

Post-Promotion Effects of Free Gift Premiums: Examining the Moderating Role of Need for Cognition

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Previous research on the impact of consumer sales promotion has typically dealt with responses in promotion time periods. Although some effort has been made to examine persistence of responses in post-promotion time periods, no studies have been reported on the role of need for cognition. The author presents findings from an exploratory study that examines the effects of different types of free gift premiums and need for cognition. Key findings reveal patterns of interactions which suggest strong moderating effects. These and other findings suggest that persistence of responses is linked to congruence between need for cognition and type of premium.

INTRODUCTION

A large number of research studies have been devoted to examining the effects of consumer sales promotions (DelVecchio, Henard, & Freling, 2006). Prior research has found that promotions can influence responses in promotion time periods; yet, differences have been found regarding persistence of responses in post-promotion time periods (Blattberg & Neslin, 1990; Rossiter & Bellman, 2005). Findings from related marketing communication studies have indicated that the need for cognition variable can help resolve some differences; as well, congruence between need for cognition and promotion type can provide additional insights (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992; Lee & Schumann, 2004; Lee & Thorson, 2009). However, in a consumer sales promotion context, the role of need for cognition in post-promotion time periods has received little or no consideration.

Consumer sales promotion research has focused on the effects of price oriented promotions, such as temporary price reductions or coupons (Blattberg & Neslin, 1990; Shimp & Andrews, 2013). Though, some free gift premiums (also known as direct consumer premiums or immediate reward premiums offered to consumers as near- or with-package incentives) have been found to be better than other promotions in creating enduring effects in post-promotion time periods (DelVecchio, et.al., 2006). Although all sales promotions have been noted by their level of desirability, free gift premiums can take on a “promotion relatedness” form not available to most other ones. Rossiter and Bellman (2005) and Prentice (1975, 1977) pointed out that promotion relatedness exists along a continuum from high complementary linkages with the promoted product’s use to low linkages and can be viewed as the degree of compatibility between knowledge structures that consumers hold about promotions and promoted products. Higher related promotions, as compared to lower related ones, provide information that is more compatible with expectations about promoted products and have the potential to stimulate more enduring effects.

In a context of examining the effects of different free gift premiums (i.e., higher- and lower-levels of

relatedness to the promoted product) in post-promotion time periods, the present study attempts to illustrate the importance of assessing the role of the need for cognition variable. In the following four sections, this paper: (1) describes the need for cognition variable and gives contextual information concerning free gift premiums, (2) discusses the role of the present study in helping to fill a gap in the literature and contributes hypotheses, (3) provides methodologies and findings, and (4) concludes with implications, limitations and directions for future work.

BACKGROUND

Need for Cognition

Differences in levels of need for cognition (i.e., high- versus low-levels of need for cognition) have been found to influence the way that individuals process marketing communications (Lee & Schumann, 2004; Lee & Thorson, 2009). According to Haugtvedt and Petty (1992) and Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the need for cognition variable can be an important moderator, where the two levels of need for cognition can be treated as two different groups. High-need for cognition individuals have been found to be more thoughtful and to expend more effort in evaluating products and promotions than low-need for cognition individuals. High-need for cognition individuals tend to seek out and consider product related information, while low-need for cognition individuals evaluate products more quickly and depend on simple processing of extrinsic information (Kardes, Cronley, & Cline, 2011).

Response Persistence and Congruence

A few studies have demonstrated that level of need for cognition can influence potential carry-over effects in post-promotion time periods. For instance, Haugtvedt and Petty (1992) found that newly formed responses of high-need for cognition individuals persisted longer than newly formed responses of low-need for cognition individuals.

