Ad–Self-Congruency Effects: Self-Enhancing Cognitive and Affective Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how the drive for self-enhancement influences responses to ads depicting images that are self-congruent along the dimensions of femininity and individualism/collectivism. Participants' schematics on the portrayed dimension were found to exhibit higher levels of cognitive self-referencing and positive affect when the ad image was congruent with their ideal self-schemata than when it was not. Greater self-referencing and positive affect were found, in turn, to promote more favorable ad attitudes, thereby resulting in more positive brand attitudes. © 2005 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Individuals develop a general understanding of who they are and who they aspire to be as they develop. This understanding helps define the self, the various components of which are generally referred to as "self-schemata" (Markus, 1977). Because consumption is self-oriented and serves important symbolic functions (Sirgy, 1982), individuals often use products as a way to present the defined self to others (Belk, 1988). Through their selection of particular brands, which, like persons, have unique personalities and images (Aaker, 1997), individuals can project a self-image—which is often idealized—to others. This can help them gain a sense of self-consistency or self-enhancement (Sirgy, 1982).

Accordingly, responses to ad messages featuring self-congruent and self-incongruent images have been widely studied (e.g., Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Wang & Mowen, 1997). Although the superior effectiveness of self-

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congruent ad messages has been well documented, specific mechanisms for such effects have yet to be empirically tested. Sirgy (1982) proposed self-consistency and self-enhancement as the forces behind ad–self-congruency effects, but did not test the specific processes that these motivations may trigger.

It is possible that the desire for self-consistency or self-enhancement and how this brings about ad–self-congruency effects may be explained by findings related to cognitive and affective processes driven by self-schemata. For instance, self-schemata serve important selective information processing functions, directing attention to messages that are congruent with the real self in order to keep self-schemata intact and to messages that are congruent with the ideal self for the sake of self-enhancement (Markus & Wurf, 1987). In addition, self-schemata serve important affect-regulation functions (Markus & Wurf, 1987): Attending to self-congruent messages may increase positive emotions.

For example, a teenager striving to be an independent adult is likely to be more attentive than usual to an ad showing how adventures in Africa can be made possible by a Visa card. Because the ad taps into the teenager's desire for independence, he or she is likely to envision himself or herself in the same adventure context and experience positive emotions to a greater degree than usual. Such biased cognitive and affective responses to self-congruent ad messages can be attributed to viewers' self-serving motivations (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

In this article, such responses to self-congruent messages will be considered from the perspective of self-schema theory (see Fiske & Taylor, 1991, for a review). Specifically, the pursuit of the ideal self has been identified as a primary motivation for product consumption (Sirgy, 1982), and therefore the congruency between ad messages and the ideal self will be examined here. Ad messages congruent with the ideal self on crucial or central self dimensions should draw attention and cause consumers to generate self-referent thoughts and imagine themselves in the depicted ad setting, because individuals are motivated to seek out positive feedback by elaborating on information congruent with the dimensions important to defining themselves (Markus & Wurf, 1987). In addition, attending to and involving oneself in ad messages depicting user images congruent with one's ideal self-image should also elicit a strong positive emotional response, which, in turn, should lead to more favorable ad and brand attitudes.

Self-Schemata

Self-schemata have been defined as "cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of the self-related information contained in an individual's social experience" (Markus, 1977, p. 63). Self-schemata involve roles or attributes that individuals aspire to and project for the future (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986). In addition, there are many possible

selves that a person can use to define himself or herself (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987). For example, the ideal self is the positive, desired self that is likely to be realized; and it has been shown to be substantially correlated with the real self (Landon, 1974). The pursuit of the ideal self is an important determinant of behavior in general (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987), including product consumption behavior (e.g., Sirgy, 1982).

In addition, individuals can be schematic on certain dimensions but aschematic on others (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987). Even on dimensions found to be relatively universal, individuals can differ enormously in terms of how central the dimensions are to them (Markus, Crane, Bernstein, & Siladi, 1982). Aspects considered central to the self become foci of concern and remain salient parameters for information processing (Markus et al., 1982). In general, people are more likely to be self-schematic on dimensions that they believe to be self-descriptive, of personal importance, or on which they consider themselves to be extreme (Markus, 1977, 1999). Most crucial to this article, however, is the idea that such variations may explain why individuals respond to the same ad messages in divergent ways.

Self-Schemata and Advertising Effects

Prior studies have found that advertising appeals congruent with an audience's self-schemata are more effective than incongruent appeals (e.g., Brock, Brannon, & Bridgwater, 1990; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Wang & Mowen, 1997). These findings are consistent across different dimensions of the self. For example, both Chang (2000) and Hong and Zinkhan (1995) found that introvert participants responded more positively to ads depicting introvert users, and that extrovert participants favored ads portraying extrovert users. In addition, role portrayals consistent with participants' femininity or masculinity have been shown to be more effective (Jaffe, 1990, 1994) than inconsistent portrayals. Support for self-congruency effects has also been garnered from investigations centering on the collectivism/individualism dimension (e.g., Leach & Liu, 1998; Wang & Mowen, 1997).

Hong and Zinkhan (1995) found that ads portraying brand images congruent with ad perceivers' ideal self-concepts lead to more positive brand attitudes than images congruent with ad perceivers' real self-concepts. Thus, within the context of developing product evaluations, the ideal self may be more salient than the real self. For this reason, this article will primarily explore the impact on advertising processing and product evaluations of congruency between ad-portrayed user images and participants' ideal self-images.

