13. Experiential attributes and consumer judgments

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Traditionally, marketers have focused on functional and meaningful product differentiation and have shown that such differentiation is important because consumers engage in a deliberate reasoning process (Chernev, 2001; Shafir et al., 1993; Simonson, 1989). However, nowadays products in many categories are functionally highly similar, and it is difficult for consumers to differentiate products based on functional attributes. An alternative way of differentiating is to emphasize non-functional product characteristics or certain aspects of the judgment context.

For example, the VW New Beetle brand has used unique colors and shapes very prominently. Apple Computers has used a smiley face that appeared on the screen of computers when they were powered up as well as translucent colors to differentiate, for example, its iMac and iPod lines from competitive products. In addition, Apple Computers has integrated the colors and shapes of the product design with the design of its websites and the so-called AppleStores. Similar approaches focusing on colors, shapes or affective stimuli have been used for other global brands as well and for local brands in all sorts of product categories, including commodities like water and salt.

Here we refer to such attributes, which have emerged in marketing as key differentiators, as 'experiential attributes' (Schmitt, 1999). Specifically, experiential attributes consist of non-verbal stimuli that include sensory cues such as colors (Bellizzi et al., 1983; Bellizzi and Hite, 1992; Degeratu et al., 2000; Gorn et al., 1997; Meyers-Levy and Peracchio, 1995) and shapes (Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998) as well as affective cues such as mascots that may appear on products, packaging or contextually as part of ads (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Keller, 1987). Experiential attributes are also used in logos (Henderson et al., 2003), and as part of the judgment context, for example, as backgrounds on websites (Mandel and Johnson, 2002) and in shopping environments (Spies et al., 1997).

Unlike functional attributes, experiential attributes are not utilitarian (Zeithaml, 1988). Instead, experiential attributes may result in positive 'feelings and experiences' (Schwarz and Clore, 1996; Winkielman et al., 2003). Yet, how exactly do consumers process experiential attributes? How can consumers use them to reach a decision among alternatives? Moreover, are there different ways of processing experiential attributes? In this chapter, we examine how experiential attributes are processed and how they are of value in consumer decision-making. We distinguish two ways of processing experiential features: deliberate processing, which is similar to the way functional attributes are processed, and fluent processing, which occurs without much deliberation. We identify judgment contexts in which consumers process experiential

attributes deliberately or fluently, and show how consumers' judgments are affected by these contexts.

HOW DO CONSUMERS PROCESS EXPERIENTIAL ATTRIBUTES?

Deliberate processing is reason-based and often inferential (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994; Brown and Carpenter, 2000; Carpenter et al., 1994; Shafir et al., 1993; Simonson, 1989). It occurs step by step and is goal-directed (Chernev, 2001; Fischer et al., 1999).

Deliberate processing may also occur for experiential attributes. For example, consumers can engage in inferential reasoning when they judge whether the color 'red' is the right color for the product or when they reason why a company may have put an affective symbol such as a 'smiley' face on the product. Such deliberate processing for experiential attributes is similar to the process that occurs on a regular basis for functional attributes or for so-called 'trivial' attributes (Brown and Carpenter, 2000; Carpenter et al., 1994).

However, experiential attributes may also be processed by circumventing deliberation. To account for such processing in judgment and choice contexts, especially for feelings and experiences, the concept of 'processing fluency' has been introduced (Schwarz and Clore, 1996; Winkielman et al., 2003). Highly fluent processing of an experiential attribute occurs when a consumer spontaneously gets an impression of the stimulus and responds to it in a direct and immediate way without consciously labeling the stimulus as a specific attribute (Dubé et al., 2003). Fluent processes are involved, for example, in spontaneous visual categorization and discrimination (Grunert, 1996; Schneider and Shiffrin, 1977; Tulving and Schacter, 1990). Fluent processes also occur when people engage in simple congruency matching tasks (Kelley and Jacoby, 1998; Roediger, 1990), for example when individuals discriminate one stimulus type from another (for example, color from shape) or when they distinguish one stimulus category from another (for example, visually presented experiential stimuli from textually presented functional information) (Edell and Staelin, 1983; Houston et al., 1987; Shepard, 1967). Fluent processing of stimuli results in more positive judgments (Schwarz, 2004; Winkielman et al., 2003). Fluency effects have also been obtained in consumer research; it has been shown that fluency affects the generation of category-exemplars, the formation of consideration sets and brand choice as well as judgments (Lee, 2002; Lee and Labroo, 2004; Shapiro, 1999).

