THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO, COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Working Paper SERIES

WP # 0022MKT-448-2013

Date April 11, 2013

GETTING CONSUMERS TO GENERATE THEIR OWN AD CONTENT: THE IMPACT OF IMAGINE INSTRUCTIONS ON PERSUASION

David H. Silvera
Associate Professor
Department of Marketing
University of Texas at San Antonio

Frank R. Kardes
Department of Marketing
Carl H. Lindner College of Business
The University of Cincinnati

Bruce E. Pfeiffer
Department of Marketing
Whittemore School of Business and Economics
University of New Hampshire

Ashley Rae Arsena
Doctoral Student
University of Texas at San Antonio

R. Justin Goss
Department of Marketing
University of Texas at San Antonio

UTSA COLLEGE OF BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE FOR A NEW WORLD

ONE UTSA CIRCLE
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78249-0631
210 458-4317 | BUSINESS.UTSA.EDU

GETTING CONSUMERS TO GENERATE THEIR OWN AD CONTENT: THE IMPACT OF IMAGINE INSTRUCTIONS ON PERSUASION

David H. Silvera
Associate Professor
Department of Marketing
University of Texas at San Antonio
One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249 USA
david.silvera@utsa.edu
Tel: 1-210-458-6644; Fax: 1-210-458-6335

Frank R. Kardes
Professor
Department of Marketing
Carl H. Lindner College of Business
The University of Cincinnati
2925 Campus Green Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45221 USA
Frank.Kardes@uc.edu
Tel: 1-513-556-7107; Fax: 1-513-556-4891

Bruce E. Pfeiffer
Assistant Professor
Department of Marketing
Whittemore School of Business and Economics
University of New Hampshire
15 Academic Way, Durham, NH 03824 USA
Bruce.Pfeiffer@unh.edu
Tel: 1-603-862-0868; Fax: 1-603-862-3383

Ashley Rae Arsena
Doctoral Student
Department of Marketing
University of Texas at San Antonio
One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249 USA
ashley.arsena@gmail.com
Tel: 1-210-458-7310; Fax: 1-210-458-6335

R. Justin Goss
Department of Marketing
University of Texas at San Antonio
One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249 USA
justin.goss@utsa.edu.
Tel: 1-210-458-7310; Fax: 1-210-458-6335

Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by a grant from the College of Business at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Abstract

Some recent advertisements have used the technique of directly asking consumers to imagine arguments supporting the ad's message. Three studies examined conditions under which this imagine technique effectively persuades consumers. Imagine instructions were shown to be effective on consumers with low promotion focus (Study 1), consumers with high need for cognitive closure (Study 2), or consumers whose current mindset facilitates abstract (vs. concrete) reasoning (Study 3). These results are consistent with the possibility that the imagine technique works best when it can enhance the motivation level of otherwise unmotivated consumers.

JEL Code: M31

Keywords: regulatory focus, need for cognitive closure, construal level, self-generated arguments, implicit vs. explicit arguments

GETTING CONSUMERS TO GENERATE THEIR OWN AD CONTENT: THE IMPACT OF IMAGINE INSTRUCTIONS ON PERSUASION

In 1998, the state of Florida launched an expansive anti-smoking advertising campaign focused on bringing out some of the negative information underlying the success of the tobacco industry. Many of the early ads in this campaign, referred to as *The Truth*, revealed a few specific facts about cigarettes or the tobacco industry (e.g., many cigarettes contain geraniol, which is also an active ingredient in some pesticides), then asked viewers to "imagine" other negative information the tobacco industry might be hiding. Although there is evidence indicating that The Truth campaign produced positive outcomes (e.g., reduced smoking among teens; Farrelly et al. 2005), research has yet to examine the question of whether the "imagine" strategy used in The Truth ads is a generally effective persuasion technique. The present paper seeks to answer that question, and to identify target populations for which this strategy is more or less likely to work.

Explicit versus Implicit Conclusions

The unique feature of the imagine strategy is that, rather than the conventional approach of providing arguments in the ad (explicit), the imagine strategy takes the more indirect approach of providing partial arguments in the ad and asking consumers to generate additional supporting arguments for themselves (implicit). Previous research examining the effectiveness of explicit vs. implicit arguments does not bode well for this strategy. Early research in this area indicates that messages are more persuasive when presented explicitly rather than implicitly (e.g., Hovland and Mandell 1952). However, more recent research suggests that the relative effectiveness of explicit and implicit arguments depends on consumer motivation. When consumers are unmotivated and

unlikely to engage in the cognitive effort required to generate their own conclusions, explicit arguments are more effective; conversely, highly motivated consumers are more likely to draw their own conclusions and are thus more influenced by implicit arguments (Kardes 1988; Sawyer and Howard 1991). Unfortunately, even this outcome is problematic for the imagine strategy. Because research suggests that consumers in realistic ad exposure settings are typically low in motivation and involvement (Wanke et al. 1997), the imagine strategy should be ineffective for most consumers.

