

1,070
TV-Spots



Do Pleasant Emotional Ads Make Consumers Like Your Brand More?

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It is generally assumed that emotionally pleasant TV commercials not only cause consumers to like the ad itself, but they also create more positive feelings toward the advertised brand. However, because previous studies have often investigated only a small set of ads, and then sometimes only for unknown brands, the question arises as to how factual this statement actually is. Does this apply to all product categories, or is it true only for some? For example, does an emotional ad have similar effects on attitudes toward a brand of automobiles as it does for a brand of financial services, soap or chewing gum? In other words, which types of brands and categories might the positive effect of emotionally pleasant ads be true for? The results of a large Belgian study show that ad-evoked feelings indeed have a substantial impact on brand evaluations. Interestingly, these effects depend neither on the level of involvement associated with the product category nor on whether the product is a durable good, nondurable good, or a service. However, the effects are slightly more pronounced for products that are more hedonic and experiential than for products that are functional and utilitarian.

Ad-evoked feelings make brands likable /// The results were very much in line with previous lab studies that were typically carried out with much smaller sets of ads from a limited number of product categories, often among student participants. Thus, even with a large sample of real-life commercials for many well-known brands across a full spectrum of product categories, ad-evoked feelings exerted a substan-

A STUDY OF 1,070 BELGIAN TV COMMERCIALS

The attitudinal responses of 1,576 Belgian consumers to 1,070 TV commercials shown on Dutch-language Belgian television over a three-year period were analyzed. This pool of commercials featured 318 national and international brands across 153 different product categories, including beer, credit cards, diapers, coffee, laundry detergents, cars and computers.

Over a period of three years, groups of 20 to 30 respondents were shown sets of between 20 and 50 commercials and asked to rate them. Each ad was rated by an average of 43 consumers. After seeing each commercial, respondents rated their attitude toward the ad, how useful and informative the ad was, and their attitudes toward the advertised brand. Additionally, an independent group of judges rated the degree of emotionality of each ad and their degree of creativity. Given that the vast majority of TV commercials in Belgium had a positive emotional tone, only positive emotions were measured.

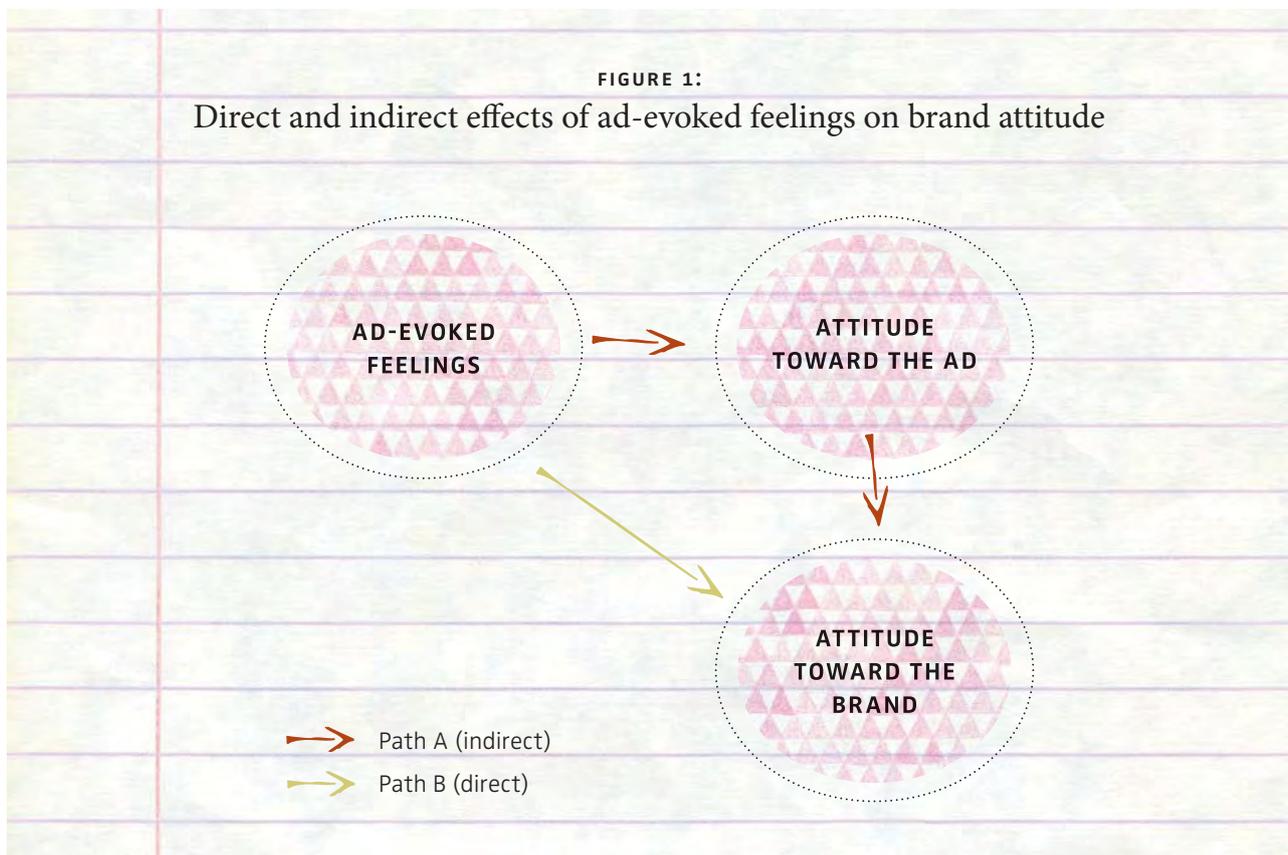
The viewers indicated, for instance, how warm, excited, happy and cheerful the ad made them feel. Another set of judges coded the 153 product categories represented in the ads in terms of their level of involvement and type of buying motivation (hedonic/experiential or utilitarian/instrumental), as well as whether the advertised product was a durable, a non-durable or a service and whether the ad was for a search or an experience product.

