Marketing communications and consumer behavior: Introduction to the special issue from the 2007 La Londe conference

This special issue of the *Journal of Business Research* includes a selection of papers presented at the 34th International Research Conference in Marketing organized by the Aix Graduate School of Management (I.A.E. Aix-en-Provence), University Paul Cézanne in Aix-Marseilles (France). This conference known as the “La Londe Conference” is devoted to Marketing Communications and Consumer Behavior on a biennial basis. The La Londe conference encourages intense discussions of specialized topics in consumer behavior and communications among a relatively small group of specialized scholars in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Those who have participated to the La Londe Conference also know the exchange value of the coffee breaks on the terrace overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and the Porquerolle islands.

The La Londe conference is truly international. It is chaired by both a European chair and an American chair: Søren Askegaard (University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark) and M. Joseph Sirgy (Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, United States) chaired the 2007 conference. A total of 74 manuscripts were submitted and double-blind reviewed by both members of the permanent scientific committee of the conference and ad-hoc reviewers carefully selected by the co-chairmen and the coordinator. Thirty papers were presented at the conference. In addition, the thought-provoking keynote address by Jan-Benedict E. M. Steenkamp (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) stimulated reflections and discussions concerning the process of researching fruitfully in consumer behavior/marketing communications fields. Jan-Benedict Steenkamp shared his outstanding research experience in a talk entitled “The Survey Research/Theory Testing Paradigm.” He presented the major methodological breakthroughs he contributed himself over the past two decades. His research has enabled researchers to develop more reliable and valid research instruments and results in “domestic” and international contexts. He also shared his view concerning the future of consumer behavior research and new methodological developments.

The eight papers of the special issue follow the dual theme of consumer behavior and marketing communications. The first three papers address consumer behavior related issues with a psychological orientation. Karolien Poels and Siegfried Dewitte (“Hope and Self-regulatory Goals Applied to an Advertising Context: Promoting Prevention Stimulates Goal-Directed Behavior”) are adding to the emerging stream of research in the phenomenon of hope in consumer research. In a series of thoroughly designed experiments, they investigate two types of hope, prevention hope and promotion hope, and their relevance for goal-directed behavior in an advertising context. Initially, they validate the distinction between prevention hope (hope to avoid an unpleasant situation) and promotion hope (hope to achieve a desirable situation) and demonstrate that they differ in terms of goal-directed behavior in that the former is more related to such behavior than the latter. In other words, hoping to avoid a negative situation seems more likely to lead to goal-directed behavior than hoping to achieve a positive situation. This insight is then checked in two further experiments based on advertising contexts. Advertisements based on prevention hope have a better effect on product information recognition and also leads to better product information recall and willingness to try the product, than advertisements based on promotion hope. Finally, in a fourth experiment, the authors demonstrate that these findings are only valid in a context of high goal relevance for the consumer. Such insights into consumer reactions to different types of messages are of significant relevance to strategic communication planning.

Loes Janssen, Bob M. Fennis, Ad Th.H. Pruyn and Kathleen D. Vohs (“The Path of Least Resistance: The Role of Regulatory Resource Depletion in the Effectiveness of Social Influence Techniques”) argue that resource depletion is an important factor in the effectiveness of social influence techniques. They do so by explaining consumers’ use of heuristics in a social influence situation and their willingness to comply with a request through resource depletion. In the first of two experiments, they demonstrate how a traditional social influence “foot-in-the-door” technique is indeed characterized by resource depletion, i.e. consumers fell more tired and less resourceful after having completed a series of introductory tasks. In a second experiment, they introduce the element of heuristics in order to study compliance with a request. Here the authors demonstrate that consumers with depleted resources are more inclined to provide a charity donation than other consumers. This effect is demonstrated in the presence of a compliance heuristic (authority) whereas it is not found when absent. The authors conclude that consumers with depleted resources are more vulnerable to the effects of compliance heuristics, and thus more likely to follow social influence techniques as ‘path of least resistance’.
In the third article, Elisabeth Cowley (“Looking Back at an Experience through Rose-Colored Glasses: Selecting moments or distorting facts”) discusses the construction of retrospective evaluations in situations where experiences are mixed, both positive and negative. More specifically, she finds support for the hypothesis that in situations where consumers need to justify repeating an action when there is a disincentive to do so, they will produce a more positive reconstruction of their past experiences than otherwise. In an experimental setting, she demonstrates how memories of a virtual poker game become more positive when subjects who want to replay the game are confronted with a disincentive to do so. Testing a second hypothesis, that people who intend to repeat an activity which is difficult to justify are more likely to produce accurate memories of the most positive moment of the prior experience, she confirms the assertion that people who need to justify a future action, focus heavily on the positive moment when constructing the retrospective. When testing an alternative explanation, no evidence of memory distortion was found. These results provide new insights into the psychology of hedonic consumption, and especially explanatory frameworks of why consumers keep repeating hedonic experiences of mixed positive and negative kind.