An important consideration with respect to previous research on explicit vs. implicit arguments, however, is that the implicit arguments in these experiments typically provided only a partial argument, leaving the consumer to decide whether to pursue that argument further. The imagine strategy has a potential advantage relative to this type of implicit argument because it directly asks consumers to generate additional information supporting the ad argument. At least one study suggests that this might be an important advantage. Linder and Worchel (1970) presented their subjects with a series of seven sequential logical arguments leading toward the target conclusion that cigarettes cause cancer. Depending on the experimental condition, participants were presented with between one and five of the arguments then asked to generate the remainder of the arguments on their own. Results indicated that the more arguments subjects generated for themselves, the more they accepted the target conclusion. Although this research procedure is considerably different from real-world ad exposure because the experimenters provided corrected versions of any erroneous participant-generated arguments, it nevertheless provides evidence consistent with the possibility that directed generation of implicit arguments can be an effective persuasion strategy.

The Power of Self-persuasion

Assuming that consumers do engage with the advertising message and generate their own supporting arguments, several research streams support the proposition that self-generated arguments should increase persuasion. First, because the consumer is the source of the argument, there is less reason to doubt the credibility or motivations of the source (e.g., Walster and Festinger 1962). Second, both the elaboration likelihood model (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983) and the heuristic systematic model (Chaiken 1980) of persuasion suggest that increased thinking about an advertising message should increase advertising effectiveness by generating stronger ad-consistent attitudes. For example, Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) found that deep processing of an advertising message resulted in increased attitude strength and persistence of attitudes over time relative to shallow processing. Pictures, concrete information, and personal relevance have all been shown to increase processing depth and thus to increase persuasive impact and attitude strength for advertising messages (Haugtvedt and Strathman 1990). It seems reasonable to expect that imagine instructions might influence advertising effectiveness in a similar way – such instructions should increase processing depth and thus produce stronger attitudes consistent with the advertising message.

Third, research indicates that memory performance is better when people are asked to actively think on their own (self-generated information) than when information is simply presented to them (externally presented information; Slamecka and Graf 1978). Advertising applications of this phenomenon include MacLachlan and Jalan's (1985) finding that memory performance was better for partial ads or for complete ads preceded by question prompts than for complete ads without prompts, and Reardon and Moore's

(1996) finding that brand names were recalled better for audio ads that prompted consumers to actively produce brand name information (e.g., "what was that camera brand again?") rather than simply providing the brand name.

Fourth, the improved memory that results from self-generated information should lead to more favorable evaluations of the advertised product. Hovland, Janis, and Kelly's (1953) classic work in the field of persuasion was based on this very premise, namely that attitudes are formed based on memorable arguments. This underlying premise that memory directly influences judgment has been challenged by research arguing that some judgments are memory-based but other judgments are made online independent from memory (Hastie and Park 1986). To the extent that even some judgments are memory-based, however, we should expect a positive overall association between memory and evaluations. Further, research indicates that even online judgments are at least sometimes influenced by memory (e.g., Hastie and Pennington 1989; Moser 1992).

Finally, research examining the impact of subjective ease of recall on judgments (e.g., Schwarz et al. 1991; Schwarz 2004) indirectly suggests that self-generated arguments should be effective. In this research, participants are typically asked to generate few or many behavioral examples (e.g., times when you behaved assertively) or attitude-supporting arguments (e.g., positive characteristics of BMWs). Evaluations of the target behavior or attitude are typically more positive when few rather than many pieces of information are generated. The authors provide a subjective ease of processing explanation. Generating few pieces of supportive information is easy and the subjective feeling of ease is a metacognitive cue that supports the attitude (e.g., it was easy to generate positive characteristics of BMWs, so they must be good cars). Conversely, the

subjective feeling of difficulty associated with generating many pieces of information is a metacognitive cue that opposes the attitude. Consistent with this reasoning, previous research has shown that consumers' product preferences decreased when they generated more positive attributes of the product (e.g., Menon and Raghubir 2003). Similarly, consumers tend to defer choice when they generate more reasons for making a choice (e.g., Novemsky, Dhar, Simonson, and Schwarz 2004).

Based on this research, the logical conclusion is that ads prompting consumers to generate their own arguments should be successful to the extent that consumers perceive the task of imagining supporting arguments as easy (Wänke et al. 1997; Petrova and Cialdini 2005). In most of this research (e.g., Schwarz et al. 1991; Schwarz 2004), ease is manipulated by explicitly asking participants to generate a small (easy) or large (difficult) set of examples. The imagine technique differs from this approach in that it encourages open-ended generation of supporting information rather than asking for a specific number of supporting arguments. Therefore, an important question for the imagine technique is what happens when consumers generate as many examples as they want? Research suggests that people terminate open-ended memory search when various indicators of difficulty (e.g., time since the last item was retrieved, number of retrieval failures) exceed some threshold (Rundus 1973; Young 2004; Raaijmakers and Shiffrin 1981). Wänke et al (1997) argue that in realistic ad exposure settings consumers typically set these "difficulty" thresholds very low in order to avoid having to devote substantial attention and effort to processing ad content. In other words, consumers are likely to stop generating information before the generation task becomes difficult.

In short, there are several reasons to expect that the imagine strategy should be effective. Evidence ranges from early work in persuasion demonstrating that self-generated arguments are especially effective in inducing attitude change (e.g., Janis and King 1954) to more recent work demonstrating that consumers who "self-endorse" either by using products in a virtual environment or by writing product testimonials develop more positive attitudes toward those products (Ahn and Bailenson 2011; Shimp, Wood and Smarandescu 2007). The first goal of the present research is to empirically demonstrate that the imagine strategy can be effective. The second goal is to extend these findings by identifying conditions under which the imagine strategy will be more or less successful.