Lee and Thorson (2009) suggested that individuals showed more pronounced responses when marketing communication type and processing styles were congruent. The importance of congruence, between need for cognition and promotion type and between promotion type and promoted product, can be explained in the context of an integrative model by Lee and Schumann (2004). Their model used a combination of principles derived from Mandler's Schema Processing Framework (1982) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Previous work on Mandler's framework suggested that information that fits with an individual's current scheme of expectations tends to be processed smoothly. Memory for congruity persists and should result in higher levels of recall (Srull & Wyer, 1989). However, if there is not a correspondence between information and current schema, the processing becomes more problematic. Memory for incongruity decays and incongruent information should be vulnerable to lower levels of recall (Myers-Levy & Tybout, 1989).

Past studies on the Elaboration Likelihood Model have focused on central and peripheral routes to persuasion (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Individuals with higher motivation and ability to process marketing communications have been found to form or change responses via the central route due to more methodical analyses of product related information. Alternatively, individuals with lower motivation and ability have been found to be persuaded through the peripheral route because they relied on easy to recognize non-product related cues rather than analysis of information. Although studies on response persistence have found that persuasion based on peripheral route issues has been less enduring than persuasion based on central route issues, some researchers have examined different peripheral cues and found differential effects for response persistence. Sengupta, Goodstein, and Boninger (1997) suggested that higher related peripheral cues should be better than others in contributing to response persistence.

Free Gift Premiums

Free gift premiums have been defined as manufacturer- or retailer-sponsored, immediate rewards with purchase of promoted products (Fry & Caffaro, 1995; Shimp & Andrews, 2013). These incentives (e.g.,

miniature bowls and spoons, ice cream scoops, glass decanters, etc.) have been delivered to consumers as near- or with-package premiums and have been frequent offers with fast-moving consumer package goods.

A proposition drawn from Lee and Schumann's (2004) integrative model is that free gift premiums which have higher levels of relatedness with the promoted product's use would have the potential to serve as central route to persuasion promotions and create more enduring effects. That is, if premiums have higher levels of relatedness, consumers would consider premiums and promoted products as fitting together in a connected memorable way. On the other hand, if premiums have lower levels of relatedness, the premiums would serve as peripheral cues and consumers would mentally separate premiums from promoted products after the promotion ends.

PRESENT STUDY AND HYPOTHESES

Gap in Literature and Role of Present Study

Recently, Boland, Connell, and Erickson (2012) and Shimp and Andrews (2013) suggested that the impact of salient non-price promotions, such as free gift premiums, has been under researched. Earlier, Blattberg and Neslin (1990) and Rossiter and Percy (1997) issued calls for research on the post-promotion effects of premiums and the role of moderators.

Answering basic and up-and-coming questions about moderating variables, response persistence and the effects of free gift premiums in post-promotion time periods are important steps in designing promotional programs (e.g., do individual differences in need for cognition result in different post-promotion effects? do different types of premiums produce different post-promotion effects?). The present study extends research by Haugtvedt and Petty (1992) on response persistence and the moderating role of the need for cognition variable. In an examination of the post-promotion effects of two different types of free gift premiums, the present study uses information drawn from work by Rossiter and Bellman (2005) and Prentice (1975, 1977) for defining/manipulating premium relatedness. It uses principles on congruence derived from Lee and Schumann's (2004) integrative model of Mandler's Schema Processing Framework and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and follows Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggestions on considering the role of moderating variables.

Hypotheses

In promotion time periods (i.e., when individuals are exposed to the free gift premium and promoted product), it is expected that promotion desirability will play an overriding role. The present study uses one level of desirability. Thus, in promotion time periods it is expected that the different free gift premiums used in the study will stimulate similar responses because of the equal level of promotion desirability.

Need for Cognition

In post-promotion time periods (i.e., after the promotion has ended, when individuals are exposed to only the product), it is expected that newly formed responses will persist/decay differently due to an individual's level of need for cognition. It is expected that a high-need for cognition individual will have more motivation to engage in processing a free gift premium promotion and will exhibit more response persistence as compared to an individual with low-need for cognition.