tial influence on brand attitudes. Regardless of how creative or informative the respondents found the ads to be, the emotional content of these ads had a significant positive influence on consumers' attitudes toward the advertised brands. Indeed, variation in the pleasantness of ad-evoked feelings across advertisements accounted for about 11 % of the variation in attitudes across advertised brands. This effect of evoked feelings on brand attitudes was both direct and indirect (Figure 1).

- > **Positive ad-evoked feelings lead directly to more positive brand attitudes** (direct path A) /// This direct effect can arise in two different ways. First, ads that elicit more pleasant feelings may trigger more positive thoughts about the brand, which results in more favorable brand attitudes. Second, the effect can result from an automatic process of evaluative conditioning: By pairing the brand with the feelings evoked by the ad, the feelings become part of the brand's evaluation.
- > **Positive ad-evoked feelings increase liking of the ad, which translates into more favorable brand attitudes** (indirect path B) /// In addition, feelings have an indirect effect on brand attitude through their effect on the attitude toward the ad itself. Ads that evoke positive feelings are liked better, and well-liked ads lead to more positive brand attitudes. Consumers simply transfer their liking of the ad itself onto the advertised brand. This indirect effect is stronger than the direct effect.

Ad-evoked emotions work independent of product characteristics /// To test the generality of the effects of ad-evoked feelings, the study investigated classic product-category determinants of ad effectiveness commonly considered by the industry.

- > **Ad-evoked feelings work for high- and low-involvement categories** /// First, the analysis considered whether the product category is typically categorized as low involvement (e.g., shower gel and paper towels) or high involvement (e.g., cellphones and banking). Results showed that the effects of ad-evoked emotions on brand attitudes did



not depend on the level of product category involvement: The emotional content of the ad had an equally strong influence on brand evaluations in low- and high-involvement product categories. Although this result may come as a surprise, it could be that categorizing a whole product category as either high or low involvement is problematic. For instance, a car may be a high-involvement product for some consumers but not for others. Similarly, buying milk or soap, products that are generally considered low-involvement, might be very important to some consumers. It could also be that ad-evoked feelings exert an influence under both low and high involvement, but through different underlying processes. Under low involvement the effect may be indirect (path B), whereas under high involvement the effect may be more direct (path A).