Potential Limitations and Boundary Conditions to Imagine Effects

The most reasonable conclusion based on existing literature appears to be that the imagine strategy is risky. If consumers actually generate ad-consistent information as requested, the imagine strategy should be effective; the risk is that consumers will be passive and not generate ad-consistent information, resulting in less persuasion than a conventional ad using direct supporting arguments. Based on this reasoning, it seems likely that factors related to consumers' motivation and capacity to think carefully about an ad will be important determinants of whether the imagine strategy is effective or not. We propose three such factors: (1) regulatory focus; (2) need for cognitive closure; and (3) construal level.

Regulatory focus theory identifies two distinct regulatory orientations: promotion focus and prevention focus (Higgins 1997). Prevention focus is associated with increased sensitivity to the presence or absence of negative outcomes and with heightened concern

for safety, responsibilities, and obligations. Promotion focus is associated with increased sensitivity to the presence or absence of positive outcomes and with heightened concern for aspirations, growth, and accomplishments. People experience regulatory fit when their regulatory orientation matches various aspects of the task they are performing (Higgins 2000; Hong and Lee 2008). For purposes of the present research, the most relevant source of regulatory fit is the match between the individual's regulatory orientation and the content of the advertising message (Aaker and Lee 2001; Lee and Aaker 2004). Previous research has shown that regulatory fit leads to better discrimination between strong and weak arguments (Aaker and Lee 2001) and an increased tendency to generate message-consistent arguments (Lee and Aaker 2004). Hong and Lee (2008) argued that these benefits of regulatory fit derive from an intensified motivational state, whereas regulatory non-fit results in reduced motivation. As a result, consumers experiencing regulatory fit between a promotion-focused dispositional state and promotion-oriented ad content should be intrinsically motivated toward thought. Therefore, no additional motivation should be necessary, rendering the imagine instructions unnecessary and ineffective. The single source of motivation should be sufficient to increase the persuasiveness of the ad. Conversely, in situations of regulatory non-fit, where consumers are not intrinsically motivated to think, additional motivation via the imagine instructions should be necessary for additional thought and increased persuasiveness of the ad. We expect that in the case of regulatory non-fit, imagine instructions will provide the necessary motivation to think more deeply about the ad and thus increase persuasion to a level similar to that obtained for consumers who are

intrinsically motivated via regulatory fit. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Situations involving intrinsic motivation related to regulatory fit and/or extrinsic motivation resulting from imagine instructions will result in greater persuasion than situations involving no additional intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (regulatory non-fit/no imagine instructions).

Need for cognitive closure (NFCC) (Kruglanski and Webster 1996) refers to a desire to quickly form a definite opinion ("seize") and to maintain that opinion once it is formed ("freeze"). Consumers with low NFCC are intrinsically motivated to think carefully before forming an evaluation and to actively adjust their evaluations in light of new or additional information (Webster and Kruglanski 1994).

As a result, consumers who are low in NFCC should be more intrinsically motivated toward thought and more likely to spontaneously generate additional ad consistent information. In this case, no additional motivation should be necessary, rendering the imagine instructions unnecessary and ineffective. The single source of motivation should be sufficient to increase the persuasiveness of the ad. Conversely, high NFCC consumers desire immediate answers over ambiguity (Webster and Kruglanski 1994) and seek to form evaluations as quickly as possible even when those evaluations might be incomplete or inaccurate. By default, high NFCC consumers should not think carefully about an advertising message unless they are extrinsically motivated to do so. We expect that imagine instructions will provide the necessary motivation to induce consumers to think more deeply about the ad and thus increase persuasion to a level

similar to that obtained for intrinsically motivated (low NFCC) consumers. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: Situations involving intrinsic motivation related to low NFCC and/or extrinsic motivation resulting from imagine instructions will result in greater persuasion than situations involving no additional intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (high NFCC/no imagine instructions).

Construal level theory proposes that construal level, or the level of abstraction with which decision alternatives are mentally represented, increases with psychological distance (Trope and Liberman 2003; Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak 2007). For example, distant future or distant past events, events affecting others, and hypothetical events are construed at a higher, more abstract level, while near future or near past events, events affecting the self, and specific events are construed at a lower, more concrete level. Further, it has been demonstrated that construal level can impact the level and type of processing. Lower-level construals result in more detailed processing of presented information (Deval et al. 2012), whereas higher-level construals facilitate creativity and generation of new ideas (Förster, Friedman, and Liberman 2004; Henderson, Trope, and Carnevale 2006). Unlike NFCC, construal level does not reflect a strong motivation to think carefully (or not think carefully), but rather indicates the type of thinking consumers will perform most effectively when they do think carefully.

Imagine instructions might provide the motivation to generate supporting arguments, but that motivation may only matter if consumers have the ability to engage in the type of creative processing necessary to generate arguments beyond what is explicitly stated in the ad. As a result, imagine instructions should be more effective for

consumers who are in high-level, abstract mindsets than for consumers who are in low-level, concrete mindsets. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: Imagine instructions will result in greater persuasion for consumers whose current mindset facilitates abstract (vs. concrete) reasoning.

