



ORIGINAL INTERPRETATION OF ATTITUDES IN THE CONTEXT OF ADVERTISING

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Abstract

Research on consumer attitudes and their change under advertising influence is becoming a defining feature in advertising communication. The present review aims to outline recent advances in social psychology on the concept of “attitude” with an emphasis on the possibility of consumer attitudes being shaped by various advertisements. Some models of attitude formation and change are discussed, as well as some current views on the stability and strength of attitudes as part of advertising. The importance of the general attitude towards advertising, the credibility of advertising, as well as the ways of promoting products and services to achieve the most effective perception, remembering and the achieved impact through advertising is emphasized. Generalizations are synthesized for future research on the different attitudes and achievement of advertising effectiveness as a marketing communication tool.

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Key words:

Attitudes toward advertising, credibility and effectiveness of advertising

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1. INTRODUCTION

Attitudes and attitude change are an important feature of modern psychology, social psychology, consumer psychology, personality psychology, and marketing and advertising communication. The growing interest in them is due to the fact that they are the “most distinctive and indispensable concept” for predicting consumer behaviour (Allport, 1935, p. 784, cited by Crano, and Prislin, 2006; Bohner & Dickel, 2011), relating it to the basic understanding of attitude and related constructs (Forgas, and Williams 2000, Forgas et al. 2003, Crano, and Prislin, 2006). The interpretation of attitude strength, and its relevance to ambivalence and resistance are an important part of the theory of planned behavior according to Crano, and Prislin (2006) (Crano, and Prislin, 2006). Offering a selective review by researchers regarding constructionist and stable-entity conceptualizations of attitude (Bohner & Dickel, 2011), as well as examining implicit and explicit manifestations of attitudes, provides some clarification on the causes of attitude change. The relationship between attitude structure and attitude change processes (Gawronski, and Bodenhausen, 2006) shows that attitude formation can occur in many ways (Crano, and Prislin, 2006), the main distinction between them being the degree to which individuals consciously accept or reject an attitude object.

In the present review, the author comments on the contribution of Crano and Prislin (2006) for the period from 1999 to 2004, as well as the selective review of Bohner and Dickel, (2011) for the period from 2005 to 2009. The main aim is to offer a new interpretation on the subject of attitude and attitude towards advertising, and the author seeks to discuss some new research on the effects of different consumer attitudes on the behaviour of consumers exposed to different advertisements. Outlining as many conceptions of attitudes as possible, while highlighting the main debates and studies, cannot offer a complete coverage of the issues on the subject. The present work can serve some companies in the purposeful formation of advertising messages for individual target groups and make some new findings regarding the consumer behaviour of the studied groups.

2. BASIC CONCEPTS OF ATTITUDE

An in-depth commentary on the conceptualization of attitude includes pointing out some key points in the definitions of researchers looking for its human manifestations. From 1999 to 2005, researchers provided useful scientific interpretations of the nature of attitude (Lord & Lepper 1999), developed dual process theories of attitude formation (Chaiken and Trope 1999, p. 34), and were interested in the role of the media in the persuasion process (Bryant and Zillman 2002, p. 67), as well as the measurement

and interpretation of some explicit and implicit attitudes (Greenwald & Nosek 2001; Greenwald et al., 2009; Fazio & Olson 2003; Bassili & Brown 2005). In some scientific subfields, the main functions of attitudes are sought (Maio and Olson, 2000, p. 88), the importance of the attribute with which the manifestation of the attitude is presented (Van der Pligt et al., 2000). According to advertising influence, an important role is played by the development of technologies through which computer-mediated persuasion is realized (McKenna and Bargh 2000, Postmes et al., 2001, Sassenberg & Boos 2003), as well as the application of virtual reality (Blascovich et al., 2002), which lead to additional measurements of the concept of attitude. Therefore, not only the definition and interpretation of attitude is essential to advertising research, but also integrative analysis, which directs attention to emerging approaches to the analysis and manifestation of human attitudes.

