

ABSTRACT

Belief refers to the subjective probability of a relationship between the object of the belief and some other object, value, concept, or attribute. If beliefs are the main and causal indicators of attitudes, then the issue is what leads to belief formation. A prominent source of belief formation is messages in print advertisements (ads). Research on how messages/arguments in print advertisement lead to belief formation (not belief change) is lacking. One objective of the present research was to critically study one such model of belief formation. Instead of the traditional classification of strong/weak arguments, a modified version of Toulmin's (1969) Jurisprudence model was examined. Toulmin outlines three essential elements of an ad: Claims, Evidence and Authority. Claims are assertions made in an ad. Evidences are specific facts, features, data and product characteristics that a communicator produces to support his/her claim. Authority (warrant or backing) in the form of rules or principles may provide links between evidence and claim. Authority may be warrant or backing. Warrants have been defined as statements of knowledge that explicitly or logically explains the relationship between an asserted claim and its supporting evidence. Endorsement by a credible source is selected as a representative of backing.

The model was modified by varying evidence on the concrete-abstract dimension. Abstractness is summarizing or concentrating a larger whole resulting in a decrease in detail (Johnson and Kisielius 1987). Four levels of abstraction were demarcated: Abstract (Image), Semi-abstract (claim in the form of attribute), Basic (unfamiliar) and Concrete (familiar). A 4 Evidence (abstract, semi-abstract, basic and concrete) x 4 Authority (Evidence without warrant and/or backing, warrant, backing, warrant and backing) between-subjects factorial design was employed. Each subject received an experimental booklet. Every subject saw two ads (toothpaste and soap), wrote their thoughts on the toothpaste ad, answered structured scales based on their perception of the ads, and rated themselves on the need-for-cognition personality scale. Correlation, Regression, Anova analyses were the major statistical tools used for validation of the hypotheses.

The following hypotheses were examined.

H1: Ads containing abstract evidence and backing would be perceived more believable than ads containing abstract evidence and warrant.

H2: Ads containing concrete evidence and warrant would be perceived more

believable than ads containing concrete evidence and backing.

- H3:** Ads containing evidence grounded at basic level would be more believable than ads containing evidence grounded at abstract or concrete level.
- H4:** Ads containing evidence grounded at basic level without authority would be as believable as ads containing evidence grounded at basic level that are also supported by warrant and/or backing.
- H5:** If ads are supported by both warrant and backing, different levels of abstractness-of-evidence would have the same effect on believability.

Based on experimental results; H1 and H2 were validated, while H3, H4 and H5 were reformulated as follows:

- H3R:** Ads containing evidence grounded at basic level would be more believable than ads containing evidence grounded at abstract, semi-abstract and concrete level; *if the ads are not supported by warrant and/or backing.*
- H4R:** Ads containing basic evidence (not supported by warrant and/or backing) would be *more* believable than ads containing basic evidence that are also supported by warrant and/or backing.
- H5R:** Ads containing abstract and semi-abstract evidence, supported by warrant and backing would be perceived **more** believable than ads containing basic and concrete evidence, supported by warrant and backing.

In addition, the process by which abstraction and authority lead to belief formation using the concept of benefit segmentation was delineated. Three validated hypotheses related to benefit segmentation are given below:

- H6:** Visualization of benefits mediates the effect of Elaboration on Desirability.
- H7:** Abstractness-of-evidence leads to its Desirability.
- H8:** Believability of an unfamiliar evidence would be greater than that of a familiar evidence.

Categorization is fundamental to belief formation. . Evaluation (attitude) of any object is based on the way it is classified. Belief that the other person has exercised choice in engaging in a behavior provides a basis for categorization. Motivation-to-classify is distinguished from

ability-to-classify. Motivation-to-classify accurately is measured using a standard scale named need-for-cognition. Hypotheses (H9 to H11) related to categorization process are given below. These Hypotheses were statistically validated.

H9: Higher the need for cognition in individuals, higher would be the classification accuracy.

H10: In a repeated task, higher the need for cognition higher would be the classification accuracy for those who misclassified in the first task.

H11A: At the abstract level of categorization, higher the need for cognition, higher would be the classification accuracy.

H11B: At the concrete level of categorization, higher the need for cognition, higher would be the classification accuracy.

H11C: At semi-abstract and basic level of categorization, classification accuracy would not be related to need-for-cognition.

Limitations and directions for future research has been delineated.