Given the previous research and findings, we assume that functional attributes are always processed deliberately. However, processing of experiential attributes may occur deliberately or fluently, and we suggest that there are two factors that determine whether experiential attributes are processed deliberately or fluently. The first factor relates to the set of alternatives, specifically the nature of the functional attributes that are part of the product description: whether they are diagnostic or not (Shafir et al., 1993; Simonson, 1989). The second factor relates to the judgment context (the environment in which the judgment takes place), specifically the type of contextual cues that can prime experiential attributes: whether they are of a matching or non-matching stimulus type (Schmitt, 1994). We now examine different sets of alternatives and contexts to formulate hypotheses about how they may affect judgments about experiential attributes.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

First, consider a situation in which there are only functional attributes – alternatives are not differentiated by experiential attribute, that is, a sensory attribute such as color and shape or an affective attribute such as a smiley face. This is a standard situation that has been used in many prior marketing studies. We use this situation to establish a benchmark or control condition. Based on prior research, consumers in this situation should engage in deliberate reasoning to determine which alternative is superior. Moreover, the context should be irrelevant: for context to act as a prime and affect evaluations, it is necessary that the contextual cue is perceptually or conceptually related to the stimulus to be judged (Winkielman et al., 2003). Since this is not the case here, the deliberate processing of the functional attributes should take place irrespective of the judgment context. Thus, we predict:

H1: When consumers judge two functional alternatives, consumers will focus on determining which alternative is superior and evaluate the dominating alternative more positively than the dominated alternative, irrespective of contextual cues.

Next, consider product alternatives differentiated on both functional and experiential attributes. A consumer faces such a situation when there are products in the marketplace that contain important functional features as well as experiential features (for example, a technology product like an Apple computer that delivers functional value but also prominently features experiential attributes).

If the judgment context is experiential, then the contextual experiential cues can serve as primes for the experiential attributes of the alternatives and affect judgments about them. Taking the experiential contextual cues into account, consumers can deliberately infer that the experiential attributes presented visually – in addition to functional attributes – may provide value to them. This inferential process is similar to that investigated for functionally trivial attributes presented verbally where consumers can infer value from the presence of such attributes (Brown and Carpenter, 2000; Carpenter et al., 1994). Moreover, the value provided by the visually presented experiential attributes should be independent of their type (for example, whether they are an attractive color or a smiley face) because of the mere fact that once experiential attributes are present in addition to functional attributes, consumers will infer that there is some value in these experiential attributes beyond the value that exists in the textually-presented functional attributes. In other words, the experiential attribute can make up for functional inferiority of a product.

However, if the judgment context, for example, the shopping environment or a website, is non-experiential, then, as in the prior situation, the functionally dominant alternative will be preferred because it will be seen as the superior product based on consumers' reasoning about functional attributes. Therefore we predict the following interaction:

H2a: When consumers judge two alternatives such that one alternative dominates the other alternative on functional attributes, but the functionally inferior alternative is differentiated with either a sensory or an affective attribute, consumers evaluate equally either alternative in the presence of experiential (sensory or affective) cues in the judgment context;

H2b: However, consumers evaluate the functionally dominating alternative more positively than the dominated alternative in a non-experiential context.

Finally, consider a situation in which experiential attributes and functional attributes are both present but the functional attributes are not diagnostic (that is, functional attributes have the same values for all alternatives). A consumer faces such a situation when products are comparable in functionality but possess an attractive experiential attribute. In this situation, functional and experiential value cannot be compared, as in the previous case. Most likely, therefore, the experiential context will draw consumers' attention to the experiential attributes of the alternatives, and consumers will engage in a spontaneous, simple visual categorization and matching of the experiential contextual cue with the experiential product attributes. This process will be a fluent one and result in positive evaluations (Schwarz, 2004; Winkielman et al., 2003). Thus, if the judgment context includes a certain sensory cue (for example, a specific color), consumers will most likely look for and notice when the cue matches with another sensory attribute of the same type (that is, another color). On the other hand, if consumers encounter an affective contextual cue (for example, a heart), they will most likely notice a matching affective attribute (for example, a smiley face). However, if there is no prime, that is, the judgment context is non-experiential, consumers will engage in deliberate processing of the functional attributes (as in the situation described first). Yet the deliberate processing of these functional attributes will make it hard for them to render a judgment: both alternatives are equally good. Thus, there will be no difference in consumers' evaluations of the alternatives in a non-experiential context in this situation.

H3: When consumers judge two functionally equally good alternatives and one of the alternatives is differentiated with a sensory attribute and the other alternative is differentiated with an affective attribute then:

H3a: Consumers evaluate the alternative with the sensory attribute more positively than the alternative with the affective attribute in the presence of sensory cue in the judgment context;

H3b: Consumers evaluate the alternative with the affective attribute more positively than the alternative with the sensory attribute in the presence of affective cue in the judgment context; however,

H3c: There is no difference in consumers' evaluations of the two alternatives in a non-experiential judgment context.

Next, we test our predictions in an experiment.

EXPERIMENT

Method

Overview

We constructed four judgment situations to test our hypotheses. In judgment situation 1, the benchmark to test H1, we asked respondents to evaluate two standard black computer

diskettes; one diskette was clearly superior to the other. The task was performed three times in three different contexts, which were defined by a banner ad in which we systematically manipulated one visual element to create a sensory, an affective, and finally a non-experiential context.

