# The Moderating Influence of Ad Framing for Ad–Self-Congruency Effects

**Chingching Chang**
National Chengchi University

## ABSTRACT

**Prior research indicates that ad–self-congruency effects are significant only when participants are not motivated to process ad messages, as when they are in a positive rather than negative affective state (Chang, 2002a). In line with this reasoning, it was expected that ad tactics such as ad framing that can evoke emotional responses would determine reliance on ad–self-congruency for making judgments. As expected, when positive emotions were evoked by positive ad framing, participants formed brand evaluations based on ad–self-congruency, generating more positive responses to self-congruent ad messages than to self-incongruent messages. In contrast, when negative emotions were elicited by negative ad framing, responses to self-congruent ad messages and self-incongruent messages were not significantly different.** 

Brands are selected to be props that consumers use to communicate who they are to themselves and to other people. To deliver an ideal self-presentation, consumers approach products that have an image congruent with their ideal selves (Sirgy, 1982). Implied in this argument is that a brand, like a person, can have a personality or image. Most of the time, advertisers cultivate brand image perceptions mainly via advertising campaigns. It thus occurs that consumers select brands simply because of the consensually shared images portrayed in advertising (Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 1993). Indeed, it has been well established in adver-

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tising research that responses to ads are determined by the perceived congruency between self-images and the brand images depicted in the ads (e.g., Chang, 2000; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Wang & Mowen, 1997). To the extent they are congruent, responses to the ads and the advertised brands are more likely to be positive.

Chang (2002a) theorized that when ad perceivers are not motivated to process ad messages, congruency between the perceived ad image and perceivers' ideal self-concepts serves as a peripheral cue, altering the way they evaluate the ads and brands. To test this idea, she manipulated motivation levels via mood induction, finding that participants induced to feel happy display an ad–self-congruency bias, whereas those induced to feel sad do not show any such preference.

A crucial point for advertisers is that it is most likely easier to use appeals to induce affective states than to select editorial content or programs that evoke the desired states. For example, advertisers can evoke emotion by using ad tactics such as warmth appeals (Aaker, Stayman, & Hagerty, 1986) or humor appeals (Stayman & Aaker, 1993). Therefore, exploring how the emotional responses evoked by using different ad appeals may moderate ad–self-congruency effects will be of greater importance to ad campaign planners than examining the influence of context-evoked emotional responses, which are usually not under their direct control.

Relevant and irrelevant affective states have been distinguished in past literature. A relevant affective state originates from consideration of attitude objects such as ad messages for products; an irrelevant affective state, on the other hand, is incidental to the attitude objects under consideration—that is, program-induced feelings irrelevant to the embedded commercials that are the attitude objects of interest (Dillard & Wilson, 1993; Petty, Gleicher, & Baker, 1991). Ad-evoked affective states have been shown to influence the strategies used to process advertising messages in a way similar to context-induced affective states (e.g., Chang & Hitchon, 2004). Hence, the intent is to extend Chang's (2002a) work in this study by exploring whether ad-evoked affective states (which are relevant affective states), rather than context-induced affective states (which are irrelevant affective states), may also moderate ad–self-congruency effects.

In other words, the primary objective is to extend Chang's (2002a) study by testing whether ad-induced positive affective states can have the same effects as context-induced affective states, with the positive affective state generating significant ad–self-congruency effects and the negative affective state failing to do so. Chang's (2002a) study used only participants recruited in Taiwan, a typical collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). This study includes participants from both collectivist and individualist cultures in order to provide stronger evidence of the interaction between affective state and ad–self-congruency effects.

## AD–SELF-CONGRUENCY EFFECTS

Advertising messages congruent with viewer self-concept have been shown to be more effective than messages incongruent with self-concept (e.g., Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Wang & Mowen, 1997). Following Markus, Crane, Bernstein, and Siladi (1982), prior research exploring self-congruency effects has generally assumed that self-concept functions as a basic framework within which information is processed and inferences are made. In general, research investigating whether self-concepts function as processing frameworks suggests that, in situations in which persuasive messages are processed, people who perceive themselves in opposing ways along a specific dimension of self-concept tend to respond to persuasive messages differently, with congruent messages generating effects superior to those of incongruent messages.