The three following articles of this special issue deal with consumer behavior from a more managerial perspective. Marcile L. Fransen, Bob M. Fennis, Ad Th. H. Pruyn and Enny Das (“Rest in Peace? The Influence of Brand-Induced Mortality Salience on Consumer Behavior”) produced a very original piece of research concerning the effects of unintended brand associations on consumer behavior. Specifically, they propose that exposure to some brands (such as insurance company brands) may increase mortality salience which provokes greater spending. In a series of three experiments, they were able to demonstrate that different modes of exposure to an insurance brand increase spending intentions (Experiment 1) and charity donation intentions (Experiment 2). Even mere subliminal brand exposure (Experiment 3) impacts preference for domestic products. In all cases, mortality salience was shown to be a mediator between brand exposure and consumer behavior effects. Therefore, unintended brand associations can influence consumer behavior by triggering unconscious consumer motives. The authors show that exposure to a brand (or even to a simple brand logo) can activate unexpected and non-managed brand associations (here mortality salience), which in turn could affect consumer behavior in many ways.

Noël Albert, Dwight Merunka and Pierre Valette-Florence (“When Consumers Love Their Brands: Defining the Concept and Measuring its Dimensions”) argue that in many instances consumers fall in love with certain brands. Their paper focuses on the conceptualization and operationalization of love in relation to brands. They conducted an exploratory study involving 843 respondents in France. Data analysis including multiple correspondence analysis and cluster analysis of the words consumers use to describe their feeling of love and the “intimate” relationship they have with certain brands reveal the existence of 11 dimensions for the love construct. These dimensions are (1) passion (for the brand), (2) duration of the relationship (the relationship with the brand has existed for a long time), (3) self-congruity (congruity between self image and product image), (4) dreams (the brand favors consumer dreams), (5) memories (evoked by the brand), (6) pleasure (that the brand provides to the consumer), (7) attraction (felt toward the brand), (8) uniqueness (of the brand and/or of the relationship), (9) beauty (of the brand), (10) trust (the brand has never disappointed), and (11) declaration of affect (feel toward the brand). These dimensions identified in France were compared to dimensions of love found in previous research conducted in a different cultural context—the United States.

Finally, Jean-Charles Chebat, Claire Gelinas-Chebat and Karina Therrien (“Gender-Related Wayfinding Time of Mall Shoppers: The Mediating Effects of Shopping Values and Information Sources”) explore the validity of the folklore belief that males are better than females in navigation skills, especially in a shopping mall. In other words, are male shoppers more time efficient in finding their way in a shopping mall than females? They report a shopping mall study designed to test this stereotype. Specifically, they conducted an experiment in which male and female shoppers were intercepted in a shopping mall and asked to find certain stores and the amount of time it took them to find those stores was recorded. The authors hypothesized that the effect of gender on time efficiency in locating the target stores is mediated by shopping values and the use of information sources. The study confirmed their mediating hypotheses. Females were found to be more efficient in finding the targeted store than their male counterparts. This was due to the fact that females were found to be more hedonists (than utilitarians) in their shopping values and used people (as opposed to maps and other landmarks) as the main source of information in navigating through the shopping mall. Being a hedonist and using people as a key source of navigation information were found to contribute significantly to being time efficient in finding the targeted stores.

