

Motivational determinants of transportation into marketing narratives

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Abstract

This paper identifies factors that facilitate narrative transportation, where people become immersed in the storyline of an advertisement. Specifically, using a lottery context, this research shows that consumers who feel lucky or believe in personal good luck are motivated to engage in transportation, a process that is intensified as the attractiveness of the outcome increases. Further, this research shows that highly transported consumers (a) become more focused on ad outcomes and less on the low personal probability of winning, and that (b) attempts to attenuate consumers' transportation are most efficacious if undertaken before the ad (and transportation) begins.

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Introduction

An emerging body of research suggests that people's transportation into the storyline of an advertisement serves to blur the divide between the real and hypothetical and in turn facilitates persuasion (Escalas, 2004a, 2007). In many product categories, advertisements aiming to persuade consumers present dramatic scenes that feature "everyday" people (Deighton, Romer, & McQueen, 1989; Mick, 1987; Stern, 1994). Spurring the viewer to imagine that "it could happen to me" draws the consumer into the ad storyline and transports him or her to a fictitious world shaped by the original ad narrative. We focus on lottery advertisements to examine the factors that drive the leap from the real world to a narrative world inspired by the ad storyline. We explore how consumers' personal beliefs facilitate their connection to the ad narrative, showing

when and how a connection can motivate immersion in the storyline.

Transportation was first identified by Green and Brock (2000) as a mechanism that could explain how through the "integrative melding of attention, feelings, and imagery" individuals could become immersed in a narrative (Green, 2004). As they get "lost" in a narrative (Gerrig, 1993), they become absorbed in the storyline and mentally simulate the events outlined. In a marketing context, transportation has been shown to play a role in consumer persuasion. When viewers are transported into a self-referencing ad storyline, they are persuaded by both weak and strong arguments; whereas traditional cognitive elaboration that relates ad information to the self results in persuasion only through strong arguments (Escalas, 2007). Similarly, highly transported individuals are shown to find fewer "false notes" (statements that do not ring true and are likely to provoke counter-arguing) while being immersed in a narrative, whereas research on involvement would predict the opposite (Green & Brock, 2000).

While there is evidence that transportation may impact persuasion, little is known about when transportation is more or less likely to occur in response to marketing narratives (Escalas,

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2007). Our research addresses this gap in the literature. Utilizing the circumstances of a lottery ad we measure the degree to which transportation impacts consumers' purchase desires, and what factors motivate consumers to immerse themselves into the narrative of the advertisement. This research makes a number of important contributions. First, we identify a belief in good luck as an intrinsic motivational factor that connects the consumer to the narrative and in turn facilitates transportation. Second, we find that the attractiveness of an outcome is an important moderator of this intrinsic motivation, as those that believe in good luck need an attractive prize outcome to connect to the storyline of the ad, become immersed in the ad, which ultimately, increases their desire to purchase. Finally, we show that a consequence of transportation in our context is that consumers become more focused on ad outcomes and less focused on the low personal probability of attaining the outcomes in the ad.

Conceptual background

Transportation is one type of visual mental imagery (MacInnis & Price, 1987; Wyer, Hung, & Jiang, 2008) that consumers may use when interacting with marketing communications and narratives. It is described as a convergent process involving imagery, cognitions, and emotions, all of which are focused on events in the narrative and lead to a heightened sense of realism. The viewer feels as if (s)he is actually experiencing the story or scenario, and this self-referencing (Burnkrant & Unnava, 1995) has been shown to facilitate learning and recall (Klein & Loftus, 1988). A transported individual treats the narrative as a frame of reference (Strange, 2002) and leaps from the world of origin to the world of the narrative (Green & Brock, 2000). Factors such as familiarity with settings, prior knowledge or experience related to the themes of a story, similarity with the main character, and regulatory fit have been shown to facilitate transportation into the narrative of text (Green, 2004; Vaughn, Hesse, Petkova, & Trudeau, 2009). Our research seeks to build on these initial findings by identifying specific factors, both individual tendencies within a consumer and external factors in the environment, which encourage individuals to transport when the narrative context involves a lottery product. Using the specific context of lottery advertising, we show that a consumer's positive belief in luck can motivate transportation. Further, we identify situation cues in the lottery context that moderate the impact of this motivation.

Lottery advertising as a vehicle for transportation

Lotteries are part of a class of products known as experiential goods (e.g. Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), meaning that most consumers do not derive monetary benefits from the purchase, nor is ownership of a physical good transferred in the transaction. In fact, most consumers derive no monetary benefit from playing the lottery; the net expected value per dollar played is $-\$0.47$ (Miyazaki, Langenderfer, & Sprout, 1999; see also United States Census Bureau, 1995). So a number of authors have suggested that the utility of a lottery ticket lies in

the hopes or dreams that are associated with ownership of it (e.g. Clotfelter & Cook, 1989).

In the U.S., lottery advertisers spend more than \$300 M annually, placing them in the top 50 advertisers in the nation, with the result that consumers see more ads for the lottery than for most conventional products (Selinger, 1993; Stearns & Borna, 1995). Lottery advertising is a profitable investment and efficacious: one study from Florida found that for every \$1 spent on advertising, \$2.11 was generated in revenue; and that advertised games outperformed comparable non-advertised ones by a 41% margin (National Council of Legislators from Gaming States, 2006). The efficacy of these ads may lie in their ability to capitalize on the imagination of the viewer. Lottery ads are notorious for encouraging participants to dream or imagine a winning scenario (Landman & Petty, 2000) and "engage transforming fantasies" (Carey, 2007), even though the odds are extremely unlikely. With campaigns such as "Give your dreams a chance" (New Jersey State Lottery), "Can you imagine" (Lotto 6/49 – Canada), and "Win the stuff dreams are made of" (New York State Lottery), lottery advertising explicitly invites viewers to suspend their persuasion knowledge and picture themselves as winners. Thus a lottery advertisement context seemed appropriate for an examination of the transportation of consumers into a marketing narrative.

Feelings about luck and outcome attractiveness as motivational factors

Some people believe luck is a positive force that acts in their favor, while others do not hold such a belief (Darke & Freedman, 1997a; Jiang, Cho, & Adaval, 2009). It should be noted that very few people believe luck exists but they themselves are unlucky people, so while beliefs in the existence of luck and one's personal good fortune are separate factors, they are strongly correlated (e.g. Darke & Freedman, 1997b). A belief in good luck or good fortune has been shown to positively predict people's expectations regarding outcomes associated with luck (Darke & Freedman, 1997b). As such, those who feel they are lucky should believe they are somewhat more likely to win the lottery than those who do not believe they are lucky, and hence should have a stronger intrinsic motivation to play. Successful lottery play is a function of chance, so if an individual does not believe in personal good luck, selective processing should occur (Kunda, 1990), resulting in unmotivated individuals being less predisposed to immerse themselves in a lottery ad narrative. Thus we propose that individual differences in feelings about personal good luck (e.g., good fortune, karma, and fatalism) are likely to have an impact on transportation and lottery play. Specifically, intrinsic motivation (i.e., feelings about personal luck) will predict transportation into a lottery ad.

We also expect that consumers' internal propensity to transport will be moderated by external properties inherent to products such as the lottery, such as the attractiveness of the outcome being advertised. If the lottery prize is negligible or trivial, the potential outcome is not highly desirable and is therefore relatively less motivating for consumers. People are willing, however, to spend thousands of dollars per year just for the chance of the positive outcome of striking it rich with a big

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