H1: In post-promotion time periods, responses of high-need for cognition individuals will persist more than those of low-need for cognition individuals

Type of Premium

In post-promotion time periods, it is expected that higher related premiums will serve as high association cues and cause memorable linkages with promoted products. Alternatively, it is expected that lower related premiums will serve as low association cues and will not induce individuals to think about linkages with promoted products over time.

H2: In post-promotion time periods, higher related free gift premiums will produce greater response persistence than lower related premiums

Congruence between Need for Cognition and Type of Premium

In post-promotion time periods, it is expected that high-need for cognition individuals who are exposed to higher related premiums (i.e., a high level of congruence between need for cognition and the promotion situation) will exhibit more response persistence than those in other situations. Consequently, it is expected that the use of higher (lower) related premiums will boost (detract from) persistence of responses among high-need for cognition individuals.

H3: In post-promotion time periods, congruence between need for cognition and free gift premium relatedness will enhance persistence of responses among high-need for cognition individuals

RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

Method

The present study used a 2 x 2 x 2 between- and within-subjects mixed design experiment with the following factors: (1) need for cognition (high-need for cognition participants vs. low-need for cognition participants), (2) premium relatedness with promoted product (higher related free gift premium vs. lower related free gift premium), and (3) time periods (promotion time period and post-promotion time period). The time periods factor was a within-subjects factor ((i.e., two sessions or time periods in which measurement of responses occurred: first session (promotion time period, immediately after initial exposure – participants were exposed to the premium offer and promoted product), and second session (post-promotion time period, one week after first session – participants were exposed to only the product, i.e., premiums were not offered and were not present)). In both sessions, an assessment was made of each participant's attitudes toward the promoted product, their purchase intent and other relevant dependent variables. Changes in responses were calculated by comparing appropriate measures in the different time periods.

Pretests

Prior to the present study, different pretests, each using different samples, were carried out. These findings indicated that a soft drink would be an appropriate promoted product, and a beverage coaster (higher related premium) and an ink pen (lower related premium) would be appropriate free gift premiums. The soft drink was taste tested for consistency, and it was camouflaged and referred to as a new brand of soft drink. The beverage coaster and ink pen were matched across the same level of desirability.

Participants and Need for Cognition

The present study was conducted using pre-screened participants associated with a small northeastern university. Participants in the pretests were not part of the present study. Some participants were nonstudent adults. Other participants were recruited from upper level undergraduate business courses and MBA courses. All participants took part voluntarily and student participants were given course credit.

Using the method described by Haugtvedt and Petty (1992), early in the semester all potential participants completed the 18-item Need for Cognition Scale along with other questions. All responded to the need for cognition items on 5-point scales, ranging from (1) "not at all like me" to (5) "very much like me". Potential participants were categorized as high- or low-need for cognition by a median split (low-need for cognition $M = 52$, range = 29 – 60; high-need for cognition $M = 72$, range = 61 – 84). Only those whose need for cognition scores placed them in the bottom 30% (need for cognition scores ≤ 48) or top 30% (need for cognition scores ≥ 76) were recruited to participate.

Procedures

Participants were asked to sign-up for a time slot that was convenient for them. As each high-need for cognition (low-need for cognition) participant arrived at the designated room, he/she was assigned to one of the two premium relatedness conditions, following a simple random assignment method (i.e., each condition contained an equal number of high- and low-need for cognition participants). In session one, the promotion time period, there were two phases and the phases were conducted in a single time period. In the first phase, participants listened to a tape recorded cover story and signed a consent form. The cover story disguised the intent of the study and led participants to believe they were participating in a taste testing phase of a new product launch study. In the second phase, participants were given appropriate premiums, asked to taste the new soft drink, and to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to assess the study's dependent variables (e.g., attitudes toward the promoted product, purchase intent). The session ended with the experimenter thanking participants for participating in the study and reminding them of their scheduled time to return for the next session.