With regard to why self-congruent ad messages are more effective than self-incongruent messages, Hong and Zinkhan (1995) have reasoned that advertising information relevant to viewers' self-schemata is more likely to draw attention, and that greater attention when ad information is encoded will lead to more linkages and associations, making

message retrieval much more likely. However, evidence in support of this cognitive process has not been documented. The same researchers also speculated that the motivations to be consistent with the self and to enhance the self-schemata may explain why self-congruent ad messages are more persuasive than self-incongruent messages (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). Unfortunately, they did not explicitly test this theory either.

In light of the lack of empirical evidence bearing on the role of such cognitive or psychological processes, in this article a theoretical framework concerning them is developed and tested in order to explain ad–self-congruency effects.

THE DRIVE FOR SELF-ENHANCEMENT—A SELF-REFERENT COGNITIVE PROCESS

When a person holds a clear set of knowledge about herself on a specific dimension, that knowledge set, being readily accessible, becomes a powerful framework for processing information (Markus et al., 1982; Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977). Information relevant to the self is thus more likely to be attended to, encoded, and processed (see Markus & Wurf, 1987, for a review). Therefore, those who are schematic on a particular self-dimension and those who are not will respond to the same message in different ways.

Even when self-relevant schemata are activated, however, the degree of message elaboration can vary. Prior research suggests that self-congruent messages are processed more efficiently than self-incongruent messages (e.g., Markus, 1977, 1999), elaborated on to a higher degree (Cacioppo, Petty, & Sidera, 1982), and recalled better (Mills, 1983), which may be a result of self-enhancing motivations. One explanation for the more extensive processing of self-congruent ad messages is that self-schemata are more emotionally laden than knowledge about others or objects and exhibit a stronger tendency to remain intact or be strengthened whenever possible (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Thus the influence of self-schemata may not be limited to the areas of response latency and degree of message retention, the primary processing functions affected by other knowledge schemata, but may also extend to self-referencing. In the advertising context, self-referencing refers to the process by which individuals are encouraged to relate their own experiences or expectations to ad messages (Burnkrant & Unnava, 1989). This may be especially true when the ad messages are relevant to the ideal self. In such situations, the desire for self-enhancement may motivate consumers to imagine themselves in the depicted ad scenario, leading to more self-referent cognitions. Greater self-referencing in turn may enhance ad and brand attitudes.

Among the many dimensions of the self, one of the few to have been closely examined by prior research is femininity (Lenney, 1991). According to Bem, Martyna, and Watson (1976), femininity is associated with "an 'expressive' orientation, an affective concern for the welfare of oth-

ers and the harmony of the group" (p. 1,016) and is thought to be independent from masculinity, the other dimension related to gender traits (Bem, 1981).

Markus and colleagues (1982) theorize that those who rate themselves high on femininity and masculinity are schematic on these constructs, and those who rate themselves low are aschematic. In line with this reasoning, it is posited in Experiment 1 that those who rate their ideal self high on femininity are feminine schematic and that the degree of self-referencing they engage in when viewing an ad will therefore be influenced by the femininity of the ad images. In contrast, those who rate the ideal self low on femininity are considered to be feminine aschematic and therefore their level of self-referencing should not be affected by the femininity of the ad images.

H1(a): For feminine-schematic individuals, ads portraying high-feminine users elicit higher levels of self-referencing and more self-referent cognitive responses than will ads portraying low-feminine users. In contrast, for feminine-aschematic individuals, the femininity of product user profiles in ads does not influence self-referencing.

THE DRIVE FOR SELF-ENHANCEMENT—AFFECTIVE IMPLICATIONS

In addition to facilitating information processing and encouraging self-referencing, another unique function of self-schemata is affect regulation (Markus & Wurf, 1987). This involves the effort both to maintain consistency on self-definitional constructs and to achieve positive affective states (Markus & Wurf, 1987). By attending to self-congruent messages, individuals reinforce self-schemata and experience positive emotions. In addition, identifying with messages congruent with the ideal self represents a symbolic route to self-completion, which also enhances positive emotions. Although the drives for self-enhancement and self-consistency are both associated with positive emotions, the drive for self-enhancement is hypothesized to be a more plausible mechanism for ad–self-congruency effects.

Moreover, it is well documented in the psychology literature that individuals tend to be unrealistically optimistic regarding the future self, exhibiting more favorable evaluations of their prospects than of their present situations (Trommsdorff, Lamm, & Schmidt, 1979; Weinstein, 1980). Messages congruent with the ideal self should thus evoke more positive affect than incongruent messages, but only for those schematic on the relevant self-dimension.

H1(b): For feminine-schematic individuals, ads portraying high-feminine users elicit greater positive affect than will ads portraying low-feminine users. In contrast, for feminine aschematic indi-

viduals, the femininity of the ad images does not influence the degree of positive affect experienced.

THE MEDIATION MODEL

Prior research has focused on comparing the impact of self-congruent and self-incongruent messages on ad and brand evaluations (e.g., Wang & Mowen, 1997). In contrast, the purpose of this article is to establish the process via which ad–self-congruency influences these two variables. According to the model proposed here (see Figure 1), the interaction between self-schemata and ad portrayals affects the degree of self-referencing and positive affect, which in turn influences ad evaluations. In addition, because ad attitudes are known to mediate the relationship between ad appeals and brand attitudes (e.g., Gardner, 1985; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986), self-referencing and positive affect should influence brand evaluations via ad attitudes.