Overview of Studies

Three studies were conducted to test the aforementioned hypotheses. Study 1 examines the motivational influence of promotion-oriented regulatory fit and imagine instructions on persuasion. Study 2 examines the motivational influence of low NFCC and imagine instructions on persuasion. Study 3 investigates the moderating influence of construal level on the persuasive effectiveness of imagine instructions. In each study, participants were presented with a fictitious advertisement and asked to evaluate the advertised product. In conjunction with the fictitious advertisements, participants were either asked to imagine further information that supported the advertisement's message (e.g., "Imagine what else Special K can do to improve your health") or provided with no instructions other than to examine the ad.

STUDY 1

Method

One hundred and ninety-nine undergraduate students at a large southwestern university participated for course credit. The study used a regulatory focus x imagine instructions two-factor design, where imagine instructions were manipulated as a between-subjects factor and regulatory focus was measured as an individual difference factor.

After arriving at the lab, participants were asked to view a positive, promotion-oriented advertisement about Special K. Participants in the imagine condition were asked to imagine additional health benefits Special K could provide. Participants in the no imagine condition did not receive any further instructions. Participants were then asked to report their attitudes toward Special K on a seven-point scales (overall evaluation of Special K, liking for Special K, and reported attitude toward Special K, $\alpha = .88$). Participants then completed an 11-item regulatory focus scale (Higgins, Roney, Crowe and Hymes, 1994; promotion focus $\alpha = .62$; prevention focus $\alpha = .82$). Regulatory fit was determined based on the participants' level of promotion focus – high promotion focus was treated as regulatory fit based on correspondence with the promotion oriented advertising message, and low promotion focus was treated as regulatory non-fit.

Results and Discussion

The theoretically derived predictions in our studies involve comparisons between high motivation (e.g., high regulatory fit and/or imagine instructions) and low motivation (e.g., regulatory non-fit and no imagine instructions) participants. Such predictions are most appropriately tested using planned comparisons (Keppel 1991), where contrast analysis provides increased statistical power and interpretive clarity (Rosenthal and Rosnow 1985). Thus, we tested the significance of our predicted pattern of evaluations by subjecting participants' evaluations to a planned contrast with the low motivation condition (regulatory non-fit/no imagine) assigned a weight of +3 and the three high motivation conditions assigned weights of -1. Because planned contrasts use error terms from an ANOVA (Rosenthal and Rosnow 1985), we also report corresponding ANOVA

results even though significant ANOVA results are not a necessary precondition for performing planned contrasts (Rosnow and Rosenthal 1995).

A planned contrast was conducted as described in the preceding paragraph with attitudes toward Special K as the dependent measure; participants' scores on the prevention subscale of the regulatory focus measure were included as a covariate in this analysis because of the possibility that prevention focus could influence information processing in relation to the health-oriented advertising message. Participants were categorized as having regulatory fit or regulatory non-fit based on a median split on the promotion subscale of the regulatory focus measure. Consistent with hypothesis 1, this analysis revealed that high motivation participants (regulatory fit or imagine instructions) reported significantly more positive attitudes toward Special K ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 0.96$) than low motivation participants ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.25$; $t\ (196) = 2.37$, $p < .02$). A 2 (regulatory fit: fit or non-fit) x 2 (imagine instructions: imagine or no imagine) ANCOVA with prevention focus as a covariate was also run. This analysis did not indicate main effects for either promotion focus or imagine instructions (p's > .20), but did indicate a significant interaction between regulatory fit and imagine instructions ($F\ (1, 194) = 7.05$, $p < .01$).

The results of Study 1 are consistent with the possibility that consumers who experience regulatory fit are inherently motivated to generate additional information to support an advertising message, but that consumers who experience regulatory non-fit require additional encouragement (e.g., imagine instructions) to generate such information. As predicted, the most negative attitudes were observed for participants with both poor regulatory fit and no imagine instructions, suggesting that these participants

were least likely to engage with the advertising message. Study 2 examines the generalizability of our motivational account for the effects of imagine instructions to a negative advertising context, and uses NFCC as a measure of a consumer's generalized motivation to carefully process information. We expect that high motivation consumers (low NFCC and/or imagine instructions) will form attitudes that more closely agree with the advertising message than low motivation consumers (high NFCC and no imagine instructions).

STUDY 2

Method

One hundred and thirty-seven undergraduate students at a large southwestern university participated for course credit. The study used a NFCC x imagine instructions two-factor design, where the imagine technique was manipulated as a between-subjects factor and NFCC was measured as an individual difference factor.

Participants were asked to view a negative ad about McDonald's. The negative message featured an obese child accompanied by textual information about McDonald's exploiting children. For participants in the no imagine condition, this ad was the only thing presented on the screen. For participants in the imagine condition, the following instructions were added below the ad: "This is what we know McDonald's has done to our children. Imagine what we don't know…."

After viewing the ad, participants were instructed to indicate their attitudes (overall evaluation of McDonald's, liking for McDonald's, and reported attitude toward McDonald's; $\alpha = .91$), purchase intentions (likelihood of eating at McDonald's in the future) and recommendation intentions (likelihood of recommending McDonald's in the

future) toward McDonald's. The purchase and recommendation intention measures were strongly correlated (r = .90) and were thus averaged to form a single index of behavioral intentions. Lastly, participants completed the 42-item NFCC scale (Webster and Kruglanski 1994; α = .73).