In judgment situation 2, we asked respondents to evaluate two computer diskettes; one diskette was functionally dominant, but the functionally inferior diskette was differentiated with a sensory attribute. The task was again performed for all three contexts. It was used to test H2.

Judgment situation 3 was similar to judgment situation 2 with the exception that the functionally inferior diskette was differentiated with an affective attribute. Again, the evaluation task was performed in three different contexts. It was also used to test H2; however for a different stimulus (affective rather than sensory).

Finally, in judgment situation 4, where we tested H3, we asked respondents to evaluate, in three contexts, two functionally equally good computer diskettes, but one of them was differentiated with a sensory attribute and the other was differentiated with an affective attribute.

Design

A 4 (judgment situation with two alternatives: functionally dominant vs. functionally dominated, functionally dominant vs. sensory, functionally dominant vs. affective, affective vs. sensory) $\times$ 3 (contextual cue contained in the banner ad: sensory, affective, non-experiential) $\times$ 2 (the two stimulus alternatives in each judgment situation) design was employed. Judgment situation was a between-subjects factor and the other factors were manipulated within-subjects. The dependent measure was likelihood of choosing each alternative on a seven-point scale (1 = 'definitely no,' 7 = 'definitely yes').

Stimuli

Three kinds of computer diskettes were created: the 'functional' diskette (that is, the regular black diskette), the 'sensory' diskette which had a transparent bright green color (sensory product attribute) instead of the standard black color, and the 'affective' diskette, which was a standard black diskette with a smiley face (affective product attribute) on it. Each diskette was described with five functional attributes. The values of the two critical functional attributes for the dominant alternative were 2HD (double high density) and 95 per cent magnetically shielded, whereas for the dominated alternative they were HD (single high density) and 90 per cent magnetically shielded. The values of the remaining attributes were the same for both alternatives (capacity 1.44 MB, IBM compatible, formatted). The attributes were presented on a sheet of paper attached to the diskette.

We pre-tested functional dominance by exposing 26 college students to a hypothetical choice situation where we asked them to choose between two standard black diskettes. Twenty-three of them picked the dominant diskette, $\chi^2(1) = 15.38$, $p < .01$.

We also conducted another pre-test to make sure that respondents perceived the sensory and the affective alternatives as equally attractive in the absence of functional attributes. Thirty-eight college students were randomly assigned to two groups, in which participants saw a 'prototype' of a diskette, either the sensory one or the affective one, and were asked to rate the attractiveness of the 'prototype product' on a seven-point scale (1 = 'not attractive at all', 7 = 'extremely attractive'). The sensory diskette received a

rating of 4.89 and the affective diskette was 4.30, and the difference was not significant, $t(36) = 1.07$, $p > .28$.

Four different judgment situations were created, each of which consisted of two alternatives: A and B. In judgment situation 1, A and B were both standard functional black diskettes and A dominated B on the listed functional attributes. In judgment situation 2, A was the functional diskette and B was the sensory diskette and A dominated B on the listed functional attributes. In judgment situation 3, A was the functional diskette and B was the affective diskette and again A dominated B. And finally, in judgment situation 4, A was the sensory diskette and B was the affective diskette and A and B were equally attractive in terms of the listed functional attributes.

Participants and procedure

Ninety-eight college students, different from the ones who participated in the pre-tests, were randomly assigned to one of the four judgment situations. Participants were told that they would see some products and website banners. The specific instructions were:

> We would like to know your opinion about some products. As you can see, you have received a prototype of two computer diskettes. One prototype is marked 'Diskette A' and another is marked 'Diskette B'. For each prototype we also list the features that each prototype diskette has – density, percentage of magnetic shielding, whether the diskette is formatted or not, compatibility, and capacity. We are thinking about advertising these diskettes on a commercial web site and we have three banners in mind for the websites.

At this point, participants were given a color printout of each of the three website banners, one at a time, each being separately labeled as 'Banner 1' (or '2' or '3'). After seeing a banner, and before seeing the next banner, participants were asked to indicate the likelihood of choosing diskette 'A' as well as diskette 'B' on seven-point scales (1 = 'definitely not choose it', 7 = 'definitely choose it'). This rating process was repeated three times, and participants provided a total of six choice likelihood ratings. The order of presentation of banners was counterbalanced across participants.

