

Consumer insight on affect intensity

Key words: affect intensity, affect, emotion, aesthetic, personality

Abstract: Consumers' responsiveness to emotional appeals has been discussed in terms of affect intensity. The present research explores affect intensity in relation to five personality dimensions: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism. The results show that degree of affect intensity toward visual stimuli can be understood by degree of extraversion and neuroticism. Consumers with a high degree of extraversion experience more pleasant affect, while consumers with a high degree of neuroticism experience more unpleasant affect.

Extended abstract: Despite that most theoretical models in marketing are based on verbal processing and cognitive appraisal, the marketing practice, such as ads, packages and product aesthetics, increasingly uses visual images as emotional appeals in order to persuade consumers (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1981; Lau-Gesk & Meyers-Levy, 2009; Berg, Söderlund & Lindström, 2014). Affects and emotions are highly subjective in nature, and thus vary between different consumers. These different emotions result in a landscape where we need to gain knowledge of the consumers as "feelers" (Carù & Cova, 2003). Researchers thus need to devote more attention to understand consumers' affective appraisal and how they respond differently toward the one and same visual stimuli (Lau-Gesk & Meyers-Levy, 2009).

The present research project aims to shed light on how personality dimensions influence emotional responses to visual stimuli. So far, researchers have discovered that consumers with a high degree of affect intensity consistently react on emotional appeals more than other consumers (Moore, Harris & Chen, 1995; Söderlund, 2003). We find it essential to learn more about how affect intensity is related to general and robust personality dimensions: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism (Larsen & Buss, 2005).

The research project consists of two studies. Study 1 explores how personality dimensions influence responses to general affective pictures. Firstly, 148 students at the University of Gothenburg completed a personality test. Secondly, the students self-reported their emotions to fourteen affective pictures. The pictures were derived from the Geneva Affective Picture Database (GAPED). This database consists of 730 visual pictures that have been tested for measuring pleasant affect e.g. babies and nature, unpleasant affect e.g. disrespect of social standards and scary animals and neutrality e.g. inanimate objects (Dan-Glauser and Scherer, 2011). Study 2 explores how personality dimensions of potential patients influence their emotions to visual design aesthetics of health-care products. Firstly, 66 students at the University of Gothenburg and at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm completed a personality test. Secondly, they self-reported their emotions to thirteen photos of health-care products designed by Veryday, a Swedish design and innovation agency.

Logistic regression analyses were performed with emotions (happiness, positive surprise, fear, disgust, sadness, anger or neutral) and affects (pleasant affect, unpleasant affect or neutral) as the dependent variable and the five personality dimensions as independent

variables. The key-findings from both studies are 1) high degree of extraversion influences pleasant affect, 2) high degree of neuroticism influences unpleasant affect, especially fear, 3) low degree of extraversion and/or neuroticism influence the absence of emotions i.e. neutral responses.

The results from both studies indicate that affect intensity toward visual stimuli, such as affective pictures and design aesthetics, can be explained through underlying personality dimensions. Consumers with a high degree of affect intensity have a high degree of extraversion and neuroticism, while consumers with a low degree of affect intensity have a low degree of extraversion and neuroticism.

The results also emphasize the importance of separating pleasant affect intensity from unpleasant affect intensity. Consumers with high degree of extraversion experience more pleasant affect but not more unpleasant affect, while consumers with high degree of neuroticism experience more unpleasant affect, especially fear, but not more pleasant affect.

The findings are useful for advertisers and designers and might be applied in their real work contexts. Firstly, the findings might be combined with previous research and used by advertisers in order to match appeal and person. Advertisers might select fear appeals in anti-drug campaigns and happiness appeal in charity promotion. According to previous research neuroticism is overrepresented among drug and substance users (Gunnarsson et al., 2008) while extraversion is overrepresented among charity givers (Anik et al, 2009). Secondly, designers might use the insight in the recruitment process for user-studies. If designers know that health-care products evoke more fear in some patients than others, they can make sure that they recruit appropriate candidates for user studies. If designers are able to reduce fear appeals among patients with a high degree of neuroticism by addressing the product design, they are probably also able to reduce it for all other patients, which is in line with arguments related to inclusive design/universal design.

Next step is to test the link between personality dimensions (especially extraversion and neuroticism) and emotional appeals in market specific contexts, for example through measure emotions to visual images on store packages and/or real advertisements.

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