 1

Linkages Created in Advertising

Ad and Brand ← Characters

Viewer

Relevance affects involvement (cf. Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Involvement reflects the extent to which consumers believe the ad is interesting, attention-getting, and entertaining. As MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski (1991) point out, involvement can be affected both by executional cues that create interest and by executional elements that indicate how or whether the brand relates to the self. When an ad depicts the brand as a causal agent to the characters’ emotions, it in essence provides a demonstration of potential emotional benefits that may accrue to the user from product use. To the extent that these emotional benefits are desirable to consumers, their depiction should prompt more ad involvement.

Interestingly, emotional flow may also affect involvement in the ad, not necessarily by affecting the ad’s relevance to the self, but simply by providing executional elements that create interest. Ads that are dynamic should be more engaging than ads regarded as static and, therefore, generate more involvement in the ad. This is so since the change of emotions that characterize these ads add drama. Thus, both emotional flow and emotional integration should affect involvement in the ad (but for different reasons).

Self-Brand Image Congruity.

Another indicator of a connection between the viewer and the brand is self-brand image congruity. Self-brand image congruity is defined here as the extent to which the commercial creates the impression that the brand is right for the consumer. Self-brand image congruity is used in place of the more traditional brand attitude concept because we felt that many consumers could have a positive attitude toward a product without necessarily feeling a personal connec-
tion to that product. In many instances, what may drive purchase is not whether the brand is liked, per se, but rather whether consumers feel that the brand is right for them. Thus, we feel that self-brand image congruity is perhaps a better indicator of self-brand linkage than is brand attitude. Although ad attitudes are not necessarily an indicator of a self-brand linkage, emotional flow and integration may also affect ad attitudes as indicated below.

Thorson (1991) examined the emotional flow consumers actually experienced during exposure to a commercial. Her results showed that commercials characterized by considerable emotional flow and strong emotions produced greater ad liking than commercials low on these variables. She hypothesized that these ads produce more orienting responses and greater attention, which in turn facilitates the learning of information conveyed in the ad about the brand. Her results also showed greater memory, more favorable ad attitudes, and more favorable brand attitudes when experienced emotional flow was high and experienced emotions were intense.

Since dynamic ads are expected to create more intense and more dynamic emotional experiences in the viewer, and since the flow of emotions the viewer experiences affects learning, ad and brand attitudes (Thorson, 1991), we expect that the greater the perceived emotional flow, the more favorable are consumers’ ad attitudes and self-brand image congruity perceptions.

We propose that emotional integration also influences ad attitudes and self-brand image congruity. First, because the ad displays a link between the product and the direct emotional benefits the viewer receives from the brand, it provides consumers with greater opportunities to learn how the brand will be relevant to them and their needs. This ability to both understand the ad and understand how the brand is relevant to the self should make the ad more likable. Also, by directly drawing a linkage between a hypothetical user and the brand, the commercial should more clearly demonstrate just how and why the brand is useful to the consumer. Thus, it provides the potential for vicarious modeling (Bandura, 1982). In other words, it provides consumers with the opportunity to experience vicariously just what emotional benefits they will receive from brand usage. This should affect the level of self-brand image congruity.

**Purchase Intentions.** Emotional flow and emotional integration may also affect purchase intentions via their effects on empathy, relevance, and self-brand image congruity. First, because emotional integration explicitly demonstrates the emotional benefits that accrue from product use, and because emotional integration and dynamic flow produce empathy, self-relevance, and self-brand image congruity, these variables may induce a vicarious trial experience which helps consumers understand what usage of the product will be like. Assuming the vicarious experience is favorable, it indicates future reinforcements the consumer will receive from product use. Consistent with these ideas, Puto and Wells (1984; Puto, 1986) propose that empathy strongly influences ad persuasiveness and choice behavior by transforming the viewer’s experiences of using the product. Relatedly, Bagozzi and Moore (1994) have shown that empathy is related to consumer action.

To explore the potential effic-acy of emotional flow and emotional integration, their effects were investigated in a study described below.

**Methodology**

**Subjects.** Four hundred consumers recruited by a professional marketing research company served as respondents in this study. All were residents of the Boston, Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Portland Metropolitan areas, and each was paid $30.00 for participating in this one-hour study. All consumers were users of the product category represented by the ads. The brand represents a well-known, frequently purchased brand, although its name cannot be released for proprietary reasons. Respondents were selected to meet the demographic profile of consumers in the target market. Thus, they were between the ages of 18 and 65, had household incomes in excess of $20,000 per year, and were predominantly (75 percent) female.