Results and Discussion

As in Study 1, we tested the significance of our predicted pattern of evaluations by subjecting participants' attitudes toward McDonald's to a planned contrast with the low motivation condition (high NFCC/no imagine instructions) assigned a weight of +3 and the three high motivation conditions assigned weights of -1. Participants were categorized as high or low NFCC based on a median split. Consistent with hypothesis 2, this analysis revealed that high motivation participants reported significantly more negative attitudes (consistent with the negative argument in the ad) toward McDonald's (M = 3.13, SD = 1.50) than low motivation participants (M = 4.36, SD = 1.65; t (133) = -3.88, $p < .001$). A 2 (imagine instructions: imagine or no imagine) x 2 (NFCC: high or low) ANOVA was also conducted. In addition to a significant main effect indicating that low NFCC participants had more negative attitudes toward McDonald's than high NFCC participants (F (1, 133) = 4.44, $p < .05$), and a marginally significant main effect for imagine instructions such that participants in the no imagine condition had more negative attitudes toward McDonald's than participants in the imagine condition (F (1, 133) = 3.44, $p < .07$), this analysis revealed the expected significant interaction between NFCC and imagine instructions (F (1, 133) = 9.46, $p < .01$).

Similar results were observed for behavioral intentions. Consistent with hypothesis 2, the planned comparison indicated that high motivation participants had

more negative behavioral intentions toward McDonald's (M = 3.96, SD = 2.24) than low motivation participants (M = 5.83, SD = 1.99; t (133) = -4.02, $p < .001$). The ANOVA indicated main effects such that imagine instructions (F (1, 133) = 7.56, $p < .01$) and low NFCC (F (1, 133) = 3.87, $p < .06$) were associated with more negative intentions toward McDonald's, and as expected, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between NFCC and imagine instructions (F (1, 133) = 6.65, $p < .05$).

The results of Study 2 are consistent with the proposition that imagine instructions serve as a motivational cue. Participants who had high intrinsic motivation (low NFCC) and/or viewed an ad with imagine instructions reported negative attitudes and negative behavioral intentions toward McDonald's, thus conforming to the negative advertising message. Conversely, participants with low intrinsic motivation and no imagine instructions reported relatively positive attitudes and behavioral intentions toward McDonald's. Study 3 examines the effectiveness of imagine instructions in relation to a variable (construal level) that is an indicator of capacity rather than motivation. Construal level is manipulated rather than measured to demonstrate the effectiveness of contextual cues in addition to dispositional cues in influencing the impact of imagine instructions on consumers. We expect the motivational influence of imagine instructions will be greater for consumers who are in high-level, abstract mindsets than for consumers who are in low-level, concrete mindsets because these consumers will have a greater ability to engage in the type of creative processing necessary to generate arguments beyond what is explicitly stated in the ad.

STUDY 3

Method

One hundred and fifty-seven undergraduate students at a large southwestern university participated for course credit. The study used a construal level x imagine instructions two-factor design, where both construal level and imagine instructions were manipulated as between-subjects factors.

Construal level was manipulated via a prime adapted from McCrea, Liberman, Trope, and Sherman (2008) in which participants were asked to view a painting by Seurat that drew their attention either to the overall effect of the painting (abstract condition) or to the details of the technique of pointillism used to make the painting (concrete condition). Participants were then asked to view an advertisement with a positive message about Subway. Individuals in the imagine condition were asked to imagine additional health benefits of eating at Subway, whereas individuals in the no imagine condition were not given any additional instructions. Participants were then instructed to provide their evaluations of Subway (overall evaluation of Subway, liking for Subway, and reported attitude toward Subway, $\alpha = .89$).

Results and Discussion

A 2 (imagine instructions: imagine or no imagine) x 2 (construal level: high or low) ANOVA was run. The analysis did not indicate main effects for either construal level or imagine instructions (p's > .35), but did reveal the predicted interaction between imagine instructions and construal level (F (1, 153) = 6.39, $p < .05$). Planned comparisons were consistent with hypothesis 3. For high-level construal participants, imagine instructions (M = 5.62, SD = 1.08) resulted in more positive attitudes toward Subway than no imagine instructions (M = 5.11, SD = 1.01; F (1, 73) = 4.43, $p < .05$).

For low-level construal participants, imagine instructions did not significantly influence attitudes toward Subway (F (1, 80) = 2.07, p > .15). See Figure 1.

PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

These results are consistent with the hypothesis that increasing participants' motivation to think about the ad via imagine instructions is only effective for participants with a high capacity to generate supporting arguments. For participants whose abstract construal level enhanced their capacity to engage in the type of creative thinking needed to generate ad-supporting arguments, imagine instructions induced more ad-consistent attitudes than no imagine instructions; conversely, for participants whose concrete construal level impaired creative thinking, imagine instructions had no effect.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Three studies were conducted to examine the effectiveness of imagine instructions in influencing consumers. In each study, certain types of consumers were influenced by imagine instructions while others were not. Specifically, results indicate the following: (1) Consumers with regulatory fit relative to the advertising message and/or consumers who received imagine instructions reported more ad-consistent attitudes than consumers with regulatory non-fit who did not receive imagine instructions; (2) Consumers with low NFCC (high motivation) and/or consumers who received imagine instructions reported more ad-consistent attitudes and intentions than consumers with high NFCC who did not receive imagine instructions; and (3) imagine instructions increased persuasion for consumers with abstract construal levels but did not impact persuasion for consumers with concrete construal levels.