The findings regarding ad–self-congruency effects on ad persuasion are consistent: ad messages congruent with viewer self-concept are more effective than incongruent messages. For example, Brock, Brannon, and Bridgwater (1990) found support for the superiority of ad–self-congruency effects with regard to level of agreement with advertising messages. Moreover, Hong and Zinkhan (1995) demonstrated how ad messages congruent with viewer self-concepts can generate better ad attitudes and brand evaluations, as well as higher purchase intentions. And Mehta (1999) found that the higher the convergence of self-concept and brand image delineated in ads, the higher the purchase intent.

Because self-concept is multidimensional (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987), various dimensions have been examined in regard to self-congruency. Among them are individualist/collectivist self values (e.g. Chang, 2000; Zhang & Gelb, 1996), extroversion/introversion (e.g., Hong & Zinkhan, 1995), and femininity/masculinity (e.g., Chang, 2000). Studies of other self-concepts related to individualist/collectivist values, such as the separateness–connectedness dimensions of self-schemata (Wang & Mowen, 1997), suggest that the individualist/collectivist dimension warrants attention as an important factor related to advertising effects. It is thus the focal self-concept dimension for this study.

## THE INFLUENCE OF AFFECTIVE STATE ON AD–SELF-CONGRUENCY EFFECTS: CONTEXT-INDUCED VERSUS AD-INDUCED AFFECTIVE STATES

Drawing upon the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and emotion literature, Chang (2002a) posited that ad–self-congruency serves as an affect-laden peripheral cue when participants are not motivated to process ad information. Specifically, she argued that, in situations in which participants are in a positive affective state and thus their motivation to process ad messages is reduced, they rely on message congruency with

self-concepts in formulating ad and brand attitudes. In contrast, in situations in which participants are in negative affective states and therefore more motivated to elaborate on messages, they do not rely on ad–self-congruency in formulating ad and brand attitudes.

As noted earlier, Chang's investigation focused primarily on irrelevant affective states. She induced affective state by inviting participants to read happy or sad stories and then write down their own happy or sad life stories. Context-primed affective states are similar to affective states induced by program content on television; as such, they certainly warrant research attention. In a typical ad-viewing context, however, affective state can also be induced by advertising content relevant to the ad.

The distinction between relevant affect and irrelevant affect has been recognized by psychologists (e.g., Bodenhausen, 1993) and communication researchers (Dillard & Wilson, 1993). Unfortunately, although relevant affect should be of focal concern for advertisers, there has been little discussion regarding the distinction between the two types of affect and their respective influences on advertising message processing. Martin (2003) found that a context-induced positive affective state discouraged participants from elaborating on ad messages and encouraged them to respond to ads on the basis of heuristic cues. Chang and Hitchon (2004) found that an ad-induced positive affective state reduced elaboration on messages and instead motivated participants to make judgments on the basis of schemata. Based on these findings, it is argued in this study that ad-evoked affect can also moderate the effects of ad–self-congruency. Specifically, this study examines the influence of relevant affective states evoked by ad framing.

## AD FRAMING AND FRAMING-EVOKED AFFECT

Ad messages can be framed in positive or negative ways. A positively framed message focuses on benefits resulting from the purchase of a product (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Smith, 1996). A negatively framed message concerns the potential losses from or adverse consequences of not purchasing a product (Homer & Yoon, 1992; Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Smith, 1996).

