The internationalization of marketing communications and consumer research: Introduction to the special issue from the 2011 La Londe Conference

Michel Tuan Pham a,⁎, Siegfried Dewitte b

a Graduate School of Business, Columbia University, 3022 Broadway, Uris 515, New York, NY 10027, United States
b Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium

A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 1 June 2011
Received in revised form 1 August 2011
Accepted 1 October 2011
Available online 9 January 2012

Keywords:
Consumer research
Marketing communications
International conference

A B S T R A C T

This article provides a brief introduction to the La Londe Conference on which this special issue of the Journal of Business Research is based, along with an overview of the 11 articles selected for this special issue.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This special issue of the Journal of Business Research includes a selection of papers presented at the 38th International Research Conference in Marketing organized by the Aix Graduate School of Management (I.A.E. Aix-en-Provence), University Paul Cézanne in Aix-Marseille (France). Informally and widely known as the “La Londe Conference,” this biennial event is devoted to recent advances in Marketing Communications and Consumer Behavior. Set in the small French Provence resort town of La Londe les Maures, by the Mediterranean Sea, the conference is unique in that it provides a very high-level program that brings together leading scholars in consumer behavior and marketing communications in a relaxed and social atmosphere that encourages intense and friendly discussions and exchanges.

The La Londe Conference is truly international. It has historically been chaired by a pair of prominent scholars in marketing communications and consumer research, one from North America and one from Europe. For example, the past five La Londe Conferences have been chaired by Wayne D. Hoyer (University of Texas at Austin, USA) and Yves Evrard (HEC Paris, France) in 1999, Professors Lynn Kahle (University of Oregon, USA) and Christian Derbaix (FUCaM, Belgium) in 2001, Professors Judy Zaichkowsky (Simon Fraser University, Canada) and Gilles Laurent (HEC Paris, France) in 2003, Curtis P. Haugtvedt (Ohio State University, USA) and Luk Warlop (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium) in 2005, M. Joseph Sirgy (Virginia Tech, USA) and Søren Askegaard (University of Southern Denmark) in 2007, and Chris A. Janiszewski (University of Florida, USA) and Stijn M. J. van Osselaer (RSM Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands) in 2009.

The 2011 conference was chaired by Michel Tuan Pham (Columbia University, USA) and Siegfried Dewitte (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium). The local organizers were Professors Virginie De Barnier and Dwight Merunka (University Paul Cézanne in Aix-Marseille, France). A total of 85 manuscripts were submitted and double-blind reviewed by ad-hoc reviewers selected by the conference co-chairs; less than half were accepted. Forty papers were eventually presented at the conference, where, in addition, Professor Norbert Schwarz (University of Michigan, USA) made a thought-provoking keynote address on the embodiment of feelings and thoughts in judgment and decision making, a rapidly growing area of research in consumer behavior and social psychology.

2. Overview of the papers

The eleven papers selected for this special issue examine a particularly broad range of issues in consumer behavior and marketing communications, from ad-execution effects on consumer memory (Ursavas and Hesapci-Sanaktekin), to consumers’ schemas about retail displays (Valenzuela, Raghubir, and Mitakis), to brand passion (Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence), to relationship with valued possessions (Karanika and Hogg). The sheer diversity of issues examined across these eleven papers clearly shows that the related fields of consumer behavior and marketing communications are well and thriving. The eleven selected papers also illustrate the

⁎ Corresponding author at: Tel.: +1 212 854 3472; fax: +1 212 854 7647.
E-mail address: tdp4@columbia.edu (M.T. Pham).

0148-2963/$ – see front matter © 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
impressive internationalization of quality research in consumer behavior and marketing communications, which the La Londe Conference taps into. No less than eight different countries – Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the USA – are represented across these papers.

The first paper by Mehdi Mourali and Anish Nagpal (“The powerful select, the powerless reject...”) examines the effects of power – a construct that is garnering an increasing amount of attention in consumer research – on consumers’ relative preference for two types of decision strategies: choosing versus rejecting options. Across two studies, the authors find that high-power consumers tend to prefer choosing options as a decision strategy, whereas low-power consumers tend to prefer rejecting options as a strategy. According to the authors, this effect arises because conditions of high power activate people’s behavioral approach system, whereas conditions of low power activate people’s behavioral inhibition system.

