

Role of relationship norms in processing brand information journalassignment assi...

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The journal article, Role of Relationship Norms in Processing Brand Information by Pankaj Aggarwal and Sharmistha Law, two types of relationships are examined. The first is the communal relationship, “ in which concern for a partner’s need is paramount” (Aggarwal & Law, 2005) and the exchange relationship in which “ a matched benefit is expected back from the partner. This study explored the relationship between business partners as being an exchange relationship and family members and friends as communal.

In the first study out of three, is about near versus far product extensions. To easily describe what is meant by this, the researchers compared a chair and furniture. A chair is easily accessed and has the greatest amount of feature-related information. Furniture is going from a specific item to a general level. The study was trying to show that depending on the context, consumers have been found to use product features at different levels of abstraction.

The first hypothesis in the first study was, “ Compared to a communal relationship, when the norms of an exchange relationship are salient people evaluate far extensions of a product poorly relative to near extensions” (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). The method for this study was using 64 undergraduate students for the 15 minute study. In the study they tested communal and exchange relationship norms purely as contextual constructs an examine their influence on a subsequent, unrelated decision test.

Participants read a brief description of the interaction with another person intended to manipulate one of the two relationships. The exchange relationship scenario used phrases such as “ keep things even,” “ return

favors as early as possible," and " expect to reciprocate. " In the C. Cox Page 2 communal relationship, the phrases were " is there whenever they need her," " does things to show she cares," and " expects friends to be there for her". Participants then had to answer an open-ended question that made them assume the role of the person described in the scenario and decide how to split a lunch bill with a friend.

The result of this first study showed that the " norms of relationship moderate to the degree to which far product extensions are seen as similar to the original product, as revealed by the differences in the evaluations of the product extensions across communal and exchange relationships" (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). The findings suggest " the salience of communal relationship norms are more likely than exchange relationship norms to lead to brand information being processed at a higher level of abstraction" (Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

The second study was about measuring memory for brand information at different levels of abstraction. The purpose of this study was to prove if people in both relationships were presented with abstract as well as more specific (or concrete) information about a brand, individuals in a communal relationship condition would encode the abstract information, whereas those in an exchange relationship would attend relatively more to the concrete brand information. The hypothesis for the second study is separated into three parts.

The first is " relative to participants in the communal condition, those in the exchange condition will show higher recognition rates for correct concrete

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brand information and lower rates of acceptance of incorrect concrete brand information”, the second, “ Relative to participants in the communal condition, those in the exchange condition would respond more slowly when correctly identifying abstract brand information”, and “ Relative to participants in the communal condition, C. Cox Page 3 those in the exchange condition would respond more slowly when identifying plausible inferences” (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). The study had 56 undergraduate students.

Participants were presented with one of the two relationships, the same statements as the previous study and a 12-item questionnaire. Participants were asked to read a 450-word description about a hypothetical clothing store. The reading contained concrete and abstract brand information. After the reading and a filler exercise, the participants completed a multiple choice recognition test.

The questions tested for memory for the concrete brand and abstract brand. The results of the second study showed that “ participants in a communal condition, relative to those in an exchange condition, have faster access to both correct abstract brand information and plausible inferences, suggesting that they particularly attend to and elaborate on brand information presented at a higher level of abstraction. Participants in the exchange condition apparently needed to construct the abstract brand information by relying on their knowledge of concrete information.

Together, these findings support the overall premise that brand-related information is processed at a broad overall level in a communal relation, compared to an exchange relationship in which it is processed at a more

detailed and nitty-gritty level” (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). The third and final study was about generating brand features at different levels of abstraction. Study three’s hypothesis was, “ Compared to consumers with an exchange relationship, those with a communal brand relationship will generate brand features at a higher level of abstraction” (Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

C. Cox Page 4 One hundred and fourteen undergraduate students were used for the study. Students were asked to fill out a 15 minute paper and pencil study to act as a filler for an unrelated computer based study. Just like the first and second study, students were given a scenario to read. The difference between this study was that the scenarios described a relationship between a person and a product. After the students studied the person and product they filled out a questionnaire about the product and how the person related to it.

Students were then asked to rate to the extent to which the brand was like a close friend, a family member, a business person or a merchant. The study showed that the number of words that it took to describe the product in the reading did not make a difference in the communal or exchange relationship. The study did, however, show, “ the type of relationship with a brand in fact leads consumers to focus on different gestures that vary on their level of abstraction” (Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

The perceived brand quality did not drive the results since the students were asked to compare it to people. The findings in study number three were the same as in the first two, but were different in context. The results of the whole study found “ that when interacting with a brand, the type of

consumer-brand relationship influence what information becomes salient. Hence, in an exchange relation, since the focus is on balancing the input and outcomes, people tend to focus on every detail which results in processing information at a lower level of abstraction.

In a communal relationship, the focus is on satisfying the partner's needs rather than the individual" (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). C. Cox Page 5 CRITIQUE Studying relationship norms in processing information about brands in the field of psychology enriches our understanding of consumer behavior by letting us know how people process brand information when they are in certain relationships. The relationship does not mean a marriage relationship, but rather if they are with a friend, family member, business person or just someone they barely know.

This study was interesting because it let me know who are the people who factor the most into their brand relationships and who does not. The problems with this study are that the studies still need further investigation before everything can be fully understood. Boundaries are needed such as differences in brands to really understand how the process is being thought through. Also, the study did use a control group, it was not usually helpful within the study. The results found not difference in what was found previously. Time was also a factor that they did not seem to fit into the study.

The study needed to find out if people in a communal relationship take a longer time to focus relative to those in the exchange relationship since the communal people are more concerned of others. The research in this study

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implies that people will think differently of brands depending in the relationship they are in. The processing time might be longer, shorter, faster or slower. The way of someone thinking about someone else is also a factor due to not thinking of themselves. Managers could use the information given in the study to show different brand features, or use a brand name for other products depending on the relationship.

Pricing could also become an issue with relationships. Consumers in an exchange relationship might prefer itemized pay as you go methods while communal relationship people like it in a lump sum price. People could also figure out what type of relationship they have and how people look at them. Those people might C. Cox Page 6 be able to, in the long run, ensure continuous, smooth and more efficient interactions along with longer and more meaningful relationships. This study could be improved if they would have used a wider range of participants.

Most undergraduate students would have a different view of a business relationship than someone who is actually in one. Also, everyone is everyones best friend at that age group so they may not appreciate the scenarios for the communal relationship. Although the study could have been called biased for those same reasons, it really was very fair and went smoothly. REFERENCE: Aggarwal, P, & Law, S. (2005). Role of relationship norms in processing brand information. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.www.libproxy.wvu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=19141303&site=ehost-live>.