The two last papers of the special issue address communication-related issues. Jean-Marc Lehu and Etienne Bressoud (“Viewers and Brand Placement in Movies: Understanding of the Effectiveness of the Technique”) focus on the psychology of product placement. Specifically, the authors explore viewers’ reactions during a second viewing of a movie. Their study involved a large sample of French viewers of DVDs (N=3,532). The survey examined respondents’ spontaneous brand placement recall, the day after the movie was watched at home. The study found that a first viewing of the movie at the cinema improves brand placement recall, as does watching it at home on a large home cinema screen. The recall improvement also seems evident when a DVD movie is chosen either because of the movie director or when the viewer likes the movie. These findings have high managerial relevance for marketing managers involved in the product placement industry.

The final paper is written by M. Joseph Sirgy, Dong-Jin Lee, J. S. Johar and John Tidwell (“The Effect of Self-Congruity with Sponsorship on Brand Loyalty”) offers a novel extension of self-image congruence research in the domain of corporate sponsorship. They define self-congruity with a sponsorship event as the degree to which consumers think the image of the sponsored event matches with their own self image. They
establish a conceptual link between self-congruity with a sponsorship event and brand loyalty and hypothesize this link to be strong under two conditions: (1) when brand customers are aware that the firm is sponsoring the event, and (2) when brand customers are involved in that event. Five surveys involving more than 1500 participants enabled collecting data concerning a major mobile telecommunication company sponsoring the NASCAR Cup Series. The results indicate that self-congruity with sponsored sports events has a positive influence on brand loyalty and that this effect is moderated by customer awareness of the firm sponsoring the event and customer involvement with the sponsored event. This research shows both applicability and importance of self-congruity theory to other domains than brands and services. Managerial implications are strong concerning the selection of sponsored events that need to match the targeted customers’ self image.

As co-chairs and coordinator of this conference and as co-editors of this special issue, we greatly appreciate the contributions of the international scientific committee members of the La Londe conference who year after year increase the quality of the contributions. The scientific committee is composed of the following very distinguished scholars: Gerald Albaum (University of New Mexico), Rajeev Batra (University of Michigan at Ann Arbor), Russell W. Belk (University of Utah), Elisabeth Cowley (University of Sydney), Christian Derbaix (FUCAM, Mons), Yves Evrard (HEC, Paris), Curtis P. Haugtvedt (Ohio State University), Wayne D. Hoyer (The University of Texas at Austin), Alain Jolibert (University PMF Grenoble), Lynn R. Kahle (University of Oregon), Michel Laroche (Concordia University, Montreal), Gilles Laurent (HEC, Paris), Siew Meng Leong (National University of Singapore), Sidney J. Levy (University of Arizona), Richard J. Lutz (University of Florida), Hans Mühlbacher (University of Innsbruck), Robert A. Peterson (The University of Texas at Austin), Rik Pieters (Tilburg University), Christian Pinson (INSEAD), Bernard Pras (University of Paris-Dauphine and ESSEC), Don E. Schultz (Northwestern University), Jan-Benedict Steenkamp (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Alain Strazzieri (Paul Cézanne University Aix-Marseille), W. Fred van Raaij (Tilburg University), Luk Warlop (Katholieke University Leuven), Arch G. Woodside (Boston College), and Judy Zaichkowsky (Simon Fraser University).

We also wish to thank all the other members of the review panel who performed a great reviewing job. Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to Arch Woodside, Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Business Research for initiating and approving this special issue. We look forward to the 2009 edition of the La Londe conference. Two outstanding researchers, Chris A. Janiszewski, Jack Faricy Professor of Marketing, University of Florida, Warrington College of Business Administration, Gainesville, Florida and Stijn M. J. van Osselaer, Professor of Marketing, RSM Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, have accepted to co-chair this next conference. The 2009 La Londe conference will take place June 2–5, 2009 in La Londe les Maures, this beautiful and stimulating place on the French Mediterranean coast.

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