

Relation between Need for Cognition & Ad Skepticism among Young Consumers

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Abstract

Today's market is full of products & a number of sources are providing information about these products. With the increasing number of sources of information, consumer is getting skeptical about truthfulness of information provided by these sources.

As mentioned in earlier studies this skepticism also varies among the consumers depending upon their age, gender & personalities. This study correlates the need for cognition among the young consumers & the skepticism towards advertisement in them.

Key Words: Ad Skepticism, Need For Cognition

“Advertising is 85% confusion and 15% commission.”

— Fred Allen

“Let advertisers spend the same amount of money improving their product as they do advertising, and they wouldn't have to advertise it.”

— Will Rogers

I. Introduction

Advertising is an industry that involves billions of dollars per year, employing bright minds with access to state-of-the-art theory in human behavior. Despite its sophistication, subtlety, vast resources, and ubiquity, advertising faces enormous challenges to the

objective of influencing sales, not least of which is that many consumers simply do not believe advertising claims.

Sorting through ad claims, many of which are difficult to substantiate, requires effort, and consumers are generally not highly motivated to process advertising information (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991). It is, therefore, reasonable that simple disbelief may be one way that consumers cope with the persuasive attempts of advertising.

Empirical evidence suggests that advertising claims (in ads that are processed) are frequently not accepted. Calfee and Ringold (1994) reported the consistent observation in public opinion poll, that roughly two-thirds of consumers claim that they doubt the truthfulness of ads. Previous research (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998, 2000) supports the proposition that consumers are socialized to be skeptical toward advertising, and the extent of their skepticism, is a determinant of their responses to advertising.

Considerable criticism has been directed at advertising and business in general, and that criticism has motivated work on scales to measure attitudes toward business(e.g., Barksdale & Darden, 1972), attitudes toward marketing, attitudes toward advertising, and beliefs about advertising, but no work has been done specific to skepticism toward advertising.

II. Review of Literature

Skepticism toward advertising in general (also referred to as ad skepticism) is regarded as a stable, generalizable marketplace belief, one of the over arching propositions that compose a consumer's implicit theory of how the marketplace operates (Moore-Shay &

Lutz, 1988). The term skepticism suggests several meanings, and Ford, Smith, and Swasy (1990) called for research into the dimensionality of ad skepticism.

One may be skeptical not only of the literal truth of ad claims, but also of the motives of the advertisers the value of the information to oneself or society or the appropriateness of advertising for specific audiences, such as children, or for specific products, such as cigarettes or alcohol.

One situational variable that affects ad claim believability is product type. Nelson (1970) and Darby and Karni (1973) identified three categories of goods: search, experience, and credence. Search goods have characteristics that can be determined by information search prior to purchase or use. Experience goods have characteristics that cannot be determined by searching but that require after use experience. Credence goods have characteristics that cannot be determined by either search or experience, at least not by typical consumers; such goods are too complex or require too much expert knowledge to evaluate. Calfee and Ringold (1994) presented ample empirical evidence suggesting widespread consumer skepticism toward advertising.

Based on a review of all available measures of consumer feelings and beliefs about advertising (mostly public opinion polls), the authors concluded that the majority of consumers believe that advertising is often untruthful that it attempts to persuade people to buy things they do not want; that it should be more strictly regulated; and that, nonetheless, it provides valuable information.

III. Need for Cognition

Cohen, Stotland and Wolfe (1955) proposed the construct and originally defined need for cognition as "a need to structure relevant situations in meaningful and integrated way. It

is the need to understand and make reasonable the experiential world." They pointed out that for any given individual, different situations may be important for arousal and satisfaction of needs. Also, feeling of tension and deprivation arises from frustration, leading to active effort to re-structure situations and increase understanding.

The construct and similar notions may be defined in different ways. For example, Murphy (1947) described the tendency of certain people to believe that it is "fun to think" and to quest for reality. Katz (1960) described as the "need to understand." Petty & Cacioppo (1982) described NFC as the "tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking," or what they later termed "effortful cognitive endeavors" (Cacioppo, Petty & Kao, 1984). Peletier & Schibrowsky (1994) characterize NFC as the intrinsic motivation to engage in problem-solving activities.

While need for cognition received little attention in the literature after Cohen et al.'s work, Cacioppo and Petty (1982) resurrected NFC by focusing on Cohen's (1957) observation that individuals with high (versus low) NFC were more likely to organize, elaborate on and evaluate the information to which they were exposed.

Cacioppo and Petty (1982) classified NFC as a motivational factor, based on individual differences, within the larger framework of their elaboration likelihood model (ELM). The ELM posits that individuals will devote varying levels of effort to cognitive processing tasks based upon their motivation (such as involvement or NFC) or ability (such as knowledge). Individuals with high motivation or ability are willing to override natural miserly tendencies among humans and will process information effort fully using central route processing.