In session two, the post-promotion time period, premiums were not offered and were not present. Participants were asked to taste the new soft drink and then complete a similar questionnaire as in session one (identical questions, yet in a different order). After they turned-in this questionnaire, they were asked to complete an ending questionnaire. The ending questionnaire was a collection of cognitive responses and recall information; plus, it was a manipulation check on perceived levels of premium relatedness and desirability, and an assessment of demand characteristics. For cognitive responses, participants were asked to write down all of the favorable and unfavorable thoughts that they recalled going through their minds about the promoted product and the premium. For recall, participants were asked about attributes of the promoted product and the premium. The ending questionnaire also was used to assess feelings toward the premium received and degree of association with the promoted product's use, and it assessed whether participants correctly guessed hypotheses. After this session, participants were thanked for their participation and debriefed.

Sample

Fifty-six participants were recruited to take part in the study. Seven were dropped because of incomplete responses, leaving forty-nine (twenty-two females, twenty-seven males) who completed both sessions and provided complete information. The average age of participants was twenty-four, and thirty-five were undergraduates.

Manipulation Checks

In order to obtain uncontaminated assessments of data collected, manipulation checks on premium relatedness and desirability were investigated at the end of the experiment. The findings indicated that the manipulations worked as planned. That is, participants perceived premium relatedness levels as being matched across the one-level of desirability and they perceived premium relatedness levels as being significantly different in appropriate directions. As in the pretest studies, for measures of relatedness participants answered two 9-point scales anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree (i.e., "When I think of using these (coasters/pens) as free gifts with purchase premiums, soft drinks are one of the first products I think about," and "There is a very good fit between using these (coasters/pens) as free gifts with purchase of soft drinks"). Using a composite relatedness measure ($r = .86$), coasters were viewed as significantly more related to soft drinks ($M = 6.8$) than pens ($M = 3.2$); $F(1, 80) = 35.1, p < .001$). For measures of desirability, participants answered two 9-point semantic differential scales (i.e., "How much do you like these (coasters/pens) as free gifts with purchase premiums," and "Please rate your impression, good-bad, of these (coasters/pens) as free gifts with purchase premiums"). Using a composite desirability measure ($r = .82$), the coasters and pens were viewed as equally desirable, although participants gave slightly more favorable ratings (not significant) to the pens ($M = 5.5$) than to the coasters ($M = 5.2$).

Demand Characteristics

Demand characteristics were also investigated at the end of the study. The findings indicated that participants did not correctly guess the hypotheses. Participants were asked to respond to one direct, open-ended question (i.e., participants were asked for written explanations of what the study was about) and to two indirect, open-ended questions (i.e., participants were asked about their feelings toward the study and to give additional comments regarding the study). Responses to the questions revealed strong support for effectiveness of the cover stories and indicated that the data were not contaminated by any demand characteristics.

Results

Primary Measures

Attitude toward the promoted product (i.e., the new brand of soft drink) (A_{product}) was assessed by averaging responses to three highly related ($\alpha = .83$) 9-point scale items (favorable-unfavorable, like-dislike, and good-bad). Purchase intent (PI) was also measured using three 9-point scale items (i.e., unlikely to-likely to, willing to-unwilling to, and do not plan to-plan to) ($\alpha = .88$).

Because of the within-subjects repeated measures design, a preliminary analysis included Bartlett's and Box's tests for homogeneity, which were used to assess the equality of variance. As suggested by Winer (1971, pp. 208 and 595), these tests were conducted to examine the null hypothesis of equality of treatment difference variances and investigate the homogeneity assumption which underlies the within-subjects analysis. Composite measures of A_{product} and PI were used in the tests; and the results indicated that all observed χ^2 statistics for Bartlett's and Box's tests were less than critical values, which in turn suggested that data across treatment conditions could be pooled, there was no contamination by inflated Type I errors, i.e., probability of falsely rejecting a true null hypothesis, and conventional F -tests were not too liberal. Other tests for assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were satisfactory.