Although the fundamental construct of attitude dating back to Thurstone (1928) includes the notion of an evaluative interpretation of cognition and affect experienced in relation to a particular object (Thurston, 1928; Crano & Prislin, 2006), variations in strength have been observed in these evaluative abstractions, which according to other authors affects the persistence, resistance and consistency of attitude and behaviour (Holland et al., 2002, Petty et al., 2004). Therefore, the first question is what are the conditions under which a new attitude is formed, as well as the degree to which individuals consciously accept or reject the object of the attitude. Influence advertising relies on traditional self-report strategies to measure attitude, asking consumers to state their attitude toward a product, service, brand, or company. Recent research and theory in social cognition, however, has made a distinction between these more traditionally measured explicit attitudes and what have been termed implicit attitudes (Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2007; Greenwald et al., 2002, cited by Gibson, 2008, p. 178). According to Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2007) explicit attitudes, which are more deliberative and propositional in nature, but implicit attitudes are more automatic and based on associations in memory (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007, p.698). The general pattern of results from these studies indicates that consistently pairing positive stimuli with a brand can create a positive attitude toward that brand. The original traditional concept of attitude was based on the view that mere exposure to a stimulus can influence the formation of attitudes at a subconscious level (Bargh, 2001; Lee, 2001), but not change an established attitude because the frequency of exposure is perceived as affectively positive (Winkielman & Cacioppo, 2004). Other research suggests that “subliminal level” processes are unlikely to lead to change (Cacioppo et al., 1992; Till & Priluck, 2000; Walther, 2002; Courbet, 2003). Therefore, offering positive role models of behaviour in advertisements may be

beneficial for consumers who maintain a neutral to positive initial attitude toward recommended products and services such as cigarettes, alcohol, and others.

Concepts of attitude and attitude change are also associated with a selective review that spans the period from 2005 to 2009 and presents mostly constructivist and stable conceptualizations (Bohner and Dickel, 2011). Building on the previous review, the good conceptualizations of attitude are analyzed - (implicit or automatic) and (evaluate or attitude) (Fabrigar et al., 2005), attitude as a stable subject - the MODE model (motivation and opportunity as determinants) (Fazio, 2007; Johnson et al., 2010), as well as a meta-cognitive model (MCM, Petty et al., 2007), both models treating attitudes as long-term memory structures. The definitions that researchers give in a special issue of Social Cognition differ in the extent to which they accept the view that attitudes are stable entities stored in memory against temporary judgments built on the spot from available information (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007). The following table lists some of the main opinions on the definition of attitude, some aspects of it, and conditions for change. (Table 1)

Table 1

Main definitions on the concept of attitude

Authors	Definitions
Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary, Petty (1992)	“When we gain more experience with an attitude object it becomes represented in memory within a richer network of associations. This greater availability of attitude-relevant information in memory, they suggest, leads to less attitude change after being exposed to an evaluative-conditioning procedure” (Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary, Petty, 1992, p. 209).
Krosnick & Petty (1995)	„Attitude strength is the extent to which attitudes manifest the qualities of durability and impactfulness” (Krosnick and Petty, 1995, p.2).
Higgins (1996)	“Judgments are rendered chronically more accessible after having been constructed many times in similar situations with the same result” (Higgins, 1996, p.179).
Eagly, and Chaiken, (2007)	“Psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a certain subject with a certain degree of favoritism or disapproval” (Eagly, and Chaiken, 2007, pp. 582).

Visser, and Mirabile, (2004)	“An Array of Summary Grades Stored in Memory” (Visser, and Mirabile, 2004, pp.783).
Schwartz, and Clore, (2007)	“Evaluative judgments formed when necessary, not lasting personal attitudes” (Schwarz, and Clore, 2007, p. 394).
Fazio, and Olson, (2003)	“Associations for the evaluation of objects in memory” (Fazio, and Olson, 2003, p.299).
Cunningham, Zelazo, Packer, and Bavel, (2007)	“Current assessments are made up of relatively stable performances” (Cunningham, Zelazo, Packer, and Bavel, 2007, p. 736).
Conrey, and Smith, (2007)	„Time-dependent system states, not static “things” that are “stored” in memory “ (Conrey, and Smith, 2007, p. 718).
Petty, Brinol, and DeMarree, (2007)	„Positive and negative evaluations, as well as fluctuations in judgments related to the same object, form ambivalent attitudes“ (Petty, Brinol, and DeMarree, 2007, p.662).
Gawronski, and Bodenhausen, (2007)	“Relationship construction has different meanings for associative and propositional processes” (Gawronski, and Bodenhausen, 2007, p. 688).