H1(c): The interaction between ad image portrayals and self-schemata influences ad attitudes via self-referencing and positive affect.

H1(d): Self-referencing and positive affect influence brand evaluations via ad attitudes.

EXPERIMENT 1

Research Design

This study featured a between-subjects design. The manipulated factor was ad-depicted product user femininity: high-feminine versus low-feminine.

Stimuli

Stimulus ads were created by professional copywriters and designers at an ad agency in Taiwan. The same product attribute information was

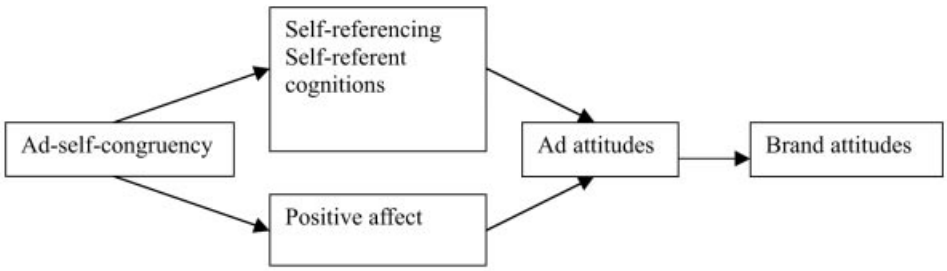

Figure 1. The proposed mediation model for ad-self-congruency effects.

included for both stimulus ads. The featured product was bottled water, which is regularly consumed by 70.5% of individuals aged 15–24 in Taiwan (East Online Ltd., 2000). To improve external validity, the stimulus ad was inserted between two real filler ads.

Participants

Three hundred twenty-five participants (55% male) were recruited from a national university in Taipei, Taiwan, and paid for their participation. Although biological differences may explain variations in gender-role beliefs, Skitka and Maslach (1996) found that biological sex accounts for very little of the variation in how individuals categorize femininity-related or masculinity-related information. Therefore, the focus of this experiment was on feminine traits, regardless of biological gender. All scales were translated into Chinese following Brislin's (1987) translation and backtranslation procedures.

Procedures

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two product user femininity conditions. At the start of the study, the coordinator informed them that the study was designed to examine the effects of various ad layouts and formats on information processing, in order to discourage the participants from discerning the actual purpose of the study and thus skewing the results. Participants were then instructed not to turn back to pages they had already read during the study. Next they read a filler ad, followed by a stimulus ad and another filler ad. The filler ads were pretested to be neutral. After reading each ad, participants wrote down the thoughts they had had when reading it and completed measures assessing their affective states at that moment. After reading the stimulus ad, the degree of self-referencing with respect to the stimulus ad was assessed, and, as a manipulation check, participants rated the product users in the stimulus ad on the femininity items in Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory. After reading all ads, they completed measures assessing their ad and product attitudes and the degree to which the Bem femininity items and items from other value and personality scales described their ideal selves. A short debriefing was conducted at the conclusion of the study.

Independent Variables

Participant Femininity: Feminine Schematic vs. Feminine Aschematic. On 7-point Likert scales, participants rated how ideal it would be for them to have each of the 20 characteristics in the femininity subscale of Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory. Cronbach's reliability alpha for femininity was satisfactory at 0.74. Following the classification system of Markus et al. (1982), those rating themselves high on femininity were considered to be schematic and those rating themselves low

were considered to be aschematic. Respondents were categorized into three groups: 111 (44% male) were considered schematic, 111 (64% male) were aschematic, and 103 (58% male) with ratings falling into the middle range were considered to be neither schematic nor aschematic on femininity and thus their responses were not analyzed.

Product User Femininity: High-Feminine vs. Low-Feminine. As mentioned above, the femininity subscale of Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory was employed as a manipulation check. Cronbach's alpha for ratings of the femininity of product users portrayed in the ads was satisfactory at .93. Product users portrayed in the high-feminine ad received significantly higher ratings on femininity than did those portrayed in the low-feminine ad condition, $F(1, 221) = 83.64$, $p < .01$ ($M_{\text{high-feminine}} = 4.77$, $SD = 1.10$, $M_{\text{low-feminine}} = 3.50$, $SD = 0.97$). Therefore, the result of the manipulation check was satisfactory.

Dependent Measures

Self-Referencing. On 7-point Likert scales, participants indicated the degree to which they related to the product users on the following four items adopted from Debevec and Iyer (1988): "picture oneself in setting," "picture oneself in position of ad character," "similarity to life experience," and "similarity to ad character." The first two items were designed to capture self-referencing and the latter two perceived similarity, which has been shown to be significantly correlated with self-referencing (Debevec & Iyer, 1988). Factor analysis of the four items with the use of varimax rotation generated one factor with an eigenvalue larger than one. Therefore, scores on the four items were averaged. Cronbach's reliability alpha for this self-referencing scale was satisfactory at 0.87.

Cognitive responses were also analyzed and coded as self-referent and non-self-referent to assess the degree to which participants related to the ad. The coding units were sentences. Examples of self-referent cognitions included "it reminds me of my own experiences" and "the ad copy makes me feel that it is talking to me." Examples of non-self-referent responses were "the ad was for bottled water" and "the color of the background was not suitable for bottled water." Self-referent responses were further categorized as positive, neutral, or negative. Two coders independently coded one third of the cognitive responses, with an intercoder reliability estimated at 0.90 with the use of Krippendorff's alpha (1980). Then they each coded half of the remaining cognitive responses. To test the hypotheses of this experiment, the number of positive self-referent responses was the only variable used.

