GOAL–ORIENTED AD DESIGN:
AN INVESTIGATION OF MESSAGE TYPE
AND CONSUMPTION GOAL CONGRUENCE

We examine whether the use of consumption goal congruent messages in advertising leads to increased communication effectiveness. Consumption goal congruent messages resulted in more favorable attitudes toward the ad and brand than goal incongruent messages for products associated with utilitarian consumption goals, but not for products associated with hedonic consumption goals. The latter result is driven by differences in product knowledge.

Consumption Goals in Message Design

The design of messages to communicate about certain aspects of the product (e.g., promotion of one or more attributes of the product) is of natural interest to marketers. In the current research, we argue that ad messages can be designed to be more effective by making reference to hedonic or utilitarian consumption goals associated with products. We empirically test the link between hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals and consumer attitudes, and demonstrate that according to the functional view of attitudes (e.g., Katz, 1960) persuasion attempts related to goal attainment lead to more favorable attitudes than persuasion attempts not invoking consumption goals related to the product category.

Hedonic and Utilitarian Consumption Goals

The view of consumption as goal–oriented behavior is well-established. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), for example, suggest that consumption goals comprise derivation of utilitarian product benefits, as well as multi–sensory and emotive aspects of consumption (see also Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Products are relevant to consumers’ striving for goal attainment in two ways: (1) in terms of their instrumental or utilitarian performance (i.e., performance of useful function) and/or (2) in terms of their hedonic or aesthetic performance (i.e., pleasure derived from the product; Mano & Oliver, 1993). These consumption goals shape consumers’ attitudes towards different product categories. Extant literature suggests that consumers’ attitudes toward products indeed have a two-dimensional structure, comprising a hedonic as well as a utilitarian component (e.g., Batra & Ahtola, 1990). We suggest that a particular product or brand associated mostly with hedonic consumption goals (e.g., videogames, music CD’s) is reflected in a strong underlying hedonic attitude dimension. Likewise, a product used for predominantly utilitarian purposes (e.g., microwave ovens) should be represented by a strong utilitarian attitude dimension. Although this link between consumption goals and attitude
structure is intuitive and has been strongly indicated in previous literature, it is yet to be empirically tested. We thus hypothesize:

H1: Consumption goals are related to dimensions of consumer attitudes toward products: (a) Utilitarian consumption goals are associated more strongly with the utilitarian rather than hedonic dimension of attitudes, and (b) hedonic consumption goals are associated more strongly with the hedonic rather than utilitarian dimension of attitudes.

Overall, extant literature in marketing indicates that there is a strong link between consumption goals and consumer attitudes. This suggests that consumption goals may be a useful, yet to date not widely explored, avenue for attitude change.

Message Congruence Effects

Given the importance of attitudes in influencing behavioral intentions and actual behaviors (Ajzen, 2001), the effectiveness of various advertising message characteristics in influencing attitudes has been widely investigated. While extant literature has focused on attitude basis–message congruence effects (e.g., Drolet & Aaker, 2002; Dubé, Chattopadhyay, & Letarte, 1996), consumption goals have not been considered as a basis of a congruence effect.

In previous research, a match between advertising message and attitude basis is based on the assumption that attitudes can be cognition or affect based (e.g., Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994; Edwards, 1990; Zajone & Markus, 1982). Edwards (1990) argues that matching affect based attitudes with affective messages, and cognition based attitudes with cognitive messages would result in greater attitude change due to primacy effects, such that individuals process information biased in the direction of preexisting attitudes. She found support for an attitude basis–message type congruence effect for affect based, but not for cognition based attitudes (see also Fabrigar and Petty, 1999 and Drolet and Aaker, 2002). A different perspective was taken by Millar and Millar (1990) who hypothesized that congruence between attitude basis and message type would result in less attitude change. These authors suggest that congruence of attitude base and message type challenges the way an individual thinks about the attitude object, and thus results in counter-argumentation and less attitude change. If message type and attitude base are incongruent, however, the message does not threaten the initial attitude towards the target and results in less counter-argumentation and greater attitude change. Millar and Millar (1990) found support for the incongruence effect with both affect based and cognition based attitudes.