Most definitions treat attitudes either as stable entities (observed in earlier research) or as temporal constructs (found in later research). Some models clearly support either a stable object or a constructivist view, while others take a more intermediate position. On the side of the stable object of the continuum we see the MODE model (motivation and opportunity as determinants) (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, and Williams, 1995; Fazio, 2007) and the meta-cognitive model (MCM, Petty, Brinol, & DeMarree, 2007), who both treat attitudes as long-term memory structures. In the MODE model (Fazio et al., 1995; Fazio, 2007) the presentation of an object is related to a global assessment; in this way, the meeting with the site will remind of the global assessment through an associative link. The meta-cognitive model - MCM (Petty, Brinol & DeMarree, 2007) makes similar structural assumptions, but includes the possibility that an object is associated with more than one generalized assessment with different associative power. Similarly, in their Associative Propositional Assessment (APE) model, Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2007) view attitudes as constructed in the situation, and they also emphasize two types of implementation process (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007). Also taking a radical constructive view,

Conrey and Smith (2007) emphasize that attitudes are “time-dependent states of the system” and not “static” things that are “stored” in memory “ (Conrey & Smith, 2007, p.720). More intermediate positions are occupied by Eagly and Chaiken (2007), who present a definition that covers the key characteristics of trend, object (or object of attitude) and evaluation (Eagly, and Chaiken, 2007, p. 585). Cunningham et al. (2007) derive an integrated model of reprocessing, which is a combined view that “current estimates are constructed from relatively stable representations of the relationship” (Cunningham et al., 2007, p. 740)

Given the empirical evidence of sensitivity to context versus stability of attitudes, each view has its strengths and limitations (Bohner, and Dickel, 2011, p. 399). While much evidence of sensitivity to the context of evaluative judgments supports a constructivist view, there is also evidence of high stability of many attitudes even in the face of changing situations (Schwarz, and Clore. 2007). Such inter-situational stability seems clear if one assumes that attitudes are stored in long-term memory, ready for access and use when needed, as in the “mental drawer” (Bohner et al., 2008, p. 111). However, stability is also within the explanatory scope of radical design models (Conrey & Smith, 2007). Studies show that judgments become chronically more accessible after being constructed many times in similar situations with the same result (Higgins, 1996). Even if the situational input varies slightly, the overall estimate obtained may remain the same until the valence of the input changes, which again leads to stability over time (Schwarz, and Bohner, 2001). The power of attitude can be defined as “the degree to which attitudes manifest the qualities of permanence and impact” (Krosnick, and Petty, 1995, p. 18). The assumption is that strong attitudes are more stable in different situations and over time and can therefore be constantly recalled, while weak attitudes are less accessible and therefore more susceptible to context.

On the one hand, the researcher considers the constructivist view of attitudes to be powerful in its scope of explanation and at the same time very frugal (Schwarz and Clore, 2007). On the other hand, theories inspired by the file drawer, such as MCM (Petty, Brinol & DeMarree, 2007), although less sparing in their assumptions, generate new hypotheses and stimulate research, as we will see in-down. For future research, it may be useful to combine the strengths of the two approaches and to take into account both stable and changeable aspects of attitudes. Therefore, the initial hypotheses to be tested are as follows:

Hypothesis 0: An attitude is a stable entity that is formed in the presence of a stimulus, based on associations in memory (implicit attitude) or on the direction of thinking about things (explicit attitude).

Hypothesis 1: Attitude is not a stable entity because it has a temporal construct, and the causal relationship to its change is subsequently discovered.