Analyses

A series of repeated measures analysis of variance and within time period analysis of variance, and follow-up t -tests, were conducted on composite measures of A_{product} and PI to examine treatment differences. Results from ANOVAs revealed that A_{product} and PI differed over time ($(A_{\text{product}} (F(1,40) = 3.72, p < .05), PI (F(1,40) = 3.42, p < .05))$ and by conditions over time ($(A_{\text{product}} (F(1,40) = 7.14, p < .01), PI (F(1,40) = 6.86, p < .01))$), and indicated significant variation by conditions in the two time periods. Main effects, both by need for cognition and by premium relatedness, revealed no differences in the promotion time period ((by need for cognition, $A_{\text{product}} (F(1,46) = .64), PI (F(1,46) = .52)$; by premium relatedness, $A_{\text{product}} (F(1,46) = .84), PI (F(1,46) = .80)$), yet significant differences in the post-promotion time period ((by need for cognition, $A_{\text{product}} (F(1,46) = 16.12, p < .01), PI (F(1,46) = 14.14, p < .01)$; by premium relatedness, $A_{\text{product}} (F(1,46) = 18.22, p < .01), PI (F(1,46) = 16.66, p < .01)$). In the post-promotion time period, for high-need for cognition groups, but not for low-need for cognition groups, there was a significant interaction effect between need for cognition and premium relatedness ($(A_{\text{product}} (F(1,20) = 18.42, p < .01); PI (F(1,20) = 16.14, p < .01)$).

Follow-up t -tests were conducted on composite measures in promotion- and post-promotion-time periods. In the promotion time period, the results suggested that there were no significant differences. Specifically, there were no significant differences between means of high-need for cognition (HNFC) groups versus low-need for cognition (LNFC) groups ($(A_{\text{product}} (M_{\text{HNFC}} = 7.1, n = 24 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{LNFC}} = 6.7, n = 25), PI (M_{\text{HNFC}} = 5.0, n = 24 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{LNFC}} = 4.9, n = 25))$ and no significant differences between means of higher related premium (HRP) groups versus lower related premium (LRP) groups ($(A_{\text{product}} (M_{\text{HRP}} = 7.0, n = 26 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{LRP}} = 6.8, n = 23), PI (M_{\text{HRP}} = 6.0, n = 26 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{LRP}} = 5.9, n = 23))$). In the post-promotion time period, though, results from the follow-up t -tests suggested that there were significant differences between means of high-need for cognition groups and low-need for cognition groups ($(A_{\text{product}} (M_{\text{HNFC}} = 6.4, n = 24 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{LNFC}} = 5.2, n = 25; t = 2.2, p < .02), PI (M_{\text{HNFC}} = 5.7, n = 24 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{LNFC}} = 4.8, n = 25; t = 2.2, p < .02))$ and significant differences between means of higher related premium groups and lower

related premium groups ((A_{product} ($M_{\text{HRP}} = 6.0, n = 26$ vs. $M_{\text{LRP}} = 5.6, n = 23; t = 2.2, p < .02$), PI ($M_{\text{HRP}} = 5.7, n = 26$ vs. $M_{\text{LRP}} = 4.8, n = 23; t = 2.2, p < .02$)). Further, in the post-promotion time period, for high-need for cognition groups, there were significant differences between means of the higher related premium group and the lower related premium group ((A_{product} ($M_{\text{HRP}} = 6.9, n = 14$ vs. $M_{\text{LRP}} = 6.0, n = 10; t = 2.2, p < .02$), PI ($M_{\text{HRP}} = 5.7, n = 14$ vs. $M_{\text{LRP}} = 4.8, n = 10; t = 2.2, p < .02$)); however, for low-need for cognition groups, there were no significant differences between means of higher- and lower-related premium groups.