In the second paper (“Shelf space schemas...”), Ana Valenzuela, Priya Raghubir, and Chirissy Mitakis examine how consumers’ schemas about product shelf placements align with retailers’ display practices. Across three studies, the authors find that consumers hold specific beliefs about product displays. For example, consumers believe that popular products are generally placed in the middle of a display. However, a field study of actual retailing practices reveals that some of these beliefs, including the belief that popular products are assigned a central position, are mistaken. The authors speculate that some of these beliefs, whether founded or unfounded, are held unconsciously. They suggest that retailers could take advantage of these pervasive consumer beliefs.

In the third paper (“Is luxury a female thing?”), Nicola Stokburger-Sauer and Karin Teichmann motivate their research with an interesting marketing observation. They note that across different product categories, the price premium for luxury products appears to be higher for women than for men. They investigate this phenomenon in a series of three studies. Across three different product categories, they find that women indeed have more favorable attitudes toward luxury products than men do. Additional results suggest that this effect arises because women seem to derive greater uniqueness and status benefits from luxury brands than men do. These findings have obvious implications in terms of how luxury brands should be marketed to women versus men.

The next two papers focus on branding. In the fourth paper (“Toward a micro conception of brand personality...”), Rita Valette-Florence and Virginie De Barnier offer a compelling distinction between “macro” and “micro” approaches to the measurement of brand personality. As epitomized by Aaker’s (1997) seminal article, macro approaches attempt to measure brand personality along a fixed set of dimensions (e.g., “Big Five” traits such as competence and ruggedness) that are common across product categories and cultural contexts. In contrast, micro approaches try to tailor the measurement of brand personality to the specific product category and cultural context in which it is assessed. Using the case of French media brands as an empirical example, the authors offer compelling evidence of the superiority of a micro approach over the standard macro approach.

In the fifth paper (“Brand passion...”), Noel Albert, Dwight Merunka, and Pierre Valette-Florence examine the concept of “brand passion,” which can be defined as an extremely positive attitude toward the brand that is primarily affective. In a large correlational study, the authors find that consumers’ level of passion for different brands is strongly influenced by the degree to which they identify with the brand and the level of trust that they have in the brand. This level of passion, in turn, strongly predicts the consumers’ level of commitment toward the brand and their word of mouth about the brand.

In the sixth paper (“Trajectories across the lifespan of possession...”), Katerina Karanika and Margaret Hogg draw on phenomenological interviews with consumers to examine how consumers’ relationships with their valued possessions (e.g., clothes, furniture, cars) evolve over time. They find that depending on the possession’s meaning for the consumers, these relationships tend to follow three distinct patterns. Possessions that symbolize and express an affiliation with someone (e.g., a gift by a loved one, old family photos) tend to become more cherished over time. In contrast, relationships to possessions that are motivated by a desire to establish a distinct self-identity (e.g., a new pair of jeans) or affirm one’s autonomy (e.g., a new car) tend to weaken over time. Finally, possessions that are associated with recreation (e.g., books, music CDs), security (e.g., medication), and nurturance (e.g., houses) tend to elicit more steady relationships over time.

In the seventh paper (“The influence of mood...”), Maarten Eelen, Evelien d’Heer, Maggie Geuens, and Iris Vermeir revisit a classic question in consumer behavior: When do consumers’ attitudes and preferences predict their actual behavior? Across three studies, the authors find that individuals make product choices that are more consistent with their prior attitudes and preferences when they are in a negative mood than when they are in a positive mood. This effect is especially pronounced among individuals who tend to experience affect with greater intensity. According to the authors, this is because negative moods encourage greater deliberation, resulting in a greater reliance on preexisting attitudes.

It has been recently observed that among novice consumers, the mere presence of category labels increases choice satisfaction even if the labels are uninformative—a finding called the “mere categorization effect” (Mogilner, Rudnick, & Iyengar, 2008). In the eighth paper (“The mere categorization effect...”), Tobias Langner and Martin Krengel revisit this finding in the context of products that – unlike in the original Mogilner and colleagues studies – have a more complex attribute structure. The authors find that the mere categorization effect does not extend to products with a more complex attribute structure. For such products, only labels that are informative increase choice satisfaction. This finding provides an important qualification of the original mere categorization findings.