3. ADVERTISING ATTITUDES

Although attitudes can be characterized as simple object-evaluation associations, attitudes may be part of larger sets of knowledge structures (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, cited by Fabrigar, MacDonald and Wegener, 2005). For example, in advertising, the advertised product or service is perceived as a simple object, and part of the user's evaluation is the testing of the product, which leads to the creation of cognitive, affective and some conative structures of the attitude. Other evidence supports the idea that evaluative conditioning is most effective for unfamiliar conditioned stimuli (Cacioppo et al., 1992) because the consumer has no preconceived attitude toward a product or service. Conversely, other authors demonstrate that as we gain more experience with an object, it becomes represented in memory within a richer network of associations. This greater availability of attitude-relevant information in memory results in less attitude change after exposure to an evaluation and conditioning procedure (Gibson, 2008, p. 178). Therefore, advertisers must be aware of the attributes associated with established attitudes in order to offer incentives to form new attitudes about individual products and services. This is the reason why many authors in individual years include in their questionnaires a pool statement pertaining to overall attitudes toward advertising, evaluation of various advertising components and other relevant issues (French, Barksdale & Perreault, 1982; Kwan, Ho & Cragin, 1983; Larkin, 1977; Mehta, 2000; Muehling, 1987; Ashill & Yavas, 2005). According to Mehta (2000) "print advertising performance is influenced by consumers' attitudes toward advertising in general and respondents with more favourable attitudes toward advertising recalled a higher number of advertisements the day after exposure and are more persuaded by them" (Mehta, 2000, p 67). Determining consumer preferences for individual advertisements or specific target groups is therefore the first task of any researcher. According to Muehling (1987) given the increased interest in, and practical importance of, the "attitude-toward-the-advertising" construct, it is imperative to examine more closely the antecedent factors that may influence/shape these ad-specific attitudes (Muehling, 1987, p. 32). The same author through the inclusion of valance thought indices provided additional explanation of global attitudes toward advertising (Muehling, 1987, p. 33). In addition to the need for research on attitude-toward-advertising-in-general, researchers support the idea that attitude toward advertising is multidimensional because these studies include attitude toward a product or service (Mehta, 2000), attitude toward the company (Muehling, 1987), attitude towards components used in advertising and others (Ashill, and Yavas, 2005).

The thoroughness of advertising research also requires determining some of its aspects such as variations in strength, attitude persistence, resistance, as well as

the consistency of attitude and behaviour (Holland et al., 2002, Petty et al., 2004). According to Roskos-Ewoldsen, David and Fazio (1992), attitudes and attitude strength can serve as precursors to object attachment, and also attitudes and the strength of attitudes can influence behaviour, which is an important factor in object attachment (Roskos-Ewoldsen, David & Fazio, 1992). Depending on the type of advertising, its object can be either the company as a whole - image advertising, or a product or service - product advertising. Attitudes toward advertising in general have long been the focus of research, but most of these have been more focused upon investigating the structure of advertising attitudes rather than the generalizability of overall attitude favourability (Schlosser, Shavitt & Kanfer, 1999, p. 36). Although studies on advertising attitudes vary widely in the types of samples used and the data collection methods used, they focus on dimensions of product and service judgment. Respondents are typically asked not only about their overall attitude toward advertisements, but also about their perceptions of products and services, their purchase attitudes, attitudes toward the company, and effect on prices and value of products such as attitudes toward regulatory issues (Kwan, Ho & Cragin, 1983; Larkin, 1977; Mehta, 2000; Muehling, 1987; Ashill, and Yavas, 2005). In this article, a sequence of the research of attitudes towards advertising is proposed, according to the achievements of the previous studies, as well as directions for future studies.

4. METHODOLOGY FOR TESTING ATTITUDES TO ADVERTISING

The main goal of the Consumer Attitudes Survey is to study the impact of companies' advertising and communication activities on consumer attitudes, how this impact is achieved and what are the attitudes towards the products and services of the respective companies as part of consumer assessment. The researcher seeks to determine the conditions under which it is possible to influence consumers in building their attitudes to certain products and services, as well as whether changes are possible in the built prejudices.

The research can be conducted through an interdisciplinary approach based on the communication theory of persuasive communication, media studies, psychology and social psychology in the implementation of advertising communication. Creating an original methodology for conducting advertising research is a very complex task and this is explained by the fact that there are no strictly established standard models. The main methods relied on are surveys, group discussions or in-depth interviews, and advertising media are tested for perceiving, understanding, remembering or evoking emotions in order to influence consumer interest. The methodology of the advertising

research includes a total of three main points in the advertising research: Pre-tests - tests conducted before the presentation of advertising (copy tests) on recognition / recall of advertising (recognition / recall) (Starch, 1923) and persuasion / attitude shift (persuasion / attitude shift); (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999); Basic tests - conducted during advertising; (Hollis, 2004); Tracking studies - used after the end of the advertising performance. (Brown, 1985).