Positive Affect. Participants indicated the degree to which the following eight items, selected from Edell and Burke (1987) and scored on 7-point scales, applied to them: *happy, joyful, cheerful, delighted, satisfied,*

interested, moved, and *warm-hearted*. Factor analysis with varimax rotation generated one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one. The reliability for positive affect was satisfactory at 0.90. Responses to the items were thus averaged.

Ad Attitudes. On 7-point Likert scales, participants rated the degree to which they felt the ads were *interesting, good, likable,* and *pleasant*. Cronbach's reliability alpha for these items, adopted from Madden, Allen, and Twible (1988), was deemed satisfactory at .80. Ratings for the four items were averaged.

Brand Attitudes. On 7-point Likert scales, participants rated the degree to which each of the following evaluative items, adopted from Mitchell and Olson (1981) and Holbrook and Batra (1987), applied to the brand: *good*, *like*, *pleasant*, *positive*, and *high quality*. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was deemed satisfactory at 0.87. Therefore, the ratings of the items were averaged.

Analyses and Results

As expected, in preliminary ANOVAs neither biological gender nor the interactions between gender and product user femininity or participant femininity were found to significantly influence any of the dependent measures (all ps $> .05$). Therefore, gender was omitted from all of the analyses described below.

ANOVA was used to test H1(a) and 1(b) (see Tables 1 and 2). With respect to H1(a), a significant interaction was found between product user femininity and participant femininity for self-referencing, $F(1, 218) = 4.50, p = .04$. Simple effects tests showed that, as expected, the effect of product user femininity was significant for schematic participants, with the high-feminine profile leading to higher levels of self-referencing than the low-feminine profile; $F(1, 110) = 12.56, p < .01$ ($M_{\text{high-feminine}} = 4.53$, $SD = 1.65$, $M_{\text{low-feminine}} = 3.42$, $SD = 1.65$). In contrast, for aschematic participants, the impact of product user femininity was not significant; $F(1, 110) = 0.72, p = .40$ ($M_{\text{high-feminine}} = 3.64, SD = 1.40, M_{\text{low-feminine}} = 3.41, SD = 1.46$).

With regard to positive self-referent cognitive responses as well, the interaction between product user femininity and participant femininity was significant; $F(1, 218) = 4.61, p = .03$. Product user femininity significantly influenced schematic participants' responses; $F(1, 110) = 9.33$, $p = .01$ ($M_{\text{high-feminine}} = 1.98, SD = 0.92, M_{\text{low-feminine}} = 1.51, SD = 0.67$). For aschematic participants, however, the impact of product user femininity was not significant; $F(1, 110) = 0.01, p = .91$ ($M_{\text{high-feminine}} = 1.64$, $SD = 0.76$, $M_{\text{low-feminine}} = 1.66, SD = .97$). These results were all as predicted by H1(a), which was therefore fully supported.

With regard to H1(b), the interaction between product user femininity and participant femininity significantly influenced positive affect; $F(1,$

218) = 8.31, $p = .01$. The impact of product user femininity was significant for schematic participants, with the high-feminine profile generating more positive affect than the low-feminine profile, $F(1, 110) = 51.61$, $p < .01$ ($M_{high\text{-}feminine} = 5.18, SD = 1.10, M_{low\text{-}feminine} = 3.75, SD = 0.99$). Contrary to expectations, however, the impact of product user femininity was also significant for aschematic participants, with high-feminine messages generating more positive affect than low-feminine messages; $F(1, 110) = 9.87$, $p < .01$ ($M_{high\text{-}feminine} = 4.34$, $SD = 1.05$, $M_{low\text{-}feminine} = 3.72$, $SD = 1.03$). Therefore, this hypothesis was only partially supported.

The mediation models proposed in H1(c) and H1(d) were tested with the use of procedures described by Baron and Kenny (1986). In each case, four regression analyses were conducted to establish that

1. The independent variable exerts a significant effect upon the proposed mediator.
2. The mediator accounts for significant variance in the dependent variable.
3. The independent variable significantly influences the dependent variable.
4. When the independent variable and the mediator are both in the equation, the influence of the independent variable is insignificant, but the influence of the mediator remains significant.

For H1(c), product user femininity and participant femininity were included in all analyses. High-feminine ads were dummy coded 1 and low-

Table 1. Analysis of Variance Results for Experiments One and Two.

	Experiment One		Experiment Two	
		Self-referencing		
	F	*P*	*F*	*p*
Participant	10.45	.01	.06	.80
Product user	4.74	.03	15.41	.01
Participant × product user	4.50	.04	4.09	.05
		Positive self-referent cognitive responses		
		F	*P*	
Participant		3.94	.05	
Product user		.75	.39	
Participant × product user		4.61	.03	
		Positive affect		
	F	*P*	*F*	*p*
Participant	53.44	.01	.96	.33
Product user	9.42	.01	9.92	.01
Participant × product user	8.31	.01	5.62	.02

Table 2. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Experiments One and Two.