Support for Hypotheses

Overall, the present study's findings revealed support for all three hypotheses. The first hypothesis posited that in the post-promotion time period responses of high-need for cognition individuals would persist more than responses of low-need for cognition individuals. Although the findings revealed that high- and low-need for cognition participants formed similar responses about a product immediately following a free gift premium promotion; in the post-promotion time period, responses of high-need for cognition participants persisted more than those of low-need for cognition participants. The second hypothesis stated that in the post-promotion time period higher related premiums would produce greater response persistence than lower related premiums. In the promotion time period, the findings revealed that both higher- and lower-related premiums were used as comparable contributions to A_{product} and PI because of the same level of premium desirability; however, in the post-promotion time period higher related premiums produced more persistent responses than lower related premiums. The third hypothesis stated that in the post-promotion time period congruence between need for cognition and premium relatedness would enhance persistence. The findings confirmed that, for high-need for cognition participants, the use of higher related premiums improved persistence.

Other Findings

Consistent with Haugtvedt and Petty's (1992) approach, cognitive responses and recall data were collected at the end of study. For cognitive responses, the findings indicated that high-need for cognition participants had a higher number of favorable or unfavorable thoughts about the promoted product than low-need for cognition ones. For recall, the findings revealed that high-need for cognition participants, who were exposed to higher related premiums, had better recall.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The present study examined the role of need for cognition on response persistence to free gift premiums. An important finding was that the need for cognition variable moderated the post-promotion effects of the type of free gift premium. As put forward, A_{product} of high-need for cognition participants were more persistent over time than those of low-need for cognition participants, and higher related premiums, but not lower related premiums, continued to stimulate enduring effects in the post-promotion time period. The same pattern operated when PI was the dependent variable, and cognitive responses and recall information supported these results.

Implications

The need for cognition findings reflect possibilities that manufacturers and retailers have in designing promotions to attract different individuals. The findings suggest that companies might consider trying to develop relationships by placing emphasis on multiple cues. If individuals are processing premiums and products together, congruence between need for cognition and type of premium helps them remember better.

Publications regarding manufacturers and retailers frequently contain discussions about how companies expect to appeal to new customers and hold existing customers by using different promotions.

For example, some chocolate syrup companies sometimes offer free ice cream scoops or free celebrity posters in near-package displays. Findings from the present study indicate that high-need for cognition individuals will remember the higher related premiums and promoted products better, which in-turn suggests that these premiums are better than others in helping to build brand equity.

Given the importance of sustainability concerns, companies might consider making more use of near-package premiums, instead of in-package or on-package premiums, because additional packaging is not required (i.e., it is expected that high-need for cognition individuals will give more consideration to environmental issues and social benefits). Further, companies might consider using environmentally responsible, recyclable displays of the premiums.

Limitations and Future Research

Several characteristics of the present study may limit its findings. Like many other experimental studies, homogeneous samples and small sample sizes were used. Although the controlled procedures provided important bases for initial comparisons, future research might examine whether the findings can be substantiated by more diverse samples and larger sample sizes in different settings.

In the present study, the premium relatedness manipulation was defined by degree of association with the promoted product's use. It might be argued that this definition was too restrictive, and a more expanded definition might be used that includes other factors, such as, target market commonality. Future research might investigate different levels of relatedness.

Researchers may find the present study research design and its findings helpful for examining other moderating variables. In particular, it is thought that the need for cognitive closure variable might be an influential moderator. Need for cognitive closure has been viewed as a craving for a rapid course of action (Andrews, 2013). It has been found to relate to prompt decision-making and a desire to come up with a final answer to a question instead of uncertainty. Individuals with high-need for cognitive closure have been found to make decisions faster than those with low-need for cognitive closure. Future research might examine whether high-need for cognitive closure individuals would be more likely to disregard information about levels of relatedness of the premiums because it might inhibit closure in a quick way.

In conclusion, marketers should consider the roles of moderating variables when they are examining the post-promotion effects of sales promotions. Additional studies are needed to investigate other salient moderators and other sales promotions.

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