The superiority of positively framed messages to negatively framed messages has been more consistently documented for consumption products (see Chang, 2002b, for a review). For example, Smith (1996) observed that participants were more likely to purchase a video camera that was positively framed than one that was negatively framed. Zhang and Buda (1999) found that positively framed ad messages resulted in more favorable responses than negatively framed ad messages. Levin and Gaeth (1988) observed that participants evaluated beef more favorably when it was framed positively as 75% lean than when it was framed negatively as 25% fat.

Noting the pleasure-seeking nature of the common ad-watching environment, Chang (2002b) suggested that positively framed product messages should be more effective because the pleasure gains promoted by them are congruent with one of the primary purposes for viewing ads—namely, to be entertained. Indeed, Chang (2002b) found that positively framed messages elicited more positive affective responses and fewer negative affective responses than negatively framed messages. Conversely, negatively framed ads evoked avoidance and generated more negative affective responses.

In a similar vein, Smith (1996) hypothesized that ad viewers attribute how message frames make them feel to how they like the ad and also to how they like the brand. Ad viewers will favor the ad and the brand to the degree that the message frames make them feel positive. This process is termed pure affect transfer by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989), and may explain why positively framed ad messages have been found to lead to better ad and brand evaluations than negatively framed ad messages.

These studies suggest, among other things, that ad framing can elicit emotional responses. As defined, positively and negatively framed ads contain similar product information, differing only in how the information is presented or how emotional responses are evoked. Therefore, evoking emotions through affective framing is preferable to other affect-inducing tactics that may alter ad content more significantly, introducing greater potential for confounding in the process. Thus framing-evoked affect as a moderator of ad–self-congruency effects will be explored in this study.

## Framing-Evoked Affect and Ad–Self-Congruency Effects

Based on Chang's (2002a) work and the ELM literature, it is thought that affective states induced by ads employing different framing tactics will affect processing strategies. In the ELM literature, the influence of affective state on information processing modes has been well documented (e.g., Bless, Bohner, Schwarz, & Strack, 1990; Kuykendall & Keating, 1990). For example, Kuykendall and Keating (1990) found that positive affect during message exposure decreases systematic processing, whereas negative affect increases systematic processing; as a result, the importance of argument scrutiny varies by affective state.

Therefore, it is predicted in this study that when negative affective states are induced by negatively framed ad messages, participants will be more motivated to process ad messages in an analytical way (e.g., Bless et al., 1990), and thus will take product attributes into account. Because of the enhanced motivation to elaborate, ad–self-congruency will not influence how they evaluate the ad or the brand. In contrast, when positive affective states are evoked by positively framed ad messages, participants will be discouraged from elaborating on messages (e.g., Bless et al., 1990), and thus be more likely to adopt schema-based processing (e.g., Bless et al., 1996; Bless, Schwarz, & Wieland, 1996) or rely on ad cues such as

ad–self-congruency (e.g., Chang, 2002a). Because these participants use cue-based judgments, ad–self-congruent messages generate more favorable ad attitudes and brand attitudes. Moreover, ad–self-congruency will also affect how credible participants believe the ad to be and how favorably they view the product. Based on this reasoning, it is hypothesized that:

**H1–H3:** If ad messages are framed positively, ad liking (H1) and ad believability (H2) will be rated higher and brand evaluations (H3) will be better when the ads portray self-congruent images than when they feature self-incongruent images. If ad messages are framed negatively, ad liking (H1), ad believability (H2), and brand evaluations (H3) will not be significantly influenced by ad–self-congruency.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The experiment was conducted with a three-factor between-subjects design. The three factors were culture (Taiwan vs. the United States), ad value (collectivist vs. individualist), and ad framing (positive vs. negative). Because all items employed in this study were adopted from English-language publications, the translation and backtranslation procedure suggested by Brislin (1987) was used to develop Chinese-language versions of all the scales used in Taiwan.

### Stimuli

A pretest ($N$= 20 from Taiwan, $N$ = 20 from the United States) was used to select a product that college students in Taiwan and the United States had both owned and purchased in the past year. In addition, because this study aimed to explore ad–self-congruency, the target product needed to serve transformational functions. Without utilitarian functions as well, however, ad–self-congruency might have been the only salient cue for judgment, biasing the results. Based on a series of pretests, sneakers, able to fulfill both utilitarian and transformational functions, were chosen to be the advertised product.