	Experiment One			Experiment Two	
			Self-referencing		
	High feminine product user	Low feminine product user		Individualist product user	Collectivist product user
Feminine schematic	4.53 (1.65)	3.42 (1.65)	Individualists	4.14 (1.29)	3.75 (1.40)
Feminine aschematic	3.64 (1.40)	3.41 (1.46)	Collectivists	4.73 (1.38)	4.99 (1.05)
			Positive self-referent cognitive responses		
	High feminine product user	Low feminine product user		Individualist product user	Collectivist product user
Feminine schematic	1.98 (.92)	1.51 (.67)			
Feminine aschematic	1.64 (.76)	1.66 (.97)			
			Positive affect		
	High feminine product user	Low feminine product user		Individualist product user	Collectivist product user
Feminine schematic	5.18 (1.10)	3.75 (1.00)	Individualists	4.64 (1.03)	4.39 (1.40)
Feminine aschematic	4.34 (1.05)	3.72 (1.03)	Collectivists	4.87 (1.22)	5.50 (1.13)

feminine ads –1; schematic participants were dummy coded 1 and aschematic participants –1. The results for self-referencing[1] indicated that

1. The influence of the product user femininity by participant femininity interaction term on self-referencing was significant (t = 2.12, p = .01, β = 0.14).
2. Self-referencing accounted for significant variance in ad attitudes (t = 10.33, p = .01, β = 0.54).
3. The influence of the interaction term on ad attitudes was significant (t = 2.58, p = .01, β = 16).
4. When ad attitudes were regressed on both the interaction term and self-referencing, the interaction term became insignificant (t = 1.66, p = .10, β = 0.09), and self-referencing remained significant (t = 10.03, p = .01, β = 0.53). Thus self-referencing met the criteria for a significant mediator.

The results for positive affect indicated that

1. The impact of the user femininity by participant femininity interaction on positive affect was significant (t = 2.88, p = .01, β = 0.17).
2. Positive affect accounted for significant variance in ad attitudes (t = 14.17, p = .01, β = 0.71).
3. The influence of the interaction term on ad attitudes was significant (t = 2.58, p = .01, β = 0.16); and (d) when ad attitudes were regressed on the ad by individual interaction and positive affect, the interaction became insignificant (t = .83, p = .41, β = 0.04), and positive affect remained significant (t = 13.73, p = .01, β = 0.71). This indicated that positive affect was also a significant mediator. Therefore, H1(c) was fully supported.

With regard to H1(d), product user femininity, participant femininity, and the interaction between them were included in all four regression equations. The analyses found showed that

1. The impact on ad attitudes of both self-referencing (t = 4.64, p = .01, β = 0.25) and positive affect (t = 9.34, p = .01, β = 0.55) was significant.
2. Ad attitudes accounted for significant variance in brand attitudes (t = 19.52, p = .01, β = 0.83).
3. The influence on brand attitudes of both self-referencing (t = 4.32, p = .01, β = 0.26) and positive affect (t = 8.05, p = .01, β = 0.53) was significant.

[1] Because self-referencing and self-referent cognitive responses may explain shared variance, in order to avoid multicollinearity problems, only the former was used to test the mediational processes proposed in H1(c,d).

4. When brand attitudes were regressed on self-referencing, positive affect, and ad attitudes, the influence of the self-referencing disappeared ($t = 1.78, p = .08, \beta = 0.09$), and the influence of ad attitudes remained significant ($t = 11.36, p = .01, \beta = 0.68$).

This indicated that self-referencing influenced brand attitudes via its influence on ad attitudes. However, contrary to expectations, in the fourth regression equation the influence of positive affect also remained significant ($t = 2.47, p = .01, \beta = 0.15$), although the Beta value decreased from 0.55 to 0.15. Thus, positive affect exerted both a direct influence on brand attitudes and an indirect influence via ad attitudes.

DISCUSSION

In Experiment 1, schematic participants exhibited significantly greater self-referencing and more positive self-referent cognitive responses, as well as greater positive affect, when they were exposed to ads with high-feminine product users than when exposed to ads with low-feminine product users. In contrast, for those aschematic on femininity, the femininity of the product users depicted in the ads had no effect on self-referencing, although positive affect was higher when they were exposed to high-feminine rather than low-feminine product users. This latter finding may be attributable to the fact that feminine ads tend to contain more emotion-evoking cues.

Following the gender-schema theory of Markus et al. (1982), in this study those high on femininity were considered schematic on that dimension and those low on femininity were labeled aschematic. When exploring the construct of independence/dependence, however, Markus (1999) argued that participants who rate themselves either high or low on the scale should be considered schematic on this dimension, and that only those who rate themselves in the middle range should be considered aschematic. The latter method likely applies only to bipolar constructs, such as independence/dependence, whereas for constructs featuring two independent dimensions, such as femininity and masculinity, it is likely that only those scoring high on a dimension are schematic on it. To examine these differences, Experiment 2 will apply the same theoretical framework to the construct of individualism/collectivism, generally considered to be a single bipolar dimension.

EXPERIMENT 2

Individualism and collectivism are characterized by the following important differences: (a) a sense of the self as being autonomous versus being connected to groups, (b) priority of personal interests versus priority of group goals, (c) emphasis on personal attributes versus emphasis on

group norms, and (d) the idea of relationship maintenance being a vehicle for personal benefit versus being a means of obtaining a sense of belonging (Triandis, 1995).