**Commercials.** Nine commercials selected to represent variability on the emotional flow and emotional integration constructs were used as test commercials in this study. Since the nine commercials were for the same brand, brand and product-category effects are controlled.

To maximize data-collection efficiency, three ads each were placed on a set of nine videotapes. Ads were assigned to tapes such that (1) each ad could appear in first, second, and third order, thus controlling for order effects, and (2) each ad appeared only once on a given tape. With the exception of these two constraints, assignment of ads to tapes was random. Order effects were not observed and are not discussed further.

**Procedures.** All sessions took
place at a suburban shopping mall, with 8 to 12 consumers participating in each session. Once in the session, consumers were seated around a table from which they could see a large monitor used to show the target commercials. A moderator read instructions for the study and instructed consumers to use a hand-held dial to record their responses to items from the questionnaire. The dial automatically recorded each response to each item. Responses on the dial ranged from a low of zero to a high of one hundred. Unless otherwise indicated, then, all responses had a theoretical range from 0 to 100.

Consumers first answered a set of demographic questions, followed by a set of six questions about purchase behaviors in six unrelated product categories. Consumers were then shown a commercial for a non-test ad in a different product category to familiarize themselves with the dial-turning methodology. After they were exposed to the commercial, consumers indicated the level of empathy the commercial generated, emotional flow, and attitudes toward the ad. Because the present study focuses on feelings, and because feeling responses can be fleeting, respondents were then given the opportunity to see the ad once more. Following this second exposure, they indicated the feelings the ad evoked, and their perceptions of the ad (ad relevance, involvement, and credibility). Following these ratings, consumers indicated their intentions to purchase the target brand. Respondents were exposed to two more commercials for the same brand and answered the same questions (with the exception of the self-brand image congruity and purchase-intention questions). They were then debriefed, paid, and released. Follow-up discussions with consumers indicated they generally had no difficulty with the questions and felt comfortable using the dial-turning methodology.

**Measures. Emotional Flow.** Consumers answered two questions \( (r = .76) \) designed to indicate emotional flow: (a) “The intensity of the characters’ emotions did not change much,” and (b) “The characters showed the same types of emotions throughout the ad.”

**Emotional integration** was indicated by one of the three items used by MacInnis and Stayman (1993) to measure emotional integration. The selected item had a high item-to-total correlation in their emotional integration scale. The item read, “The thoughts and feelings of the characters seemed to be caused by the use of the advertised product.”

**Feelings and Empathy.** A battery of feeling responses asked consumers to rate the extent to which they felt sentimental, joyful, warmhearted, interested, lighthearted, excited, proud, irritable, confused, guilty, doubtful, ashamed, and sad. Consistent with previous research, a factor analysis indicated these responses represented three factors: positive feelings (i.e., joyful, warmhearted, lighthearted, proud), sad feelings, and negative feelings about the ad (e.g., irritated, doubtful, confused). Alpha reliability coefficients for the positive and negative feelings factors were .89 and .91, respectively.

A six-item empathy scale was also used to measure the degree of empathy consumers experienced while watching the ad. Indicators of cognitive empathy (i.e., “I could understand how the character felt in that situation”) and emotional empathy (i.e., “I felt the same emotions as the character”; “I felt like I was ‘right there’ in the ad”) were included (Aaker and Stayman, 1989). Similar to past research, however, the items indicating cognitive and emotional empathy were empirically inseparable. Thus, all items were combined to form a summed empathy scale (alpha = .87).

**Ad Evaluations.** Consumers indicated their evaluations of the ad by indicating the extent to which they thought the ad was involving, relevant, and credible (although no predictions were generated for credibility). Indicators of involvement included evaluations of the commercial as original and entertaining. Indicators of relevance included evaluations of the commercial as meaningful, important, and interesting. Indicators of credibility included evaluations of the commercial as convincing, phony, unbelievable, and could-happen-in-real-life. A factor analysis reduced the set of items to two factors: involvement/relevance comprising the first six items (alpha = .81) and credibility, comprising the last two items \( (r = .86) \).

**Attitude toward the ad (Aad)** was measured by consumers’ responses to the following three items: “Overall, what is your impression of this ad?”; “To what degree did you feel positively toward this ad?”; and “Overall, how well did you like this commercial?” These items formed a single summed scale (alpha = .90).

**Self-brand image congruity** was indicated by consumers’ responses to a set of four questions reflecting their perceptions of the brand. Items representing the scale (alpha = .91) included “The commercial made me feel the brand is right for me,” “The commercial gave me a good feeling about buying (this product),” and “The commercial made me feel that using (this
brand) would say something good about me.”