To reduce influence from existing attitudes, a fictitious brand name was used. First, Chinese-language versions of stimuli ads were created by professionals at Ogilvy & Mather Ad Agency in Taiwan, who wrote ad messages to fit different value portrayals and ad framing and created visuals to fit message descriptions. English-language versions were then developed by a professional at Saatchi & Saatchi in Taiwan, who was born and raised in the United States and was in charge of writing English copy for international advertisers. The same visuals were used for positively framed and negatively framed messages. All ads were pretested

to ensure that message manipulations would be successful. To improve external validity, the stimuli ads were inserted between filler ads.

## Participants

The study was composed of two samples. One hundred seventy-six participants were recruited, 124 in Taiwan and 52 in the United States. Participants in Taiwan came from the campus of a national university in Taipei; 50% were male. Participants in the U.S. came from the campus of a state university in the Midwest and were awarded extra credit for their participation. Sixty-nine percent of them were male. All participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (ad value by ad framing).

## Procedures

Participants were first ushered into a classroom. After they were seated, the coordinator informed them that the study was designed to examine the effects of various ad layouts on information processing. The false story was meant to discourage them from guessing at the real purpose of the study and thus skewing the results. They were then instructed not to turn back to pages that they had already read for the duration of the study. After that, participants read a filler ad, followed by a stimuli ad, and then another filler ad. After reading each of the ads, they were asked to rate their emotional state. Next, as manipulation checks, participants rated their perceptions of the ads on portrayed values and framing valence. Then they rated the ads for liking and believability and evaluated the product. Finally, they were asked to rate themselves on Yamaguchi's (1994) collectivism scale, as well as on other irrelevant self-values scales in order to divert their attention from the featured values of collectivism/individualism. Once they had completed the study, the coordinator conducted a short debriefing.

## Independent Variables

***Culture.*** Taiwan was selected as a collectivist culture, and the United States as an individualist culture. In Hofstede's (1991) study, Taiwan was ranked 44th on individualism among the 50 countries examined, and the United States was ranked first. As expected, participants from the two countries assigned different levels of importance to the five items in Yamaguchi's (1994) scale, with participants from Taiwan giving significant higher ratings than participants from the United States, $F(1, 174) = 9.61$, $p = .01$ ($M_{\text{Taiwan}} = 5.16$, $SD = 0.83$, $M_{\text{U.S.}} = 4.73$, $SD = 0.94$).

Three three-way interaction terms (Culture by Ad Frame by Ad–Self-Congruency for each outcome variable) tested whether culture moderated the degree to which participants relied on ad–self-congruent mes-

sages when exposed to ads framed in different ways. However, none were significant—ad liking, $F(1, 168) = 0.08, p = .78$; ad believability, $F(1, 168) = 3.61, p = .06$; brand attitudes, $F(1, 168) = 2.06, p = .15$—suggesting that the ad frame by self-congruency two-way interactions for ad liking, ad believability, and brand attitudes were roughly similar across the two cultures.

***Ad Framing.*** Half of the participants were exposed to ad messages suggesting that owning the sneakers would provide them with positive psychological outcomes. The other half were exposed to messages that suggested that owning the sneakers would prevent them from experiencing negative psychological consequences. Four questions were used for the manipulation checks: "the ad addresses what you will gain if you purchase the product," "the ad provides reasons for you to purchase the product in a positive way," "the ad addresses what you will lose if you don't have the product," and "the ad provides reasons for you to purchase the product in a negative way." The first two items measured positive framing and the latter two items measured negative framing. Pearson correlation coefficients were significant for the two positive items, $r = .43, p < .01$, as well as for the two negative items, $r = .43, p < .01$. As expected, positively framed messages were rated higher on positive framing than were negatively framed messages, $F(1, 174) = 13.97, p < .01$ ($M_{\text{positive}} = 4.90$, $SD = 1.22$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 4.14$, $SD = 1.47$), whereas negatively framed messages were rated higher on negative framing than were positively framed messages; $F(1, 174) = 56.77, p < .01$ ($M_{\text{positive}} = 3.06$, $SD = 1.16$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 4.45$, $SD = 1.38$). Therefore, the results of the manipulation check were satisfactory.