Overall, empirical findings regarding attitude change as a function of attitude basis–message type congruence are mixed. This is ascribed to various factors, such as differences in dimensionality of cognitive and affective attitude bases (Edwards, 1990) or whether cognitive messages actually targeted the specific cognitive attitude base (Drolet & Aaker, 2002). Extant research thus suggests that cognitive/affective attitude basis–message type congruence effects are either contingent on a number of other factors that cannot easily be determined and controlled in practice (e.g., salient dimensions of cognitive attitudes toward a specific product) or that such a congruence effect is still very much in doubt (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). For these reasons, application of attitude basis–message type congruence in marketing is difficult and therefore not widespread (Dubé et al., 1996).

We propose an alternative conceptualization of congruence effects in advertising with a focus on hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals. Depending on the consumption goals associated with a product or brand, attitudes can vary along two dimensions: hedonic and utilitarian. In other words, consumption goals affect consumers’ attitudes toward products in that they influence whether these attitudes are highly (or not at all) hedonic or utilitarian. We propose that matching an advertising message with consumption goals associated with a product has a positive effect on attitudes. Such a congruence effect is expected for the following reasons:

First, a message congruent with a consumption goal should make the underlying attitude dimension (i.e., hedonic, utilitarian) related to that goal more accessible than an incongruent message. Hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of attitudes are based on individuals’ motivation to attain a hedonic
or utilitarian goal through consumption. They thus serve what Katz (1960) describes as adjustment function of attitudes, “formed toward specific objects, people, and symbols as they satisfy specific needs” (p.164). He states that attitude objects that are closely linked to need satisfaction would be more likely to evoke positive attitudes. This would suggest that increasing the accessibility of the underlying attitude dimension by clearly establishing a link between product and attainment of a consumption goal in messages should affect attitudes positively. A second reason to expect a goal congruence effect is that goal congruent messages support the adjustment function of underlying attitudinal dimensions, and provide confirming evidence. A consumption goal congruent message thus does not threaten the underlying attitude dimension and is therefore unlikely to create less favorable attitudes due to reactance and counter-arguing (cf. Millar & Millar, 1990). Based on this line of reasoning, we propose that:

H2: Advertising messages congruent with the consumption goal associated with a product category will result in (a) more favorable attitudes toward the ad and (b) more favorable attitudes toward the brand than messages incongruent with the consumption goal.

Method

Study 1

Seventy-three undergraduate business students rated two product categories in terms of the consumption goal associated with each. Based on prior research (Voss et al., 2003), we used alkaline batteries to represent a product category associated with utilitarian consumption goals and videogame consoles to represent a product category associated with hedonic consumption goals. Consumption goals were measured using 9–point Likert-type scales (Cronbach’s α’s = .77 and .95, for utilitarian and hedonic, respectively). Each goal measure included 3 items (e.g., utilitarian: “I use [product] for functional purposes,” and hedonic: “My main reason to use a [product] is enjoyment”).

A MANOVA indicated a significant effect of product category on consumption goals (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian). Alkaline batteries were more strongly associated with utilitarian consumption goals than videogame consoles ($M_{\text{alkaline batteries}} = 7.54$, $M_{\text{videogame consoles}} = 2.99$, $F(1,145) = 318.03$, $p < .001$), while hedonic consumption goals were significantly more prevalent for videogame consoles ($M_{\text{alkaline batteries}} = 4.44$, $M_{\text{videogame consoles}} = 7.95$, $F(1,145) = 136.65$, $p < .001$). Additional analyses revealed that videogame consoles were more strongly associated with hedonic as opposed to utilitarian consumption goals ($t(72) = 20.86$, $p < .000$), while alkaline batteries were perceived to be more strongly related to utilitarian than hedonic consumption goals ($t(72) = -9.31$, $p < .000$).