It has been argued that the most important aspect of individualism/collectivism concerns how people relate to one another (Kagitcibasi, 1994). The classification of cultures as either individualist or collectivist is primarily based on the degree to which each culture emphasizes relationships with others and places others before the self (Hofstede, 1980). A sense of interpersonal independence and separateness describes individualist cultures, whereas a sense of interpersonal relatedness and dependence is thought to characterize collectivist cultures (Triandis, Bontempo, Villlareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988).

Although individualism/collectivism is generally discussed as a cultural value, it can also be applied to individuals (Kagitcibasi, 1994). From this perspective, it is hypothesized in Experiment 2 that the degree of individualism/collectivism at the individual level will influence levels of self-referencing and positive affect in the context of self-congruent and self-incongruent ad appeals. Specifically, ad–self-congruency is expected to affect these variables only for individuals schematic on individualism/collectivism. The same mechanism explored in Experiment 1 will also be examined here.

H2(a,b): For participants who rate their ideal selves high on collectivist values (and thus low on individualist values), ads portraying collectivist users elicit higher levels of self-referencing (a) and positive affect (b) than ads portraying individualist users. Likewise, for participants who rate their ideal selves low on collectivist values (and thus high on individualist values), ads portraying individualist users elicit higher levels of self-referencing (a) and positive affect (b) than ads portraying collectivist users.

H2(c): The interaction between product user values and participant values influences ad attitudes via its influence on self-referencing and positive affect.

H2(d): Self-referencing and positive affect impact brand evaluations via their influence on ad attitudes.

Research Design

This study featured a between-subjects design. The manipulated factor was ad-depicted product user values: collectivist versus individualist.

Stimuli

Stimulus ads were created by professional copywriters and designers. Two versions of each ad, using the same visuals but different copy, were

created for purposes of replication. However, no ad version effect for any of the three dependent variables was observed (all ps $> .55$). Therefore, in the following analyses, responses were collapsed across ad version. To improve external validity, the stimulus ads were inserted between two real filler ads. According to the Eastern Integrated Consumer Profile (2000), college students in Taiwan are equally likely to consume instant coffee in private (35.7%) and in social gatherings (35.5%). Instant coffee was thus chosen as the stimulus product, as it seemed suitable for both collectivist and individualist ad appeals.

Participants

Two hundred participants (49% male) were recruited from the campus of a national university in Taipei, Taiwan, and were paid for their participation. They were randomly assigned to one of the two product user value conditions.

Independent Variables

Product User Values: Collectivist versus Individualist. Half of the participants were exposed to ads containing messages that depict users with collectivist values and half to ad messages showing users with individualist values. As a manipulation check, participants scored the product users on the 10 items of Yamaguchi's (1994) collectivism scale. Factor analysis with varimax rotation generated two factors with eigenvalues larger than one. The first factor[2] included five items, was labeled "sacrifice for the benefit of the group," and appeared to capture the positive side of collectivism. The second factor[3] consisted of five items, was labeled "blind compliance," and appeared to capture the negative side of collectivism. There was concern that the effects of social desirability might bias scores on the second factor when the same scale was employed later to measure participant individualism/collectivism. Therefore, to be consistent, for both this manipulation check and the assessment of individual collectivism, only the first factor was used. Therefore, only the first factor was used for the manipulation check. Cronbach's reliability alpha for this subscale was satisfactory at 0.76. ANOVA indicated that users portrayed as holding collectivist values received significantly higher ratings than did those portrayed as individualist, $F(1, 199) = 6.53, p < .01$ ($M_{\text{collectivist ad}} = 5.28$, $M_{\text{individualist ad}} = 4.97$). Therefore, the result of the manipulation check was satisfactory.

[2] The five items for Subscale 1 were: "I sacrifice self-interest for my group," "I stick with my group even through difficulties," "I maintain harmony in my group," "I respect the majority's wishes," and "I make an effort to avoid disagreement with my group members."

[3] The five items for Subscale 2 were: "I support my group whether they are right or wrong," "I remain in my group if they need me, even though dissatisfied with them," "I avoid arguments within my group even when I strongly disagree with other members," "I act as fellow members would prefer," and "I respect decisions made by my group."

Participant Values: Individualist versus Collectivist. On a 7-point Likert basis, participants rated the degree to which they felt that the items in Yamaguchi's (1994) collectivism scale were ideal to themselves. Factor analysis (varimax rotation) generated the same two-factor result as for ratings of product user values. Participants were categorized into three groups based on the first subscale of collectivism, "sacrifice for the benefit of the group," the reliability of which was satisfactory at 0.76. Adopting the procedure described by Markus (1999), those who rated themselves high on Yamaguchi's scale were labeled collectivists (N = 79; 34 male, 45 female), those at the opposite end of the scale were termed individualists (N = 70; 41 male, 29 female), and those with ratings falling in the middle range were labeled aschematics (N = 51, 23 male, 28 female).[4] Only data from the collectivist and individualist participants were used for hypothesis testing. ANOVA confirmed that the collectivists found collectivist values to be more ideal to themselves than did the individualists, $F(1, 148) = 493.83$, $p < .01$ ($M_{collectivist} = 6.21$, $M_{individualist} = 4.44$).

Dependent Measures

The same measures of self-referencing, positive affect, ad attitudes, and brand attitudes as in Experiment 1 were used. Cronbach's alphas for the four scales were satisfactory at 0.81, 0.88, 0.76, and 0.86, respectively.