Our findings are consistent with the possibilities that (a) imagine instructions serve as a motivational cue, (b) any positive motivational factor is sufficient (McGill, 1998) to encourage deeper ad-related processing, and (c) deeper ad-related processing is only effective when consumers are in a creative state that facilitates generative processing. Both NFCC (Kruglanski and Webster 1996) and regulatory fit (Hong and Lee 2008) are primarily motivational variables, and in each of the studies using these variables, we observed a sufficiency effect – low NFCC, regulatory fit, or imagine instructions were sufficient to induce participants to form stronger ad-consistent evaluations. In other words, imagine instructions increased the persuasiveness of the ad for low motivation participants but had no additional persuasive impact on high motivation participants. This is consistent with the possibility that imagine instructions might provide an extra motivational boost to help ads reach disinterested consumers.

While study 1 and study 2 investigated motivation, study 3 focused on the importance of ability. It demonstrated that, although imagine instructions can provide the necessary motivation, the ability to generate supporting arguments is dependent on abstract and creative processing. Consumers in a more abstract mindset were better able to respond to the imagine instructions, while a more concrete mindset impaired the effect.

Conclusion

A great deal of time and money was spent employing the imagine strategy to reduce smoking. The present research examined conditions under which this strategy is most likely to be effective. Consistent with Farrelly et al's (2005) observation that *The Truth* campaign was effective overall, the present research suggests that the imagine strategy can be effective under the right circumstances. Specifically, our results suggest

that imagine instructions can aid persuasion when consumers are not already intrinsically motivated (regulatory non-fit, high NFCC). This, however, is dependent on creative and abstract thought processing associated with higher-level construals. When the conditions of motivation and ability are not met, consumers are unlikely to generate arguments supporting the ad and the imagine strategy is unlikely to be effective.

The imagine strategy itself appears to motivate consumers to be more likely to engage with the advertising message and actively generate supporting arguments. In order to maximize the benefits of this strategy, however, it might also be necessary to facilitate consumers' capacity to think in a generative manner. Although capacity (via construal level) was enhanced with an artificial external task in the present research, it is quite possible to similarly enhance capacity with the content of the ad itself. For example, previous research has shown a variety of ways to induce abstract construal levels. Some of these could potentially be incorporated into ad content to aid the motivating effect of imagine instructions.

Increased temporal distance (e.g., cigarette execs knew about this problem 30 years ago), increased social distance (e.g., using similar vs. dissimilar others in ads), less descriptive detail (e.g., Special K provides important health benefits, as opposed to Special K has 23% more fiber than the leading competitor), and verbal vs. pictorial representations have all been associated with abstract construal levels (Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak 2007) and could thus be expected to enhance idea generation in response to the imagine strategy. Further, research has indicated that considering "why" one does something activates high-level construals while considering "how" one does something activates low-level construals (Freitas et al. 2004; Vallacher and Wegner 1987). For

example, White, MacDonnell, and Dahl (2011) successfully manipulated abstract vs. concrete mindset in an advertisement promoting recycling by framing the ad copy in terms of either a “how” to make a difference (concrete) or “why” to make a difference (abstract), while Hong and Sternthal (2010) manipulated construal level in an advertisement for an MP3 player by focusing on either “why” the features were valuable (high-level) or “how” the features operated (low-level). This framing technique could be used effectively in either the ad copy, the imagine instructions, or both to active an abstract mindset and aid in ad consistent idea generation.

REFERENCES

Aaker, Jennifer L., and Angela Y. Lee (2001), "'I' Seek Pleasures and 'We' Avoid Pains: The Role of Self Regulatory Goals in Information Processing and Persuasion," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28 (June), 33-49.

Ahn, Sun Joo, and Jeremy N. Bailenson (2011), "Self-endorsing versus Other-endorsing in Virtual Environments: The Effect on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention," *Journal of Advertising*, 40 (2), 93-106.

Chaiken, Shelly (1980), "Heuristic versus systematic information processing in the use of source versus message cues in persuasion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 39 (5), 752–66.

Deval, Hélène, Bruce E. Pfeiffer, Douglas R. Ewing, Xiaoqi Han, Frank R. Kardes, and Maria L. Cronley (2012), "The Role of Temporal Construal in Omission Neglect," Working Paper.

Farrelly, Matthew C., Kevin C. Davis, M. Lyndon Haviland, Peter Messeri, and Cheryl G. Healton (2005), "Evidence of a Dose – Response Relationship Between "truth" Antismoking Ads and Youth Smoking Prevalence," *American Journal of Public Health*, 95 (3), 425-31.

Förster, Jens, Ronald S. Friedman, and Nira Liberman (2004), "Temporal Construal Effects on Abstract and Concrete Thinking: Consequences for Insight and Creative Cognition," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87 (2), 177-89.