Purchase Intentions. The impact of the commercial on purchase intentions was assessed by a pre-post measure. Prior to ad exposure consumers indicated the number of units of the brand they had bought during a given time period. Following exposure, the number of units of the brand to be purchased in the next time period was assessed. Purchase intentions are represented by the percentage change in units in the postexposure compared to the preexposure period.

Results

Results were analyzed according to consumers’ perceptions of the ad as dynamic and their perceptions of the ad as being high versus low on emotional integration. Table 1 summarizes the results.

Consistent with expectations, ads regarded as dynamic evoked more empathy than ads regarded as static (Xs = 67.49 versus 54.19, p < .007). Also consistent with expectations, commercials for which emotional integration was high evoked more empathy than those for which emotional integration was regarded as low (Xs = 69.08 versus 61.21, p < .001). The interaction between emotional flow and emotional integration was not significant.

Also as expected, emotional flow and integration affected the extremity of consumers’ feelings from ads. Consumers experienced more intense positive feelings (X = 61.7 versus 55.90, p < .001) when emotional flow was dynamic versus static. Consumers also experienced more intense sad feelings when emotional flow was dynamic versus static (Xs = 42.6 versus 38.05, p < .016). Consumers also experienced more positive feelings when emotional integration was high versus low (Xs = 62.0 versus 55.82, p < .001). However, high versus low emotional integration did not appear to influence the extremity of sad feelings (Xs = 37.09 versus 38.92, p = .630).

In addition to influencing ad-intended feelings like (in these commercials) sadness, emotional flow and integration also seemed to influence some unintended negative feelings like irritation, doubt, and confusion. Although we had no a priori expectations about these types of feelings, the results indicated that dynamic compared to static commercials evoked fewer unintended negative feelings (Xs = 9.76 versus 14.97, p < .001). An interaction between emotional flow and emotional integration also revealed that when emotional integration was high, static ads evoked substantially more negative feelings (X = 16.69) than did dynamic ads (X = 9.03). The difference between static and dynamic ads was less when emotional integration was low (Xs = 13.40 versus 10.34). Combined, these results suggested that dynamic ads are less likely to produce unintended negative feelings from ads like irritation, confusion, and doubt than are static ads, particularly if the product is positioned as a causal agent to the actor's emotions in the ad. In contrast, such ads appear to be more capable of producing ad and brand-relevant negative emotions (in this case sadness).

We expected that involvement with the ad would increase as a function of the level of emotional flow and that relevance would increase as a function of

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the level of emotional integration. Since items indicating relevance and involvement loaded on the same factor, items indicating the combined relevance/ involvement scale are reported here. The results indicated that dynamic commercials generated more involvement/relevance than did static commercials \( (X_s = 73.24 \text{ versus } 67.02, p < .001) \). Also, commercials for which emotional integration was regarded as high generated stronger involvement/relevance than did commercials for which integration was regarded as low \( (X_s = 70.33 \text{ versus } 64.04, p < .001) \). There was no significant interaction between flow and integration.

We also expected that ad attitudes and self-brand image congruity would be enhanced when emotional integration was high (versus low) and when emotional flow was dynamic (versus static). Consistent with expectations, significant main effects were found for both independent variables. When emotional flow was dynamic, ads generated more favorable ad attitudes \( (X_s = 78.05 \text{ versus } 70.46, p < .001) \) and stronger self-brand image congruity \( (X_s = 65.09, 62.10, p < .027) \) than when emotional flow was static. Furthermore, the commercials also evoked more favorable ad attitudes \( (X_s = 73.53 \text{ versus } 67.65, p < .001) \) and greater self-brand image congruity \( (X_s = 65.10 \text{ versus } 59.63, p < .001) \) when emotional integration was high versus low.

Finally, we proposed that purchase intentions would be affected by emotional integration and flow. The results for purchase intentions, however, revealed only a directionally consistent effect. Consumers reported greater likelihood of purchasing the brand when emotional integration was high versus low \( (X_s = .46 \text{ versus } 08, p < .075) \). However, there was no significant effect of flow on purchase intentions. The interaction between flow and integration approached significance \( (p < .10) \).