The most widely discussed topic of advertising research in foreign literature is the topic of pre-tests, also called (copy tests). These are quantitative requirements, the values of which are measured and compared with empirically established coupons, on the basis of which it is decided whether and what improvements should be made. The second main group of advertising research is the so-called basic tests (Hollis, 2004), which are conducted during advertising. The third main group of advertising research is the so-called tracking studies to determine the effectiveness of the advertising. The following is established: assisted brand awareness; advertising reminder; diagnostics of advertising performance - liking, acceptance; intentions to make a purchase. The study of consumer attitudes towards advertising can follow the following sequence: 1) study of attitude towards advertising in general, which should include attitude towards the company, attitude towards the product category, attitude towards the company's products and services. Additional statements about the types of company advertisements would help establish consumer familiarity with the products and services under study, attitude is also defined as long-term memory structures. 2) after establishing a certain targeted group of respondents who have positive or from neutral to positive attitudes towards the company's products, a survey is conducted with this group, which includes various modules for determining individual attitudes - cognitive, affective and conative; 3) respondents are offered separate statements about the company's advertisements. Claims must contain the following components: degree of awareness of products and services, usefulness of using the products, promotions, absence of misleading information, presence of purchase incentives and others; 4) affective attitudes are explored through statements about the sensations before, during and after exposure to advertisements; induced moods and feelings during and after making a purchase, as well as in the achieved impact of advertisements after trying the products; 5) conative attitudes are an important part of the study, because they are related to all behavioural changes of consumers - behaviour before trying the product, behaviour during the impact of advertising, as well as some individual reactions of consumers after making a purchase. The researcher should look for the reasons for repeat purchase or the reasons for the lack of one.

5. CONCLUSION

This article offers advertisers and marketers a systematic account and empirical evidence from various studies of the value of attitude toward advertising, and each new study should begin with a general statement regarding the overall attitude toward advertising, as well as an evaluation of various advertising components (Barksdale et al., 1982; French, Barksdale & Perreault, 1982; Kwan, Ho & Cragin, 1983; Larkin, 1977; Mehta, 2000; Muehling, 1987; Ashill & Yavas, 2005). Also, future advertising research should focus on the conditions under which a new attitude is formed, as well as the extent to which consumers consciously accept or reject the object of the advertisement. Another part of the study is the identification of both familiar and unfamiliar conditioned stimuli (Cacioppo et al., 1992), especially when individual consumers do not have preconceived attitudes about some of these stimuli.

Another important point in the study of attitudes towards advertising is the determination of the previous factors that can influence consumers in the formation of certain pre-attitudes (Muehling, 1987, p. 32), because a preliminary negative individual evaluation of products and services would lead to a decline of the influence of incentives in advertising. When identifying certain targeted groups of users, in which there is a strong positive attitude towards a certain product or service, a precursor of attachment to the object of the advertisement, a high degree of impact and effectiveness of advertisements is expected. In order to develop the most suitable scale for measuring attitudes towards advertising, statements from modules with different purposes should be offered for evaluation by users. Names of formed factors are those that have the highest loading on this factor. In some scientific studies, factors such as credibility of advertising and minimization of misleading effects, control of advertised products and services with clearly stated benefits, measuring the economic value of advertising and others are brought out (Ashill & Yavas, 2005). In addition, it can be pointed out that in some studies brand attitudes as well as purchase intentions also determine the positive and negative attitudes that hinder advertising effectiveness (Calfee & Ringold, 1988; Pollay & Mittal, 1993) Therefore, in future studies advertising claims should not be made in such a way that benefits appear overblown or duplicitous, as well as referrals to product benefits should be limited to tangible and not perceived benefits (Ashill & Yavas, 2005, pp. 346-347). In addition, future research should make a comparative analysis between different countries, as well as consider the influence of cross-cultural values in each country, because this would affect the retention, recall and meaning of the advertisements offered, as well as the attitudes that these advertisements would have built.

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