To prevent demand artifacts, we used an independent sample from the same population to rate the same product categories on hedonic and utilitarian attitude dimensions. Seventy-eight undergraduate business students rated the two product categories (videogames and alkaline batteries; product order counterbalanced) on the HED/UT scale (Voss, et al., 2003), on 9–point scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$). For both of the products, significant differences emerged in terms of the underlying attitude dimensions. For videogames, the underlying attitude dimension was hedonic rather than utilitarian ($M_{\text{attitude-hedonic}} = 6.54$, $M_{\text{attitude-utilitarian}} = 4.67$, $t(77) = 11.80$, $p < .001$). For alkaline batteries, on the other hand, the underlying attitude dimension was significantly more utilitarian than hedonic ($M_{\text{attitude-hedonic}} = 3.91$, $M_{\text{attitude-utilitarian}} = 8.03$, $t(77) = -18.29$, $p < .001$). In support of hypothesis 1, these findings strongly indicate that the underlying dimensions of consumer attitudes are aligned with hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals.

Pretest to Study 2

Prior to Study 2, a pretest was designed to verify the congruence of created ad messages with consumption goals. Sixty-one undergraduate business students participated in this pretest. The ads pertained to Duracell alkaline batteries (utilitarian consumption goal) and Xbox videogame consoles.
(hedonic consumption goal). Consumption goal (hedonic, utilitarian) was included as a within-subjects factor. Participants viewed one consumption goal congruent and one consumption goal incongruent message. A goal congruent message was a utilitarian message for alkaline batteries (Duracell: “Lasts 25% longer than others. It’s so easy to choose your battery”) and hedonic message for videogame console (Xbox: “Don’t let the explosive graphics scare you – just enjoy the game”). A goal-incongruent message was a hedonic message for alkaline batteries (Duracell: “Music. Pictures. Games. Have fun using batteries”) and a utilitarian message for videogame console (Xbox: “Put an end to “Game Over” – with three years of warranty”). The messages were presented with a picture of the product that was held constant across message conditions. Consumption goal/message order was completely randomized. After viewing the ad, participants completed scales measuring the extent to which the ad focused on utilitarian consumption goals (“This ad highlights the performance of the product.”) and hedonic consumption goals (“This ad emphasizes having fun with the product.”), as well as a two-item measure of ad believability (unconvincing/convincing, unbelievable/believable; Cronbach’s α = .77). All scales were measured on nine points.

For alkaline batteries, a MANOVA revealed a significant effect of ad message on perceptions of consumption goals associated with the ad (F(4, 56) = 14.01, p = .000). This effect was also significant at the univariate level for both of the dependent variables: hedonic and utilitarian goal measures (p < .001). For the videogame console, a MANOVA resulted in a significant effect of ad message on perceptions of consumption goal associated with the ad (F(4, 56) = 4.39, p = .004). At the univariate level, the hedonic message resulted in a higher level of association with hedonic consumption goals (p < .001) as expected with this product category. There was no significant difference in the level of utilitarian consumption goals evoked by either message (p = .65). For both products, there was no significant effect of message on ad believability (p ≥ .31). Overall, the messages were effective in conveying hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals. The ads examined in this pretest therefore served as manipulations of consumption goal congruence in study 2.

**Study 2**

The purpose of this study was to test hypothesis 2, suggesting that advertising messages congruent with the consumption goal associated will result in more favorable attitudes than incongruent messages. A total of 117 undergraduate students participated in this study. Consumption goal associated with the product category (utilitarian: alkaline batteries, hedonic: videogame console) and ad message (congruent, incongruent) were included as between-subjects factors. The experimental stimuli included the ad messages verified in the pretest, pictures of the products, and three pieces of product-related information (e.g., for the videogame console: wireless controller system, Ethernet port, over 100 games available).