Although the effects of flow and integration on purchase intentions were not significant, exploratory analyses were conducted to determine whether the effect of these variables operated differently on various usage segments of consumers. The sample of consumers was therefore divided into one of four groups defined on the basis of prior brand loyalty (high versus low) and prior category usage (high versus low). This classification yields four loyalty/usage segments. The low loyal/low usage segment is managerially the most difficult segment and in many cases is regarded as that with the least potential. Fewer advertising dollars may therefore be spent targeting this group. The loyal/high usage segment is that group for which few advertising dollars may also be spent given that loyalty and usage are already high. Thus, the two key target segments are the low loyalty/high usage segment and the high loyalty/low usage segment. The objective for the former is to increase loyalty. The objective for the latter is to increase usage.

The effects of emotional flow and integration on purchase intentions for consumers in the low loyalty/low usage segment were not significant. Nor were the effects of emotional flow and integration on purchase intentions for consumers in the high loyalty/low usage segment significant.

Among consumers in the low loyalty/high usage segment, the results revealed a significant interaction between emotional flow and emotional integration \( (p < .05) \). The pattern of means indicated that changes in intentions were greatest when commercials were dynamic and emotional integration was high (18 percent change), compared to the other three conditions (percent change = 9, 8, and 5.5 for static/high integration, static/low integration, and dynamic/low integration, respectively).

Among consumers in the high loyalty/low usage segment, the results also revealed a significant interaction between flow and integration \( (p < .01) \). The results indicated that, as with the previous case, changes in purchase intentions were greatest when ads were dynamic and emotional integration was high (percent change = 12). Notably, when ads were dynamic and emotional integration was low, consumers were less likely to report desires to purchase the advertised brand (percent change = -9.5). For this low-usage segment then, it is not sufficient to use a commercial for which flow is dynamic. A dynamic flow should be combined with high emotional integration. One reason for this effect is that although a dynamic ad was found to increase this segment of consumers’ involvement in the ad, exposure to an involving ad that shows little of the product may distract consumers' attention and thoughts from the product to other factors and thus reduce the efficacy of the commercial as a whole.

Discussion

Combined, the results suggest a clear superiority to ads regarded as dynamic versus static in nature and those for which emotional integration is high versus low. Such ads seem to create greater linkages between the viewer and the consumer—creating more empathy and
more intense feelings from the ad. They are also associated with less negative feelings about the ad—feelings that are unintended by the advertiser. Such ads also appear to enhance linkages between the viewer and the product. They create more favorable evaluations of the ad as relevant/involving, create greater liking for the ad, and create a better sense of congruence between the brand and the self.

The effects of emotional flow and integration on feelings, relevance/involvement, ad liking, and self-brand image congruity may drive purchase intentions, but the effect of emotional flow and emotional integration on purchase intentions seems to vary by consumer segment. These advertising variables seem to have little impact on intentions for consumers in the least-promising segment (low loyalty/low usage) or those consumers in the segment that is currently most profitable (high loyalty/high usage). Instead, they seem to create differential effects on the two segments with the greatest leverage capabilities—the low loyalty/high usage and high loyalty/low usage segments. These results are promising since they indicate potential behavioral effects of advertising on segments for which leverage is most substantial.

While emotional flow appears particularly important in creating empathy, feelings, and ad likability, the interactions reported in Table 1 suggest that when emotional integration is low and ads are dynamic, the increase in involvement and likability due to dynamic emotional flow may detract from purchase intentions. In terms of attributions, dynamic ads may make the viewered-in interested in the cause of the character’s actions and emotions, but in the absence of salient cues about the product’s causal role (low emotional integration), this enhanced curiosity is effectively wasted on attributions related to other cues.

The underlying theory of expectancy theory is that humans have (typically positive) emotional or hedonic end states and goals which serve to guide their choices among possible behaviors. Assuming that this includes decisions regarding the purchase and use of different brands and categories of products, we would expect that ads in which characters display such desired emotions, seemingly as a result of their interactions with the product (high integration), should be more relevant to the viewer. That is, the motivation to process information about the brand should be enhanced. Furthermore, because this brand information is, by definition, so intertwined with the character-related executional aspects of high emotional integration ads, involvement and hence empathy should be strengthened. This would explain the empirical inseparability of items for involvement and relevance.)

Emotional flow and integrations may “work” through their intervening effect on several of the variables examined here. Although examining the causal relationships among the dependent variables investigated here is beyond the scope of this work, future work might model the variables that intervene between commercials that vary on emotional flow and integration, on the one hand, and self-brand image congruity or purchase intentions on the other.

The results of this study suggest future work on the independent and joint effects of emotional flow and integration. Although further replication with additional brands, commercials, measures, and consumers is warranted, the results of this study are sufficiently encouraging to warrant further exploration of how these and other variables relevant to portrayed emotions in advertising affect emotional information processing, and influence the connections between the brand, the characters in the ad, and the viewer.

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References


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