***Ad Values.*** Half the participants were exposed to ad messages depicting users with collectivist values, and the other half viewed ads describing users with individualist values. Participants were asked to rate the ads on a four-item scale: "the ad suggests that your friends would admire you if you have the pair of shoes," "the ad suggests that owning the shoes will help you win friends' recognition," "the ad talks about how comfortable you will be when you wear the shoes," and "the ad talks about how much you can enhance your self-satisfaction once you own the shoes." The first two items measured collectivist values and the latter two individualist values. Pearson correlation coefficients were significant for the two collectivist items, $r = .75, p < .01$, as well as for the two individualist items, $r = .51, p < .01$. As expected, collectivist ads were rated higher on collectivist values than were individualist ads—$F(1, 174) = 44.08, p < .01$ ($M_{\text{collectivist ad}} = 5.04$, $SD = 1.45$, $M_{\text{individualist ad}} = 3.55$, $SD = 1.49$)—and individualist ads were rated higher on individualist values than were collectivist ads—$F(1, 174) = 4.09, p < .02$ ($M_{\text{positive}} = 4.33$, $SD = 1.51$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 4.81$, $SD = 1.38$). Therefore, the results of the manipulation check were satisfactory.

***Ad–Self-Congruency.*** Participants rated the degree to which collectivist values described themselves. Five statements scored on a 7-point Likert scale were adopted from Yamaguchi (1994): "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." Cronbach's reliability of the scale was satisfactory at 0.80. Participants were categorized into two groups, collectivist and individualist, based on a median split. Collectivist participants exposed to ads with collectivist appeals and individualist participants exposed to ads with individualist appeals comprised the ad–self-congruency group. Collectivist participants exposed to ads with individualist appeals and individualist participants exposed to ads with collectivist appeals comprised the ad–self-incongruency group.

## Dependent Measures

***Positive Affective State.*** Positive affective state was assessed by seven items scored on a 7-point Likert scale, selected from Edell and Burke (1987). The items were: "happy," "cheerful," "delighted," "interested," "joyous," "satisfied," and "carefree." Cronbach's reliability alpha for the items was satisfactory at 0.89. Ratings for the items were summed and averaged.

***Negative Affective State.*** Negative affective state was assessed by five items scored on a 7-point Likert scale, also selected from Edell and Burke (1987). The items were: "depressed," "annoyed," "sad," "dull," and "irritated." Cronbach's alpha for the items was satisfactory at 0.83. Ratings for the items were summed and averaged.

***Ad Liking.*** A five-item Likert scale was used to measure ad liking. The items, adopted from MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) and Madden, Allen, and Twible (1988), were: "interesting," "good," "likable," "favorable," and "pleasant." Cronbach's alpha for ad liking was deemed satisfactory at 0.92. Ratings for the items were summed and averaged.

***Ad Believability.*** A 4-item Likert scale was used to measure ad believability. The items, selected from Beltramini's (1982) advertising believability scale, were: "believable," "convincing," "reasonable," and "authentic." Cronbach's alpha for ad believability was deemed satisfactory at 0.87. Ratings for the items were summed and averaged.

