

Advertising time expansion, compression, and cognitive processing influences on consumer acceptance of message and brand

Carol M. Megehee*

Nicholls State University, United States

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Abstract

This article examines the nature of consumer process involvement and cognitive processing of advertising content as mediating variables between commercial message executions (e.g., broadcast time compression and expansion and using broadcast versus print media) on attitude and behavioral intentions. The article proposes a framework that builds on the prior work of Krugman, Wright, and MacInnis and colleagues; the framework includes hypotheses of an advertising execution and processing involvement interaction effect on cognitive processing of commercial messages and a substantial direct effect of cognitive processing on attitude and behavioral intention. The article includes details of an experiment testing hypotheses in the framework. The findings provide strong support of the hypotheses. Implications for advertising strategy include adopting a conservative view on the use of time compression in advertising commercials and nurturing *low* consumer processing involvement of commercial messages.

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Advertising in some contexts (e.g., television or radio media) may work “just by changing perceptions [cognitive processing] toward the product in the course of merely shifting the relative salience of attitudes, especially when the purchaser is not particularly involved in the message” (Krugman, 1965, p. 349). While not relying explicitly on Krugman’s proposal in developing his own models, Wright (1973, 1980) concludes that (1) consumer cognitive processes mediate the acceptance of advertising messages and (2) the use of spontaneous free-response recording of thought processes appears to be an:

... extremely promising method for studying communication effects. Such measures offer important advantages over researcher-imposed measures. The information contained in such protocols is extremely rich compared to sterile, fre-

quently uninvolved measures requiring nothing more than a quick checkmark on the part of the subject (Wright 1973, p. 61).

Friestad and Wright (1994) propose that in addition to temporal contingencies, cultural and individual differences are likely to influence people’s motivation to process and use persuasion knowledge. Consumers are likely to vary substantially in their involvement in processing an advertising message; such variation is one example of temporal contingencies likely to affect the direction and strength of ongoing cognitive activity when hearing, watching, or reading a commercial message—a general proposal that follows from Krugman’s more specific proposal that television advertising is a low involvement message receiving context.

The present article builds on prior proposals by Krugman (1965) and the research by Wright (1973), Friestad and Wright (1994), and related literature (MacInnis et al., 1991; MacLachlan, 1982; MacLachlan and Siegel, 1980; Montigny, 2007; Schlinger et al., 1983) to theoretically and empirically examine how consumer message involvement may mediate media and temporal

* Corresponding author. Nicholls State University, College of Business Administration, Thibodaux, Louisiana 70310 United States.

E-mail address: carol.megehee@nicholls.edu.

advertising influences on the creation and use of cognitive processing information by consumers and possible attitude outcome influences of such a process. The present report also contributes by proposing and testing how media and temporal advertising manipulations affect consumers' cognitive responses and how such responses influence consumers' advertising acceptance and use from the perspective of an important individual difference (i.e., consumer process involvement with the advertising message). The theoretical propositions and empirical evidence in this report offer a rich contingency perspective of the unique contribution of message involvement influences on how advertising dynamics affect consumer cognitive responses and use of persuasion knowledge.

This report expands and empirically tests some of MacInnis et al.'s (1991) propositions. MacInnis et al. (1991) contribute a framework proposing that variations in advertising strategies and cues affect consumer processing-related activities (e.g. counter-arguing and generating product support arguments) and that such activities mediate the impact of strategies and cues on communication outcomes—attitude toward the message, product, spokesperson, intention to purchase, and recommending the product to friends and family members.

Despite the plethora of research on (1) the relationship between executional cues and communication outcomes and (2) the impact of brand information processing on communication outcomes, few investigators have studied the mediational role of MOA [consumer motivation, opportunity, and ability] on the executional/brand-processing relationship. Investigating this mediational role is critical, however, as (1) MOA in the typical [advertising] exposure setting is often low, (2) executional cues are controllable aspects of ad design that can enhance MOA, and (3) enhancing (MOA) in ads can produce enduring brand attitudes and memories. (MacInnis et al., 1, pp. 45–46)

The present study is the first report in the literature on both media (print versus audio) and temporal (time compression versus expansion) affects on cognitive processes—consumers' interpretations that likely mediate the influences on communication outcomes. Wright's 1973 observations support the value of such additional research on message modality influences on mediating cognitive influences. In his laboratory study, "Counterarguments proved to be a significantly stronger mediator of acceptance among subjects receiving the Audio mode message than among those receiving the Print version" ($Z=2.10, p<.04$, Wright, 1973, p. 57). The following 1973 conclusion remains valid into the 21st century, "The influence of message modality on the process of attitude modification has not received much attention among basic or applied researchers. Reasons for this apathy are not readily apparent since the mode of information transmission represents one of the most basic dimensions of any communication setting" (Wright, 1973, p. 61).

Research on time-compressed versus normal speed influences on communication outcomes produce conflicting findings. LaBarbera and MacLachlan's (1979, p. 30) conclude from the findings of their laboratory experiment that "...radio advertisers might achieve heightened impact, and require less time

for their messages, if they use electronic speech compression." They emphasize, "There is no 'Donald Duck' effect as the speech is speeded up. In fact, as long as the speech is not speeded up by more than 50% the listener will be unaware that there has been an electronic alteration of the original recording" (LaBarbera and MacLachlan, 1979, p. 30).

Additional research results for audio and television commercials conflict with the LaBarbera and MacLachlan's findings and conclusions (see Hausknecht and Moore, 1985; Megehee et al., 2003; Moore et al., 1986; Murphy et al., 1986; Schlinger et al., 1983; Riter et al., 1983; Vann et al., 1987). For example, Schlinger et al.'s (1983, p. 79) laboratory findings lead them to conclude "... time compression had only small effects on cognitive processing and postviewing attitudes. It appears that time compression can result in somewhat fewer ideas being played back in response to open-ended questions, inhibit both positive and negative attitudes toward the advertised brand, and depress positive emotional involvement with the execution." In Schlinger et al.'s study time compression had no impact on consumer buying intention.

The findings in the study in this article extend Schlinger et al.'s (1983) findings—time compression is likely to have a small negative influence on cognitive processing among consumers highly active in processing the advertising message but time compression is likely to have a large negative influence on cognitive processing among consumers not very active in processing the advertising message in comparison to consumers receiving advertising messages at normal speeds. An update of Krugman's (1965) insights is telling—message involvement levels mediate modal and temporal influences on consumer cognitive processing (i.e., learning without involvement is a valid interpretation of advertising's influence for both broadcast and print modes and for both compression and expansion temporal contexts); Wright's insights also receive strong support—cognitive processes mediate the influence of modal and involvement influences on message acceptance (i.e., attitude measures).

1. Hypotheses

Fig. 1 represents the following hypotheses.

H1. Process involvement mediates modal (print and broadcast) influences on consumer cognitive processes, more specifically, (a) consumers relatively low versus high in processing the advertising message counter-argue less with the advertising message, derogate the source less, and generate more support arguments; (b) this effect occurs to a greater extent for broadcast versus print ads because broadcast is a less involving medium than print medium. Krugman's (1965, p. 355) view offers a rationale for H1b: "With high involvement [e.g., print versus broadcast] one would look for the classic, more dramatic, and more familiar conflict of ideas at the level of conscious opinion and attitude that precedes changes in overt behavior."

H2. (a) The main effects of time compression and time expansion on cognitive processing are not substantial because the influence of temporal variations depends on consumer process involvement. This hypothesis is an extension from Schlinger

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