The next two papers are focused on marketing communication. In the ninth paper (“Effects of dramatic contrast on memory...”), Baris Ursavas and Ozlem Hesapci-Sanaktekin examine the effects of emotional incongruity (vs. congruity) between an ad’s message and its musical background. In two controlled experiments, they find that conditions of emotional incongruity lower people’s memory for the ad’s message and make the ad appear shorter. This effect is more pronounced among individuals with a high level of discomfort with ambiguity than among individuals with a low level of discomfort with ambiguity. These effects can be further moderated by people’s preexisting mood states.

In the tenth paper (“Celebrity co-branding partners...”), Jasmina Ilicic and Cynthia Webster examine the effects of pairing a brand with a celebrity spokesperson on brand beliefs and brand attitudes. In their study, they find that pairing a brand with a celebrity spokesperson does not enhance brand beliefs and brand evaluations compared to a control condition where a customer is used to convey the brand’s benefits. In fact, if the celebrity spokesperson only provides information that is irrelevant to the brand, beliefs in the brand’s benefits and brand evaluations decrease compared to this control condition. This finding suggests that advertisers need to be judicious in their use of celebrity spokespersons.

In the final paper (“The contrast between social network theory and tribal theory...”), Luke Greenacre, Lynne Freeman, and Melissa Donald examine how well music communities can be modeled by two different theories of social systems and interactions: social network theory and tribal theory. Qualitative analyses of depth interviews with members of different Australian music communities
(e.g., hip hop, rave, opera) suggest that these communities are better accounted for by social network theory than by tribal theory. The authors provide a variety of marketing implications of their findings.

As co-chairs of this conference and co-editors of this special issue, we express our gratitude to Dwight Merunka and Virginie De Barnier for their outstanding organization of the conference. We extend our thanks to Rosemary Calazel for her admirable administrative support. We also greatly appreciate the inputs of the international scientific committee members of the La Londe Conference who, year after year, have contributed to the paper selection process and helped guarantee the quality of the contributions through their reviews. The scientific committee is composed of the following distinguished scholars: Gerald Albaum (University of New Mexico), Søren Askegaard (University of Southern Denmark, Odense), Rajeev Batra (University of Michigan at Ann Arbor), Russell W. Belk (University of Utah), Elisabeth Cowley (University of Sydney), Christian Derbaix (FUCaM, Mons), Curtis P. Haugtvedt (Ohio State University), Wayne D. Hoyer (University of Texas at Austin), Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida), Alain Jolibert (University of 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), Stijn van Osselaer (Erasmus University), Robert A. Peterson (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), M. Joseph Sirgy (Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University), Jan-Benedict Steenkamp (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Alain Strazzieri (Paul Cézanne University in Aix-Marseille), Pierre Valette-Florence (University of Grenoble), W. Fred van Raaij (Tilburg University), Luk Warlop (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), Arch G. Woodside (Boston College), and Judy Zaichkowsky (Simon Fraser University).

We especially thank the more than 150 ad hoc reviewers who evaluated the submissions for the 2011 conference, including the eleven papers that were selected for this special issue. While they are far too many to identify here by name (they are identified and acknowledged in the conference’s proceedings), they did an outstanding job in reviewing the submissions in a timely and constructive manner. Michel Pham extends his personal thanks to Charlene Chen (a PhD student at Columbia University) for her excellent editorial assistance with this special issue. 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.

3. Conclusion

The 38th edition of the La Londe Conference was a large success. It featured dozens of excellent papers from many different countries and international institutions. The 11 articles that appear in this special issue are a testimony of the vibrancy and quality of consumer behavior and marketing communication research that is being conducted around the world.

We look forward to the 2013 edition of the La Londe Conference on Marketing Communication and Consumer Behavior. Two outstanding researchers, L.J. Shrum, University of Texas, San Antonio, USA, and Luk Warlop, Faculty of Economics and Business, K.U. Leuven, Belgium, have agreed to co-chair the next conference. The 2013 Conference will take place from June 4 to June 7 in the recently renovated resort of La Londe les Maures on the French Mediterranean coast.

Reference