***Brand Attitudes.*** Brand attitudes were measured with a five-item, 7-point Likert scale. The items, adopted from Mitchel and Olson (1981) and Holbrook and Batra (1987), were: "good," "like," "pleasant," "positive," and "good quality." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was deemed satisfactory at 0.94. Ratings for the items were summed and averaged.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSES

Before testing hypotheses, it was important to establish that positively framed and negatively framed ad messages did indeed evoke different affective states. As expected, ANOVA indicated that positively framed messages elicited significantly more positive emotions than did negatively framed messages—$F(1, 168) = 16.07, p < .01$ ($M_{positive} = 3.84, SD = 0.86, M_{negative} = 3.44, SD = 0.97$, see Table 1). Conversely, negatively framed messages generated significantly more negative emotions than did positively framed messages—$F(1, 168) = 10.86, p < .01$ ($M_{positive} = 2.58, SD = 1.15, M_{negative} = 3.15, SD = 1.53$). These results justified testing the hypotheses.

For ad liking, a significant two-way interaction (ad framing by ad–self-congruency) was found, $F(1, 168) = 3.90, p = .05$, as expected. Simple effects analyses revealed that, when ad messages were framed in a positive way, the influence of ad–self-congruency was marginally significant, $F(1, 86) = 3.79, p = .06$ ($M_{congruency} = 4.50, SD = 1.29, M_{incongruency} = 3.88, SD = 1.32$). On the other hand, as expected, ad–self-congruency did not significantly influence ad evaluations when ad messages were negatively framed, $F(1, 83) = 0.60, p = .44$ ($M_{congruency} = 3.47, SD = 1.21, M_{incongruency} = 4.07, SD = 1.20$). Hypothesis 1 was therefore partially supported.

For ad believability, as well, the interaction between ad framing and ad–self-congruency was significant, $F(1, 168) = 4.31, p = .04$. In the simple effects analyses, as expected, ad–self-congruency significantly influenced ad believability when ad messages were positively framed—$F(1, 86) = 4.12, p = .05$ ($M_{congruency} = 3.70, SD = 1.21, M_{incongruency} = 3.27, SD = 1.05$)—but not when they were negatively framed—$F(1, 83) = 0.62, p = .43$ ($M_{congruency} = 3.15, SD = 1.20, M_{incongruency} = 3.40, SD = 1.21$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was fully supported.

With regard to brand evaluations, as expected, a significant interaction between ad framing and ad–self-congruency was observed, $F(1, 168) = 3.94, p = .05$. In the simple effects analyses, the influence of ad–self-congruency only approached significance when ad messages were framed

**Table 1. Summary of Analyses of Variance as a Function of Culture, Ad Framing, and Ad–Self-Congruency.**

| | Positive Emotions | | Negative Emotions | | Ad Liking | | Ad Believability | | Brand Attitudes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *F* | *p* | *F* | *p* | *F* | *p* | *F* | *p* | *F* | *P* |
| Culture (C) | 27.88 | .01 | 10.99 | .01 | 21.90 | .01 | 8.07 | .01 | 11.95 | .01 |
| Framing (F) | 16.07 | .01 | 10.86 | .01 | 5.81 | .02 | 1.08 | .30 | 2.30 | .13 |
| Congruency (N) | .60 | .44 | .01 | .99 | .31 | .58 | .42 | .52 | .09 | .77 |
| C × F | 3.94 | .05 | .74 | .39 | .01 | .92 | .46 | .50 | .03 | .87 |
| C × N | 5.47 | .03 | .26 | .61 | 1.29 | .26 | .40 | .53 | 1.57 | .21 |
| F × N | .17 | .68 | 1.33 | .25 | 3.90 | .05 | 4.31 | .04 | 3.94 | .05 |
| C × F × N | 1.44 | .23 | .06 | .81 | .08 | .78 | 3.61 | .06 | 2.06 | .15 |

positively—$F(1, 86) = 3.16$, $p = .08$ ($M_{congruency} = 4.31$, $SD = 1.22$, $M_{incongruency} = 3.89$, $SD = 1.46$)—and did not significantly influence brand evaluations when ad messages were framed negatively, $F(1, 83) = .90$, $p = .35$ ($M_{congruency} = 3.58$, $SD = 1.41$, $M_{incongruency} = 4.13$, $SD = 1.30$). Hypothesis 3 was thus partially supported.