The banner had the wording 'Welcome to the dot in .com', with the letter 'o' in the word 'dot' differently represented for sensory (a solid circle in orange color; the sensory contextual cue), affective (a heart; the affective contextual cue) and non-experiential (a normal lower case letter 'o') banner. We pre-tested whether the sensory and the affective banner were of the appropriate stimulus type (that is whether they were perceived in fact as 'sensory' and 'affective' banners). To do so, we showed a color printout of the sensory and of the affective banner to 26 college students, and asked them to rate each banner on six bipolar seven-point scales. The scales measuring sensory impact were 'this banner does not try/tries to have sensory appeal', 'this banner tries/does not try to engage my senses', and 'this banner is/is not focused on sensory appeal'. The affective scales were: 'this banner tries/does not try to appeal to feelings', 'this banner does not try/tries to be affective', and 'this banner tries/does not try to be emotional'. The appropriate items were reversely coded and a composite sensory (alpha = 0.69) and affective (alpha = 0.74) rating was computed. On the sensory composite scale, the mean rating for the sensory banner was 5.41 compared to a mean rating of 3.44 for the affective banner, $t(25) = 10.96$, $p < .0001$. Conversely, on the affective composite scale, the mean rating for the affective banner was 5.85 compared to 4.40 for the sensory banner, $t(25) = 10.04$, $p < .0001$.

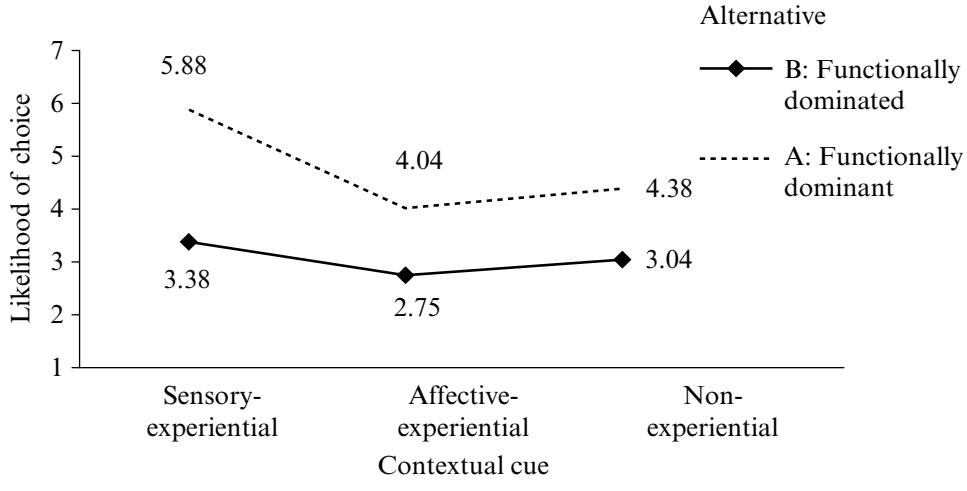

Figure 13.1 Alternative by contextual cue interaction: judgment situation 1 (benchmark)

Results

A 4 × 3 × 2 mixed ANOVA performed on the choice likelihood ratings revealed a main effect of banners containing contextual information, $F(2, 180) = 21.26$, $p < .0001$, and a main effect of choice alternative, $F(1, 90) = 34.61$, $p < .0001$. The analysis also revealed a two-way interaction of judgment situation by alternative, $F(3, 90) = 3.53$, $p < .02$, and an interaction of alternative by contextual cue: $F(2, 180) = 6.46$, $p < .001$.

Importantly, the ANOVA revealed a significant three-way interaction, $F(6, 180) = 10.77$, $p < .0001$, indicating different likelihood of choice patterns for the alternatives across the four situations. Separate 2 (alternative) × 3 (banners containing contextual cues) ANOVAs on choice likelihood ratings were performed for each situation, the results of which are shown in Figures 13.1 to 13.4. Below, *M* stands for the mean likelihood of choice, the first index stands for alternative (A or B, see Figures 13.1 to 13.4), and the second index stands for the contextual cue contained in the banner (sensory, affective, non-experiential).

In benchmark situation 1 (Figure 13.1), the ANOVA revealed a main effect of alternative, indicating that respondents preferred alternative A ($M_A = 4.76$) over B ($M_B = 3.06$), $F(1, 23) = 20.99$, $p < .001$. This result was consistent with the manipulation of having A dominate B in situation 1 and supported our benchmark prediction (H1). In support of that prediction, the likelihood of choosing the functionally dominant alternative, alternative A in this case, was greater than the likelihood of choosing the functionally dominated alternative, alternative B in this case, irrespective of the type of the contextual cue: $M_{\text{Asense}} = 5.88 > M_{\text{Bsense}} = 3.38$, $t(23) = 6.19$, $p < .001$; $M_{\text{Aaffect}} = 4.04 > M_{\text{Baffect}} = 2.75$, $t(23) = 2.67$, $p < .02$; and $M_{\text{Anonexperiential}} = 4.38 > M_{\text{Bnonexperiential}} = 3.04$, $t(23) = 2.37$, $p < .03$.