Procedures

The same procedures as in Experiment 1 were followed, with one exception. To reduce participant sensitivity to rating both product users and themselves on the same scales, after evaluating the ad and brand, participants were asked to rate their ideal selves on additional scales, including Snyder's (1974) self-monitoring scale, Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory, and the Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barrett (1985) introversion/extroversion scale. This was presented as a favor for a professor in the psychology department said to be interested in exploring personality differences among Taiwanese, and all participants complied with the request. Upon completion, a short debriefing was conducted.

Analyses and Results

H2(a) and 2(b) were tested with the use of ANOVA (see Tables 1 and 2). With regard to H2(a), the interaction between product user values and participant values significantly influenced $F(1, 144) = 4.09$, $p = .05$. Even though simple effect tests did not find a significant influence of product

[4] Given that there were only five items in the subscale, many participants shared the same means. Therefore, it was indeed impossible to categorize participants into three equally sized groups. The effort was made to have roughly equal numbers in the high and low groups. As a result, the sample size for the middle range was much smaller.

user values either for collectivists, $F(1, 76) = 2.40, p = .13$, or for individualists, $F(1, 67) = 1.62, p = .21$, the means were in the expected directions. For collectivist participants, self-referencing was higher when the product users were also collectivist rather than individualist ($M_{collectivist} = 4.99, SD = 1.05, M_{individualist} = 4.73, SD = 1.38$). And for individualist participants, self-referencing was higher when the product users were portrayed as individualist rather than collectivist ($M_{collectivist} = 3.75, SD = 1.40, M_{individualist} = 4.14, SD = 1.28$). Given that the interaction was significant and that the means were in the expected direction, this hypothesis was generally supported.

With regard to H2(b), the interaction between product user values and participant values significantly influenced positive affect; $F(1, 144) = 5.62, p = .02$. For collectivists, the influence of product user values was significant—$F(1, 76) = 2.40, p = .13$—and the means were in the expected direction. Collectivist participants exhibited more positive affect when the product users were portrayed with collectivist values than when they were depicted as holding individualist values ($M_{collectivist} = 5.50, SD = 1.13, M_{individualist} = 4.87, SD = 1.22$). Although the influence of product user values was not significant for individualist participants—$F(1, 67) = .89, p = .35$—they did exhibit more positive affect when the product users were portrayed as individualist rather than collectivist ($M_{collectivist} = 4.39, SD = 1.40, M_{individualist} = 4.64, SD = 1.32$). Given that the interaction was significant and that the means were in the expected direction, this hypothesis was also generally supported.

H2(c) and H2(d) were tested with the use of regression models, according to the procedure described by Baron and Kenny (1986). Product user values and participant values were included in all equations. For H2(c), the analyses for self-referencing found that

1. The impact of the product user values by participant values interaction on self-referencing was significant ($t = 2.02, p = .05, \beta = 0.15$).
2. Self-referencing accounted for significant variance in ad attitudes ($t = 6.93, p = .01, \beta = 0.48$).
3. The product user values by participant values interaction significantly influenced ad attitudes ($t = 2.86, p = .01, \beta = 0.21$).
4. When ad attitudes was regressed on both the interaction term and self-referencing, the influence of the interaction term became insignificant ($t = 1.90, p = .06, \beta = 0.13$), whereas the self-referencing remained significant ($t = 8.22, p = .01, \beta = 0.56$). Self-referencing thus indeed served as a significant mediator.

The analyses for positive affect found that

1. The impact of the product user values by participant values interaction on positive affect was significant ($t = 2.37, p = .02, \beta = 0.19$).

2. Positive affective accounted for significant variance in ad attitudes ($t = 11.17, p = .01, \beta = 0.65$).
3. The product user values by participant values interaction significantly influenced ad attitudes ($t = 2.35, p = .02, \beta = 0.18$).
4. When ad attitudes was regressed on both the interaction term and positive affect, the influence of the interaction became insignificant ($t = 1.70, p = .09, \beta = 0.09$), whereas positive affect remained significant ($t = 10.71, p = .01, \beta = 0.63$). Thus positive affect was also a significant mediator. Therefore, H2(c) was fully supported.

For H2(d), the results showed that

1. Both self-referencing ($t = 3.02, p = .03, \beta = 0.20$) and positive affect ($t = 8.21, p = .01, \beta = 0.53$) influenced ad attitudes.
2. Ad attitudes accounted for significant variance in brand attitudes ($t = 9.56, p = .01, \beta = 0.68$).
3. The influences of both self-referencing ($t = 2.28, p = .02, \beta = 0.17$) and positive affect ($t = 4.75, p = .01, \beta = 0.35$) on brand attitudes were significant.
4. When brand attitudes were regressed on self-referencing, positive affect, and ad attitudes, the influence of self-referencing ($t = –1.15$, $p = .25$, $\beta = –0.09$) and positive affect became insignificant ($t = –1.06$, $p = .29$, $\beta = –0.10$), whereas the impact of ad attitudes remained significant ($t = 8.11, p = .01, \beta = 0.79$). Thus the effects of both self-referencing and positive affect on brand attitudes occurred via their influence on ad attitudes. Therefore, H2(d) was supported.

Discussion

In Experiment 2, participant individualism/collectivism significantly affected responses to advertising. As expected, collectivist participants exhibited higher levels of self-referencing and positive affect when they were exposed to messages containing collectivist rather than individualist appeals. For individualist participants, as well, self-referencing and positive affect were higher when there was ad–self-congruency. The existence of a mediation process involving cognitive and affective responses was also demonstrated.