Freitas, Antonio L., Peter Gollwitzer, and Yaacov Trope (2004),"The Influence of Abstract and Concrete Mindsets on Anticipating and Guiding Others' Self-Regulatory Efforts," *Journal of Experimental Social psychology*, 40 (6), 739–52.

Hastie, Reid, and Bernadette Park (1986), "The Relationship between Memory and Judgment Depends on whether the Judgment Task is Memory-based or On-line," *Psychological Review*, 93 (3), 258-68.

————, and Nancy Pennington (1989), "Notes on the Distinction between Memory-based versus On-line Judgment," *Online Cognition in Person Perception*, John N. Bassili, ed., Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1-17.

Haugtvedt, Curtis P. and Alan J. Strathman (1990), "Situational Personal Relevance and Attitude Persistence," *Advances in Consumer Research,* 21 (3), 766–9.

Henderson, Marlone D., Yaacov Trope, and Peter J. Carnevale (2006), "Negotiation from a Near and Distant Time Perspective," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91 (4), 712-29.

Higgins, E. Tory (1997), "Beyond Pleasure and Pain," *American Psychologist*, 52 (12), 1280-1300.

———— (2000), "Making a Good Decision: Value from Fit," *American Psychologist*, 55 (November), 1217-30.

————, Christopher J. R. Roney, Ellen Crowe, and Charles Hymes (1994), "Ideal versus Ought Predilections for Approach and Avoidance: Distinct Self-regulatory Systems," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66 (2), 276-86.

Hong, Jiewen, and Angela Y. Lee (2008), "Be Fit and Be Strong: Mastering Self-regulation through Regulatory Fit," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34

(February), 682-95.

Hong, Jiewen and Brian Sternthal (2010), "The Effects of Consumer Prior Knowledge and Processing Strategies on Judgments," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47, 301-311.

Hovland, Carl I., Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelly (1953), *Communication and Persuasion*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

————, and Wallace Mandell (1952), "An Experimental Comparison of Conclusion-drawing by the Communicator and by the Audience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 47 (3), 581-8.

Janis, Irving L., and Bert T. King (1954), "The Influence of Role-playing on Opinion Change," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 49 (2), 211-18.

Kardes, Frank R. (1988), "Spontaneous Inference Processes in Advertising: The Effects of Conclusion Omission and Involvement on Persuasion," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (2), 225-33.

Keppel, Geoffrey. (1991), *Design and Analysis: A Researcher's Handbook* (3rd ed.), Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Kruglanski, Arie W., and Donna M. Webster (1996), "Motivated Closing of the Mind: "Seizing" and "Freezing"," *Psychological Review*, 103 (2), 263-83.

Lee, Angela Y., and Jennifer L. Aaker (2004), "Bringing the Frame into Focus: The Influence of Regulatory Fit on Processing Fluency and Persuasion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86 (February), 205-18.

Linder, Darwyn E., and Stephen Worchel (1970), "Opinion Change as a Result of Effortfully Drawing a Counterattitudinal Conclusion," *Journal of Experimental*

Social Psychology, 6 (October), 432-48.

MacLachlan, James, and Pradeep Jalan (1985), "The Effects of Pre-questions on Advertising Recall," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 14 (1), 18-49.

McCrea, Sean M., Nira Liberman, Yaacov Trope, and Steven J. Sherman (2008), "Construal Level and Procrastination," *Psychological Science*, 19 (12), 1308-14.

McGill, Ann L. (1998), "Relative Use of Necessity and Sufficiency Information in Causal Judgments about Natural Categories," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75 (1), 70-81.

Menon, Geeta, and Priya Raghubir (2003), "Ease of Retrieval as an Automatic Input in Judgments: A Mere-accessibility Framework?" *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30 (2), 230-43.

Moser, Donald V. (1992), "Does Memory Affect Judgment? Self-generated versus Recall Memory Measures," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62 (4), 555-63.

Novemsky, Nathan, Ravi Dhar, Itamar Simonson, and Norbert Schwarz (2004), "Parallels in the Underpinnings of Constructed Preference and Constructed Attitudes," in *Advances in Consumer Research* Volume 31, eds. Barbara E. Kahn and Mary Frances Luce, Valdosta, GA: Association for Consumer Research, 95.

Petrova, Petia K. and Robert B. Cialdini (2005), "Fluency of consumption imagery and the backfire effects of imagery appeals," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (3), 442-52.

Petty, Richard E., John T. Cacioppo, and David Schumann (1983), "Central and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of

Involvement," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10 (2), 135-46.

Raaijmakers, Jeroen G., and Richard M. Shiffrin (1981), "Search of Associative Memory," *Psychological Review*, 88 (2), 93-134.

Reardon, Richard and David J. Moore (1996), "The Greater Memorability of self-Generated versus Externally Presented Product Information," *Psychology & Marketing*, 13 (3), 305-20.

Rosenthal, Robert and Ralph L. Rosnow (1985), *Content Analyses: Forced Comparisons in the Analysis of Variance,* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rosnow, Ralph L. and Robert Rosenthal (1995), "Some Things You Learn Aren't So: Cohen's Paradox, Asch's Paradigm, and the Interpretation of Interaction," *Psychological Science,* 6 (1), 3-9.

Rundus, Dewey (1973), "Negative Effects of Using List Items as Recall Cues," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 12 (1), 43-50.