Participants were first asked to respond to a number of questions which included the pre-exposure brand attitude measure presented with attitude measures for four unrelated product categories. Next, participants were presented with two independent filler tasks before being exposed to the ad manipulation. Then, participants completed following measures: attitude towards the ad (negative/positive, dislike/like, bad/good, undesirable.desirable; Cronbach’s α = .94), ad believability (Cronbach’s α = .83), attitude toward the brand (negative/positive, dislike/like, bad/good, undesirable.desirable; Cronbach’s α = .94), product knowledge (Smith and Park 1992; Cronbach’s α = .88), and demographics (gender, age, etc.).

It was hypothesized that ad messages that are congruent with the consumption goal of the product category will result in more favorable attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand. The data was analyzed separately for products associated with utilitarian and hedonic consumption goals (see Table 1). The first set of results pertains to attitude toward the ad. For alkaline batteries, there was directional support based on the results of an ANOVA (F(1, 59) = 2.72, p = .10). Planned contrasts indicate that attitude toward the ad was significantly higher when the ad message was goal congruent than when it was incongruent (t(59) = 1.65, p = .05, one-tailed test). For the videogame console, there
was no significant effect of goal congruence of the ad message on attitude toward the ad \((F(1, 59) = .27, p = .60)\).

**Table 1**

**Study 2 Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Nature of Ad Message</th>
<th>Consumption Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Utilitarian (Alkaline batteries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the Advertisement</td>
<td>Congruent</td>
<td>6.40 (1.92)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incongruent</td>
<td>5.56 (2.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the Brand</td>
<td>Congruent</td>
<td>6.80 (1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incongruent</td>
<td>6.41 (1.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Cell entries are mean attitude, standard deviation, and cell size.

The second variable of interest in this study is attitude toward the brand. Goal congruent ad messages are expected to result in more favorable attitudes toward the brand. For alkaline batteries, the effect of goal congruence of ad message on brand attitudes was not significant at \(p < .05\). However, there was directional support, such that a goal congruent (i.e., utilitarian) ad message resulted in a more favorable attitude toward the brand than a goal incongruent (i.e., hedonic) ad message \((F(1, 57) = 2.78, p = .10)\). Planned contrasts involving difference scores indicate that attitude toward the brand was significantly more favorable when the ad message was goal congruent than when it was incongruent \((t(57) = 1.72, p < .05, \text{one
d-sided test})\). For the videogame console, goal congruence of the ad message did not have a significant effect on attitude toward the brand \((F(1, 51) = .18, p = .68)\). In sum, hypotheses 2a and 2b were only supported for alkaline batteries: While goal congruence of the ad message led to more favorable attitudes toward the ad and the brand for the product associated with utilitarian consumption goals (i.e., alkaline batteries), no significant effect of goal congruence of the ad message on attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand emerged for the product associated with hedonic consumption goals (i.e., videogame console).

To better understand the nature of these results, we examined product knowledge concerning alkaline batteries and videogame consoles. There was a significant difference in the level of product knowledge for these product categories \((M_{\text{alkaline batteries}} = 5.84, M_{\text{videogame console}} = 4.76, t(115) = 2.70, p = .004)\).

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Supplementary Analysis 1: While attitude toward the brand was the focal dependent variable, attitude toward the brand prior to exposure to the ad manipulation was included as a covariate. An alternative analysis of the difference scores of attitude toward the brand (post exposure – pre exposure attitudes toward the brand) yielded similar results for both products: Goal congruence of ad message had a positive impact on difference scores for alkaline batteries \((F(1, 59) = 2.97, p = .09)\), no significant effect of goal congruence was observed for the videogame console \((F(1, 51) = .04, p = .84)\).
This difference is not surprising, but may have affected the impact of consumption goal congruent messages. An ANOVA was conducted for both alkaline batteries and the videogame console with nature of message (congruent and incongruent) and product knowledge (low and high, after median split) as between-subjects factors, and attitude toward the ad as dependent variable. This analysis revealed a significant effect of message on attitude toward the ad for alkaline batteries \( (p = .02) \), while level of product knowledge and the message × product knowledge interaction were non-significant. For the videogame console, the message × product knowledge interaction was significant \( (p = .007) \): For participants high in product knowledge, the goal congruent (i.e., hedonic) message resulted in more positive attitudes toward the ad \( (M_{\text{low knowledge}} = 4.13, M_{\text{high knowledge}} = 5.45, t(30) = -2.04, p = .05) \), whereas for participants with low product knowledge, this effect did not hold. Directionally, incongruent message (i.e., utilitarian) seems to result in more positive attitudes toward the ad \( (M_{\text{low knowledge}} = 5.75, M_{\text{high knowledge}} = 4.44) \), yet this effect was not significant at \( p < .05 \). Although we observed a similar pattern of means with attitude toward the ad as the dependent variable in both product categories, the interaction effects were not significant (all \( p ' s \geq .14 \)).