An interesting sidelight is that, on average, collectivist participants exhibited higher self-referencing and positive affect than did individualist participants. Because collectivist individuals are more concerned with relationships with others and strive to avoid interpersonal conflict to a greater degree than individualists, they may be more likely to give favorable responses in an experimental setting.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In contrast to the existing literature, which is primarily concerned with the effects of ad–self-congruency, this article focuses on the psychological mechanisms *behind* the effects. Specifically, the application of self-schema theory has been extended to the understanding of these mechanisms. In this article, self-schemata are theorized to encompass not only cognitive components that encourage greater self-referencing in response to self-congruent information, but also affective components that cause positive emotions to be evoked by self-congruency. Consistent with this theory, ad–self-congruency was clearly found to influence cognitive and affective responses to advertising .

Self-referencing has been largely ignored in extant research pertaining to ad–self-congruency effects. A review of the literature suggests that self-referencing is usually considered to be an independent variable primed in particular by direct instructions (e.g., Rogers et al., 1977) or message manipulations (e.g., Burnkrant & Unnava, 1989, 1995). In contrast, in this article it is proposed that an important view of the role of self-referencing is as a mediator of the effects of ad–self-congruency on ad and brand attitudes.

Although prior research suggests that self-schemata serve important affect-regulation functions (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), that idea had not yet been applied to understanding the effects of ad–self-congruency. Consistent with the finding that individuals are strongly motivated to maintain a favorable view of themselves and to maintain or bolster their self-esteem (Greenwald, Bellezza, & Banaji, 1988), this article found that viewing aspects of the ideal self via ad-portrayed product users evoked positive affect.

Moreover, the findings of the two experiments conducted demonstrate the viability of a process that explains why self-congruent messages are preferred to self-incongruent messages. Both self-referencing and positive affect predicted ad preferences. Most important, more positive attitudes stemming from higher levels of self-referencing and positive affect led to more favorable product evaluations.

In contrast to the bulk of prior studies, which examine only one dimension of the self, this article explored both femininity and individualism/collectivism. In addition, whereas Experiment 1 compared the responses of schematic and aschematic individuals, Experiment 2 compared schematic individuals from opposite ends of a bipolar construct. That both variations yielded similar results strengthens the applicability of the findings.

This article focused on the ideal self, but other aspects of the self may be equally important when exploring responses to consumer information. For example, Greenwald and Pratkanis (1984) recognize private, collective, and public aspects of the self. Although people vary in the degree to which they are able to access these selves, cognitions pertain-

ing to particular aspects can also be primed by contextual cues (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). The fact that some products are consumed privately and some publicly (Bourne, 1957) may determine which aspects of the self will be more salient and further moderate advertising congruency effects. Future research can explore this in more detail.

Ad–self-congruency effects are thought to vary as a function of the motivation to elaborate on messages, with Chang (2002) finding ad–self-congruency effects to be significant only when participants were not motivated to elaborate on messages. That is, participants appeared to rely on congruency as a peripheral cue in formulating ad and brand evaluations only when elaboration likelihood was low. Therefore, how context affects the influence of self-schema is another potentially rich area for future investigation.

The findings of this article have important implications for marketers. For instance, this article suggests that caution should be exercised when determining branding strategies, which usually involves developing a positive image for the brand via advertising campaigns, as target consumers with the same demographic background may have diverse ideal self-images. Understanding how individuals differ in self-schemata can help managers develop more effective branding strategies and use their promotion budgets more efficiently. In addition, data on important self-concepts, such as masculinity and femininity, should be collected. Future promotion programs can then use the data to tailor direct-mail messages to specific audiences.

Of course, the results of this article should be considered in light of several limitations. First, only the ideal self, one of many possible "selves," was examined. Positive affect has been shown to be an important mediator in processes involving the ideal self, but affect of a different valence may be more salient for processes involving other aspects of the self. For example, when schemata related to the "actual" self are involved, the underlying motivation may be to shun self-incongruent messages in order to avoid the resultant negative affect; and thus it may be negative affect that is the more important mediator in the process.

Second, the two self-dimensions examined in this article, although considered here at the individual level, are more often employed at least in the research literature to characterize cultural variation. Because both experiments were conducted in Taiwan, which differs from other countries in terms of cultural femininity and individualism/collectivism, interpretation of the findings should take into account the potential influence of such systematic cultural factors. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) found persons in collectivist and individualist cultures to vary not only in self-perceptions, but also in the accessibility of self-focused (as opposed to other-focused) emotions. Therefore, replicating these two experiments in different cultural settings, investigating different self-schemata, and examining the role of nonpositive affect are all important directions for future research.

Another potential limitation concerns the outcome variable proposed in the model, brand attitudes. Although brand attitudes have been positively associated with purchase intentions (MacKenzie et al., 1986), other research has found that attitudes do not correspond exactly to behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Therefore, future research should also include purchase intentions in the model, in order to better understand the effects on consumer behavior. Finally, it is possible that positive affect as assessed in the two experiments may simply reflect ad attitudes; thus more rigorous assessment methods should be employed in the future.

Despite these limitations, however, a new theoretical framework for understanding the cognitive and affective processes influenced by ad–self-congruency was proposed in this article, tested using a specific model, and supported by two separate sets of findings.

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