Sawyer, Alan G., and Daniel J. Howard (1991), "Effects of Omitting Conclusions in Advertisements to Involved and Uninvolved Audiences. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 28 (4), 467-74.

Schwarz, Norbert (2004), "Metacognitive Experiences in Consumer Judgment and Decision Making," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14 (4), 332-48.

————, Herbert Bless, Fritz Strack, Gisela Klumpp, Helga Rittenauer-Schatka, and Annette Simons (1991), "Ease of Retrieval as Information: Another Look at the Availability Heuristic," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61 (2), 195-202.

Shimp, Terence A., Stacy L. Wood, and Laura Smarandescu (2007), "Self-generated

Advertisements: Testimonials and the Perils of Consumer Exaggeration. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47 (4), 453-61.

Slamecka, Norman J., and Peter Graf (1978), "The Generation Effect: Delineation of a Phenomenon," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, 4 (6), 592-604.

Trope, Yaacov, and Nira Liberman (2003), "Temporal Construal," *Psychological Review*, 110 (3), 403-21.

————, Nira Liberman, and Cheryl Wakslak (2007), "Construal Levels and Psychological Distance: Effects on Representation, Prediction, Evaluation, and Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 17 (2), 83-95.

Vallacher, Robin R. and Daniel M. Wegner (1987), "What Do People Think They're Doing? Action Identification and Human Behavior," *Psychological Review*, 94 (1), 3–15.

Walster, Elaine, and Leon Festinger (1962), "The Effectiveness of "Overheard" Persuasive Communications," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 65 (6), 395-402.

Wänke, Michaele, Gerd Bohner, and Andreas Jurkowitsche (1997), "There Are Many Reasons to Drive a BMW: Does Imagined Ease of Argument Generation Influence Attitudes?" *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (September), 170-77.

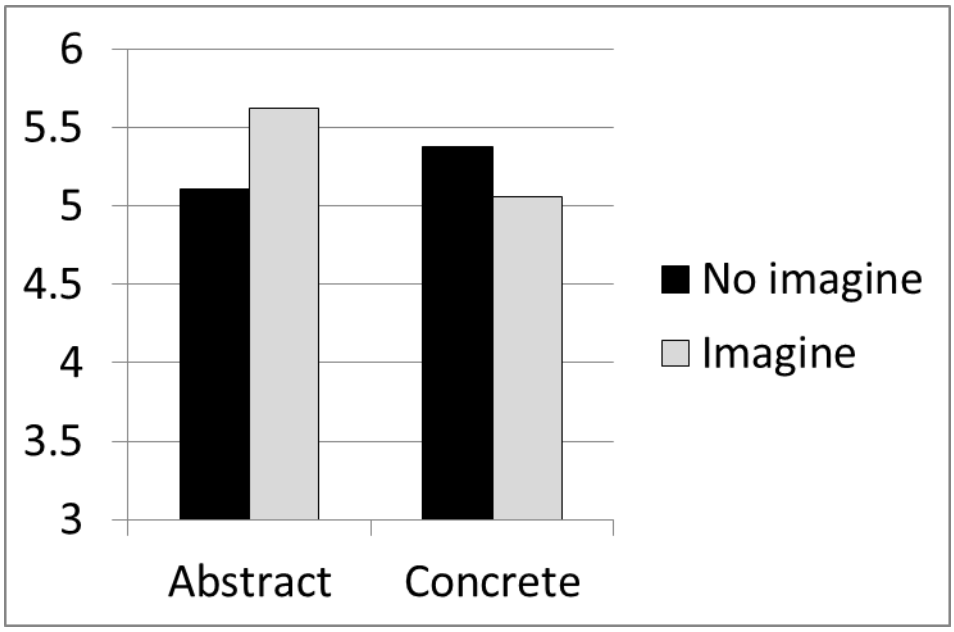
Webster, Donna M., and Arie W. Kruglanski (1994), "Individual Differences in Need for Cognitive Closure," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67 (6), 1049-62.

White, Katherine, Rhiannon MacDonnell and Darren W. Dahl (2011), "It's the Mindset that Matters: The Role of Construal Level and Message Framing in Influencing Consumer Efficacy and Conservation Behaviors over the Long-Term," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48 (3), 472-485.

Young, Carole J. (2004), "Contributions of Metaknowledge to Retrieval of Natural Categories in Semantic Memory," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 30 (4), 909-16.

FIGURE 1

BRAND ATTITUDES AS A FUNCTION OF IMAGINE INSTRUCTIONS AND CONSTRUAL LEVEL IN STUDY 3



APPENDIX 1: ADVERTISING STIMULI

Study 1:

Imagine Condition

No Imagine Condition

Study 2:

How does McDonalds exploit children?

According to the American Health Association, McDonald's advertising is aimed at children. Young children now think of a burger every time they see a clown with orange hair.

Study 3:

Imagine Condition

SUBWAY

Eat healthy

At Subway, Jared achieved a healthy weight and lifestyle. He is living proof that eating at Subway can help you lose weight and improve your health.

Imagine what eating at Subway can do for you...

No Imagine Condition

SUBWAY

Eat healthy

At Subway, Jared achieved a healthy weight and lifestyle. He is living proof that eating at Subway can help you lose weight and improve your health.