In situation 2 (Figure 13.2), the ANOVA revealed a main effect of contextual cue contained in a banner, $F(2, 44) = 5.42$, $p < .008$, the main effect of alternative, $F(1, 22) = 4.10$, $p < .06$, and an interaction of contextual cue by alternative, $F(2, 44) = 6.81$, $p < .003$. When sensory contextual cue was used, choice likelihood ratings were similar for the

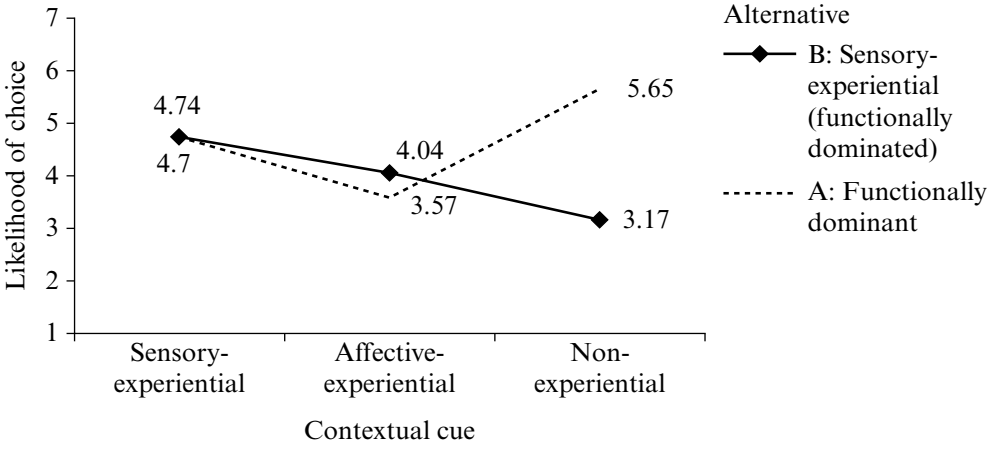

Figure 13.2 Alternative by contextual cue interaction: judgment situation 2

alternatives, $M_{\text{Asense}} = 4.70$, $M_{\text{Bsense}} = 4.74$, $t(22) = 0.07$, NS. Similar results were observed when the affective contextual cue was used, $M_{\text{Aaffect}} = 3.57$, $M_{\text{Baffect}} = 4.04$, $t(22) = 0.81$, NS. Hence, either contextual experiential cue, sensory or affective, primed either experiential product attribute, sensory or affective, and managed to offset the functional inferiority of the dominated alternative that was also differentiated with an experiential attribute. Therefore, H2a was supported. However, when the non-experiential contextual cue was used, the ratings were significantly higher for the functionally dominant alternative A than for functionally dominated alternative B, $M_{\text{Anonexperiential}} = 5.65 > M_{\text{Bnonexperiential}} = 3.17$, $t(22) = 4.18$, $p < .001$, because the respondents used the diagnostic information contained in functional attributes as the evaluation criterion, as was predicted by H2b.

As expected, the results for situation 3 (Figure 13.3) were analogous to those in situation 2. Again, the main effect of contextual cue was significant, $F(2, 44) = 5.28$, $p < .009$. The main effect of alternative was also significant, $F(1, 22) = 8.94$, $p < .007$. Importantly, the interaction of contextual cue by alternative was significant, $F(2, 44) = 12.48$, $p < .001$. When provided with the sensory contextual cue, respondents were equally likely to choose the functionally dominant diskette and the affective diskette, $M_{\text{Asense}} = 4.74$ versus $M_{\text{Bsense}} = 4.22$, $t(22) < 1$, NS. Similar results were obtained for the functionally dominant diskette and the affective diskette when respondents were provided with the affective contextual cue, $M_{\text{Aaffect}} = 3.26$ versus $M_{\text{Baffect}} = 4.09$, $t(22) = 1.53$, NS. However, respondents strongly preferred the functionally dominant alternative to the affective diskette in the non-experiential context, $M_{\text{Anonexperiential}} = 5.48$ versus $M_{\text{Bnonexperiential}} = 2.78$, $t(22) = 7.31$, $p < .001$. Thus, the effect confirming H2 was replicated with a different stimulus pair.

Finally, in situation 4 (Figure 13.4) where respondents had to judge the sensory (A) and affective (B) diskettes, which had equally attractive functional attributes, the results revealed a marginal main effect of alternative (in favor of the affective diskette), $M_{\text{A}} = 4.0 < M_{\text{B}} = 4.43$, $F(1, 24) = 3.21$, $p < .09$, and a significant interaction of contextual cue by alternative, $F(2, 46) = 15.15$, $p < .001$. When the respondents were exposed to the sensory contextual cue, they indicated a much higher likelihood of choosing the sensory diskette