By contrast, individuals with low motivation or ability will default to a peripheral route form of processing, in which they are content to rely upon various peripheral cues (such as source credibility) to make summary assessments without thorough examination of arguments.

Need for cognition has been incorporated in a growing number of ELM studies, facilitated by Cacioppo and Petty's (1982) creation of a 34-item NFC scale (1982) and a streamlined, more efficient 18-item version (Cacioppo, Petty & Kao, 1984). In their original study, Cacioppo and Petty (1982) found that NFC was weakly and negatively related to being close-minded, unrelated to social desirability, and positively related to general intelligence. Later, in the first major research providing support for NFC as a motivational factor in an ELM context, Cacioppo, Petty and Morris (1983) found that use of strong arguments led to greater persuasion among subjects high (versus low) in need for cognition, while source variables led to greater persuasion among low NFC individuals.

In subsequent research by Cacioppo and Petty's colleagues, generally consistent and supportive results have been reported (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao and Rodriguez, 1986; Haugtvedt, Petty, Cacioppo & Steidley, 1988), Haugtvedt, Schumann, Schneider and Warren, 1994; Petty, Cacioppo & Haugtvedt, 1992; Petty, Priester & Wegener, 1994; Petty, Schumann, Richman and Stratham, 1993).

By 1996, Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein & Jarvis (1996) reported that NFC had been examined in more than 100 published studies. Their exhaustive literature review documented the subsequent substantiation of the construct and NFC linkages to a wide range of psychological variables.

IV. Purpose of Study

Evidence indicates that NFC affects responses to advertising. High NFC consumers are more responsive to argument strength in a advertising context while low NFC consumers are more responsive to peripheral cues (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1989). Similar effects might be hypothesized for ad skepticism (Obermiller & Spangenberg).

Some research, in fact, has indicated a positive association between need for cognition and ad skepticism, but the relation appears to be more complex than a simple association (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1997b). On the basis of theory it was thought to find out relation between need for cognition & ad skepticism. The hypothesis formulated was as follows:

H₁: There is positive correlation between need for cognition & ad skepticism. Or we can say that the consumers with more need for cognition are more ad skeptic

V. Method

Data Collection

The sample consisted of students of one of the universities (Panjab University) of India as the study was based on young consumers. The respondents were contacted personally to fill the questionnaire & all respondents were in age group of 18-30. 100 questionnaires were distributed among the students out of which 69 responses were usable. The sample was selected on the basis of convenience of researcher.

Measures

The variables were operationalized with previously developed scales. The variable NFC (Need for Cognition) was measured by scale given by Cacioppo, Petty & Kao (1984). This scale is seven point scale, with more value indicating more need for cognition. The

ad skepticism was measured by scale given by Obermiller & Spangenberg (1998). This is a five point scale, with more value indicating more level ad skepticism.

VI. Results

Result 1 — Reliability of Ad Skepticism scale

Table below shows the reliability of the Ad skepticism, & the value of Cronbach α is 0.851, showing that the scale is reliable for measurement.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.851	9

Result 2 — Reliability of Need for Cognition (NFC) scale

Table below shows the reliability of the NFC scale & the Cronbach α is 0.410. This value is little less than value (0.5) required for standard scale. This may be due to small sample size & other reason may be that the items in the scale were not easy to understand.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.410	18

Result 3 — Correlation between the Variables

Bivariate correlation between the variables was carried using SPSS. Table below shows that the correlation is significant ($r = 0.45$).

Correlations

		Ad skepticism	NFC
Ad skepticism	Pearson Correlation	1	0.450(**)

	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	69	69
NFC	Pearson Correlation	0.450(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	69	69

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

VII. Discussions

Results show that the respondents with high need for cognition were more ad skeptic, which means that H_1 is accepted. The reason for this could be that the consumers with high need for cognition rely more on central cues rather than peripheral cues. The claims made by the advertisers without substantial proof or without central cues to support them would have made such consumers to be more ad skeptic.

VIII. Limitations & Future Research

The main limitation of the study was that of small sample size due to which the NFC scale showed less reliability. With the increased sample, the NFC scale would have shown better reliability. Regarding the future research the ad skepticism could be studied to have any relation with other personality traits. Moreover, ad skepticism & need for cognition could also be studied to have any difference gender or any other socio demographic variable.

IX. Conclusion

With the increasing competition & increasing ad expenditure by the companies it is important to understand the personality traits of target segment particularly with respect

to cognitive aspects, because it will help in development of the effective copy of the message so that it clicks into the mind of customers in desired way.

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