> *Ad-evoked feelings work better for fun products than for functional products* /// Second, the study investigated the effect of different buying motives. Products are usually bought either for fun (hedonic/experiential motives), such as when buying products like ice cream or perfume, or to serve a rather functional purpose (utilitarian/instrumental motives), such as when buying products like detergents or trash cans. Consumers with experiential motives are driven by the intrinsic rewards of the consumption itself (e.g., how much fun one will have playing a game of tennis), and therefore concerned with issues such as how much pleasure, sensory stimulation or entertainment they may experience. On the other hand, consumers with instrumental motives are driven by some extrinsic functional benefits

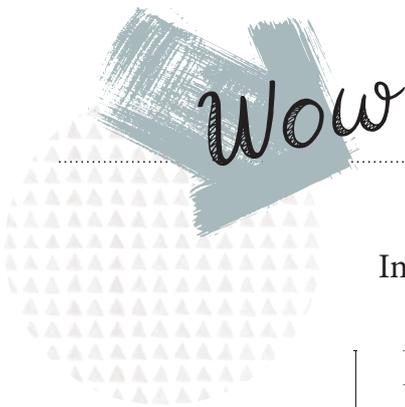
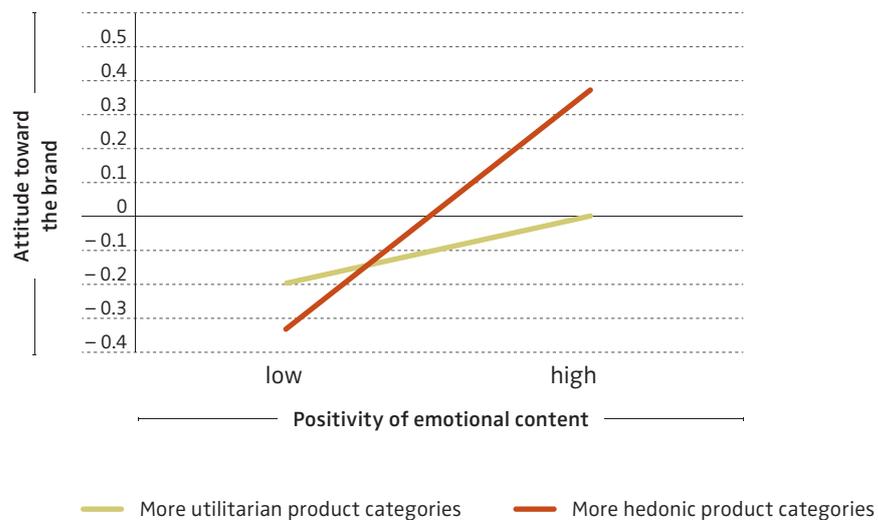


FIGURE 2:

Impact of emotional content on brand attitude



of the consumption (e.g., whether playing tennis would help them lose weight), and therefore less concerned with issues such as pleasure, entertainment, and sensory stimulation. As expected, the effects of ad-evoked feelings on brand attitudes were more pronounced for products typically associated with fun than for products typically associated with functionality. This result is consistent with other research showing that feelings are typically considered to be more relevant and weighted more heavily when consumers have experiential goals than when they have instrumental goals.

> **Ad-evoked feelings work equally well for durables, non-durables, and services, and for search and experience goods** /// Third, the effect of durables (e.g., cars and refrigerators), non-durables (e.g., food and toilet paper) and services (e.g., haircuts and phone subscriptions) was also investigated, as was the distinction between search goods and experience goods. Search goods can be easily evaluated by the consumer before a purchase (e.g., clothing and furniture), while experience goods can only be evaluated after the purchase, by consuming and experiencing the product (e.g., a diet program and movies). The results showed that the durability and tangibility of the product and the search-versus-experience nature of the product did NOT influence the effects of ad-evoked feelings on brand evaluations. The effect was similar across all of these product characteristics.

Use positive emotions in advertising, especially for hedonic products /// “Convincing a consumer to like a brand through advertising is largely an emotional challenge”, Pham, Geuens and De Pelsmacker conclude from their research. Their findings can be summarized with the following recommendations:

- > The effects of ad-evoked feelings on brand evaluations are substantial. Whenever possible, advertisers should develop ads that elicit pleasant feelings, not only because these ads are liked better, but more importantly because these ads lead to more favorable brand attitudes.
- > It does not really matter which type of product category is advertised; positive ad-evoked feelings have an equally strong positive effect on brand attitudes for durables, non-durables, services, high- and low-involvement products, and search and experience products.
- > However, for brands in product categories that are mostly hedonic and experiential, evoking positive emotions is even more important for developing favorable brand attitudes.
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Managerial summary of an article published in the top academic journal “International Journal of Research in Marketing”:

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