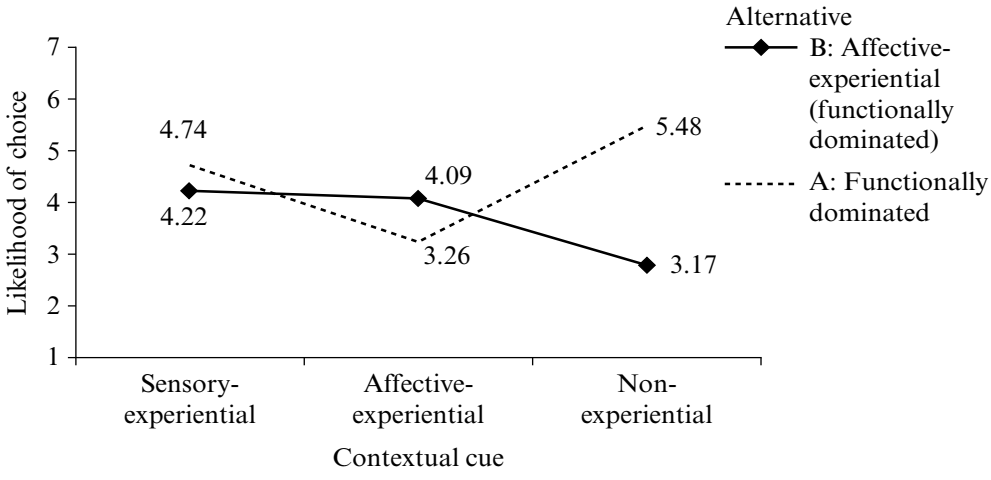

Figure 13.3 Alternative by contextual cue interaction: judgment situation 3

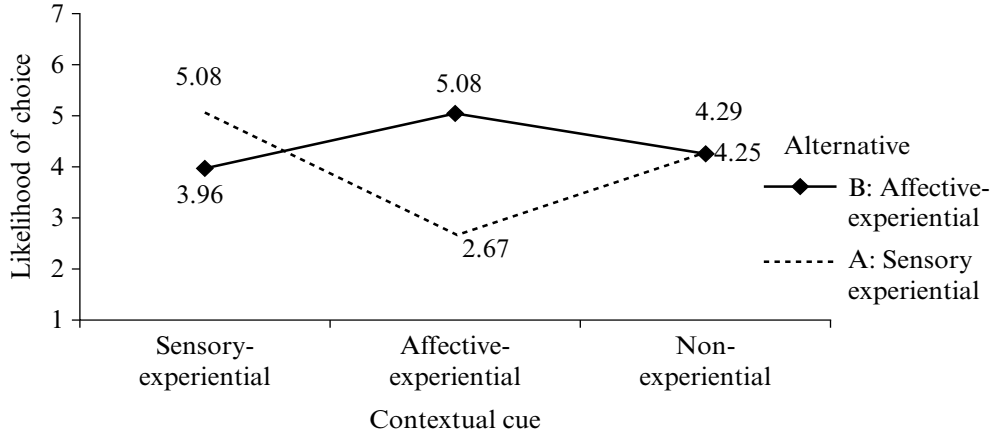

Figure 13.4 Alternative by contextual cue interaction: judgment situation 4

than the affective diskette, $M_{\text{Asense}} = 5.08 > M_{\text{Bsense}} = 3.96$, $t(23) = 2.41$, $p < .03$, as was predicted by H3a. In contrast, when the affective contextual cue was used, respondents' ratings were significantly higher for the affective than for the sensory diskette, $M_{\text{Aaffect}} = 2.67 < M_{\text{Baffect}} = 5.08$, $t(23) = 8.21$, $p < .001$, as was predicted by H3b. Finally, in the non-experiential context, no significant differences were observed, $M_{\text{Anonexperiential}} = 4.29$ versus $M_{\text{Bnonexperiential}} = 4.25$, $t(23) < 1$, NS, which means that the respondents based their judgment on functional product attributes in the absence of experiential contextual cues, and were equally likely to choose either alternative, because they were equally good on functional attributes, as was predicted by H3c.

Another way of testing the differential impact of experiential contextual information on consumers' judgments can be presented by analyzing the results across judgment

situations (Figures 13.1 to 13.4). Below, *M* stands for the mean likelihood of choice, the first index stands for alternative (A or B, see Figures 13.1 to 13.4), the second index stands for the judgment situation (1 or 2 or 3 or 4, see Figures 13.1 to 13.4), and the third index denotes the contextual cue (sensory, affective, non-experiential). For example, when we compare the likelihood of choice between the functionally dominated alternative in situation 1 (alternative B; functional alternative with no experiential attribute) and the sensory alternative in situation 2 (alternative B) (see Figures 13.1 and 13.2), and these alternatives were *equally good functionally*, we see that in the sensory context respondents had greater likelihood of choosing the sensory alternative, $M_{\text{B2sense}} = 4.74$, over the functional alternative, $M_{\text{B1sense}} = 3.38$, $t(45) = 2.89$, $p < .01$. The same is true in the affective context: the likelihood of choice for the sensory alternative was $M_{\text{B2affect}} = 4.04$ and for the functional it was $M_{\text{B1affect}} = 2.75$, $t(45) = 2.45$, $p < .02$. The effect disappeared in the non-experiential context: $M_{\text{B1nonexperiential}} = 3.04$ for the functional vs. $M_{\text{B2nonexperiential}} = 3.17$ for the sensory alternative, $t(45) = 0.28$, NS, which we would expect since the two products did not differ on functional attributes.