It is also important to note that the main effects of ad–self-congruency on ad liking, ad believability, and brand attitudes were not significant (ad liking, $F(1, 168) = 0.31$, $p = .58$; ad believability, $F(1, 168) = 0.42$, $p = .52$; brand attitudes, $F(1, 168) = 0.09$, $p = .77$), suggesting that ad–self-congruency itself did not affect ad liking, ad believability, or brand evaluations when ad framing was not considered.

## DISCUSSION

Ad–self-congruency effects depend on whether ad messages are framed in positive or negative terms. The underlying mechanism can be understood in terms of the literature on affect and ELM. In other words, motivation to process ad messages may have been reduced by the positive affective state evoked by the positively framed messages, encouraging reliance on ad–self-congruency cues. In contrast, motivation to elaborate on ad messages may have been enhanced by the negative affective state evoked by the negatively framed messages, discouraging participants from making judgments on the basis of ad–self-congruency.

The findings of this study suggest that ad-evoked affective responses have evaluative consequences. Image-building ad tactics may not be effective in appealing to consumers with congruent self-images unless the ads make them feel happy, and thus reduce their motivation to process ad messages in an analytical way. There are other emotion-evoking ad appeals that are commonly employed by advertisers to develop brand images (such as warmth appeals and slice-of-life appeals). It is possible that the findings of this study can be extended to these ad appeals. Moreover, in addition to ad-induced affective state, there are other factors that may alter motivation to process messages, such as product involvement (e.g., Chang, 2002a), personal relevance (e.g., Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 2004), and task importance (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Future exploration of ad–self-congruency effects should take these factors into account.

Culture was not shown to influence ad–self-congruency effects when different ad framing strategies are employed. Although the focus is more on others in collectivist cultures and more on the self in individualist cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), self-concepts seem to be salient for and accessible to participants in both types of culture. This salience may readily enhance processing based on self-congruency when motivation to engage in message processing is low, suggesting that ad–self-congruency is an important cue for both individualist and collectivist participants.

Some cultural differences, however, did emerge. For example, Taiwanese participants scored significantly higher than American partici-

pants on positive emotions, ad liking, ad believability, and brand attitudes, and significantly lower on negative emotions. This may be attributed to the collectivist values of Taiwanese culture, in which confrontation is actively avoided. Participants in collectivist cultures may be more susceptible to the influence of social desirability and the intention of the person administrating the study (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1999), and therefore provide more positive responses.

The findings of this study should be interpreted within certain limitations. First, mood was not assessed at the outset to ensure even distribution across experimental groups. However, participants were randomly assigned to conditions, reducing the possibility that existing affective state confounded results. Second, although this study explored ad–self-congruency effects for a specific product, these effects may also vary as a function of product categories (Chang, 2002a), a factor that should be explored in future research.

Despite these limitations, the findings may have important implications for marketers. Enhancing self-image is the underlying driving force for purchasing, regardless of culture. Thus, designing ad messages to appeal to the ideal self-concepts of the target audience is always an important promotion strategy. However, the effectiveness of an image-building ad strategy does not hinge simply on the degree of congruency, but also depends on contingencies that influence motivation to process messages. The findings of this study regarding the effects of framing of print ads on motivation can be applied to understanding ad processing in other media contexts. For example, advertising transmitted via television, which cannot be elaborated on extensively, may encourage reliance on self-congruency cues. Therefore, television is probably a good vehicle for messages that appeal to ideal self-images. The same logic can be applied to understanding the possible effects of ad–self-congruency in other contexts.

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Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to: Chingching Chang, Department of Advertising, National Chengchi University, 64, Sect. 2, Chi-nan Rd., Taipei 116, Taiwan (shenc@nccu.edu.tw).