The message × product knowledge interaction suggests that a consumption goal congruent ad message may be more meaningful and thus have more impact on individuals with a higher level of product knowledge, who are more familiar with the consumption goal associated with a product. As a result the attitude dimension related to the consumption goal is more pronounced. When presented with a consumption goal congruent message, the corresponding attitude dimension is made more accessible and attitude is more affected by consumption goal congruent messages. Low knowledge consumers, on the other hand, are less familiar with the consumption goal associated with the product. Consequently, the attitude dimension associated with the consumption goal may not be very pronounced. When presented with a consumption goal congruent message, the corresponding attitude dimension is not accessible and attitude is, thus, not affected by consumption goal congruent messages.

The lack of a message × product knowledge interaction with batteries can be attributed to the observed high level of knowledge in this product category: Despite a significant difference in knowledge between low and high knowledge groups \( (M_{\text{low knowledge}} = 4.89, M_{\text{high knowledge}} = 7.15, p < .001) \), the low knowledge group still had a mean close to the midpoint of the scale. With videogames on the other hand, the low and high knowledge groups displayed a greater difference in knowledge \( (M_{\text{low knowledge}} = 2.47, M_{\text{high knowledge}} = 6.89, p < .001) \).

**Conclusion and Implications**

This research examines whether the use of consumption goal congruent messages in advertising leads to increased communication effectiveness. We first established that consumption goals (i.e., hedonic versus utilitarian) can be tied to dimensions underlying consumers’ attitude toward certain product categories (Study 1). Our results suggest that the use of consumption goal congruent ad messages resulted in more favorable attitudes toward the ad and the brand than the use of goal incongruent ad messages for the product associated with utilitarian consumption goals (Study 2). For the product associated with hedonic consumption goals, this result was obtained only for consumers high in product knowledge. The goal congruent messages did not have an effect on attitude toward the brand.

The focus of the current research was on one product category associated with utilitarian and one category associated with hedonic consumption goals (alkaline batteries and videogame consoles). The choice of the hedonic and the utilitarian product used in this research was based on prior research (Voss et al., 2003) which resulted in selection of products from different price categories. In future research, matching product categories in terms of price should be an additional criterion in selection of the products to control for involvement. Generalization of our results would require a replication of the studies involving a greater range of products. Although we focus on hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals separately, consumers may purchase a given product to satisfy both hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals. A future study that focuses on consumer-specific consumption goals and
customization of ads to individual level goals may address this limitation. Finally, in future research the impact of product knowledge and familiarity with the brand on message-goal congruence can be examined in greater detail. To that effect, product knowledge can be experimentally manipulated.

In terms of managerial implications, findings suggest that consumption goals are strongly linked to dimensions of consumers’ attitudes towards products. This implies that consumption goals can easily be determined by measuring the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of consumers’ attitudes with readily available scales (e.g., Voss et al., 2003). Second, our findings suggest that advertising can be designed more effectively by employing consumption goal congruent messages. Compared to approaches introduced in extant literature (i.e. attitude basis-message congruence), the appeal of such a strategy is that it is relatively easier to establish what the consumption goals associated with products are. As such, the implementation of consumption goal congruent ad messages is more practical and less complicated than other approaches discussed in extant literature.

References