A similar pattern of results can be obtained by comparing situations 1 and 3. This time we compare the functionally inferior alternative in situation 1 (alternative B; functional alternative with no experiential attribute) and the affective alternative in situation 3 (alternative B). Note again that these two alternatives were *equally good functionally*. In the sensory context the likelihood of choosing the affective alternative, $M_{\text{B3sense}} = 4.22$, was marginally greater than the likelihood of choosing the functional alternative, $M_{\text{B1sense}} = 3.38$, $t(45) = 1.65$, $p = .1$. In the affective context the likelihood of choosing the affective alternative was $M_{\text{B3affect}} = 4.09$; it was significantly greater than the likelihood of choosing the functional alternative $M_{\text{B1affect}} = 2.75$, $t(45) = 2.43$, $p < .02$. Similar to the previous comparison, in the non-experiential context the effect disappeared again: $M_{\text{B1nonexperiential}} = 3.04$ for the functional alternative vs. $M_{\text{B3nonexperiential}} = 2.78$ for the affective one, $t(45) = 0.56$, NS.

We can separate the influence of the sensory context from the affective context on judgment, as we previously did in situation 4, when we compare situations 1 and 4. This time we first compare the inferior functional alternative from situation 1 (alternative B; functional alternative with no experiential attribute) to the sensory (A) and then to the affective alternative (B) in situation 4. Again, in all these comparisons we examine alternatives that were *equally good functionally*. In the sensory context the likelihood of choosing the sensory alternative was $M_{\text{A4sense}} = 5.08$ and the likelihood of choosing the functional alternative was $M_{\text{B1sense}} = 3.38$. The difference between the two is significant, $t(46) = 3.64$, $p < .001$, because the sensory context increases the likelihood of choosing the sensory alternative. However, the likelihood of choosing the affective alternative and the functional alternative in the sensory context was the same: $M_{\text{B4sense}} = 3.96$ vs. $M_{\text{B1sense}} = 3.38$, $t(46) = 1.28$, NS. The results were exactly the opposite in the affective context. Basically, there was no difference in the likelihood of choosing between the functional and the sensory alternatives: $M_{\text{B1affect}} = 2.75$ vs. $M_{\text{A4affect}} = 2.67$, $t(46) = 0.20$, NS. However, the likelihood of choosing the affective alternative was greater than the likelihood of choosing the functional alternative in the congruent affective context: $M_{\text{B4affect}} = 5.08$ vs. $M_{\text{B1affect}} = 2.75$, $t(46) = 5.00$, $p < .001$. Finally, in the non-experiential context these differences in the likelihood were significant: $M_{\text{B1nonexperiential}} = 3.04$ for the functional vs. $M_{\text{A4nonexperiential}} = 4.29$ for the sensory alternative, $t(46) = 2.43$, $p < .02$, and

$M_{\text{B1nonexperiential}} = 3.04$ for the functional vs. $M_{\text{B4nonexperiential}} = 4.25$ for the affective alternative, $t(46) = 2.34$, $p < .03$. This result indicates that the sensory and the affective alternatives were more attractive than the purely functional alternative.

Finally, although functional attributes were not the focus of the present study, it is interesting to note that functional attributes were negatively affected by the set of alternatives under experiential priming conditions. When we examine the data for functional alternatives in Figures 13.1 to 13.4 across situations, we note that in the same judgment context the same functional alternative (that is, the dominating alternative without an experiential attribute) was consistently evaluated worse when it was evaluated in a set of mixed alternatives (that is, against a dominated experiential alternative) than when it was evaluated in a set of purely functional alternatives (that is, against the dominated functional alternative). Specifically, in the mixed-alternatives sets (situations 2 and 3; Figures 13.2 and 13.3), in the sensory context, the means for the dominating functional alternative were $M_{\text{A2sense}} = 4.70$ and $M_{\text{A3sense}} = 4.74$ respectively, compared to the mean of $M_{\text{A1sense}} = 5.88$ in the set of purely functional alternatives (situation 1; Figure 13.1), $F(1, 90) = 6.84$, $p < .02$. Similarly, in the sets of mixed alternatives (situations 2 and 3; Figures 13.2 and 13.3), in the affective judgment condition, the means of the dominating functional alternative were $M_{\text{A2affect}} = 3.57$ and $M_{\text{A3affect}} = 3.26$ compared to the mean of $M_{\text{A1affect}} = 4.04$ in situation 1 (Figure 13.1), $F(1, 90) = 1.96$, NS. While this effect was non-significant ($p < .2$), it did occur in the expected direction. However, the functional dominance appears to be stronger in mixed-alternatives sets (situations 2 and 3; Figures 13.2 and 13.3) relative to the set of purely functional alternatives (situation 1; Figure 13.1) in non-experiential judgment contexts, $M_{\text{A2nonexperiential}} = 5.65$ and $M_{\text{A3nonexperiential}} = 5.48$ vs. $M_{\text{A1nonexperiential}} = 4.38$, $F(1, 90) = 7.20$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

The results of our study strongly indicate that experiential attributes affect consumer judgments. As many products in today's marketplace are highly similar functionally and therefore difficult to differentiate on a functional basis, there is an alternative way to differentiate products: using experiential attributes and experiential contexts to affect consumer judgments and evaluations.

Specifically, when the products to be judged had functional attributes only, consumers evaluated the product with the functionally dominant attributes more favorably than the one with dominated attributes, irrespective of context. However, in situations in which both functional and experiential attributes were present, the experiential attribute (sensory or affective) was able to make up for the functional inferiority of the experiential alternative, when the judgment context included an experiential cue (sensory or affective). Finally, when functional and experiential attributes were both present but the functional attributes were not diagnostic, the alternative that was evaluated most positively was the one that matched the stimulus-specific context. That is, an alternative with a sensory attribute was most positively evaluated in a sensory judgment context, whereas an alternative with an affective attribute was most positively evaluated in an affective judgment context.

The results of the study indicate the operation of different processes in different situations. Unlike functional attributes which are processed deliberately, experiential attributes

demonstrate processing flexibility and can be processed deliberately or fluently. Deliberate processing of experiential attributes occurs when consumers decide whether experiential attributes can offer value in addition to the value that functional attributes provide (as in situations 2 and 3). Fluent processing occurs when functional information is non-diagnostic and therefore cannot provide value for decision-making. Under such circumstances (as in situation 4), experiential contextual cues draw consumers' attention to the experiential attributes of the alternatives, and consumers spontaneously engage in a visual categorization process to match the experiential contextual cue with an experiential attribute of the same type. In other words, judgment context may be used either as a reason to justify the presence of experiential features, or it may be used to prime a specific category of experiential attributes that matches the judgment context.

The experiential stimuli used in our studies (for example, colored diskettes) are reminiscent of what have been called 'trivial' attributes in marketing research such as 'alpine class down fill' (for down jackets) or 'Brazilian high-altitude roasting process' (for coffee) (Carpenter et al., 1994; Brown and Carpenter, 2000). Trivial attributes are traditionally considered to be irrelevant features and to contribute little to product functionality; yet it has been found that they contribute value despite their lack of functionality (Carpenter et al., 1994). However, there are some critical differences between trivial attributes and experiential attributes. First, trivial attributes in previous research have been presented exclusively in verbal or textual form (Carpenter et al., 1994; Brown and Carpenter, 2000). In contrast, experiential attributes are mostly non-verbal visual stimuli. More importantly, trivial attributes *imply* functionality. For example 'alpine class down fill' suggests greater warmth protection and 'Brazilian high-altitude roasting' implies better taste (Carpenter et al., 1994). Thus consumers confer value to them through an inferential process based on this implied functionality. Experiential attributes, however, do not imply functionality. It is not clear why a diskette of a particular color, or with a smiley face on it, should be better on any functional dimension than a diskette with a different color or without a smiley face. Consumers thus cannot use experiential attributes to draw inferences about functionality. However, they can use experiential attributes to derive meaning or value that makes up for functional inferiority. For example, an attractive color or a smiley face can be seen as valuable as a functional attribute because it adds appropriate aesthetical or emotional appeal to the product.

One important issue for future research concerns the degree to which experiential and functional approaches are transferable across markets and cultures and to what degree they are culture-dependent. For example, it may be the case that experiential attributes are universal in their appeal and effect when they are processed fluently. However, when they are processed deliberately, personal and cultural meanings may influence their appeal and effectiveness. Another issue of future research concerns how experiential attributes affect choice. We suggest that experiential attributes be incorporated into choice models to determine how their presence affects choice probabilities. That is, in addition to estimating choice models that account for latent brand attributes (Chintagunta, 1994; Elrod, 1988) or unique brand attributes (Erdem, 1996), researchers should model the differential impact that experiential and functional attributes have on consumer brand choices, thus paving the way for experiential choice models (Degeratu et al., 2000).

From an applied marketing perspective, the present chapter explains, in part, the success of the recent product launches such as the Apple iMac and iPod, and the VW New

Beetle discussed earlier. Based on our research, an experiential approach can increase the likelihood of choosing a brand, especially when consumers perceive both the experiential attributes (for example, the color and design of Apple products) and the presentation context (the website and stores) as attractive and interrelated. Therefore companies should incorporate experiential approaches into marketing strategy to differentiate their products. This requires, first, that managers select those sensory or affective attributes that enhance the value of a product in the most effective way. Moreover, managers should be sensitive to the importance of the context in which the product is placed. That is, certain shopping environments, websites, and the design of certain communications can be beneficial or detrimental to product success (Buchanan et al., 1999). Most importantly, experiential marketing requires an integrated approach that gets the consumer to view the product, its packaging, its shopping environment, as well as websites and communications, as one consistent whole (Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt, 2003).

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